

## CHALLENGES AND THE COUNSELLING STRATEGIES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS

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### Abstract

Inclusive education is a systematic integration, mainstreaming and embracing learners with special needs and learning disability in a regular classroom with the normal individuals. This paper is discusses implementation of inclusive education in Nigerian schools: challenges and the way forward. The paper tried to look at the meaning of inclusive education which is philosophy for attaining equity, justice and equality in education for all, especially those excluded because (of their disabilities). The implementation of inclusive education in Nigerian schools involves making learning environment conclusive, providing enough equipment and training teachers on how to handled learning disabled. The paper examined the challenges facing inclusive education in Nigeria among which is inadequate funding by the government and the way forward is to fund education sector, recruiting specialist, training teachers and buying equipment for teaching individuals with special needs. It was recommended that, campaign should be mounted to sensitize teachers and parents on the ways of handling, identifying and caring for individuals with special needs.

**Keywords:** Inclusion, Learning disability, Students with special needs

### Introduction

Nigerian educational system has suffered greatly due to lack of political will by leaders to make an over haul re-structuring and repositioning of the system backed by enough funding, qualified teachers and structures. Inclusive education has faced many challenges in the country due to many factors related to the governments, parents, pupils/teachers and the community. The world conference on Education for All (EFA) and the United Nation Convention on the Right of the child emphasized urgent priority to ensure access to and improve the quality of Education for all children (Madeuwesi, 2001).

Implementation of inclusive education in Nigerian has faced many hindrances and obstacles which consequently led to the dysfunction of the programme in the country. Full inclusive is the integration of all students, even those that require substantial educational behavioral support and services to be successful in regular classes and the elimination of segregated special classes (Olufunke & Oluremi, 2014). 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.

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 National Policy of Education (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).

Implementation of inclusive education in Nigerian schools involves making learning environment conducive for learning disabled and 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.

Many implementation strategies were proffered by government and scholars in Nigeria schools but many obstacles and hindrances prevented its successful implementation. Maria & Bwoi (2015) stated that; implementation strategies of inclusive education involves identifying children's needs and rights, engaging parents and families, engaging the community, state and local government, making school welcoming and accessible to all learners. Folanke (2009) maintained that, Nigeria is known to have some of the best laws on inclusive education in Africa but the implementation has remained the main problem due to different hindrances.

The main rationale behind inclusive education, according to Obi (2008) is the right issues when person with disabilities are not discriminated based on religion, race, ethnicity, tribe or disability. According to Hull, in Odebisi (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. Successful implementation of inclusive education depends upon removing all barriers, hindrance and obstacles.

The way forward 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 equipment 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 and improving the condition of the school plant, involving parents and community members and finally, making education accessible to the learning disabled and individuals with special needs.

### **Implementation of Inclusive Education in Nigerian Schools**

Inclusive education is a form of educating individuals with special needs and learning disabled persons with a view to providing them with the same educational, social, vocational and political opportunities with normal individuals. Aja-Okorie (2010) identified some government policies intervention targets at inclusive education in Nigeria to include; the enactment of three crucial activities which were (i) signing of the UNESCO National Education Strategy for Nigeria (2006-2015), (ii) launch of community accountability and transparent initiatives and (iii) the publication of national plan based on the education sector situation analysis.

Federal government in an effort to upgrade and improve efficiency of the educational system stated that, not less than 2% of its consolidated revenue fund (CRF) as intervention to states for the implementation of UBE, pre-primary (5%), primary (6%) and junior secondary (35%), (Anubuze and Okwo, 2013). A cursory analysis into the 1999 and 2001 budgetary provision for education should be that; 16.77 percent and 4.08 percent of the budget went for education in 2011; it got 10.24 %, while in 2013 budget it represents 8 percent, from the 2011 appropriation (Afolayan, 2014).

According to UNESCO (2005) inclusion is: Recognition of the right to education and its provision in non-discriminatory ways, a common vision which cover all people, a belief those schools and other places of learning to have a responsibility to educate all children, a continued process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners. Okwudwu and Okechukwu (2008) saw inclusive education as the progressive increase in the participation of students in reduction of the exclusion from the culture, curricula and committee of local schools. Inclusive embodies the values, policies and practice that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability to participate in a brand range of activities and contexts as full member of families, community and society (Odebisi, 2016).

