



SUSTAINING AND STRENGTHENING SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION AMIDST SECURITY CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

In the recent, there have been terrible and gruesome cases of security breaches and breakdown of law and order in the nation, resulting into countless loss of lives and property, such that raise searching questions on the ability and capacity of government at all levels to guarantee adequate protection of lives and property of the citizens. This dangerous security dimension in the nation has been impacting negatively on all sectors of the nation, especially in education. Thus, this paper focuses on sustaining and strengthening special needs education amidst security challenges in Nigeria. The paper vividly reviews the security situation in the country vis-a-vis special needs education. It clarifies the concept of

Introduction

In the recent, there have been increasing tides and tales of countless number of security breaches and breakdown of law and order in Nigeria, which has culminated in wanton destruction and waste of many precious lives and property. Nigerian daily newspapers are always awash with frightening and pathetic reports about the states of insecurity in the country. Virtually on daily basis, there are sadden headlines and news of youth restiveness, kidnapping, bombing, arson, militancy, insurgency inter alia (Ogheneakoke, 2014). This pathetic and ugly scenario has been a major threat to the unity of the nation and an issue of concern to governments at all levels because it has negatively affected national growth, economic development and human capital development within the nation. In fact, it has prompted the government to set aside and devote large chunk of the national yearly budget for combating and curtailing security challenges in the nation. However, it is very disheartening that in spite of various measures and strategies embarked upon by the government to checkmate the recurrence of insecurity in the nation, the situation has continued to linger and persist. Pointedly, Nigeria is beset with myriad of social disorder, insecurity, poverty, illiteracy, balance of payment deficit, poor health statistics, ethnic and religious conflicts, corruption, crime and criminality and political crises (Oshio, 2009). Critically considering this security situation and trend, it is evident that the nation is not secured in terms of human wellbeing. Besides, with the inability of the security apparatus put in place by the government to guarantee safety and security of live and property, what would be the fate of many armless civilians, including special needs children? (Achumba, ighomereho and Akpor-Robaro, 2013). It is pertinent to state that the security of a nation, society, community and the individual at large is a sine qua- non to not only the national development, but also to educational development and sustainability (Charles-Zalakoro, Oko-jaja, Osusu, and Affen (2019). Besides, it is opined that a nation that attaches more importance and commitment to sustenance of security is likely to be more advanced and developed. Thus, to date, it is a fact that the prevailing security challenges in the nation has impacted virtually on every sector in the nation, including all spectrums of human development, governance, infrastructural development,



special needs education and security in Nigerian context. In addition, the paper examines the effects of security breaches and threats on sustainable special needs education in the nation and attempts to proffer and discuss possible strategies aiming at sustaining and strengthening this unique type of education in Nigeria. The paper concludes by making some pragmatic suggestions which include the need for the government to be pro active in handling the security challenges bedeviling the nation so as to create conducive social milieu for special needs education to thrive in the nation. Besides, in order to guarantee provision and access to special needs education by the deserved children and adults, the government, apart from providing adequate facilities and personnel, has the onus of providing adequate security agents to guard the school environment and at the same time ensure the protection and preservation of both teachers and learners.

Keywords: Special needs education, security challenges, sustaining and strengthening, Nigeria

education, transportation, business, entrepreneurship, agriculture et cetera (Charles-Zalakoro, et al., 2019). In the midst of persisting security challenges in Nigeria, educational institutions tend to be more vulnerable and mostly perceived as soft targets for attacks. This explains the reason why the Boko Haram insurgents with its myopic ideology opined that western education is evil and thus commenced series of attack on schools and university campuses where many innocent students were butchered, lynched and some even kidnapped. This sporadic onslaught and killings has resulted in closure of schools and the withdrawal of many children from schools especially in the northern parts of country. Little wonder why Oto and Ukpere (2010) remarked with dismay that the security situation in schools and the country in general is nose-diving and deteriorating more and more.

Persisting security challenges in Nigeria do not only affect regular school education but also special needs education. The objectives of special needs education were vividly articulated in Nigeria's National Policy on Education (2004), which includes:

1. To give concrete meaning to the idea of equalizing educational opportunities to all children, disabilities notwithstanding.
2. Provision of adequate education for all people with special needs in order that they may fully contribute their quota to the development of the nation.
3. Diversified and appropriate curriculum for all the beneficiaries.

