

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: EQUAL ACCESS AND APPROPRIATE EDUCATION FOR SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN

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Abstract

Majority of people are excluded from participating in meaningful activities like economic, social, political, educational and cultural life of their communities (UNESCO 2003). Human right activists moved by that, changed the educational issues of persons with disabilities, those in difficult circumstances and those belonging to minority groups from charity development approach to human right approach. This has further changed and redefined the roles of the United Nations (UN) and its agencies like WHO, UNESCO, World Bank, and International Community, government of different countries, schools, teachers, parents and persons with special needs towards provision of education in the whole world. UN with its agencies and several countries of the world held several conventions towards providing inclusive education. Education became a right and not a privilege for a few. It should be free, compulsory and qualitative at the primary and secondary stages. Educational provision for children with disabilities should be based on equal opportunity and should pay much attention at the early years. All these groups of children, youth and adult should have access to this all inclusive education which should include access to all educational facilities including quality teachers.

Introduction

Base on world observation, majority of people are excluded from participating in meaningful activities in their communities. They are exempted or excluded from economic, social, political, educational and cultural life of their communities. It is understood that such societies are neither efficient nor safe (UNESCO, 2003). It was due to such isolation or exclusion of persons with disabilities in communities, institutions or special schools that human right activists changed the educational issues of persons with disabilities from charity development approach to human right approach. Their education is shifted from institutionalism to inclusion etc. This has given room for several international conventions.

International Conventions for Rights Base Approach to Education

1948: Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights—adopted by the United Nations (UN) in 1948 Article 26 states that:

(1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory...

1989: UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

This states that: *Disabled children have a right to education based on equal opportunity.*

1990: World Declaration on Education For All (EFA).

According to World Bank (2010) EFA is an international initiative first launched in Jomtien, Thailand; in 1990 to bring the benefits of education to “**every citizen in every society**” Coalition of national governments, civil society groups, and development agencies such as UNESCO and the World Bank got committed to achieving education goals. Two of these goals of EFA include:

- i. *Expand and improve comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.*
- ii. *Ensure that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, those in difficult circumstances, and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete, free, and compulsory primary education of good quality.*

1994: Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action

A world conference was held from June 7 – 10th 1994 titled Special Needs Education Access and Quality in Salamanca Spain. It was there that inclusive Education was officially born. A lot of reforms came up in Special Education because of this conference (UNESCO 1994).

2000: Millennium Development Summit

The international community reaffirmed its commitment to EFA in Dakar, Senegal, in April 2000 and again in September of that year. At the latter meeting, 189 countries and their partners adopted the two EFA goals that are also Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

2: Universal Primary Education by 2015

3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women

2006: Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Children with disabilities should have access to “an inclusive, quality and free primary and secondary education (Article 24). Schools and Schools facilities also need to be accessible (Article 9).

Effects of the International Conventions Held On Education

These international conventions and declarations have given room for national initiatives in different countries. They include constitutional amendments, National Policies and new laws etc on Special Education (See Nigerian National Policy on Education 4th Edition 2004). The conventions also are legal instruments that state the right to inclusive education. All these conventions are responsible for the current educational reforms that are going on in different countries of the world.

As a human right issue, denying a person education on any ground is as grievous as denying the person life or taking the life of the person. To achieve inclusive education, there is the need to emphasis the importance of effective individualized support measures, facilitating the learning of Braille, sign language and other required forms of communication, orientation and mobility skills etc. It is in view of this that Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) is currently developing an Instructional Sign Language Book for Nigerian schools. The newly developed Curricular are adapted for learners with visual impairment in all subject areas.

Concept of Inclusive Education

The guiding principle that led to the framework or idea of inclusive education is that schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children. Children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups. This is why the National Policy on Education (2004) includes nomadic Pastorals, migrant fisher folks, migrant farmers, hunters etc under Special Education. The only thing that can change the life of people mentioned here positively is education. Unless a special approach is made, it will be difficult to achieve this kind of education.

According to framework of action 7 of the Salamanca statement, the new thinking in education (special needs education) is to promote integration and participation and to combat exclusion. Inclusion and participation are essential to human dignity and to the enjoyment and exercise of human rights. This is with the aim of bringing about genuine equalization of opportunity. Education is much broader than schooling. It does not happen at school alone. It happens in the family, the community, schools, institutions, and in society as a whole. Children learn in families, and in non-formal settings. It

prepares child's life so that after school you will prepare him for productive living. Apart from access to learning and resources that meet the needs of persons with disability and respecting their rights, children with disabilities learn and play alongside their peers and have appropriate support to help them learn. Local schools include all local children; they should be accessible, welcoming, have a flexible curriculum, teachers are trained and supported. There should be good links with families and the community. People with disabilities are involved in education as role models, decision-makers and contributions. The home environment is adapted to encourage and support learning. The community is sensitized and should know that children and adults with disabilities can learn and so communities should offer them support and encouragement. There is good collaboration between health, education, social and other sectors. Therefore inclusion is all-inclusive. (Including many things, many people or everything.)

