

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: THE ROLE, CHALLENGES AND PREPARATION OF TEACHERS

Emeka, Ifeanyi David Ph.D¹, Emeka, Chukwudozie Joseph² & Albert Chukwuemeka Onyebuch3i
id.emeka@unizik.edu.com¹ emekachukwudoziejoseph@gmail.com²
chukwuemekalbert@gmail.com³

Department of Educational Foundation, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka^{1, 3}.

Abstract

Inclusive education is an emerging concept that has recently drawn the attention of both local and international stakeholders in education. Major organizations with educational interests, such as the United Nations Organization (UNO), United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) etc, are also not left out in the intellectual discourse concerning the success of inclusive education across the globe. The implementation of inclusive education in Nigerian schools involves making learning environment conducive, providing enough equipments and training teachers on how to handled learning disabled. The paper examined the role, challenges and preparation of teachers towards the task of implementing inclusive education in Nigeria. Numerous challenges facing inclusive education in the country include inadequate funding by the government, inappropriate socio-cultural and religious practices, massive neglect in the development of functional school libraries over the years, erratic and inadequate funding of projects and programmes etc. It was recommended that, campaign should be mounted to sensitize teachers and parents on ways of handling, identifying and caring for individuals with special needs.

Key words: Role, Challenges, Teachers Preparation, Inclusive Education, Disabilities

Introduction

Education is one of the fundamental human rights especially to the child and very important for the development of a nation. Education draws people to live peacefully with others and emphasized peaceful values, upon which society must rely for growth and development. The emphasis here is based on training, disciplining of the mind and the body. Ogoh (2018) defined education as the systematic process of acquiring knowledge for the benefits of individual and society at large. This is the reason why nations set plans on how to ensure that the education is for all citizenry (Aduge-Ani, 2018). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)'s Education for All (EFA) is one of the programmes designed to ensure that education is for all (Okoye & Ifi, 2020). Also, the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 came up with a set of 17 global goals which they tagged the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the year 2030 (UNESCO, 2018). The SDG 4 is set to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. The first target in this SDG 4 is on primary and secondary education because it is believed to be the bedrock of all other forms of education. Across the globe presently, much emphasis is being laid on inclusive education as many countries have aligned with UNESCO in propagating inclusive education (Okoye & Ifi, 2020).

Inclusive education is a system of education that carter for the special needs of pupils and students with visual, auditory and hearing impairment,, mental retardation, emotional disorder, physical and health impairment and learning disabilities. Ajuwon (2008) describe inclusion or

inclusive education as the philosophy and practice for educating children with special needs in general education settings.

Nigeria as a nation supports the operation of inclusive education in its national policy. National Policy of Education (2004) as cited in Lawal and Isah, (2022) states that:

“access to education shall be provided and inclusive education or integration of special classes and unit into ordinary/public schools under UBE scheme. Persons with special needs and learning disabled shall be provided with inclusive education service in school which normal persons attend, in age appropriate to general education classes directly supervised by general teachers.”

Inclusive education is a philosophy for attaining equity, justice and equality in education for all children who have been excluded from education for the reason of disabilities (Christopher & Elizabeth, 2012). In another development NPE (2004) maintained that, every Nigerian child shall have a right to educational opportunities irrespective of any real or imaginary disability.

Inclusive education can provide a range of academic and social benefits for students with disabilities, such as high achievement in language and mathematics, improved rate of high school graduation, and more positive relationship with non-disabled individuals (Isuwa & Lengnen, 2014). This implies that implementation of inclusive education in Nigerian schools involves making learning environment conducive for teaching and learning of individuals with special needs, equipping learning resource centers with learning materials, training and retraining teachers on how to identify and handle disabled individuals in a regular classroom, specialist to screened individuals with special needs and learning disabilities should be positioned in designated centers in each Local Government of the country and finally, provide enough funding by government to support inclusive education. The main rationale behind inclusive education, according to Obi (2008) as cited in Lawal and Isah, (2022) is the right issues when person with disabilities are not discriminated based on religion, race, ethnicity, tribe or disability. According to Hull, (as cited in Odebiyi, 2016), the main challenges facing inclusive education are lack of qualified teachers, absence of support service, relevant materials, inadequate personnel and training programmes, lack of funding structure and the absence of enabling legislature in Nigeria.

