

CONSIDERATIONS IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN WEST AFRICA: WHAT CHALLENGES REALLY EXIST?

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Abstract

The recognition of education as an inalienable right of every individual has necessitated the call for quality education for all. Global trend in education demands that every form of impediment in the process of accessing quality education is eradicated. This idea is rooted in the philosophy of equal rights and has led to current drive for inclusive education. As laudable as this trend is, many nations, especially developing nations, are yet to implement inclusive education practices. West African nations being among the developing nations of the world have been found to be lagging behind in this direction. This paper examined the concept of inclusive education and the recent report of the Global Partnership on Education (GPE) on the status of inclusive education in West Africa. From this report, issues for considerations for proper implementation of inclusive education in West Africa were raised. Such issues include policy, teacher, pedagogical, psychological and learning environment. Implementation of inclusive education (IE) in West Africa demands the examinations of contextual factors that have impeded its smooth take-off from a multi-layered approach.

Introduction

The world has witnessed an increasing interest in educating persons with disabilities. The Salamanca declaration and other World Conferences and Declarations that had the right of individuals with disabilities as their front burner led to this. The contents of these declarations relied so much on the philosophy of equal rights and recognition of the dignity of the human person. On this premise, arises the issue of equity in provision and access to social infrastructure. In the provision and access to this, lies the idea of non-discrimination and fair justice. Education as a matter of fact is such an indispensable social infrastructure that it is an inalienable right. One's race, gender, disability, religion, and affiliations should and must not serve as impediments to access to quality education. Inclusivity recognizes a society that is open to diversity (Gherut, 2010). Minuo (2011), however, stated that children with disabilities over the years have been excluded from schools

because of the apparent difficulties in handling them in schools. This stands to be in contradiction to what the world projects.

Even though efforts are being made to ensure equal rights in education, there has been strong conviction that many nations and institutions may not be getting it right because of cultural configuration and perceptions of persons with disability. As a matter of fact, many have the wrong notion that educating persons with disabilities may be a kind of “privilege” evidenced in the way they are handled in schools and policy provisions. However, not educating persons with disabilities amounts to the world losing at both ends. History has shown that a number of inventions and classical breakthroughs were pioneered by persons with disability showing that when they are well educated they would help advance the course of the human race. Equally important is the fact that when they are not educated, it becomes more burdensome for the world to bear.

A lot of facts have conspired to slow down the processes of educating persons with disabilities in an inclusive education setting. The factors include societal degradation of persons living with disabilities, inadequate or ambiguous policies and legislations protecting the rights of persons living with disabilities, inadequate budget for the education of PLWDs, uncondusive environment, poorly trained teachers, and lack of cooperation with parents. The progress achieved in inclusive education in any country is dependent on the extent such nation has combated the above factors. In West Africa and other developing nations, children with disabilities are still excluded in regular classrooms. This leaves millions of children out of school and has questioned our commitment in inclusive education. This paper is to x-ray the considerations for effective inclusive education to be practiced given the fact that most nations of the world are still struggling with giving children equal opportunities in education.

What was the Practice and what Happened?

Before now the best practice in educating children with disabilities was to send them to learn some forbidden trades or rather in fortune-telling in some societies that associates them with religious myths. Thereafter, there was the issue of sending them to some Cheshire homes where they were taken care of by Christian Missionaries. They were also trained in some trades. It was this arrangement that led to segregational arrangement in educating them. Some of these Cheshire homes where children who were fortunate were sent to were named, most of the time, after the type of disabilities that were being managed there. Some were built outside the communities. Schools that emerged from these were totally segregational. They were educated in

environment quite different from the society they are going to live in. The practice was a barefaced segregation which Sailaja (2017) has referred to as macro-exclusion in which children were educated in special schools. In most cases these schools are compartmentalized according one's disability. In these schools, children with disability are educated alongside their counterparts who are living with same disability. At best what could happen is the fact that they could be confined in a unit in a regular school. This experience is actually traumatizing, dehumanizing and incapacitating. One wonders the kind of knowledge that could be acquired which is detached from the reality in society and being confined in a place is actually a form of label because it sends dangerous information to the child that that is where he belongs to and should have nothing to do with the larger society. However the obvious disadvantages of this educational arrangement led human right activists and concerned stakeholders to advocate the abolition of this segregation. This was as a result of growing understanding that human beings of all category and ability are equal and deserves equal right. Chakraborti-Ghosh (2017) has noted that throughout the world children with special needs were neglected till the 18th century. This neglect came to an end as a result of efforts of 18th century political reformers in both the United States and France and leaders in turning the attention of educators towards equity and fairness in educating persons with special needs (See Chadda in Chakraborti-Ghosh, 2017). Also civil rights groups were among the people that shifted the attention of the world to inclusive education in which law makers in the United States and world bodies were made to legislate and made declarations that children with special needs shall be educated equally with their counterparts.

