

Review Article

Special needs and Inclusive Education in Nigeria

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Abstract: Inclusive education connotes the non-discrimination of students with diverse and different learning and physical abilities staying in the same classroom to learn and study side by side. It involves the non-segregation of students and adapting them into appropriate general education classes in schools available within their immediate environment that gives them access to high quality instructions, interventions and assistance to meet up primary, secondary and tertiary academic curriculum irrespective of any physical challenge they may have. The implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria will inevitably create new and increased demands for special educators, as well as other stakeholders putting all hands on deck to make ensure special needs children have quality and inclusive education. With the growing number of special needs children in the society due to the prevailing economic, societal and family problems, there is urgent need for the full adoption and enforcement of the special needs and inclusive education law of the child right act in Nigeria. This means the development of schools curriculum to cater for inclusive educations in the country. Government should place emphasis on special educators who are also expected to make adaptations and accommodations to the inclusive curriculum, their instructional techniques and evaluation procedures, as well as cater for their classroom behavior and develop appropriate management styles. The specialists who are already engaged in inclusive education must be provided with sufficient instructional resources, while at the same time encouraged to continue their efforts to reach out to all learners. Inclusive education should be seen by the government as a basic human right and the foundation for a more just, equal and egalitarian society.

Keywords: Special needs inclusive education, educators, Government policy, and child right act.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education means students with diverse and different learning and physical abilities staying in the same classroom to learn side by side. It is the act of placing students in age appropriate general education classes in schools available in their immediate environment that gives access to high-quality instructions, interventions and assistance to meet up primary academic curriculum irrespective of any challenges they may have. Educators need to recognize the fact that children with disabilities have equal capacities to learn and perform optimally as their age-mates that are without limitations. These children are therefore supposed to be part of all educational activities in their classrooms and within the neighborhood. Such activities include excursions,

academic debates, student government, sports and other related activities Gambari, A. I. (2008).

Recognizing the values in the diversity and unique contribution of each student in the classroom is one of the key drivers of an inclusive education system. Every child feels safe and develops a sense of belonging. The students along with their parents are involved in setting academic goals and making decisions that determine the success of their learning and education. A lot of schools claim to be inclusive, but this is often not the case. Sharing the same physical space and performing different activities is not inclusive (Karl, W. D. & William, J. F. 1966). Most educational institutions in Nigeria do not operate an inclusive setting; the reason for this could be inadequate funding,

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cultural beliefs, negative perception and teacher qualification. These problems appear to be getting worse by the day as hundreds of thousands of graduates are churned out annually from the various Nigerian institutions of higher learning. As if to compound the problem, there appears to be disconnecting between the various theoretical knowledge accumulated in school and the practical realities of such knowledge (Effiom, Cyril & Godwin 2020). However, this is an area they should look into and take seriously. The country can join forces with other progressive nations to advocate for the right of learners with disabilities. There is several benefits of including special need students in the classroom with other students. Research-based evidence on the importance of Inclusive education has become significant over the years, and it has, therefore, become a vital system that should be included in the classroom (Pie, M. and Kasper, S. 2003).

2.0 X-raying the Importance of Special Needs and Inclusive Education in Nigeria

2.1. Development of a positive perception of themselves and others as future leaders

Attending classroom settings that depict the true nature of the similarities and differences that exist in the world helps children appreciate diversity. It is essential that a child's education introduces him or her to the reality of the world out there beyond the walls of just an academic environment. Playing and learning alongside with other children of different cultures and abilities assist children to grow in understanding people that are unique in skills due to physical, social or other challenges (Reamer, A. K. 2005). The culture of respect for one another also grows when children are allowed to play with one another without segregation.

2.2 Developing a healthy friendship inclusive environment for all

Asides from academic education and learning made available to children in school, friendships are developed and social skills learnt. Allowing special needs children to mix with other children in the school settings makes them feel included, and this expands their network of friends (Robert, K. 2011).

2.3 Helping parents realize their expectations for the special needs children through inclusive education

Every parent wants their child to be happy and accepted by their peers, have a healthy life and education. Allowing a child with the special need to interact and learn with other students in the school positively improves their academic performance, their personality and the expectations of the parents. Introducing inclusive education in the classroom will reduce stigmatization and help such children attain their highest heights (Anderson KG, Case A, Lam D 2001).

2.4 Parental involvement in special needs and inclusive education

Introducing inclusive education into the classroom encourages parents to be actively involved in their child's education and other school activities. Parents love to witness the performance of their children during events such as debate, quiz competition, sports and other programs. It also drives a higher commitment to the school by the parents as they become more involved in the school program (Bankston, CL, Caldas SJ 1998).

