

THE RELEVANCE OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATION TO GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

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Abstract

The study focused on the relevance of inclusive education in Nigeria: implication to guidance and counseling. The paper explained that education is the process of facilitating learning or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits, relevance typically refers to learning experiences that are either directly applicable to the personal aspirations, interests, or cultural experiences of students that are connected in some way to real-world issues, problems, and inclusive education is about ensuring access to quality education for all students by effectively meeting their diverse needs in a way that is responsive, accepting, respectful and supportive. It went further to explain that relevance of inclusive education in Nigeria is when all handicapped children are entitled to a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. The paper also explained implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria and benefits of inclusive education in Nigeria. The paper concludes that it is indeed relevant that students with disabilities and non-students with disabilities should learn in the same environment to eliminate the stigmatization of making both of them the same in the society. Recommendations were made among others that the society or the community should be enlightened on the need for inclusive education in our society and the teachers and other students with abilities should see those ones with disabilities as same in their learning environment.

Introduction

Education has many meanings as defined by different authors. Dewey (1916) viewed education as the continuous reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases the ability to direct course of subsequent experience. Yoloje (1980) said education is a weapon for combating ignorance, poverty and disease. Yoloje went further to say that education is a bridge between confusion and

comprehension, as dam for concerning man's store of civilization, as a rocket for transporting man from a state of intellectual subservience to a state of intellectual sovereignty. Fafunwa (1980) in other ways described education as a process of transmitting culture in terms of continuity and growth and for dissemination of knowledge either to ensure social control or to guarantee rational direction of society. Education is the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits.

Educational methods include storytelling, discussion, teaching, training, and directed research. Education frequently takes place under the guidance of educators, but learners may also educate themselves. Education can take place in formal or informal settings and any experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels, or acts may be considered educational. Education is the knowledge and skill that you gain from being taught in formal or informal way.

Relevance typically refers to learning experiences that are either directly applicable to the personal aspirations, interests, or cultural experiences of students which is personal relevance or that are connected in some way to real-world issues, problems, and contexts which is life relevance. Personal relevance occurs when learning is connected to an individual student's interests, aspirations, and life experiences. Advocates argue that personal relevance, when effectively incorporated into instruction, can increase a student's motivation to learn, engagement in what is being taught, and even knowledge retention and recall.

Inclusive education is when all students, regardless of any challenges they may have, are placed in age-appropriate general education classes that are in their own neighborhood schools to receive high quality instruction, interventions, and supports that enable them to meet success in the core curriculum (Alquraini & Gut, 2012; McManis, 2017). Inclusive education is when students attend and are welcomed by their neighbourhood schools in age-appropriate, regular classes and are supported to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of the life of the school.

Inclusive education is all about how we develop and design our schools, classrooms, programs and activities so that all students learn and participate together. Inclusive education is about ensuring access to quality education for all students by effectively meeting their diverse needs in a way that is responsive, accepting, respectful and supportive. Students participate in the education program in a common learning environment with support to diminish and remove barriers and obstacles that may lead to exclusion.

The relevancy of inclusive education is carried out in a common learning environment where educational setting for students in a different

background and with different abilities learns together in an inclusive environment. Common learning environments are used for the majority of the students' regular instruction hours and may include classrooms, libraries, gym, performance theatres, music rooms, cafeterias, playgrounds and the local community. A common learning environment is not a place where students with intellectual disabilities or other special needs learn in isolation from their peers. If the students with disabilities are being isolated from educational learning or being from their peers, it will further make them to feel stigmatized which they may end up not completing their educational pursuits.

Relevance of Inclusive Education in Nigeria

Balami (2015) opine that inclusive education is practice of teaching children in regular classrooms with handicapped and non-handicapped children to the fullest extent possible; such handicapped children may have orthopedic, intellectual, emotional, visual difficulties or handicaps associated with hearing. Inclusive education has been of increasing interest in the past decades. A handicapped student tends to learn better in regular than in special classes, racial imbalance existed in special education classes. The civil right movement stressed that education is the right of individual either handicapped or normal. The Federal Education for all Handicapped Children Act (1975) stated that; all handicapped children are entitled to a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment which has been widely interpreted as supporting the expansion of inclusive education. Inclusive education has worked well with those segments of special student populations whose disabilities are compatible with a classroom setting and is felt in general to better prepare special students socially for life after school. It has also helped other school children to gain a greater understanding of those with disabilities.

Implementation of Inclusive Education in Nigeria

Today in Nigeria, special educators, parents of students with disabilities, policy-makers and other stakeholders continue to debate the benefits and challenges of this education paradigm (Ajuwon, 2008). The discussions have been shaped largely by the principle of inclusion, which stresses that ordinary schools should cater for all children and young people, regardless of their circumstances or personal characteristics.

In both low and high income countries, proponents of the policy of inclusive education are now reaffirming their commitment to education for all and acknowledging the urgency of providing education for their marginalized citizens. The momentum for the inclusive education movement derives from

the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) proclamation that, among other things, emphasizes that "Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all (UNESCO, 1994). UNESCO further states that the same blueprint, advocates and buttresses their stance by noting that educational policies at all levels, from the national to the local, should stipulate that a child with a disability should attend the neighborhood school that is the school that would be attended if the child did not have a disability.