What is inclusive Education?

Inclusive education became the focus of the world because of its failure to give equal opportunity to a group of learners that may need extra attention. The world was really reluctant to attend to the needs of this group of learners given the fact that it was only in 1945 that a statement that ushered in subsequent conferences and declarations were made. The current summersault in policies and the reluctance of many nations could attest to this. Even in this 21st century the world is struggling to pay serious attention to the education of persons with special needs. Global leaders and governments waited till human right activists took it upon themselves to awake them to the need to educate their citizens. The structure in schools, society, the perception of teachers and parents led to abandoning this group to their fate. When the issue of inclusion arises, it is a reminder to the fact that a group of people were/are excluded in learning in schools. Sailaja (2017) has noted that the term inclusive education

is a contentious one in the sense that it lacks explicit conceptual emphasis leading to different interpretations, misinterpretations and confusion. Sailaja began to explain inclusive education by pointing out what it is not. In his worlds, inclusive education 'is not about 'special' teachers meeting the needs of 'special' children... it is not about 'dumping' pupils into an unaltered system of provision and practice. Rather, it is about how, where and why, and with what consequences, we educate all pupils' (p.43). Sarkar (2017) defined inclusion as an emerging trend, philosophy and global movement which believes that all children regardless of their ability, disability, caste, creed, religion, socio-economic background and so on should learn and can learn together in mainstream school. It is a model that values the diversity in the abilities, competencies, behaviours and personalities of children. It relies so much on social justice and human right (Sakar, 2017) which aims at making sure that every child is given the opportunity to attain to his maximum potentialities. Inclusive education is a departure from the medical model to the social model in which there is the recognition of the fact that disability of the child is not resident in the child rather a configuration of societal encumbrances.

Inclusive Education: The West African Experience

Well at this point it could be said that West African nations keyed into the inclusive education trend at least by signing and some of the countries ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) stated that governments should ensure equal access to education system at both primary and secondary levels and ensure provision reasonable accommodations and support required within the general education system to facilitate effective education of children with disabilities. In realizing this right, governments must ensure that:

- a. Children with disabilities are not excluded from the general education and can access an inclusive, quality, and free primary education and secondary education on equal basis with others in the communities in which they live;
- b. Governments must ensure that children with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education;
- c. Reasonable accommodation of the individual's requirement is provided;
- d. Government should facilitate learning of Braille and sign language, ensuring that the education of persons, and in particular children,

children, who are blind, deaf, or deaf blind, is delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual, and in environments which maximize academic and social development. (See Global Partnership for Education, 2018, p. 2).

Quite interesting is the fact that a good number of countries in West African have signed this laudable document which demonstrates a commitment in pursuing inclusive education based on the ideals of UNCRPD (Global Partnership for Education, 2018). What this should imply is the fact that this is binding on these countries and it becomes the responsibility of these governments to help in achieving these. A better understanding of the progress of inclusive education in West African in recent time could come from the insight from the report by the Global partnership for Education (GPE) which documented 'progress and highlights the need to step up support to GPE partner countries on disability and inclusive education, to improve consideration of issues around disability and inclusion in education sector analysis and sector planning processes to better promote the achievement of GPE 2020 strategic goal 2, and to fulfill the transformative vision of Agenda 2030' (GPE, 2018, p. vi). This study was conducted with 51 developing countries which are partners with GPE. It was conducted in fall 2016. This study is considered useful to our discussion here because it is quite comprehensive bringing out the indexes that could be used in measuring the progress of a nation as it has to do with inclusive education. Its relevance is manifest in the fact that West African countries are developing nations. West African countries that participated were intentionally selected to present the journey so far. The indexes that were used include the following; Commitment to international frameworks; National rights and policy framework for children with disabilities; Disability data; Key barriers to education for children with disabilities; Approaches to educating children with disabilities; Quality of teaching; Increasing environment; Improving quality; Promoting effective education system; Disability and inclusive education in GPE-Funded grants; and Building inclusion in education sector plans and systems. Looking at these indexes one after the other and how these West African nations are performing will help address a number of issues in inclusive education.

