

INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL PROVISION: CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL EMPOWERMENT

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ABSTRACT

Global practices in education have come to frown at discrimination in the process of educational provision on the basis of gender, social standing, and religion, as well as ethnic, regional or country considerations. Viewed as that type of education which responds and addresses the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing exclusion from education, inclusive education aims to address the educational needs of all learners in conducive and supportive environment. Both disabled and non-disabled children need equal and functional education, as a right, based on their individual needs, talents, abilities and challenges. To achieve this, models and other ways such as the Magic Formula, have been discussed. Several benefits accrue from educational inclusion that border on both disabled and non-disabled children, teachers, parents and the community. At the centre of inclusive educational provision are the teachers, educators, government, family and the community. Consequently, teacher, school, government, family and the community are known to constitute impediments to the effective implementation of inclusive education. To deal with these challenges, the paper suggests that there is need to develop an empowering curricula and pedagogy that will adequately address children's educational needs, children's rights need to be respected, and the right environment must be created in order for inclusive education to thrive.

Key words: Disabled Education, Inclusive Model Need Non-disabled Right

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has been at the front burner in global discourse for decades. Children with special needs and indeed all children require attention when considering educational provision. If children with disabilities are to be attended to alone, studies have shown that generally if children's educational needs are overlooked in the first few years, there will be gaps in their development (American Psychiatric Association, APA, 2013; Rosan, 2015). In other words, children with disabilities and non-disabled children require adequate educational provision. Because all children have been born with diverse and sophisticated capacities, serious attention needs to be paid to their diverse needs, aspirations and challenges. This will require adults to support the children's emotions, understand their stressful situations, develop relationships and communication skills, promote critical thinking, and demonstrate empathy as well (Mag, Schofield & Burns, 2017).

It is against this backdrop that the paper examines the concept of inclusive education, the aim and scope of inclusive education, and the types of inclusive education. It discusses the journey into inclusive education, and the ways for implementing inclusive education. Finally, the paper discusses the benefits and impediments to inclusive education.

The Concept of Inclusive Education

A fundamental concept of inclusive education, according to UNESCO (2002) and Westwood (2013), is embedded in the belief that as much as possible, all students with special education needs (SEN) should be enrolled in their local schools, and provided with support services and education suited to their abilities and needs. All this is anchored on the

fundamental principles of respect for human diversity and the right to equal educational opportunities for all.

Inclusive education is that type of education designed for improving learning and social skills of students with special needs (Meijer, 2004). Mitchell (2014) defined inclusive education as that type of education which is designed to accommodate all students, particularly students with special needs. Citing UNESCO, Acedo (2011) saw inclusive education as "a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing exclusion from education and from within education." Buttressing this further, Acedo held that the goal of inclusive education is that the whole education system will be able to facilitate learning environments in which learners and teachers will be able to embrace and welcome the challenge and benefit of diversity.

Viewing the fact that children come from different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, Mitchell (2009) opined that education must be designed in such a way as to fit into the different needs of children. Consequently, the author saw inclusive education as "education that fits", that is, inclusive education is that education that fits the diversity of learners in every school, classroom and country. According to Sapon-Shevin (2003), "inclusive education is not about disability nor is it only about schools. Inclusive is about social justice. Inclusion demands that we ask, What kind of world do we want to create? What kinds of skills and commitment do people need to thrive in diverse society?" The author argued that "By embracing inclusion as a model of social justice, we create a world fit for all of us."

Perhaps for us to better understand and appreciate the full import of educational inclusion, we need to examine the concepts "exclusion", "segregation", and "integration". In their report, Hehir and others (2016) saw exclusion as a situation where students are directly or indirectly prevented from or denied access to education. In segregation, the authors argued that this occurs when the education of children with disabilities is provided in separate environments designed or used to respond to a particular or various impairments, in isolation from students without disabilities. The authors further held that integration refers to a process of placing persons with disabilities in existing mainstream educational institutions, as long as the former can adjust to the standardized requirements of such institutions.

