



ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EQUITY AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION CURRICULUM IN NIGERIA

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INTRODUCTION

This paper appraises the successful implementation of the educational system in Nigeria. That is, providing necessary resources for the implementation of a seemingly laudable educational system and policies on inclusive education. It explains the concepts of inclusion in education, implementation needs and strategies; and appraises the successful implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria. It provides frameworks that may be helpful to successful implementation and provides some solutions on the way forward to a successful implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria. Although, great efforts have been made to encourage inclusive education in Nigeria however, the efforts have been hindered by certain barriers or constraints.

Being faced with the challenges of successful implementation of inclusive education, there is



evidence of an increased interest in the ideas of making education more inclusive and equitable in Nigeria. Yet, the condition on the educational reform remains confused as to the actions needed in order to put into practice the policies and practice towards the realization of the goals of inclusion in education. As per inclusion in education, much progress in access to education have been made, yet clear inequalities in access, participation and learning still persist. This embraces the need to examine the successful implementation of the programme (Agunloye, Pollingue, Davou and Osagie, 2011).

While strides have been made towards improving equity in education, the most marginalized students and their communities are still not being reached. As such, constraints to education related to gender, disability, ethnicity, conflict, bandits, kidnapping, herdmenism and poverty are largely recognized urgent steps need to be taken in order to then we need to take urgent action to address these issues and to understand that these barriers, except they are well taken care of, issues about global access to education would continue to be a dream not realized (Ademokoya, 2003; Adesina, 2006).

Implementation of any educational programme, reform or policy involve the serious attention of all the stakeholders for combined efforts on the frameworks and the implementation strategies; gaining public acceptance for the new procedure, concept, or policy. It requires among other things, early involvement of those who are likely to be affected by the new system or policy and sharing of responsibilities for its successful implementation. It equally requires a clear and precise understanding of the participants' roles as well as reassurance that risk-taking may be a necessary ingredient in the change process, policy or system of education. These involved a sense of competence and confidence, openness to new information and a willingness to take risks. Most importantly, there should be the realization of the fact that successful implementation of inclusion in education is very costly and the readiness to bear the financial costs, otherwise, implementation process of inclusive education may not be achieved (Sightsaver, 2011; Ainscow, 2014).



Inclusion in Education

The term inclusion in education may be confused since it may be interpreted in different perspectives by different people. In whatever way, there is a need for agreed definition or interpretation of the concept in order to present a focused policy and practice that is relevant to inclusive education. According to a recent international document on inclusion and equity in education, the documents argue that inclusion in education should be seen as principles that inform all aspects of educational policy (UNESCO, 2017). In some countries such as Zimbabwe, Tanzania, and Sudan to mention but a few, inclusive education is seen as an approach to serving children with disabilities with general education settings (Chimhenga, 2016). Some scholars like Magrid, 2015; Obi and Ashi, 2016; and Singh, 2016 emphasize on equity to explain the concept “inclusion in education” which implies a concern with fairness in education policy and practice.

Broadly speaking, it is seen as a principle that supports diversity among all learners which aimed at eliminating social exclusion that is a consequence of attitudes and responses to diversity in race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender and ability. As such, it lays emphasis on the belief that education is a basic human right and the foundation for a more just society. An assistive opinion for a focused and realistic presentation of the concept would accept a definition that involves a process, that is:

... a process that is concerned with the identification and removal of constraints to the presence, participation and achievement of all students (Ainscow, 2007).

This will lead to a wider understanding of inclusion in education and will create a leverage in respect to fostering the conditions within which schools can feel encouraged to move in a more inclusive direction and all the stakeholders in the communities, families, political and religious leaders would be adequately aware of the intended direction. The discussion above suggests that every learner matters equally and has the right to receive effective educational opportunities (Dike, 2003; NPE, 2013). According to



the National Centre on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion (NCERI), inclusive education means:

Providing to all students including those with significant disabilities, equitable opportunities to receive effective educational services, with the needed supplementary aids and support services, in age and appropriate classrooms, in order to prepare students for productive lives as full members of society (NCERI, 1995).

Consequently, the aim is to ensure that diverse learners; those with disabilities, different languages and cultures, different homes and family lives, different interests and ways of learning; are all exposed to teaching strategies that reach them as individual learners without the stigmatization that comes with separation. This is an opportunity to revive the notion of inclusion as a general guiding principle to strengthen equal access to quality learning opportunities for all learners. Hence, inclusion in education amounts to equal educational opportunity for all in the society.