Therefore, implementation of inclusive education depends upon removing all barriers, hindrance and obstacles. All the challenges should be tackled one after the other. The role of the teacher and all stakeholders in education for the successful implementation of inclusive education involves, early screening of the special needs individuals and learning disabled, training of specialist and teachers on handling these individuals, providing equipments and teaching/learning materials, monitoring sensitization campaign on inclusive education, allocation of enough fund to cater for individual with special needs and education sector in general, adequate supervision, involving parents and community members and finally, making education accessible to individuals with special needs.

Approaches to Inclusive Education

This section according to Mugambi (2017) focuses on two approaches: the Human Right Based approach to inclusive education and the Multicultural Approach.

Human Right Based Approach

Many world governments have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) a holistic human rights treaty addressing the social, economic, cultural, civic, and political and protection rights of children. It emphasizes both the right to education on basis of equality of opportunity and

the broad aims of education in terms of promoting the fullest possible development of the child. Article 2 of CRC gives governments an obligation to assure the realization of all rights to every child without discrimination, including on the grounds of disability. Additionally Article 23 of CRC specially addresses the right of children with disabilities to assistance to ensure that they are able to access education in a manner that promotes their social inclusion. The committee on Childs Rights identified four rights which must be understood as general principles to be applied in the realization of all other rights:

- a) Nondiscrimination.
- b) Best interest of the child.
- c) Optimum development of the child.
- d) The right of the child to be heard and taken seriously in accordance with age and maturity.

Article 24 of the 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which reaffirms the right of disabled children to quality education and committed governments to ensure that 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 (Riesern, 2012). Article 32 places an obligation on donor governments to make their support inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities". According to UNESCO (as cited in Mugambi, 2017) several principles underpin a right based approach to education:

1. **Universality and inalienability** – Human rights are universal and an entitlement of all people everywhere in the world.
2. **Indivisibility**-Human rights whether civil, cultural, economic, political or social are inherent to the dignity of every person.
3. **Interdependent and interrelatedness**- The realization of the rights often depends on wholly or in part on the realization of others.
4. **Equality and non-discrimination**- All individuals are equal as human beings and by virtue of the inherent dignity of each person are entitled to their rights without discrimination of any kind.
5. **Participation and inclusion**- Every person and all people are entitled to active, free and meaningful participation in contribution to and enjoyment of civil, economic, social, cultural and political development.
6. **Empowerment**- This is the process through which people"s capabilities to demand and use their human rights grow. The goal is to give people the power and capabilities to claim their rights, in order to change their own lives and improve their communities.
7. **Accountability and respect for the rule of the law**- A right based approach seeks to raise levels of accountability in the development process by identifying „rights holders“ and corresponding „duty bearers“ and to enhance the capacities to those duty bearers to meet their obligation.

Systems of education must therefore strive to fulfill the right to education, respect the right to education, and protect the right to education.

Multicultural Approach

Multicultural education describes a system of instruction that attempts to foster cultural pluralism and acknowledges the differences between races and cultures. It addresses the educational needs of a society that contains more than one set of traditions that is a mixture of many cultures. The goal of multicultural education is to help students understand and appreciate cultural differences and similarities and to recognize the accomplishments of diverse ethnic, racial,

and socioeconomic groups. It is a practice that hopes to transform the ways in which students are instructed by giving equal attention to the contributions of all the groups in a society. Multicultural education aims to eliminate prejudice, racism and all forms of oppression. To do this, "it is imperative that multicultural educators give voice and substance to struggles against oppression and develop the vision and the power of our future citizens to forge a more just society." According to Omeda, (2016). Multicultural education addresses issues of white privilege, challenges the status quo, and compels students and teachers to identify their own biases. It increases awareness and understanding of racism, how it has shaped our society in the past and the manifestations of racism, classism and oppression in the contemporary world.

Goals of Multicultural Education.

According to Pantrick, (2015) the goals of multicultural education are as follows:

- a. To have every student achieve to his or her potential.
- b. To learn how to learn and to think critically.
- c. To encourage students to take an active role in their own education by bringing their stories and experiences into the learning scope.
- d. To address diverse learning styles.
- e. To appreciate the contributions of different groups who have contributed to the knowledge base.
- f. To develop positive attitudes about groups of people who are different from ourselves.
- g. To become good citizens of the school, the community, the country and the world.
- h. To learn how to evaluate knowledge from different perspectives.
- i. To develop an ethnic, national and global identity.
- j. To provide decision making skills and critical analysis skills so that the students can make better choices in their everyday lives.

