

# CHALLENGES HINDERING EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

*The National Policy on Education states that education of children with special needs shall be free at all levels of education and all necessary facilities that would ensure easy access to education shall be provided via inclusive education or integration of special class and units into ordinary/public classes under the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme. It is under this inclusion model that learners with special needs spend most or all of their time with so-called normal learners. Lack of adequate resources to meet the educational needs of the learners in the regular schools causes most of the parents to have doubt as to whether the needs of their children are adequately met in these schools. This article briefly examines the following: Definition of special education, concepts of special needs children, inclusive education in Nigeria, some points that can facilitate inclusion in the Nigeria setting, inadequate educational facilities, poor teacher training, and poor policy implementation e. t. c.*

## **Introduction**

Nigerian National Policy on Education (1981) stated that:

“All children, including the gifted as well as those with physical, mental and leaving difficulties, must be provided for under the educational system”.

The corollary of UPE according to government is that special education arrangements must be made for the handicapped and the exceptional children/adults. These exceptional area are stated in the definition of special education provided by the National Policy on Education (1981) which defines special education as:

“The education of children and adults who have learning difficulties because of different sorts of handicaps: blindness, partial sightedness, deafness, hardness of hearing, mental retardation, social maladjustment, physical handicaps e.t.c. due to circumstances of birth, inheritance, social position, mental and physical health pattern, or accident in later life. As a result, a few children and adults are unable to cope with the normal school class organization and methods”.

The same policy also states that:

“There are also the specially gifted children who are intellectual precocious and find themselves insufficiently challenged by the programme of the normal school and who may take to stubbornness and apathy, in resistance to it”.

Concept of special needs child:

Special needs children include all children who, for whatever reasons, are failing to benefit from (UNESCO Report, 1994). Ozoji and Mugu cited by Unegbu (2006). Define special people as “those with significant sensory deficits or unusual high intellectual that are not properly addressed in the regular programme.”

They further opine that a highly intelligent child is a child with outstanding achievement and ability who is not well catered for in the regular class room. Moreover, Kamu (2008) is of the opinion that people with special needs are those generally referred to as exceptional persons and they comprise children, youths and adults with one form of disability or learning difficulty or the other. In the same vain, Akuogibo and Dada cited in Nwachukwu (2006) see the special needs child as one who:

“Deviates from the ordinary child such that he/she requires special attention, special services and areas that could make life more meaningful and worth living those who require special education service in order to benefit from the regular school curriculum. They are those who learning difficulties or disabilities compel to require additional potentials within the curriculum (p. 278)”.

Inclusive education is about the integration approach of the special needs learners in school. Ozoji (2006) sees inclusive education as the programme that allows children with disabilities to learn together with other children in regular school with appropriate support. This implies that effective inclusion entails the use of appropriate supportive facilities and services to meet the needs of children with special needs in regular school system. Inclusive education is a process that involves the transformation of school modification in content, approaches and strategies, structures, facilities and services with a common vision that covers all children of appropriate age. The regular school setting is responsible to educate all children in same neighbourhood schools with appropriate supportive resources that would meet each child’s educational needs disability notwithstanding.

### **Inclusive Education in Nigeria**

It is a matter of fact that no concrete step has been taken with regard to inclusive education in Nigeria. Even at policy level, integration remains the focus of planning special education programmes. However, professional associations concerned with the education of persons with special needs, have been addressing the issue of inclusive education in the country. For instance, inclusive education was one of the major issues examined at the 21<sup>st</sup> Annual National Conference of the National Council for exceptional

children held at Minna, Niger State, in August, 2002. In the key note address presented at the conference, Tim Obani (one of the Pioneers in special education in the country), argued, “the old special education system with its restrictive practices cannot successfully address these problems (of special needs children). The answer lies in conclusion or inclusive schooling. In changing and recognizing the entire school system to accept all children and cater to their varied ‘special’ or ‘ordinary’ leaning needs and difficulties” as alluded to earlier, the education of persons with special education needs has received wide attention at policy level, even though it is otherwise, at the level of implementation. The following problems have identified with special education in Nigeria.

