

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN NIGERIA: HOW FAR?

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Abstract

This study investigated inclusive education practices as it affects persons with disabilities in Nigeria. The study involved one hundred teachers in regular primary schools and one hundred Ministry of Education staff in South West Nigeria. Two research questions were formulated. Descriptive survey was used for the study. Scheduled interview was also used to gather data. The study revealed that there are potential barriers to inclusionary practices in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Inclusive Education, Persons with Disabilities, Regular teachers, Ministry of Education Staff, South West, Nigeria.*

Introduction

Inclusive education has received international endorsement because it is seen as ensuring education in least restrictive environment for persons with disabilities. Inclusionary practices are anchored on the principle of fundamental human rights. Fundamental human rights here mean all students; irrespective of their abilities or disabilities have a right to be educated in the same classroom setting where possible. Inclusive education as observed by Farrell and Ainscow (2002) reflects the United Nations global strategy of Education for All. The Nigerian National Policy on Education (2004) stipulated that persons with disabilities should be educated in regular schools along with their non-disabled peers. The policy further stipulated that persons with disabilities would receive free education from primary school up to higher institution. The policy statement shows that Nigeria sees inclusion as an inalienable right of persons with disabilities. It is however worrying to note that Nigeria, a developing country in Africa is yet to 'catch the bug' where inclusionary practices are concerned.

The Nigerian National Policy on Education though laudable has not translated into adequate inclusive educational opportunities for persons with disabilities. The policy for now remains mere rhetoric. Oladejo and Oladejo (2011), in buttressing this observation reported that strategies that will make inclusion work in Nigeria are yet to be put in place. Regular education teachers are the pivot on which inclusive education stands. Their relevance to the success of inclusion is so important that the world cannot afford to ignore them. For inclusion to be successfully practiced support staff, disability friendly environment, appropriate facility and equipment for the teaching learning process, curriculum modification, early identification, positive attitude, awareness of what inclusion is all about and accurate census of persons with disabilities are central factors that would ensure appropriate inclusive education for persons with disabilities worldwide. Human and material support and factors such as the ones listed here are not in place to ensure that inclusion becomes feasible in Nigeria. Yeo (2005) reported the World Health Organisation (WHO) as estimating that 'there are approximately 19,000,000 (Nineteen Million) disabled people living in Nigeria'. Yeo further reported WHO as claiming that this figure is equivalent to 20% of Nigeria's total population. Nigeria cannot afford to ignore persons with disabilities because of their high population and because of their inalienable right to education. Individuals with disabilities as observed by Oladejo and Oladejo (2011) have invaluable roles to play in the national development of Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

Countries in many parts of the world have made declarative statements about inclusion and such statements have been formulated into policies that would make inclusive education work. The policies made by many developed countries of the world have been backed up with positive actions. In Nigeria, the inclusive education policy formulated by government has largely not been practicalised. This statement is supported by researches that have been conducted on what has been done so far to make inclusion work in Nigeria. There is a need to conduct further researches on what is happening to inclusive practices in Nigeria. Such researches will enable special educators and allied professionals to continuously remind the Nigeria Government and other stakeholders that it is imperative to join the band wagon of inclusionary education practices as it obtains in many countries of the developed world.

Reasons for the Study

The need to update information about inclusive education practice in Southwest Nigeria necessitated this study. The study was also carried out to establish whether facilities, equipments and materials necessary for inclusion practice to be effective are in place in Southwest Nigeria.

Significance of the study

This study is significant because it seeks to update information on what is happening to inclusive education in Nigeria. This study is also expected to be one of the studies that will continue to sensitise the Nigeria government and special educators that Nigeria needs to key into the inclusive education programme so that individuals with disabilities will have access to equal educational opportunities with their 'normal' counterparts.

Scope of the Study

This study involved two hundred participants from five states namely, Oyo, Osun, Ogun, Lagos and Kwara. One hundred regular education teachers and one hundred Ministry of Education staff were sampled.

Research Questions

- Are the participants in this study knowledgeable about inclusive education practices in Nigeria?
- What is the attitudinal response of participants towards inclusion of persons with disabilities in regular schools in Nigeria?
- Are there facilities, materials and equipment that would make inclusionary education practicable in Nigeria?

Methodology

Research Design

Descriptive survey was used to gather data for research questions 1 and 2. Scheduled interview was used to gather data for research question 3.