Security situation in Nigeria has not only been crippling the attainment of these noble objectives, but practically making the objectives very elusive. Hence, the need for concerted efforts to strengthen and sustain special needs education amidst hydra-headed security challenges in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

It is pertinent to first examine the concept of security. In the perception of Akin (2008) security refers to "the situation that exists as a result of the establishment of measures for the protection of persons, information and property against hostile persons, influences and actions". According to Achumba, Ighomereho and Akpor-Robaro (2013), security can be viewed as the existence of conditions within which people in a society can go about their normal daily activities without any threats to their lives or properties. In the perception of Nmom (2013), security refers to a total peaceful state of mind of an individual, the group, the state, the nation at a particular point in time and space. According to him, security may not connote an absence of violence or some sort of physical assault or some disruptions but a relative peace that can guarantee quality life and social



cohesion for survival of the individual group or nation. It also entails freedom from anxiety, fear, the safety of a state or organization against criminal activities and attacks like terrorism, theft or espionage (Ogheneako, 2014).

In a broad sense, security entails stability and continuity of livelihood (stable and steady income), predictability of daily life (knowing what to expect), protection from crime (feeling safe), and freedom from psychological harm (safety or protection from emotional stress which results from the assurance or knowing that one is wanted, accepted, loved and protected in one's community or neighbourhood and by people around (Achumba, Ighomereho and Akpor-Robaro, 2013). From the foregoing, it can be deduced that security is perceived in terms of protecting the generality of the people, and it is a collective responsibility of the government and the people (Omoroje, Egbule and Emuebie, 2020).

On the other hand, insecurity is the opposite of security and according to Effiom and Edinyang (2013), it refers to a state of being subjected to danger and injury. It is a feeling of un-usual nervousness that may be triggered by perceiving of oneself to be vulnerable. Achumba, Ighomereho, Akpor (2013) views insecurity from two different perspectives. On one hand, insecurity is the state of being open or subject to danger or threat of danger, where danger is the condition of being susceptible to harm or injury. On the other hand, insecurity is the state of being exposed to risk or anxiety, where anxiety is a vague unpleasant emotion that is experienced in anticipation of some misfortune. The major emphasis of these definitions is that those affected by insecurity, apart from not being certain or aware of what would happen, they are also vulnerable to the threats and dangers when they occur (Ndubusi-Okolo and Anigbuogu, 2019). Succinctly put, insecurity in the context of this paper refers to indiscriminate killings of Nigerians (both children and adults), the wanton destruction of property and public goods, and the displacement of people from their homes, ancestral land, farms and businesses.

Ezeocha, S.L. (2010), identified the following aspects of insecurity with destructive consequences: Physical insecurity: violence against person and property; Public insecurity: violent conflicts, insurgency and terrorism; Economic insecurity: Poverty, employment, deprivation, penury; Social insecurity: illiteracy, ignorance, decrease, malnutrition, discrimination; Human Rights violation: Denial of fundamental rights by state, state agencies and others; Political insecurity: Denial of goods and special democratic governance. When all these forms of insecurity are in place there is bound to be instability in the educational system. Students in the different campuses will not be able to concentrate on their studies, teachers will not be able to carry on with their job, and there will be total disruption of the school calendar which might end up making the calendar year not fulfilling its agenda for the session.

Education has been defined as a process by which individuals are assisted formally through proper direction and guidance to develop their capacities for their own benefit and that of the society (Okeke, 2003). It is geared towards developing the individuals for them to live effectively and efficiently in the society and to contribute to its advancement and upliftment. Thus, through education, the behaviour patterns of the citizens could be changed in the desired direction (Orikpe, 2013). Education is a veritable tool for the development of both the individuals and the state. It is a process that involves the spread of valuable knowledge, planned activities and skills that help individuals in the pursuit of national development (Ochoyi and Donald, 2008).

Special needs education, as subset of regular education, is a kind of education specially designed for children and adults who have different kinds challenges including physical, cognitive, language, learning, sensory, and/or emotional disabilities that distinguished them from general population. This kind of education is carefully and specifically tailored to provide instructions capable of meeting individualized needs of the beneficiaries. Vandeh and Ugoh (2012) defined special needs education (SNE) as that kind of educational services given to meet the needs of special needs children (SNC) that is, the blind, hearing impaired, gifted, learning disabled, retarded, physically handicap and those with other health problems; such as services include special methods, appropriate materials, specially trained teachers, adoption and modification of the programme to meet the needs of special children.



