



The Possibility of Implementing Inclusive Education in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the efforts for effective and successful implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria. It also looks at factors that make the implementation possible such as modified curriculum, barrier-free-learning environment, adequate trained personnel, adequate funding and the roles of other professionals. This can help the genuine implementation of the programme, and some recommendations were made as per steps to take in order to have a successful adoption of inclusive education in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Yes, successful Implementation of inclusion in Nigeria can be possible through the provision of appropriate funding for special facilities, to redesigning inclusive schools and to conveniently accommodate special need children and for retraining programmes for both regular and special education teachers to be better equipped for meeting the challenges of inclusion and also for the purchase of instructional aids and equipment to aids the children with exceptionality; that could be included into a regular schools. But it would be reasonable here to have a working definition of the word “inclusion” what is it and how does it turn out in practice.

The contemporary history of special education will definitely not be complete without a sufficient recourse to inclusion. inclusion is perhaps one if not of the most important issue presently engaging a considerable attention of various individuals, groups concerned with special education practice; it is a word which is used quite often today in educational discussions or debate among professionals in special education and other stakeholders that have come up in the recent times were devoted to discussing issues on inclusion.

Mittler [2000] posits that inclusion involves a process of reform and restructuring of school as a whole, with the aim of ensuring that all children

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can have access to the whole range of educational and social opportunities offered by school system. This according to him encompasses the curriculum, recording and reporting of pupils' achievements, the decisions that are taken on the grouping of pupils with schools and classrooms, pedagogy of teaching, sport and leisure and recreational opportunities.

Ozaji [2005] says Inclusive education is an educational option or programme carefully designed to educate special learners with diverse needs within the restructured mainstream or school community.

Nwazuake [2001] on the other hand sees inclusion as Normalization of learning conditions for learners with disabilities so that they can learn and develop alongside with their able bodied counterparts in schools and in communities as a whole.

In the same vein, McCarthy [2000] defined inclusion as bringing support services to the child rather than moving the child to a segregated setting to receive special services.

The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English defines the word "Inclusion" as the act of including or state of being included. The Renaissance Group [1999], asserts that inclusive education means that all students in a school regardless of their strengths or weaknesses in any area, become part of the school community.

Similarly, the centre for studies on inclusive Education [CSIE] of the University of Bristol, England states that inclusive education means disabled and non-disabled children and young people learning together in ordinary pre-school provision, schools, colleges and universities, with appropriate networks of support.

In his own definition, Manivannan [1999] stated that inclusive education is the implementation of the policy and process that allow all children to participate in all programmes. He remarked that schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of students, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning for ensuring quality education in all, through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangement, teaching strategies, resource use and partnership with communities.

Inclusion therefore, means that all children in a school, regardless of their strengths and weaknesses in any area of disability become part of the same learning and interactive community. They are included in the feeling of belonging among other students, teachers and other members of community. The national policy statement with baked up legislation and guidelines is an essential first step for inclusion education, followed by two landmark world conferences therefore equitably prepared the ground for inclusive education world-wide. These include the world conference on "Education for All" which took place in Jontien, Thailand from 5th to 9th March, 1990, and the world conference on "Special Needs Education" which met in Salamanca in June, 1994.

Landipo [2002] reported that in June 1994, representatives of 92 governments and 25 international organizations met in the world conference on Special Needs Education, held in Salamanca, Spain, they agreed on a

dynamic new statement on the education for all disabled children, which called for inclusion to be the norm.

The statement also calls on the international community to endorse the approach of inclusive schooling in particular it calls on UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, and the World Bank for these endorsement.

In this paper, effort will be made to discuss ways for the effective and successful implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria, and these include; modified curriculum; barrier-free learning environment; adequately trained personnel; adequate funding for special facilities; The roles of other professionals in Inclusive Education.

