

Achieving Psycho-Social Adjustment of Students with Special Needs Through Inclusive Education

BY

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Abstract

Inclusive education is a new educational approach to breaking the barrier of discrimination and segregation of students with special needs in every community all over the world. Nigeria is a signatory to the declaration of inclusive education by UNESCO in 1994 at Salamanca. Despite this, the government has not deemed it necessary to establish inclusive education in the country. There are conflicting arguments on why it will be necessary to allow students with various needs (emotional, behavioural, physical handicapped, mental retardation, etc) with normal students be in the same learning environment and of what effects will it contribute to helping the students. This paper highlights the need for education to all students of various categories and the psycho-social adjustment of inclusive education as well as its goal at improving their intellectual function through healthy competition.

Introduction

Education is light to body and soul of every individual. It involves developing an individual into a responsible, purposeful, innovative, creative and useful individual, who is able to contribute meaningfully to the society where he finds himself. Aluede (2006) posits that education is the process of building a child and strengthening of his body and mind (transmission and impartation of his culture. The greatest investment a nation can make is in the development of her human capital. Education brings out the innate potential in an individual and transforms him into a veritable tool for societal growth and development. It is on this basis that the National Policy on Education (2004) clearly states that:

- Education foster the worth and development of the individual for each individual's sake, and for the general development of the society" and
- Education shall continue to be highly rated in the national development plans because education is the most important instrument of change; any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an educational revolution" (FRN, 2004)

It could be in the light of this that the Federal Government in 2004 introduced the Universal Basic Education which stipulated 9 years of free and compulsory formal and basic education which involves 6 years of Primary education and 3 years of junior secondary education. This implies that every child of school age is expected to enroll in school irrespective of his language, ethnicity, emotional, social or physical needs. This means no child should be discriminated against. The free education component of the UBE was emphasized in Section 18(1) and (3) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 which states that “Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy, and to this end, Government shall as and when practicable provide:

- a. free, compulsory and universal primary education;
- b. free secondary education;
- c. free university education; and
- d. free adult literacy programmes

This is a laudable legal framework, aimed at ensuring equal access to education for all; including students with special needs.

Who are the Learners/students with Special Needs

Nigeria Education Sector Diagnosis(NESD) (2005) viewed special education as “specialized educational services delivery to children and adults who are unable to cope with the regular school class organisation and methods”. Much as this view is made in very recent time, it claims for today’s recent educational innovation is incorrect or inadequate. To the Nigerian government and entire populace, students with special challenges or disabilities are viewed as being unable to cope with regular school and this precipitated on the attitude, perception and treatment given to these set of citizens in the Nigerian education context.

According to NESD (2005), there are 302 identified Special Schools/Centres/Homes/Units in 32 states of the Federation established to take care of students with various challenges. The National Policy on Education (NPE)

(2004) aimed at providing adequate education for students of all categories and adults who require special education services and to provide diversified and appropriate curriculum for each category of disability. This implied the Nigerian government is committed to educating students with special needs.

With the establishment of special schools/Homes/Centres/Units across the country, it is obvious that students with special needs are segregated from normal regular schools. Most students with special needs which is also reflected in government's views about their could not have access to these homes, centres, and education centres because they are located in the urban areas and the cost of educating them is very high for their parents.

Present Enrolment Status of Learners With Special Needs in Nigerian School System

The history of education with special needs has three stages. It started with total discrimination or segregation with creation of special schools at some locations in Nigeria. The second stage was when some students with special needs such as the blind were integrated into normal school setting by allowing them to be admitted and finish their education in normal school. The third stage is the new approach of inclusive education which embraces all sets of students with special needs and normal students studying in the same academic environment.

Access and equal opportunities is a far cry from the situation on ground for students with special needs. According to the Nigeria Education Sector Diagnosis (2005), one worrisome feature of education of students with special needs is the consistent decline in the pattern of enrolment as the children move from one class to another. This suggests that the drop out rate increases as the students move up the academic ladder. The dropout rate appears to be higher for the males than for the females. In 1999, there were 180 males and 50 females in JSS 1. In 2000, there were 150 males and 47 females in JSS 2, a reduction of 30 males and 3 females respectively. The figure for males in year 2000 is against the fact that 13 schools provided data for year 2000 whereas only 12 schools provided date for 1999.

The Table below showed the trend in enrolment of students with special needs from 1999 to 2003.