Hehir and others (2016) argued that the concept of inclusion involves a systematic process of reform embodying changes and modifications in content, approaches, teaching methods, structures and strategies in education. All this should tailor towards overcoming barriers with a vision serving to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience, as well as the environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences. The authors therefore, argued that placing students with disabilities in the same learning environment with their peers without necessary changes to methods, structures, curriculum, and teaching and learning strategies, does not constitute cohesion.

Aim and Scope of Inclusive Education

What does inclusive education really set out to do? Viewed as a "process of increasing the participation of students in schools including those with disabilities", Ankutse (n.d.) posited that inclusive education "is about restructuring the cultures, policies, and practices in schools so that they respond to the diversity of students in their locality." Ankutse stressed that inclusive education focuses on those groups of learners who were in the past excluded from educational opportunities. These groups, according to the author, include persons with hearing impairment, persons with visual impairment, persons with intellectual disability, and persons with physical disability. Others are gifted and talented persons, persons with specific learning disability, persons with autism, and persons with emotional behaviour. Yet others are

children displaced by natural catastrophes and social conflicts, nomadic children, children living in extreme social and economic deprivation, and persons with deaf-blindness.

According to Adetoro (2014), inclusive education aims to address the educational needs of all learners in conducive and supportive environment in order to include learners who are excluded from education because of barrier of learning such as gender stereotyping, colour, race, religion, and socio-economic considerations. Buttressing this point, Langsberg (2005) held that inclusive education aims at increasing the participation of students in the curricula, cultures and communities of educational systems of government. Speaking further, Shongwe (2005) held that inclusive education is aimed at not only individual students' educational equality but also social and economic equality, not minding the students' intelligence, disability, gender, race, ethnicity and social background.

Mitchell (2009) has advanced four reasons why inclusive education is important. First, if given properly, inclusive education will accord learners the opportunity to gain socially and academically, and will improve their self-esteem. Secondly, inclusive education is economically viable, especially when learners with special needs will have to be transported to special schools meant for their category. In other words, instead of embarking on such a costly venture, inclusive education given broadly to disabled and non-disabled learners in the same environment has cut down on such an expenditure. Thirdly, according to the author, research shows that if properly implemented, inclusive education provides positive outcomes to learners with special education needs and other learners. Fourthly, inclusive education, viewed as a right, benefits both those with special education needs and other learners.

UNESCO in Tuggar (2014) explained that "inclusion is increasingly understood more broadly as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners to eliminate discrimination and provide accommodations for all students who are at a disadvantage because of some reasons other than disability." Inclusive education therefore, entails every child's access to education irrespective of his background, gender, religion, physical condition as of impairment, ability or other factors (Sankull, 2005). This entails further that education for all children must be viewed as a human right, and based on their potential, must be provided equally without hindrance. Acedo (2011) added that aside from the 75 million children who have been denied access to education, educational inclusion must also refer to those children in school who have been discriminated against on the basis of sex, colour, cultural background, social condition, ethnicity or other individual characteristics. These are issues that need to be conscientiously dealt with through the enactment of policies, contents and teaching approaches in order to address children's diversity. The principle of inclusive education is therefore, embedded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights expressed thus: "Every single child shall have the rights to equal education and shall acquire school education for as high as possible, based on their capacity. Education should enable children to use and improve their capability and potential....." (Bubpha, Erawan & Saihong, 2012).

Types of Inclusion

Citing the Wikipedia, Adetoro (2014) identified two types of educational inclusive. These are partial inclusion and full inclusion. In partial inclusion, the author explained that students with special needs are educated in regular classes for nearly all the day, or at least for more than half of the day but would receive specialized services outside the regular classroom such as speech therapy, physical therapy or hearing therapy as the case may require. Full inclusion deals with the total integration of all students, including those that require the most substantial educational and behavioural supports and services in a regular class.

