



Challenges of inclusive education policy implementation for the physically challenged students

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Abstract

Physical challenge is an impairment that is present in a person as a result of damage or disfigurement to a specific vital organ such as legs, hands, toes, fingers, muscles, skeleton, spinal cord and central nervous system that are required for effective daily life functions such as mobility, spatial orientation or body coordination. A physical impairment leads to incapacitation or difficulty of ease of movement or bodily manoeuvre for daily for daily life functions (physical disability) while the disabling condition results in a handicapping situation by the creation of an obstacle between the tasks expected to be performed with ease or independently. This paper identify support staff, disability friendly environment, appropriate facility and equipment for teaching/learning process, curriculum modification, early identification, positive attitude, awareness of what inclusion is all about and accurate census of physically challenged students as central factors that could ensure appropriate inclusive education. The paper concluded that, the possibility of Nigeria as a country is pessimistic and skeptical. However, for the country to achieve full implementation of the policy as put forward in this paper, all hands must be put on deck. Essentially, the government must further intensify efforts and pragmatic approach, rather than myopic approach. There is need for government to formulate good implementation strategies and ensure their adherence by all and sundry.

Keywords: inclusive education, physically challenged students, policy implementation

1. Introduction

The National Policy on Education (2013) stipulates the need for quality of educational opportunities to all Nigerians irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities by fostering each to his/her ability. In addition, people should acquire skills, ability and competence in both mental and physical education that will equip the individual to live and contribute to the development of the community and the nation. Education of the physically challenged is the education of children and adults who have learning difficulties because of different kinds of handicaps such as; blindness, partial sightedness, deafness, hardness-of-hearing, mental retardation, social maladjustment, limp deformity or malformation due to circumstances of birth, inheritance or accident in later life. According to Emeka, Gabriel and Ibrahim (2016) ^[17] a person is considered to be physically challenged if he/she does not behave in a way majority of people do. Although normality is a relative concept in that, a person, child's behaviour may be seen as normal or abnormal depending on the time, environment and circumstance in which the behaviour occurs (Omode, 2010). Therefore, challenge has been defined differently by many authors and scholars. Despite the fact that government in its National Policy on Education (2013) made it mandatory for people not to discriminate against the physically challenged person, discrimination and rejection have occurred, even from the policy implementers. For instance, researchers such as Racheal, Mustapha and Ibrahim (2017) ^[17] observed that architectural accessibility posed physical barriers to the independent functioning and free movement confronting the physically challenged students. These and other inconveniences make the integration of the physically challenged to be difficult. Absence of ramps does not allow students on wheel chairs

or on crutches to enter buildings easily. In many buildings, doorways need expansion to allow wheel chairs to pass. Entrances to hostel accommodation are not also conducive. Grab bars or support railings that are supposed to help along the classrooms, chalk boards, toilets, ramps, lifts and conveniences in getting access into the library to aid the progress of physically challenged in their educational pursuit are not accessible (Racheal, Mustapha & Ibrahim, 2017) ^[17].

Inclusive education according to Omede (2016) ^[16] 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 marginalized areas or groups" (The Salamanca Statement and Frame work for Action on Special Needs Education, 1994). Thus, 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) ^[24].

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 2004) ^[2]. However, Stevens (2009) ^[20] 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.

Meaning, Concept and Theory of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is based on the simple idea that every child and adult is valued and deserves the same opportunities and experiences. Inclusive education is about people with disabilities whether the disability is mild or severe, hidden or obvious participating in everyday activities, just like they would if their disability were not present. It's about building friendships, membership and having opportunities just like everyone else (Racheal, Mustapha & Ibrahim, 2017) ^[17]. Inclusive education happens when learners with and without disabilities participate and learn together in the same classes.

According to Sarason & Skinner (1996) ^[19] physically challenged individuals have many challenges facing them from birth. Not only due to the children having their disabilities as a challenged in their live but difference is often being hauled off to their parents. These children are also often ignored by their parents because the parents are afraid or don't know how to handle or approach them. These children often developed a sense of mistrust that has no one to take care of all their special needs, this leads to attachment problem. Those with attachment problems are more likely to have mental problem later in life, such as depression and anxiety, and also attention problem (Sarason & Skinner, 1995:5) ^[19]. Therefore, inclusive education is operated on the basis of the principles of promoting equitability in learning; equalization of learning and daily life environment experiences; ensuring commensurate learning opportunities for all learners; prioritization of meeting of functional learning for all learners, irrespective of their abilities and social backgrounds; and inclusiveness (UNESCO, 1994) ^[23].

