



INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN NIGERIA: AN IMPLICATION FOR EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract:

Even though it is a clear fact that inclusive education as a policy is stated in Nigeria's national policy on education, our point of interest is centered on its practicability. This is because the issue of policy implementation is virtually in every policy outline in Nigeria up to this day. Inclusive education which is aimed at integrating persons with special needs and those without any form of impairment to learn side by side in the same classroom environment has failed largely in its regards, especially at its implementation stage, which is a result of the unperturbed nature of both government and other state actors who are piloting the affairs of the country. Certain constraints relating to corruption, lack of proper sensitization, inadequate educational facilities, location of institutions, etc. were some factors considered in this work as responsible for the failure of educational development in the 21st century in Nigeria. Hence, the workability of inclusive education now rests in the hands of every meaningful Nigerian. Those with questionable characters must not be involved in any policy-making process and the government must streamline approaches on how its policies will be attended to at all levels.

Keywords: inclusive education, policy implementation, Nigeria

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1. Introduction

When we talk about inclusive education and its tenets in the Nigerian context, it becomes quite unfortunate to note that what comes into the mind of every individual is a question of how possible it is for its implementation process to be cried out successfully, even though it is a notable fact that problems of policy implementation are not only associated to Nigeria alone as other nations around the globe do experience the same issue when it comes to policy implementation, especially the third world countries but the point of interest now is anchored on the way and manner the problem is managed. Over time education has been categorized as the cornerstone for even development, this means that every nation world over that seeks to develop must accept and embrace education wholeheartedly.

Sadiq (2013) affirmed that an educated population is an asset to a nation which is anchored on the fact that education sets the stage for national security and development as it transmits desirable changes in human behavior that make the individual useful to both the society and to themselves. The above discussion therefore implies that education is a basic necessity for every child and is supposed to be made attainable to individuals irrespective of the nature of the deformity the child is facing.

Therefore, the introduction of inclusive learning in the classroom is a welcome development in the policies governing the operations of education in Nigeria and a means of fostering peaceful co-existence amongst the citizenry. Adetoro (2014) highlighted that the adoption of inclusion in Nigeria's National Policy on Education maintains that the nation has accepted the principle and implementation of inclusiveness in her educational system to take care of the diverse persons who come to learn. Obi (2018), asserted that the practice of inclusiveness represents a situation where the school responds directly to students, with the view of equality to every educational opportunity made available by the government.

However, it is pertinent to state categorically clear that inclusive education is an organized programme aimed at integrating special needs individuals into the mainstream of learning for the sole aim of leading out the inborn potentialities in them so that the former will be able to lead a useful life for himself and contribute to the society which he belongs. The aforementioned, therefore implies that teachers and trainers have to realize that students with disabilities have equal capabilities to learn and perform optimally as their peers that are without any form of limitations or disability (Obi 2018). These students are therefore supposed to be part of every educational activity in their classrooms and within the neighborhood. Such activities include excursions, academic debates, student government, sports, and other related activities, etc. Recognizing the values in the diversity and unique contribution of each child in the classroom is one of the key drivers of an inclusive educational system. Every child feels safe and develops a sense of belonging when they see students who are not in the same situation as they are, studying together, even though their first experience might not turn out to be what they actually need.

Lipsky and Gartner (1997) noted that the process of inclusiveness represents equal opportunity for every child to have access to education, irrespective of his or her deformity. Therefore, maintaining that persons who need special attention should be given an avenue to learn in regular classrooms which will help boost their confidence, while regular students learn how to respect and accept them as well as shun every level of discrimination.

2. Statement of Problems

Inclusive education has become a major challenge facing educational systems around the world and most especially, African nations (Ainscow, 2004). In some developing countries like Nigeria, inclusive education is thought as an approach to serving children with disabilities within the general education environment. Consequently, the National Policy on Education in Nigeria states that Special Education is created as a formal special educational training given to people (children and adults) with special needs (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004: p. 47). However, this is contrary to the international practice where inclusive education is seen *“as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners”* (UNESCO, 2001). Even when the government have put in place certain modalities to the successful implementation of the inclusive education programme, with her confines, the programme is still suffering total failure, as it is not meeting up with the aims and objectives targeted upon its enactment, which is evident on the numerous problems confronting the programme in form of political instability, corruption, poor planning, inadequate sensitization etc. It is on this benchmark that becomes imperative to investigate those factors responsible for the failure of the programme, access the implication of its failure on educational development in Nigeria, as well as postulate certain recommendations of the way forward.

