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**THE CHALLENGE OF IMPLEMENTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENT IN NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

*This paper examined the concept of inclusive education, the characteristics of children with hearing impairment, benefits and the challenges of inclusive education. The authors identified some findings that highlighted the problems facing inclusive education in developing countries. The paper finally focused on factors that could enhance the successful implementation of inclusive education especially in developing countries like Nigeria.*

**Key words:** Hearing Impairment, Inclusive Education

**INTRODUCTION**

Educational programmes for children with hearing impairment have witnessed a lot of changes over the years in many parts of the world. Given the present economic situation in Nigeria, only a small percentage of children with hearing impairment could be said to have access to quality education and training in regular schools

This poses problems to professionals in the field of special education, especially in the light of the demand for equal educational opportunities for people with special needs as entrenched in the National Policy on Education (2004) by the Federal Government of Nigeria. It

is imperative for special educators, in Nigeria to familiarize themselves with innovative educational practices adopted for children with hearing impairment and other categories of children with special needs by professionals in other parts of the world notably in Britain, United States of America, Germany, France and Canada.

Hearing impairment is a generic term which refers to conditions of hearing loss ranging from mild to profound Davis and Silverman (1985), Ademokoya and Oyewumi (2001) emphasize that hearing impairment is



the inability of the individual to hear, because they believe that hearing is the ability to receive and understand sounds, using the ear.

A child who is deaf according to Heward (2000) is not able to use organ of hearing to understand speech through the ears alone, while those who are hard of hearing respond to speech and other auditory stimuli with the help of hearing aid. Generally, the children with hearing impairment are those having hearing loss either before or after birth.

The education of children with special needs in Nigeria began with segregation. Segregated system of education was first practised in the United Kingdom and later in United States of America and Canada. Okuoyibo (2001) and Olukotun (2007) asserted that the after school adjustment for children with special needs who had gone through segregation system has been a very difficult one. This implies that segregation places social handicap on children with special needs in their later years. Integration represents a placement option where children with special needs are brought into the regular schools to undertake learning activities alongside their counterparts, who are without disabilities in the same environment (Alper and Ryudak 1992, Feller and Gibson 1999). This system of education has some limitation. The students who are without hearing impairment do not accept those with hearing impairment, rather they discriminate against them.

Presently, professionals in special needs education are of the view that children with hearing impairment should be included in the regular classroom settings, because they are part of the larger society. For instance, Schiller, Courting and Kaufman (1993) maintain that on going educational reform and restructuring initiatives demand that special education be united with regular education. One of the demands placed on general education is to provide inclusion for students with disabilities through the Regular Education initiative (REI).

## **Philosophy of Inclusive Education**

Inclusive education has to do with the right of the child to education irrespective of his conditions or background. In view of that, Dixon and Verenikina (2007) posited that inclusion is a philosophy that has its root in social justice and the deinstitutionalization and civil rights movement of the 60s. According to them, the philosophy of inclusion and the development of inclusive schools have great rhetorical power and are influencing special education policy and practice. Also, the adoption of this philosophy has brought profound changes to the provision of educational services for children with special needs in most countries of the world..

Inclusive education aimed at increasing the participation of individuals with special needs in all the activities of their society both in and out of school. It is presently understood as including people with disabilities into everyday life by means of various forms of education and preparation for professional life and active participation in the society. (MYE-Portfolio of Education 2007)

## **Overview of Inclusive Education**

Inclusive education is gradually replacing integration in principles. Failure of the government, especially in the developing countries of Africa, to enforce proper equalization of education opportunities for children with special needs as their counterparts who are without disability is the bane of the emergence of inclusive education.

Inclusive education is the provision of educational services for students with disabilities in schools, where non-handicapped peers attend and directly supervised by general education teachers, with special education support and assistance as determined appropriate through the individualized Educational Planning Committee (IEPC). (Michigan Department of Education, 1991)

Furthermore, Obi and Mensah (2005) indicated that inclusion is based on the philosophy that, children with disabilities should be given opportunity to learn, play, grow, work and live together without any inhibition. Inclusion



is a system of education that brings together all categories of children in a teaching and learning environment. They include children with hearing impairment, visual impairment, intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities, learning disabilities, those without disabilities, as well as, gifted and talented children. Inclusion entails a total reform and restructuring of the school system in order for all children to have equal access to educational and social opportunities in their environment.

Furthermore, Obi *et al.*, (2005), Smith, Finn, and Dowdy, (1993) stated that inclusion means that:

- every child should have a place in the general education system.
- every child should be included in general education in classroom based on the child's needs.
- the education of children with disabilities should be seen as a shared responsibility by all teachers.
- the school should show commitment to include children with disabilities in all facets of the school life.
- inclusive education promotes the sharing together of learning experience by a group of learners from different backgrounds.

