
PREPARATION OF STAKEHOLDERS FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

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Introduction

When the idea inclusive education first came about in 1994, not everybody believed that this new direction in special needs education will last. Skeptics believe that sooner or latter the idea will die. However, far from dying, for almost two decades now the inclusive education doctrine have moved from just being an idea on paper and has become a gigantic movement. It is a movement in the sense that papers have been written and continue to be written advancing its merits to service providers and benefits to the consumers. Researches and pilot studies have been conducted to test its workability; seminars and conferences continue to be held in order to shed more light on its importance; workshops are being held to demonstrate how it works. All of the above exercises are not only important but also necessary.

However, preparation of stakeholders for effective implementation of this new direction in special needs education is not receiving the attention it deserves. Stakeholders are the wheels on which the vehicle of ideas move. For a vehicle to move, easily and fast, the wheels must be oiled and serviced properly. In the same vein for inclusive education to be successful, stakeholders must be properly grounded or prepared on what to do and what not to expect.

Inclusive education is rooted out of the need to provide unlimited opportunity for children with disabilities to attend the school that is nearest to them instead of having to leave home to attend a special school that may be far away from their home. Infact the Salamanca statement which advocates inclusive education states that “those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools” (UNESCO, 1994:2). Access to school is therefore the driving force behind inclusive education. Because children with special needs have to attend the schools in their neighbourhood, all those individuals and groups of individuals who can be described as stakeholders should be given the necessary preparation needed to firmly establish the practice of inclusive education.

The Position of Stakeholders to Inclusive Education

Stakeholders of inclusive education are undecided on the workability or otherwise of inclusive education in Nigeria. However, it is generally agreed that public schools in Nigeria are presently not positioned to practice inclusive education. This is because although there are many qualified teachers in special needs education, only few are really competent to teach children with special needs. For example, not all teachers of the blind can read and write Braille. Also many teachers of children with hearing impairment cannot communicate in sign language. In situation like this it is doubtful if such persons can be of any help in an inclusive classroom.

Stakeholders also fear that in a situation where there is only one child with a disability in a classroom or in the entire school, such a child can be easily forgotten and may not be given the much attention he needs. Teachers can easily forget the child in terms of meeting his special learning needs. The school authority may also consider it a waste of resources to make modification of physical structures to accommodate only one child with a disability.

There is also the fear that a child with severe disability may also disrupt other children in the classroom. For example, Kauffman and Hallahan (2004) in Adebowale and Makinde (2012) argue that a child with a serious inattention problem may be unable to focus in a classroom that contain twenty or more active children.

Stakeholders especially teachers argue that teaching special needs children in special school setting in a Herculean task talkless of teaching them together with other children that have no disabilities.

Inclusive education is arguably not fully accepted by stakeholders in Nigeria as is evidence by the few number of schools that are currently practicing inclusive education. Even among special educators there are skeptics who say that inclusive education is not feasible in Nigeria (Ozaji, 2004).

In Nigeria, there is still misconception about disability and about people living with disabilities. This misconceptions has led to stereotypical attitude. Individuals with disabilities are thus seen as a group and are so judged so that any negative tendency displayed by one person with a disability is interpreted to mean that all persons living with that kind of disability are bound to behave that way. To this end, when a child with a disability is falling academically skeptics are apt to translate this to mean that all children with that type of disability will also fail academically.

Prejudice to inclusive education is therefore rooted in the stereotypical attitude that the society has on persons with disabilities. There is therefore the need for stakeholders to be given the necessary preparation that will enable each of them play their active part in the spirit of collective responsibility in order to make inclusive education succeed. That is why Ozaji (2006) pointed out that “establishment of inclusive education involves adequate preparation and adoption of a procedure”. P.18.

Stakeholders in Inclusive Education

The Oxford Advanced Learners dictionary defines a stakeholder as a person who is involved in a particular organization, project or system because he has invested money in it. To this end, individuals or a groups of individuals who are involved in one way or the other in the education of children with disabilities through inclusive education constitute the stakeholders in inclusive education. Pambot (2006) identified the stakeholders in inclusive education as, the special needs child, parents, those children who have no disabilities, teachers, the community and the government.

Preparing Stakeholders for Inclusive Education

The following steps are suggested by these writers as a necessary prerequisite for the establishment of inclusive education.