Population

The population of the study comprised all regular teachers in public primary schools and Ministry of Education officials in Oyo, Osun, Ogun, Lagos and Kwara states.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

20 regular education teachers and 20 Ministry of Education staff were purposively selected for the study through balloting in each of the five states selected for the study. Four teachers were sampled in each school, and five schools were sampled in each state. A total of twenty schools were selected for the study. Systematic random sampling was used to select the schools sampled for the study in each state

Validity and Reliability of Instrument

A Cronbachs Alpha of 0.79 was obtained for the instrument on knowledge of participants on inclusion, while a Cronbachs Alpha of 0.81 was obtained for the instrument on attitude of participants towards inclusion. Validity for questionnaire on participants' knowledge of inclusive education was established using item total correlation that ranged between 0.5 and 0.9. Validity for questionnaire on attitude of participants towards inclusion was established using total item correlation that ranged between 0.3 and 0.8.

Procedure for Data Collection

Rapport was established in the appropriate quarters. Purpose of the study was explained to the participants. A self-constructed questionnaire tagged; Inclusive Education Questionnaire (IEQ) was administered in this study. Section A of this instrument contained the demographic data of the participants. The instrument had thirty questionnaire items, fifteen items based on

knowledge of participants on inclusive education was in section B, while the remaining fifteen items based on attitude of participants towards inclusionary practices was in section C. The questionnaire was rated on a four point scale of Strongly agree (4) Agree (3) Strongly disagree (2) and Disagree (1). The higher the score the higher the negative attitude and lack of knowledge of respondents. Questionnaire Items were based on participants' knowledge and attitude towards including persons with disabilities in regular schools. To facilitate administration and retrieval of questionnaire, research assistants were trained and used for the study. Administration and retrieval of questionnaire was done in one week.

Method of Data Analysis

Simple percentage was used to analyse data for research questions 1 and 2. Scheduled interview was used in research question 3.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 showing participants knowledge about inclusive education practices

Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Total
96 (48%)	99 (49.5%)	02 (1.0%)	03 (1.5%)	200 (100%)

The result as shown in table 1 showed that the participants' knowledge about inclusive education practices is very low.

Table 2 showing the attitudinal response of the participants towards inclusion of persons with disabilities in regular schools

Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Total
85(42.5%)	98 (49%)	09 (4.5%)	08 (4%)	200 (100%)

Inclusive education in the Nigerian system as found out in this study is still at the theoretical realm.

The participants in this study who are supposed to be custodians of inclusive education as revealed in the above table are barely aware of the concept of inclusion, the modalities for its practice and advantages of inclusion for persons with disabilities. Respondents see inclusion as teaching special and normal students in the same class or the same school environment. Most of the respondents claimed that they do not understand the goals of inclusive education and how it would be practised in the regular classroom. Majority of the respondents strongly agreed that inclusion would be stressful and cause confusion in regular classes. Many respondents indicated that inclusion means using different curriculum to teach regular students and different groups of persons with disabilities, they also claimed that managing a class where children with different types of disabilities are present would be difficult. All the participants agreed that persons with disabilities in regular schools are taught just like all other students in the class. Participants were of the opinion that persons with disabilities should be educated in special schools. According to most respondents teaching persons with disabilities in regular schools translates to more work and more worries for regular education teachers. Many of the participants as revealed in the table above have negative attitude towards including persons with disabilities in the classroom.

Many respondents claimed that teaching persons with disability could result in having children with disabilities. A high number of participants averred that they feel uncomfortable

interacting with persons with disabilities, they also see collaboration with other specialists within the regular classroom as intrusion. A high population of respondents opined that inclusive education in regular schools is an imposition on regular teachers. UNESCO (1994), Boyle, Scriven, Durling and Downes (2011) affirmed that knowledge of inclusion and attitudinal factors play an invaluable role in the integration of special needs children within the regular education setting. It is therefore posited here that negative attitude of custodians of inclusionary practices would adversely affect persons with disabilities within and outside the classroom. Lack of knowledge where inclusionary practices are also concerned would not augur well for persons with disabilities. Scheduled interview with teachers and ministry officials revealed that Nigerian Primary schools are not disability friendly in terms of environment. Participants in this study revealed that schools are not architecturally designed to accommodate persons with disability. Oyewumi, Oyawole, Akinpelu, and Azanor (2012) in affirming this finding reported that Nigerian schools lack facilities that could make the environment conducive for persons with disabilities. Overcrowded classrooms where large population of 'normal pupils' overwhelm regular teachers, as discovered in this study does not show that Nigeria is ready to practice inclusion. This is also noted by Ajuwon (2011) and Mushoriwa (2001) Inclusion will not become possible if persons with disabilities increase the already high population of children in many of our schools in Nigeria as discovered in this study. Persons with disabilities are supposed to be educated in the nearest schools to their home. A situation where students are too many in a class means that when inclusion becomes a reality in Nigeria, persons with disabilities are going to be at disadvantage when they find themselves in classrooms with high population of students.

