Research Paper Education

Inclusion: A Concept in Nigerian Educational System and the Role of Libraries

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ABSTRACT

Integration of disabled children into Nigeria educational system had been on the tract few decades back. Satisfaction or dissatisfaction on the implementation of the inclusive can only be justified by the 'present'. Future trends on the implementation will have more meaning when strategies are given priority. Awareness is high everywhere in the world that human success and prosperity can only be achieved through new ideas, new designs and innovations associated or anchored by creativity which allows collaborative partnership. The utilization of library services to "include the excluded" is of paramount importance in achieving the education for ALL agenda of Nigeria. It has therefore become imperative for government to expand and increase facilities for the training of disabled children and also increase the allowances of special education teachers if this concept is to be profitable in Nigerian educational system.

KEYWORDS Inclusion, Inclusive Education in Nigeria and Role of the Libraries.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusion in education is an attempt to educating students with special educational needs. Under the inclusion model, students with special needs spend most or all of their time with non-disabled student regardless of their strengths or weakness in any area, and seek to maximize the potential of all students. Based on certain observations, it could be seen that many persons are excluded from certain meaningful activities, especially persons living with disabilities in our communities. Their exclusion is giving many persons serious concern; based on this, this work intends to take a look at inclusion, an overview of inclusive education, the role of libraries in inclusive education, the future perspectives of inclusive education in Nigeria and the way forward

Kirk and Gallagher (1997) described inclusion as an effort to provide educational services for students with special needs in least restrictive environment. This means that the child will be place with his or her peers; receive services in the regular class (not special class); and interact as much as possible with his or her peers without disabilities in the least restricted environment. The rationale for inclusion according to the authors is that the child with special needs will best be able to cope in a normal world by learning to adapt in a normal school environment as much as possible. Stubbs (1998), assert that "inclusion is a strategy effectively contributing towards the ultimate goal of promoting an inclusive society, one which enable s all children whatever their gender, age, ability, ethnicity, impairment or HIV status to participate in and contribute to their society". Inclusion therefore, seeks to change the philosophy and structure of schools so that all students regardless of individual differences and abilities can be educated with their peers in the regular classroom environment, (Wade and Zone, 2000). However, the reality is that student in segregated special education classes have fallen further and further behind. Overtime, we have learned that inclusive education is a better way to help all students succeed.

Overview of Inclusive Education

Today, it is widely accepted that inclusion maximizes the potential of vast majority of students, ensures their rights, and is the preferred educational approach for the 21st century. Unfortunately, the philosophy has not always been widely held. Our thinking and acceptance has evolved rapidly over the last century and continues to evolve, in response to political beliefs.

special classes, at first did not exist .later, they were developed as a place for students who could not meet the standard and keep peace with follow class mates .many authorities in the field agreed that segregated special classes were not an appropriate educational sitting for most students with special needs for it was cleared that educating students with special needs in isolated setting minimized, rather than maximized their potential.

The situation today is thus that a number of initiatives from stakeholder themselves as from various multilateral and lateral organizations NGOs support a growing consensus that all children have the right to a common education in their locality regardless of their background, attainment or disability. Despite the consensus on the right to education, children with disabilities are still perhaps the group most excluded from schools and within the education system.

Inclusive education has evolved from a movement associated with the struggle against exclusion of learners with disabilities and other categorized as having special needs to one which challenges all exclusionary policies and practices in education. However, inclusion as such is not a concept that can be clearly and easily defined. Some authors deliberately avoid using the concept inclusion in order not to create a misunderstanding. It mighty therefore is better to view inclusion rather as an approach or a principle which aims at removing any barriers to learning.

There is a growing consensus globally that all children have the right to be educated. In Nigeria's National Policy of Education, one of the Nigeria's philosophies of education says that every Nigerian child shall have a right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities each according to his or her ability, (Federal Republic of Nigeria,

2004). This borders on inclusive education which is a human right issue reflecting on giving equal value, opportunities and ending segregation in separating children with disabilities or those who experience difficulties in learning. Education should be seen by the government as a basic human right and the foundation for a more just and equal society (UNESCO, 2009). This implies that every child, no matter the background, characteristics, need and abilities should be given equal opportunity to learn. Inclusive education necessitates that every learner's fundamental right be considered as each child has unique abilities and needs. Hence, given the right and equal opportunities, all children can develop their potentials as inclusive education considers differences in the learning and physical abilities of children as opportunities for making education system and schools more responsive and dynamic, (Masalela, n.d).

Inclusive education in Nigeria is the best option for achieving education for all where most disabled children or children with special needs receive equal education. Children with special needs could be seen as those children with situational disadvantages due to physical, mental, or emotional impairments as well as those who experience difficulties in learning at any time during their school age.

Some advantages of inclusive special education is that children who would otherwise not get a chance to study with other children are being offered the opportunity to be educated. Hence, inclusion in education is an approach to educating children or students with special educational needs. Under the inclusion model, students with special needs spend most or all of their time with non-disabled students.