The Nigerian National Policy on Education (2004) defined Special Needs Education (SNE) as the “education of children and adult who have learning difficulties because of the different kinds of handicaps; blindness, partial - sightedness, deafness, hardness of hearing, mental retardation, social maladjustment, limb deformation or malformation etc; due to circumstances of birth, inheritance, social position, mental and physical health patterns, or accident later in life. As a result such children and adult are unable to cope with the regular school class organization and methods Adebisi, Jerry, Rasak and Igwe (2014). From the foregoing, it is evident that special needs education is a formal, special educational training given to the children and adults with special needs. Two major categories of recipients of special needs education can be identified: those with disabilities; the gifted and talented children. Children and adult with disabilities include those with hearing impairment, visual impairment, physical and health impairment, intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, multiple handicap and emotional disturbance Adebisi, Jerry, Rasak and Igwe (2014). Besides, the gifted and talented are exceptional children who demonstrate high performance abilities such that ordinary regular classroom activities are grossly inadequate to meet their academic yearnings.

Therefore, special needs education is designed to provide additional services, support programmes, specialized placements or environment needed to cater for all these unique children in order to minimize the psychological trauma derived from various disabilities and still able to actualize their potentials.

Sundry Security Challenges in Nigeria

Nigeria as a nation has witnessed an unprecedented level of insecurity despite the provisions in the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which stipulates that “The security and welfare of the people shall be the primary aim of government (Ndubuisi-Okolo and Anigbuogu, 2019). Internal security particularly from 2007 to date seems to be elusive. Some of the indicators of insecurity in Nigeria include: ethno-religious conflicts, violence, kidnapping, terrorism among others. It assumed different dimensions in the various regions of the country (Joshua, Ibietan and Azuh, 2016). Besides, persisting spate of security challenges in Nigeria manifests in different coloration and magnitude among which include bombings in some parts of the country, election related crises, kidnapping, human trafficking, militancy, assassination, hunger, armed robbery, ritual killings, environmental degradation and other nefarious acts being perpetuated in the country (Orikpe, 2013).

In the perception of Abubakar (2005), some of the major security challenges bedeviling Nigeria in the recent include political and electioneering conflicts, ethno-religious crises, ethnic militias, boundary disputes, cultism, criminality and organized crimes.

Significant Causes of Security Challenges in Nigeria

Achumba, Ighomereho and Akpor-Robaro (2013) highlighted some of the possible causes of security challenges in Nigeria to include:

Porous Borders: Nigeria shares border with some of the West African countries such as Republic of Niger, Chad and Republic of Benin which facilitate the influx of migrants from these countries to Nigeria (Adeola and Oluyemi, 2012). As a result of the porous borders as well as the weak security system, weapons (both small and light weapons) are smuggled easily into Nigeria from the neighbouring countries. The availability of these weapons have aided the spread of criminality and insurgency in the nation as militant groups and bandits have cheap and unchecked access to arms (Hazen and Horner, 2007). It is opined that some of the perpetrators and criminals that have been making peace elusive in Nigeria are young men which are mostly migrants.

Rural/Urban Migration: The problem of uneven development of rural and urban cities in Nigeria was initiated by the former colonial master. The urban centers have witnessed astronomic expansion with arrays of infrastructural and industrial development. This has necessitated indiscriminate influx of youths, especially job seekers to urban cities, thus compound the rate of criminality and insecurity in the nation (Onuoha, 2011). Many youths in search of elusive job have resorted into crime out of sheer frustration.



Inadequate Commitment to Corporate Social responsibility by Companies: There are certain social responsibilities expected to be provided by companies to their immediate host communities. It is opined that the rise in bandits, insurgents, militants and other criminally minded groups in some parts of the nation is partly a consequence of the neglect of social responsibility by companies to the community where they are operating.