The Role of Teachers in Achieving Inclusive Education

The teacher's role in an inclusive classroom is quite enormous and tasking therefore, the teacher must be psychologically prepared to take up such task. The teacher also collaborates with the other support staff like the medical personnel, physiological therapists, other support team, parents and social workers. Pershina et al. (2018) identified that psychological readiness of a teacher is a necessity for inclusive education. Psychological readiness according the scholars involves the emotional acceptance of children with various types of developmental disorders, readiness to include children with different types of violations in lesson activities, and satisfaction with the pedagogical activity. Psychological preparations are very crucial as it form the basis for other preparations. Psychological preparations also include: being able to treat all the children in the class without segregation, being psychologically stable and firm despite difficulties and challenges, being compassionate, having the right mind needed to shape the children into better persons.

To ensure effective teaching and learning in an inclusive classroom, teachers must possess skills and competencies that make for success. According to Pershina et al. (2018); Saloviita, (2018) the teachers profession requires him/her to be prepared in terms of: possession of pedagogical techniques, knowledge of the basics of psychology and correctional pedagogy, knowledge of individual differences in children, the readiness and ability of teachers to simulate a lesson and use variability in the learning process, knowledge of individual characteristics of children with various disabilities in development, and skills on how to teach them. These are related to the teacher's skills.

The teacher possesses the ability to motivate the students to learn. The level of and diversity of skills possessed by teachers to a great extent affect their effectiveness in the classroom. The teacher also depends on other resources to achieve the stated goals.

Resources according to Owoko as cited in Okongo et al. (2015) include teaching materials and time available for instruction. Oyugi and Nyaga (2010) highlighted the resources needed for teaching and learning in an inclusive classroom to include: peripatetic services, support staff like sign language interpreters and Braille transcribers, community involvement, regular and special teachers among others. Resources could be in the form of human resources or physical resources. The teacher must be able to at least identify a student with a disability and then send the student for confirmation. Dinh and Le (2010) opined that positive attitude of teachers are fundamental to achieving inclusive education. The teacher as he progresses on the job may be better prepared in the adoption of inclusive education. According to Yeo, Chong, Neihart and Huan (2014) teachers with less years of experience on the job showed a negative attitude, while those with more years of experience showed a positive attitude to inclusive education. Apart from the teacher factor, there are other factors that affect effective implementation of inclusive education. They include: large number of children in a class, insufficient number of support staff, small size of classrooms, inadequate hours for classroom activities, attitude of parents and society and failure of examination bodies to adequately provide for peculiarities during examinations. Inclusive education is a contemporary move in the field of education and there is need for teachers to be prepared. This informs the study to determine the lower basic education teachers' preparedness for the adoption of inclusive education in Nigeria.

Preparation for Inclusive Education

Teachers are critical component to creating inclusive classrooms that allow children with disabilities to learn and thrive. Therefore, careful attention to teacher preparation is a must if we are to continue to ensure that this marginalized groups such as the disabled or physically challenged can have access to quality education today.

Three essential components for capacity building in inclusive education include:

1. Increase awareness and attitudinal change through advocacy
2. Create a future of trained professionals: pre-service training
3. Build on existing human resources: in-service training and professional development. "It is vitally important that teachers, principals and other education stakeholders maintain a positive attitude towards inclusion."

Attitudinal Changes and Awareness Rising:

- 1 For inclusive education to succeed, it is vitally important that teachers, principals and other education stakeholders maintain a positive attitude towards inclusion. They must be firmly convinced of the benefits that inclusive practices bring to all children.
 - 2 Even if inclusive education is mandated by law, it will never succeed without the enthusiastic support of its practitioners.
 - 3 Obtaining such support involves behavior and attitudinal change which is not a quick or easy process.
- Organize training workshops for educators and key community members on general inclusive education techniques, especially those which highlight how such techniques can benefit all children by improving overall quality of teaching.

- Integrate awareness about inclusive education into schools' regular professional development activities.
- Integrate knowledge about the benefits of inclusive education into initial training programs for student teachers in colleges and universities.
- Develop mass media activities and materials that emphasize the value of inclusive education.
- Child with disability is helped by his non-disabled peer increasing awareness about inclusive education improves the confidence of teachers in their ability to teach students with diverse learning needs.
- Increase awareness of the many benefits of inclusive education through the interaction of educators and key community members with people with disabilities. It was found that increased interaction helps to bring about mutual understanding and respect.

People with disabilities should also be encouraged and helped to become trained teachers themselves.

