Policy Framework for Inclusive Education in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges

OMEDE ANDREW A.

Department of Educational Psychology, Kogi State College of Education,P.M.B 1033,Ankpa,Kogi State,Nigeria

Abstract
This paper explored the policy framework for inclusive education in Nigeria. The proper approach towards educating persons with special needs has been a subject of academic debate in contemporary times. Inclusive education is an approach to educating students with special educational needs. Under the inclusive model, students with special needs spend most or all their time with non-disabled students. It is a break away from the old norm of segregating persons with special needs in a special school setting. Notable policy documents on inclusion in Nigeria include the 1977 National Policy on Education; Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) 1989; Child's Rights Act, Laws of the Federation 2004; the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act 2004; and the National Policy on Education (2008). The paper observed that for the inclusion policy to be successful, issues that must be addressed include the role of parents in the inclusion process, continuous review of policy, research, and educational resources. The paper identified the cost of running an inclusive school, societal attitude, accessibility, educational modifications, and cooperation among special and general teachers as main challenges confronting the success of inclusive education in Nigeria. The paper concluded that the task of including the needs of students with disabilities, and those of their families, in any national policy on education is important and carries life-long implications and the Universal Basic Education Act 2004 provides a legal backing for a claim to inclusion.
Keywords: Inclusive, education, policy, Nigeria, issues, challenges.

Introduction

Disability, which encompasses a number of different functional limitations (including physical, intellectual, as well as sensory impairment, medical conditions or illness), occurring in any population, in any given country of the world, is a basis for discrimination. Notwithstanding, this people along with other socially excluded members of the society are entitled to exercise their civil, political, social, economic, educational and cultural rights on an equal basis with others. This is why Omede (2010) postulated that "the importance of education to humanity and the economic sector in particular of any society cannot be ever emphasized as it gives ample opportunity to those that are educated to contribute meaningfully to national development be it in agriculture, health, sports etc."

The origin of special education is rooted in the realization of the importance of education to persons with disabilities. Special education is education of children (and adult) who deviate significantly from normal patterns of living in terms of the intellectual, social, physical, emotional attributes etc. Inclusive education should be viewed in terms of including traditionally excluded or marginalized groups. The most marginalized groups are often invisible in the society: disabled children, girls, children in remote villages, and the very poor. This invisible group are excluded from governmental policy and access to education. The Jomtien World Conference on Education for All (1990) set the goal of Education for all. UNESCO, along with other UN agencies, a number of international organisations have been working towards achieving the goal of inclusion adding to the efforts made at the country level.

Despite encouraging developments, it is recognised that current strategies and programmes have largely been insufficient or inappropriate with regards to the needs of children and youth who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion. Where programmes targeting various marginalised and excluded groups do exist, they have functioned outside the mainstream- special programmes, specialized institutions, and specialist educators. Notwithstanding the best intention, too often the results have been exclusive: 'second rated' educational opportunities that do not guarantee the possibility to continue studies, or differentiation becoming a form of discrimination, leaving children with various needs outside the mainstream of school life and later, as adults, outside community social and cultural life in general (UNESCO, 1999). Inclusive education seeks to address the learning needs of all children, youth and adults with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalisation and exclusion. It was adopted at Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education (1994) and was restated in Dakar.

The focus of this paper however is to explore the policy framework for inclusive education in Nigeria, identify related issues and current challenges with a view to charting a way forward.

Inclusive Education

Inclusive education simply means: "Schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children,

street and working children, children from other remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalised areas or groups" (The Salamanca Statement and Frame work for Action on Special Needs Education, 1994). Inclusive education is an approach that looks into how to transform education systems in order to remove the barriers that prevent pupils from participating fully in education. These barriers may be linked to ethnicity, gender, social status, poverty, disability etc. In some contexts certain ethnic minorities face discrimination in the classroom, in other contexts the family's poverty might make it difficult for a family to afford sending their children to school.