The Special Needs Child

Special needs children as stakeholders in inclusive education should be organized to play important roles that will lead to effective establishment of inclusive education in their communities. When properly organized, children can challenge existing practices that hinder children with disabilities from attending school because the schools are segregated. When special needs children refuse to attend segregated special schools, the regular schools will be forced to become inclusive.

Parents

Parents should be the strongest advocates of the rights of their children who have disabilities. But in Nigeria because of the high level of illiteracy, many parents do not even know that their children who have disabilities have certain rights that they (parents) should advocate for. As stakeholders, workshops and seminars should be organized for parents in order to educate them on the rights of their children and what inclusive education is all about. They should be informed that segregation not only violates the rights of special needs children but that it is also responsible for their poor academic performance (Okoli, 2011). They should also be encouraged to organize themselves as a group to challenge the policy of exclusive education. Parents of children with disabilities should be supported to work in partnership with organizations of person with disabilities and other groups so that they can advocate for the rights of their children.

Teachers

Teachers should be trained about inclusive principles and on the basics of disability. This will ensure that their attitude and approaches do not prevent children with disabilities from gaining equal access to the curriculum. The training of teachers should be in form of short courses and should take place at both pre-service and in-service stages. Teachers should also be helped to understand and accept that it is their responsibility to teach all children since all children have a right to education.

Teacher preparation should also include teaching methods. They should learn to be flexible in their methods. They should also learn how to rearrange the classroom in such a way that children can work in small groups.

Normal Children

The normal children can help make inclusive education succeed if they are encouraged and organized to provide support to their peers who have disabilities. For example, being friends with the child with a disability will send the message that inclusion will not be a problem because both normal children and those with a disability are used to being together. Also, the normal children should be encouraged to be note takers for children with hearing impairment or pushers for those on wheelchair.

Community

The Salamanca framework of Action on Inclusive Education lists many community members who can contribute to the development of inclusive education. These are community base rehabilitation (CBR) workers, community leaders, religious leaders, parents, disabled adults and children themselves. They should make use of locally available human and material resources to help develop links between schools, families and communities, as well as promoting community ownership of inclusive education programmes.

The Government

As the major provider and founder of education, the government should make available all the necessary resources needed both human and material to make inclusive education develop. In addition, the government should mount up enlightenment campaigns on inclusive education. Where necessary legislation should be employed by enacting a bill on inclusive education. This will take care of recalcitrant forces such as private schools and cultural taboos that may resist the idea of children with disabilities mixing with those who have no disability. This will not only foster and facilitate the development of inclusive education, it will also silence retrograde forces.

The special needs child, parents, teachers, normal children, the community and the government as stakeholders on inclusive education need adequate preparation in order to make inclusive education functional and effective. This is because without collaborative effort inclusive education cannot work. In other words each of the stakeholders should be aware of their responsibility and be ready to play their respective roles. For example, while the teacher has a responsibility to make adjustments in the seating arrangements in the class and also make modifications in his teaching methods and plans, the child with a disability has a responsibility to learn, how cope with the teacher's shortcoming and to know that the other children in the class also have a right to have their learning needs met. Adequate preparation is therefore necessary to enable stakeholders know all that is required of them. In the view of these writers the following suggestions should be

considered as preparation of stakeholders for effective implementation of inclusive education.

- Periodic sensitization workshops should be conducted for all stakeholders where everyone will bare his mind on certain concerns and fears he may have on inclusive education practice.
- Enlightenment campaigns should be carried out by the mass media stressing reasons why children with special needs should allowed to attend the serve schools with other children.
- Governments at all levels should affect the necessary structural modification of all existing public schools no matter where they are located so that architectural barriers would not stand as a stumbling block to the inclusive education programme.
- Special education teachers should be trained on how to teach in an inclusive classroom.
- Government should enact a law that will make it mandatory for all public schools to practice inclusive education.
- Once a child with a disability is admitted iin a regular school, all the regular teachers and students should be groomed on how to accommodate the child in the classroom and in the school even before the child’s first day at school.

Conclusion

Regardless of what skeptics and its opponents want to say, inclusive education has to stay in Nigeria like in other countries. In order for Nigeria not to be left behind in order to help special needs children, everything possible should be done to ensure inclusive education is firmly established in Nigeria and that children with special ds are benefiting from it in terms of academic performance and the right and access to school of their choice. It is in this regard that preparation of stakeholders for effective establishment of inclusive education becomes necessary.

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