

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN THE UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN NIGERIAN

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Abstract

The growing complexity of modern life and formal education delivery indicate the need for inclusive language teaching in particular, and inclusive education delivery in general in the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in Nigeria. It is in the light of this that this paper discusses inclusive education and barriers to it (inclusive education). The paper also discusses inclusive English language teaching and identifies techniques necessary for its teaching in the programme. The paper concludes that due to the rapid changes and complex nature of modern life, the need arises for UBE curriculum to make adequate provision for inclusive education and inclusive English language teaching.

Introduction

Human life in general and learning contents in particular are naturally complex and dynamic. This situation loudly calls for dynamic, relevant and integrative approaches to the teaching of all school subjects in general and target languages in particular with a view to manipulating the complexity of the situation and achieving functional objectives of education. Part of the manipulation strategies is the provision for inclusive education across subject areas in general, and inclusive (English) language in particular in the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme which occupies strategic position in the education system in Nigeria.

This paper is set to discuss the concept and conduct of inclusive education in general and inclusive English language in particular in the UBE programme in view of the far-reaching role of education in the development of the society, and the strategic roles that the English language plays in the educational, socio-political, socio-economic, and socio-cultural life in the country.

The Meaning of Inclusive Education

The term inclusive education is to do with the provision of ample opportunity or access to learning irrespective of the various differences that may surround the learners. Stainback (2005) considers Inclusive Education as the process of allowing all children the opportunity to fully participate in regular classroom activities regardless of disabilities, race or other characteristics. This shows that education policies that directly or indirectly narrow or bar the chances for certain citizens to acquire knowledge and skills provided in schools due to their racial, gender, religious, socio-economic, regional,

or ethnic background are a disaster to education and human empowerment. In similar development, Osokoya (2007) sees inclusive education as the provision of educational services for students with disabilities in schools where non-handicapped peers attend. Certainly, Osokoya’s views that the provision of educational services to the disabled only, and in the presence of the normal learners is, itself, discriminatory and non-inclusive as normal learners too stand to benefit from educational services provided in schools. In a related perspective, Ajuwon (2012) reports that inclusive educators contend that special classes, separate schooling or other forms of removing children with disabilities from the regular environment should occur only when the nature or severity of disability of the learner is such that education in regular class cannot be accomplished.

Addressing Barriers to Inclusive Education

Teachers have the responsibility to identify and address the barriers in their education system or school that may prevent learners from accessing education, participating in the learning process and making achievements to the best of their individual abilities (UNESCO, 2013). Such barriers may include negative parental, family or community attitude towards girl-child education. Similarly, if a teacher has negative attitude about the potential of learners with learning disabilities/ difficulties such as visual and / or hearing impairment, that teacher may not make efforts to include learners with such challenges in classroom activities. Furthermore, barriers to education are often linked to wider structural and cyclical inequalities in the society. For example, members of a poor family may not have access to qualitative education which, in turn, minimizes their chances to power and status in the society. In the light of this background, administrators and teachers in the UBE programme shoulder the responsibility to address the various barriers to inclusive education in the country.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2013: 5) observes that addressing barriers to inclusive education requires a systematic and far-reaching approach. In line with this, UNESCO (2013: 6) designed the table adapted below to illustrate the process of addressing barriers to inclusive education:

| Type of Barrier | Example | Solutions |
|------------------------|---|--|
| Attitudes | A bias against learners with disability/ from ethnic minority/low social class | A welcoming attitude to all learners which sees their diversity as an opportunity and not a problem for good education |
| | A belief that slow learners are not worth wasting time on/ Not all children are able to learn | A belief that working to support the slow learner is as worthwhile as supporting the fast learners/ All children are able to learn |
| | Negative attitudes towards female | Supporting female learners to |