- ❖ Inadequate plans for the identification of special needs children
- ❖ Lack of adequate guidance services for the parents and the nature and extent of special education facilities available for their children
- ❖ Most special schools are located in urban centers.
- ❖ Begging which is fast assuming the status of an occupation among adult persons with disabilities, as well as other adult who have children with disabilities.

Inclusive education has its benefits, some challenge hindering effective implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria are: Inadequate educational facilities, poor teacher training and poor policy implementation.

### **Inadequate Educational Facilities**

In most of the schools in Nigeria, there are no adequate educational facilities. These range from lack of adequate reading materials, to desks, classrooms among others. Inclusive education has led to an increased number of learners in the learning institutions. This leads to decrement in the available resources in the schools. According to study conducted by Oakes and Saunders (2002) shortage of teaching and learning materials has a negative impact on the learners, especially the special need ones with less knowledge about a subject. This forces most of the parents to remove their children from the schools and take them to special schools. Lack of adequate resources to meet the educational needs of the special needs learners in the regular schools cause most of the parent to have doubt as to whether the needs of their children are adequately met in these schools. Thus, most parent prefer to take their children to the special schools as compared to the inclusive schools. This affects negatively the success of inclusive education. Additionally, many schools in Nigeria are characterized by inadequacies in basic facilities such as properly ventilated classrooms, furniture suitable for the special needs and non-special needs learners, kitchen, safe clean water, play ground, toilets and play materials among others (IAEYC, 1991). This limits the enrolment of the special needs learners in the regular schools hence affecting the success of inclusive education.

## **Poor Teacher Training**

Teacher's training is equally important in the teaching and learning process. Most of the teachers do not have adequate training on handling both the special needs and non-special needs learners in one class. This affects the understanding of some of the learners of which it is reflected in their performance.

Continued poor performance among the special needs learners due to the poor teaching skills and abilities of the teachers' triggers their poor enrollment in the regular schools. Angrist and Lavy (2001) observe that lack of adequate and proper training received by teacher lead to a reduction in pupil's test scores. Thus, lack of adequate teacher training to handle both the special needs and so-called normal learners in the same class negatively affects the success of inclusive education.

## **Poor Inclusive Education Policy Implementation**

There is no adequate support for inclusive education from the concerned stakeholders. In Nigeria most of the parents of the special needs learners are caution about placing their children in an inclusion programme because of fears that children will be ridiculed by other children, or be unable to develop regular life skills in an academic classroom. This is mainly attributed to poor policy implementation. Government in Nigeria has not been able to effectively implement inclusive education policy framework. One case in point is the endlessly controversial National Exam, which fails to capture learners' diverse backgrounds and needs (Sugiharto, 2008).

The following points can facilitate inclusion in the Nigeria setting:

- ❖ Campaign to enlighten all stakeholders in the education of children with special needs
- ❖ Adults with disabilities living on the streets needs to be rehabilitated and gainfully engaged.
- ❖ The Government needs to mobilize people to form more Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), to pursue the cause of people with special needs.
- ❖ Professionals and other stakeholders should work towards getting the National Assembly to legislate the creation of a special fund for the education of children with special needs.
- ❖ Though the education policy makes provision for a special education commission, this is still to be implemented. The Government should step up action towards this end.
- ❖ Finally, there is the need to get the machinery going towards the process of monitoring, in order to ensure effective implementation of inclusive schooling for children with special needs.

## **Conclusion**

Inclusive education in Nigeria still remains in the realm of theory and far from practice, it is still grappling with problems of policy implementation, an environment that

is not conducive for practice. The success of inclusive education is hindered by other factors like community's attitude towards special needs, lack of adequate involvement of all stakeholders among others. As such, more still need to be done in order to ensure that the best is achieved from the objectives of inclusive education.

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