The Impact of Financial Crisis on Inclusive Education in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT   *Inclusive education does not end at rapid increase in students' numbers in regular classrooms. Adequate funding is indispensable for a comparable expansion in resources, staff, accommodations and facilities to meet the educational needs of every child.*

Introduction

Nigeria became a signatory to Solomence Declaration Report (1994) in the year 1995. The Report called upon all government and urged for the adoption, as a matter of law or policy, the principle of inclusive education. Inclusive education brings all children (those with disabilities, different languages and cultures, different interests and ways of learning) in one classroom and community regardless of their strengths and weaknesses in any area, and seeks to maximize their potentials. It can be deduced from the above explanation that mere physical contact of all learners does not guarantee success. In other words, children are not included unless their unique educational needs are fully addressed by specially trained personnel in the appropriate environment.

The high point of inclusion lies in restructuring of the entire school programme and practices; changes in the organizational arrangements, curriculum, and provision of necessary facilities to cater for their various and different educational needs. All learners demand access. The influx of learners with different educational needs demands building of more houses, restructuring existing classroom, buildings following the universal design features, provision of assistive technology devices to equalize educational opportunities and meet each child's educational needs, and provision of well qualified educators who understand the nature of the learners and who have the ability to infuse the view of diversity across curricular.

Regular schools in Nigeria have witnessed an influx of learners and more learners still to be enrolled. The federal ministry of education estimates put the population of Nigerian children of school age with various types of disabilities at 3.5 million or 7% are enrolled in primary school (FME). Statistics also show that more than 10 million Nigerian children of school age are not yet in the formal school system. Inclusive education demands that all children be included in school irrespective of the population.

Inclusive education by its nature is capital intensive. Moreover, since every child in the regular classrooms needs individualized education programme to have access to the general curriculum, the more the children the more the cost. This not withstand, Nigeria has suffered chronic decline in funding of education resulting into insufficient learning facilities, ill prepared educators, insecurity and undue emphasis on certificate and neglect of knowledge and skill acquisition. This study explores the nature of inclusive education and its financial implication in Nigeria.

Nature of Inclusive Education

The first step towards implementing inclusive education in any country, following United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO (1994) transformative inclusive agenda, is to identify all forms of exclusion and barriers to learning within the national policies, cultures, educational institutions and communities with a view of removing them. One form of such exclusion in Nigeria is negative attitude of people towards children with disabilities (Okeke, 2001; & Ozoji 2003).

Researches have shown that the greatest challenge of individuals with disabilities and which they found most difficult to contend with is the negative attitude of people towards them (Hyman 2004).

The negative attitude is often expressed in the form of rejection, discrimination, inaccessibility to buildings among others. The negative attitudes of the people (the public, educators, family members and government) impede the inclusive process and defect its purpose (Mowes, 2002; Powers 2002 and Ozorji 2005). For change of attitude, studies suggest proper education, orientation and training (Smith 2007).

Although the principle of inclusion presupposes a warm and embracing attitude towards all learners, a great deal of responsibility lies with educators who are pivotal cornerstone of the process. Downing (2002) maintains that the knowledge, skills and competencies required for inclusive education are substantially different and require additional training and support for educators. The issue of teacher competence in teaching pupils with diverse abilities was strongly affirmed by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO (1999) when it asserted that "appropriate preparation of all educational personnel stands out as a factor in promoting progress towards inclusive education. In other words, according to Darling-Hemmond (1997:154) "if teachers are to prepare an evermore diverse group of pupils for much more challenging work..., they will need substantially more knowledge and radically different skills than most schools or education now develops".

In addition to skill and competence acquisition by educators, Hargreaves, Lieberman, Fullan and Hopkins (1998) stated that educators need to be emotionally prepared to embrace inclusive education. To support this assertion further, Swart, Engelbrect, Eloff and Pettipher (2002) asserted strongly that most of the barriers in implementing inclusive education are embedded in the emotional predisposition of educators among which are feeling of anxiety, ignorance, confusion

skepticism, concern for personal loss of autonomy, security and job satisfaction, as well as feeling of discomfort and fear of failure. In other words, when policy makers and national issues ignore educators' emotions, the consequences can be disastrous, because emotions enter all aspects of life.

Sharing information and working as a collaborative team can serve to alleviate concerns and resistance (Dawning 2002). Meeting the diverse needs of all children included in the school demands team work. Working as a team is a key to success (Smith, 2007). The classroom teacher often needs assistance in teaching curriculum and adopting teaching approaches and identification of children with various disabilities. Improper identification can lead to over representation and misappropriates representation and under presentation of children with diverse needs in the classroom. Involving parents and other experts in the identification and overall education of children lowers children's alienation and enhances children's achievement (Brown, Paulsen and Higgins, 2003).

The presence of diverse children in one classroom necessitates a constant review and expansion of the curriculum in order to meet each child's educational needs. In other words the change in curriculum must support all learners, the intention being to sustain lifelong learning in heterogeneous classrooms. Research has proved the argument that individuals are not the same and that their needs are diverse (Guild 2001 and Mulroy and Eddinger, 2003). One size fits all curriculum no longer meets the needs of the majority of learners (Tomlinson 2002; Forsten, Grant and Hallas 2002 and McBride, 2004). Research supports the view that curricular should be designed to engage students. It should have the ability to connect to their lives and positively influence their levels of motivation (Coleman, 2001, Guild, 2001 and Hall, 2002).