3. Conceptual Review

The UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education (CADE, 1960) which stands as the first entity in the right to education, saw education in its article 1(2) as all types and levels of education, which includes access to education, the standard and quality of education and the conditions under which it is given (UNESCO 2000). CADE and other international organization on human rights instruments have made these provisions on the right to education, Nigeria as a member is a signatory to these instruments and have taken steps in domestication its provisions through her Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and Child’s Rights Act in 2003 as well as its position on education in section 18 of the 1999 (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended) which states that:

- 1) The government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels,
- 2) The government shall promote science and technology,

- 3) The government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy, and to this end, the government shall as and when practicable provide:
- free, compulsory, and universal primary education,
 - free secondary education,
 - free university education, and
 - free adult literacy programme.

Kusumo and Chidozie (2004) stipulated that in discussing inclusiveness in education, we must place our emphasis on special education, this is because it is an education practice that is centered on articulating appropriately, the needs of persons with different forms of deformity. Thus, studies have revealed that students or persons with special needs tend to do better in any field of endeavor when they are given the opportunity to practice freely with persons within their environment.

Corroborating from the above, it, therefore, means that the educational confines are a place where persons from different categories of life converge for the sole aim of learning, and as such, individual status or personality, age, class, or level is not measured as criteria that promote the process of socialization and thus, does not only provide training for personal development but also goes further to equip the learners to new ideas of thought which form the fulcrum of innovation and development. which is why the Nigerian government saw the need to include the principles of inclusiveness in her educational philosophy which have aided in yielding tolerance and acceptance for individual and group differences, thus providing unlimited opportunities for the promotion of teamwork, solidarity, and the forging of strong bonds of friendship among and between students and groups.

Obi (2008) perceived inclusive education to be a situation whereby persons with disabilities are not discriminated against based on religion, race, ethnicity, tribe, or disability. Obi noted that the Dakar World Education Forum recognized the rights of all children, the disabled, at-risk, and vulnerable to have access to qualitative education by 2015 through:

- 1) Expansion of educational opportunities for all children especially the disabled, vulnerable, and disadvantaged,
- 2) Promotion of innovative programmes that encourage those with special needs and disabilities to help them enroll, attend and successfully complete their programmes in inclusive settings,
- 3) Ensuring accessibility in inclusive settings for children with special learning needs and children with various forms of disabilities (UNICEF, 2004).

However, it is pertinent to state categorically clearly that the concept of inclusive education is divided into two basic areas which include:

- a) Partial inclusion, a situation where students with special needs are made to learn in regular classes for nearly all day but would receive special services outside the normal classroom such as speech therapy, physical therapy, or hearing therapy as the case may require,

- b) Full inclusion, which represents a total integration of all students, including those that require special education and behavioral support services in a regular class.

Thus, whether full or partial inclusion, education which is the bedrock for any society with developmental goals, must be taken seriously and should be made available to all sundry that is a member of any society.

4. Inclusive Education in the 21st Century

The idea of inclusive education was conceived in June 1994 at an international conference which was organized by 92 countries and 25 international organizations in Salamanca, Spain. The Salamanca Statement and Framework assert that every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities, and learning needs and that *“those with special needs education must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them with a child-centered pedagogy cable of meeting those needs”*.

The Salamanca Statement also states that the educational systems must take into cognizance the wide diversity or difference in learners' characteristics and needs which is perceived as the most effective means of curtailing discriminatory behavior, creating a welcoming environment, building an inclusive atmosphere and making an educational system for all.

Obi (2006) affirmed that it is on this benchmark that the Nigerian government who is also a member of the international community adopted the policy and seeks to implement its outline in her national philosophy of education. Therefore inclusive education in the 21st century must represent as a whole the fulcrum of inclusiveness not only in education but in Nigeria at large, this is because the level of inclusiveness is not properly harnessed in the Nigerian environment up to date, in fact, the entire educational system is faced with divers problems ranging from lack of qualified personnel, poor funding, political manipulation, and corruption, poor policy articulation and implementation, insecurity, etc. with the present of all of aforementioned, there is no way the objectives of the policy of inclusiveness in education will be achieved.

4.1 Policy Framework on the Implementation of Inclusive Education in Nigeria

The formulation of an educational policy sets the stage for implementation which according to Ukeje cited in Orlunga (2021) is perhaps the most important aspect of planning. However, policy implementation in education is a flashy national problem that has become a major discuss in Nigeria as it stands on the gateway between societal objectives and national needs, as well as it also encourages deviations from planned courses of action. According to Awokoya (2017), educational policies are designed to promote the quality of life of the citizenry, satisfy individual needs, and community pressures, and the degree of complexity and sophistication to which socialized individuals must be educated or trained to be useful to themselves and the society he belongs.

Also, educational policy issues continue to be a question of serious concern in developing countries in Africa as a tool of development; this is because the implementation process is mostly hijacked by individuals whose self-interest overshadows the ideas of the said policy. Hence every society world over that has good developmental aspirations within its confines must be able to monitor the implementation process of every given or outlined policy, or else the goals and objectives of the organization or society are put to shambles.