2.5 Establishing a foundation for an Inclusive society through inclusive education

A society that embraces and integrates an inclusive education will naturally introduce the same culture of inclusion in its concepts of civic participation, employability and community relationships. The seeds of inclusion need to be planted in the young so that they will learn the values, skills and knowledge to include others who are different from them. That's the basis of our future society. Those with special needs can become pioneers of public projects and programs (Baumeister, R.F., & Leary, M.R. 1995).

2.6 Adoption of wide range of teaching skills and learning methods by the professionals

An Inclusive education system makes teachers and staff flexible when it comes to preparing their teaching and instructional materials. The use of non-traditional resources like videos, audio, kinesthetic and even multimedia can be employed to make learning more accessible and exciting. By this action, even students without disabilities learn faster too (Bell J, McKay TM 2011). The other side of the coin is that the lack of appropriate and necessary education, training and development would adversely affect the pace of emergency, patterns of behaviours and consequently lead to a slow pace of performance of the economy (Effiom, Cyril & Godwin 2020).

2.7 Enhancing the academic performance of the special need children through inclusive education

Research has shown that students' learning together in the classroom improves academic excellence among them. Students set higher goals for themselves due to the presence of others with diverse abilities. Students with disabilities challenge themselves to perform optimally like their classmates, while other students also spontaneously set a high standard for themselves (D'zurilla, T.J., & Sheedy, C.F. 1991).

As educators, we won't know what gifts are hidden in our students until we unmask them. Most successful teachers of inclusion classes have found that when they teach basic skills within the context of meaningful lessons, all students can achieve higher-level learning. Such lessons stimulate critical thinking and motivate students to make personal connections with the material.

2.8 Helping special needs children to develop leadership skills through inclusive education

Students in an inclusive education environment naturally learn to take up the responsibility of caring for one another. There are situations where students stand up and speak up to protect their friends who are bullied. This naturally can lead to leadership skill. The school environment also encourages self-discovery as students with diverse abilities find themselves performing roles and functions they usually would not be exposed to if they had been separated. To fully implement inclusive learning in the classroom there should be a development of a culture of acceptance, understanding and giving equal attention to the diversities and differences of all the students in the school Laiqa R, Shah RU, Khan SM (2011). At the primary level, it is not enough to teach pupils the skills of reading, writing, calculating and elementary science. They must be taught how to apply these skills in solving the problems of society; this is where model 2 above becomes highly relevant. They must be taught to develop vision of a better future society, thus making infants to be visionary conscious (Effiom, Cyril & Godwin 2020).

3.0. Strategies for building a formidable special needs and inclusive education in Nigeria

3.1. Application of wide spectrum of instructional materials, teaching aids and models

The purpose of contemporary tools such as interactive whiteboards, videos, audio lessons and multimedia tools are often associated with higher student engagement. A lot of times, teachers also employ the use of groupings to carry out academic exercise in the classroom. Often the groups are shuffled just to allow all students to relate to each other and carry out the task assigned to them. Teachers lead group task in the cases of younger age students in preschool or elementary or driven by a student when dealing with older children in secondary school (Fiske EB, Ladd HF 2004). Therefore, appropriate entrepreneurial educational training and development programmes must be provided for pupils and students of various levels of Nigeria educational systems and for the adult in other forms of social institutions of which they are members (Effiom, Cyril & Godwin, 2020).

3.2 Developing an Inclusive academic curriculum

The same learning goals drive the learning experience of every student. The content of the school academic program is such that gives equal opportunity for all the students to participate in all school educational activities at the same pace of progress. Educators consider students with disabilities before creating the school curriculum. They do this to allow all students to have equal access to instructions and opportunities to participate in learning activities. Such curriculum makes provision for students with special needs to be given attention without pulling them out in

the middle of lessons and making their differences noticed (Fraser WF, Killen R 2005).

3.3 Involvement of parents in developing curriculum

Parent's participation in the education of the child in an inclusive system can ultimately define its success. Inclusive education involves coming up with innovative and strategic methods of getting parents involved and noticed by children in the learning process. The process of creating educational contents and other learning activities in an inclusive system ensures a significant contribution of parents through the planning stage (Guo G, Harris KM 2000).

3.4 Special needs education and Building Relationships

It is the responsibility of the teachers to connect with all the students in the classroom. Speaking to your students one-on-one is a great way to start building a relationship. By taking some extra time and effort to view each pupil as an individual and truly believing that each student can succeed, you'll become partners in their success. Finally, it is important not to forget that there are extreme cases where special need children act out in the classroom and as such, they might require one-on-one supervision. In this case, the service of a special educator is needed to support the children in a well-groomed learning environment (Strickland MJ, Shumow L 2008).

4.0 CONCLUSION

The importance of inclusive education in the classroom is crucial. Research has shown the tremendous benefits it offers to students and parents. It is of great importance for schools to not exclude special need students from associating and learning with other pupils. They should be provided with quality education just like other children. They are bright, intelligent and they need to be surrounded by other students so they can strive and learn social skills.

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