This latter principle appears to be what is implied in Nigeria's National Policy on Education (2004) which tangentially refers the concept of inclusive education within the broader Universal Basic Education scheme. Consequently, some vocal advocates now see inclusive education as a favored approach to responding to the needs of all students in ordinary schools. Thus, as inclusion of students with disabilities into regular classrooms becomes a reality within public schools in Nigeria, it becomes imperative to determine the perceptions of special educators toward this practice. These special educators, most of whom have been trained in the country, are gradually being recognized as key stakeholders in the implementation of the strategic inclusive practices at all levels of the education system (Ajuwon, 2012).

Garba (2013) as cited by Oluka and Egbo (2014) ; asserts that to ensure a sustainable and successful implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria, the following components are very paramount and necessary:

1. **Heterogeneous grouping:** all students including those with special needs are educated together in groups with those without disabilities.
2. **A sense of belonging to a group:** all students are considered active members of the class. In such an environment, students who have disabilities feel welcomed as those without disabilities.
3. **Shared activities with individualized outcomes:** they share educational experiences (lessons, laboratories, fieldwork and group learning at the same time). The learning objectives for the students are individualized to meet each student's learning needs.
4. **Use of environment frequented by individuals without disabilities:** The learning experiences take place in general education classrooms and community work sites.
5. **A balanced educational experience:** it seeks an individualized balance between the academic functional and social or personal aspects of schooling (Lere, 2007).

The Role of Guidance and Counseling in Implementation of Inclusive Education in Nigeria

The objective of education - for- all (EFA) is to achieve equal educational opportunities for all children in the 21st Century, despite their peculiarities. The guidance counselors are the key role players in ensuring that the goals of inclusive education are actualized in Nigeria.

School counselors among other inclusive education stakeholders will be afforded a set of criteria to monitor measure and evaluate the challenges involved in schools guidance and counseling services provisions for children with disabilities in Nigeria including primary schools. Inclusive schools counselors will also have valuable information required for informed decision making regarding which school guidance counseling services to provide how, when, why and where these should be provided. It is expected that such critical information will enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of school counselors in managing and administering schools guidance counseling services provision for children with special needs in inclusive schools. This will ultimately benefit the generality of the children in inclusive schools including primary schools in Nigeria. Children with disabilities are also expected to benefit from the increased sensitization, awareness and understanding of schools guidance services programmes available in Nigerian inclusive schools.

Benefits of Inclusive Education in Nigeria

The students with and without disabilities learn more when they are together. Many studies over the past three decades have found that students with disabilities have higher achievement and improved skills through inclusive education and their peers without challenges benefit too (Alquraini and Gut, 2012; McManis, 2017).

Students with disabilities benefits in times of academic gains, reading and writing in mathematics, English language, social studies and both in grades and on standardized tests, better communication skills, improved social skills and more friendships. More time in the general classroom for students with disabilities is also associated with fewer absences and referrals for disruptive behavior. This could be related to attitude in that they have higher self-concept, they like school and their teachers more, and are more motivated around working and learning.

Their peers without disabilities also benefits by showing more positive attitudes in these same areas when in inclusive classrooms. They make greater academic gains in reading, mathematics solving and other subjects. The presence of students with disabilities gives non disabilities students' new kinds

of learning opportunities by making both students serve as peer-coaches. When the students are attending to help one and other, their own performance improves. Another benefit is that as teachers take into greater consideration their diverse views of students with disabilities learners, they provide instruction in a wider range of learning modalities which are visual, auditory and kinesthetic which benefit the regular students as well.

Researchers often explore concerns and potential pitfalls that might make instruction less effective in inclusion classrooms (Dupois, 2006; McManis, 2017). But findings show this is not the case. Neither instructional time nor how much time students are engaged differs between inclusive and non-inclusive classrooms (McManis, 2017). In fact, in many instances regular students report little to no awareness of even students with disabilities in their classes. If non-students with disabilities are aware, they demonstrate more acceptance and tolerance for students with disabilities when they all experience an inclusive education together.

Conclusion

Education is a process of transmitting culture in terms of continuity and growth and for dissemination of knowledge either to ensure social control or to guarantee rational direction of society. The paper explained the relevance of inclusive education that, inclusive education is when students with disabilities learn in the same environment within the community that is accepted by all. It is indeed relevant that students with disabilities and non-disabilities students should learn in the same environment to eliminate the stigmatization making both the same in the society. The presence of students with disabilities gives students without disabilities new kinds of learning opportunities by making both students serve as peer-coaches to each other in the same environment they are learning.

Recommendation

The following recommendations were made:

1. The society or the community should be enlightened on the need for inclusive education in our society.
2. Teachers and other students with abilities should see those ones with disabilities as same in their learning environment.
3. There should be counselors to counsel teachers on their attitudes towards pupils with disabilities on their capacity and view to enhance social relations on the differences in classrooms and on their willingness to deal with those differences effectively.

4. There should be training and retraining of the teachers of regular schools in inclusive education pedagogies and skills by the government and non-governmental organizations.

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