Inclusive education is a system of grouping average and able bodied children with special needs in the same class or learning environment for the purpose of instruction (Mbah, 1995).

Full implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria involves systematic reform to change the funding, strategies and structures in education, teaching methods, nature of the school plant and approaches to remove all hindrances that will prevent pupils and students with special needs and learning disability from receiving equitable learning experience, educational and social opportunities with their nondisabled counter parts.

Implementation strategies of inclusive education in Nigeria, according to Maria and Bwoi (2015) include; identifying children's need and right, engaging parents and families, engaging community, national, state and local government and making school accessible and welcoming. The strategies mentioned were mostly not adhered to and many impediments prevent their success. Implementation of inclusive education involves making collaborations with parents, families and communities, establishing welcoming and conducive environment to enable teachers provide for the needs of learners and practices must be based on language, religion and culture of the immediate environment, specialist should be employed to screen pupils/students and identify their needs and disabilities and finally teachers should be trained to have knowledge on the concepts of learning disability, special education, learning styles, teaching styles, learning approaches and study habits of students screened for inclusive education.

Inclusion means more funds, additional experience to deal with new challenges, extra work, being abreast of recent information, willingness to work in collaboration with other professionals. (Adetoun, 2003). Andrew (2016) states that; the Salamanca statement and framework for action on special needs education maintained that, for inclusion to succeed; Schools should accommodate children with physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other disabilities, gifted children, street and working children, nomadic population, linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantage or marginalized groups.

Students with learning disability could be those with dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, attention hyperactive or deficit disorder, autism, aphasia, borderline behavior disorder and they need to be recognized as equal to the normal individual if inclusive education in Nigeria is to succeed. Individuals with learning that are involved in inclusion mostly have spelling, reading, writing, and mathematical and communication disorder, disorganization, maladjustment and mild mental disorder.

Adequate implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria should embody making school accessible to individuals with special needs, removing the negative attitudes of teachers towards learning disabled individuals, providing adequate equipment and fund to cater for the needs and interest of learning disabled and individual with special needs. National Policy on Education (2004) stated that, the three key objectives of special needs education are to: To give concrete meaning to the idea of equality in educational opportunity to all children, disabilities notwithstanding, Provision of education for all in respect of their special needs and disability should be a priority in order to allow them contribute their quota to sustainable national development of Nigeria, diversified and use appropriate curriculum for all the beneficiaries. The index for inclusive education is a widely used tool and defines in close education as having the following components; values students and staff, acknowledging the right of all students, increasing students' participation in learning, emphasizing the role of schools in nation building, establishing mutually sustaining relationships and recognizing inclusive education as one aspect of inclusion in Nigeria (Rieser, 2012).

Inclusion is poised to succeed where the following variables are available; parents' participation, the regular teacher believes students can succeed, school authority to accept responsibility for learning outcome, acceptance of normal students to receive learning disabled as a colleague (Omeda, 2016). Ten steps for implementing effective inclusive practice in Nigeria according to Kilgore (2011); are defining current practice, establishing leadership team, development and action plan for change, defining implementation parameters, meeting with families, identifying implementation measures, providing professional learning opportunity and support.

### **Challenges Facing the Implementation of Inclusive Education in Nigeria**

Children with special needs have not fully embraced and tapped their potentials due to a number of problem, according to Isuad & Akinmusire (2010), these challenges include; 1. inaccessibility

2. inadequate sensitization of the programme,
3. lack of funding, absence of accurate data,
4. lack of specialist to carry out designated procedure and lack of knowledge by the teachers to detect learning disabled. Many barriers, hindrances and obstacles lay along the path for the successful implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria.

Nigerian educational sector pay more attention to the management of literacy than inclusive education, teacher-student ratio is very high in most public primary school, secondary schools and tertiary institutions (more than a hundred), negative perception and attitudes of teachers and students on individuals with disabilities and lack of professionalization on the part of teachers as regards teaching methods, recognition and acceptance of learners with disability and special needs.

The main challenges to the educational system in Nigeria are; lack of accurate and available data on individuals with special needs, inappropriate ethnic, socio-cultural and religion practice, inadequate funding, teaching learners in the mother tongue, providing child-friendly and conducive environment. Mantey (2014) maintained that, challenges associated with inclusive education are; poor parental involvement and community participation, inaccessible buildings, large class size and high pupil-teacher ratio.

