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**BASICS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH  
SPECIAL NEEDS IN NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Inclusive education policy emerged in response to the declaration on Education For All by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) several years ago. Actually, inclusive education represents the latest attempt in the provision of placement options or alternative programmes worldwide for children with special needs. It ensures that children with special needs are educated within the regular education system, free of all forms of labelling, stigmatization and segregation. This paper discussed the basic elements existing in thriving inclusive educational settings. It also discussed the benefits of inclusive education to children with special needs, as well as the current state of inclusive education in Nigeria. It recommended that a nationwide awareness programme highlighting the benefits of inclusive education should be carried out to ensure adequate training, planning, implementation and support towards achieving Education for All in Nigeria.*

Key words: inclusive education, historical development, basic elements, benefits to children with special needs,

**INTRODUCTION**

One truism which finds expression readily in democratic settings is that "All Men are Born Equal". It is pursuance of the realization of such a lofty idea that led to the emergence of the concept of inclusive education. Historically, inclusive education emerged as a result of this clarion call made on the international community by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to give each child the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning. At the World

Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca, Spain in 1994; UNESCO reaffirmed her commitment to Education for All, having recognized the necessity and urgency of providing education for children, youth and adults with special educational needs within the regular education system (UNESCO, 1994).

Significantly, to attain the noble goal of "Education for All" (EFA) as prescribed by UNESCO for all states of the world is to do away with all forms of discrimination in the

education of children, their background or special needs notwithstanding. According to the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2011), EFA focused world attention on the basic learning needs of neglected groups and on learning achievement rather than on mere attendance. This is important because most countries have groups of children who are excluded and/or underachieve, leading to long-term economic and social consequences for everyone. Consequently, UNESCO employed member states to

*'adopt an inclusive education approach in the design, implementation, monitoring and assessment of educational policies as a way to further accelerate the attainment of Education for All (EFA) goals as well as to contribute to building more inclusive societies. To this end, a broadened concept of inclusive education can be viewed as a general guiding principle to strengthen education for sustainable development, lifelong learning for all and equal access of all levels of society to learning opportunities so as to implement the principle of inclusive education'* (UNESCO-IBE, 2009, p. 18).

Basically, inclusive education is a system which supports and accommodates for the diverse needs and abilities of all students within a typical education setting (Bergsma, 2000; Crippen, 2005; Eleweke & Rodda, 2002). Regular schools are to welcome all children irrespective of categories of their diversity. Inclusive education for children with special needs is both evolving and changing, especially within many developing countries (that is, countries which maintain low-income and middle-income economies, where a majority live on less income and lack essential public services compared to extremely industrialized countries (The World Bank Group, 2006). Approximately, 600 million people with disabilities exist worldwide, all of whom encounter physical and social boundaries within

cultural life (UNESCO, 2006; World Health Organization [WHO], 2007). Of this total, it is estimated that 80% of people with disabilities live in developing countries (UNESCO, 2006; WHO, 2007). One hundred and fifty million of these are children with disabilities, of which less than 2% are receiving rehabilitation (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002).

In view of the foregoing, the significance of this paper is that it mainly provides information concerning the basic elements of inclusive education for children with special needs. Educators, particularly those in the field of special education would find useful principles in this paper which would serve as a guide to them in their conceptualization and implementation of inclusive education. Therefore, this paper traced the historical development of inclusive education, and discussed the basic elements of inclusive education, the benefits of inclusive education, and the current state of inclusive education in Nigeria. In addition, recommendations for effective implementation of inclusive education for children with special needs were proffered.

## **HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

Inclusive education represents the latest attempt in the provision of placement options or alternative programmes for children with special needs. The United Nation's Declaration on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 focused on integration initiatives and equity issues for all including those with special needs. To achieve the goal of "Education for All", the Jomtien conference called on each nation to take immediate steps to implement the recommendations contained in the documents on "World Declaration on Education for all.