Meaning, Concept and Theory of the Physically Challenged

The term physically challenged according to Emeka, Gabriel and Ibrahim (2016) ^[17] refers to the medical of traumatic sign of damage or disfigurement to a specific vital organ (legs, hands, toes, fingers, skeleton, spinal cord, central nervous system, etc.) required for effective daily life functions such as mobility, spatial orientation or body coordination. A physical impairment leads to incapacitation or difficulty of ease movement or bodily manoeuvre for daily life functions (physical disability); while the disabling condition results in a handicapping situation by the creation of an obstacle between the tasks expected to be performed with ease or independently (Emeka, Gabriel & Ibrahim, 2016: 250). Special needs interventions are required in the educational settings to enable individuals with physical impairment to overcome their disabilities and handicaps. The special educational needs of the physically challenged persons according to Emeka, Gabriel and Ibrahim, (2016:

254) ^[17] include the following:

1. Specialized assistance for overcoming handicapping situations in the form of scientifically oriented/technology devices and human assistance. Wheel chairs; life support gadgets or drugs; constant human care and assistance; are the types of services always required by physically challenged persons.
2. Physical and architectural special designs and adaptations for enhancing access and enabling easier overcoming of physical barriers.
3. Physical adjustments and reservations in the homes, community spaces, schools and classrooms for ease of accommodation.
4. Specialized medical services for those who are on chemotherapy and who may also need intermittent medical attention while at home, school or rehabilitation facility.
5. Physiotherapy and psychotherapy services for attending to personality and physical illness conditions respectively in the homes, schools and rehabilitation centres.

Bugesk (1962) propounded a theory that is concerned with the significance of psychological development of higher mental function. Bugesk presented dynamic assessment of the physically challenged. According to him the structure of physically challenged person is so complex and it can be studied through simple summing up symptoms primary disorder (visual, hearing, language and impairment) and these symptoms lead to the children exclusion from the social, cultural, traditional and educational environment. He stressed the importance of social learning in the upbringing and educational of the physically challenged persons. Bugesk also criticized the teacher, parents, psychologist to the child's normality and suggest the need for psychologist to be concerned on the adjustment of physically challenged individuals.

Global Overview of Inclusive Education Policy

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 is 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 & Osagie, 2011) ^[3].

Inclusive Education Policy in Nigeria

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 cited in Omede, 2016) ^[16]. 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.

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 (2013) 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, 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.

Challenges of achieving Inclusive Education in Nigeria

The Nigerian National Policy on Education though laudable, but has not translated into adequate inclusive educational opportunities for physically challenged students. The policy for now remains mere rhetoric. Oladejo and Oladejo (2011) ^[14] in buttressing this observation reported that strategies that will make inclusion work in Nigeria are yet to be put in place. Regular education teachers are the pivot on which inclusive education stands. Their relevance to the success of inclusion is so important that the world cannot afford to ignore them. Oladele, Ogunwale and Dafwat (2016) ^[15]

posited that for inclusion to be successfully practiced support staff, disability friendly environment, appropriate facility and equipment for teaching/learning process, curriculum modification, early identification, positive attitude, awareness of what inclusion is all about and accurate census of physically challenged students are central factors that would ensure appropriate inclusive education worldwide and which is not available in Nigeria. This is supported by Yeo (2005) ^[25] who reported the World Health Organization (WHO) as estimating that 'there are approximately 19,000,000 (Nineteen Million) disabled people living in Nigeria'. Yeo further reported WHO as claiming that this figure is equivalent to 20% of Nigeria's total population. Nigeria cannot afford to ignore persons with disabilities because of their high population and because of their ineffable right to education.

The study of Oladele, Ogunwale and Dafwat (2016) ^[15] revealed that respondents claimed that teaching physically challenged students could result in having children with disabilities. The respondents averred that they feel uncomfortable interacting with physically challenged students, they also see collaboration with other specialists within the regular classroom as intrusion. The respondents also opined that inclusive education in regular schools is an imposition on regular teachers. UNESCO (1994) ^[23], Boyle, Scriven, Durling and Downes (2011) ^[8] affirmed that knowledge of inclusion and attitudinal factors play an invaluable role in the integration of special needs children within the regular education setting. It is therefore posited here that negative attitude of custodians of inclusionary practices would adversely affect persons with disabilities within and outside the classroom. Lack of knowledge where inclusionary practices are also concerned would not augur well for persons with disabilities.