The Journey into Inclusive Education

Mitchell (2009) related that journey into the concept, principle and need for inclusive education began in 1948 by the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, where it affirmed that elementary education should be provided free and should be made compulsory. To deal with the issue of 75 million out-of-school children globally, the United Nations came up with Declaration of Conventions. First, the Dakar Framework for Action, affirmed by 164 governments, set 2015 the dateline for implementation of the principle of Education for All. This was followed by the UN's Millennium Declarations. Two of the Millennium Declaration Goals dealt with inclusive education: the achievement of Universal Primary Education by 2015, and the elimination of gender disparity by 2005. The third UN convention dealt with the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted in 2006. Mitchell explained that the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities required Member-states, as pertains inclusive education, to provide education of persons with disabilities that encourages their participation in society, their sense of dignity and self-worth, and the development of not only their abilities but also personality and creativity as well.

Then as a buildup to the first three stages, the UNESCO Conference of 2008 devoted its theme to inclusive education thus: "Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future". This conference was attended by delegates from 153 Member-states. The delegates affirmed, among others, that Member-states should:

- (i) recognise the importance of a broadened concept of inclusive education that addresses the diverse needs of all learners;
 - (ii) further accelerate the attainment of Education for All goals;
 - (iii) address social inequity and poverty levels as priorities;
 - (iv) promote school cultures and environments that are child friendly, conducive to effective learning and inclusive of all children, healthy and protective, gender-responsive, and encourage the active role and the participation of the learners themselves, their families and their communities;
 - (v) consider as appropriate the ratification of all international conventions related to inclusion and, in particular, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted in December 2006;
 - (vi) develop early childhood care and education programmes that promote inclusion as well as early detection and interventions related to whole child development;
 - (vii) train teachers by equipping them with the appropriate skills and materials to teach diverse student populations and meet the diverse learning needs of different categories of learners through methods such as professional development at the school level and pre-service training about inclusion.
- (UNESCO, 2008.)

In developing countries of Africa, even before the UN's universal declaration of human rights, there were special schools set up which catered for the people with disabilities. In Ghana, for instance, education of the youth with disabilities started in 1936. This led to the establishment of a school for the blind in Akropong-Akwapim in 1946. Later, other schools were built for the deaf and the intellectually disabled in the 1960s. Most of the schools were segregated (Ankutse, n.d.).

In Nigeria, the National Policy on Education in 2004 came up with an education programme known as "Special Education" which was designed to cater for three categories of individuals, namely, the disabled, including people with physical, visual, hearing, mental, emotional, social, speech, learning and multiple impairments; the disadvantaged involving the children of nomadic pastorals, migrant fisher folks, migrant farmers, hunters etc., and the

gifted and talented, involving those people who have high intelligent quotient and endowed with special traits in arts, creativity, music, leadership, intellectual precocity etc and therefore, find themselves insufficiently challenged by the regular schools (FRN, 2004).

The National Policy on Education specified that education for children with special needs at all levels shall be free and government would provide the necessary facilities for training. Government would also ensure that access to education would include, among others:

1. Inclusive education or integration of special classes and units into ordinary/public schools under the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme;
2. Regular census and monitoring of people with special needs to ensure adequate educational planning and welfare programme;
3. Special education training on braille reading and writing, typewriter use, speech signs, daily living skills;
4. Special training and re-training of the personnel on capacity building to keep them abreast of latest teaching techniques on various categories of disabilities, the gifted and talented; and

In sum, according to Pingle (2015), educational inclusion has its root in special education. Provided in a separate field from general education, the author argued that special education provision has been challenged both from human rights point of view and from the perspective of effectiveness in dealing with children with special needs. Today, since the UN Declaration on Human Rights of Persons with Disabilities, government legislations in many countries of the world encourage inclusive approach to education. More so, as the National Centre on Inclusive Education, NCIE (2011), pointed out, educating students with disabilities on an equal basis reflects the fundamental principle of modern democracy that all citizens deserve the right to claim a place in mainstream society.

