

Overcoming the challenges of inclusive education in Nigeria: A focus on south-south geopolitical zone

(scientific paper)

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Abstract: *Inclusive education was the outcome of the Salamanca statement in 2008. Its focus was on addressing the failures and challenges of general and special education, especially the subject matter of integration and mainstreaming. The implementation of inclusive education was expected to act as a magic wand in addressing the deficiencies, challenges and hiccups in both general and special education. Inclusive education in Nigeria is confronted with multifarious and multifaceted difficulties and challenges which if left unaddressed will defeat the desired expected objective. This paper therefore undertook a survey of the very crucial challenges confronting the full, effective and functional implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria focusing on the South-South geopolitical zone with a view to addressing the inadequacies. To illicit responses, questionnaires were designed and administered on respondents from three states of Cross River, Akwa Ibom and Rivers. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to analyze the data and the results discussed. From the findings, suggestions/appropriate recommendations were proffered toward enhancing efficient and effective implementation of the policy to benefit learners in Nigeria schools thus, improving on the overall set standard of education.*

Key-words: *Inclusive education, special education, integration, mainstreaming, Nigeria schools, standard of education*

1 Introduction

Creating an inclusive society is the main objective of inclusive education. Special needs education incorporates an eclectic array of pedagogies from which all learners may benefit. It assumes that human differences are normal and that learning

must accordingly be adapted to the needs of the child rather than the child fitted to pre-ordained methodologies regarding the pace and nature of the learning process.

A child-centred pedagogy is beneficial to all learners. It is evident that it can substantially reduce the drop out syndrome which is characteristic of the present education systems while ensuring higher levels of achievements. A child-centred pedagogy can as well help to avoid the waste of resources and shattering of hopes that all too frequently a consequence of poor quality instruction and one fitted all mentality towards education (The Salamanca statement 1994).

Inclusive education paved way for a training ground for people oriented society that respects both differences and the dignity of all human beings. Thus, the right of every child to education is proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which was reaffirmed by the world declaration on Education for all (EFA). Every person with a disability has a right to self-expression with regards to education, as far as this can be obtained.

It should be noted that prior to the Salamanca Framework for Action, various forms of providing educational services for special needs persons were advocated around the world. This was with the aim of making education accessible and life in general convenient to persons with special needs. These pedagogies included the practice of integration in Britain, mainstreaming in the United State and normalization in the Scandinavia and Canada (Amadi in Ewa 2000).

It can therefore be deduced that inclusion as proclaimed by the Salamanca framework is an expansion as well as a merger of the already existing services to serve persons with special needs around the world.

This paper therefore undertook a survey of the very crucial challenges confronting the full, effective and functional implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria, focusing on the South – South geopolitical zone with a view to addressing the inadequacies.

2 Literature Review

The fundamental principle of inclusion is that all handicapped should learn together wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have as contained in the Salamanca framework for Action (1994).

By implication therefore, an inclusive school should provide a conducive atmosphere for learning to all children, disabilities notwithstanding that is, teaching/learning activities, including teachers, learning aids/materials and equipment, architectural designs and above all environmentally friendly atmosphere to special needs persons.

One important tool for an effective inclusive education program is that in the inclusive schools, children with special educational needs should receive whatever extra support they may require to attain a functional education.

Mutale (2008) opined that children who learn together learn to live together. According to her, inclusive education serves as both a social and educational tool for integration. She noted that universal education suggests that all children irrespective of their gender, creed, economic status learning difficulties, disability etc. have equal access to learning through the regular school system. Furthermore, she explained “all children need an education that will help them develop relationships and prepare them for life in the mainstreamed society”.

Inclusion of all children into the educational system is a human right. Hence inclusion is a term which expresses commitment to educating a child with all disability to the maximum extent appropriate in the school and classroom he/she would otherwise attend. It involves bringing the support services to the child rather than moving the child to the services (Olayi 2008).

Inclusive education according to Kanu in Obi (2008) is the provision of educational services for children with special needs in regular schools and classrooms attended by non-disabled children. Those schools and classrooms are directly supervised by general education teachers with appropriate special education support and assistance.

According to the six goals of the Dakar Framework (1990) for action, education for the most vulnerable children should be an integral part of the overall school system. Avoke (2005) stated that education for all calls for forceful capacity building to improve quality and increase access to education through building on inclusive education approaches. Inclusive programs need to harness all the services to ensure that children make consistent social, emotional and academic gains. Inclusive education is ideal for achievement of the EFA goals and MDG Vision 2020 that seeks to make education accessible to all Nigerian children by the year 2020.

