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6 Roles of Stakeholders in the Provision of Inclusive Education for Secondary School Students with Hearing Impairment in Nigeria

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Abstract: *This paper examined the roles of stakeholders in the provision of inclusive education for secondary school students with hearing impairment in Nigeria. The meaning and benefits of inclusive education were extensively discussed. The education stakeholders were identified as the parents, teachers, policymakers, and society, and their roles were discussed. The importance of depoliticizing inclusive education for national development, and the need for Public-Private Partnership in the provision of inclusive education for secondary school students with hearing impairment in Nigeria were discussed. Recommendations were made based on the submission made by the author.*

Key words: Depoliticizing, Inclusive education, Stakeholders, Students with hearing impairment

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Introduction

Educating students with special needs in an inclusive educational setting has been a debate for several years; but in recent times, the debate about inclusive education has moved from developed countries like the United States and Canada to a developing country like Nigeria, where an official policy of educating children and youths with disabilities alongside their peers without disabilities in ordinary schools has been adopted (Ajuwon, 2012; National Policy on Education, 2004). Globally, most countries of the world are now embracing inclusive education as a means of giving access to education to children with special needs due to its benefits to those with special needs and their counterparts without special needs. These categories of learners include those with hearing impairment, autism, intellectual disabilities, and learning disabilities. Inclusive education, according to Akiniyi, Nyangia, and Orodho

(2015), is 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 within and from education. It involves a range of changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures, and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children with special educational needs, and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2005).

Concept of Inclusive Education

Inclusion involves a process of reform and restructuring of schools as a whole to ensure that all students have access to a wide range of educational and social opportunities offered by the school. This includes curriculum being offered, the assessment recording, and reporting the students' achievements. The agenda of inclusive education has to be concerned with overcoming barriers to participation in education that may be experienced by students (Akiniyi, Nyangia, and Orodho, 2013).

In addition, Skidmore (2004) concluded that in overall terms, inclusive education implies four key elements, namely:

- It is essentially a process of looking for the most appropriate ways of responding to diversity as well as trying to understand how to learn from differences.
- It is linked to stimulating, through multiple strategies, the creativity and students' capacity to address and resolve problems.
- It comprises the right of the child to attend school, express his/her opinion, have quality learning experiences, and attain valuable learning outcomes, and
- It implies the moral responsibility of prioritizing those students who are at risk of being marginalized and excluded from the school and obtaining low learning outcomes.

Moreover, the inclusion of students with special needs in regular schools has become a major concern of educational research over the years because of its social and academic importance to the students, in terms of opportunities for learning and social interaction. Inclusive

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education for students with hearing impairment, for instance, according to Isaiah and Aderibigbe (2012) will afford them the opportunity to interact with their peers with normal hearing in the inclusive classroom setting, both socially and academically. According to them, inclusive education will also afford students with hearing impairment the privilege to attain equal educational and social opportunities with their normal hearing counterparts. This is entrenched in the National Policy on Education (2008) by the Federal Government of Nigeria. It is imperative for special educators in Nigeria to familiarize themselves with innovative educational practices adopted for students with hearing impairment and other categories of students with special needs by professionals in other parts of the world, notably Britain, United States of America, Germany, France, and Canada.

Although, many countries of the world are now embracing the practice of inclusive education due to its benefits to both students with hearing impairment and those with other forms of special needs like visual impairment, autism, communication disorders, and intellectual disabilities as well as their counterparts without disabilities, the success of the practice of inclusive education will absolutely depend on the roles played by key stakeholders in the education of students with special needs. Stakeholders, according to Olagunju and Aranmolate (2012), are people involved in the planning and execution of the programme. They include the government or policymakers, teachers, parents, community, and the students with special needs themselves. The workability of inclusive education in any country depends majorly on depoliticization of the educational system; that is, the needful should be done by ensuring that government policies on education are adequately implemented and all the major stakeholders are allowed to play their roles by contributing their quotas to the implementation of inclusive education practice.