Inclusive education is an approach to educating students with special educational needs. Under the inclusive model, students with special needs spend most or all their time with non-disabled students (Wikipedia 2012). Inclusion differs from previously held notions of integration and mainstreaming which tended to be concerned principally with disability and special educational needs and implied learners changing or becoming ready for or deserving of accommodation by the mainstream. By contrast, inclusion is about the child's right to participate and the school's duty to accept the child. Inclusion rejects the use of special schools or classrooms to separate students with disabilities. A premium is placed upon full participation by students with disabilities and upon respect for their social, civil and educational rights. Inclusion gives students with disabilities skills they can use in and out of the classroom. Fully inclusive schools, which are rare, no longer distinguish between "general education" and "special education" programmes. Instead, the school is restructured so that all students learn together. Inclusive education is based on the right of all learners to a quality education that meets basic needs or learning needs and enriches life. Focusing particularly on vulnerable and marginalized groups, it seeks to develop the full potential of every individual. The ultimate goal of inclusive quality education is end all forms of discrimination and foster social cohesion (UNESCO 2012). According to Adetoun (2003), 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 and many more. Knight (1999), opines that the inclusion involves all children with disabilities, full time participation in schools and communities with their neighbourhood.

Stevens (2009) considers an inclusive classroom as a replacement option for students with learning disabilities. The author explains further, that, it is a least restrictive form of education for special needs students and it allows the students to be included in a typical classroom enrolment with his or her peers.

Inclusive Education Policy in Nigeria
The formulation of educational policy and regulations in Nigeria is the dual mandate of the Federal and State Governments as it is an item in the Concurrent Legislative List. Attempts to entrench an inclusive education policy in Nigeria dates back to 1976 when the Universal Primary Education was introduced although with little success. In 1977, the first National Policy on Education was formulated. This document contained some provisions for special education including the idea of equalizing education for all children irrespective of their physical, mental, and emotional state (Garuba, 2003). One of the first states in Nigeria to move forward with the dictates for the education of children with special needs in the 1977 National Policy on Education was Plateau State; by enacting the Plateau State Handicapped Law in 1981 which makes the education of children with disabilities compulsory with a provision for the rehabilitation of adults with disabilities.

In the arena of education, national policies, especially in developing countries, are driven by international organization manifestos especially those from the United Nations International Children and Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nation Educational Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declarations. From the late 1980s UNICEF began to take on the issue of education for children as a central goal. In pursuance of this goal, the organization produced a binding international instrument known as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989. The Convention sets out 54 articles and two Optional Protocols. Part I, Article 2, Section 1 of the Convention states.

" State Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status" (Office of the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights, http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm).

Nigeria has also enacted its own Child's Rights Act, Laws of the Federation 2004. Also of significant importance are the UNESCO's Declaration on Education for All (EFA) in 1990, the Salamanca Statement Framework for Action 1994, and the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000. All of these form the coherent force that influenced the adoption of national policies on the education of children with disabilities in Nigeria (Agunloye, Pollingue, Davou, and Osagie, 2011). As a result of political instability, Nigeria was unable to formulate a coherent national policy on education, especially the education of children with special needs until 1999 when a democratic system of government began to take root again; following three decades of military dictatorship. In 1999 the Universal Basic Education (UBE) policy was adopted and enacted into law in 2004 as

the UBE Act which makes a provision of 2% of its Consolidated Revenue Fund (CRF) to finance the UBE program. Thus, the compulsory free Universal Basic Education Act, 2004, provides a legal framework within which the Federal Government supports states towards achieving uninterrupted nine-year compulsory Universal Basic Education for all children in primary and junior secondary school levels throughout the country (http://www.fme.gov.ng/pages/cati.asp). However the actual provision for funding of the education of children with special needs, as a national education policy under the UBE Act, was not put into effect until 2008 (Ajuwon, 2008). This was when the policy of Inclusive Education was officially and formally adopted as an integral part of the UBE policy.

Section 7 of the revised National Policy on Education (2008) explicitly recognizes that children and youth with special needs shall be provided with inclusive education services. The commitment is made to equalize educational opportunities for all children, irrespective of their physical, sensory, mental, psychological or emotional disabilities. Undoubtedly, these are lofty goals intended to improve the quality of special education services, but much more is needed to translate the goals into concrete action.