The concept of inclusion is based on human rights, equal opportunities, social justice and participation. Inclusive education is very complex and multifaceted recognizing that there is no just one inclusion but rather, inclusion according to government rhetoric, inclusion as seen by children within schools, inclusion according to disabled activists, inclusion according to lay person and inclusion contested by various academics. Inclusion involves many stakeholders and it is a process that is difficult to implement. It is also controversial in the sense that it has multiple interpretations; it means different things to different people. Poverty, ethnicity, disability, gender or membership of a minority group may limit access to or marginalize within education. Cultural, social and economic consequences of these factors vary from time to time, country to country and from location to location (UNESCO, 2003)

Role of Libraries in Inclusive Education in Nigeria

Libraries are fundamentally established to make information resources available to users for teaching, learning, research and recreation. They play a key role in creating literate and conducive environment by offering relevant and attractive reading materials for all ages. In view of inclusive education, libraries should endeavor to create an enabling environment that is physically and psychologically conducive where all students could better be accommodated, feel safe and supported; have positive relationships, and accepting of each other. Igwesi (2012) noted that "globally, libraries are dedicated to providing free and equitable access to information for all, be it in written, electronic or audio-visual forms". However, in developing countries, one of the major constraints of inclusive education could be attributed mainly to serious shortage of resources such as lack of adequate facilities, lack of staff, lack of learning materials and absence of support (UNESCO, 2003). Ozoji (1995) observed that "most of the educational institutions in Nigeria lacked the basic units and materials necessary to provide adequate education for deaf and other learners with special needs in inclusive settings". Libraries should therefore endeavor to provide diversified learning materials such as audio/talking books, Braille materials, electronic text, and audio tapes, cassette for the visually impaired; television, finger alphabet, video, films, CD-ROM, DVD, overhead projector, computers, pictures, text books for the hearing impaired; the library should also be built in such a way that the lame could be accommodated by making the entrance wide and sloppy in a way that those on wheelchairs can have access.

Future Perspectives of Inclusive Education in Nigeria

We should all live to see full inclusion but the way towards it is not straight and clear or easy.

Even today research findings are still somewhat controversial one can find results for or against the fact that there are convincing findings of successful inclusive education on a comprehensive scale makes the situation even more problematic. The finding of small pilot projects may not be enough to convince all decision makes that inclusion, as an overall approach, is beneficial for all .Furthermore many teachers do not fully agree and do not believe that inclusion would work (see Huhtamaki e al. 1993, 146153,Homby et al .1997; Moberg 1998, 156).

A UNESCO survey (1986) about teachers views on integrated system point out that countries where teachers favor education of all children in ordinary classes have a law requiring this. But in Nigeria which offers sophisticated segregated educational provision, teachers and adults are the major barriers to inclusion (UNESO 1999).

In Nigeria, the content of teacher training remaining unrelated to the nature of inclusion and the condition in which they work; there separation between theory and practice. On many teacher education courses, inclusion is considered in separate session, usually associated with learners with impairment or those categorized as having special educational needs rather than permeating the approach to education in all courses. Inclusive education is not a near imitative with an associated set of policies that are additional to existing educational activities. It is not a form of special needs educational but an alternative to it concerned with the appropriate responses to all aspect of diversity within the mainstream, in which learners with impairment are one important element. The continuation of separate special needs education policies represents one of the challenges to the development of inclusive approach in Nigeria. Today in Nigeria, special educators, parents of students with disabilities, policy-makers and other stakeholders continue to debate the benefits and challenges of this education paradigm (Ajuwon, 2008). This is based on the premises of inclusive education that every school should cater for all children, irrespective of their circumstances, needs and abilities.

In Nigeria there is a tendency for new labels to be given to educational initiatives associated with particular government departmental organizations rather than connect them with existing Governmental organizations rather than to connect them with existing policies. Non-Governmental organizations may find themselves in competition with each other to provide service and these service can be poorly integrated with state provision. In some area despite an overall shortage of resources there are more interventions than the system can effectively absorb. While policy fragmentation and overlapping interventions are wasteful of resources in Nigeria, they have particularly serious consequences for economy. There is a need to bring together educational policies under label such as inclusive education; social inclusion and exclusion, education of marginalized learners, special needs of education community based rehabilitation 'health promoting school, child –friendly schools' within the education for All framework so that education for all is truly concerned with providing a high quality education for All learners within their local communities.

Way Forward

The development of inclusive education can only be possible if there are clear policies and legal frame works that establishes right and responsibilities, and the provision of the necessary resources. Inclusive education must be policy of the ministry of education as a whole because it involves the transformation of general education. The current divisions into regular, special inter cultural education, and so on, place barriers to the development of inclusive policies.

Despite education is an option for those responsible for educational system, it could not be really effective unless social and economic programs are to undeveloped parallel undertake some of its course in the social context thus, it is necessary to develop intersect oral policies and regulations that many include health, justice, welfare, employment and so on. It is also necessary to strengthen the articulation between government and the society, since NGOS, organizations or international agencies implement many of the programs addressed to the more vulnerable groups.