3 Why inclusive education in the south-south geopolitical zone and Nigeria as a whole?

Inclusive education is seen as a human and child right issue, where individuals are not to be discriminated on religion, race and ethnicity, condition of birth or disability. The Dakar world Education Forum recognized the rights of all children, abled, disabled, at-risk and the vulnerable to have access to the qualitative education by 2015 through:

1. Expansion of educational opportunities for boys and girls, especially the disabled, vulnerable and disadvantaged.

2. Promotion of innovative programs that encourage those with special needs and disabilities to help them enroll, attend and successfully complete their programs in inclusive settings.
3. Ensuring accessibility in inclusive settings for children with special learning needs and for children with various forms of disabilities (Unicef, 2004).

Obi (2008) identified the benefits of inclusive education to include:

- It promote better academic achievement for the disabled. Non-disabled children could become peer teachers by assisting the disabled in topics and areas that they find difficult. Children with difficulties in benefiting from traditional academic programs could learn faster by observing others.
- Inclusive education develops a better working relationship, communication skills, social interaction skills and friendship between children with and without disabilities. These children without disabilities could begin to appreciate those with disability by understanding that disability is not contagious nor is it a disease and that disabled children are people with whom they can live together.
- It reduces stigma and enhances disabled children self – esteem. Stigmatization brings discrimination and labeling. Hence inclusion will remove the vices.
- Inclusion gingers healthy competition among children, disabled children who are remained unidentified and as such its drop out for problems that could easily have been solved in an inclusive setting.
- It also leads to collaborative approach between professionals in general education, special education, social workers, counselors, psychologists etc. for the good of the children (Unicef 2004).

4 Challenges of inclusive education

1. Among the hindrance to educating disabled children is discrimination, segregation and labeling. Many parents of disabled children are ashamed to bring out their children from hiding (homes) and send them to labeled schools. This is because once a child is said to be attending a special school for the deaf, blind, mentally retarded, physically disabled, it will immediately be concluded that the child is disabled. This impacts negatively on the morale and performance of children with disabilities who will definitely develop poor self concept and inferiority complex that may lead to frustration.
2. Societal attitude: Ewa (2000) put it that generally speaking the societal attitude towards the inclusion of the special needs children has been negative. This is characterized by discrimination, segregation, labeling and non acceptance of the special needs into the mainstream of the regular school environment. To many

the best and ideal place of learning for the special needs persons is special schools/centres.

3. One other challenging factor to the issue of inclusive education is that the Nigeria Policy on Education does not have a legislating backings and so leaving a wide gap for litigation in the case of failure by the implementators of the policies. For instance the Universal Primary Education introduced in 1976 gave only a de-facto legal status to the integration and education of children with special needs in Nigeria. Similarly the National Policy on Education (1981) although devoted section 8 of the policy to special education with clearly stated objectives, lack legislative backing and so cannot be challenged by any one in the case of failure.
4. Personnel: The dearth of trained personnel in the areas of audiology, orientation and mobility, sign language interpreters, braillists, speech therapists and lot more posts a lot of threat to inclusive education. In most cases the available ones tend to quit the job for greener pasture due to poor remuneration and lack of incentives. Evidence abounds across the states in the zone that even special schools for over the years lost special teachers to other better paid jobs thereby leaving the fate of our special children in the hands of ill trained and ill equipped non specialist teachers who are either deployed on secondment to help the situation or engaged on part time arrangement.
5. Funding: Olayi (2008) indicated that inclusive education is capital intensive as more funds may be required to carry out restructuring/redesigning the environment to suit the special needs children. It may also placed financial burdens on the schools, parents and government as it may involve employing supplemental aids and services, equipment and technological appliances. As a result, some parents of children with more severe disabilities may become apprehensive about the opportunities their children may have to develop basic life skills in the regular schools.
6. Training: The absence of update of knowledge on new skills and assistive technologies especially for children with visual impairment remains a serious challenge for teachers, students as well as managerial effectiveness and expertise. The need for continuous in service training and on the job update of knowledge and skills in line with new innovations in the teaching/learning, instruction/instructional programming cannot be overemphasized. Hence this remain the only tool for overcoming the fast degrading and deplorable state of our educational system vis a vis the implementation of the inclusive education policy.
7. Over population: One other gruesome challenge besieging effective implementation of inclusive education is overpopulation in the classrooms in the Nigerian schools. In a situation where a teacher has much to do in tackling the large number of students in the regular school, what then becomes the fate of the teachers as well as students when the special needs students are brought into the regular

school system? This does not give room for individualized attention as enshrined in the Salamanca statement framework for action (1994).

