

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A VITAL TOOL FOR IMPROVEMENT OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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ABSTRACT

This paper basically focuses on highlighting the impact of inclusive education on children with special needs. It states that support and provision of special services in education, vocation and personal social needs is of paramount importance. And inclusive education is one of the most essential means of providing them. The paper examines the concept of inclusive education for children with special needs. It also reveals that education of children with special needs is a matter of the child's right and not privilege. Therefore, for effective identification and recognition of the child's potentialities, provision of maximum education through inclusive collaboration would be of great importance. Inclusive education will enable the child benefit from educational provisions thereby making him a functional member of a given society. The paper gives the brief history of inclusive education in Nigeria and the prospective learners in inclusive classroom setting. It discusses the tasks of teachers in inclusive classroom, challenges of inclusive education and factors for successful inclusive education.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Vital Tool, Improvement, Children, Special Needs.

INTRODUCTION

Education is to human beings what water is to fish. Education is very important to everyone, but it is especially significant to children with special needs. This is true, not only because it is an entry point to other opportunities but also because the educational impact in children with special needs can have ripple effects within a given family and beyond. It is on this view that the National Policy on Education (NPE) which is the educational blueprint in Nigeria has it that education is one of the fundamental human rights of every Nigerian child. "All Nigerian citizens, regardless of their disabilities, tribes or religion are expected to receive unconditional free and compulsory public education". Children with special needs who are not exceptional in the above, should receive this education as a matter of rights and not privilege. Education of children with special needs yields high dividends. This is so as education of children with special needs helps in maximization of individual growth and builds a sense of community for them. It helps in affording a sense of belonging to the diverse human family and evolving in feelings of being a member of a diverse community. It helps them in effective and cordial relationship and interaction with animals (people), objects and events in any given society. Several education policies and conventions not only encourage the education of children with special needs, but also in an inclusive setting.

Concept of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is a concept of effective schooling where every child has a place to study with his peers in the same physical location and appropriate services. Inclusive education came as a rescue mission in the actualization of educational and psycho-social services for children with special needs.

According to Onwubolu (2017), the education of children with special needs started with the system of segregation, after much advocacy, it changed to the system of integration (mainstreaming), and as the advocacy, continued in favour of human right, the system now in place is inclusive education. Segregation was the provision of special education to children in a secluded environment meant for only those with disabilities. Integration is the placement of children with disabilities in a regular school to learn with the 'normal' children. Integration was implemented in Nigeria when, in the third National Development Plan between 1975 and 1980 stated that integration education for children with special needs was perceived as part of the universalization process (Mohammed & Musa 2004). Inclusive education was conceived because of the desire to equalize educational opportunities for all children the world over. The conception took place at the Jomtien Conference in 1990 which was organized to discuss the way forward for effective education for all. The outcome of the conference was what is popularly known today as Jomtien Declaration on Education For All (EFA). In the view of Ozoji, (2005), inclusive education is an educational option or programme carefully designed to educate special learners with diverse needs within the restructured mainstream or school community.

In Nigeria, the National Policy on Education (Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN, 2004) stipulates inclusive education as the new educational facility that government will provide to ensure equal access and opportunity to education. The policy in FGN (2013) emphasizes that, 'persons with special needs shall be provided with inclusive education services in schools in which "normal" persons attend, in age-appropriate general education classes and directly supervised by general education teachers' (FGN, 2013; pp. 36).

The 2013 education policy also mentions that regular teachers will be trained and re-trained for the effective implementation of inclusive education. Perhaps, this indicates that Nigeria has interest and efforts for implementation of inclusive education. More so the National Policy on Special Needs Education (Federal Ministry of Education (FME, 2015) states that its mission is to ensure inclusion of persons with special needs, provide equal opportunity, equity and access in a barrier free environment. It is important to note that human right is the basis for inclusive education and access to appropriate education for children with special needs is its main thrust.

