

Understanding the myth of inclusion preparing teachers for an inclusive setting in Nigeria

(overview essay)

Ewa James Abua

Abstract: *The Salamanca Statement 1994 charged respective governments to make education inclusive. Of the several problems besieging inclusive education in Africa, especially in Nigeria, is the misunderstanding and misconception of the subject matter even by certified educators. If inclusion has to work in the school system; it follows therefore that the facilitators of the subject matter must understand the ingredients. The thrust of the paper therefore is on how to train, retrain, orientate, and re-orientate teachers who are the major catalysts in the inclusive agenda to be poised towards achieving the goals of the inclusive education in Nigeria.*

Key words: *Inclusion, inclusive education, benefits of inclusion, disabled people*

1 Introduction

Education has remained the bed rock of national development. It is liberating force and in our time, a democratizing tool cutting across the barriers of caste, class, creed and circumstances imposed by birth (Olayi, Orim and Ewa 2011). Thus, the Blue print on Education of the handicapped in Nigeria, published in 1981 and revised 1997 states "All children have the right to education, the physical make up, economic status of parents, sex, religion and place of origin notwithstanding". It states further that the educational system should be such that the needs of all children are met including the handicapped.

It should be noted that considering the importance of education in the entire life of a person, educating a handicapped child holds limitless promises and expectations because the acquisition of knowledge through education has come to be recognized as the only opportunity to escape from all obstacles to progress into a life of achievement and self fulfillment.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities (UNCRPD) is the first Human Right Instrument specific to disabled people. It recognizes inclusion and promises full participation in economic, social, educational, cultural and political life (making the connection: Sight Saver 2009).

According to the document, when world leaders established the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), there was an omission of one fifth of the world's poorest people, that is the disabled people who consistently face discrimination with 82% living below poverty line. It insists that for a better understanding and the inclusion of this forgotten group, government must deliberately deliver quality education for disabled. It further insists that for a better understanding and the inclusion of this forgotten group, government must deliberately deliver quality education for disabled children. Other developmental organization were urged to ensure that their program understand and embrace inclusion and then include disabled persons alongside their counterparts.

It is in the light of the philosophy of inclusion of persons with disabilities into the mainstream of general education for their overall development that this paper attempt to unravel the myth of inclusion to pave way for understanding of the need for inclusion as a tool for develop persons with disabilities. The focus in on teacher preparation and the representation of inclusive education in Nigeria.

Of the several problems besieging inclusive education in Nigeria, the most prominent is misunderstanding and misconception of the subject matter. This is evidenced in negative attitude of the society towards the special needs children, government reluctance and unwillingness in the implementation of policies affecting persons with disabilities, poor teacher preparation, poor funding, lack of knowledge of the psychology of special needs children, non-availability of supportive staff/caregivers, poor teachers remunerations, non-effective parental involvement as well as lack of empathy on the part of the stakeholders in education.

2 Concept of inclusive education

If inclusive education has to work in the school system, it follows therefore that the facilitations (teachers) of the subject-matter of inclusion must understand the ingredients. It is common knowledge that children who learn together learn to live together. Inclusion emanated from the Salamanca conference of June 1994. In this conference, 92 governments and 25 international organizations met for the purpose of sharing ideas on special needs education and the way forward. The conference agreed on a dynamic new statement on the education of all children with special needs. It adopted a new framework of action with 14 guiding principles that the regular school accommodate the special needs child regard less of his/her ability.

Inclusive education is therefore an education setting where everyone belongs, is accepted and supported by his/her peers and other members of the inclusive community in the course of having his/her education needs met, Pambot 2005). From this definition the special child is made comfortable in the extent that the limitations brought about by disabilities are minimized.

According to Kanu in Obi (2005) inclusive education is the provision of education services for children with special needs in regular schools and classrooms attended by non-disabled children. These schools and classrooms are directly supervised by general education teachers with appropriate special education support and assistance. Inclusive education, simply put, is the education of children with disabilities alongside their non-disabled peers in neighborhood schools (Obi 2003). It is the opportunity given to children with disabilities to participate fully in all educational activities of the school alongside the non-disabled children in a regular school environment. It calls for the provision of support services to general education teachers to enable them support the children. It is based on the philosophy that children with disabilities should be given the opportunity to learn, play, grow, work and live together with the non-disabled children. This promotes natural respect for each other. It calls for the adaptation of the curriculum, the school environment, the teaching resources, the methodology and the recreational activities etc. to meet the special needs of the disabled children.

3 Rationale for inclusive education

It is estimated that about 113 million primary school age children worldwide are not attending school (Unesco 1998). According to Unesco 90% of them live in developing countries. Through efforts are on to meet these needs as a part of the global upsurge for education for all, millions of children are still denied access to education. The problem is further aggravated when it comes to education of children with disabilities who most of the time are denied access to education and opportunity to learning for various reasons like attitudinal, social, cultural, economic, and geographical.