Some professionals hold the view that inclusive education in principle is an attempt to ensure that all children with disabilities including those with social, emotional and behaviour disorders are given education in the regular schools (Kanu, 2001, Olukotun, 2007). In addition, Stainback and Stainback (1992) defined inclusive school setting as a place where everyone belongs, is accepted, and supported by his or her peers and other members of the school community in the course of having his or her educational needs met. This definition implies that inclusive education provides an enabling environment for the children with disabilities by all members of the school community rather than being neglected.

Inclusive education is now a globally acceptable ideology for educating children with special needs. In view of this, scholars have over the years identified the benefits of inclusive education to children with special needs. For instance, Olukotun (2007) identified the following benefits of inclusive education:-

- No special classes or schools. That is, inclusive education does not allow for discrimination. Children with disabilities are educated in the same school environment alongside their counterparts who do not have disabilities.
- Placement in the neighborhood schools. Educational provisions are made available for children with hearing impairment in regular schools nearest to their homes
- Special education support is given to regular education
- Special teachers and support staff are readily available to complement the work of the regular classroom teachers.
- Cooperative learning practice. Children with hearing impairment and their hearing counterparts learn together in an inclusive education programme.

In view of the above, Ajuwon (2012) posited that inclusive education is a process of enhancing the capacity of the education system in any country to reach out to diverse learners. The momentum for inclusive education derives from United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) proclamation that among other things emphasizes that regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all (UNESCO, 1994). The basis of inclusive education is that pupils with special needs have a right to the benefits of a full school experience, with needed modifications and supports, alongside their peers who do not have disabilities, who receive



general education (UNESCO, 1994). Today in Nigeria, special educators, parents of students with special needs, policy makers and other stakeholders continue to debate the benefits of inclusive education (Ajuwon, 2008)

### **Challenges of Implementing Inclusive Education in Nigeria**

The views of scholars have shown that inclusive education is still at its developmental stage in Nigeria. Although, some states like, Lagos, Sokoto, Bauchi and Abia have already embarked on inclusive education. However, it should be noted that many challenges have been militating against the successful implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria. (Garuba, 2003) In view of this, Ajuwon, (2008) posited that inclusive education in Nigeria has been plagued with multiple problems including extreme politicization of education, disagreement over the role of religion in public education, inadequate funding, low and irregular teachers' salaries and limited involvement of the private sector and philanthropic citizens. Further, Ajuwon (2012) reported that inadequate teachers' professional competence, inadequate teacher preparation, inadequate knowledge of instructional techniques and behavioural skills for managing learners with special needs in the regular classroom setting are the challenges facing the successful implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria.

Furthermore, Eleweke and Michael (2000) observed that professionals are concerned about the workability of full inclusion in developing countries, like Nigeria, for some category of learners with special needs. This could be as a result of the challenges facing the implementation of the programme. According to them, the following challenges are confronting the successful implementation of inclusive education in developing countries: lack of facilities and materials, inadequate personnel training programmes, lack of funding structure and absence of enabling legislature.

In the light of the above, there seems to be unresolved fundamental issues beclouding inclusive education in Nigeria. The attitude of

the society towards those with disabilities may not be encouraging enough for the successful implementation of the programme. Also, there is also the issue of whether the regular classroom teachers will be willing to teach children with disabilities and whether the students without disabilities will want to be educated along-side children with disabilities.

### **CONCLUSION**

It is evident from this paper that inclusion of children with hearing impairment into the regular school system is very important to their educational and social development, it becomes therefore, very important that all the challenges facing its implementation should be reduced by stakeholders in the education of children with hearing impairment to the barest minimum, so that they could maximize their potentials as their counterparts who do not have disabilities.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the perceived challenges facing the successful implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria as identified in this paper, the following are recommended:

- Census should be conducted for children with special needs so that their numbers will be known for provision of services for them in the inclusive classroom.
- There should be adequate public awareness through the efforts of stakeholders in the field of special education, about the benefits of inclusive education.
- Regular Teachers should be made to undergo in-service training on issues concerning handling of children with special needs in their classrooms.
- The issue of inclusive education for children with special needs should not be a matter of policy alone in Nigeria; legislation should be put in place to back it up.



- Equipment and materials should be made available for children with hearing impairment and their counterparts with other forms of disabilities in the regular school system.
- The government of Nigeria should be ready to support the education of children with special needs by providing funds from time to time.
- Buildings should be constructed in such a way that all category of children with special needs especially those with physical disability would be accommodated.

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