
Research on the Influences of Educational Policy on Teaching and Learning

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INFORMATION AGE PUBLISHING, INC.
Charlotte, NC • www.infoagepub.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Research on the influences of educational policy on teaching and learning /
edited by Cynthia Sunal, University of Alabama, Kagendo Mutua, University of
Alabama.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-62396-250-0 (pbk.) – ISBN 978-1-62396-251-7 (hardcover) –
ISBN (invalid) 978-1-62396-252-4 (ebook) 1. Education and state–Africa.
2. Education and state–Caribbean Area. 3. Education and state–Middle
East. I. Sunal, Cynthia S., editor of compilation. II. Mutua, Kagendo,
1966-, editor of compilation.

LC95.A2R47 2013

379.6–dc23

2013005271

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Printed in the United States of America

CHAPTER 4

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The Nigerian Attempt

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education has undoubtedly become the current global trend in education. This chapter examines the implementation of inclusion in Nigeria. The history of special education in the country is traced from the pre-Christian era to the coming of the missionaries and eventually the formal education for exceptional persons until this era of inclusion. Perspectives of the concept “inclusive education” are also examined. The chapter also looks at the introduction of a Universal Basic Education scheme, which is seen as an opening for inclusion. The implementation and legal framework of inclusion as well as its barriers in Nigeria are discussed. The chapter concludes that the implementation and practice of inclusive education in Nigeria is only in the realm of theory.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has an area of 923,768.00 square kilometers and lies between latitude 40 and 140 north of the equator and longitudes 30 and 140 east of the Greenwich meridian. This is entirely within the tropical zone. It is bounded on the west by the Republic of Benin, on the north by the Republic of Niger and on the east by the Federal Republic of Cameroun. On the northeast border is Lake Chad, which also extends into the Republic of Niger, touching the northernmost part of the Republic of Cameroun. On the south, the Nigerian coastline is watered by the Atlantic Ocean (Wikipedia, 2011).

As a country located in West Africa, Nigeria was a British colony and has a uniform colonial history, though the southern part of the country had an earlier encounter with the British colonial masters vis-à-vis the Western style of education and Christianity at the point the northern part had already been introduced to Islamic religion and education. This dichotomy has created different sociocultural orientation in the country. The country operates a federal system of government with 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) spread into six geopolitical zones whose function is administrative and resource sharing. Each zone comprises a number of states.

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa with a population of about 150 million people, is an active member of the E-9 countries (i.e., nine most densely illiterate populated countries) (<http://allafrica.com/stories/201006210895.html>). Her educational system is often influenced or based on several factors and lessons learned over several decades of post-colonial history. The first two decades of the new millennium were marked by several significant policy thrusts and goals for sustainable national development, using education as *instrument par excellence*. Perhaps, as observed by the Federal Ministry of Education (FME; 2008), the most critical factors that drive Nigeria's educational aspirations is Nigeria has very important leadership roles on the educational international scene. By implication, Nigeria's serious commitments to a wide range of global frameworks, conventions, declarations, protocols and other international mandates, which include education for all, the United Nations' Millennium Declaration, the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD), and the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD), among others. It is these commitments together with those targeted at national needs and emerging challenges that drive educational policies, including inclusive education, that this chapter seeks to address.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF SPECIAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

In order to understand the concept of inclusive education within the Nigerian context, one needs to reflect on the history of special education in Nigeria since the former is being provided within the purview of the latter. The historical antecedence is expected to guide the analysis and interpretation of variables in this chapter.

Prior to the coming of the Christian missionaries, nobody had any scientific basis for explaining the causes of disabilities. It was conventional to look in the direction of witches, devils, and other gods, and sometimes bad neighbors, as the probable cause of the disabling condition. This was why in the pre-Christian era in Nigeria, many children with disabilities were secretly put to death by their parents, relations, or other influential members of their communities. In some instances they were left at the mercy of wild animals, inclement weather, or abandoned in the evil forests to be dealt with by gods and evil-doers who resided there (Nwazuoke, 2010). However, this cruel attitude to the needs of the exceptional persons that held sway gave way to acceptance with the coming of the Christian missionaries in the 19th century. In other words, the advent of Christianity ushered in an era where persons with disabilities (PWD) started to be accepted in Nigeria.