In the same vein (Okwudire and Unogwu 2011) summarized the challenges of inclusive education in Nigeria as follows:

- Administrative rigidity, inflexibility of location and distribution of educational resources.
- Inadequate funding
- Social attitude
- Government lukewarm attitude towards education of the special needs person.
- Manpower development
- Inadequate content in the curriculum

Statement of the problem

Inclusive education in Nigeria is confronted with multifarious and multifaceted difficulties and challenges which if left unaddressed will defeat the desired expected objective of inclusion. This study was prompted by the desire to address these challenges.

Purpose of the study

This study focused on identifying and determining the various strategies to be put in place in order to overcome the challenges affecting the smooth implementation of inclusive education in the south-south geopolitical region of Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. To what extent has the state government in the south-south geopolitical zone enhanced inclusive education for persons with disabilities.
2. Are there likely problems confronting the smooth implementation of inclusion of persons with special needs into regular schools across the zone?
3. To what extent does lack of facilities affect the smooth implementation of inclusive education in the zone.

Research Hypotheses

- H0₁ Governments across the states in the south-south zone do not fully understand the concept of inclusion and have not made adequate provision for the implementation of the policy.
- H0₂ There are inadequate facilities on ground for the smooth implementation of inclusive education in the zone.

H0₃ Poor funding and supervision by governments across the zone has significant effect on the implementation of inclusive education.

H0₄ Poor knowledge and lack of awareness about the policy by individuals and disabled people organizations (DPO) across the zone has no significant effect on the smooth implementation of inclusive education.

Methodology

The survey research design was adopted for this study. This is because it allows the researchers to make inference and generalization of the population by selecting and studying the sample for the study. The population of the study consists of government officers from Ministry of Education (MOE), teachers/school heads and disabled persons. A total of 360 respondents were randomly selected for the study. The selection was done through a multi-stage random sampling involving the stratified and sample random sampling techniques. The stratification was based on the three units stated above (MOE, teachers/school heads and disabled person). In each of the stratum, a simple random sampling was employed to select 60 government officials from MOE, 240 teachers/school heads and 60 disabled persons making a total sample of 360.

Four points likert-type questionnaire was the main instrument used for data collection. The instrument was validated by Experts in Measurement and Evaluation/Statistic of the Faculty of Education, University of Calabar. The test-retest reliability method was employed to ascertain the reliability estimate of the instrument. The reliability index was found to be 0.81. At the end of the exercise, 360 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved with the aid of some research assistance.

5 Hypothesis-by-hypothesis presentation of result

Hypothesis one

Government across the states in the south-south zone do not fully understand the concept of inclusion and have not made adequate provision for the implementation of the policy.

The independent variable involved in this hypothesis is government understanding of the concept of inclusion, while the dependent variable is implementation of the policy. Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis was deployed to test the hypothesis. The result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Pearson Produce Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship government understanding of the concept of inclusion and implementation of the policy (N = 360).

Variables	Σy Σy		Σx^2 Σy^2	Σxy	r-value
Concept of inclusion	17.31	6232	9347	61031	-0.44
Implementation of inclusive education	16.48	5933	7838		

*significant at .05 level, critical $r = .113$, $df = 358$

The result in Table 1 shows that the calculated r-value of -0.44 is higher than the critical r-value of .113 at .05 level of significance with 358 degrees of freedom. With this result the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that government fully understands the concept of inclusive education. The negative value attached to the calculated value indicates that the implementation of inclusive education is significantly low or not at all.

Hypothesis two

There are no significant adequate facilities on ground for the smooth implementation of inclusive education in the zone.

The independent variable is adequate facilities, while the dependent variable is implementation of inclusive education. Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis was employed to test this hypothesis. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship between inadequate facilities and smooth implementation of inclusive education (N = 360).

Variables	Σy Σy		Σx^2 Σy^2	Σxy	r-value
Inadequate facilities	6.89	6080	8957	136492	-0.40*
Implementation of inclusive education	16.48	5933	7838		

*significant at .05 level, critical $r = .113$, $df = 358$

The result of the analysis reveals that the calculated r-value of 0.40 is higher than the critical r-value of .113 at .05 level of significance with 358 degrees of freedom. With this result the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that inadequate facilities

on ground significantly affect the smooth implementation of inclusive education in the zone.

Hypothesis three

Poor funding/supervision by the government across the zone has no significant effect on the implementation of inclusive education. The independent involve is poor funding/supervision; while the dependent variable is implementation of inclusive education. The result is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship between poor funding/supervision by the government and implementation of inclusive education (N = 360).

