

Best practices in special education in Nigeria

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(book review)

Reviewed by James Abua Ewa

Prof. John Oyundoyin is a lecturer in the Department of Special Education, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. He has published many researched articles in Deaf education in both local and international journals.

In this article, the author tries to review the best practices that can be adopted to ensure effective service delivery to the special needs children in Nigeria. According to the writer, 'Best Practices in special needs education implies in meeting the needs of the persons with special educational needs and challenges, the concept of special education service delivery must be a holistic and individual centred program. This will make the service delivery interesting and beneficial to persons with special needs, their families and the executors of the special education programmes. Accordingly, the author identified the parameters that can facilitate best practices of special needs education service delivery to include:

- Total adherence to the fundamental Tenets of Special education.
- Making use of highly qualified special educators.
- Adoption of responsible practices of special education.
- Practical practices of individualized education programme and conferencing.
- Utilization of the principle of Responsible classroom practices.
- Provision of accommodations.
- The need for instructional modification.
- The use of Assistive Technology (AT) devices.
- Advocacy and awareness creation.
- Full implementation of inclusion/inclusive education practices.
- People first.
- Collaborative services from related disciplines.
- Parental involvement.
- Community efforts.

The author upholds that best practices of special education services delivery can be attained if the current trend on inclusive education is put in place. The reason being that inclusion simply aims at removing all forms of labelling and by placing all children in their nearest neighbourhood schools, regardless of the type of disabilities and the level of severity. Moreover, it has been observed that segregation of children in special classes denies these children access to normal experiences and that segregated services have not only but have also resulted in inadequate education for the children with special needs/disabilities. Inclusion on the other hand portrays there are no differences between children with disabilities and those without disabilities thereby encouraging all children to be part of the general education class. The author pointed out that inclusion has been widely supported by governments worldwide and in essence, it assumes that children with special needs are a part of the society and should be educated based on the principles of normalization, that is all persons regardless of ability should live and learn in environment as close to normal as possible (Wolfenbargers, 1972, The Salamanca Statement UNESCO, 1994). The basic idea behind normalization is that persons with special needs should be viewed in the ways in which they are the same as other people, rather than on the way in which they are different.

The author noted that lack of awareness about learners with special educational needs by service providers, policy makers and the community at large is a common problem. In that presently in Nigeria, there is low level of advocacy and lobbying for the rights of persons with disabilities by concern parents, communities and disability organizations. Therefore, owing to that, issues relating to special needs education and disability have not been given prominence in public meetings and the media. He pointed out further that the best practices in special needs education are practices that advocate for the rights of persons with special needs/disabilities and ensure that they are fairly treated. This is because persons with disabilities are marginalized. The marginalization which is largely founded on misconceptions and mistaken beliefs, cultural practices and attitudes which have led to prejudice paternalistic treatment and at times, outright discrimination and as a result majority of persons with disabilities have limited access to education due to lack of public awareness on the capabilities of the individuals with special needs that would have otherwise addressed these issues.

The writer opines that the best practices in special needs education service delivery can be on the offing with multidisciplinary collaboration, the use of assistive technology devices, parental involvement as well as community efforts put in place, much can be achieved. He sums up by holding that:

- Special education programmes and services should be a top priority of government budget to the education sector, as this is the only means by which the government can show her commitment/concern for persons with special educational needs in the country.

- The official acceptable best practices in special education should be clearly spelt out in the education policies of the countries of the world.
- The use of IEP should be mandated in the education of persons with special needs.
- Frequent on the job training should be made available to the regular classroom teachers in order to acquaint them with the principles and dynamics of special needs education practices.

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