

Full Length Research

## **Promoting Special Needs Education in Nigeria: Implications for Effective Service Provision**

<sup>1</sup>Amwe, Racheal Asibi and <sup>2</sup>Amwe, Grace Dansti

<sup>1&2</sup>Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation Sciences, Faculty of Education, University of Jos. Plateau State

Accepted 5 August 2021

### **Abstract**

Special Needs Education (SNE) in Nigeria has in recent times drawn global attention with the implementation of inclusive education. It is in line with this that this paper discussed the promotion of special needs education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the need for inclusive education. This paper presented the concept of Special Needs Education (SNE). Educational programmes and resources in Special Needs Education was also discussed. The trends in special needs education discusses the eras and issues in the current state of special education in Nigeria. The paper further highlights the concept of inclusive education. Furthermore, the need for inclusive education will be presented in order to highlight some issues that need to be addressed for a successful and fruitful implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria. The justification for inclusive education as a tool for promoting special needs education in Nigeria was presented. In conclusion, the paper outlined some recommendations in terms of extensive networking, cooperation and consultation among all stakeholders and also the formulation of an Inclusive Education policy designed to ginger the implementation process. This policy should provide clear and detailed statements that would go a long way in promoting the implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Special Needs Education, Nigeria, inclusive education

**Cite This Article As:** Amwe, R. A., Amwe, G.D (2021). Promoting Special Needs Education in Nigeria: Implications for Effective Service Provision. *Inter. J. Acad. Res. Educ. Rev.* 9(8): 357-361

### **INTRODUCTION**

The present state of the regular system of education in general and special needs education in particular has in recent times drawn the attention of professionals and stakeholders at all levels of education. This is due to the recent global trend advocating for the implementation of inclusive education (Garuba, 2003; Dakun, 1995). The current pathetic state of the quality education in Nigeria is worrisome and poses a great challenge to the full implementation of inclusive education. Moreso, an educational system that seeks to address the special/unique learning needs of special needs children characterized by negative attitude and apathy from the society.

However, with the global advocacy on the need to

introduce inclusive education, questions have been raised on its relevance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Answers to these questions indicate that the implementation of inclusive education will promote and sustain special needs education in a developing country such as Nigeria. Nevertheless, according to Egbo (2005), despite many well-intentioned educational policies that have been adopted by the federal government e.g. the 6-3-34 and the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme, the educational system in Nigeria has fallen victim to the nations chronic social and political challenges that tend to reduce institutional efficiency thereby posing a great challenge to the implementation of inclusive education.

The contemporary state of Special Needs Education (SNE) in Nigeria is faced with major problems such as inadequate provision of specialized services in

classrooms, lack of accommodations (adaptations and modification in teaching and learning), for children with special needs even on mainstream basis. The phenomenal growth in enrolment without corresponding expansion in physical facilities; low participation of children with special needs (especially those in rural areas); lack of interest in young people to study special needs education at the university level; the duties assigned to stakeholders is inadequate etc. these manifestations of problems are however militating against the entire educational system in Nigeria.

The promotion and sustainability of Special Needs Education (SNE) is therefore inevitable for the successful implementation of inclusive education. It is based on this premise that the paper is poised to determine the current state of special needs education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the need for inclusive education in Nigeria. It is expected that the paper will be a contribution to a focused understanding of special needs education. It also hopes to provide a general orientation for the need for inclusive education in Nigeria.

### **The Concept of Special Needs Education (SNE)**

The definition of Special Needs Education (SNE) according to Ozoji as cited in Ireogbu (2008) connotes a carefully designed instructional programme for meeting the educational needs of children with special needs so that they can attain their potential in life. It is an educational system that seeks to address the educational learning needs of exceptional children. A child has Special Education Needs (SEN) if he or she has learning difficulties or disabilities that make it difficult for him or her benefit maximally from teaching/learning experiences in the classroom. Special instructional programmes are needed to enable such a child function maximally.

Similarly, the definition of Special Needs Education (SNE) according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2005) refers to those with special educational needs that need additional public and/or private resources provided to support their education. The use of this definition in a consistent manner calls for agreement about the term "additional" and an appreciation of the various kinds of possible services provided which should be considered. Thus these additional resources are those made available over and above the resources generally available to students where no consideration is given to the special needs of students likely to have particular difficulties in accessing the regular curriculum.

### **Educational Programmes and Resources in Special Needs Education (SNE)**

A special education programme is a cluster of resources; specialist, teachers and support staff at a particular school. A school's special education programme is dedicated to supporting the educational needs of students in one or more disability areas. According to the State of Queensland Department of Education and Training (2007), programme specialization is available in different disability areas. These educational programmes include: educational adjustment programme for students with special needs and programmes specializing in supporting students with multiple impairments. Special education programmes support students across a range of ages. Programs for children of prior to pre- age and pro-age are called early childhood development programmes.

Some schools provide support in a variety of ways: some have dedicated special education classrooms, supporting students in the classroom alongside their peers while other programmes might give students separate specialized lessons when needed. In some cases a few schools may co-operate to share a specialized programme. Some programmes might only support students with a verified disability while others might support a much wider range of others.