Scheduled interview with some participants also revealed that appropriate equipment and materials needed to make inclusion practicable are not in place. The work of Lang and Upah (2008) and Anumonye (1991) corroborated the findings of these researchers. Participants as indicated in this study are not aware of ongoing efforts by policy makers to modify the present curriculum being used by primary school teachers to accommodate inclusionary practices. They are also not aware of early intervention strategies being propounded by policy makers for early identification of persons with disabilities. Participants from the ministry reported that there are records to show the total enrolment of students with disabilities attending special schools at primary and secondary school levels. There are however, no accurate data of persons with disabilities who are in regular schools in the states sampled. According to Ajobiwe (2000) without accurate census, it will not be easy to adequately and efficiently serve people whose number is not known. The figures of persons with special needs given by the Federal Ministry of Education 1986 and the UNESCO figure of 1998 according to Adedoja (1998) are merely projections and estimate. Yeo (2005) explained that the 19,000,000 figure given by WHO as the population of persons with disabilities in Nigeria could also be an estimate. Meetings held with the National Planning Commission and the National Bureau for Statistics confirmed that there are not reliable statistics of persons with disabilities in Nigeria (Yeo, 2005). There are evidences to show that some higher institutions in Nigeria are training special educators who are potential collaborators with regular teachers once inclusion has taken root in Nigeria. Support personnel such as braillists and sign language interpreters are also available in some special schools in Nigeria. Support staffs such as itinerant teachers' resource room personnel and note takers as revealed by scheduled interview are not on ground if inclusive education were to be a project that will start very soon in Nigeria. It should not be noted that the support staff who are on ground in Nigeria for example special educators hardly collaborate with regular teachers. The basis for collaboration has not arisen because Nigeria government at all levels is yet to see the need for inclusionary practices.

Summary of findings

- ✓ Nigeria is still excluding persons with disabilities in its educational programme.
- ✓ Majority of the respondents are not knowledgeable about inclusion, its goes and practices.
- ✓ Attitude toward inclusion is mainly negative and would not make inclusion work.
- ✓ In the schools and ministries visited, response of respondents showed that inclusion is not practised.
- ✓ Nigeria public schools are overcrowded, this negate the goal of inclusion.
- ✓ The environment of regular schools is not disability friendly.
- ✓ There is no accurate census of persons with disabilities in regular schools.
- ✓ The curriculum of regular schools has not been modified to accommodate inclusionary practises.
- ✓ Scheduled interview revealed that facilities, materials and equipments needed to make learning meaningful for person with disabilities are not in place.
- ✓ Nigeria public schools are overcrowded, this negate the goal of inclusion.
- ✓ The environment of regular schools is not disability friendly.
- ✓ There is no accurate census of persons with disabilities in regular schools.
- ✓ The curriculum of regular schools has not been modified to accommodate inclusionary practises.
- ✓ Scheduled interview revealed that facilities, materials and equipments needed to make learning meaningful for person with disabilities are not in place.
- ✓ Persons with disabilities are mostly not found in regular school but in special schools.

Conclusion

Inclusive education from the perspective of these researchers could be full of partial. Full inclusion means persons with disabilities will be in the regular classroom with their non disabled counterparts. In this instance the curriculum and required facilities would be adapted to suit the needs of persons with disabilities. Inclusionists contend that special classes, separate schooling or other forms of removing children with disabilities from the regular environment should occur only when the nature or severity of the disabilities of the child is such that education in regular classes; with the use of supplementary services cannot be accomplished (Ajuwon 2012). Ajuwon, from this explanation described partial inclusion.

Nigeria is still excluding persons with disabilities, partial or full inclusion is yet to take off in all the states where this study was carried out the situation is the same for all other states in Nigeria. This is year 2015; Nigeria cannot meet the 2015 deadline of Education for All goals where inclusionary practice and persons with disabilities are concerned.

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