The European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2011) revealed that subsequently, other international declarations and conventions built upon the call for Education for All. In 2000, the World Declaration on Education for All (UNESCO, 1990) was re-

affirmed in the Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2000), which recognised that education deficits restrict social, economic and cultural development, reducing the capacity of individuals, communities and nations. It was also recognized that there was an unequal distribution of education within and between nations. The commitment to Education for All was further developed in the International Conference on Education in Geneva (UNESCO-IBE, 2009). While the UNESCO's Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education was adopted in 1994 (UNESCO, 1994), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006), in particular article 24 on Education, also provides clear support for inclusive education (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2011).

In its present form, the emergence of inclusive education was given fillip by the World Conference on Special Education which took place in Salamanca, Spain, in 1994. At this conference, twenty-five (25) international organizations and ninety-two (92) governments developed a "bold and dynamic statement" that called for inclusion to be quite simply the norm. The Salamanca Statement and its accompanying Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994) is arguably the single most important international document in the field of special education. This Statement mandated that:

"schools should assist them to become economically active and provide them with the skills needed in everyday life, offering training in skills which respond to the social and communication demands and expectations of adult life" (UNESCO, 1994, P. 34.)

In addition, this statement urged governments to:

- give the highest policy and budgetary priority to improve education systems to enable

them to include all children regardless of individual differences or difficulties

- adopt, as a matter of policy, the principle of inclusive education (UNESCO, 1994).

Vayrynen (2000), in discussing the Salamanca Statement and the Framework for Action, noted that 'it provides the clearest and most unequivocal call for inclusive education'.

In Nigeria, the development of education took a turn for the better with the introduction of education reform. Most significantly, the Nigerian government passed into law, the Compulsory, Free, Universal Basic Education Act 2004, which demonstrated the strong political will of the Nigerian government to drive national development through education sector-wide-reforms by first ensuring universal access to educational opportunities at all levels: basic, post-basic, tertiary as well as non-formal, including special needs groups of children, youths and adults. In 2006, the implementation of the education sector reform was initiated and this involved setting up of eleven task teams to critically examine three pillars of the inclusive education reform process namely, access, equity and quality (Federal Ministry of Education, 2008).

Essentially, the Nigerian government has adopted inclusive education as a policy and through the Federal Ministry of Education, Nigeria as a country, has characterized policy guidelines for inclusive education that targets the three groups (the disabled, the disadvantaged and the gifted or talented), with greater focus on desegregation, anti-discrimination, and enforcing the fundamental human rights of these special needs groups (Federal Ministry of Education, 2008).

## **BASIC ELEMENTS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

Inclusive education focuses on the restructuring of schools to accept and provide for the needs of all students. In Inclusive education, specialized instructions and support are provided to any student who is in need of such support without labeling him or her as

disabled. All the children with or without special needs are provided for by making necessary arrangements and accommodation for their education in the same school and class (Mangai, 2007).

The strategy runs quite contrary to the ideas and philosophy related to institutionalization, separation or segregation which catered to the needs of persons classified as disabled. The idea and provisions in terms of separation and segregation, whether through special schools or special classes actually engendered discrimination and differentiation among children with disabilities and those without disabilities of the same society, country or humanity. It is against the law of nature which is kind enough to propagate equal opportunities to all to grow and develop without any differentiation and discrimination. Thus, the philosophy of inclusion is governed through equity and equal opportunities to all without any discrimination (Mangai, 2007).

Additionally, inclusive education replaced the earlier term 'integration', which was used in the 1980s to refer to the placement of pupils with special educational needs in regular schools. As Farrell and Ainscow (2002) pointed out, the problem with defining integration solely in terms of placement is that it tells us little about the quality of the education received in that context. The integration movement was based on an assimilation model. Its emphasis was on providing supports to individual students to enable them to 'fit in' to the mainstream programme without any changes being made to that programme. In contrast to integration, inclusion is about the pupil's right to participate fully in school life and the school's duty to welcome and accept them (British Psychological Society, 2002).