Singh (2016) perceived Inclusive Education as a new approach towards educating the children with disability and learning difficulties with that of normal children within the same roof. He further said that it brings all students together in one classroom and community, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses in any area, and seeks to maximize the potential of all students. Marimuthu and Cheong (2014) added that disability is recognized as one of the least visible yet most potent factors in educational marginalization, though the children with disabilities have equal right to education as their counterpart, (the normal and able children), yet, that is not practically applied in most of the African countries. African Child Policy Forum (2011) in its document, Article 24 of the Convention states that State Parties shall ensure that;

- i. Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with



- disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability;
- ii. Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live;
 - iii. Reasonable accommodation of the individual's requirements is provided;
 - iv. Persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general educational system, to facilitate their effective education; and
 - v. Effective individualized support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion.

It is shocking to discovered that some of these disabled persons with impairment, poor eyesight, hearing loss, mental disability, the mute, the lame, the crippled, albinism, complex intellectual or mental health challenges are even looked down upon by their families, simply because they are regarded and considered as disgrace or curse to their families (Africa Educational Trust, 2014). These groups of the disadvantaged school aged children need to be secured and protected by government, their communities, and by all and sundry, bearing in mind that regardless of their condition they are human beings and all human beings are equal and have equal right to pursue their dreams, ambitions and aspirations. Hence, they should also be given access to education.

Nigeria's Education Policy and Inclusive Education

The Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) through her National Policy on Education (2013) gives due recognition to Special Needs Education which is viewed as a customized educational programme designed to meet the unique needs of persons with special needs that the general education programme cannot cater for. The policy identifies special needs persons as those with visual impairment, hearing impairment, physical and health



impairment, intellectual disability, emotional and behaviour disorder, speech and language impairment, learning disabilities, gifted and talented and albinos. The policy further states that these categories of persons shall be provided with inclusive education services in the same school with the normal persons in age-appropriate general education classes under the supervision of general teachers. The above policy statement implies that the idea of segregation and stigmatization in the educational system will be removed and those with special needs will not see themselves as different from the rest of the students.

The National Policy on Special Needs Education (2015) acknowledges the fact that inclusive education should be conducive in the school environment that will accommodate inclusion of persons with special needs will be created. It further states that children and youths of special needs shall have access to equitable education in line with UNESCO's prescription for inclusive education programme. The policy mission is to ensure inclusion of persons with special needs, provide equal opportunities, equity and access in a barrier free environment. However, the policy did not categorically state that persons with special needs shall attend the same schools with those that are not.

Obi and Ashi (2016) while assessing the National Policy on Education identifies the contradictions in the NPE (2013) and the need for inclusive education premised on the acknowledgment of the need for special schools in the policy. The provision for special classrooms and units for persons with special needs as stated in the 6th Edition of the NPE further promotes segregation and stigmatization even when learners with special needs are accommodated within the same school environment with those not in need but accommodated in special classrooms and units. Inferences from the various Federal Government policies on Education and Persons with Special Needs reveal that the ideal inclusive policy is yet to be put in place not to talk of implementation. Therefore, necessary inclusive policy should be formulated, human and material resources that could promote proper implementation of such policy should be provided.



Importance of Inclusive Education Curriculum

The idea of inclusive education emanated from the drive to accord every child equal educational opportunities devoid of any form of stigmatization and segregation as practiced under the established of special education programmes. Scholars have advocated inclusive education premised on the benefits that could accrue for it which would be to the advantage of both the beneficiaries and the society at large, Singh (2016) found out that inclusive education:

- (i) improves the academic performance of learners with special needs as they are able to benefit from the richness of the general curriculum;
- (ii) generates a long-lasting relationship among learners of special needs and those without challenges;
- (iii) removes the social stigma attached to those with special needs and exposed those who are not challenged to the needs of others thereby encouraging the feeling of care and love among learners of different abilities;
- (iv) increases the rate of high school graduation and more positive relationship with children not challenged as part of benefits emanating from inclusive education;
- (v) improves interaction with students that are not challenged which could have suppressed their feeling of neglect under a non-inclusive system, and
- (vi) reduces the social differences associated with students of different abilities and disabilities as interaction within the school system enable each student to identify the diversity in themselves in terms of strengths and weaknesses thereby enabling them to become aware that every individual has his or her points of strength and weakness thereby making them to realize that difference is part of normal life therefore leading them to build good relationship among themselves rather than segregation.



Towards Successful Implementation of Inclusive Education Curriculum

A productive educational system and policy demand a diversification of the school curricula towards meeting the needs of the changes in educational policy. The change in the educational policy towards inclusive education in Nigeria needs a massive infusion of funds for general mobilization of all stakeholders in education and encouragement of continuing professional education and training programmes for classroom teachers and support staff as constructive fora for reasoned discussions, cross-fertilization of novel ideas, critical analysis and high-minded resolution of contemporary problems for improvement of creative skills, habits and procurement of well-maintained infrastructural facilities which would enhance successful implementation of inclusive education (Oyekan, 2006).