Benefits of Inclusive Education to Students with Hearing Impairment

Students with hearing impairment are those with hearing loss that ranges from mild to profound. They have the right to access equal basic education like their counterparts with normal hearing. The major way to achieve this is through inclusive education. Scholars have identified some of the benefits of inclusive

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education to students with hearing impairment. For instance, Omoni and Ijeh (2012) stressed that inclusive education offers a kind of environment that encourages positive self-perception in students with hearing impairment. Again, it offers each child the chance to be an equally valued member of a school culture.

Lazarus and Ajibade (2012) identified the following benefits of inclusive education to students with special needs, including those with hearing impairment:

- Barriers against the education of students with special needs are removed through inclusive education.
- Inclusive education provides adequate support for learning and participation of learners with special needs.
- It enables children with special needs to get opportunities to participate in shared educational experiences while pursing individually appropriately learning objectives with necessary teaching-learning strategies, supports, and accommodation needed for making inclusion a success for all.

Similarly, Isaiah and Aderibigbe (2012) identified benefits of inclusive education to students with hearing impairment thus:

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

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The Roles of Stakeholders in the Success of Inclusive Education for Students with Hearing Impairment

The stakeholders – parents, teachers, policymakers and members of society – have some major roles to play for the success of inclusive education for secondary schools students with hearing impairment in Nigeria. It is pertinent to identify these roles in this paper.

The Roles of the Parents

The roles of the parents of students with hearing impairment in the provision of inclusion in Nigeria cannot be underestimated. This is because, the home is the first point of contact for the child; this makes the active involvement of parents in the provision of inclusive education for students with hearing impairment to be very crucial. Onu (2008) submitted that the influence of parents is a major factor in raising children with special needs. For a successful programme for a child with disability, the child has to be seen in the context of where he lives. Also, the fact remains that early intervention may decrease the chances of the disability degenerating, and it can help to foster parent-child interactions. This means that the home acts as a link between the child and the larger society. The child that is well taken care of or accepted from home is likely to adjust well in an inclusive education setting. This is the reason why parents should be encouraged to participate in the implementation of inclusive education for students with hearing impairment. Parents should ensure that the needs of the child are met in the inclusive classroom setting. This is possible when parents monitor the academic progress of their children as well as the provision of other support services like the interpreters and note-takers. In view of these factors, Onu (2008) summarized the roles of parents in the provision of quality education for students with special needs:

(1) Acquisition of related skills and behaviour management for helping them to cope with their learning and social environment.

(2) Parents should act as pressure group to ensure that policies that will provide subsidies, free education, and employment opportunities are enacted for the sake of their children with special needs.

In addition, the involvement of parents in the provision of inclusive education for students with special needs will afford them three major functions:

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(1) Opportunity to relate their observation of their children to professionals, and thus act as a valuable source of information.

(2) Parents are involved in the teaching process of their children. They can thus teach their children pre-academic and academic skills.

(3) Parents, if trained, help to reinforce learning. They ensure that functional skills learned in the school are applied at home (Onu, 2008). The involvement of parents in the provision of inclusive education will help them participate as decision-makers in educating their children.

Roles of Teachers

It is very obvious that teachers, whether regular or special education teachers, determine what happens in classrooms. Their perception and attitude towards the successful implementation of inclusive education is very crucial. That is the reason why their roles in handling students with special needs are very important. Teachers should believe in the workability of inclusive education. In view of this, teachers should develop new ways of believing that:

- All children can learn.
- They have the capacity to make the difference in children's lives (Onyezere, 2012)

Teachers should collaborate with parents and other professionals on the process of inclusive education. In other words, they should act as team players in order to make inclusive education work.