How to Implement Inclusive Education

Global practices in educational provision have led to the development of ways for implementing inclusive education. While some, like Mitchell (2009), provided what has now come to be known as Magic Formula, others like Griffiths (2002) and Choltharmon (2003), have relied on models. The Magic Formula provided by Mitchell is presented as follows:

Inclusive Education = V + P + 5As + S + R + L, where

V = *Vision*: This means that inclusive education needs a commitment from educators at all levels of the system.

P = *Placement*: Here, learners need to be placed in age-appropriate classrooms.

5As= (i) Adapted Curriculum (ii) Adapted Assessment (iii) Adapted Teaching (iv) Acceptance (v) Access

Speaking on the five As, Forchin (2007) and Westwood (2013) held that in order to effectively undertake inclusive education, the curriculum and teaching and learning processes must be made to match closely with the needs and talents of individual students. This is aside from the fact that the learning environment will be consciously created to enable students to benefit maximally from individualized approach. The environment should be one that should be able to encourage learners to make choices, be involved in participatory audience thereby enhancing individual competency (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In respect of teaching methods, teachers will be required to vary their strategies for presentation and student engagement during lessons. There will also be the need to modify methods of assessment of learning to fit into the students' talents and abilities (Lewis & Batts, 2005; Rock, Gregg, Ellis & Anderson, 2007).

S = *Support*: Support from a team of professionals such as teacher aides, specialist advisers and therapists, will be required, in addition to regular classroom teachers.

R = *Resources*: Inclusive education will succeed with adequate funding and facilities
L = *Leadership*. Here, leadership is required at all levels (government, national and local education authorities, principals and classroom teachers) in order for the Magic Formula to come into effect.

According to Eskay et al. (2020), the goals of inclusive education will not be realized if it is operated without models. Consequently, speaking on models in inclusive education, Choltharmon (2003) held that inclusive education involves an inclusive learning guideline which promotes equal participation of community, students and conducive environment for teaching and learning to take place smoothly. Consequently, Choltharmon developed a model for inclusive education that has now come to be known as the SEAT model. Explaining, the author said letter S stands for *students* in which academic support is provided to students irrespective of the condition of disability or ability. The letter E represents *environment*, where students with special needs are given least restricted and conducive environment. The letter A, according to Choltharmon, refers to *activities*, in which inclusive education should extend beyond learning in the classroom. It should include external and internal learning to make for sound emotional, physical and social development of learners. The last letter which is T stands for *tools*. What this means is that special learning facilities and apparatus need to be provided to learners in an inclusive classroom setting.

Griffiths and others (2002) posited that models of inclusive education encompass the following phases:

Phase 1-D: creating an avenue for caring and friendliness

Phase 2-D: establishing a ground where students can easily understand their feeling and individual differences

Phase 3-D: creating an enabling environment for skill acquisition and other intervention programmes.

On a global level, different countries adopt models of inclusive education based on their peculiarities. For instance, for a country such as Thailand, Bubpha and others (2012) pointed out that the models of inclusive education in Thailand includes those similar to and different from those practised in other countries of the world, comprising the following: 1) instructional adjustment; 2) development of teaching and learning activities, for example, learning activities based on multiple intelligence theory; 3) research on instructional approaches for students in different classes using co-teaching; 4) multiple instructional approaches; and 5) a peer tutoring approach.

In Ghana, Ankutse (n.d.) relates that there had been about six initiatives/models of implementation of inclusive education. These are Inclusive Schools without Special Education Resource Teacher Support, Inclusive Schools with Special Education Resource Teacher Support, Units for the Intellectually Disabled, Integrated Education Programme (IEP) for Children with Low Vision and Blindness, Hostel Support, and Special School as Home for Pupils with Blindness.

