

## Inclusive Education Programmes: Challenges and Roles of Guidance Counsellors

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### Abstract

*Inclusive education involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children. This aspect of education also ensures that quality education is provided for all, with respect to the diversity and the different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of the students and communities. This paper therefore, presents the challenges facing inclusive education programmes and as well discussed the roles of the Guidance Counsellors in ensuring that this aspect of education is widely accepted in Nigeria. Concepts, components and challenges of inclusive education were looked into and the roles of the guidance counsellors were provided. The paper concluded by suggesting that the guidance counsellors should guide students with special needs to develop their capacities as thinkers and make them have awareness of their capacities as thinkers; capable of developing skills, tools, attitudes to become increasingly independent as learners. It also suggested that special educators should not focus on the disability of a student rather focus on the student's abilities.*

**Keywords:** Inclusive Education, Guidance Counselling, Learning Disabilities, Special Education

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### Introduction

The central purpose of education is to ensure that all learners gain access to knowledge, skills and information that will prepare them to contribute to communities' development and workplaces. According to Salami (2013), inclusive education was not the norm in our schools. Many years ago, special classes were created for students with special needs. Special educators felt that if they would just teach the students separately in smaller groups, they could help them to catch up. However, the truth is that students in segregated special education classes have fallen further and further behind. Over time, it has become apparent that inclusive education is a better way to help all students succeed.

According to Obani (2006), inclusive education is the most current system of providing education for children with special needs. This entails the acceptance of all children without exception or discrimination into the neighbourhood school that they should ordinarily attend. It also implies that there has to be some adoptions and modification in the regular schools in terms of administrative strategies, curriculum, learning materials, infrastructure, personnel and methods of approach in order to accommodate the special learning needs of children not with their forms of disabilities and difficulties in learning. All these according to Nkwoagba (2013) are geared towards including our children, youths and adults with special needs into their homes and the general society starting from the school.

Ozaji (2005) view inclusive education as an option or programme carefully designed to educate special needs learners with diverse needs within the re-structured mainstream or school communities. It means that all students in a school regardless of their strength and weakness in any area become part of the school community. Inclusive education also means to place disabled children with non disabled ones in the same classroom and school environments where they are taught to play together, communicate without possible labelling and discrimination of any sort. This means that the students start from the early days in life to regard each other as colleagues, understand one another's weaknesses and individual differences as a result, and appreciate one another at their level.

Okuyibo (2001) sees inclusive education as a means whereby students with disabilities regardless of the nature or severity of their disabilities are put into all planning activities at general education such as school, classroom and surrounding communities. Inclusive in order words implies that a child should be unconditionally mainstreamed into the regular educational system without regard to nature and severity of his/her disability. From the above definitions so far, what we arrived at is that inclusive education represents a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities and of reducing exclusion within education.

### **Goals of Inclusive Education**

Ozaji (2005) identified the goals of inclusive education as follows:

- To provide education for children with diverse learning needs within their structured school community.
- To make special needs children active members of the school community and then to help them achieve quality educational outcomes and to achieve social competence.
- To build a supportive school community that is able to identify and minimize barriers to learning and participation.
- To educate more children better.
- To ensure successful learning and social experience competence.
- To empower children who are hitherto excluded or isolated.
- To enable students to participate in mainstream education to the best of their abilities.
- To build inclusive schools that can respond to diverse needs.
- To study the pressures that lead some people in schools to feel excluded and separated.
- To attend imaginatively to diverse learning needs in the classroom.
- To ensure improvement of student learning outcomes
- To develop exemplary units of planning for diversity and to understand this diversity.
- To dismantle barriers to access and participation and facilitate achievement in schooling and training.

It should be note that for one to say that inclusive education is successful, the above goals must be achieved.

### **Components of Inclusive Education**

Garba (2013) asserts that to ensure a sustainable and successful implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria, the following components are very paramount and necessary to be on ground:

- Heterogeneous grouping: all students including those with special needs are educated together in groups with those without disabilities.
- A sense of belonging to a group: all students are considered active members of the class. In such a n environment, students who have disabilities feel welcomed as those without disabilities.
- Shared activities with individualized outcomes: they share educational experiences (lessons, laboratories, fieldwork and group learning at the same time). The learning objectivities for the students are individualized to meet each student's learning needs.

- Use of environment frequented by individuals without disabilities: The learning experiences take place in general education classrooms and community work sites.
- A balanced educational experience: it seeks an individualized balance between the academic functional and social or personal aspects of schooling (Lere, 2007).

### **The challenges of Inclusive Education**

The road to achieving inclusive education is a long and varied one, on which challenges and opportunities will arise. No government can realistically expect to switch overnight from special or integrated approaches to education to inclusive education. ‘Twin track’ approaches may be adopted, meaning that special or integrated initiatives and inclusive schools sit side-by-side as governments work towards the proper inclusion of all children (in line with human rights principles) within mainstream education systems over time. Ideally these twin approaches will inform one another, with learning gained from each informing the development of future strategies, rather than being parallel processes without links between them. Special schools can act as useful resource centres for inclusive schools by providing equipment and helping to develop teachers’ technical skills (Myer and Bagree).

