

Teacher Preparation for Sustainable Inclusive Education of Persons with Special Needs in Nigeria: the Challenges and Solutions

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Abstract: *Inclusion of students with special needs education especially those who need specialized skills and technical support give more rise challenges to the training of teachers to produce quality one to handle such children in question. Special needs children, as stipulated in article 223 of the UN's child right convention endorsed in 1989 have the right to enjoy in full, decent life in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the Child active participation in inclusive educational system. This paper focuses on teacher preparation in inclusive education, the concept of inclusive, the benefits, include in-service training programmes, special teacher and inclusive education, teacher preparation and the challenges where discussed. The paper, concluded with some recommendations such as: government at all levels should make inclusive education compulsory for schools and colleges to avoid discrimination against persons with special needs, government should set up committee that will put up machineries for effective implementation of inclusive education among others.*

Keywords: *Teacher preparation, sustainable, inclusive education, person with special needs, challenges, Nigeria.*

I. Introduction

Educational training institutions are charged with the responsibility of providing professional training for teachers in various disciplines. A qualified teacher is expected to have a background of general education as well as professional preparation that includes the psychology, emotional and philosophical condition of children or adolescent, the principles and techniques of teaching and the historical foundations of education. Teacher education is an inevitable tool for successful implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria (Amwe, 2012). Good teachers form the foundation of good schools, and it improves teacher's skill and knowledge (Omede and Sani, 2013). According to Christopher and Elizabeth (2012) Educational programmes of a country can only materialize if the teachers in the given countries are adequately trained and prepared to carry out the programmes as intended by the countries' policies. Inclusive education for persons with special needs not an exception. The importance of teachers' training to meet this aim is very vital.

In the United States and in the developing countries like Nigeria, the term special needs are used in clinical diagnostic and functional development to describe individuals who require assistance for disabilities that may be medical, mental, or psychological for instance in the diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders and in the international classification of diseases guidelines for clinical diagnosis, types of special needs vary in severity. People with autism, Down syndrome, dyslexia, blindness, ADHD, or cystic fibrosis are considered to have special needs. However, special needs also include cleft lips, palate, portwine stains and missing limbs.

Special needs person is a legal term globally applying in foster care, in line with adoption and safe families Act of 1997. It is a diagnosis based on behaviour, childhood and family history, and is usually made by a health care professional. Traditionally, children with special needs have been considered harder to place for adoption than other children, but experience has shown that many children with special needs can be placed successfully with families who want them. The adoption and safe families Act of 1997 has focused more attention on finding homes for children with special needs and making sure they receive the post-adoption services they need.

The objectives of National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) to special need persons, is to enable them perform and benefit from adequate educational planning and welfare programme. Special needs persons are characterized with some traits, such as communication challenges, emotional and behavioural disorder etc. Persons with these kinds of special needs are supposed to benefit from additional education services which is a different approach to teaching and the use of technology such as assistive technology devices.

Education be it segregation or inclusion, is a bedrock for development and advancement of individuals. Education is no doubt, a potent instrument for development of an individual and the society at large. To have effective and sustainable education for person with special needs, teacher preparation in the system is imperative. Persons with special needs have over the years suffered a lot of setbacks in their education in Nigeria. This is because of lack of adequate schools also trained personnel are few lack of support services for effective inclusion that many people with special needs in Nigeria may never have opportunity to be educated in the inclusive service. In Nigeria the practice of inclusive education is a myriad and theoretical as there are no proper policy frame works to galvanize the system. Therefore, this paper intends to explore teacher preparation for inclusive education for persons with special needs in Nigeria.

II. What is Inclusive Education?

UNESCO (2005) defined inclusive education as responding to diverse needs of all learners by increasing participation in leading and reducing exclusion within education. This means that all children have equal right to quality education that caters for their individual needs. Inclusive education means that all students are welcomed by their neighborhood schools in age-appropriate, regular classes and are supported to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of life in the school. Inclusive education is internationally recognized as a philosophy for attaining equity, justice and equality in education for all children, especially those who have been excluded from education for the reason of disabilities (Christopher and Elizabeth, 2012).