The Federal Government of Nigeria in the National Policy on Education (2004) Section 10 defines Special education as "a formal, special educational training given to people (children and adults) with special needs... who fall into three categories: the disabled, the disadvantaged and the gifted and

talented. The disabled include the visually impaired, hearing impaired, physically and health impaired, mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed, speech impaired, learning disabled and multiple handicapped. The disadvantaged include children of nomadic pastoralists, migrant fisher folk... who, due to their lifestyles and means of livelihood, are unable to have access to conventional education provision and, therefore, require special education to cater for their particular/peculiar needs and circumstances. The gifted or talented, on the other hand, are at the other end of the spectrum of special needs."

Similarly, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) identified fourteen categories of students with special needs. These categories include autism spectrum disorders, deaf-blindness, deafness, developmental delay, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, mental retardation, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury and visual impairment including blindness.

These impairments or deprivations make the children unable to cope with the normal school class organization and teaching methods. In order to adequately cater for the needs of the different categories of children with special needs in the school system, Uppal and Dey (2001) as cited in Mangai (2007) submitted that inclusive educational requirements of children with special needs include a common curriculum with a view to accommodating the differential learning needs of the children.

Besides, the expression 'inclusive education' portrays a shift of focus from the child to the school. In other words, the major work has to be done by the school and not the child. Inclusive education therefore emphasizes school reform and school development. Changes are made in the way schools are organized, in the curriculum and in teaching strategies, to accommodate the range of needs and abilities of all students. Buttressing this basic feature of inclusive education practice, Ainscow, Booth, Dyson, Farrell, Frankham,

Gallannaugh, Howes, and Smith (2006) posited that inclusive education practice requires significant changes to be made to the content, delivery and organisation of mainstream programmes and is a whole school endeavour which aims to accommodate the learning needs of all students. Moreover, these researchers noted that the discourse on inclusive education has moved beyond simply focusing on the response to individuals to explore how settings, policies, cultures and structures can recognise and value diversity.

In the same vein, Giangreco (1997) averred that features which are common to schools where inclusive educational practice are said to be thriving are:

- collaborative teamwork
- a shared framework
- family involvement
- general educator ownership
- clear role relationships among professionals
- effective use of support staff
- meaningful Individual Education Plans (IEPs)
- procedures for evaluating effectiveness

In addition, Lipsky and Gartner (1997) also reported common factors present where inclusive educational practice thrives to include: visionary educational leadership, refocused use of assessment, appropriate funding levels, curriculum adaptations and instructional practices.

In specific terms, collaborative teamwork entails participation of pupils, teachers, parents and community members. This participation must be strengthened and sustained. The pupils are the key stakeholders in education; they are therefore invaluable to the success of the inclusive educational process (Rose & Shevlin, 2005). Pupils' insight and perspectives have the potential to provide crucial directions for school improvement and information to enhance learning, teaching and relationships (Gross, 2002). Teachers who are able to take responsibility of inclusion are central to successful inclusion. Effective instructional strategies must be employed while continuously maintaining a strong relationship with professional learning communities.

Parents on the other hand are usually in a position to provide essential and useful first-hand information about their children. When family members are actively involved, the quality of education is positively influenced (Giangreco, 1997).

Visionary leadership involves a united commitment by the school and its staff towards supporting inclusive education. They must be willing to struggle, learn and seek answers when specific approaches pose challenges. The school and its staff members must also be committed to an effective and collaborative support system with emphasis on the educational, social and medical needs of the students.

