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TEACHER EDUCATION FOR INCLUSION: AN OVERVIEW OF NIGERIA SITUATION

by
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Abstract

For any community or nation to attain a high level of development, equity of access to education cannot be side tracked. Through inclusion, equality among citizens and level of literacy within the society would be guaranteed. Hence, this paper discussed teacher training programme in relation to inclusive education. The concept of inclusive education, structure of training teachers, the National Policy on Education's Position for catering for students' with special needs, strategies for preparing teachers for inclusive education, roles of teachers in inclusion, challenges and solution of teachers in inclusive classrooms were discussed. It also emphasizes the need for in-service and pre-service teachers to learn the practice of inclusive education and how to effectively implement it. The paper recommended among others that support should be given to teacher educators and councils overseeing the affairs of teacher training on how best to review their existing training systems in order to cater for inclusion. Inclusion should rather be seen and felt within the nation rather than just mere policy.

Keywords: Teacher training, Inclusive education, Policy.

Introduction

The school is expected to be an instrument of change that will promote dialogue and participation through making available quality education for all without an exception. However, Nigeria unlike all other developed Nations has not successfully implemented the policy of inclusion in schools. Although, the National Policy on Education, (NPE, 2013) stated that "Persons with special needs shall be provided with inclusive education services in schools which normal persons attend in age appropriate for general education classes directly supervised by general teachers". Despite this inclusive education policy, little or no effort has been made in higher institution of learning to sensitize pre-service teachers on how to effectively manage and handle inclusive classes.

Inclusive education is the integration of students with and without special needs in a class for the purpose of equality and learning. It do not discriminate among those who may be potentially marginalized due to disability, behavioural problems, family background, ethnicity, poverty, language delay, visual and hearing impairment among others. Inclusive education welcomes diversity among learners and removes segregation of any kind from educational practices. Inclusive can either be partial or full as the case may be. In partial inclusion, students with special needs are educated in regular classes but when there is need for any special service, they are pulled out of the regular classroom for those services while in full inclusion, education for the special students is considered a service and not a place and those services are integrated in to the daily classroom routines, curriculum, environment and strategies. Those saddled with the responsibility of implementing the inclusive education are the teachers. Hence, without them, the mission of inclusive education might not be attained.

The quality of an educational system cannot exceed the quality of their teachers. The role of teachers in schools and particularly in classrooms cannot be overemphasized, it is however unfortunate that the teachers with whom the success of inclusive education rest on are not aware of the educational principles that is expected in an inclusive classroom, Although, Adeniji, Waheed, Alabi and Ameen (2017) reported that teachers views on inclusive education are positive but they possess inadequate knowledge and resources to effectively and efficiently implement inclusive education. However, Adedokun (2014) opined that the success of inclusion can be measured through the participating teachers. This implies that teachers are the key to inclusion success. This prompted the need for teachers training for the successful construction and management of inclusive schools and classrooms.

Strategies for preparing mathematics teachers for inclusion

The following are the ways by which teachers particularly mathematics teachers could be trained to perform effectively in inclusive environment

1. A coherent and comprehensive teacher education programme which would embrace integrated curriculum innovations and reflect the solutions to the societal problems should be embraced.
2. Teacher education programmes should recognize individual differences and implements learning strategies which would be for all without discrimination. The teacher preparation program should equally translate equality and equity concepts to specific educational interventions. The representation of diverse and varying learners needs help in promoting cooperation and uniqueness in individuals.
3. The inclusion policy and practices should not be limited to primary and secondary schools. It should however be embraced in higher institutions of learning particularly for training teachers. So that when they are being trained in an inclusive classroom, managing inclusive classrooms when they are certified would be a lot easier.
4. More recognition should be given to the teaching profession so as to attract best brains who would be ready to perform and deliver excellently all policies of teacher education and particularly inclusive education.
5. Only professional qualified and certified teachers should be employed to teach if best practices of inclusive education is desired.
6. Teacher education programme should inculcate into teachers in training the use of information communication technology (ICT) so that they could relate with the global village and gradually move from traditional educational system. This will also ease the management and practices of inclusion when they imbibe the western world practices.
7. Teachers training should be directly linked with the educational services expected of them. Also, there should be proper linkage between the theory and practice.

Roles of teachers in inclusive education

The role of teachers in Nigeria and many other developing countries cannot be over emphasized. Even with the advent of technology, no tool has been able to completely replace a teacher. The National Policy on education, (FRN, 2013; 39-41) maintained that no educational system can rise above the quality of its teacher. Hence, teacher education should continue to be given major emphasis in educational planning and development. The goals of teacher education as highlighted by the FRN are to:

- (a) Produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our educational system;
- (b) encourage further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers;
- (c) Help teachers to fit into social life of the community and the society at large and enhance their commitment to national goals;
- (c) Provide teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for the assignment and make the adaptable to changing situations; and
- (e) Enhance teachers' commitment to the teaching profession