Formal education for exceptional persons can therefore be traced to the efforts of some Christian missionaries in the 19th century. The early Christian missionaries who came to the shore of Nigeria were the Roman Catholic Church Missionaries Society, the United Free Church of Scotland, the Southern-American Baptist Convention, and the Seventh Day Adventist Church, among others (Kyauta, 2011). It is on note that each of these religious organizations established schools and laid emphasis on reaching out to the needy. Their aim in educating individuals with exceptional needs was to train them to be self-reliant and to foster independence. The first major initiative made to cater for the exceptional children was in 1945 by the Methodist church, with the establishment of a leprosy settlement for the treatment and rehabilitation of lepers. A school was attached to the settlement for individuals who had been rendered physically disabled on account of leprosy infection at Abeokuta (Abang, 1992). In addition to learning to read and write, they were given entrepreneurship training in gardening and craft.

The first formal school for exceptional children, however, was set up in 1953 at Gindiri, in the present Plateau State by the Sudan United Mission. In 1958, the center at Orji River was established by Dr. and Mrs. D. F. Money, and Rev. Dr. Bedan Daws for the treatment of leprosy patients. However, in 1958 two blind children were admitted into the center for academic training. In 1963, more children were similarly admitted. Henceforth the

center provided primary education for children with physical, visual, and hearing impairments.

The second formal school for exceptional children was established in 1958 in Lagos. The school was named Wesley School for the Deaf. The school was founded by a group of philanthropists who later formed the Society for the Care of the Deaf in Nigeria. In 1958 the Nigeria Vocational Centre for the Blind was established in Ogbomosho (Kyauta, 2011).

Mr. Andrew Foster, a deaf American, was also instrumental in the education of persons with impairments in Nigeria. He established the Ibadan Mission School for the Deaf in Moleke. The Ibadan Mission School for the Deaf later merged with the Home School for the Deaf established by Chief (Mrs.) Oyesola Adeleke in 1963. The merged institutions later became known as the Ibadan School for the Deaf and two other schools in Kaduna and Enugu were established. The schools provided educational services in addition to vocational training.

In 1961, Miss Beth Torrey assisted the women's Voluntary Organization to establish a home and school for mentally retarded and those with behavioral disorders. She also established Beth Torrey Home for the mentally retarded in Kano. She was reported to have been killed by a hit-and-run driver in Kano (Kyauta, 2011).

The next school established was Pacelli School for Blind Children in Lagos in 1962 by the Roman Catholic Mission with Archbishop Leo Hale Taylor as the first proprietor. In 1965, the Anglican diocese of Lagos founded the Atanda Olu School for orthopedically handicapped children. Other schools established for exceptional children in the country include Special Education School, Tudun-Maliki, Kano. The school was founded in 1950. It was then a school for maladjusted children under the Ministry of Social Welfare. In 1977, it was turned into a school for deaf and blind children, which still exists today. It is funded by the Kano State government but also receives donations from private donors and voluntary organizations on a regular basis.

St. Joseph School for the Blind in lower-level Obudu, Good Shepherd Special Education in Cross River State, and St Francis School for Blind and Deaf in Ilorin are examples of other special schools. Presently every state (including FCT) in the federation has at least two institutions catering to disabled children. Moreover, private special schools have also been established in some states. The provision of the Special Education program does not stop at the lower level of the educational sector. Rather, there are institutions for higher educational levels as well. It is interesting to note that the year 1977 marked a turning point for special education in Nigeria. That was the year that, for the first time, the government recognized the need to provide for persons with special needs with the realization that:

The problem of providing for children who are handicapped as a result of disabilities such as blindness, deafness has become more complicated with growing awareness in the area. The current level of efforts has proved inadequate in meeting their needs and argues for a change in improving the situation both quantitatively and qualitatively. (Kyauta, 2011, p. 113)

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN; 1977) also made public her first *National Policy on Education* and introduced in it "integration." This policy document states in part that "Government has decided that integration is the most realistic form of special education since handicapped children are eventually expected to live in the same society with their able-bodied counterparts..." (p. 12).

The Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) also established the Federal Advanced Teachers College (Special) in Oyo in 1977, which is the first of its kind in sub-Saharan Africa. Today, the Federal Advanced Teachers College (Special) in Oyo is known as Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo which provides training in special education. Between 1976 and 1977 more special schools were established by both the state and the federal governments and state and federal coordinators were appointed to monitor the progress of these special schools. In 1977, the FGN also directed the Elements of Special Education as a nonoptional course unit be introduced in all teacher education programs in the country. The purpose of this course unit is to enable regular teachers to cope with the special learning needs of children in regular school settings. At the moment, the following universities offer degree programs in special education: Universities of Ibadan, Jos, Calabar, and Uyo; Bayero University, Kano; University of Nigeria, Nsukka; Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai; Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife; and Kaduna Polytechnic.

Meanwhile, Ozoji (2006) traced the history of inclusive education in Nigeria to the "open education" experiment by the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind (RCSB) in Katsina. Geoffrey Salisbury of the society came to Katsina in 1959 to kick-start it following Nigeria's meeting the three criteria for its commencement in any commonwealth country. The criteria were a high incidence of blindness, a good network of primary schools and local administration, and a strong voluntary organization

Salisbury in Ozoji (2006) explains that open education is the latest weapon in our attack on blindness. It is not a stunt but a carefully conceived plan aimed at absorbing blind children in small groups into the routine of the ordinary day without upsetting the normal pattern of work. He first of all trained a few itinerant teachers who would each have four or five schools under their wings. Dr. Sykes supervised the open education scheme in the eastern region and adopted a different model of regular teacher training to cope with the peculiarity of the region.

Ozaji (2006) explains that the project took off in 1960 in Katsina with eight boys and three girls. It was a joint partnership project between RCSB and the northern Nigerian government. The success of the scheme spread to Kano, Oshogbo, and other major cities of the country. According to Sykes and Ozaji of the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council [NERDC], 2008), open education flourished in the northern region due to a number of critical factors. First, there was a good relationship between the regional government and the various indigenous authorities. Second, the recruitment of visually impaired children for the scheme was sustained by payment of a meal subsidy to encourage the children to attend. The third factor was the training of itinerant teachers, and the fourth and above all, the funding support of the government and RCSB. Unfortunately, the scheme could not be sustained because of lack of trained personnel and lack of support and advocacy on the part of those who provided services for the children.

As evidenced in the above case, special education was provided in residential and segregated settings. It was an instructional activity outside the regular school. Second, by the time most of the children were identified, many had grown beyond the regular school age, and this is the case whether the provider was a missionary or a philanthropist or government. This means that the segregated approach in special education has taken up such a large discussion and practice in the country that one may be tempted to conclude that it is almost impossible to dislodge it. This tradition is understandable in the context of children with disabilities who were left to roam the community without a place in the regular schools. These schools were not to blame because they lacked the necessary tools and skills to educate the children, considered the rejects of the society. This argument is in line with the work of Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard (1775–1838), the physician who tamed Victor, “the wild boy of Aveyron,” as reported by NERDC (2008), that working with exceptional children was seen as a laboratory experience, something to be “trial-tested” in a secluded place before being tried in a normal setting. It is worthy to note that the developed nations of the West were ahead in the march toward inclusion of special needs children following the Salamanca resolutions while developing countries still see it as the most practical means of providing basic special education, regardless of what their official policy documents have to say.

PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONCEPT INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Many definitions of inclusive education have evolved throughout the world since the Salamanca declaration of 1994. Such definitions range from:

- *Extending the scope of ordinary schools to include a greater diversity of children.* For instance, Rufai (2004) views inclusive education as an approach to redesign the concept of “mainstreaming,” which is placing exceptional children in a regular school setting with supportive services and materials. This means that inclusiveness implies the involvement of persons with disabilities in every education-related endeavor or activity with their nonexceptional counterparts.
- *A set of principles that ensures that the student with a disability is viewed as a valued and needed member of the community in every respect.* For example, Okoroikpa (2008) views inclusion as a process of restructuring the cultures, policies, and practices in schools in order to respond to the diversity of students as members of their locality.
- *Human interaction and organizational arrangement.* Okeke-Oti (2009a, 2009b) contends that inclusion is an educational placement that deemphasizes exclusion and emphasizes the restructuring of institutions (schools), classrooms, and approaches to instruction to meet the needs of all learners. The generally accepted UNESCO (2001) definition of inclusion is also relevant here:

Schools, centers of learning and educational systems that are open to ALL children. For this to happen, teachers, schools and systems may need to change so that they can better accommodate the diversity of needs that pupils have and that they are included in all aspects of school-life. It also means a process of identifying any barriers within and around the school that hinder learning and reducing or removing such barriers.

The following definition of inclusive education is the perspective of a commissioned study by NERDC (2008) undertaken on opportunities for inclusive education in Nigerian primary education. Inclusion means that all children regardless of their developmental level, disability, social background, ethnic group, gender, location, or legal confinement are always included in whatever society considers appropriate and available to other children of their age. For this definition to emanate from Nigeria's commissioned project, it can be seen as the country's definition of inclusive education since the *National Policy on Education* has not clearly conceptualized it.

There is, however, an argument that inclusive education is conceptualized as an ideology rather than a program. The ideology emphasizes that individuals with special needs should intrinsically be made an integral part of their societies and its various elements, such as political, economic, and sociocultural life. Inclusion is about building a community where everyone is equal and freely participates actively in all activities of the locality.

THE INTRODUCTION OF UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION

There is a growing consensus throughout the world that all children have the right to be educated together. In the last three decades, a number of major international statements have appeared, affirming the principle of inclusive education and the importance of working toward *schools for all*, that is, institutions that include everybody, celebrate differences, support learning, and respond to individual needs. For instance, the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); the Jomtien World Conference (1990) which set the goals for Education for All (EFA), the UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993), and UNESCO's Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action are all powerful tools in the struggle to dismantle segregated education, which denies children with disabilities the right to be part of mainstream schooling and reinforces society's prejudice and discrimination against them. These documents, which together make a strong case for inclusion, provide a unique opportunity to place inclusive education firmly on the agenda of national governments.

It is in compliance of the foregoing that the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme was launched by the FRN at Sokoto on September 30, 1999, by then President Olusegun Obasanjo. Fundamentally, the aims of UBE and the disbanded Universal Primary Education (UPE) are alike since both are free and universal. The UBE scheme is, however, compulsory for all children of age 6–15 who are mostly at the Primary and Junior Secondary School (JSS) levels (Obasanjo, 1999). Apart from the 9-year universal, free, and compulsory education for school-age children, UBE also covers the rural and nomadic population, persons in physically isolated settlements, urban slums, adult illiterates, and street children as well as children and adolescents with special needs, among others (Agunbiade, 2000). The UBE scheme launched in 1999 existed without legislative backing until 2004 when the UBE Act was passed and consented into law.

The universal nature of UBE is in adherence to the 1999 Constitution of the FRN, Section 8(1), which states that "government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities for all at all levels." Most importantly, the introduction of UBE was in the spirit of obedience to a long list of international educational covenants on Basic Education to which Nigeria is one of the signatories, for instance, the Jomtien Declaration (1990) on Education For All (EFA); the New Delhi (1992) Declaration on the E-9 countries; and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Decade of Education in Africa (1997–2006) on Inter-Africa Co-operation on Education with a strong emphasis on the pursuit of basic education (Obanya, 2000). Obani (2006) contends that the UBE launch was Nigeria's response toward EFA by the year 2000 as well as the UN Mil-

lennium Declaration to be achieved by 2015. Obani (2006, p. xv) believes that the inclusive nature of UBE is that “persons in all manners and conditions, including those with special needs will be taken into account.”

Nigeria's concept of inclusive education is influenced by the several global and national normative instruments and frameworks to which Nigeria subscribes. In the context of this framework, the UBE was launched in 1999, though the UBE Act was only passed and signed into law in 2004. Similarly, the Child Rights Act (2004) guarantees unfettered access to education for all children of school age and nondiscriminatory education (FME, 2008). The concept of inclusion was earlier envisaged in the country in 1977 when the Federal Government declared that integration was the most realistic form of special education since handicapped children are eventually expected to live in the general society (FME, 2008).