Furthermore, an accessible and flexible curricula, a vital key to meeting the needs of learners is needed. The curricula must take different abilities and needs into consideration. To this end, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2005) suggested strategies such as flexible time frame for work completion, differentiation of tasks and additional support. Besides, the Department of Education and Science (2007) enumerated thirteen factors which enhance effective teaching of students in an inclusive education setting such as, a variety of teaching strategies and approaches; clear learning objectives outlined at the beginning of the lesson, reference made to them during the lesson, and a review with the students of what has been learned at the end of lesson; formative assessment strategies for identifying the students' progress that are used to help inform teaching approaches; the content of lessons is matched to the needs of the students and their levels of ability; multi-sensory approaches to learning and teaching; materials, including concrete materials, are appropriate to the needs, ages, interests, and aptitudes of the students and deviations from lesson plans when unexpected learning opportunities arise do not result in the loss of the original objectives of the lesson, to mention a few.

As regards assessment in an inclusive educational setting, it is ideal to recognize all

achievements. Learners' involvement in the assessment process based on performance against goals is enhanced through the setting of personal goals (National Council for Special Education (NCSE) 2010). The Individualised Educational Plans (IEPs) of learners should be drawn with the active involvement of the parents, teachers, as well as the students. They must all come together to look closely at the learner's unique needs and set appropriate goals. It is also vital that the IEP is managed in such a way that the individual does not feel marginalized or different. The students should be encouraged to achieve set goals (NCSE, 2010). In addition, the IEPs should be periodically reviewed to ascertain its efficiency in meeting the individual's needs, accommodate changes and new developments as well as to enhance achievement to the best of their ability to ensure functioning as independently as possible.

#### MODELS OF INCLUSION

According to Heiman (2004), there are four different models of inclusion. These are:

- a. In-and-out
- b. Two-teachers
- c. Full inclusion
- d. Rejection of inclusion

**In-and-Out Model:** Some of the strong supporters of this model believe that students with disabilities would benefit from two worlds: the special instruction they needed, together with regular lessons and interactions with their peers in regular settings.

**The Two-Teacher Model:** This model was somewhat popular in Israel and less so in Britain. According to this model, two teachers teach simultaneously in the classroom with one of them, who has training in special education, concentrating on the students with disabilities.

**Full Inclusion:** In practice, it calls for the inclusion of full educational programmes of the school (curricular and co-curricular) on full time as practised by a school in its regular timetable. All types of services for helping the

children according to their special needs and normality are taken to the individual child in the school setting. Proponents of this viewpoint think that additional support and cooperation between teachers in addition to services within the educational system would engender the success of full inclusion.

**Rejection of Inclusion:** Those who support this model believe that it would be better for students with disabilities to study in separate classes, given special programmes, so that they could progress at their own pace. They assert that such a model is more effective since special needs students in an inclusive class would never be able to reach the academic level of the regular students.

#### BENEFITS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION TO CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

According to existing literature, children with special needs derive a lot of benefits from inclusive education practice. Some of these benefits are presented in this section.

Inclusive education is a process of educating all children. All children are included in this system of education in their local schools and general classes without any discrimination and consideration of their unique nature or special needs. UNESCO (1994) implored all schools to accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. According to UNESCO, many children experience learning difficulties and thus have special educational needs at some time during their schooling. Schools are therefore enjoined to find ways of successfully educating all children, including those who have serious disadvantages and disabilities. Furthermore, Ainscow, Booth, Dyson, Farrell, Frankham, Gallannaugh, Howes, and Smith (2006) noted that the concept of inclusive education embraces those who are at risk of marginalization or exclusion for whatever reason. It can be thought of as an approach that seeks to address 'barriers to learning and participation', and provide 'resources to support learning and participation'.

Inclusive education provides unique opportunities for children with special needs to receive education with peers of the same age groups who do not have disability. In a similar vein, Galadima (n.d) explained that inclusive education enables children with special needs to become socially integrated. He argued that children with special needs are eventually expected to live and walk within the larger society, if they are restricted from their other peers (through segregated schools), they would develop deficits in social skills and adopt wrong perceptions of one another. Thus, it can be inferred that inclusive education offers children without special needs a better understanding of disability and how to live with those with special needs.