MODIFIED CURRICULUM

Successful Inclusion practices depend on special adaptation and modification of curriculum, the present curriculum of the regular school system in Nigeria should be re-worked in the light of inclusive practices in the schools. Curriculum designers should therefore plan the learning experiences in a way that the unique needs of the children are adequately addressed. The roles of supportive staff such as sign language interpreters for hearing impaired and other ancillary should be therefore spelled. It should be pointed out that large classes should not be encouraged given the fact that children with disabilities benefits more from individualized educational programme, the school must make conscious attempts within the framework of the curriculum to address in a differential manner the learning needs of each child. As Corbett [2001] puts it differentiation means using many teaching styles and sharing special skills. The reason for this is that children as well as obtain information in a multiplicity of ways' while some prefer oral stimulus, others opt for visual cues.

The curriculum designers should also plan the curriculum in the following manner:

- The curriculum has to be structured and to be capable of being taught in such a way that all students can access it.
- The curriculum has to be underpinned by a model of learning which is itself inclusive. It needs to accommodate a range of learning styles and to emphasize skills and knowledge which are relevant to students.
- The curriculum should have sufficient flexibility for responding to the needs of particular students' communities and religious, linguistic, ethnic or other groups. Therefore it cannot be rigidly prescribed at national or central level.
- The curriculum needs to have basic levels which students with varying levels of entry skills can access. Progress needs to be managed and assessed so that all students experience success.
- Mittler [2000] outlined three key principles for developing a more inclusive curriculum as:
 - Setting suitable learning challenges

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- Responding to pupil's diverse learning skills
- Overcoming potential barriers to learning and assessment for individuals and groups of pupils.

The curriculum must embrace all the learning experiences that are available to students in their schools and communities; it therefore has to be rigorous, but flexible enough to respond to the very diverse characteristics of students.

Barrier-Free Learning Environment

Effective implementation of inclusion in Nigeria has to do with barrier-free learning environment resources [human and material] and instructional strategies which will benefit each child differently. The environment in which children learn exerts tremendous influence on them.

Inclusive practices can only be effectively carried out in supportive environments. Ramps should be constructed to assist students who are wheel-chair bound. Library resources should be enriched with brailled versions of the prescribed text. The school buildings should be constructed in such a way that children with Visual Impairment can easily find their way in and out of them.

The school infrastructure and other public building should be designed in cognizance of the handicapped, easy accessibility to classrooms, hostels and offices should be made available with the provision of pavements along the road, flat terrains, and broad corridors for wheel chairs, ramps, elevators and escalators. This gives special needs children opportunities to improve their worth. The more time is spent in regular school the more special needs children achieve academically [Abang, 2003].

Adequately Trained Personnel

Personnel preparation is a critical factor which planners of inclusive project must give adequate attention if the goals of inclusive education are to be realized for the success of inclusive education. There is need for training of personnel to handle an inclusive programme with able and disabled persons such teachers must have a special and collaboration of the teachers with other supporting personnel, there is need to train technicians to handle the special equipment installed in regular schools for the use of exceptional children.

It is not just enough for government to embark on massive recruitment of teachers to handle the rise in pupils enrolment as a result of inclusive practices. Inclusion bring together, in the same classroom children with mixed abilities as well as children with disabilities, efforts should be made to bring in teachers who would be able to respond appropriately to the challenges posed by the children in the classroom.

Capacity building in support of inclusive education should therefore involve the training of regular teachers to acquire at least basic skills in special need education, in order to make the pre-service training effective, the

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enrolment figures for students training in special need education should be increased in institutions.

For all these to be workable, government should first organize train-the-trainers workshops in different part of the country, those whose responsibility is to train the regular teachers will first receive their own training at national level.

The development of human resources as a way of facilitating inclusive education is a sine qua non, as pointed out in Article 40, Salamanca framework for action.

“Appropriate preparation of all educational personnel stands out as a key factor in promoting progress towards inclusive schools” (UNESCO 1999 P.15).