Inclusive education is not limited to children with disabilities but all children that have been excluded from school because they have learning difficulties, are disadvantaged or are out of school because of their location, parental socio-economic status, religion, race or that they are highly gifted and talented that the regular class was not challenging enough. In fact, there is a change in focus on educational service delivery to people with special needs from exclusion to inclusion. Ozoji (2005) has three essentially meanings of inclusive education to include the process of:

- enabling all learners to participate fully in the work of mainstream setting
- conveying a continuing process of breaking down barriers to learning and participation for all children and
- a right to belong to the mainstream or a joint undertaking to eradicate discrimination and to work towards equal opportunities for all pupils and students.

Brief History of Inclusive Education in Nigerian

Efforts to educate children with special needs in Nigeria have spanned over the years. Prior to the introduction of formal schooling, persons with disabilities were neglected and exterminated. However, like many other countries, the education of persons with special needs in Nigeria was initiated by the missionaries. They educated them in the segregated schools where they only interacted with the members of the family and their community during school holidays. Despite this attempt, many school-age children were still out-of-school.

One of the earliest and major attempts to educate all children came with the introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) which was launched in 1976. It was a move to provide all school-age children with free and compulsory universal primary education even though it did not record so much success. Some international declarations spurred inclusive education in Nigeria. As a follow-up of the Jomtien World Declaration of Education for all in 1990, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) was launched in 1999 by the Federal Government of Nigeria, although the programme took off in 2004 after the UBE Act was signed. This initiative was taken to provide quality basic education to all school-age Nigerian citizens. Although a laudable project, the education of children with special needs were not well catered for as the necessary accommodations and support the children required were not provided for in the schools.

The adoption of the National Policy on Education in 1977 equally influenced the efforts made to establish inclusive education in Nigeria (Agunloye, Pollingue, Davou& Osagie, 2011). In the National Policy on Education 1977 reprinted in 1981, revised in 2004, 2007 and 2013, a section was dedicated to special needs education. The aims of special education, as stated in the NPE include to:

- Give concrete meaning to the idea of equalizing educational opportunities for all children, their physical, mental, emotional disabilities notwithstanding.
- Provide access to education for all persons in an inclusive setting
- Provide adequate education for all persons with special needs in order that they may fully contribute their own quota to the development of the nation.

In the 2004, 2008 and 2013 editions of the National Policy on Education, Federal Government of Nigeria included the provision of inclusive education in the document. It addresses issue of access and participation of children with special needs in inclusive schools. It clearly states that inclusive education services will be made available to children with special needs. In 2015, the Federal Ministry of Education (FME, 2015) developed a coherent and explicit National Policy on Special Needs Education in Nigeria which is an indication that Nigeria has a guideline on the implementation of inclusive education. The policy document focused on early identification and referral, equipment, material and funding, stakeholders and their roles, different categories of persons with disabilities, special training and retaining needed

by personnel and identification and assessment of persons with special needs. It further states that inclusion will be driven based on some stated principles. These principles include: the principle of creating a least restrictive environment, zero reject, total inclusion of persons with disabilities in the ambience of the society and diversification of services beyond the school setting. Following this, some State governments developed their state's policy on inclusive education. Such states include Enugu, Lagos, Nasarawa, Kano, Plateau, Kwara, Kaduna, Adamawa and Katsina.

To ensure that inclusive education is well practiced, Nigeria also saw the need to prepare teachers who will teach in inclusive classrooms. Based on this, the Federal College of Education (Special) Oyo was established, Special education unit was established in the Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, to train teachers on research-based strategies for managing children with special needs. Apart from this, teachers' preparatory institutions such as colleges of education, institute of education, faculties of education, universities of education and so on were mandated to teach elements of special education to all their students. Sequel to the SDGs in 2015, the Federal Government initiated an in-service training programme to build the capacity of teachers. The federal government mandated the National Teachers Institute to organize training for practicing teachers. This is part of the Federal Government's commitment to achieve the SDGs 4 before 2030. This training is meant to equip serving teachers with the necessary skills to enable them to respond to the needs of diverse children in inclusive schools and to support children with special needs in regular schools. Ever since then, some inclusive schools have been in operation in some states of Nigeria.