Type of Disability	1999		2000		2001		2002		2003	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Visual Impairment	398	280	500	320	495	298	496	258	430	229
Hearing Impairment	1111	242	1073	276	1095	261	1057	253	1279	319
Mental Retardation	8	11	11	13	78	33	57	33	63	32
Multiple Handicap	5	4	4	3	32	12	34	23	24	23

Source: FME, ESA Sample Survey, 2003
Total Number of Institutions Used 117

Table 2: Enrolment At The Secondary School Level

Type of Disability	1999		2000		2001		2002		2003	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Wheelchair Bound	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	7	2
Visual Impairment	538	362	745	539	708	596	907	598	966	645
Multiple Handicap	7	7	8	8	11	9	16	11	18	12
Mental Retardation	108	71	110	80	121	81	128	81	137	79
Learning Disability	8	5	10	5	11	8	427	11	24	17
Health Impairment	10	5	11	6	12	7	21	7	13	11
Hearing Impairment	651	266	755	246	866	352	985	402	1108	500
Behaviour Disorder	1	0	2	0	3	0	221	3	3	0
Physical Handicapped	98	69	111	57	116	49	166	63	146	63

Source: FME, ESA Sample Survey, 2003
Total Number of Institutions Used: 117

It is evident from the above statistics that there is no equal access and opportunities to education for students with special needs. The enrolment figures

are very low. Unfortunately, there is no statistics, framework, and plan for them in the Roadmap for the Nigerian Education Sector which was adopted by the Federal Government of Nigeria in 2009. This important omission in the roadmap seem to point to the fact that the Nigerian Government lack interest in catering for students with various challenges (visual impairment, hearing impairment, physical and health impairment, learning disability, mental retardation, talented and gifted students, etc).

Bridging The Gap in Accessibility to Education for all through Inclusive Education

Ensuring that all children of school age are in school irrespective of their physical, emotional and psycho-social development is inexcusable. This portends to having an inclusive education that will meet the goal of Education For All EFA and increase access to education most especially for students with special needs. This can be achieved through inclusive education.

What is Inclusive Education?

Inclusive education is a new approach to education which embraces all children irrespective of their background, special needs, ethnicity, and linguistic, physical, intellectual, emotional, and social conditions. The Salamanca declaration at the World Conference on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994) which was restated and adopted at the Dakar World Education Forum (2000) stated that inclusive education shall “include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups”. Furthermore, Burnett (2009) described inclusive education in a broader form, he stated that

Inclusive education is a process that involves the transformation of schools and other centres of learning to cater for all children – including boys and girls, students from ethnic and linguistic minorities, rural populations, those affected by HIV and AIDS, and those with disabilities and difficulties in learning and to provide

learning opportunities for all youth and adults as well. Its aim is to eliminate exclusion that is a consequence of negative attitudes and a lack of response to diversity in race, economic status, social class, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, sexual orientation and ability (p.4)

The Salamanca Statement (1994), clearly equally stated that

- every child has a fundamental right to education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning,
- every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs,
- education systems should be designed and educational programmes implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs,
- those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child centred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs,
- regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes , creating welcoming communities , building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; more over, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system.

Inclusive education is teaching and learning that takes place in a classroom where teachers and learners and other professionals interact to achieve individual's educational goals for normal children and students with special needs.

Origin of Inclusive Education

Advocacy for inclusive education in developed countries had been on since the 19th century for students with special needs. The rationale is to ensure that provision is made for children and young people who for reason of their disabilities had been segregated/discriminated against in regular/normal schools.

The fundamental principle for inclusive education according to the Salamanca Framework (1994) is that

...all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Inclusive schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all

through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities. There should be a continuum of support and services to match the continuum of special needs encountered in every school (p. 19)

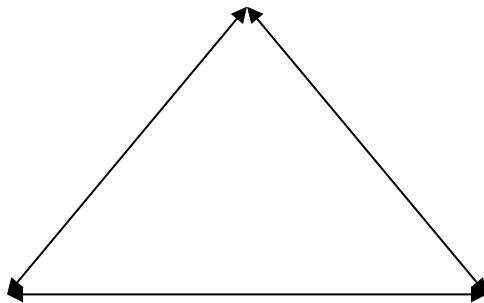
Inclusive Education started from the framework of the United Nations Convention Right of the Child (1989) that stipulated that no child should be discriminated as respect should be given to them for representation of their wishes and views. Furthermore, The World Declaration on Education for All, adopted in Jomtien, Thailand (1990) initially set the vision of ensuring universal access to education for all children, youth and adults and to promote equity. This was buttressed by the UNESCO's Salamanca Statement in 1994 which urged all governments to give the highest priority and budgetary priority to inclusive education and adopt the principle of inclusive education by enrolling students in regular schools.. Furthermore, United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006 and appeal to all countries that are signatories to ensure that inclusive education system take off in their respective countries at all levels of education. Nigeria as a matter of emphasis is a party and a signatory to UNESCO.

According to Evans and Lunt (2002) in Winter and O'Raw (2010),, "the US paved the way with the introduction of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, which was subsequently amended as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in 1990 and updated again in 1997, to promote 'whole-school' approaches to inclusion" Initially, the inclusive education was focused primarily on people with disabilities and learning difficulties, but presently Ainscow, et al, in Winter and O'Raw (2010), observed that there are changes in legislations in which countries have been encouraged to embrace inclusive policy of education in regular school settings. From the above, it behooves on Nigeria put in place a system where children with special needs are education within the same school environment other children irrespective of their conditions.

UNESCO EFA Monitoring Report 2010 also pointed out three broad sets of policies that can help in curbing lack of access and equal opportunities or marginalization in education. They are access and affordability, the learning environment and entitlements and opportunities. It forms a policy that is called Inclusive Education Triangle.