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|-------------|---|---|
| Practices | learners' education in schools | attend and flourish in schools |
| | Rote teaching and learning | Provision of interactive/ practical leaning activities |
| | Provision of exam-centred education | Provision of functional education |
| | Lack of interactive and participatory teaching methods and activities | Provision of interactive and participatory teaching methods and activities |
| | The use of corporal punishment | The use of positive/ non-corporal punishment |
| | The use of language which most of the learners cannot understand | The use of bilingual/ multilingual teaching |
| Resources | Gender bias in school teaching | Giving fair and equal treatment to male and female learners |
| | Inability/ unwillingness to deal with learners with disabilities | Readiness to work with learners with disabilities |
| | Lack of teaching and learning resources that are gender sensitive, accessible to learners with disabilities, accessible to learner from minority ethnic group, and locally relevant | Provision of gender neutral and accessible learning resources for different groups of learners |
| | Lack of chairs, desks, tables, and assistive devices for the improvement of teaching and learning activities | More support for procuring the relevant instructional materials for effective teaching and learning |
| Policies | Policies that do not support the development of linguistically appropriate and locally relevant curricula and material that relate to the local community and classrooms | Making policies that support curricula that provides for the appropriate and relevant learning contents that relate to the aspirations of the local community |
| | Policies which do not support gender balance and learners with disabilities | Making policies that recognise gender balance and learners with disabilities |
| | Policies which only allow for teaching in a dominant national language rather than the learners' mother tongue or multilingual | Provision of policies that support teaching in multilingual and mother tongue teaching |
| Environment | Lack of clean water and toilets, and lack | Ensuring that schools have |

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|--|---|
| of separate toilets for female and male learners | access to clean and adequate water, and separate toilets for the to sexes |
| Inaccessible classrooms and other facilities (e.g. multi-storey school building) for learners with mobility challenges | Making all classrooms and related offices accessible for learners with disabilities |

In addition to the process of addressing barriers to inclusive education indicated in the table above, Dixon (2013: 5) advises teachers and administrators in schools to observe the following guidelines in the inclusive education classrooms:

- 1) Give your students the opportunity to share their diverse experiences as they relate to the course contents;
- 2) Reflect diversity in your syllabus, reading and visual materials;
- 3) Provide opportunities for your students to interact across cultures;
- 4) Use visual materials to illustrate your lessons;
- 5) Do not hold one groups' experiences as the norms against which others are measured and evaluated;
- 6) Do not stereotype individuals and/ or group among your students;
- 7) Use inclusive language in your teaching;
- 8) Try to learn about your students' cultures;
- 9) Try to call your students by name

It is apparent that this advice is aimed at empowering teacher to strengthen the process of inclusive education in their schools.

Promoting Inclusive English Language Teaching in the UBE Programme

Being the foundation in the Nigeria's education system, the UBE programme determines the success of the subsequent levels of education in the country. The UBE programme comprises three equal stages as follows: (a) The lower Basic (primary 1 - 3), (b) the Middle Basic (primary 4 – 6), and (c) the Upper Basic (Junior secondary 1 – 3), (National Policy on Education – NPE 2004). Thus, the UBE programme is ideally planned for learners aged six to fifteen years. Inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy, and the ability to communicate effectively, which has relevance to inclusive language, is one of the cardinal objectives of the programme.

Worth (2014) considers inclusive language as a language that avoids the use of certain words and expressions that exclude particular groups of people. Inclusive language is also seen as a form of spoken and written language that aims to eliminate or neutralize reference to gender, ethnicity, race, disability and related natural conditions (Quirk, Greenbom, Leech & Svartvic, 1985). For example, the word 'policeman' and 'stewardess' are gender specific, while 'police officer' and 'flight attendant' are gender neutral. Similarly the word 'blind' is not appropriate for use in inclusive language-based

teaching and learning. The right alternative is, among others, ‘visually challenged’. Advocates of inclusive language emphasize that whenever speaking or writing, it is very important to use language that fits the audience and purpose, and that inappropriate language can undermine one’s argument and alienate the audience (Dixon, 2013). The advocates maintain that writers who use unbiased language write in ways that are free from gender and groups stereotypes including race, ethnicity, disability or gender. English language teachers in the UBE programme need to be guided by the highlights on the focus and practices of inclusive language in formal school setting.