Commitments to International Frameworks

Commitments to international frameworks captures the extent to which the partner countries are determined to follow the principles, ideals, legislative, administrative and adjudicative measures to implement the

provisions enshrined in the CRPD (GPE Working Paper, 2018). This is evidenced in their signing and ratifying of the CRPD or by accession. They become legally bound to CRPD. As a matter of fact, commitments to international frameworks on inclusive education could be seen as a starting point for nations to queue in the global trend to make education accessible to all despite ones unique characteristics. In the report of GPE as shown in table 2, 13 out of the 16 West African countries captured in the study have signed and ratified the CRPD while 3 have not signed the CRPD but became members by accession. These three nations have signified their agreement to be legally bound by the terms of the CRPD.

Table 1: Commitments to International Frameworks

	Signed and Ratified CRPD	Signed but Not Ratified CRPD	Have Not Signed CRPD
Benin	•		
Burkina Faso	•		
The Gambia			•
Ghana	•		
Guinea	•		
Guinea-Bissau	•		
Liberia	•		
Madagascar	•		
Mali	•		
Mauritania			• (a)
Niger	•		
Nigeria	•		
São Tomé and Príncipe			• (a)
Senegal	•		
Sierra Leone	•		
Togo	•		
Total	13		3

Source: UN (March 2017) as cited in GPE working paper (2018).
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Note: (a) = The country did not sign the CRPD but became a member of the Convention by accession.

National Rights and Policy Framework for Children with Disabilities (CWDs)

This shows the extent the countries have guaranteed the rights to primary education of all children in their constitutions and the availability of policy provisions for children with disabilities. It encompasses national disability law/policy, education policy on children with disabilities (CWD), and inclusive (IE) policy. Table 3 shows that only six West African countries (Burkina Faso, The Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria and Sierra Leone) have national disability law/policy. Only Ghana has National Disability Law, Education Policy on CWD, and Inclusive Education Policy. However, National Policy on Education may contain inclusive education policies (GPE Working Paper, 2018).

Table 2: National Rights and Policy Framework for Children with Disabilities

Country	National Disability Law/Policy	Education Policy on CWD	IE Policy Plan to Draft	IE Policy Drafted	IE Policy
Benin					
Burkina Faso	•		•		
The Gambia	•				
Ghana	•	•			•
Guinea				•	
Guinea-Bissau					
Liberia		•			
Mali	•				
Mauritania					
Niger					
Nigeria	•				
São Tomé and Príncipe					
Senegal					
Sierra Leone	•			•	
Togo			•		
Total	6	2	2	2	1

Source: Secretariat, Global Partnership for Education as cited in GPE working paper (2018)

Disability Data

For effective implementation of education policies, there is need for accurate data that will facilitate decision making. GPE report contained disability data on children. A good number of West African countries had no data reported in the ESPs. See table four.

Table 3: Disability Data

	Data Reported on CWDs	Preprimary Enrollment Data	Primary School Enrollment Data	Secondary School Enrollment Data	Special School Enrollment Data	No Data Reported in ESPs
Benin						•
Burkina Faso	•		•		•	
The Gambia	•		•		•	
Ghana	•		•		•	
Guinea						•
Guinea-Bissau						•
Liberia	•		•			
Madagascar						•
Mali						•
Mauritania						•
Niger						•
Nigeria	•					
São Tomé and Príncipe						•
Senegal	•					•
Sierra Leone						
Togo	•		•			
Total	79	0	5	0	3	9

Source: Secretariat, Global Partnership for Education

Key Barriers to Education for Children with Disabilities

This will enable us understand the hindrances encountered in implementing inclusive education policies in these countries. Just four countries (Burkina Faso, The Gambia and Ghana) reported barriers on the demand-side barrier. Other countries did not (GPE, 2018).