In order for inclusive leaning to be effective, UNESCO (2008) provided the following procedure: 1) Educational policy development of any country should give room for equal participation ; 2) There should flexibility of curriculum development in order to address the future needs of the people; 3) Facilitators should be trained to be tolerant and show love to all the learners disregarding learning difficulty; and 4) Communities and families should be actively involved financially, morally and otherwise. Speaking on the teacher factor in inclusive education, the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2003), in its report, outlined the following points:

1. Inclusion depends on teachers' attitudes towards pupils with special needs, on their capacity to enhance social relations, on their view on differences in classrooms and their willingness to deal with those differences effectively.

2. Teachers need a repertoire of skills, expertise, knowledge, pedagogical approaches, adequate teaching methods and materials and time if they are to address diversity effectively within their classrooms.
3. Teachers need support from inside and outside the school. Leadership on the level of the head teacher, school districts, communities and governments is crucial.
4. Regional co-operation between agencies and parents is a prerequisite for effective inclusion.
5. Governments should express a clear view on inclusion and provide adequate conditions, which allows a flexible use of resources.

It is true that if teachers are well considered and given the necessary support they will be able to fully commit to undertaking inclusive education. This point is buttressed in a study by Chan and Yuen (2015) which found that the school was reasonably successful in raising teachers' awareness about inclusive education principles, creating a whole school culture inclusiveness, and forming partnership with parents. The study discovered however that teachers' commitment to implementation of inclusive practices in their classrooms differed from teacher to teacher. Some teachers could not adopt well enough in their teaching approach and had difficulties differentiating between instruction and learning activities.

On the whole, the study report by the European Agency for Development in Education (2003) revealed five groups of factors for effective inclusive education. These are cooperative teaching, cooperative learning, collaborative problem-solving, heterogeneous grouping and effective teaching. In cooperative teaching, teachers need support from, and to be able to cooperate with, a range of colleagues within the school and professionals outside the school. In cooperative learning, pupil tutoring is effective on cognitive and affective areas of pupils' learning and development. In other words, where pupils assist each other within a flexible pupil grouping, they profit from learning together. Collaboration between teachers and pupils or between teachers assists greatly in an inclusive class setting. The report also shows that the heterogeneous grouping and a more differentiated approach on education are necessary and effective when dealing with a diversity of pupils in the classroom. The report finally shows that the four factors discussed here need to take place within an effective school/teaching approach which is the fifth factor, where education is based on assessment and evaluation high expectations, direct instruction and feedback.

Benefits of Educational Inclusion

According to Kochhar, West and Taymans (2000), students with disabilities benefit in the sense that inclusion facilitates more appropriate social behavior because of higher expectations in the general education classroom; offers a wide circle of support, including social support from classmates without disabilities; and improves the ability of students and teachers to adapt to different teaching and learning styles. Speaking in the same vein, Wang and Walberg (1995) and Katz and Mirenda (2002) attest to the fact that students with disabilities who received their education in general education classes performed wonderfully well such that they did better than their peers who have been educated in segregated classes. A study by Hehir and colleagues conducted in 2012 examined the performance of more than 68,000 primary and secondary school students with disabilities in the State of Massachusetts, United States of America. The study found that after strategically controlling variables such as family income, school quality and English proficiency, on the average, students with disabilities had spent a larger proportion of their school day with their non-disabled peers, performed significantly better on tests of language and mathematics than students with similar disabilities who spent a small proportion of their school by day without disabled peers (Hehir, Grindal & Eidelman, 2012).

Mag, Sinfield and Burns (2017) identified the benefits of inclusive education, inter alia: developing individual strengths and gifts, fostering a school culture of respect and belonging,

providing opportunities to learn about and accept individual differences, lessening the impact of harassment and bullying, developing friendships with a wide variety of other children, each with their own individual needs and abilities, and positively affecting both their school and community to appreciate diversity and inclusion on a broader level.