Prospective audience/learners in inclusive classroom setting

Inclusive education is the educational process that provides opportunity, access and the enabling environment for all children to be equitably educated, without segregation or discrimination, irrespective of perceived abilities (Ozegya 2016). Inclusive classroom serves as an arena where equal educational opportunities are provided and granted to all children; the special (gifted) and "normal" It is the aim of inclusive education to see that all categories of children, whether "normal" or those with disabilities are accommodated and carried along in the teaching-learning process. The categories of children are:

a. Regular (typical) learners

These are the typically average children popularly referred to as 'normal' or sometimes called 'regular children'. They present no specific obvious learning challenges. They are of average behavioral dispositions. Their knowledge, skills as well as performance in most subject-specific areas are also average.

b. Gifted/Talented learners

The gifted learners do not usually present learning challenges. However, the behavioral dispositions can be contextual and dependent on the individual gifted child. These dispositions if not properly handled can constitute menace to the child and other children in the classroom. This category children achieves self-directed learning with minimal instructional guidance. However, they need timely anticipatory instructional prompts and feedback from the teacher. They have very high self-expectations and academic performance. They could be intellectually or creatively gifted.

c. Learners with hearing impairment

These are children who find it difficult to perceive the presence of sound. They could be hard of hearing or deaf. With reasonable accommodation and instructional modification, they can learn just like regular learners. Some of them could be as intellectually and creatively gifted as the gifted children when nurtured in the right environment.

d. Learners with visual impairment

These are children who find it difficult to see or view objects either from far or near. They are categorized into partial sightedness, long sightedness, and low vision. Children with visual impairment can learn with reasonable accommodation and instructional modification.

e. Learners with orthopedic learning disabilities

These are learners with physical impairment that affect the use of their limbs (hands and/or legs). The challenges may impede their mobility and often do not affect their mental and learning capabilities. These children can compete favourably with the regular children when the appropriate context is created and or enable for them.

f. Learners with specific learning disabilities

These are learners with one or more challenges in one or more areas of cognitive domain process. The challenges could be dyslexia (inability to read), dysgraphia (inability to write) or having problem processing and manipulating numbers, dyscalculia. Other specific learning disabilities includes attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD). This is a situation where the learner is hyperactive and unable to pay attention. Children with these challenges can also learn with reasonable accommodation and instructional modification.

g. Learners with health impairment

These are learners with health-related problems. This limits the ability of the child to concentrate or focus during the teaching and learning process. Examples of such health problems are epilepsy, heart diseases, diabetes, sickle cell, HIV, AIDS, cerebral palsy, etc. although school officials cannot treat the cases, they should be aware and have the basic knowledge of these health issues in order to make the appropriate accommodation and modification to help these children during the learning process.

h. Learners with multiple impairments

These are children who have two or more handicapping conditions, individually affecting the child's learning. They can learn but at different rates. They may also have specific areas of academic and or skill they excel in. It is the role of the educator to identify what makes them responsive to learning and make the appropriate instructional modification and accommodation to bring the best out of them.

Impacts of Inclusive Education

The relevance of inclusive education has been a major focus of discussion and debate for a long period of time now. Many scholars have different views and opinion on as to why

inclusive education is relevant. In view of the different assertions and declarations, UNESCO in world Vision (2012) attempted to summarize them. This she did by Identifying the educational, social and economic reasons in support of inclusive education. Some of the reasons are:

- (a) **Education is a fundamental human right:** One of the significant factors for advocating for inclusive education is that education is a fundamental human right of all irrespective of any form of disability. Several international declarations have maintained that it is the right of every child to be educated with their peers in inclusive schools where they will be accepted and valued without any form of discrimination. Children with or without disabilities have the same rights to educational opportunities under the United Nations convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989). Based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, denying children equal access to educational opportunities is an infringement on their right. All children, therefore, deserve equal access to quality education that will enable them to develop optimally. Hence segregating them is a violation of their right to be educated in schools in their community (NCSE, 2012).
- (b) **Promotion of social justice:** Another compelling reason for advocating for inclusive education is that inclusion crates a society without discrimination where equality and the right of all are nurtured and valued. It gives everyone a right to participate in and contribute to society irrespective of the differences in their abilities, languages, cultures, interests and ways of learning. The value schools place on children and the ways they are treated will invariably affect how they will be valued and treated in society. If they are well accepted in the schools, society will also accept them, but if they are neglected and discriminated against in schools, society will equally discriminate against them. Sapon-Shevin (2003) noted that inclusion is not about disability, nor is it only about schools; inclusion is about social justice.
- (c) **Inclusion is Economical:** Inclusive education has also been advocated for on the grounds that it is cost-effective and quite sustainable. What it will cost to take care of one residential school for the Blind in different locations will be greater than what is spent on deinstitutionalized schools. Inclusive education also makes it possible to maximize the same learning environments in the interest of all learners (NCSE, 2010). Several teaching materials, equipment, support staff and differentiated approaches provided for few children in segregated schools can be useful to very many children if they are adopted in regular schools.

Onwubolu (2017) opines that inclusive education is of paramount importance in every society. It further emphasizes it by stating that inclusive education is very contributive to the improvement and development of all, including those with disabilities and those without disabilities, teachers, parents and society in general.

Impacts of inclusive education on the students with special needs:

- a. Inclusive education promotes the social and academic interaction among children with and without special needs without being discriminated against or stigmatized.
- b. Inclusive education makes it possible for all children to access the general education curriculum in the same classroom.

- c. Inclusive education promotes healthy relationship and friendship among students with and without special needs.
- d. Inclusive education makes it possible for all to attend neighbourhood schools from the comfort of their homes.
- e. Inclusive education gives them the opportunity to participate in general school activities.
- f. It gives them the opportunity to meaningfully engage in school community activities.
- g. Inclusive education makes them better prepared to transit from school to community activities.
- h. Inclusive education increases the self-efficacy and self-concept of learners with special needs.
- i. It Increases the value and worth other children place on those with special needs.
- j. Inclusive education improves the social skills, social competence and communication skills of children with special needs.
- k. It reduces segregation and discrimination against children, persons with special needs.
- l. Inclusive education can improve the academic achievement of the children as they learn together.
- m. It gives them equal access and opportunity to learn with their peers in the same environment.
- n. It reduces the risk of moving from their home of distant schools.
- o. Inclusive education provides them with the opportunity to learn age- appropriate behavior.

Impacts of inclusive education on the students without disabilities (normal):

- a. Inclusive education gives them the opportunity to help their peers with special needs as they can serve as peer tutors.
- b. Inclusive education provides them with an opportunity to serve as role models both academically and behaviorally to those with special needs.
- c. It provides them with an opportunity to learn and practice the specialized skills used by persons with disabilities such as Braille, sign language and so on.
- d. It helps them to develop a sense of responsibility that they can now take care of their peers with special needs by serving as guides, transcribers or scribes to them.
- e. Inclusive education offers them an opportunity to recognize, accept and celebrate the strengths and abilities of their peers irrespective of their disability.
- f. It increases the performance of the children as they learn collaboratively.
- g. Inclusive education gives them the opportunity to value and appreciate the abilities in disability.
- h. Inclusive education enables the students to develop a positive and friendship towards their peers with special needs due to their constant interaction.

Impacts of inclusive education on Teachers:

- a. Inclusive education gives teachers an ample opportunity to learn and practice skills necessary for teaching diverse learners in their classroom.
- b. It provides them with the opportunity to learn new instructional strategies such as differentiated instruction which are very relevant for addressing the different learning, styles, interests and abilities of their classroom.