Accordingly, the universal nature of UBE has the following implications for children with special needs:

- Inclusiveness implies that persons in all manners and conditions of physical, spatial, and psychological existence will benefit from the scheme.
- Special attention will be paid to special learning needs of all sectors of the population.

The central concern of the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) with special education, according to Obani (cited in Taoheed, 1999), is that all Nigerian children should receive education that is appropriate to the needs and peculiarities of such children. Taoheed (1999), therefore, contends that the introduction of UBE is a long-awaited answer to this desire. The scope of UBE, therefore, encompasses the following, among others:

- A formal school system from the beginning of primary education to the end of junior secondary, which combines skill acquisition.
- Special training and skills for children with handicaps (Obasanjo, 1999; Okeke, 2001).

The blueprint for the implementation and funding of UBE ascribes specific roles to the federal, state (and Federal Capital Territory), and local governments; local communities; voluntary agencies; nongovernmental organizations (NGOs); and international community, donor agencies, and individuals while the funds accruing to it (UBE) would be expended on teacher training, teacher recruitment and remuneration, infrastructural provisions and instructional and learning materials (FME, 1999).

Despite the fact that UBE intends to achieve the stated objectives through strategies like training, retraining, and retention of teachers; cur-

riculum enrichment; full community participation; and data collection and analyses, this cannot be achieved without the presence of an effective and functional teacher who imparts appropriate knowledge, information, skills, values, and attitudes to learners (Okeke, 2001). Notwithstanding this noble role of a teacher, it is common knowledge that not every teacher can meet the different special learning needs of exceptional children in regular school settings. Okeke (2001) argues that in spite of the teachers' pedagogical skillfulness, other support staff including interpreters and braillists are required to ensure effective delivery of UBE curriculum. Okeke poses a rhetorical question on whether there are teachers and other support staff who are efficient and adequate to successfully manage the special needs of exceptional children, who must not be excluded to benefit optimally from the UBE scheme. Little wonder then that the Federal Government of Nigeria admitted that:

Presently, there is no special provision in the UBE program for mainstreaming the disabled in the regular schools. There are equally, no adequate data for planning and addressing the provisional needs of the disabled in the country. All these call for an urgent research to focus on the extent to which disabled persons can benefit from the UBE program. (Okoro, 2011, p. 74)

This shows that the likelihood for UBE to achieve inclusion of exceptional children in Nigeria is bleak unless something urgent is done.

Legal Framework for Inclusive Education in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the legal framework of inclusive education is guided by several global normative instruments, as discussed above under the introduction of UBE. However, the Nigerians with Disability Decree of 1993 of the Federal Military Government of the FRN promulgated a decree whose purpose was to provide a clear and comprehensive legal protection and security for Nigerians with disabilities as well as establish standards for enforcement of the rights and privileges guaranteed under the decree and other laws applicable to the disabled in the FRN.

The Decree was meant to guarantee treatment of persons with special needs as equals to other nonexceptional Nigerians. The Decree was also meant to ensure that the government at all levels and all her agencies as well as individuals adopt and promote policies that would ensure full integration of the disabled into the society. The Decree went on to state that disabled persons shall have equal rights, privileges, obligations, and opportunities as other Nigerians. On education, the Decree states that "Disabled persons shall be provided in all public educational institutions free education at all levels. And that government organs and authorities shall

ensure adequate training of personnel to cater for the educational development of the disabled in educational institutions." The Decree specified that government organs shall take into consideration the special needs and requirement of the disabled in the formulation, design, and implementation of educational policies and programs. As observed by Abang (2009), the decree was laudable but was terminated after the handover to the present democratic dispensation in 1999. Abang regretted that if the decree was well implemented, Nigeria would not have so many children rejected and excluded from attending school in regular institutions today. In other words, this decree would have laid a solid legal foundation for inclusion to strive if not because it was short-lived following the demise of Late Gen Sani Abacha, which brought his regime to an abrupt end.