Inclusive education enables children with special needs to get opportunities to participate in shared educational experiences while pursuing individually appropriate learning objectives with necessary teaching-learning strategies, supports and accommodation needed for making inclusion a success for all. Next, inclusive education seeks all round development of children with special needs: by providing opportunities and integration in areas of academic, physical, social, emotional and vocational education programmes of the schools (UNESCO, 1994). In addition, inclusive education helps children with special needs to be self-reliant and self-supporting individuals contributing in their own way to the advancement of the community and prosperity of the state.

Moreover, inclusive education tries to bring desired educational opportunities to the doorsteps of children with special needs rather than expecting them to move to segregated settings outside their immediate neighbourhood. According to the Salamanca Statement by the UNESCO (1994):

'educational policies at all levels, from the national to the local, should stipulate that a child with a disability should attend the neighbourhood school that is, the school that would be attended if the child did not have a

*African Journal of Inclusive Education* disability. Exceptions to this rule should be considered on a case-by-case basis where only education in a special school or establishment can be shown to meet the needs of the individual child' (UNESCO, 1994. PP. 17-18).

By so doing, children with special needs are able to live with their families and receive necessary support from their families and friends during the period of their education. Furthermore, inclusive education is an antithesis of segregation which is inhuman and indefensible.

Crucially, inclusive education seeks to remove all kinds of labelling and societal stigma on children with special needs and launches them into a life of belongingness and self worth. In the Salamanca statement, UNESCO averred that, 'regular schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society, and achieving an education for all' (UNESCO, 1994). It goes on to suggest that regular schools provide an effective education for the majority of children and improve the efficiency and cost effectiveness of the entire education system.

UNESCO (2005) also indicated that in countries where resources are scarce, some cost-effective measures have been identified. These include:

- ◆ utilising a trainer-of-trainer model for professional development
- ◆ linking university students in pre service training institutions with schools
- ◆ converting special needs school into resource centres to provide expertise and support to clusters of mainstream schools
- ◆ building capacity of parents and linking with community resources
- ◆ utilising students themselves in peer programmes (UNESCO, 2005).

Last, but not the least, inclusive education promotes healthy academi

competition among special needs children and their other peers without special needs. (Galadima, n.d).

### CURRENT STATE OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA

According to The Federal Ministry of Education (2008) several innovative policies that address specific needs and challenges of inclusive education have been formulated in Nigeria. These include the National Policy on HIV & AIDS for the Education Sector in Nigeria; the National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Development in Nigeria 2007; The National Policy on Gender in Basic Education (2007), the Guidelines for the Identification of Gifted Children (2006) and the Implementation Plan for Special Needs Education Strategy (2007). Data by the Federal Ministry of Education (2008) stated that the population of Nigerian children of school age with various types of disabilities is estimated to be about 3.25 million or 7% of the Nigerian population. According to this report, only 90,000 or 2.76% are enrolled in primary school, while a further 65,000 or 1.85% are in secondary schools.

Moreover, the Federal Ministry of Education (2008) reported that the guidelines for inclusive education issued by the Nigerian government address (i) the nine categories of impairment/disability and gifted/talented that "have traditionally been excluded from educational opportunities" (ii) the changes that need to occur to ensure successful inclusion: adjustments to be made to physical infrastructure, provision of special equipment and material, intensive advocacy to mobilize all stakeholders and communities/grassroots organizations partnerships, collaboration and alliance-building; the specification of the roles of key stakeholders especially the National and State Ministries and parastatals and other agencies. There are other inclusion strategies at the formal school system and a four-phase procedure comprising, "teacher training as special needs educators, deployment and retraining; and the need for establishment of special education assessment centres in every

local government area which would "provide support for inclusion through identification, referral to relevant services, and supply of adaptive materials where necessary".