Issues in Inclusive Education

Much progress has occurred during the past several years concerning the inclusion of students with disabilities in their homes and school. This can be seen in the formulation of robust policies and enactment of legislations to back up the policies as espoused above. Despite this progress, there are many who continue to struggle to advocate for the necessary (and rightful) supports to fully include all students in educational settings. Some of the basic issues worthy of attention surround the stakeholders in inclusive education, and they are discussed below:

1)   Parents: they include any one responsible for the care and wellbeing of a child. Included are single parents, parents by birth or adoption, guardians, grandparents, foster parents, surrogate parents, and care givers. Parents of children with special needs are critical stakeholders in inclusive education and are often required to make decisions that other parents don't face. As a parent, you may meet with many different people who will provide the services needed by your child. You will need to know what kinds of services are available so you can make decisions that you think are best for your child and your family (Susan, Kim and Veda, 1997).

2)   Policy: Education is serious business, more serious where persons with special needs are involved. The implication is that such serious business cannot be pursued sporadically under ad hoc policies. Although policies and legislations have been put in place to ensure hitch free inclusive education, it should be seen as a continuous process that entails reviewing the policies regularly and updating the laws constantly to bring the inclusive education programme up to date with present realities. The National Policy on Education (2008) and the Universal Basic Education Act (2004) are arguably the high-water mark of Federal control of Nigerian education law and policy. A critical point the laws must address is the process required to determine the size and nature of each disabled child's entitlement to special services. The essence is to ensure an appropriate education to each disabled child. It should not marginalise the parents and special educators.

3)   Pre-School Resources: According to Parker (2009), teachers in an inclusive pre-school education should be both general education teachers and special education teachers working together with para-professionals to support the unique learning needs of all students. Teaching staff in inclusive pre-school programme must have knowledge of typical development and methods of instruction that reach all students. To both serve and advocate for students, they must also understand the importance of the relationships among children, family members, and staff. The vision of inclusive pre-school is to have every child prepare to succeed in school as well as in life on (Parker 2009).

For inclusive pre-school resources to be effective, the following qualities must be put in place:

1.   Teachers must work together to provide for the needs of all students.

2.   Parents, general education and special education teachers and science providers must work together to determine the students' needs.

3.   Programme practices must be research based and culturally, linguistically and developmentally appropriate.

4.   Children must have opportunity to work and play with each other throughout the school day,

5.   The school must provide a welcoming and on-going relationship with the families, focusing on the needs.

6.   There must be focus on the whole child.

7.   There must be a collaboration and partnership with families and communities.

8.   The pre-school must be accountable for the improved outcomes for all students.

4)   Research: There is a strong research base to support the education of children with disabilities alongside their non-disabled peers. Although separate classes, with lower students to teachers ratio, controlled environments and specially trained staff would seem to offer benefits to a child with a disability, research fails to demonstrate the effectiveness of such programmes (Lipsky and Gartner 1997). There is mounting evidence that,

other than a smaller class size, there is little that is special about the special education system, and that the negative effects of separating children with disabilities from their peers far outweigh any benefit to smaller classes (Lipsky and Gartner 1997). Students with disabilities in inclusive classroom show academic gains in a number of areas, including improved performance on standardized test, mastery of IEP goals, motivation to learn (National Centre of Education Restructuring and Inclusion, 1995).

The type of instructional strategies found in inclusive classrooms, including peer tutoring, cooperative learning groups and differentiated instruction, have shown to be beneficial to all learners.

5) **Teachers and Professional Resources**: Classrooms that successfully include students with disabilities are designed to welcome diversity and to address the individual needs of all students whether they have disabilities or not (Adamson, Matthews and Schuller 1990). The proper premise is that children with disabilities are educated with normal children, and, that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children from regular environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that the education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be attained satisfactorily. One of the educational options that is receiving increasing attention is meeting the needs of students with disabilities in the regular classroom. Years of research have contributed to our knowledge of how successful inclusion of students with disabilities and support system has commonly improved the learning profile of students with disability. Inclusion is poised to succeed where the following variables are present:

1. The regular teacher believes that the students can succeed.
2. School personnel are committed to accepting responsibility for learning outcomes of students with disabilities.
3. School personnel and the students in the classroom have prepared to receive a student with disabilities.
4. Parents are informed and support programme goals.
5. Special educators are committed to collaborative practice in general education classroom.

Challenges of Inclusive Education
Inclusive education is expectedly confronted with many challenges. Some of these challenges are discussed below:

1) **Expense**: Funding is a major constraint to the practice of inclusion. Teaching students with disabilities in general education classrooms take specialists and additional staff to support students' need. Coordinating services and offering individual support to children requires additional money that many schools do not have, particularly in a tight economy (Stephanie, 2012). Inadequate funding can hinder on-going professional development that keeps both specialists and classroom teachers updated on the best practices of inclusion.