The 1999 Constitution of the FRN, which ushered in the present democratic governance, Section 18(1) states that "government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities for all at all levels." Section 18(3) of the constitution goes further to state that "Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy, and to this end, government shall as when practicable provide: (a) free, compulsory and universal primary education; (b) free, secondary education; (c) free university education; and (d) free adult literacy programs.

The critical mechanism of state set up for these purposes is the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), with a wide range of stakeholders, as spelled out in the UBE Act. It is also unfortunate that these aspects of the constitution are grossly compromised and this explains why, as observation has shown, that the educational needs of exceptional children are not met in our regular schools.

Another legal instrument that is meant to drive inclusion is the UBE Act of 2004, which was passed and signed into law by the FGN. It is interesting that the Act has already been domesticated in all states of the federation including the FCT. The Act provides that government shall provide free, universal, and compulsory education for school-age children at the basic education level. Universalizing education here implies that all children, exceptionality notwithstanding, shall have unfettered access to regular education. It is indeed unfortunate too that the segregated system of education continues to exist years after the promulgation of this Act. In other words, the continued existence of special schools raises more questions than answers on the sincerity of Nigeria in her march toward inclusive education.

The *National Policy on Education* (NPE) is FRN's normative instrument that directs policy guidelines on educational policies generally. Its maiden edition section 55(4) states Nigeria's resolution to integrate exceptional children based on the philosophy of egalitarianism, which Nigerian education revolves by stating that "integration is the most realistic form of Special Education since the disabled persons are expected to live in the society"

(FRN, 1977, p. 12). This was reaffirmed in the policy's revised editions of 1981 and 1998. The 2004 edition, section 10 (96c), states:

All necessary facilities that would ensure easy access to education shall be provided, for example,

- i) Inclusive education or integration of special classes and units into ordinary/public schools under the UBE scheme.
- ii) Regular census and monitoring of people with special needs to ensure adequate educational planning and welfare program.

Section 10(97) states, "Architectural designs of school building shall be barrier free, i.e., they shall take into account special needs of the handicapped, e.g., ramps instead of steps; wider doors for wheel chaired, lower toilets, etc. (FRN, 2004, pp. 49–50).

The policy also emphasized the need for training and retraining of personnel to develop their capacities to cope with the challenges of the latest trend in special needs education. The *National Policy on Education* is not a legal document but a policy statement that represents government position on educational matters. The policy is regarded as a giant step toward inclusion, but it is ambiguous on either inclusive education or integration.

Implementation of Inclusive Education in Nigeria

The country's effective action plan for implementation of inclusion was embodied in the education reform agenda of the Obasanjo administration. Its plan of action was clearly spelled out in the document termed "WE CAN," which the FME put together and is still awaiting full implementation (NERDC, 2008). The proposal's short-term strategy plan indicates that:

1. Three special needs-friendly schools at the basic education (i.e., primary and junior secondary school) and secondary school levels in one state in each of the six geopolitical zones would be selected. This implies that for the gestational period, nine schools in each state representing a geopolitical zone would be selected to serve as a pilot study, bringing a total of 54 schools to participate in the pilot scheme.
2. Three schools at each of the different levels of education will exclusively focus on children with special learning needs in the following specific areas:
 - Children with visual impairment (VI)
 - Children with hearing impairment (HI)

- Children with intellectual, learning, and physical disabilities
3. At the school level, each school will charter at least 50 students with special learning needs. The schools will be required to:
- Carve out two additional classrooms for 15 special needs students per class; 30 students in total; with the expectation that over time students will move from special classrooms to the regular classes.
 - Operate mixed-ability classes where children with special learning needs will receive education alongside their peers, catering up to 20 students (NERDC, 2008).

It is regrettable that observation has shown that this pilot scheme is yet to take off when one feels that for inclusive education to be successfully implemented it must be planned and pilot-tested and the necessary support services put in place.