There are particular challenges about negative attitudes and behaviour, on the part of both educators and parents, in relation to the skills of disabled children to learn. These challenges can be conquered by raising consciousness of human rights in communities and publicising optimistic examples of disabled children succeeding in inclusive education and in life beyond school as a result. Other possible methods include supporting disabled children to express their aspirations and participate in planning processes, as well as promoting action research and critical pedagogy amongst teachers (Croft, 2010).

Another major challenge to inclusive education in Nigeria is lack of funding. UNESCO (2009) stated that funding is a major constraint to the practice of inclusion. Teaching children with disabilities in general education classrooms takes specialists and additional classrooms to support student needs. Coordinating services and offering individual supports to children requires additional money that many schools do not have, particularly in a tight economy. Therefore, inadequate funding can hinder ongoing professional development that helps keep specialists and classroom teachers updated on the best practices. However, Cortiella (2009) asserts that a major constraints is serious shortage of educational resources; lack of schools, inadequate facilities, lack of teachers and shortage of professionally trained qualified staff, lack of modern learning/ instructional materials. And again, policy makers who do not understand the concept of inclusive education can be barrier to implementation of this wonderful aspect of education (Ainscow and Booth, 2005). Lack of powerful policy to support the implementation of inclusive education programme in Nigeria is another problem facing this aspect of education. The policy makers most a times play non-challant attitudes to promote inclusive education.

### **Roles of the Guidance Counsellors**

The services of the Guidance Counsellors in educational institutions such as the University, Polytechnics, Secondary Schools and Colleges etc. apply to the sum of total of programme of activities and services that are designed to help individuals achieve self understanding and self direction necessary to make adjustment to school, home and community possible. Guidance counsellors are professionally trained to work with clients, as individuals and in groups, to whom they supply professional services concerning educational, vocational and personal/social development. Guidance counsellors values the dignity, integrity and welfare of their clients, work in ways which promote clients’ control over their own lives, and respect clients’ ability to make decisions and engage in personal change in the light of clients’ own beliefs and values. To protect clients’ interests, members of the Institute are required to comply with this Code of Ethics, which makes explicit the values underlying their practice (Lere, 2007).

However, the roles of guidance counsellors in ensuring effective and sustainable inclusive education are:

1. Ellins and Porter (2005) assert that many teachers' attitudes towards inclusion are not particularly positive. Also, Florian and Rouse (2001) noted that many teachers reported in their study that they did not think that they could teach children with disabilities. But with the assistance of guidance counsellors, many teachers will be able to develop confidence and their repertoire of teaching strategies will develop over time.
2. Since majority of teachers are not professionally trained special educators/teachers, the guidance counsellors in schools should train teachers on professional specialist courses on teaching strategies, disability and special needs; how children and even adult students learn, what pupils need to learn, classroom organization and management; identifying and assessing difficulties, assessing and monitoring students' learning etc.
3. Counsel teachers on their attitudes towards pupils with special needs; on their capacity to enhance social relations, on their view on differences in classrooms and on their willingness to deal with those differences effectively.
4. Train school teachers to make them know that they need repertoire of skills, expertise, knowledge, pedagogical approaches, adequate teaching methods and materials and time if they are to address diversity effectively within their classrooms.
5. Creates opportunities for students without disabilities to accept differences, make diversity of friendships, encourage cooperation and as well help students to become resourceful and creative.
6. Assist students with disabilities to afford sense of belonging to diverse human family, provides diverse stimulating environment to grow and learn; enable development of friendships.
7. Help the students with disabilities to be educated with same age peers and enhance self-respect.
8. The guidance counsellors are also expected to protect the feelings of the children with special needs since sometimes they are often called all sorts of names; sometimes, teachers and principals hardly accept children with disability.

### **Conclusion**

The objective of education for all (EFA) is to achieve equal educational opportunities for all children in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, despite their peculiarities. Hence, the concept of inclusive education is a welcome development. This aspect of education has been seen as the latest acceptable educational alternatives for special needs persons all over the world; it enables bringing together the students with special needs and their normal counterpart into one educational environment without discrimination. More so, for inclusive education to be successful, all stakeholders and policy makers involved in inclusive education must join forces to promote this aspect of education, which is the true representation of the Education for All. The guidance counsellors are the key role players in ensuring that the goals of inclusive education are actualized in Nigeria and in other developing nations. The counsellors should guide students with special needs to develop their capacities as thinkers and make them have the awareness of their capacities as thinkers; capable of developing skills, tools, attitudes to become increasingly independent as learners.

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