On issues relating to the policy framework in inclusive education, the National Policy on Education in its section 7 categorically stipulates that persons with special needs shall be provided with inclusive education services. These commitments were made to equalize educational opportunities for everyone, irrespective of their physical 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 (Omede, 2016).

Corroborating from the above, by 2013 the Nigerian government in her National Policy on education re-affirmed that education for individuals with disabilities would be free at all levels, to this end, every necessary material that will aid the smooth access to education shall be made available which includes:

- a) Erecting of classroom blocks and special units in public and some private schools for easy inclusion.
- b) Regular census and monitoring of people with special needs to ensure adequate educational planning and welfare,
- c) Provision of special education materials in the form of abacus, braille textbooks, Perkins braille, wheelchairs, crutches, speech trainers, audio-visual materials, internet facilities ear molding machines, etc.,
- d) Training and provision of special education trainers on braille reading and writing, typewriter use, speech signs, daily living skills,
- e) In-service training of staff on capacity building and equipping them with the current trends in job delivery.

However, it is pertinent to state categorically clearly that the evolution of different schools for special need persons, delimit already, the policy of inclusion as this is the current happenstance in the Nigerian context. By and large inclusive education like other policies that are articulated in Nigeria is facing the same problem at the implementation stage just like every other policy that was already formulated earlier in Nigeria. In fact, the policy which is aimed at integrating both students and adult individuals with special needs in the same education environment to learn side by side with others who do not with any form of disability has failed in its regards, as the existence of separate schools for the physically challenged defies the policy of inclusion.

Moreso, virtually all the schools in the different states of Nigeria have no environment that incorporates both special needs students and students who are without any form of disability, the implication is that the policy and programme of inclusive education are obviously domesticated in theory but in terms of its practicality, the policy

lacked the loco-standee. Hence creating room for moral decadence, loss of faith in government, cause of nuisance as most special needs individuals are mostly used as beggars on the streets, segregation, and stigmatization, etc. it implies that the aforementioned, in a rare sense, is not supposed to be what Nigeria should be facing at the 21st century, but corruption, political instability, selfishness, and host of many other issues are some predisposed factors responsible for what Nigeria is facing in terms of policy implementation, also there is lack of support for inclusive education from stakeholders, government, parents and the larger society. Ibrahim (2018) affirmed that most parents of special needs learners are cautioned or misinformed about placing their children in an inclusive programme based on the fears that their young will be ridiculed by other children, or will be unable to develop normal life skills in an inclusive environment.

4.2 Benefits of Inclusive Education in Nigeria

The importance of education should not be overemphasized, as Orlunga (2021) affirmed, the most proficient and essential tool in the security of life and property in any developing nation is education, education is the bedrock through which every successful society relies. Hence, education, according to Jombo (2008), is seen as a deliberate and conscious effort to bring a new member of a social group into contact with the accumulated knowledge of his cultural heritage. From the above definition, one can conclude by saying that education is an inevitable entity in society, this is why it becomes imperative to educate every member of the society whether with a particular disability or impairment which is the central message of inclusive education.

- 1) Brown, cited in Kusimo, Chidozie & Amoo (2019) affirmed that the importance of inclusive education includes the amalgamation of persons with special needs in education to develop his or her latent skills to be able to influence his or her environment which is suitable for the development of the both the individual and the society which he belongs as it will instill in the learner some basic skills and competency.
- 2) inclusive education helps in removing apathy in the minds of learners and the entire society as it creates an enabling environment where students see and accept their peers for who they are and learn to associate with them. on the other hand it will also create an enabling environment for those with special needs to participate actively in any function or event they found themselves.
- 3) proper harmonization and implementation of inclusive education help to educate not only students but the entire society on the need to see persons with disabilities as a normal human and so help in streamlining and making provisions for proper inclusiveness in the society as it is noted that virtually all parastatals in Nigeria do not make room for persons with disability which is evident on the kinds of structures that are been erected. thus most buildings in Nigeria do not make provision for slopy rales while over 65% percent of public and private structure including schools, have in them only stirecase, with no elivator. How then can a

physically challenged person make use of this buildings or structures, this is a have become a major that requires immediate response if inclusive education must be practiced in its wholesomeness.

- 4) learning side by side helps in developing a positive perception of themselves and others as well as assists in appreciating their cultures and abilities, It helps children to grow with the understanding that people are unique in skills due to physical, social, or other challenges. When they are alloud to learn side by side with those with special needs, it will help them understand and discover independently the inborn potentialities that are inherent in those with special needs and inturn would creat inthem the spirit one partnership or collarboration, while the former will now learn to understand that thses persons are human with potentials that can be tapped.
- 5) a nation that embraces and integrates an inclusive education will naturally introduce the same inclusion in its concepts of civic participation, employability, and community relations. Inclusion is a basic element that needs to be integrated into the lives of our young ones so that they will learn the values, skills, and knowledge to include others who differ from them. Hence, those with special needs can become pioneers in public administration, project managers, and coordinators as well as given a fare playing grounds to context in general elections as their peers without the fear of been victimized or discriminated.

