

Enhancing the Effective Implementation of Inclusive Education in Nigerian Schools

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Abstract

This paper focuses on enhancing the effective implementation of inclusive education in Nigerian schools. The paper examined the concept of inclusive education and its goals. It X-rayed some of the challenges facing the successful implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria, amongst which include societal lack of awareness, poor funding, poor infrastructural facilities, manpower need, etc. The paper concluded that the collaborative efforts of parents, teachers, stakeholders and government are necessary to provide a conducive atmosphere for the take-off of the programme in the near future. Above all, a multidimensional approach on how to take the problem of implementing inclusive education in Nigeria was recommended.

Introduction

Inclusive education is a contemporary issue in Nigeria and the world over. The recent drive for enrolment of children into regular schools has made classrooms to be over crowded with both children with special needs and those without special needs. The resultant effect is that it has compounded the already existing problem in the regular education classroom where individual attention was rarely provided (Margo, Mensah & Nantwi, 2020). To Obani (2010), admission and instruction of all children (with or without disabilities and /or other educational special needs) in the same neighbourhood schools, otherwise called inclusive education, is desirable and is now the trend the world over.

Inclusive education has to do with the latest attempt in the provision of placement options or alternative programmes for children with special needs. The concept of

inclusive education is anchored on the philosophy of education for all people regardless of their individual needs and nature (UNESCO, 2009). A number of policies, frameworks and conventions were signed by the international community which informed inclusive education. Some of them were: the United Nation's Declaration on education for all in Jomtien, sustainable development goals (2015), Incheon declaration and framework for actions for implementation of sustainable development goal 4(2015), United Nation's convention on the right of persons with disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006), Salamanca statement and framework for Action on special needs education (1994) and others. The declaration state as follows:

- i. Every child should learn Science in their mother tongue, hence at least one global science curriculum should be provided for free, translated for free, and posted in a public site.
- ii. The materials derived from the same curriculum should be provided with the same perspective: translated into the child's mother tongue, easily available and free.
- iii. These derived materials should address as well the traditional/local knowledge, respecting indigenous cultures.
- iv. We strongly believe that, to achieve the 2030 goals for education, a massive global act of passion altruism that puts each teacher and pedagogue's creativity at the service of global science teaching.
- v. For other subjects, the feeling and convictions are the same.
- vi. But, because we all depend on ecosystems that sustain us, to deliver that message using a science curriculum is an obligation.
- vii. Sharing a global science curriculum open to change and debate that conjugates Biology, Geology, Physics, and Chemistry, while having in consideration the sustainable development goals, is the aim of this manuscript.

Nigeria is a signatory to a number of some of these international policies and conventions to which inclusive education is an obligation. As a result, the Nigeria

education system has to adopt the principle of inclusive education which was carefully done when the Nigerian government passed into law, the compulsory Free, Universal Basic Education Act in 2004 and subsequently, in the year 2006 The implementation was further enhanced when she set up the eleven task teams to critically and carefully examine three pillars of the inclusive education reform process namely: access, quality and equity (Federal Ministry of Education, 2008). As reported by Suleiman (2019), the Nigerian government has adopted inclusive education as a policy and through the Federal Ministry of Education, Nigeria as a country, has characterized policy guidelines for inclusive education that targets the three group (the disabled, the disadvantaged and the gifted or talented), with greater focus on *desegregation*, anti-discrimination and enforcing the fundamental human Rights of these special needs groups.

The concept of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education deals with provision of education for all and recognizes the necessity and urgency of providing education for all children, young people and adults within the regular education system (Oladele, 2003). Danlami (2020) asserted that ample opportunity or access to learning irrespective of the various differences that may surround the learners. Suleiman (2019) asserted that inclusive education represents the latest attempt in the provision of placement options or alternative programmes for children with special needs. In the same vein. Farrel (2022) sees inclusive education as a policy of educating all children of various categories (either disabled or non-disabled, gifted or non-gifted) in the same schools, by the same teacher and in the same classrooms with each one achieving what is expected of him or her. Stainback (2005) in Saleh (2015) conceptualized inclusive education as a process of allowing all children the opportunity to fully participate in regular classroom activities regardless of disabilities, race or other characteristics. Magdalane, Eke and Benedict (2017) aptly pointed out that inclusive education is an ongoing process aimed at offering quality education for all while respecting diversity

and the different needs and abilities, characteristics and eliminating all forms of discrimination. They further added that these diverse children include: street children, child workers and people with disabilities, rural children and nomadic children.

Types of Inclusive Education

The following are the four types of inclusions in practice (Awajiokinor, et al. 2024).

Full Inclusion: Full inclusive education entails that all the children, including those with severe disabilities, are enrolled in same school with those without disabilities and are allowed to learn side by side in the same classroom without any form of segregation or exclusion.

Partial Inclusion: The proponent of partial inclusion model emphasizes allowing special needs learners to interact with their peers socially and academically. Though the interaction does not require learners with disabilities and special needs remain in a standard classroom for all lessons. What this means is that learners will meet with a special education teacher or speech therapist in a separate class to avoid disrupting the learning activities in standard classroom.