However, special education programmes support children with special needs and also assist teachers in the development of their educational programmes. Special education programmes can be site- based or across sites for example, a special education programme may span the local primary and secondary school or a cluster special education programmes may support a number of students across a number of schools.

Consequently, special education resources are made available over and above the resources generally available to students where there is no consideration given to the special needs of students likely to have particular difficulties in accessing the regular curriculum. These resources can be of many different kinds. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2005), these resources include personal resources, material and financial resources. Personal resources involve a more favorable teacher/ student ratio than it is obtained in a regular classroom where no allowance is being made for students with special needs, additional teachers, class assistants or any other personnel (full or part time basis). Training programmes are also provided for teachers and other personnel's to equip them for work in special needs education. Material resources include aids or support of various types (e.g. hearing aids); modification or adaptation to classroom and specialized teaching materials. Financial resources involve the funding formulas which are more favorable to those with special

needs (including classes where it is known or assumed that there are students with special needs). Special systems for funding are usually set aside for special education needs within the regular budget allocation, payment made in support of special needs and cost of personnel and material resources are taken into consideration.

### **Trends in Special Needs Education**

According to Garuba (2003), two eras have been identified in the development of special needs education in Nigeria. The first era is the humanitarian/missionary era (1945 -1970) during which provision of services was dominated by the Private Voluntary Organizations (PVOs) and private individuals. In this era, religious bodies (mostly Christians) were also a driving force behind the establishment and maintenance of some of the special education programmes for children with special needs. However, during the first era, the government had an indifferent attitude towards Special Needs Education (SNE).

The second era of special education started in (1974) and was characterized by significant contribution from the government as well as inputs in terms of establishment of the Universal Primary Education (UPE). This era is known as the social service era where the government took over all schools (including special schools) established by private voluntary organizations. The establishment of training institutions and the commencement of special education programmes in teacher training institutions also commenced. In addition, during this era a significant achievement in the educational system was the release of the National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1977. Similarly, the establishment of special schools and training institutions across different parts of the country were major achievements of special needs education. In addition, elements of special education are included in the list of courses in teacher training colleges to equip teachers with the ability to cope with people with special needs.

The current state of special needs education according to Adewumi&Oseni (2006), outlined some achievements recorded in special education in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to include the following: attitudinal change; training of personnel, establishment of special schools; sense of belonging through integration; legislation; research development (scholarship to students, rehabilitation services and also the training of specialist in ear mould impression fabrication in Nigeria). In addition, another major achievement was the introduction of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme introduced by the Federal Government to provide free and compulsory access up to junior secondary school level which operates under the structure of the 6-3-3-4 educational system.

### **The concept of Inclusive Education**

The issue of inclusive education started in June 1994 when representatives of 92 government and 25 internal organizations organized the world conference on special needs education held in Salamanca, Spain. The conference adopted a new framework for action with 14 guiding principles that regular school accommodate the special needs child regardless of his/her ability (Salamanca, 1994). Globally, the educational system has laid credence to this improved version of integration as it has become necessary for the survival of special needs children in the regular school system.

Consequently according to Door as cited in Ogot, McKenzie and Dube (2008), inclusive education is defined as a form of education that makes provision to all students, including those with significant disabilities, equitable opportunities to receive effective educational services. He also asserts that the emphasis is on children with disabilities who have been traditionally excluded from mainstream education, to be supported with the needed supplemented aids and support services in age appropriate classes in their neighborhood schools in order to prepare students for productive lives as full members of the society.

This definition stresses the fact that Inclusive education as a new philosophy basically supports that all children can learn (especially when they are taught together) in the same classroom environment and that the multiplicity of disabilities found in diverse groups of children are valued and no child is discriminated against.

Similarly, Farrel (2002), refers to inclusive education as the extent to which a school or community admits all people as full members of the group and values them for the contribution they make. In addition, inclusive education as defined by Nwazuoke(2010) goes beyond merely placing pupils in schools in their neighborhoods. It involves instead the designers of the curriculum making opportunities universal through teaching approaches and utilizing appropriate assessment procedures to indicate the extent to which programme goals have been achieved.

However, Obani (2006) also stated that inclusive education is an educational programme that allows all children and young persons with or without disabilities learn together in a regular school with appropriate support. More so, previous to the introduction of inclusive education strategies, children with special needs were generally turned away from educational establishments and either remained uneducated, was educated at home or were later sent to special schools. The nature of exclusive nature of special schools was not found to be morally acceptable therefore giving way for the ideology of inclusive education emerged. (Ogot, McKenzie and Dube, 2008)

## The Need for Inclusive Education

The educational system in Nigeria has not taken a concrete step with regards to the implementation of inclusive education. A world report commissioned by World Vision estimates that one third of 77 million children still out of school are children with special needs (UNESCO 2006) and WHO (2004) states that about 10% of children with special needs are in school in Africa. Thus there is need for the implementation of inclusive education in order to embrace a larger population of children with special needs (Ogot, McKenzie and Dube, 2008). If inclusive education is to embrace a large population of children with special needs including the disadvantaged (normals, neglected, marginalized etc). Similarly women, youths, girls and also the gifted and talented amongst others comprise the target population.