Ellina and Porter (2005) submitted that teachers do not have concerns about inclusion. Many surveys have found that teachers' attitude towards inclusion is not particularly positive. Further, they express concern about lack of preparation for inclusion and teaching all learners. However, in situations where teachers are encouraged to try out a range of teaching strategies, they reported that they knew more than they thought they knew, and for the most part, children learn in similar ways. Also, many teachers reported that they did not think that they could teach such students, but their confidence and repertoire of teaching strategies developed over time. This means that with constant practice teachers can develop positive attitudes towards inclusive education.

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Roles of Policymakers

Policymakers, or government agents, are part of the team players in the provision of inclusive education for students with hearing impairment in Nigeria. The National Policy on Education (2008) stipulated that students with special needs should enjoy equal educational right as their counterparts who are without special needs. Many laudable policies have been formulated to ensure that students with special needs, including those with hearing impairment, are provided with quality basic education. Unfortunately, many of these do not have access to quality education due to social and educational barriers. Consequently, a lot of them are either dropouts, or are on the streets begging for alms.

It is therefore very important that policymakers wake up to their responsibilities by ensuring that the policies made in respect of inclusive education are not on papers alone, but they also get to the level of implementation. In view of this, the roles of the policymakers, or government agencies, should include provision of resources, funding, training and retraining of personnel, and monitoring of policy implementation through relevant government agencies.

Onu (2008) submitted that in the provision of needed resources, especially for education, the concern of any government should not end with merely supplying the resources, but ensuring that they are evenly distributed among its populace, which includes students with hearing impairment.

Furthermore, it is the responsibility of the government or its agents to ensure that personnel like the regular teachers, special educators, medical personnel, and support staff are adequately trained, while in-service training should equally be provided for the existing members of staff who are saddled with the responsibilities of educating students with hearing impairment in the inclusive educational setting.

Societal Roles

Members of society have vital roles to play in the provision of inclusive education for students with hearing impairment in Nigeria, since it has to do with inclusion socially and academically. In many cases in Nigeria, members of society are not favourably disposed to students with hearing impairment and those with other forms of disabilities. There is no way inclusive education can work if the negative attitude of members of society towards students with

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special needs continues. For instance, Ajobiewe (2014) submitted that disability is about people and their social relationships and, as such, it is about the life of people with disabilities and their interaction with society. People with disabilities still experience societal barriers and negative attitudes and discrimination in many societies. In our contemporary societies, persons with special needs and their families continue to experience stigma, disempowerment, social, educational, and economic manipulations. According to Ajobiewe (2014), persons with special needs face a wide variety of barriers, including:

- Attitudinal barriers: these are experienced among persons with disabilities themselves, health employers, and service providers.
- Policy barriers: resulting from policy design and delivery, which do not take persons with special needs into consideration, and
- Those linked to empowerment as a result of which persons with special needs are not listened to, consulted, or involved.

In view of the above, there is the need for members of society to change their attitude towards persons with special needs and support the government in providing services to them. Members of society should also believe that students with special needs can be educated like their counterparts who are without disabilities. Again, they should respect the worth of persons with disabilities. Inclusive education will work in such a disability-friendly environment.

Depoliticizing Inclusive Education in Nigeria for National Development

Nigeria has embraced the policy of Education for All (EFA) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB). A lot of policies have been formulated to ensure that students with special needs receive or gain access to quality basic education like their counterparts who are without disabilities through inclusive education. All these policies are laudable, but most of them are just paper work that lack implementation. Consequently, many students with special needs, including those with hearing impairment, are out of school. Isaiah (2015) reported that 90 per cent of students with special needs in developing countries do not go to school due to several factors such as:

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- Lack of proper understanding of the concept of inclusion.
- Inadequate government leadership.
- Non-continuity in government policies.
- Politicization of education for persons with special needs.

In most cases in Nigeria and other African countries, experts are not consulted when educational policies are to be made. Policymakers are selected on the basis of politics; hence, the policies made are at variance with the needs of persons with special needs. Apart from that, representatives of persons with special needs are not consulted when policies concerning them are to be made. Consequently, educational policies and programs do not reflect the need of individual differences or disabilities. This was buttressed by (Abang, 2005; Fabunmi, 2005; Obiakor, 1991; Ozoji, 2003) the fact that the inability of the Nigerian government to pass laws to support persons with disabilities has continued to create ongoing myths about causes of disabilities.