2) **Misinformation**: One of the greatest challenges associated with inclusion in education is the negative attitude. As with society in general, this attitude and stereotype is often caused by a lack of knowledge and understanding. Public enlightenment work in schools must begin the process of educating the school and the general community in order to eradicate superstitions about causation of disabilities, and to modify the fears and myths about children with disabilities that create misunderstanding and inhibit normal interaction (Ajuwon, 2008). The attitude and abilities of general education teachers and para-educators in particular can be a major limitation in inclusive education. For instance, teachers in regular schools in Sokoto State, Nigeria (primary and secondary) are enthusiastic and dynamic in using appropriate methods, techniques and instructional materials to enhance learning. They are, still, however, sceptical of the workability of inclusive education arrangements in regular schools (Galadima, 2012). If educators have negative attitude towards students with special needs or have low expectations of them, children will unlikely receive a satisfactory, inclusive education.

3) **Lack of Qualified Personnel:** Another problem is the issue of qualified personnel. About 90% of the regular teachers in Sokoto State, Nigeria lack the basic skills in special education (ORASS 2007). For instance, a teacher with no basic skills in special education may not see the need to specify directions or positions when describing certain things or ideas in a class with visually impaired students. He may just say "here" or "there", "this way" or "that way" instead of "left or right", "top or bottom", "front or back". In a study carried out by Ajuwon (2012) on inclusive education in Nigeria, the scholar arrived at the following findings: 'While most participants stated they were tolerant of the diverse behaviors of their students within the inclusive setting, they were less confident in their abilities to manage the behaviors of students with special needs. This lack of confidence in their professional competency may indicate limited training and/or exposure to inclusive practices'. Specifically, the study found that 'In terms of educational qualification, both a greater tolerance of potentially negative behaviors and a greater understanding of the needs of students with sensory disabilities were associated with higher formal training. The motivation of participants who have acquired advanced professional training may have led them to embrace new conceptualizations in the emerging field of inclusive education. This is a positive finding which underscores the necessity to provide ongoing professional development and training to special educators'. In other words, the higher the qualification of the regular teacher, the more positive attitude he/she is likely to demonstrate towards the notion of inclusion.

4)   Accessibility: it is a fact that a student with disability cannot learn in an inclusive classroom if he cannot enter the classrooms, dormitories and hostels. Some schools are still inaccessible to students in wheelchairs or to those other elevators, ramps, paved pathways and lifts to get in and round buildings. Accessibility can go beyond passageways, stairs, and ramps to recreational areas, paved pathways, and door handles.

5)   Educational Modifications: Just as the environment must be accessible to students with disabilities, the curriculum must facilitate inclusive education, too. General educators must be willing to work with inclusion specialists to make modifications in classroom and homework assignments. Teachers should be flexible in how students learn and demonstrate knowledge and understanding. Written work, for example, should be limited if student cannot write and can accomplish the same or similar learning objective through a different method.

6)   Cooperation: Lack of communication among administrators, teachers, specialists, staff, parents and students inhibits the success of inclusive programme. Open communication and coordinated planning between the general education teachers and special education staff are essential for inclusion to work. Time is needed for teachers and specialists to meet and create well-constructed plans to identify and implement modification, accommodations, and specific goals for individual students. Collaboration must also exist among teacher, staff, and parents to meet a student's needs and facilitates learning at home.

Conclusion

The Nigerian inclusive education policy indicates that children and youth in general have every right to an education that will inculcate in them the requisite knowledge and survival skills in society. Some will argue that although the UBE scheme does not specifically reference children and youth with disabilities, such youngsters are invariably subsumed under the law, since they constitute part and parcel of society and have every right to basic education and other essentials of life. If we accept this premise, then, the various stakeholders must begin to provide adequate financial and human resources to actualize what it truly means to bring children and youth with special needs within the education fold. As a starting point, teacher and administrator understanding and commitment must be fostered, followed by parent and community involvement and support. More fundamentally, it must be recognized that the task of including the needs of students with disabilities, and those of their families, in any national policy on education is important and carries life-long implications.

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