- c. Inclusive education enables them to collaborate with parents, other teachers and professional in related fields.
- d. It gives teachers the opportunity to value, respect and explore the potentials of diverse learners in their classes.
- e. Inclusive education provides them with the opportunity to interact with diverse children and also model appropriate behaviours to them.

Impacts of inclusive education on Parents:

- a. Inclusive education gives parents the psychological satisfaction and fulfilment that their child is accepted and welcomed in the neighborhood school though the child has special needs.
- b. It provides them with the opportunity to cooperate and collaborate with the teachers, school authorities and other parents of children with and without special needs.

Impacts of inclusive education on the Society:

- a. Inclusive education provides an opportunity for all stakeholders to support diverse learners.
- b. It makes society to appreciate and value their strengths and unique abilities.
- c. It reduces the cost of having separate facilities for children with special needs.

Tasks of Teachers in Inclusive Classroom

The tasks of teachers, especially in inclusive education setting involve teaching, counseling and supervisory roles. Classroom teachers are explained to be the trained, certified and qualified persons whose duties include the effective and accurate organization and management of their classrooms for teaching-learning processes. Organization in classroom simply implies a systematic arrangement or plan in which individual classroom activities are properly coordinated in order to accomplish a teaching-learning purpose while management in classroom stands for the arrangement of students and grouping of activities into units for effective teaching and learning. The effectiveness and accuracy of inclusive classroom organization and management depend on the step-to-step decisions of the teacher in the classroom. This is because teachers are the chief curriculum implementers as their duty includes day-to-day running and interaction with the students/learners in the classroom. Teachers play important roles in an inclusive classroom and where this task is not very well executed the children may be excluded, marginalized, disillusioned, frustrated and some may even drop out of school. Achieving inclusive education is a collective responsibility of professionals and experts from diverse areas of specialization to include teachers. Teachers, to a large extent, especially in inclusive classroom, determine what goes on in the classroom. Some of the roles of teachers include:

- i. Creation of a conducive and welcoming environment where all children are valued. It is the responsibility of the teacher to ensure that all children are valued irrespective of their differences and diversities. The teacher creates a child-friendly environment where every child feels safe without any fear of violence, abuse, neglect, isolation or segregation. The teacher ensures that everyone is given an opportunity to develop their strengths and potentials.
- ii. Application of various instructional methods/strategies with appropriate learning experiences that will benefit different learners in the classroom irrespective of their

- differences. The teacher also gives the children opportunities to express what they have learnt in their unique ways.
- iii. Using research-based strategies that will benefit all the children in the classroom. In doing this, the teacher considers the different learning styles, interests and areas of strengths and weaknesses of the children. The teacher uses active learning strategies and hands-on activities to get the children actively engaged.
 - iv. Modification and adoption of curriculum and differentiates instructions so that all children can be accommodated in the classroom. The teacher has the responsibility to acquire skills that will enable him modify, adapt or adopt the content, the learning materials, methods and assessment procedures. It is also the responsibility of the teacher to give the children more time to complete their learning tasks.
 - v. Provision of equal learning opportunities for the learners to engage themselves in meaningful activities that will enable them to participate in both academic and extracurricular activities.
 - vi. Collaborating with parents in determining the child's needs and goals. It is the teacher's responsibility to discuss with parents of children with special needs so as to acquire information concerning the special child's specialties, abilities, health records and medical conditions. It is through such interactions, that teachers will be able to get information on the special needs of the child as well as the areas of concerns of the parents. If for instance, the child has an intellectual or health impairment, the parents will explain this to the teacher as well as the management strategies the teacher can adopt in case of any emergency.
 - vii. Collaborating with other professionals: professionals here include psychologists, counselors, therapists, special education experts and so on. The teachers should as a matter of necessity work closely with other experts and professionals in conducting an assessment for the child, designing and individualized education programme, implementing the programme as well as evaluating the progress of the child so as to ascertain aspects of review or adjustment if any.
 - viii. Planning of lessons to accommodate the interests, abilities and needs of all learners including those with special needs and those without. This is necessary if the specific needs of the child such as medical appointment will be taken cognizance of.
 - ix. Modifying the children's behavior since children spend a good part of their time in school. The teachers adopt measures to reduce persistent mis-behavior. The teacher needs to be skilled in the use of behavior modification techniques such as positive reinforcement and token economies, among others.
 - x. Providing individualized attention to the children. Teachers provide individual learning support to children especially those with learning difficulties who would sometimes require a one-to-one attention for them to perform their learning tasks.