Education Inclusion: In this type, there is specialization of educational opportunities for all children with disabilities regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions.

Social Inclusion: This does not actually refer to school settings rather the process that provides opportunities for persons with special needs to participate in social activities. Where learners with special needs can feel accepted in sports, musical entertainment, debate, quizzes and many other activities that are socially driven. This include the freedom and dignity to vote and be voted for in an election.

Economic Inclusion: This involves training in vocation and employment of services. It should involve development of specific jobs, skills, trade and vocational schools, colleges apprenticeship programmes, rehabilitation centres, sheltered workshop

among others that should enhance the employability of abilities of SNE and disabilities learners in any field of their endeavours (Bubpha 2014).

Goals of Inclusive Education

The general aim of inclusive education was to provides a natural environment where pupils with special educational needs/disabilities learn alongside their peers and are freed from isolation that is characteristic of most special school programme (Ugo, 2005) Three broad reasons proposed by Stainback and Stainback (1990), for inclusive school are:

- 1 To provide each student the opportunity to learn to live and work with his or her peers in natural integrated educational and community settings.
- 2 To avoid the effects of segregation inherent when students are placed in separate, special schools and/ or classes and
- 3 To do what is fair, ethical and equitable.

In support of the above view, Danlami (2015) added the following goals:

- i. To provide education for all children with diverse learning needs within the restructured school community.
- ii. To make special need children active members of the school community and then help them achieve quality education outcome.
- iii. To build a supportive school community that is able to identify and minimize barriers to learning and participation
- iv. To educate more children better
- v. To ensure successful learning and social experience or competence.
- vi. To empower children who are hitherto excluded or isolated
- vii. To enable students to participate in mainstreamed education to the best of their abilities.
- viii. To build inclusive schools that can respond to diverse needs.

- ix. To study the pressures that lead some people in school to feel excluded and separated
- x. To attend imaginatively to diverse learning needs in the classroom.
- xi. To ensure improvement of students learning outcomes
- xii. To develop exemplary units of planning for diversity and understanding the diversity.
- xiii. To dismantle barriers to access and participate in and facilitate achievement in schooling and training.

The Need for Inclusive Education in Nigeria

Salaam and Situ (2005) identify the need for inclusive education as thus:

- 1 Increases awareness about various categories of disabilities, encourages more acceptance by their non-handicapped peers and parents.
- 2 Parents and siblings of children with disabilities are happy for it as their special needs member of the family attends a regular school in the neighbourhood.
- 3 It promotes full integration of children with special needs into their school and community at large.
- 4 It focuses on the strengths, talents, and interests of all students unlike special schools.
- 5 It reduces the cost of running special schools alongside with the regular schools.

In support of the above view, Ozgya, Ezeanochie and Bodang (2017) identified the benefits of inclusive education as follow:

- i Reduce negative stigma associated with attitudinal disposition of members of the public.
- ii Feeling of being connected with their peer group in the same educational environment
- iii To gain access to the general education curriculum and setting.

Again, Ogunloye in Ozgya et al (2017) provided the moral bases for inclusive education of children with special needs. These include:

- i Inclusive education helps to fulfil the promise of equality in educational opportunity for all children.
- ii The bases for quality, equality, equal access, socialization, empowerment and fostering of human dignity.

Policy Framework on Inclusive Education in Nigeria

The National Policy on Education (2013), provides that education of children with special needs are expected to be free at all levels and all necessary facilities that would ensure easy access to education shall be provided to include: (a) Inclusive education or integration of special classes and units into ordinary/public schools under the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme; b) Regular census and monitoring of people with special needs to ensure adequate educational planning and welfare programme; (c) Special education equipment and materials like Perkins Braille, white/mobility care, brailed textbooks, abacus, talking watch, audiometers, speech trainers, hearing aids, ear molding machines, educational toys, calipers, crutches, wheel chairs, artificial limbs, audio-visual equipment and internet facilities; (d) Special education training on Braille reading and writing, typewriter use, speech signs, daily living skills; (e) Special training and re-training of the personnel on capacity building to keep them abreast of latest teaching techniques on various categories of disabilities, the gifted and talented; and (f) A teacher pupil ratio of 1:10 in special schools. Equally the special schools are to arrange for effective architectural designs of school buildings with regular sensory, medical and psychological screening assessments to identify any incidence of handicap.

Analyzing Inclusive Education, Aja-Okorie 2010 cited in Suleiman & Isa (2022), stated that the Federal Government of Nigeria also made some policy interventions targeted at inclusive education in the following areas: i. signing of the UNESCO

National Education Strategy (UNESS) for Nigeria (2006-2015) which was the outcome of a two-day UNESCO/Federal Ministry of Education stakeholders' round table. ii. The launch of Community Accountability and Transparent Initiatives (CATTI), and iii the publication of national plan based on the education sector situation analysis which clearly reveals the serious dysfunctional state of Nigerian education.