Need for Relevant Curriculum Development

One of the major obstacles in facilitating inclusive education system in developing countries is the problem of relevant curriculum development. In most cases, the educational curriculum is constantly undergoing changes without putting into consideration the special needs of children with learning disabilities. However, for any curriculum to be relevant, it has to be flexible and dynamic in order to accommodate the special needs of all learners. Often times, according to UNESCO (2003), "in many contexts, the curriculum is extensive and demanding or centrally designed and rigid, leaving little flexibility for local adaptations or for teachers to experiment and try out new approaches. The content might be distant to reality in which the students live and inaccessible and unmotivating. The curriculum might also be gender biased and degrading". Hence, it is imperative to design and develop a worthwhile curriculum for teaching and learning that will take cognizance of the special needs, interest, aspirations and uniqueness of all learners.

This is because different learners come from different backgrounds and have different abilities, divers needs, skills and values.

Need for Personnel Training Programme

In order to achieve a successful implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria, there is a need for regular training and re-training of teachers in order to acquire new and relevant skills to enable them meet up with the challenges of inclusive education. One of the responsibilities of the Federal Ministry of Education for coordinating special education in Nigeria in collaboration with relevant Ministries and non-governmental organizations and international agencies (UNICEF, UNESCO, UNDP, WHO, etc.) is special training and re-training of the personnel to develop capacity building and to keep abreast of latest teaching technique, for the various categories of disabilities, the gifted and talented, (National Policy on Education, 2004). However, most schools in Nigeria do not make provisions for their staff to undergo further training. Hence, most Nigerian schools are faced with serious shortage of qualified teachers. On this note, Eleweke, 1999; 2002) lamented that "inadequate personnel training programs is one of the major hindrances to achieving effective inclusion programs in Nigeria". Apart from the regular and special needs of teachers, the successful implementation of inclusive education requires the involvement of different professionals who will assist in identification, referral, diagnosis, treatment and of appropriate educational and related services, (Eleweke, 2002). He further emphasized that there is a need to establish more teacher-training programs in the country to ensure that all the schools are adequately staffed for the effective implementation of inclusive educational programs for deaf and other learners with special needs".

Need for Adequate Funding of Schools

One of the greatest challenges facing educational system in Nigeria is poor funding. Nigeria as a Nation has been in a serious economic quagmire. This has greatly affected the general funding of the education system. There are little or no infrastructure, equipment and learning resources. Although the government accepted full responsibility for adequate financial provision to ensure successful implementation of inclusion program as stated in the National Policy on Education (2004) document, evidence suggests that there is no special funding arrangement for the implementation of inclusive programs in the country, (Mba 1995; Onlinenigeria, 2007). However, successful inclusion practices depend on adequate funding of the school system in general and a holistic restructuring of school's entire program and curricula in order to "include the excluded"; and constant assessment of practices and results.

Recommendation

To further buttress the point mentioned above, the following recommendations are hereby prescribed:

- School teachers and school administrations and all concerned must come to unstained that it is their responsibility to educate all children.
- School must be set up to be learning organizations that is, the staff of the school must able to adapt themselves to new demands both of national economics and student diversity and grow over time in their ability to successfully meet individual student needs.
- Funding is an especially important issue for clear policy actualization. Nigeria still have funding policies which bias placement of disabled students.
- Increase the acceptance of diversity in school through development of more flexible curricular and more relevant student evaluation mechanisms.
- A strong financial support.
- Parents and community must also understand that successful education and socialization depends on parent's and other adults and children who form part of the community involvement in the communities working, social and political life is also a part of being included and this aspect cannot be ignored.

Conclusion

Involvement in education is an expression of hope for future generations. The Education for all movement recognizes that the exclusion from full participation in education, experienced by any individual, is a global responsibility .This paper argues that inclusive education is a right and based on principles of social justice inequitable. Furthermore it is possible, and when carried out appropriately, can improve educational outcomes for both disable d and non-disabled students alike. Starting with the recognition that many children are still excluded from education and excluded within education for variety of reasons, this paper however ,clarified and address the issue of inclusion in education by examining the challenges and barriers to learning throughout education system in general and by in p addressing in particular the possibilities to increase access and participation in learning for all children . throughout the last decade, learners with impairments continues to be on disproportionately excluded from any form of education, for example ,learners who are deaf and whose first language is sign language have a need for a sign language community which has to be reflected in plans for increasing their participation in education. However, in this study inclusive is not only concerned with learners impairments with overcoming the barriers to the learning and participation experienced by all learners vulnerable exclusion from full educational participation .The view of inclusion within the study involves a shift of focus from learners to learning centers , education systems and society . It is about creating inclusive cultures, policies and practices at all levels of the system. The educational inclusion of any group of learners cannot proceed very far without developing the capacity of learning centers to respond to learner diversity.

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