Challenges of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education, just like every other programme, especially education, has its challenges not minding the numerous and undoubtable benefits it provides. Inclusive education has records of benefits to individual persons and society in general, however, a number of factors deter its effective implementation. These factors come from different areas, levels and parts,

such as parents of and children with special needs, schools, government and so on. Some of the challenges include:

1. **Lack of Statistics:** One of the major challenges to the implementation of inclusive education is the lack of statistics on the number of persons with special needs. If the government does not have comprehensive information and identification on the statistics of persons with special needs, it will be very difficult if not impossible to plan and implement effective educational programmes. They may experience difficulty getting the number and the type of facilities or resources that will be commensurate with the number of persons with disabilities.
2. **Teachers' attitude:** Another major factor affecting inclusive education is teachers' attitude towards inclusive education and learners with special needs. Teachers' attitude will likely influence the attitude of the other school children towards learners with disabilities. If the teacher accepts, welcomes and values the special child, the other children in the class will do same, however, if the teachers' attitude is on the contrary, other children will reach the same way. Be it as it may, some teachers still label, isolate, neglect and stereotype learners with special needs. Some consider the inclusion as an extra burden or an activity that is not their responsibility.
3. **Lack of support staff:** Very many regular schools do not have members of staffs who will work with the regular teachers in delivering special education services to persons with special needs. Teaching a large class size especially without a support staff could hinder the effective implementation inclusive education. Especially, if the class size is so large, certainly, it will be very difficult for a single teacher to manage all the children without support staff (UNESCO, 2006).
4. **Lack of organizational change in the school system:** The organization of the school system seems to be a major challenge to the implementation of inclusive education policies. The organization of the school system is not yet flexible so as to accommodate differences in cognitive, social and perceptual skills. The strict adherence to the timetable and the curriculum content which must be covered within a stipulated time may not enable teachers to attend to the varying needs of diverse learners in the classroom. UNESCO (2006) observed that more progress will be made if we realize that an inability to attend to the varying needs of all learners in the class is due to the way schools are currently organized.
5. **Lack of adequately trained members of staff:** Lack of adequately trained members of staff has been viewed as one of the major constraints to inclusive education. Teachers are a very powerful resource in the implementation of special education but where they fail to understand the principles and practices of inclusive education it becomes a problem. Many teachers are still not adequately prepared and they do not possess the appropriate and prerequisite skills needed to accommodate and teach diverse learners in the classroom (Deiner, 1999). The presence of diverse learners with multiple intelligences, abilities and disabilities, interests, need and different learning styles requires that teachers will be well trained on best inclusive strategies and practices that will enable them to meet the varying needs of the learners (Subban, 2006). This places an increased responsibility on the teacher to be able to diversify instructional

content, methods, materials and assessment strategies to meet the needs of all learners. Unfortunately, in the traditional regular schools, teachers take the children as if they are a homogenous group. They teach them the same curriculum context, using the same process and teaching method and also expect them to express what they have learnt in the same way and in most cases using paper-pencil test. They do not take cognizance of their varying interests, needs, abilities, disabilities and learning styles. The teachers need to be retrained to adopt, adapt, modify and differentiate instructions in order to meet these varying needs and abilities.