Unemployment and Poverty: It is not a gainsaying that poverty rate in Nigeria is alarming. The scarcity of employment opportunity for teeming graduate, seeking for elusive jobs has compounded the spate of poverty in Nigeria. Iredia (2011) citing the National Bureau of statistics, stated that there are about 35 million unemployed youths in the country who are forced to resort to anything that can serve as a means of livelihood. As a result of the high level of unemployment and poverty among these young people, many of them have been directly or indirectly lured or attracted into different shades of cruelty and unspeakable crime (Adagba, Ugwu and Eme, 2012). Corroborating the foregoing, Omoroje, Egbule and Emuebie (2020) aptly remarked with dismay that the abysmal failure of successive administrations in Nigeria to address challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequitable distribution of wealth among ethnic nationalities, ultimately resulted to anger, frustration, agitation and violent crimes against the Nigerian state by individuals and groups.

Terrorism: In the present day Nigeria, terrorism is the most fundamental source of insecurity, and its primary bases and sources of support have generally been located in religious fanaticism and intolerance particularly in Islam dominated states of Nigeria (Achumba, Ighomereho and Akpor-Robaro, 2013). Terrorism according to Sampson and Onuoha (2011) is “the premeditated use or threat of use of violence by an individual or group to cause fear, destruction or death, especially against unarmed targets, property or infrastructure in a state, intended to compel those in authority to respond to the demands and expectations of the individual or group behind such violent acts”. Terrorism in Nigeria is orchestrated by the Boko Haram insurgents based in northern part of Nigeria. This terrorist group has been a major threat to Nigerian security as many innocent lives have been sent to untimely grave, while many have been rendered invalid or disabled, with property worth billions of dollars destroyed especially in the North since 2009.

Political desperation and election malpractices: Desperation, intolerant and ruthless contests among politicians and their followers have often resulted in violence, security breaches, killings and destruction, all of which threaten the existence of the Nigerian State. There are violent and desperate politicking among political parties, electoral fraud and money politics (Orikpe, 2013). Electoral fraud poses a major challenge to democracy in Nigeria and by implication, a threat to the security of the nation. It generates resistance from those who believe they have been cheated out and they often will resort to violence.

Government insensitivity: It is evident that the state of insecurity in the nation is largely a function of government failure and carefree attitude towards the poor masses. This is manifested in the inability of government to deliver public services and to provide basic needs for the masses like shelter, food and clothing (Ndubuisi-Okolo and Anigbuogu, 2019). Recent social unrests in some African countries no doubt have roots in the failure of the government policies to provide or manage the basic human physiological needs of their citizens.

In addition, Ogheneakoke (2014) identified a plethora of factors as causes of insecurity in Nigeria. These include, but not limited to, the following: corruption; marginalization; social inequality; ethnicity; poverty and greed; loss of value system; religious intolerance; foreign infiltration – insurgency; bad leadership; youth unemployment; porosity of our borders; falling standard of education; poor judiciary system; cultism and cult activities; high value for material things; manipulation of electoral processes by political parties; lack of trust on security agents; human right abuses; injustice, and lack of transparency.



Sordid Effects of Security Challenges on Special Needs Education in Nigeria

Education is indispensable bedrock of social and economic development of any nation. But the prevailing security situation is not in favour of effective provision and delivery of quality education. For instance, the Islamic militants as well as bandits have serially attacked myriad of students and facilities in educational institutions especially in the northern states of the country (Chibok Girls and Burnin Yadin Boys Government Schools). As a result, many schools have shut down their academic programmes. This has drastically impacted the teeming number of students seeking admission into academic institutions at all levels (Omoroge, Egbule and Emuebie, 2020).

The sordid effects of security challenges in Nigeria are more pronounced on special needs education. This manifests in repeated invasion of schools as well as kidnapping of school teachers and pupils; demand for ransom; assassination of many innocent teachers, incessant closure of schools due to nefarious and ghastly activities of terrorists, bandits and militants; social injustice, unemployment for young people with special needs; lack of access to livelihood resources, persistent rise in price of goods and services; destruction of homes and displacement of families and so on.