Additionally, Nwazuoke (2010) observed that in Nigeria, integration of children with disabilities into the school system has only taken place in a few schools at the secondary school level (for example, Girls' High School, Akabo, Imo State; Emekuku Boys High School, Emekuku, Owerri, Imo State; Ijokodo High School, Ibadan, Oyo State, and in some primary schools in Lagos State). The question he posed was; how prepared is the primary school system to receive children with disabilities in large numbers? Again, what measures would guarantee successful implementation of inclusive education programme in the light of UBE in Nigeria? He went further to observe that regular schools in Nigeria are not adequately equipped with relevant technology in special needs education and what is available in regular schools in Nigeria may either be obsolete or under-utilized.

Galadima (n.d) stated that Sightsavers International in conjunction with Ministries of Education, Social Welfare, and Health in Sokoto, Kwara and Kaduna States Nigeria, developed an inclusive education project document in 2006. This project was designed to be implemented on a pilot basis in these three states of Nigeria for a period of three years. Galadima (n.d) reported that attempt have been made to actually integrate students with special needs into regular schools in Sokoto, but this attempt met with scepticism on the part of the teachers. In his opinion teachers in both primary and secondary schools in Sokoto State are enthusiastic and dynamic in using appropriate methods, techniques and instructional materials to enhance learning, but these teachers are still, skeptical of the workability of inclusive education arrangements in our schools.

Besides, Nwazuoke (2010) stressed that inclusive education in Nigeria has far reaching implications for personnel preparation, pedagogy, curriculum, learning, environment,

funding, conditions of service, school management structures, monitoring and evaluation. Similarly, researchers such as Okoro (2009) concluded that inclusive education is at its primary stage of implementation in Nigeria. In her opinion, Okoro (2011) maintained that as a country, Nigeria has adopted inclusive education however, the critical issue lies with its successful implementation. Okoro suggested that the collaborative effort of all stakeholders in education is required for successful implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS**

Based on the foregoing, it is important to provide the following services before inclusive education can effectively be adopted for children with special needs especially in Nigeria.

- ◆ The Federal Ministry of Education in Nigeria should embark on an awareness programme aimed at highlighting the benefits of inclusive education in Nigeria.
- ◆ Both primary and secondary school administrators should become actively involved in supporting, in ensuring that the key features of inclusive education are present in their schools and in implementing inclusive education programmes in their various schools as sound school leadership is critical and pivotal towards achieving the overall goal of the inclusive education.
- ◆ Proper planning and teacher preparation for the programme is essential. This is because inclusive education programme could be successfully implemented if the level of the teachers' competency is increased. Thus, opportunities to attend courses (pre-service and in-service education) that are related to inclusive education programme should be created, especially for those who lack exposure and training in special education.
- ◆ Training of more special education teachers should be encouraged. Teacher training programmes should incorporate the concept of inclusion as part of the curriculum, for training future special education teachers.
- ◆ The government of Nigeria should provide sufficient fund for the effective implementation of inclusive education programmes. This is because inclusive education is cost intensive and its financial implications are enormous. If possible, the government should solicit the assistance of non-governmental organization (NGOs), and philanthropic individuals, and religious bodies to focus on providing incentives to schools, which need support for making inclusion a success.
- ◆ Parental support should be encouraged at all times, if inclusive education programmes are to succeed.
- ◆ Legal and social support needs to be promoted to meet the challenge of inclusive education.
- ◆ Teachers should endeavour to utilize appropriate techniques and strategies suitable in the inclusive class set-up such as collaborative team approach activity based learning, cooperativ

learning and experiences, and creative problem solving in their classrooms.

Special education services in form of resource room facilities, individualized guidance and help from special educators and professionals may be arranged for children with special needs to remain on track in the inclusive set-up.

In conclusion, inclusive education provides a foundation for children with special needs in ways that are not feasible in special schools or classes. In view of the nature and benefits of inclusive education, it behooves all states in Nigeria to implement inclusive education programmes. Inclusive education thus requires support to services move towards the child (rather than moving the child to the services) and in the belief that children with special needs will benefit from such integration as opposed to placing them in a segregated setting.

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