4.3 Problems Facing Implementation of Inclusive Education in Nigeria

The following are some problems hindering the effective implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria: poor planning process, lack of trained personnel, inadequate educational facility, corruption, location of institution, lack of proper sensitization, etc.

4.3.1 Poor Planning Process

Planning is described as the most crucial stage of any policy; it is the process by which the framework and progamme of every policy is carefully drawn and articulated. Most programmes in Nigeria are sometimes carefully outlined but end up facing Waterloo at the planning stage which is mostly accredited to a lack of professionalism, the person who is members of the planning committee are either not knowledgeable enough or are there for political reasons, thereby misappropriating and interpreting the goals of an outlined policy which is what inclusive education is facing today in Nigeria.

4.3.2 Lack of Trained Personnel

Professionalism and training are very vital aspects in the teaching and learning process, most teachers are not knowledgeable enough to teach or handle both special needs children and those without any form of deformity in the same class, which is evidently shown in their academic performance. The implication is that parents of these special needs students are likely to send their young out to special schools, which will in turn

affect negatively the policy of inclusive education and is accredited to poor teaching skills.

4.3.3 Inadequate Educational Facilities

Several schools in Nigeria are having problems of a lack of basic amenities ranging from lack of desks, tables, inadequate reading materials, etc. Inclusive education has created room for more students to be admitted into the school system thus, creating room for the need of more teaching aids and materials which if not available will affect the teaching and learning process, Oakes and Saunders (2015) affirmed that shortage of teaching personnel's and utilities has negative implications on the learners, especially the special need ones who have little or no knowledge of the subject matter. lack of adequate materials to meet the educational needs of special needs learners in a regular school environment causes most parents to have doubt about the educational system, and if it will actually incorporate their child and thus this may likely lead to parents sending their young to special school which have in turn affected the policy of inclusive education.

4.3.4 Corruption

This is the major problem that is facing virtually all sectors in Nigeria, a situation where every public servant or political office holder sees every duty or appointment as an opportunity to enrich themselves. No doubt, these have also affected the implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria. The government should ensure that persons without integrity should not be given an opportunity to hold any public office, and every policy as regards the implementation of inclusive education should be followed strictly to avoid misappropriation of funds.

4.3.5 Location of Institution

The location of the institution (school) plays a vital role as to whether a special need child will go to school or not, over time it has been discovered that virtually every inclusive school are situated in urban towns, which is a major constrain to other special need children who are based in the remote areas. This has in turn affected the enrolment into the school of children with special needs who are based in the rural areas. Again, the economic disposition of most parents has become a major determinant of whether a child with special needs is sent to school or is used as a machine for money making through begging on the streets, hence government must endeavor to establish inclusive schools not only in towns but also in remote areas.

4.3.6 Lack of Proper Sensitization

Sensitization is the hallmark of inclusive education to parents, teachers, and the society at large. The entire society needs to be adequately educated and informed on the need to see and appreciate persons with special needs as their fellow humans; by so doing, will reduce the issue of stigmatization, mockery, and abuse of any kind as well as aid in making provisions for persons with special need in every policy articulation, to this end

it is advised that person with special needs should be allowed or given certain position when it comes to policymaking as it will aid in proper representation and harmonization.

5. Conclusion

Education is seen as the foundation to which every society that seeks to develop must embrace wholeheartedly, every society must as a matter of necessity ensure that her populace whether normal or persons with special needs gets educated at least up to the basic level as this will not only help in developing the society but also aid in helping those who come across it, lead a useful life and contribute to the society. However, it is disheartening to state clearly that the problem of policy implementation has taken center stage in Nigeria in the 21st century which is pointed directly to poor governance and has affected the policy of inclusiveness in education. Hence, inclusive education in Nigeria is still wallowing in the realm of rhetoric and far from effective practice as a result of poor policy implementation and the unperturbed attitude of the government, the populace, and both state and non-state actors.

5.1 Recommendations

- 1) Every policy that is articulated in the educational sector should be taken seriously and should be devoid of persons with questionable characteristics if the sole aim of that particular policy is to be achieved.
- 2) National Policy on Education Statement 2003 which maintained that education of special needs persons shall be free at all levels should be cross-examined to ascertain if the process is carried out in practical terms and if it is true.
- 3) Researchers should conduct research to find out why we have a lot of persons with special needs in our streets as beggars rather than in schools or training centers.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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