Salient Approaches for Strengthening and Sustaining Special Needs Education amidst Insecurity in the Nation

There is a significant relationship between national security and education. Condoleezza Rice, former Secretary of State of the United States of America remarked that quality education of a nation is a direct function of a country's national security (Ejirika, 2014). According to Nandi (2013), education helps in developing intelligent social actors with the ability to make rational decisions and act intelligently. It helps to address issues of poverty, violent crimes and illiteracy. Quality education also promotes the spirit of nationalism and patriotism among youths. Anadi (2008) argued that submitted that for a nation to be developed and secured, there must be a very considerable proportion of trained educated citizens in that nation not only to act as doctors, engineers, teachers, agriculturist, scientists, and the likes, but also to create a new class sufficiently large and hence, sufficiently strong to establish its own values of justice, security, selection on merit, flexibility, empiricism and efficiency. In the light of the foregoing, it is imperative to make conscious efforts to strengthen and promote quality special needs education in the face of the prevailing security challenges in Nigeria. The first major step is to review and renew the curricular contents of general education as well as special needs education to suit the needs of the individual child, the nation and employers of labour in general. Similarly, it is also imperative to reduce the incidence and reoccurrence of securities breaches in the nation and at same create an atmosphere of peace for special needs education to thrive. Nothing can flourish or succeed in a crisis laden environment, including education. Therefore, government has the onerous responsibility of tackling the menace of insecurities in the nation by putting appropriate machineries in motion.

Another strategy is to create or establish more special schools in Nigeria. This becomes imperative as menace of insurgency, ethnic militia and bandits inglorious activities have resulted in destruction of many schools, while at same time rendered many victims disabled, thus escalating the number of special school's candidates. Apart from the facts that the available special needs schools are grossly inadequate, disabled from persisting insecurity has exacerbated the number of children in need of special schools in Nigeria. Similarly, state of the art facilities are desperately needed for effective, efficient and result oriented special needs education in Nigeria. Assistive technologies, educational technologies, information and communication technologies, regular power supply are all important and indispensable for special schools in Nigeria to keep pace with international standard. Besides, adequate professional teachers are wanting in many special schools and these schools cannot function as expected without adequate supply of competent and qualified special needs educators. Government in particular, and parents by extension, needs to collaborate to ensure that sufficient number of teachers are recruited to man the various schools for special needs education.



In addition, as part of efforts to sustain special needs education in Nigeria, bearing in mind the vulnerability of the children, provision of maximum security for each of the schools is non-negotiable by the government. Both teachers and learners deserve to be well protected and secured. No teacher can venture to work in a crisis zone or trouble zone and no parent would attempt to send his/her wards to an unsafe environment for schooling. Many parents and their wards are grossly unaware of existence of special needs education and this explains the reason many disadvantaged children, special needs children are not exposed to appropriate education. In order to promote special needs education, efforts must be made to create awareness about this kind of education, its recipients or beneficiaries as well as mode of operation. Money is very important for smooth running of any organization. In the same vein, adequate budgetary and financial allocation is vital to funding and provision of special needs education. While preparing the yearly budget, government needs to set aside adequate fund for the provision and sustenance of special needs education as distinct from general education.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Causes of insecurity in different nations of the world, and especial in Nigeria, are vary and multi-dimensional; hence the need to fashion out a pragmatic and holistic strategies for checkmating the incidences and menace; in the absence of which sustainability of special needs education will be a mirage. Thus, the following proactive measures for checkmating insecurities in the nation and sustaining special needs education are suggested. An aphorist says an idle hand is the devil's workshop. To avert the resurgences of insecurities in Nigeria, many idle young graduates in search of elusive job should be provided employment opportunities. Without mincing words, unemployment and underdevelopment has been a major threat to livelihood of many people in Nigeria, hence the need for prompt solution.

Further, there should be re-awakening and overhauling of the national value system. Values, such as hard work, honesty, loyalty, accountability, transparency and probity should be strengthened, encouraged and rewarded while corruption, violence, kidnapping, ritual killing, dubious business (419), yahoo + and other anti-social behavior should be discouraged and seriously frowned at.

Importantly, in any developed nation, there is no substitute for visionary leadership and good governance. Conscious efforts need to be made to enthrone leaders with vision and passion for good governance and welfare of the people at heart; such leaders that will be willing to adopt and committed to implementation of social and political security so as to alleviate poverty. In addition, while the security personnel of the nation should be well equipped and trained, there should be recruitment of more hands to join the security forces. Besides, every other unregistered security outfits, ethnic militia, insurgent group, bandit should be outlawed. The religious leaders and organizations have the responsibility of preaching and promoting peace, tolerance, camaraderie and unity in their various assemblies and congregation.

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