Relevance of Inclusive Education in Nigeria

Inclusive Education is essential in the welfare of disability learners in terms of interaction, integration and engagement in extra curricula activity that will help to improve their skill development. Anupriya & Salim (2014) affirmed that the basic reason for inclusive education is to encourage students with disabilities to be independent and also benefit from educational resources, practices and activities. Inclusive education implies that children requiring special attention should be able to learn in regular classrooms to boost their confidence, while regular students learn how to accept children with different characters, temperament and talents. In the same vein, Wenenda & Okeke (2018), stressed that inclusion give avenue for schools to respond and deal individually with students, bearing in mind that these students have rights that have been seen through the lens of equality to every opportunity provided by government.

Inclusiveness is imperative in the integration of the society, because bringing students with and without special needs together makes a statement that a diverse group of people make up what is called society, and that no one type of student is better than another. Inclusive education will thus remove barrier to friendship among students with and without special needs, imbining in them the spirit of cooperation, integration and team work, integration into the mainstream enables students with disabilities to benefit from the stimulation of mixing with relatively more able students and to have the opportunity to observe higher models of social and academic behaviour (Omede, 2015). The mixing of ability forms essential ingredient germane for national

integration. Inclusive education welcomes diversity among all learners; it removes segregation of any kind from educational practices, caters for the unique needs and learning styles of individuals and provides all students with community membership and greater opportunities for academic and social achievement.

Moreover, some research findings have shown that at the elementary school level, pupils with disabilities who are included in general education curricula are able to benefit socially and academically without facing the stigma of segregated or pull-out classrooms (Fareo, 2020). Inclusive education encourages setting of standards for behaviour so instruction are higher, and students with classifications have more opportunity to reach higher standards and become independent learners (Jacob & Olisaemeka, 2016). Inclusion has academic and social benefits for all students, whether with or without disabilities, such as increased communication and social interaction opportunities, age-appropriate models of behaviour skills, more active participation in the school community, individualized education goals, as well as access to the rich core curriculum (Salend, 2025). Above all, Inclusiveness integrates all learners hence everyone stands a chance working together, understand others feelings and temperaments, irrespective of their ability, disability, social class, religion or creed, this form the foundation for better national integration.

Challenges of implementing inclusive education in Nigerian

Over the years the Federal government of Nigeria has had good ideas and intentions of how best to provide special education services for special needs children and full implementation of inclusive education, for instance section 8 of the National Policy on Education, clearly stated in its objectives but not yet fully implemented or merely looks like a lip-service without implementation. Therefore, some of the challenges of inclusive education are as follow according to Awajiokinor, et al. (2024):

- 1 Most parents and teachers or special educators are not aware of the features, nature and programmes of inclusive education.

- 2 The problem of poor and inadequate funding by the government may affect the programme.
- 3 Materials and infrastructure are not available. Specialized teaching materials required for learning for impaired, visually impaired, mental retardation and others are not readily available in schools.
- 4 For inclusive education to be possible, or successful there is need for the building of mainstream classrooms, such classrooms could hardly be found in Nigerian schools.
- 5 Teaching children with learning impairment in the midst of normal children in an inclusive class may not be given attention based on his/her unique needs.
- 6 Inadequate manpower development is near absent in most Nigerian schools. specialist teachers, speech pathologists, audiologists, braille/computer technologists.
- 7 Inclusive schools are relatively expensive for students to afford, thereby making it difficult for low-income parents to sponsor their wards.
- 8 Securing the commitment of parents, teachers, specialist teachers, head of schools and other stakeholders to plan and implement inclusive education in Nigeria may not be realizable or might be difficult.
- 9 Stigmatization attached to the disabled may not disappear from the mind of the regular students. The discriminatory attitude from the normal student will create more inferiority complex among the handicapped children.

Strategies for Enhancing the Implementation of Inclusive Education in Nigeria according to Awajiokinor, et al. (2024)

- 1 Government should develop comprehensive framework for full implementation of inclusive education. This may have to do with objective setting, mode of implementation, monitoring, programme evaluation and feedback mechanism.

- 2 There should be meticulous arrangement of the school environment so that the structure of the environment and the child's experience of it may lead naturally to learning.
- 3 Parents and teachers of special education should be aware of all it takes to embark on inclusive education and do all the needful.
- 4 More special education teachers, rehabilitators, counselors and medical personnel should be recruited into schools to cater for the inclusive population of children.
- 5 Early intervention programmes should be provided in schools. Such services may range from identification, screening and referred services, to diagnoses and direct intervention for inclusive programmes.
- 6 Assistive technology software, compensatory and adaptive skills as well as materials and equipment for learning should be provided in schools.
- 7 Government should sponsor conferences, seminars and workshops to discourage segregation and promote cooperation for effective inclusive educational settings.
- 8 Inclusive or integration call for flexibility in both the school curriculum, learning environment, equipment, methodologies and instructional materials.

Conclusion

Inclusive education in Nigerian remains a laudable policy for implementation but its practicability might still be a problem. As desirable as the policy of inclusion education is, efforts should be renewed by the entire society to overcome the likely challenges or expected short falls. Above all, if the principles of the programme are to be based on a model of learning to match learner's predispositions and development, then teachers will need explicit training, funds should be provided, employment and retention of personnel can be a gateway for a successful inclusive education in Nigeria.

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