Learning Environment

- Allocating Teachers Equitably
- Recruiting and training teachers from marginalized groups
- Provision of additional support to disadvantage school.
- Developing a relevant curriculum
- Facilitating intellectual and bilingual education



Accessibility and Affordability

Cutting direct and indirect Costs
 Providing targeted financial incentives
 Bringing classrooms closer to children
 Supporting flexible provision
 Coordinating and monitoring non-state Provision

Entitlements and Opportunities

Developing Poverty Reductions
 Tackling early childhood deprivation
 Enforcing anti-discrimination legislation
 Allocating public spending more equitably.

Source: EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2010.

Barriers to Implementation of Inclusive Education

The barriers to implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria as numerated by FME (2009); FME (2008); Garuba (2003) and Garuba (2001) include

- Lack of funds to build more schools
- Inadequate and obsolete infrastructure, equipment and library facilities
- Inadequate instructional materials and resources.

- Inadequate capacity for policy formulation
- Low private sector involvement
- Ineffective, obsolete and outdated policies and legal framework.
- Poverty, marginalization of the general population and other groups
- Unavailability of reliable data of the population of school-age children with special needs.
- Placement of education on the concurrent list, under Federal, State and Local Government authority, which makes consensus-building and the passage of legislation by States a protracted and sometimes controversial matter;
- Weak enforcement of legislation, and national policy requirements, a multicultural environment with very diverse socio-cultural practices and value systems, and resistance to change and education reform;
- A high corruption index;
- Poor quantity, quality, status enhancement and motivation and retention of teachers;
- Inadequate funding at all levels, inadequate for the capital-intensive nature of inclusive education;
- Low capacity of the Education Management Information System;
- Poor physical infrastructure, especially for basic education;
- Poor quality of curriculum, monitoring assessment and evaluation of learning;
- Low capacity of the Federal and State Inspectorate services;
- Poor manpower for development and capacity-building in the Education sector;

- Lack of adequate guidance services for the parents on the nature and extent of special education facilities available for their children in regular schools.

Importance/Advantages/Need for Inclusive Education

Despite barriers for implementation of inclusive education which Nigeria is a signatory, the importance of inclusive education outweighs the barriers to its implementation. A cursory look at the practical application of inclusive education from Centre for the Study of Inclusion (CSIE) (2000), that classroom practice of inclusive education includes the following:

- strategies to improve pupils' self-esteem;
- management and career structures for learning support assistants;
- collaborative training for support assistants and teachers;
- collaborative learning among pupils;
- attention to home-school communication;
- lessons are responsive to student diversity, accessible to all pupils and develop an understanding of difference;
- pupils are actively involved in their own learning, learn collaboratively;
- assessment encourages the achievement of all pupils;
- staff expertise is fully utilized;
- pupils' differences are used as resource for teaching and learning;
- the knowledge and resources of special education teachers are fully tapped as they are used as regular classroom teachers.
- it removes the barrier to access and equal opportunities to education.

Psycho-Social Effects Adjustment Benefits of Inclusive Education for Students With Special Needs

The psycho-social effects of inclusive education cannot be overemphasized. They include The above practical application of inclusive education ensures psycho-social development as well as improvement of intellectual functioning of

students with special needs. Inclusive education has several effects on students across the globe where it is practiced and for Nigeria, the psycho-social and improvement of intellectual functioning of inclusive education according to Onwubolu and Edozie (2010); Burnett, (2009); Federal Ministry of Education (2008); Kalu (2008); United Nations (2006); Garuba (2003) and Kelly (1999) include the following:

1. Inclusive education removes fearfulness, ignorance and prejudice from students with special needs.
2. It promotes a sense of teamwork and cooperation among learners.
3. It helps students with special needs to compete favourably with others with different abilities, endowments and backgrounds.
4. an improvement in pupils' self-confidence and self-reflection on their own behaviour;
5. a reduction in incidence of serious disruptive behaviour;
6. more sharing;
7. more mutual support among the pupils.
8. it helps pupils to articulate feeling and ideas – leading to greater confidence;
9. pupils are able to develop trust in the group;
10. it raises of self and the consequences of behaviour among students;
11. it brings about a solution-focused approach to teaching and learning;

Conclusion

Psychosocial needs of students with special needs will be enhanced greatly when they are in the same learning environment, most especially in the same classroom with normal students. This will help them to open up, have a different perception from what they have had before and relates well in their environment and community. Moreover, intellectual functioning of students with special needs will greatly improve as there will be a healthy rivalry amongst them in achievement test.

Effort at achieving Education For All by the year 2015 which is in line with the Millennium Development Goal and the Nigerian Vision 20-2020 will be further be enhanced when inclusive education is implemented and well funded to accommodate student with special needs and provide them opportunity to interact and relate with every member of the school community. The effects of this will go beyond psycho-social benefit of students with special needs to strengthen the bond of togetherness among these set of people and normal children. This will also help the government to adjust the curriculum and make it an adaptive one to embrace children of all needs. Inclusive Education is the way forward for the future of education the world over, and Nigeria's implementation of Inclusive education will ensure access and equal opportunity to education for all Nigeria children. It will also promote psycho-social adjustment of students with special needs in our regular school environments.

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