Inclusive education aims at giving every child equal and maximum opportunity to learn. To promote learning, active participation is essential and often achieved through the use of technology and other teaching aids. It calls for adequate provision of instructional materials, provision of science laboratory equipment, language laboratories and recreational equipment, among others. Moreover, children with disabilities need technology for mastery of those skills which come more naturally to their peers without disability. These technology devices known as assistive technology equalize educational opportunities for children with disabilities (Eskay&Oboegbulem, 2013; Michaels and McDermott 2003, Cooper and Nicholas 2007 and Smith 2007). These technology devices include Braille, hearing aids, clutches, speech synthesizers, computers, audio loops, automobile prosthesis, to mention but a few. Most of these devices are computer compliance and also use electricity to power. Most children with disabilities need one assistive technology or the other.

Inclusive Education in Nigeria and Impact of Financial crisis
The adoption of inclusive education in Nigeria has added to the existing challenges of education in Nigeria. Prior to the acceptance of inclusive education and even till date, Nigeria has suffered chronic issues in the areas of inadequate funding, serious infrastructural inadequacies, insufficient numbers of qualified teachers and administrators (FRN, 2008). In the words of Muhammed (2007) Nigerian education is characterized by overcrowded classrooms, very poor learner-teacher ratio, absence of basic teaching and learning materials, infrastructural and teacher incompetence in terms of innovation, reflective teaching and learning approaches and poor learning environment. Moreover, the growth of special education in Nigeria is inhibited by rigidity in equipment, teacher training, facilities, funding, law and administration. These reports help

to bring out the challenges of education in Nigeria and then explain the depth of inclusive education in Nigeria.

In specific terms, overcrowded classrooms and dilapidated school houses are rampart in schools in Nigeria. The existing buildings are in a state of decay due to negligence. The amount of funding needed for new buildings is high and the estimated cost of the rehabilitation of existing infrastructure is even higher (World Bank, 2000). Inclusive education in Nigeria urgently demands that those dilapidated houses be repaired, more houses built to accommodate the turning population of children of school age and restructuring already existing ones in line with the principle of Universal design. As outlined in the American with Disabilities Act ADA '04 universal design features seek to improve access to all learners to the physical environment and the community and the workplace by removing or reducing barriers found in the environment. Moreover, building of curb cuts, sidewalks and lift, to mention but a few will give individuals with various disabilities equal access to the learning environment.

Under inclusive education, there is much need to enroll all children irrespective of severity of disability, economic status of parents and so on. It is estimated that more than 10 million children are still out of school (Mohammed). It is important to note that the number keeps growing everyday and day. Getting such number of children in school is wholesome task. Much money is needed for sensitization, awareness, training of the public and families involved to bridge gender, regional rural and urban disparities in enrollment numbers in schools. Such sensitization is needed also for a change of attitude of some significant others within the child's environment.

Learning facilities needs to be comparable with the fast growing number of children in schools and those yet to be enrolled. Experience has shown that there is shortage of textbooks in schools due to high cost of books. A recent UNESCO study (1994) indicated that less than 17 of primary schools have access to textbooks, and in general, textbook availability in schools is 10% of what it should be. Imagine the number of textbooks when all children get enrolled in schools? In addition to textbooks, much money is needed for equipping the science and language laboratories and procurement of instructional materials that appeal to all senses are needed for effective teaching and learning. Array of services are needed and must be provided in order to give every member equal and maximum opportunity to learn.

In addition, procurement of adequate specialized and functional assistive technology devices is indispensable in running an inclusive education. In spite of its necessity in equalizing educational opportunities for all children with all manner of learning difficulties, it is sad to note that those devices are rarely found in all schools in Nigeria base on the cost of procurement, maintenance, and its uses in improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools assistive devices which are learning in schools. Assistive devices which are computer compliance are expensive to run especially considering of a conducive environment. They cannot be effectively used without steady power supply, expertise and security issues, which seem to have defiled solutions in Nigeria. The need to allocate reasonable funds to procure use and maintain these devices is critical in giving every child equal access to quality education.

Training and retraining of educators are paramount to a successful inclusive education practice. Research (Eskay, 2011) has proved that our teachers lack competence and skills in teaching in inclusive classrooms because of inadequate training.

In addition to the increase in diversity in the pupils' population, there are also growing social problems and tensions created by technological changes and globalization of economy. These put intense pressure in teachers and make the need to review constantly the way our frontline teachers are trained. Assistive technology devices ought to be provided in adequate quantity in all teacher training in all schools in Nigeria to enable teachers learn how to utilize these devices in teaching children with various disabilities in regular classrooms. Funds are also needed in training and recruitment other professionals outside the classroom teachers. Those professionals include doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, social workers and others whose roles are essential in the overall education of all children.

Following the aforementioned, running inclusive education in Nigeria involves huge resources and as a result, sustainable financial arrangement must be devised and developed if Nigeria is to meet up with international call for inclusive education. Recognizing this, education sector analysis made recommendation in its 2000 report that 507 of annual budget be allocated to education. Unfortunately, it is yet to be implemented. Based on the Education Sector Analysis (ESA) report (2000) resource allocation from Federal government budgets between 12.25 – 7.23% in 1996 to 2000, and this trend has not changed significantly. In other words, funding education in Nigeria has being on the decline over the years irrespective of the fact that inclusive education is capital intensive. It is not wrong to say that the government alone seems incapable of funding inclusive education in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Since quality education is panacea to positive development of any nation it is most paramount that highest priority be given to education. Moreover, adequate funding is critical to running inclusive education otherwise it becomes counter-productive. Therefore, funds need to be provided through the three tiers of government, non-governmental organization, and philanthropists, among others. Those funds generated should be utilized judiciously to avoid diversions and wastes.

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