Similarly, Garuba (2003) is of the opinion that integration has remained the focus of planning special educational programmes at the policy level despite the fact that professional associations have been addressing the issue of inclusive education. Though, Damboyi, Orim and Alasa (2008) argued that the present conventional school structures do not guarantee effective and sustainable implementation of inclusive education considering the diversity of special needs children. They maintained that it is more challenging however for the government to implement inclusive education alongside the Universal Basic Education.

If inclusive education is fully implemented, the negative attitude towards children with special needs would be a thing of the past. It will form a link between special and neighboring schools could harness their relationship thus developing friendships among children with special needs and their peers. Engelbrecht and Green (2006) asserts that there is growing evidence showing that inclusive education can work in developing countries such as Nigeria. This is solely dependent on the level of commitment from the government and stakeholders' cooperation to make it a global action programme in education reforms. Consequently, the Salamanca conference (1994) declares that:

*Those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child-centered pedagogy capable of meeting these needs. The regular schools with inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discrimination attitudes, creating welcome communities: build an inclusive society and achieving education for all (UNESCO, 1994: 9).*

The need for inclusive education is therefore inevitable in the promotion of inclusive education. Inclusive systems and societies can only be realized if governments are

aware of the nature of the problem, together with the appropriate legal frameworks that are in line with relevant international conventions and recommendations that support the understanding of inclusive education as a rights issue. (UNESCO 2009).

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The need for Inclusive education especially in this 21<sup>st</sup> century is a crucial in promoting special needs education in Nigeria. the provision of opportunities for the creation of a democratic society which will ensure and promote the respect for values of tolerance of diversity and in addition, quality educational provision for all learners (irrespective of their special needs), schools and communities. It is therefore recommended that: firstly, a situation analysis should be carried out on all educational regions. Secondly, there is need for extensive networking, cooperation and consultation among all stakeholders (government, advocacy groups, community, parent groups, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), organizations of persons with special needs, etc) in the planning and implementation of inclusive programmes. Thirdly, an Inclusive Education policy should be formulated and designed to ginger the implementation process. This policy should provide clear and detailed statements on staff implications, curriculum issues, support services, degrees of inclusion and the roles of schools and communities when implementing Inclusive Education programmes. Finally, there should be an emergence of a global consensus and vision on Inclusive Education.

## REFERENCES

- Ademuyiwa, O. A. & Oseni, I. A. (2006). Special education in the twentieth century: The journey so far in Nigeria. In A. Titus, O. Noah & T. Ajobiwe (Eds) *Special education in Nigeria: A search for new direction*.
- Dakun, W. S. (1995). Introduction to special education: *A Book of Readings in General Education*. Vol. 1, Jos: Ehindero Nig. Ltd. Pp. 93.
- Damboyi, M., Orim, S.O. & Alasa, M. V. (2008). Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) relating to educational inclusion of special needs children. *Journal of Childhood and Primary Education*. 5(1), 59-66.
- Egbo, R. (2005). *The state and future of education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Lessons learned from developed countries*. A key note address presented at the 2005 National Conference of the Nigerian Primary and Teacher Education Association held at Asaba, Delta State.
- Engelbrecht, P. & Green, L. (2006). *Responding to the*

- challenges of inclusive education in south Africa*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Farrel, M. (2002). Educational inclusion and raising standards. *British Journal of Special Education*. 27 (1), 35-38.
- Garuba, A. (2003). Inclusive education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: challenges and opportunities for Nigeria. *Asia Pacific Disability Rehabilitation Journal*, 4 (2), 191-200.
- Ireogbu, V.U. (2008). The place of psychology in special needs education. *Jos Journal of Education*. 1 (1), 219-224.
- Nwazuoke, I. A. (2010). Paradigms, perspectives and issues in special needs education. An Inaugural Lecture Delivered at the University of Ibadan on Thursday, 20<sup>th</sup> May, 2010. Ibadan University Press.
- Obani, T. C. (2006). Special education and special needs. In T.C. Obani, (Ed). *Teaching pupils with special needs in the regular UBE classroom*. Ibadan: Book Builders.
- Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) (2005). *Students with disabilities, learning difficulties and disadvantages: statistics and indicators*. OECD, Paris. Retrieved on 27<sup>th</sup> march 2012 from <http://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID%3D7271>
- Ogot, O., McKenzie, J. & and Dube, S. (2008). Inclusive education and community based rehabilitation. In S. Hartley & J. Okune (Eds). *CBR: Inclusive policy development and implementation*. University of East Anglia Norwich, U.K.
- Queensland Department of Education and Training (2007). *Educational programmes and services in special education*. Retrieved on 6<sup>th</sup> December, 2011 from <http://education.gld.gov.au/studentservices/learning/disability/parentguide/programs/index.html>.
- Salamanca Statement (1994). *World conference on special needs education*. Access and Quality. Spain. UNESCO and Ministry of Education and Science.
- UNESCO POLICY GUIDELINES (2009). Inclusive education. Retrieved on 4<sup>th</sup> February, 2012 from <http://eenet.org.uk/resources/eenet-newsletter/news12/page7.php>