Scheduled interview with teachers and Ministry officials revealed that Nigerian Primary schools are not disability friendly in terms of environment. Participants in this study revealed that schools are not architecturally designed to accommodate physically challenged students. Akinpelu, Oyewumi, Oyawole, and Azanor (2012) ^[7] in affirming this finding reported that Nigerian schools lack facilities that could make the environment conducive for persons with disabilities. Overcrowded classrooms where large population of 'normal pupils' overwhelm regular teachers, as discovered in this study does not show that Nigeria is ready to practice inclusion. This is also noted by (Ajuwon, 2012 and Mushoriwa, 2001) ^[6, 13]. Inclusion will not become possible if persons with disabilities increase the already high population of children in many of our schools in Nigeria as discovered in this study. Persons with disabilities are supposed to be educated in the nearest schools to their home. A situation where students are too many in a class means that when inclusion becomes a reality in Nigeria, persons with disabilities are going to be at disadvantage when they find themselves in classrooms with high population of students.

Scheduled interview with some participants as reported by Oladele, Ogunwale and Dafwat (2016) ^[15] in their studies revealed that appropriate equipment and materials needed to make inclusion practicable are not in place. The work of Lang and Upah (2008) ^[12] and Anumonye in Oladele, Ogunwale and Dafwat (2016) corroborated the findings of these researchers. Regular education teachers and Ministry of Education staff as indicated in this study are not aware of

ongoing efforts by policy makers to modify the present curriculum being used by primary school teachers to accommodate inclusionary practices. They are also not aware of early intervention strategies being propounded by policy makers for early identification of persons with disabilities. Participants from the ministry reported that there are records to show the total enrolment of students with disabilities attending special schools at primary and secondary school levels. There are however, no accurate data of persons with disabilities who are in regular schools in the states sampled. According to Ajobiewe (2000) without accurate census, it will not be easy to adequately and efficiently serve people whose number is not known. The figures of persons with special needs given by the Federal Ministry of Education 1986 and the UNESCO figure of 1998 according to Adedjoja (1998) [2] are merely projections and estimate. Yeo (2005) [25] explained that the 19,000, 000 figure given by WHO as the population of persons with disabilities in Nigeria could also be an estimate. Meetings held with the National Planning Commission and the National Bureau for Statistics confirmed that there are not reliable statistics of persons with disabilities in Nigeria (Yeo, 2005) [25]. There are evidences to show that some higher institutions in Nigeria are training special educators who are potential collaborators with regular teachers once inclusion has taken root in Nigeria. Support personnel such as braillists and sign language interpreters are also available in some special schools in Nigeria. Support staffs such as itinerant teachers' resource room personnel and note takers as revealed by scheduled interview are not on ground if inclusive education were to be a project that will start very soon in Nigeria. It should not be noted that the support staff who are on ground in Nigeria for example special educators hardly collaborate with regular teachers. The basis for collaboration has not arisen because Nigerian government at all levels is yet to see the need for inclusionary practices.

Suggestions

Inclusive education in Nigeria is still feasible. However, it requires stakeholders in education and the governments at all levels in particular to take bold steps and urgent measures. Therefore, the following must be noted and acted upon as a matter of urgency.

1. Schools should be proactive in making changes that will cater for physically challenged students. This can be achieved by formulating long-term plans and policy on the curriculum modification and accommodation for persons with disabilities.
2. The federal government should increase allocation to education sector. Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) should be well funded. In fact, the UNESCO's recommended 26% of the annual budgetary allocation to education sector. This will help to solve the funding problem.
3. The government at all levels should conduct a census to ascertain the accurate figure of physically challenged students.
4. Apart from making education free, government should ensure to introduce meal at least once a day for day schools and thrice a day for boarding schools. Pupils should be given free uniform and other necessary teaching and learning materials. This will further

encourage physically challenged students and will also encourage parents/guardians to send their wards to school, having known fully that they need to put in little financial inputs.

5. Adequate practice support staff, disability friendly environment, appropriate facilities and equipment for teaching/learning should be provided by the government at all levels to ensure appropriate inclusive education for physically challenged students.
6. Finally, both Federal and State government should ensure that our schools are architecturally designed and conducive to accommodate persons with disabilities.

Conclusion

This paper recaps inclusive education, education of the physically challenged students, inclusive education policy in general and in Nigeria, current status of physically challenged education and challenges of achieving inclusive education in Nigeria. It can therefore be concluded that, the government has not pursued vigorously this idea of integration and inclusion of physically challenged students and the fact still remains that there are various challenges jeopardizing the implication of inclusive education in Nigeria. It can thus, be said that the possibility of Nigeria as a country to achieve inclusive education is pessimistic and skeptical. However, for the country to achieve full implementation of the policy as put forward in this paper, all hands must be put on deck. Essentially, the government must further intensify efforts and pragmatic approach, rather than myopic approach. There is need for the government to formulate good implementation strategies and ensure their strict adherence by all and sundry.

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