Relating the role of teachers to inclusive education, it is necessary for teachers in this kind of setting to be aware of the diversity in his class and attend to learners in accordance to their respective needs. However, the main role of teacher in this classroom setting is to avoid stereotyping and they should make students within the community to realize the values of inclusive education as a way of promoting national stability and literacy. With this, every individual in the society would be informed of the need to avoid discrimination of any form and the societal culture and norms would gradually be restructured to emphasise love for all, equality and respect for individual differences. In an attempt to effectively implement inclusive education in schools, UNESCO, (2005) suggested the following to the teachers:

- (a) identify barriers to learning in class
- (b) identify barriers to learning in the broader school environment
- (c) identify support available to schools
- (d) identify support available to the vicinity around the school
- (e) find a way of solving the identified barriers and maximize the support available to schools

How to make inclusive work

As teachers are the sole implementer of inclusive education, there is need to start the training of inclusive principles from the scratch of the professional education. Therefore, teachers in training should be intensively trained by competent and knowledgeable people with revised syllabus which will incorporate the need for equity and equality. The revised syllabus should also involve responses to psychosocial needs of children such as issues of child rights, special needs of orphan and vulnerable children, management of inclusive classes. After this training, they should be placed in both primary and secondary schools around the country not considering rural or urban or school ownership. These set of trained teachers would have the special responsibility of implementing values and ensuring that all learners (with and without special needs) achieve their learning potential to the fullest. Also, all learner should be able to demonstrate the behavioral objectives for individual lessons.

Furthermore, these sets of newly trained teachers would have been acquainted with identifying and how to address the needs of individual learner. This would therefore demand that such teacher uses appropriate teaching methods which will support inclusive classes. While the newly trained teachers demonstrate and put into practice the strategies of effective inclusive management in schools, the in-service teachers should be motivated and encouraged to be involved in professional self-development such as attending workshops, seminars, conferences and part-time programmes.

Educational stakeholders and experts in special children needs should train the participants in conferences, seminars and workshop on the need for inclusion and principles to effectively implement it. The strength and weaknesses of inclusive policy should be communicated so that their knowledge and awareness of implementing such policy would be guaranteed.

Challenges of Inclusive education in Teacher Education programme

Inclusive education is a strong commitment to enhancing and assuring the right of all pupils to attend and to be active members of the school community. Teachers are the main actors towards developing and implementing inclusive practices. The role of teachers in schools and particularly classrooms cannot be emphasized. It is however unfortunate that the teachers with whom the success of inclusive education rest on are not aware of the educational practices that is expected in an inclusive classroom setting. Also, according Adeniji, Waheed, Alabi and Ameen, (2017), teachers' views on inclusive education are positive but have inadequate knowledge and resources to effectively and efficiently implement inclusive education. Hence, the varying responsibility of teacher educators. As teachers ranging role ranges from being a facilitator and guide, mediator, researcher, designer of learning scenarios, collaborator, evaluator and orchestrator.

However, researchers such as Ogunyinka, Okeke and Adedoyin (2015) asserted that the quality of teacher education programme in Nigeria is low and cannot be compared to international standard, hence, the failure to implement inclusive policy which has been on paper since 2009. Moreso, Linares, Rada and Lopez (2016) asserted that teacher training is the essential factor which steers the educational proposals in the construction and management of inclusive schools and classrooms.

In addition, Maseko and Sisana found out that teachers are not supported in the implementation of inclusive education, therefore they are unsure of their role of implementing it. Other challenges facing inclusive education are

- (a) Job Discrimination: students with special needs especially those with disabilities might not be adequately considered for job after being trained because of the cultural beliefs and values that they are likely to be less productive.
- (b) Inadequate resources: most schools lack both material and human resources that would aid the effective implementation of inclusion. Such resources include sign language interpreters, access to assistive devices and others.

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- (c) Inadequate knowledge of inclusion: Teachers are not taught how to implement inclusive education; they therefore have challenges of inability to identify learners with learning difficulties. This is supported by Swart (2002) who submitted that teachers are competent but lack understanding of inclusive education and one cannot implement what is ignorant of.
 - (d) Inadequate trained professional teachers: inadequate quality and quantity of in-service and pre-service teachers who are sufficiently trained and motivated to include children with disabilities.

Conclusion

Since teachers who are the integral implementer of educational practices lack necessary knowledge and skills of inclusion. Hence, the need for teacher education programme to re-structure their curricular to involve inclusion policies and practices so as to make education be for all.

Recommendation

The following recommendations were made based on the discussion in this paper

- (i) Teacher training programmes especially at the university level should intensively train teachers who would be knowledgeable on what inclusive education entails and strategies for its successful implementation.
- (ii) Educational experts and stakeholders in special education should be hired in higher institution of learning so as to provide teachers with logical and intensive training
- (iii) The educational system should review its policies to accommodate a breakdown of how to successfully implement inclusion in schools
- (iv) Government should provide finance to support in-service training of teachers and also to empower and increase their pay as their responsibilities as inclusive teachers' increases.
- (v) There should be priority for improving educational opportunities of marginalized children and communities.
- (vi) Policy makers and trainers responsible for developing and delivering teacher training and for recruiting teachers need to have in-depth understanding of inclusive education and its importance so as to improve educational practices.

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