NB: Components of inclusion: Resource team and centers, Parents involved, Organisation of Persons with Disabilities involved, Families involved or supported, Sign Language Groups, Braille centers, Early Childhood Education, Non-Formal Programmes, and Home Base Education.

Early Childhood Education

A key element considered in inclusive education components is Early Childhood Care and Education. In the Salamanca document, Early Childhood Education is considered area of priority. The section states that early childhood education enhances the educability of all children. The success of inclusive education depends considerably on early identification, assessment, and stimulation of the very young child with special educational needs. This is because:

- The human brain grows very rapidly in young children. If stimulation is not received, development will be delayed, sometimes permanently
- Early years provide opportunity to lay the foundation for healthy overall development in language, social, thinking and physical skills
- Early childhood education sows the seeds for an inclusive society because it is where children with and without disabilities start to interact, learn together, play together and grow together.

Inclusive education is not only concerned with primary, secondary or higher education alone but also Non-Formal Education (especially with a focus on children) Home base learning for persons with disabilities is available either as a supplement to formal school learning in preparation for formal schooling, or as an alternative to formal school. It also concerned with Life –Long learning (with focus on adults)

Parent Partnership

According to section 59 of framework for action of inclusive education, the education of children with special educational needs is a shared task of parents and

professionals. A positive attitude on the part of parents favours school and social integration.

Inclusive Education cannot succeed without family relationship. We need to create strong community relationship. Most often relationship between school and family is weak. Schools only contact parents when they need money or have some problems. Due to the charity approach in special education, parents are never involved in the education of their special needs children. Some do not even know that it is their responsibility. Some Parents lamented that they never had opportunity to participate in their child's education. Family involvement here is important both in formal and informal situations. Things we can do with parents:

- Families need awareness raising, training and support
- We can also learn from family
- Individual learning plans for the child can be developed with family
- Creating parent self-help group
- Creating support networks and linkages, family, community, youth volunteers and local professionals.

Inclusive education states that the education of persons with disabilities is an integral part of the education system. To understand the difference between inclusive education and integration, there is the need to understand that in special school concept, the special education component is APART (Separated) from the general education system. Integration is A PART (A portion or section) of the General Education System. Inclusive Education is an INTEGRAL part (almost complete) of the General System. The transition from "Special School Concept to Inclusive Education can be treated as evolutionary (Mani 2003). Integration is providing access to particular group of children with disability in school. Providing access is not the most important issue in providing education. Inclusion says the system is the problem therefore you should reform the system to meet the needs of the children so restructure curriculum, train teachers, and modify the environment.

Schools for All

The principle of inclusion is to have institutions, which include everybody, celebrate differences, support learning, and respond to individual needs. Consider the wide diversity of this characteristic. Regular schools have excluded special needs children on the ground that they do not fall within the norm (normal curve). The regular schools are generally concerned with the average children. Therefore Education seeks to serve children with the same capability, existing in the same environment, using the same tools and same speed. This is not a reality. All people differ (individual differences) Paragraph 2 Salamanca, statement states that every child has unique characteristics, interest, abilities and learning needs. Education system should be designed and educational programmes implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these

characteristics and needs. In inclusive education, diversity is not exceptionality but norm. Therefore, the special needs child is not only accepted in regular school but we need to reform the education to meet the needs of diverse pupils in the world.

Recruitment and Training of Educational Personnel

Section 27 is full of packages in terms of training for teachers.

Teaching profession is noble. People who serve this role are virtuous people. You need commitment in and outside classroom before children succeed and for national development. Unfortunately we have moved away from ethics of teaching and the nobility is lost. However there are a few virtuous ones.

Inclusive Education requires commitment by teachers for the children to succeed. Teachers, Head teachers, Supervisors Administrators Senior teachers and Younger teachers are to be engaged with workshops, seminars, trainings, self instruction etc. The children on their part are required to learn together. Therefore the children will be prepared to accept diversity and learn from each other.

Provision of support services

Inclusive education involves participation of all stakeholders. There is networking with the disabled persons themselves (Organizations of Persons with Disability (OPD)). There is need for awareness creation on inclusive education, child's capability, and attitude to break resistance towards inclusive education. It will require comprehensive assessment which will require well-equipped assessment centres/programmes with qualified personnel. Many Western worlds have developed an integration of educational, clinical, and medical and rehabilitation support. This has resulted in a team approach for screening, diagnosis and placement of special needs children in special or public schools. This is an essential component of educational provision of inclusion.

Conclusion

Inclusive Education is about principles and policies put in place to give equal access and appropriate education to everyone especially those that are marginalized. It aims at giving educational opportunities to those that ordinarily will not be opportune to have education either because they are minorities, they are isolated or excluded due to presence of disabilities or any disadvantage they have in life.

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