It appears the challenges confronting a successful implementation of any educational programme including inclusive education is that of marginalization of teachers' knowledge, abilities, values and beliefs in the instructional process and suggestions for all necessary resources needed to achieve the goals and objectives of such programmes. Moving towards successful implementation should involve teachers' vital ideas for optimum curriculum planning, development, implementation and evaluation processes. Hence, proposals for a functional implementation process of inclusive education should lend credence to professional servicing teachers as vehicles for effective curriculum implementation (Adebile, 2014).

Moving towards successful implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria should be propelled by the principles of inclusion in education as a human right, the National Policy on Inclusive Education plans to engage relevant actors, creating awareness with the public, training and re-training of teachers, building capacity, creating a safe and appropriate learning environment etc. in order to ensure adequate accessibility with proper implementation guidelines and appropriate human and material resources; with proper planning, practices, monitoring and reports. The activation and development of above mentioned strategies would enhance inclusive education implementation, also through a sensitization activity. Advocating for closer collaboration between the ministry of education and other



relevant ministries and health, women affairs, finance, labour and environment with regular curriculum development and review would play a notable assistive role in effective implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria (Adebile, 2007; ESSPIN, 2021).

Professional Training for Inclusive Classroom

Regardless of whatever policy and practice adopted for inclusive education, it must be noted that the teacher factor is very germane. Recognition of professionally trained teachers towards removing the barriers on successful implementation of inclusive education cannot be overemphasized. Professional teachers are needed to stimulate creativity and problem-solving skills for successful inclusion in education. Special training and re-training of teachers on building capacity to keep them abreast of latest teaching techniques on various categories of disabilities, the gifted and talented would be very necessary at every level of education in Nigeria. Also, special training and re-training on Braille reading and writing, speech signs and daily interactive skills for successful instructional process will be very necessary for a worthwhile inclusive educational programme (Adebile & Ogunyemi, 2013).

An inclusive education classroom is a term used to describe a classroom in which all students, irrespective of their disabilities or skills are welcomed holistically. It is built on the notion that being in a non-segregated classroom will better prepare special-needs students for better life and academic development. Successive inclusive education classroom happens primarily through accepting, understanding and attending to student differences and diversity, which paying particular attention to certain skills in teaching and learning process by the teacher. Also, an inclusive classroom is a general education classroom where students with and without learning differences learn together. It should be noted here with the concept of inclusion that in an inclusive classroom strategies and techniques of teaching are never the same as usual, teachers weave in specially designed instructional process as the different cases demand, satisfying the needs of the individual learners in the same learning environment (NCERI, 1995; UNESCO, 2001). Such



teachers that would be effective in this interactive classroom practices need to be specially prepared for effectiveness and smooth implementation of such educational programme. The inclusion is a process that forces the teacher to think permanently about the conditions of the classroom that implement inclusive practices. The classroom management in inclusive education has a consistent standard that must be followed for effective learning. For instance, the teacher must create opportunities to listen to all children, develop a “scaffold” approach to learning and be aware of specific needs of every child in the class (Sage, 2015). For these reasons re-training of professional teachers for inclusive education is a way forward to achieving the goals of inclusion in education in Nigeria.

Constraints to Achieving Successful Implementation of Inclusive Education Curriculum

It is a good educational policy that the Federal Government of Nigeria and its relevant education agencies have made all primary and secondary public and private schools inclusive of, and accessible to all children including those with disabilities in order to drastically reduce the number of out of school children and the burden of unproductive and unskilled members of the nation. Yet, this goal intention was hindered by inability to successfully implement the programme. The following are considered to be the key points against successful implementation of inclusive education:

- inadequate teacher preparation and marginalization of teacher’s beliefs, contributions and
- stigma and negative attitudes towards people with disabilities
- limited engagement with local leaders (communities) and key stakeholders.
- inadequate funding of inclusive schools e.g. inadequate number of personnel, training personnel, inadequate purchase of necessary technological equipment ...
- identifying and assessment problems of children in different areas.
- challenges faced by children with disabilities.



- material and professional limitation in schools.
- dearth of instructional materials and classroom management strategies.
- insufficient awareness and orientation for teachers and the public.
- insufficient infrastructure for conducive learning environment in schools

Many of the factors outlined above constitute attitudinal barriers to inclusive education. The teaching of learners with special needs require teachers who are dedicated, responsible, trained for that specialized area and those who are ready to display positive attitude to learners that are different. The implementation process demands that teachers are aware of prerequisite for implementation, anticipate the difficulties that could be encountered, and be considerate of cognizance of relationship necessary in designing and developing curriculum accommodative to learners for inclusion. Training for inclusion involves the acquisition of knowledge and skills to meet diverse needs that allows a teacher to support individual learning in inclusive classroom setting. It is doubtful that pre-service teachers of tertiary colleges of education are trained in the area of delivery of service to enhance inclusive education in Nigeria.