6. **No synergy among the professionals needed for the delivery of quality inclusive education:** The services of essential personnel such as special educators, counsellors, speech therapists, occupational therapists, school nurses are lacking in schools and this affects the quality of inclusive education. In Nigeria, there is fragmentation in the service delivery to persons with special needs. The psychologists, neurologists, optometrists, physiotherapists, speech therapists and some other professionals do not see their connection in the provision of special education services. Consequently, some of the services that will enhance quality inclusive education are not provided in schools.
7. **The dearth of resources:** If schools do not have adequate facilities and equipment required in inclusive schools it would serve as a constraint to inclusive education. Lack of adequate assistive technology devices and instructional materials which persons with special needs require could be another hinderance. Many of the equipment used by persons with special needs are quite expensive. Environment is not accessible to students with special needs they will experience some difficulties (Morgan & Houghton, 2011).

Factors for Successful Inclusive Education

Basically, for effective, quality and successful implementation of inclusive education, so many factors should be put into consideration. Several factors are imperative for the successful implementation of inclusive education. This is why Mittler (2013) suggests that the government must have the political will, teachers must have the necessary skill and parents must be ready to partner with the schools to provide the necessary support. Mariga, McConkey, and Myezwa, (2014) also suggests creating a child-friendly learning environment and involving multidisciplinary professionals in providing interventional programmes for the children as factors that can facilitate inclusive education. Some of the requirements for achieving quality inclusive education include:

a. Teachers' positive attitude towards persons with special needs: If we expect learners with special needs to learn in inclusive school and succeed, then the attitude of teachers must be positive, supportive and welcoming. Positive attitudes towards children with special needs will greatly enhance their inclusion into the regular education classroom. When all children are accepted and valued in the family, classroom and the community, they will have a sense of belonging and it will boost their self-esteem and self-efficacy. The child would want to come to school without fear of discrimination or stigmatization. The teacher's favourable dispositions towards all children will make them use their spare time to give more attention to those who need it.

b. Teacher's professional development: Teacher's professional development is vital, considering the major role teachers play in the teaching and learning process. Teachers must be adequately trained so they can acquire the needed skills, ideas, information and pedagogy that will be suitable for teaching children with special needs. The teacher professional development includes the initial teacher preparation programme undertaken in teacher education institutions and in service teacher capacity building programmes which are organized intermittently through seminars and workshops. These institutions must be equipped with state-of-the-art assistive technology devices that will enable the students to have hands on experiences in the use of IT devices, drafting an IEP, and programming of children with disabilities. The number of teachers who undergo special education training and re-training needs to be increased. Furthermore, the time and the scope of training given to in-service teachers must be expanded for the effective implementation of inclusive education. The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) states that for effective inclusive education, all categories of teachers in regular schools should be trained on special service areas such as Braille reading and writing, Mobility orientation and training, Use of regular typewriter, Use of computers with jaws for persons with visual impairment, Total communication speech technique/sign language the 3R for the hearing impaired and Daily living activities or skills for persons with intellectual disabilities.

- c. **Availability of support staff:** The role of support staff cannot be undermined if quality inclusive education must be provided. The support staff gives the child one-on-one support and ensures the child participates in school programmes as much as the strength and the abilities of the child can permit. The support staff equally helps in preparing teaching materials and adapting programmes to meet the child's level of ability.
- d. **Creating an inclusive learning-friendly environment:** The physical, social and psychological environment of the school must be conducive and friendly. Adequate facilities must be made available and schools should have a learning-friendly environment where all children can learn irrespective of their differences and disabilities.
- e. **Laws and Legislations:** There are laws guiding the implementation of inclusive education in various states of Nigeria. However, these laws must not just be on paper. There is need to enforce its implementation if inclusive education must succeed.

Conclusion

Inclusive education is indeed a vital tool for improvement of children with special needs. This paper discusses the impact of inclusive education to children with special needs in particular and society at large. It is made obvious that the education of children with special needs is an issue of right of the child and NOT a privilege. Therefore, the appropriate education for children with special needs as enunciated in the Nigerian National Policy on Education can only be achieved if stakeholders and particularly the administrators of schools galvanize efforts, by recognizing the ability and potentials of the child and providing such relevant services to help the child benefit from our regular education system.

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