The trend in the promotion of inclusive English language indicates emphasis in the area of vocabulary development particularly in terms nouns and pronouns as they relate to gender markers (he, she, it). For example, whereas **he** and **she** are used for entities treated as persons (including supernatural beings and, sometimes, animals/ pets), the pronoun ‘it’ is normally used for entities not regarded as persons, though the use of **he** or **she** is optional for animals of known sex (Quirk et al. 1985: 342). These authors provide examples to illustrate the use of ‘it’ and ‘her’ to refer to a bird as follows:

- 1) The robin builds **its** net in a well-chosen position,.. and after the eggs have hatched, the mother bird feeds **her** young there for several weeks. The pronoun **it**, according to the authors, can also be used of children in some circumstances, for instance when the sex is indefinite or when the writer has no emotional connection to the child, as in a scientific context. For example:
- 2) A child learns to speak the language of **its** environment.

As inclusive English language teaching places emphasis on the teaching and use of vocabulary as they relate to gender, disability, race, ethnicity, and related labels, English language teachers need to identify and apply the appropriate reading materials, teaching methods, conducive teaching and learning atmosphere and curricular support in order to achieve their objectives. The following would serve as a guide for English language teachers in the UBE programme in the teaching of inclusive English language.

The Curriculum

The English language curriculum should be supported or adapted to dislodge barriers to inclusive language in terms of vocabulary, teaching methods, and evaluation practices.

a) Vocabulary

This centres on nouns, pronouns, and adjectives that relate to gender, race, disabilities, ethnicity, and related labels. The table below shows examples in both non-inclusive and inclusive English language usage to serve as a guide:

| Gender Specific Nouns | Gender Neutral Nouns |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Mankind | People |
| Chairman | Chairperson |
| Salesman | Salesperson |
| Policeman | Police officer |

| | |
|---|---|
| Mailman | Mail carrier |
| Wife/ Husband | Spouse |
| Waiter/ Waitress | Server |
| Steward/ Stewardess | Flight attendant |
| Manager/ Manageress | Manager |
| Officers and men | Officers and other ranks |
| Men at work | People at work |
| Fireman | Fire fighter |
| Manpower | Work force |
| Businessman | Business person |
| Whoever comes in, tell him/ her that... | Whoever comes in, tell them that... |
| Black (e.g. in the USA) | African American |
| A blind man/ woman stands by the door. | A visually challenged person stands ... |

b) Reading Materials

When choosing novels, poems, short stories, and related reading materials, ensure that you choose ones that use language which are neutral in terms of gender, ethnicity, race, and free from stereotypes. In other words, select literature that is representative of a variety of cultures and of how those cultures function in their various community domains.

c) Interaction with the Target Language Learners

- Treat and respect each student as an individual for who she or he is;
- Rectify any language pattern or case that exclude or demean any group (s);
- Use both she and he during lectures, discussions and writing and encourage the students to do the same;
- Request your students to use gender neutral words in the essays they write;
- Have the students go through newspapers and magazines and try to identify non-neutral words and come up with neutral alternatives;
- Avoid vocabulary that extends negative racial, cultural, or ethnic connotations, and avoid usage that carries hierarchical valuation or portrays groups of people as inferior, bad. Criminal or less valued than others;
- Be conscious of norms which can limit a person’s aspirations and self-concept. Imagine what it would do to an African or African-American child, for example, to be bombarded with images of white as beautiful or clean or pure or virtuous and black as dirty and menacing. It is equally bad to create guilt in the socially concerned white middle class youth by claiming that she or he is one of the oppressors or the roots of evils (Worth, 2014)

Conclusion

As teaching and learning activities across subject areas in schools are dynamic, it is just natural for English language teaching and learning to follow suit. Furthermore, the need for inclusive education and inclusive language arises due to the sensitive nature of modern living and social interaction. This situation justifies the need for the UBE curriculum and language- teacher education programmes to make adequate provision of inclusive education in general, and inclusive language education in particular.

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