Furthermore, the educational set up is mainly structured and not accommodating of students with hearing impairment. How are students with hearing impairment expected to cope in inclusive classrooms without interpreters or note-takers? Or how will the child with speech and language defect be taught by a teacher who lacks the skills to communicate? Obviously, a lot of politics are played in the provision of inclusive education for learners with special needs generally in Nigeria, and those with hearing impairment in particular. These include poor funding and weak, or lack of enforcement mechanism. In view of these, Isaiah (2015) reported that one of the problems facing special needs education or inclusive education is poor funding. Most centres or schools where students with hearing impairment are educated are ill-equipped as a result of poor funding. Again, Olorode (2012) affirmed that the implementation of the policies that are made to protect the rights of persons with special needs do not see the light of the day because of absence or weak enforcement mechanisms stimulating the punitive measures or legal actions to be taken against anyone or organizations contravening the rights of persons with special needs.

The rights of persons with special needs should be protected; the government therefore should do the needful by moving the policies concerning

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persons with special needs from paper to implementation, and remove all sorts of politics that are played in the provision of educational opportunities for persons with special needs through inclusive education in Nigeria.

Need for Public-Private Partnership in the Provision of Inclusive Education for Students with Hearing Impairment in Nigeria

Public-private partnership (PPP) is a situation whereby government, or her agents, enter into agreement with private organizations in order to provide educational or social services to the citizens. In the case of provision of inclusive education in Nigeria, private organizations should be encouraged to partner with the government in order to fund or maintain the existing schools or build new ones. This will help to remove the dragging of feet that is involved in the provision of quality basic education for students with hearing impairment and their counterparts with other forms of disabilities.

It is very obvious that government faces a lot of difficulties in providing education for her citizens, especially those with special needs. This could be due to lack of funds or interest in the education of students with special needs. There is the need, therefore, to involve the private sector, such as non-governmental organizations, business corporations, and communities, in the finance and management of schools (Manisha & Shikha, 2013).

Public-private partnership (PPP), according to Jandhyala (2010), is projected as an innovative idea to tap private resources and to encourage the active participation of the private sector in national development. It is helpful when public resources are projected to be inadequate to meet needs. The policy initiatives of PPP are now being extended to human development sectors such as education. Nigeria should, as a matter of fact, embrace PPP in her efforts to provide inclusive education for secondary school students with hearing impairment. This will boost their access to equal basic education like their counterparts who are without disabilities. According to Juan (2017), the benefits of PPP are:

- It provides better infrastructure solutions than initiatives that are either wholly public or wholly private. Each partner does its best.
- It results in faster project completion and reduces delays on infrastructure projects by including completion time as a measure of performance.

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- A PPP return on investment, or ROI, might be greater than traditional, entire private, or government methods. Innovative and financing approaches become available when the two entities work together.
- The feasibility of a project or program can be detected early. This could encourage proper planning.
- The greater efficiency of PPP reduced government budget and deficits.
- High-quality standards are obtained and maintained through PPP.

All these benefits could be enjoyed by the Nigerian government if she embraces PPP in the process of providing inclusive education for secondary school students with hearing impairment.

Conclusion

Inclusive education has been found to be a good means of educating students with hearing impairment, but its workability depends to a very large extent on the roles played by all the stakeholders in education, that is, students, parents, teachers, policymakers and the society as a whole. It is pertinent, therefore, that government should ensure that inclusive education works in Nigeria.

Recommendations

1. Government should be ready to fund the education of students with hearing impairment.
2. Government should ensure that all the policies that have to do with students with hearing impairment are implemented.
3. Parents should show love to their children with hearing impairment.
4. Members of society should be encouraged to develop positive attitudes towards learners with hearing impairment. This can be ensured through public awareness programs on radio, television and other mass media.

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