Apparently, it is globally acclaimed that inclusive education has been an option and best practice in education of children and adult with special needs, and that special educators, parents and other stakeholders have not relented efforts in debating on the benefit and challenges of this education standard (Ajuwon, 2008). This scholar stresses further that the debase have been shaped largely by the principle of inclusion, which explained that ordinary schools should cater to all children and young people, regardless of their circumstances or personal characteristics. Internationally the Salamanca statement on inclusive education called on government worldwide to provide a more inclusive education system that is underpinned by an ideological position based on recognition that all pupils should have a fundamental right and equal opportunity to experience education in mainstream schools (UNESCO, 1994).

Looking at inclusive education vividly, teachers are the driving force to the success of the programmes, including students with disabilities into regular classes. The prepared teachers are the custodian to advocates inclusive education programmes in order to make it more realistic and profitable to persons with special needs which kick against discrimination and stigmatization that is usually accorded to them by the populace. Inclusion is a step further in mainstreaming. It is the principle applied to accommodate/include all human beings, thus the full spectrum of diverse abilities, with one system, in such a manner that all involved can be assured of successful, equal and quality participation in real-life experiences from birth-death (Burden, 2008).

Inclusive education retains most of the essential characteristics of mainstreaming as a programme for accessing special needs children education in the regular school. The commonalities between them and the non-disabled peers are many, special need children are instructed in the regular class curriculum adaptation is made to march the needs of these unique children.

III. The benefits of Inclusive Education to persons with Special Needs

The following among others are the benefits of inclusive education to persons with special needs.

- i. Family's visions of a typical life for their children can come true: All parents want their children to be accepted by their peers, have friends and lead "regular" lives, inclusive settings can make this vision a reality for many children with disabilities.
- ii. Children develop a positive understanding of themselves and others: When children attend classes that reflect the similarities and differences of people in the real world, they learn to appreciate diversity. Respect and understanding glow when children of different abilities and cultures play and learn together.
- iii. Friendships develop: Schools are important places for children to develop friendships and learn social skills, children with and without disabilities learn with and from each other inclusive classes.
- iv. Children learn important academic skills: In inclusive classrooms, children with and without disabilities are expected to learn to read, write, and do math. With higher expectations and good instruction children with disabilities learn academic skills.
- v. All children learn by being together: Because the philosophy of inclusive education is aimed at helping all children learn, everyone in the class benefits. Children learn at their own pace and style within a monitoring learning environment.

IV. In-Service Training Programs for Teachers in Inclusive Education

In the words of Alih (2014), teachers occupy an important position in the teaching and learning enterprise. It is generally believed that educators, more than any other school personnel determines the nature and extent of learning achievement in schools. As important as they are in this field is the most importance. Shade and Stewart (2001) observed that teachers report frustration, burden, fear, and inadequacies because they don't believe that they have the abilities to meet the individual needs of children with special needs in their classroom. This is because their professional skills were not developed before they entered the workforce of inclusive setting. It is crucial that teachers already teaching be provided with skills and techniques for inclusive education. It is expected that teachers in Nigeria should update their professional skills on a regular basis to enhance their teaching performance especially for inclusive classrooms.

Hence, teachers need training about inclusive principles and the basics of disability to ensure that their attitudes and approaches do not prevent disabled children from gaining equal access to the curriculum. Training should be ongoing provided in short courses (or modules) and should take place within a local school environment preferably their own school. Training should take place at both pre-service and in-service stages. The effective implementation of inclusive education depends on the high quality of professional preparation of teachers at pre and in-service levels to equip them for and update their knowledge and skill in meeting the needs and aspirations of a diverse school population.

Originally, teachers had a negative attitudes towards inclusive due to the fact that they were trained to cope with learners who experienced barriers learning and that their schools did not have the facilities or equipment needed by these learners. Schools need restructuring and educators need in-service training for a successful inclusive school to become a possibility.

V. Special Education Teacher and Inclusive Education

The teacher in inclusive education has the following indefatigable roles to play:

- Knowledgeable about the child's instructional goals and objectives, special strategies and objectives that will accomplish him for the day to day progress of the child.
- Identification and assessment of children with special needs whether in a wall or special centres, school bound or hospital bound.
- Observing, analyzing, selecting and sequencing learning rather than falling further behind.
- To motivate and reinforce children with special needs.
- Act as resource or itinerant teacher in regular schools.
- In the hospital setting, special educators work as speech and language therapist for stroke victims.
- Special need educators for those with visual impairment play the role of Braille transcribers, translators for normal book prints.
- Actual delivery of educational therapies for children with special needs whether in a home or special centers, school bound or hospital bound.
- They act as guidance and counselors to the parents of children with special needs.
- They also train the parents to be able to take the primary responsibility of teaching their children at home.
- Often participating in developing curriculum for children with special needs.
- They serve as consultants that provide support or assistance to regular school teacher.
- They play the role of master educational therapies. In this case, they seek diagnostic causes of failures or problems, whether environmental, organic or both and tailor cause contents to suit individuals understanding.
- The special needs educators for those with learning impairment work as audiologists in the audio logical unit to measure the level of the hearing loss and to know the types of learning that will be appropriate for each child. They can work as sign language interpreters and news casters to the hearing impaired in factories, classroom, children's government ministries and establishments, television studios and conferences.
- Special needs education teachers should serve as advocate in legislative matters championing the course of special needs children, initiating workshop, seminars and conferences on behalf of children with special needs. Ihanacho in Christopher and Elizabeth (2012).

VI. Teacher Preparation and Challenges of Inclusive Education

The challenges of inclusion could be attributed to the local culture of the society, parents, guardians and their perceptions of educating people with disabilities. However, Ahmed (2001) posits that in Nigeria, despite genuine efforts to educate children with disabilities in public schools, a substantial number of them are still suffering from neglect due to societal misconception's insufficient resources, manpower and funding.

A classroom teacher is expected to select educational methodology to best suit each students. This is a challenging goal for one teacher who potentially has more than 30 students in each of six to eight classes. Most students can be grouped with other students whose educational needs are similar. This may reduce the planning required to two or three groups. If you add special needs students who have learning delays, developmental issues, or who speak little or no English, this task can feel almost insurmountable especially if the inclusive classroom does not include a co-teacher.

The biggest problem for special education teachers who have students in inclusive classroom is being available to every student. For example, if a special education teacher has 50 students who are distributed through the classes during any given period there is no way to assist every student every day. Students may have to be pulled out of class a few times a week for additional services, which also impacts the ability of the child and classroom teacher to maintain pace. If the special education teacher rotates into different classes on different day, they are not able to get the full educational picture of the class and may not be there when the student need them most.

Special education and mainstream both benefits from being in a classroom together. After all, work and life are not segregated by intelligence or ability. However, there are still some problems that need to be recognized. In a classroom of 30 with one or two special education students, it can be difficult for the classroom teacher to give the individual time and attention the students require and deserve. If the teacher is focusing on the special needs students, the students who need a more challenging environment may be overlooked because they are able to succeed with minimal assistance. While the students will likely succeed in the class, they may not feel challenged and may become bored and disinterested in the class.

If the teacher tries to make the class more challenging for the mainstream students, the special education students may feel singled out when their individualize educational programmes expectations becomes more noticeable in areas such as presentations, projects and homework requirements. Being in every class together may actually alienate the students more than if they were separated from specific classes.

In inclusion programme special education teacher may be well prepared to discharge his responsibility but if the available instructional materials do not meet the needs of special need persons, then effective teaching and learning cannot take place. This means that special education teachers deserve quality and accurate instructional materials to facilities the efficiency of teaching task in both inclusive and segregation.

VII. Conclusion

Fundamentally, inclusive education has come to stay and the sooner it is well implemented in Nigeria the better policy formulation is very easy, but its implementation is always elusive. Therefore, teachers in both regular and special are the pivot in the system. When already existing teachers are adequate prepared, the sustainability of the programme, will be ensured because there would be able to address the numerous challenges within the system. This paper has not provided all the solutions for teacher preparation for sustainable inclusive education but has touched the major aspects which can assist all the stakeholders in the sector by making teachers to be awarded of the enormous responsibility they have in making inclusive education sustainable in Nigeria.

VIII. Recommendations

For inclusive education to be sustainable and efficient in Nigeria, the following recommendations are put forward:

- Government at all levels should make inclusive education compulsory in all schools and colleges to avoid discrimination against persons with special needs in quest of their educational pursuit.
- There should be public enlightenment campaign to enable the Nigerian citizens embrace inclusion with ease.
- Teachers for both government and private should update their knowledge in the field of inclusive education, this will go along way making them more relevant.
- The need for availability of manpower, funding and adequate instructional materials is necessary as it will ginger or motivate teachers and the learners within the system.
- Government should set up a committee that will be charged with the responsibility of putting the necessary machineries together in attaining the goals of inclusive education for persons with special needs.

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