CYDA (2019) summarized the benefits of inclusive education to students, families and the community, and to teachers and educators. For students who experience disability, they have better academic and vocational outcomes than their peers in non-inclusive settings, greater social interaction, resulting in more opportunities to establish and maintain friendships, and a sense of belonging and a self-concept of not just being a receiver of help but also a giver of help. For all students, the benefits are a more positive sense of self and self-worth, and greater social development. For families and the community, there is greater psychological and economic wellbeing for parents, and greater community cohesion. Inclusive education is beneficial to teachers and educators as it promotes their professional growth, increases personal satisfaction, there is higher quality of engagement with students, and greater confidence in their ability as educators. The social, communicative and academic benefits of inclusive education to students have also been noted by Beukelman & Mirenda (2005), McSheehan, Sonnenmeier, and Jorgensen (2009), and Tuggar (2014).

Impediments to Inclusive Education

Impediments to inclusive education are numerous and vary from country to country. According to Mitchell (2005), these impediments can be recognized as antagonistic social and cultural beliefs, economic factors, lack of mechanisms to ensure compliance, and a top-down introduction of inclusive education without adequate preparation of schools and communities. Others are inadequate educational infrastructures, particularly in rural and remote areas, large class sizes, and the dominance of the medical model of disability. Yet others are conservative attitudes among teachers and teacher educators, parental resistance, a lack of skills among teachers, rigid curricula and examination systems, and fragile democratic institutions. It has also been found that lack of knowledge about how to create classrooms that are truly inclusive, the persistence of segregated educational practices and the diverse views among parents and teachers about the appropriateness of inclusive education, are some of the problems associated with inclusive education (GÖransson & Nilholm, 2014; Nilholm, 2020).

Inclusive education, viewed mainly from the backdrop of special needs children have a number of challenges, making its success difficult. Blackie (2010) in a study on the perceptions of educators towards inclusive education, found that educators perceived themselves to be inadequately trained to undertake the work of inclusive education. In the classroom, the study found perceived barriers to learning in the classroom which were emotional and cognitive barriers to learning. Language was also found by the study to be a barrier to inclusive education. Buttressing the position of Blackie, and Bubpha and others (2012) argued that the teacher constitutes a challenge to inclusive education. Teachers, according to the authors, do not appear to be ready to teach children with special need in inclusive classrooms. The teachers do not plan and therefore, needed to learn new teaching approaches. All this, the authors contended, have to do with the teachers' training and experience. On the part of children, Bubpha and others, held that the children's difficulty lies in their inability to turn up regularly in classes that adopted teaching approaches suitable to such children with special need. The study by Mag et al. (2017) buttressed previous works. It discovered that a fundamental challenge to inclusive education deals with the teacher, stressing that "lack of teacher training in facilitating the learning of students with disabilities is a barrier to individuals being able to succeed in education."

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Viewing how important children are in the global arena, it became necessary to protect the future of the children by providing them with functional education on an equal basis, as a right and not a privilege. Catering for both children with special needs (disabled children) and non-disabled children, inclusive education aims at the total development of the children. Challenges to inclusive education have been identified to include those dealing with teachers, educators, pupils, the school, parents and the community. In view of the challenges, the paper makes the following recommendations:

1. There is need for policy reform which will demonstrate government's commitment to inclusive education. Schools need to identify policies and strategies for education management, which serves diverse needs of children.
2. The attitude of administrators and teachers, teaching and learning processes, and parents/community must be enhanced (Bubpha et al., 2012).
3. There is the need to create a culturally responsive school environment for the children of the fishermen, the cattle rearers and hunters such that their curriculum is adapted to their traditional job-orientation and modern skills provided for them in the own classroom settings (Adetoro, 2014).
4. There is need for parental support for the successful implementation of inclusive education.
5. There is need to ensure that inclusive education involves creating an environment that will allow and make it easier for all students to feel supported emotionally. The students will need to be respected and appreciated for their personal differences (Gaad, 2004).
6. Children and their rights need to be respected in spite of the economic condition of parents and their countries of origin.
7. There is need to develop an empowering curricula and pedagogy that will adequately address children's educational needs.

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