In addition to aforementioned, teachers' negative attitude can prevent inclusive education from being implemented with success especially when teachers label learners as slow, mentally retarded, learner disable as this itself constitute negative attitude towards special needs learners. Experience further showed that most teachers in Nigeria are not confident and enthusiastic in working with children who do not fit their expectation of 'normal' child, particularly where they have fears or prejudices about what such children will be like. Implementation of inclusive education is constrained when schools and education systems reflects the prejudices and discrimination because students feel most marginalized and remain invisible to the education system



Inadequate funding of inclusive education in terms of resources mobilization is a major impediment to the successful implementation on inclusive education bearing in mind that it requires specialized human, materials and physical resources. The irregularity of fund disbursement to education sector, irregular payment of teachers' salary across the country coupled with paucity of research on cost-effectiveness of funds allocated and sent to schools to promote inclusive education in Nigeria are barometers to barriers on implementation of the programme. Learners with special needs require more specialized materials and resources for their education more than non-disabled peers. It is pertinent that resources be provided in kind, as services, additional teaching staff specialist equipment to mention but a few.

Curriculum development and adaptations also serve as constraints to successful implementation on inclusive education because of lack of clarity that arises when diagnostic definitions are not available. Chimhenga (2016) stated that non-categorical functional model of disability is advanced because of generic nature of inclusive education. For this approach to succeed, there is the need for relevant related services in terms of learning styles, instructional training methods, modification and adaptations potential needed by persons with special needs. Identifying individual learning styles and appropriate instructional methods that take into consideration the visual, auditory and kinesthetic learning modes relative to various instructional methods such as printed materials, verbal teaching materials, workbook sheets, audio-visual materials and demonstration using vocational tools and concrete materials are not fully adapted in inclusive education in Nigeria. Gaps exist in the area of curriculum development and its attendant adaptation in the consideration of aforementioned needs.

Assessment of categories of students in inclusive education setting is also a major constraint on successful implementation on inclusive education. Inclusion goes beyond simply encouraging the presence of students with disabilities in regular classrooms. All students should be expected to make progress in their school but the progress could only be assessed using



measuring instruments such as tests, observational checklists, questionnaire to mention but a few. However, in awarding certificates in Nigeria, assessment involves the use of knowledge-based curriculum which could be formal standardized test that is content oriented than success oriented. Inclusive education setting, barriers to students' progress has to be identified and a plan of action is put in place to help them to progress. Inclusive education demand flexible inclusion curriculum because formal standardized test could reinforce bias especially for special needs students

Way Forward

The way forward to successful implementation of equity and inclusive education in Nigeria involves an excellence in teaching and learning to ensure that teachers have the proper training, flexibility and enough resources to teach students with diverse needs and learning styles. Inclusive pedagogy for both serving teachers and pre-service teachers is very imperative. Teachers should have training, flexibility, good attitude and enough resources to teach students with diverse needs and learning styles. These could be achieved through provision of in-service training, seminars and workshop for serving teachers in order to enhance their knowledge, competence and right attitude towards handling inclusive education effectively. Schools should recruit expert personnel (educational psychologists, computer technologists and remedial teachers) to provide back-up services in order to assist in the implementation process. In addition, pre-service training programme should adequately equip them to handle diverse educational needs in the classroom. The unwillingness to work with or teach learners with special needs has to be eliminated.

Adequate supply of all necessary resources for effective teaching and learning that centres on promotion of positive learning environment has to be provided. Facilities and learning resources that could enhance learning and be beneficial to different categories of learners in terms of their divergent needs and interest is tenacity to quality teaching and inclusive education. Therefore, facilities and resources to be provided in classrooms and the school environment should take care of all the categories of students. According to Tripath and Kiran (2012), facilities to be provided in inclusive education can be categorized into classroom, common, library, transport and canteen facilities. Madrid (2015)) also identifies facilities and



resources such as ramps where there are steps, classroom clutter such as games, bags, rug, toys, appropriate table, bench and shelf height, accessible sinks and accessible drinking fountains amongst others for inclusive education.

Encouragement of learners' interaction among their peers is very germane towards successful implementation of equity and inclusive education in Nigeria. This could be achieved by providing curriculum adaptation that is child-centred, flexible, participatory and peer partnership oriented in order to strengthen learning outcomes. The child-centred curriculum would take into consideration the individual needs of diverse learners through individualized instruction. There is also the need for specific, observable, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely conscious curriculum. There should be adequate collaborative relationship with the parents and the wider community towards learners' interaction with their peers.

Conclusion

Inclusive education is an educational policy aimed at fulfilling the goals of education for all and reducing the social problem of discrimination and marginalization at different levels in Nigeria. Consequently, all necessary resources for its successful implementation should be provided. Also, the issue of non-inclusion of critical teacher factors or marginalization of such factors should be removed; for adequate instructional procedures and worthwhile implementation reports on inclusive education in Nigeria.

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