Pre-Service Training Programs

- 1 In order to build human resources in the field of education, training must be done both at pre-service and in-service levels. Pre-service training refers to training individuals before they become teachers.
- 2 This includes training at teacher training colleges and universities at both the national and provincial levels. Ideally, inclusive education should be a compulsory subject for all teacher candidates and an integral part of teacher training curricula.
- 3 Fundamental knowledge and skills of inclusive education, such as understanding needs and abilities of children with special needs and pedagogic skills such as instructional accommodation and activity differentiation, should be provided widely to teacher candidates.

In-Service Training Programs

- 1 In-service training includes professional development for teachers who are already working in the classroom. In addition to developing the skills of professionals before entering the workforce, it is essential that teachers already teaching be provided skills and techniques for inclusive education.
- 2 Teachers in many countries are required to upgrade their professional skills on an annual or regular basis to enhance their teaching performance. In-service training programs offer pre-school teachers the opportunity to enjoy thematic training on inclusive education particularly effective strategy to improve the quality of an entire educational system for all children regardless of their needs.
- 3 Inclusive education methods are child-centered, employing active and participative learning techniques that improve teachers' capacity to teach children both with and without disabilities.
- 4 Collaborative and participative techniques not only enhance learning outcomes, but also reduce prejudice and discrimination among children.

This type of training will have a positive impact on preparation of all teachers and children in participating schools.

Challenges of Inclusive Education in Nigeria

According to the Iwuamadi, and Obasi (2020) several important challenges still persist in the education sector that tends to affect inclusive education adversely. They include;

1. Lack of adequate available reliable and up-to-date baseline data to facilitate effective planning

2. Inappropriate socio-cultural and religious practices
3. Massive neglect in the development of functional school libraries over the years
4. Erratic and inadequate funding of projects and programmes
5. Enforcement of instruction in the mother tongue
6. Providing unhindered access to about seven million school age children
7. Providing more classrooms to meet the expansion in access
8. Providing child-friendly environment through the renovation of dilapidated physical structures and home grown school feeding and health programme for learners
9. The non-formal sector faces the challenges of repositioning in order to address the world of work and economic empowerment. It has to develop programmes that are flexible so as to cater for the needs of out-of-school youths including pregnant girls and young mothers.
10. Funding remains a huge challenge in all sectors and particularly so in the non formal education sector with serious implications for the adequate provision of basic infrastructure, equipment, instructional materials and transportation for facilitators, teachers and supervisors to reach distant places
11. The need for the integration of learning in the non-formal setting into formal context, which would enable learners to transit from formal education/learning context
12. All teachers need to be trained in the use of FLHE (Family Life Health Education) curriculum (FME, 2006)

Conclusion

Inclusive education is an all inclusive education programme that requires a whole lot of commitment from all stakeholders in education such as teachers, learners themselves, education authorities, government etc to make it work. All these groups have a lot to contribute to its success. Presently in Nigeria, inclusion still remains in the realm of theory and far from practice, special needs education is still grappling with problems of policy implementation. If inclusive education is been properly implemented with back-up from government and the masses, with enough mobilize resources and information dissemination, inclusive education is the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving equal educational opportunities for all. There should therefore, be a plan by the authorities or school management to provide a plan to support teachers and students through good inclusive practices such as, collaboration, team work, innovative instructional practices, peer-strategies and more.

Recommendations

- a. The government through National Orientation Agency should mount campaign in all modes of communication to sensitize parents, teachers and communities' members on the nature, characteristics and signs of learning disability to reduce the negative perception people have about the concept.
- b. State governments should attach at least a psychologist and a medical personnel to each primary school to assist the teachers in the early identification of students with special needs.
- c. The state governments should liaise with the non-governmental agencies to get their support in terms of finance and provision of facilities and equipment needed to achieve the aim of inclusive education.
- d. Government should make provisions for related instructional materials, equipments and supportive services for proper inclusive education.

- e. Inclusive education programme was recognized to be the multidisciplinary and multidimensional program, therefore Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and other agencies must ensure all hands are on deck to see that all challenges are minimized to allow effective implementation of inclusive education.
- f. Individualized education programme procedure should be encouraged by school administrators since it is learner based.
- g. Education for special needs children should be quality driven and should be compensatory and competitive focused, so that special needs child will not only be re-equipped due to his impaired skills but also be prepared adequately to compete with has able-bodied peers in whatever are involved.

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