ADEQUATE FUNDING

Government and all those who have stake in the education of Nigerian children need to properly fund the programme if it is to succeed, they should be prepared to invest financially in the educational project. The Government will have to pay attention to the issue of adequate remuneration for teachers, more importantly the total welfare of teachers and other workers in the scheme should be looked into. Efforts should be made to pay salaries as and when due. To sustain the inclusive education scheme, it is important that teachers are highly motivated and committed; this can be done when the employers of teachers respond meaningfully to the rational demand of teachers.

Large sum of money is involved if all the necessary facilities and equipment are to be provided, it is essential therefore, that national and local governments establish partnerships with other potentials resource-providers. International donors and NGO's are obvious sources of additional resourcing. So also are the business and industry, who have a vested interest not only in the establishing goodwill in the country but also in helping to produce a well-educated workforce?

Government should continue to monitor and evaluate the programmes in order to ensure that funds are properly utilized.

THE ROLES OF OTHER PROFESSIONALS

For effective implementation of inclusive education in our schools, the services of other professionals are required if teaching and learning is to be meaningful to special need children, carr-sauders in Ozoji (1993) defined professional as one with specialized training for the purpose of supplying skilled services. A special education professional, is one who has a general knowledge of education but with specialized skills in the education of the persons with special needs. Professionals in special education and other related disciplines are the pivot of the success of inclusive education; persons with special needs in an inclusive setting require the cooperation of the

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professionals and non-professionals to work as a team to help them to be educated together in the same classroom.

In an inclusive setting, all professionals in special education with different skills in their area of specialization work together as a team to educate the child within the same environment.

The professionals that should be involved in this service provision in an inclusive education setting include the following;

The psychologist, Audiologist, Educational Technologist, Medical Doctor, Guidance and Counselor, The Sociologist, Optician, the Otologist, Speech and Language Pathologists, Nurses and Nurse Practitioners, Physical Therapist, Social Worker, Orthopedist, Pediatrician and Physical Education Teachers.

Some of the roles played by the above mentioned special education professionals as listed by Ihenacho (1989) include;

- Observing, analyzing, selecting and sequencing learning tasks so that the child overcomes his delays rather than falling further behind.
- Actual delivery of educational therapies to the children with exceptionality in school.
- Motivation and reinforcing the special need children in the school.
- Carrying out identification and assessment on the special need children for the purpose of educational placement.
- Serving as consultants that provide support or assistance to regular school teachers.
- They often participate in developing curriculum for persons with special needs to include both practical and theoretical.
- In hospital setting, special education professionals have role to play as speech and language therapist for stroke victims.
- The specialist for deaf work as audiologist to measure the level of hearing loss and to know the type of hearing aid that will be appropriate for each child. They can also work as sign language interpreters and news announcers for hearing impaired in factories, classrooms, government ministries, television studios, conferences etc.

Finally, the special education professionals are playing a very important role as advocates in legislative matter, championing the course of person with special needs, initiating societal awareness, workshops, seminars and conferences on behalf of the exceptional children (Dadai 2002).

For successful implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria, there is need for the effective utilization of the various categories of professionals that could make the programme functional.

RECOMMENDATION

For effective implementation of inclusive education to be achieved in Nigeria, the following need to be enforced:

- A successful Inclusion Programme in Nigeria requires a strong financial support and total commitment from the government.

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- Adequate material, human resources and responsive parent feedback.
- The government should declare war on the negative attitudes of the people through various enlightenment programmes.
- Restructuring of building may be necessary so as to make the environment conducive for children with special needs.
- Government and institutions should provide a barrier free environment to enable people with disabilities study in a regular schools. Provision of mobility aids and appliances should be given priority.
- Provision of competent trained professionals is crucial to the implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria.
- Adequate remuneration of teachers should be greatly considered.

CONCLUSION

For successful execution of inclusive educational practices in Nigeria, there are peculiar roles to be carried out by the government, teachers and parents. This system can only be successful if teething problems that prevent effective implementation of segregation, mainstreaming/integration are promptly taken care of in the bud.

Inclusive Education can be a reality and successfully implemented in Nigeria by putting the necessary things in place.

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