There is also the record of efforts by Mr. Enitan O Oke, the Head of the Special Education Unit at Federal Government College, Ijanikin-Lagos, where he has organized and held a series of training workshops with the teaching and nonteaching staff, including parents of exceptional children, on the imperative of inclusive education, curriculum modification, alternative assessment, and other topical issues regarding inclusion (Enitan, n.d). This effort is quite commendable but the project is faced with challenges of staff pessimism, lack of special instructional materials, and the fixed evaluation procedure.

Similarly, Sight-Savers International in conjunction with Ministries of Education, Social Welfare, and Health in the Sokoto, Kwara, and Kaduna States of Nigeria developed an inclusive education project document in 2006 (Galadima, n.d). This project was to be implemented on a pilot basis in these three states of Nigeria for a period of 3 years. Prior to this project, the Sokoto State Ministry of Education had earlier in 1990 attempted integrating special needs students into regular schools. This initiative met a brick wall due to skepticism on the part of the teachers. In general teachers saw its implementation as a difficult task that would end up hindering the progress of other children in the class and that students with special needs would not be able to keep up with the challenges and rigor of general classes and curricula.

At this juncture, the Special Education Unit had to intervene promptly by enlightening the regular teachers in the participating schools. First, about the rights of the special needs students to pursue education at all levels in regular settings. Second, about the potential and capabilities of these students. The teachers were urged to wait and see what the students could do. The teachers were also given some hints on teaching special needs students. This Sight-Savers' project with the ministries has also not taken off

well due to the challenges of attitude and the dearth of personnel to support the program.

To ensure successful implementation of inclusive education, a series of training workshops has been mounted by the States Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) for training of teachers on inclusive practices. Various NGOs are also not left out in their drive toward teacher needs for inclusive education. For instance, the National Center for Exceptional Children (NCEC) organized a workshop for teachers on inclusive education in the North-West geopolitical zone at Sokoto State Polytechnic in July 2011. The purpose of the workshop was to empower teachers with pedagogical skills of meeting the special learning needs of persons with disabilities in regular school settings.

Meanwhile, to ensure a successful implementation of inclusion, Okoroi-kpa (2003) has identified the following prerequisites for successful implementation of inclusion in Nigeria, among others:

- Policy statements made in the *National Policy on Education* must be backed by legislation of the National Assembly and domesticated in all states of the federation including FCT.
- Provision for due process against discrimination, marginalization, and lack of implementation of the charter of inclusive education
- Monitoring is of utmost importance in the implementation of inclusion.
- Reviewing the Special Teacher Training Program (STTP) and preparing professionals and nonprofessionals alike to support inclusive education.
- Changing the negative attitudes toward exceptional persons/children.
- Putting in place modalities to discourage parents of nonexceptional children not to withdraw their children from the regular schools.

It is, however, unfortunate that none of these conditions has been put in motion in the country. It is in this vein that, Nwazuo (2010) submits, in Nigeria, inclusive education as a concept is a largely unexplored social frontier in education. Nwazuo maintains is because most academic discussions bordering on it are tilted toward abstract ideological positions rather than focusing on the practical details on how it can be operationalized within our peculiar circumstances. Nwazuo notes that it is interesting that the general advocacy for inclusion is being made by groups who are more concerned about human rights and social justice but pay little or no attention on the application of educational theories in inclusive classes. The question is, how then can inclusion be achieved? Something drastic and urgent needs to be done more realistically in the implementation of inclusive education.

Barriers to Effective Inclusion in Nigeria

The Salamanca Statement and Framework of Action of 1994 undoubtedly has given a serious boost to inclusive education the world over. In Nigeria, for example, UBE was launched as a step in this direction. In spite of this considerable development, inclusion is faced with the following difficulties.

Impairments. Children who have physical, sensory, or intellectual impairments can experience many difficulties in learning in a typical environment. For example, a child may have lost a limb due to either an accident or from birth and may be unable to walk or climb stairs to access classrooms, or be unable to carry heavy learning materials. Undoubtedly, the impairment holds him or her back in various ways as he or she cannot move freely around the instructional environment as others, particularly considering noncompliance of the Nigerian public buildings to the special needs of such individuals. Nwazuo (2004) argues that inclusion cannot be successful if architectural designs of public buildings remain unchanged. Ozoji (2005) is of the view that public buildings must be re-engineered to allow students access to physical plant and equipment for inclusion to function properly.