Similarly, Unesco contends that about 20–25% of the school age population require one form of special needs education or the other. Usman in (Umar 2011) observed that about one quarter of each school population in Nigeria needs special educational services to be able to live as frictional members of the society. However, the dearth of specialist teachers coupled with the inability to put such children in our school/society at a disadvantage position. Thus there is the need to change our attitude, our orientation and our direction towards the education of such category of children in order that they can be included in schools.

According to Florin (1988) in Umar (2011) the inclusion of all children in mainstream schools is part of an international human Right Agenda which calls for full

inclusion of persons with disabilities into all aspects of life. Umar further opined that inclusive education is a philosophy of special needs education that is based on certain principles which maintained that all children have the right to learn together and children should not be discriminated because of their disability and also there are no legitimate reasons to separate children for the purpose of learning on the grounds of inequality, disability, gender etc.

Unicef (2004) outlined the benefit of inclusion to inclusive

- Expansion of educational opportunities for boys and girls especially the disabled, vulnerable and disadvantaged
- Promotion of innovative programs that encouraged those with special needs and disabilities to help them enroll, attend and successfully complete their programs in inclusive settings for children with special learning needs and for children with various forms of disabilities.

4 Preparation and recruitment of teachers for inclusive education

Appropriate preparations of all educational personnel especially teachers stand out as a key factor in promoting progress towards inclusive education.

Good and effective teaching is key to effective learning in an inclusive environment. No doubt good teaching normally emanates from good teachers. It involves skills and ingenuity to reconstruct the curriculum, redesign the environment and change one's behavior, so that the learners would have experiences, resources and support they need to develop their sensitivity, compassion and intelligence. Moreover the teacher is the initiator of the learning process, the facilitator of the learning skills and is also regarded as the single most important factor of fostering the frontiers of knowledge in the inclusive setting (Kohl 1976, Lassa 1988 and Adima 1990 in Umar (2010).

Additionally, all tiers of government especially the Federal Ministry of Education should as a matter of necessity intensify efforts to ensure that as a signatory to this agreement, the implementation of this inclusive policy is adequately pursued.

In view of the above fact, there is therefore an urgent need for highly trained and specialized personnel as enunciated in the section 8; subsection 56(3) of the Nigerian National Policy on Education (2004). "In order to meet the personnel needs for the education of the handicapped the federal government bursary award for personnel development shall be extended to the education of the handicapped up to the tertiary level."

It is the position of this paper that for the purpose of training and re-training program of teachers to carry out with dedication the work of educating the handicapped children in an inclusive setting, both special and regular teachers involved in the

teaching and education of the handicapped children be given equal opportunity to acquire and develop their skills as related to their teaching and instructional activities.

Also, all institutions of higher learning in Nigeria offering courses in areas of special needs education be adequately funded to enable them procure the much needed technological requirement for their development and research services. This will enable them provide the necessary skills while preparing teachers for the programs.

Hence for teachers to be constantly updating their knowledge and skills in their services delivery, mandatory attendance at workshops, seminars and in-service training should as a matter of necessity be a part of the system.

5 Conclusion

It would be of importance for all stakeholders in this project to understand that inclusion is a planned, systematic and continuous process and not a quick fix solution. The underlying issue therefore is that inclusion need to be understood properly and attended to.

Under ideal conditions there should be legislation backing the policy. All stakeholders should be properly educated on the policy and then machineries for implementation adequately strategized.

It should be understood also that inclusive practices depend on restructured school system that allows for flexible learning environment, with flexible curricula and their communities, thus eventually promoting inclusive society.

Recommendations

The following actions should be taken to re-dress the challenges confronting inclusive education with a view to creating an inclusive society.

- Legislation there is need for a bill to back up the practice of inclusion in Nigeria to be passed by the National Assembly.
- Both federal and state executives should be mandated to as a matter of fact place the responsibility of running the educational sector in the hands of professional educationists. The minister and commissioner(s) for education should be professional educationists.
- There should be a policy implementation committees to oversee the implementation of the policy at all levels, apart from education supervisors and inspectors of schools
- The Federal college of education special Oyo, charged with the responsibility of producing middle class man power (teachers) as well as the universities of Ibadan, Jos, Calabar etc. providing special educational programs should be encouraged through adequate budgetary allocation to practically inculcate the knowledge and attitude of educating persons with special needs emphasized on the theory.

- Special education teachers should be employed, properly remunerated and deployed to schools designated as inclusive education schools/centers.
- There should be adequate awareness created by the Ministries of Education, Information Orientation as well as women and social welfare as the case may be to ensure proper understanding of the policy by all concerned.

6 References

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(reviewed twice)

Ewa James Abua
 Dept of voc & special edu
 Faculty of Education
 University of Calabar
 Nigeria
 e-mail: luckyewa27@ ymail.com