Many obstacles and challenges facing the implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria are; lack of accurate data on children with disability, lack of knowledge and understanding of the concept, lack of training and retraining of teachers on special education and finally inadequate funding. Eskay and Angie (2013) identify the following as the challenges facing inclusive education in Nigeria: Inadequate plan for

the identification of children with special learning disabilities. There are no specialist and experts that can help in the screening of learning disabled individual in Nigeria.

Most specialists 'employed for the diagnosing and screening students for inclusive education needs schools and location in urban centers: where there is specialist, they tend to chose urban areas and neglect rural areas. Parents lack adequate information and guidance on available education centers. Most parents in rural areas do not know the existence of specialist education centers in Nigeria. These centers are mostly found in the state capitals and there is no enough sensitization to inform parents of their existence.

### **Low Standard of Living of Parents**

Parents are not able to carter for the needs of normal students, let alone to talk of individuals with special needs or learning disabled.

Nigerian government has no definite strategy to search for and identify children not attending school. There is no accurate data on the number of learning disabled children attending school and those not attending school. Inadequate funding and ignorance of the community members of the effects of learning disability on children. Pantric (2015) pointed out that, the challenges of teaching children with hearing impairment in an inclusive education are; inadequate infrastructure facilities, inadequate specialist, irregular staff training and inadequate teaching/learning materials. Omede (2016) in a study titled policy framework for inclusive education in Nigeria, issues and challenges opined that, the following challenges faced inclusive education in Nigeria ; expense, misinformation, lack of qualified personnel, inaccessibility of the programme by students, lack of co-operation among teachers, community and government.

Effective implementation of inclusive was looked at by Okrome (2003) and he asses the effective implementation of the UBE programme (inclusive education included) and revealed significant inadequacy in the implementation efforts. Among the constraints that impede effective implementation are; inadequate qualified teachers, insufficient funds, inadequate teaching and learning facilities, poor motivation of teachers and lack of guidance and counseling services. Universal Basic Education Board lamented that children with special needs do not access education due to the followings; lack of equipment and facilities, misappropriate of fund, lack of trained specialist, lack of accurate data (Isuad & Akinmosire, 2010).

### **The Counselling Strategies for the Implementation of Inclusive Education in Nigeria**

The Counselling Strategies for the implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria schools involves;

- i. Full government's commitments to provide enough fund for the training and retraining of teachers on special education in order to equip them with the skills to teach and control students with special needs and disability, provide enough fund for the procurement of teaching materials that are peculiar to individuals with special needs and hearing disability, create screening centers and employ personnel's that will be screening and diagnosing students in all state of the federations, mount an enlightenment campaign to sensitize community members on the existence of learning disability and ways of its identification.
- ii. Inclusive education in Nigeria should involve building sound system for data collection, provide support to parents and promote inclusive opportunities in schools, providing pre-service and in-service training for teachers (Isuwa and Lengnen, 2014). State governments should have department of special education not mere desk officer headed by a director and it is to vested with the recruitment of specialist and teachers. iii. Allocation of enough funds, adequate supervision, improving the condition of school plant and motivation of teachers will greatly help in removing barriers for the implementation of inclusive education (Boyi, 2014). Inclusive education could be made successful through providing friendly

environment in all schools where family members of the learning disabled are involved in school activities, creating and managing friendly atmosphere and classroom for learning.

### Conclusions

Inclusive education is poorly implemented in Nigeria because of many challenges faced despite supporting laws for the enhancement and improvement of the programme. Lack of full government's commitment, knowledge on the concept of inclusion by parents, teachers and community members, lack of specialist to screened students with disabilities and individual with special needs invariably lead to the withdrawal of learning disables from schools. Improvement in the area of funding by government, provision of equipment and materials for students with special needs, recruitment of specialist and training of teachers on learning disability will greatly help in removing the barriers to fully implement of inclusive education in Nigerian schools.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations were proffered;

1. Enough funding should be made to support inclusive education. - Teachers should be trained on special education, method of teaching and identification of learners with special needs.
2. Enough teaching materials, equipment and books for teaching learning disabled and individuals with special needs should be procured.
3. Campaign should be mounted 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.
4. School environments should be made conducive and friendly where everyone is somebody and no one is anybody. This will make inclusion to be effective.

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