Variables	Σy Σy		Σx^2 Σy^2	Σxy	r-value
Poor funding/supervision	17.25	6210	9286	167332	0.69*
Implementation of inclusion	16.48	5933	7838		

*significant at .05 level, critical r = .113, df = 358

The result in Table 3 indicates that the calculated r-value of 0.69 is higher than the critical r-value of .113 at .05 level of significance with 358 degrees of freedom. With this result the null hypothesis was rejected. This result implies that poor funding/supervision by the government has a significant effect on the implementation of inclusive education in the zone.

Hypothesis four

Poor knowledge/awareness about the policy by individuals and disabled people organization (DPO) across the zone has no significant effect on the implementation of inclusive education in the zone.

The independent variable in this hypothesis is poor knowledge/awareness; while the dependent variable is implementation of inclusive education. Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis was used to test this hypothesis. The result is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship between poor knowledge/awareness and implementation of inclusive education (N = 360).

Variables	Σy Σy		Σx^2 Σy^2	Σxy	r-value
Poor knowledge/ awareness	17.01	6124	9279	158421	0.62
Implementation of inclusion	16.48	5933	7838		

*significant at .05 level, critical $r = .113$, $df = 358$

The result in Table 4 indicates that the calculated r-value of 0.62 is higher than the critical r-value of .113 at .05 level of significance with 358 degrees of freedom. With this result the null hypothesis was rejected. This result implies that poor knowledge/awareness of the policy by individuals and disabled people organization (DPO) has a significant effect on the implementation of inclusive education across the zone.

6 Discussion of findings

The result of the first hypothesis revealed that governments fully understand the concept of inclusive education but the implementation of the policy is low and ineffective. The finding corroborates with the views of Ewa (2000) that the societal attitude towards the disabled persons is negative. This equally extends to planning programs that will be beneficial to them.

The result of the second hypothesis indicated that inadequate facilities on ground affect the effective implementation of inclusive education in the zone. The findings are in agreement with the view of Olayi (2008) who opined that inclusive education is capital intensive, hence adequate funds is not made available to put the necessary facilities on ground for the smooth take off of inclusive education in the zone.

The result of the third hypothesis showed that poor funding/supervision by the government has a significant effect on the implementation of inclusive education. The finding is in line with the view of Okwudire and Unogwu (2011) who opined that inclusive education is faced with the problem of inadequate funding which tends to affect the smooth implementation of the policy.

The result of the last hypothesis indicated that poor knowledge/awareness of the policy by individuals and the disabled people organization significantly affects the implementation of inclusive education in the zone. The finding is in consonance with the view of Obi (2008) that poor knowledge about the abolition of persons with disabilities leads to discrimination and segregation thereby affecting their self concept.

7 Conclusion

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that the principle of inclusion is based on the fact that all categories of children, disability notwithstanding should learn together wherever possible regardless of any difficulties or differences. In view of the above fact, it can be said that the practice of inclusive education in the South – South geopolitical zone of Nigeria is yet to take a stand. This is due to the miss-feelings still exhibited by the state governments concern.

The paper therefore concluded that the practice of inclusion in the south-south geopolitical zone is still in theory and not in practice. It therefore calls on the government and other stakeholders in education across the zone to brace up to the challenges.

8 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to help overcome the challenges of inclusive education in the south-south geopolitical zone:

1. The National Assembly should enact a legislation to back up all educational policies especially Education policies on education of the handicapped so as to give room for accountability on the part of government and other stakeholders in education.
2. For proper inclusion into the regular school system, adequate preparation in terms of restructuring architectural designs to suit persons with disabilities, procurement of special learning aids/facilities should be provided to all schools.
3. More personnel especially the special educators should be trained. Moreover the incentives as spelt out in the blue print on education of the handicapped in Nigeria should be paid to the teachers/personnel working directly with the special needs children in the inclusive schools.
4. Bursary awards should be made available to all special needs persons in school so as to motivate them to learn and be properly integrated in the school.
5. Emphasis should be placed on training teachers, special educators and other supportive staff as well as procurement of special equipment and materials in order to give equal access to education and to bridge the gap between children with handicapping conditions and their non handicapped peers with regards to learning. Above all governments across the zone should ensure that as enshrined in the Blue Print on the education of the Handicapped in Nigeria, a census aimed at identifying children with special needs be carried out because this will go a long way in helping the various ministries of education across the zone to identify schools where inclusion can be carried out.

9 References

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