Attitudes. Negative attitudes toward differences and the resulting discrimination and prejudice in the society against exceptional persons manifest itself as a serious barrier to inclusion. It is in this vein that Pambot (2006) argues that the attitude of the general public, regular teachers, and students must be positive. According to Adeniyi and Egunjobi (2005), the central point in inclusion is acceptance and love where the exceptional child is extended feelings of acceptance and belonging.

Socioeconomic factors. Socioeconomic status of most families, particularly among the third-world countries, is even below subsistence level and invariably contributes significantly to learning breakdown (UNESCO, 2003). Also according to UNESCO (2003), other social factors like violence, child abuse, and HIV/AIDS continue to place large numbers of learners at risk.

Curriculum. The school curricula have been unable to meet the needs of a wide range of different learners. In this vein, Adaka (2010, p. 263) says that "over 80% of regular teachers lack basic pedagogical skills in meeting the learning needs of exceptional children under inclusive settings." In a similar vein, Oriade (2009, citing Ogbong, 2001) feels that changing the entire curriculum to meet the special learning needs of all students in inclusive settings is a problem for curriculum planners. In other words, successful inclusive practices depend on restructured schools that allow for a flexible learning environment in terms of curricula, assessment, and instructional approaches.

Lack of Political Commitment. One of the major political features of the developing countries is inconsistency or lack of sustainability of government policies as well as lack of political commitment. Ogbong (cited in Oriade, 2009) identifies constant change of government policies, particularly those that lack continuity, as a measure of constraint to inclusion. The discontinuities in policy implementation within many developing countries where Western ideals (that are often tied to continued funding and aid) are uncritically implemented in local contexts without due consideration and alteration of the existing infrastructures in order to accommodate the new realities. Similarly, Maiwada (2004) notes that, while government's pronouncements on inclusion are unambiguous, in practice educational opportunities provided by government are tailored toward segregation or outright exclusion. This means that the parallel system of education does not ensure inclusion. Indeed, the educational praxis within schools that are supported by the government are tailor-made for rank-ordering and sorting students by ability levels within a meritocracy.

Funding. Nigeria as a country is yet to meet the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) recommended 26% budgetary allocation to education (Egudu, 2009). For the success of inclusive education in Nigeria, government at all levels needs to provide adequate and appropriate funding to ensure the provision of special instructional and learning materials for students with impairments.

Accessibility. Proximity of schools to communities is an obvious condition for participation in education, especially for children with orthopedic and sensory impairments. This explains why UNESCO (2010) advocates that public policy should be developed to ensure that children are not disadvantaged in education due to their geospatial location. Other barrier factors to inclusion as outlined by Okeke-Oti (2009b, p. 79) include lack of supportive staff, large classes, insufficient time, and lack of incentives to teachers.

CONCLUSION

Special needs education in Nigeria is still grappling with problems of policy formulation and implementation as well as the lackadaisical attitude of the people and the government toward individuals with disabilities, an environment that is not conducive for supportive practice. Implementing inclusion in such an environment therefore may be unrealistic and counterproductive. For successful implementation to be achieved, special needs education has to be prioritized. In other words, at the moment in the country inclusion only exists in the realm of theory and far from practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For inclusive education to be implemented successfully in Nigeria, I make the following arguments:

- Inclusion must be backed by law to be promulgated by the National Assembly and domesticated in all states of the federation and the FCT.
- Training, retraining, and retention of teachers to meet the teacher needs of inclusion must be undertaken.
- There must be improved budgetary allocation for inclusion at all levels of government.
- There is also the urgent need for aggressive sensitization of parents, exceptional and nonexceptional students, and indeed all stakeholders on the comparative advantages of inclusive education vis-à-vis segregated mode of education.
- The pronouncement on inclusive education in the *National Policy on Education* needs to be stated more categorical.
- There is the need for synergy among NGOs, multinational organizations, and government at all levels toward inclusion.
- The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) needs to be restructured and a Directorate of Inclusive Education should be created.
- There should be an agency/commission charged with the responsibility of enforcing and monitoring the implementation of inclusion in Nigeria.

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