São Tomé and Príncipe									•
Senegal									•
Sierra Leone	•	•	•				•		
Togo									•
Total	4	2	2	1	-	1	1	0	1

Table 6: Approaches to Educating Children with Disabilities

Country	Segregation (Special Education)	Integration: Pilot	Integration: Large-Scale	Both: Special + Integration	Inclusive Education Pilots
Benin					
Burkina Faso	•		•	•	•
The Gambia	•		•	•	
Ghana	•		•	•	
Guinea	•	•			
Guinea-Bissau					
Liberia	•				
Mali	•				
Mauritania					
Niger					
Nigeria	•		•		
São Tomé and Príncipe	•				
Senegal	•		•		
Sierra Leone	•		•		•
Togo	•			•	•
Total	11	1	6	4	3

Table 7: Quality of Teaching

	Conducting In-Service Teacher Training	Conducting Preservice Teacher Training	Providing Support for Teachers	Providing Teaching & Learning Materials	Development of IE Training Modules	Recruitment of Additional Staff	No Data Reported in ESPs
Benin							•
Burkina Faso				•		•	
The Gambia	•	•					
Ghana	•		•	•			
Guinea	•			•			
Guinea-Bissau							•
Liberia							•
Mali	•					•	
Mauritania							•
Niger							•
Nigeria				•			
São Tomé and Príncipe							•
Senegal							•
Sierra Leone	•						
Togo							•
Total	5	1	1	4	0	2	8

Source: Secretariat, Global Partnership for Education

Table 8: Quality of Learning

	Develop or Modify Curriculum	Develop Ongoing Learning Assessment	Develop Toolkit on Inclusive Education	Set Up Learner-Friendly Schools	Provide ICT	No Information Available on ESPs
Benin						•
Burkina Faso						
Burundi						•
The Gambia		•				
Ghana	•				•	
Guinea	•			•		
Guinea-Bissau						•
Liberia			•			
Mali						•
Mauritania						•
Niger						•

Nigeria		•				
São Tomé and Príncipe						•
Senegal						•
Sierra Leone						•
Togo	•					
Total	3	1	1	1	1	9

Table 9: Supporting Teachers and Students

	Training in Identification of Disabilities	Provide Rehabilitation Aids	Establish Resource Centers
Benin			
Burkina Faso		•	
The Gambia			
Ghana	•		•
Guinea			
Guinea-Bissau			
Liberia			
Mali			
Mauritania			
Niger			
Nigeria			
São Tomé and Príncipe			
Senegal			
Sierra Leone	•		
Togo			
Total	2	1	1

Table 10: Activities to Improve Education Access

	Building or Making School Accessible	Providing Special School/ Center	Providing Transport	Raising Awareness	No Data Reported on ESPs
Benin					•
Burkina Faso	•	•		•	
The Gambia		•			
Ghana	•		•	•	
Guinea		•			
Guinea-Bissau					•

Liberia		•			
Mali	•				
Mauritania					•
Niger					•
Nigeria		•			
São Tomé and					•
Senegal	•	•			
Sierra Leone	•			•	
Togo	•			•	
Total	7	6	1	4	5

Source: Secretariat, Global Partnership for Education

Table 11: Activities Promoting Effective Education System

	Improve Disability Data Collection	Scaling Inclusive Education Pilot Projects	Cross-Ministerial Work	EMIS Data Collected on Children with Disabilities
Burkina Faso	•			•
The Gambia	•			•
Ghana	•			•
Liberia				•
Nigeria				•
Senegal				•
Sierra Leone				•
Total	3	0	0	7

Source: Secretariat, Global Partnership for Education

A ‘Take Home’ from the GPE Report of 2018 on West African Nations

It is very important we look into these data critically to understand the progress we have made. The findings of the study may not be significantly different from what is on ground and its comprehensive nature could inform policies. It appears that West African nations may not have scored very high marks in implementation of inclusion education. This will lead to a number of considerations in implementation of inclusive education. The issues that must be put into consideration for inclusive education to be effectively implemented in West Africa include:

Policy Issues

A good number of West African countries have signed and ratified the CRPD but there is little commitment at the national level. Enshrining the

rights to education for all in their constitutions may not be enough without articulating this in their National Policy on Education. Even with the national policy on education, there is need for a law that will spell out the responsibilities of the stakeholders in that a defaulter could be taken to court of competent jurisdiction. Many of the West African nations have no IE policy. GPE (2018) has noted that inclusive education can only thrive in a nation where there is an articulated policy on inclusive education. Many of these nations not having an IE policy may spell doom for inclusive education in such countries in the sense that they may be handicapped in coordinating a more effective action plan and budget for adequate resources (GPE, 2018). It is only Ghana that has developed an inclusive education policy as reported in the ESPs of these nations (GPE, 2018). This has helped her to have a good direction in the implementation of inclusive education. Among the developing nations captured in the GPE report, Ghana was one of the two countries that have made a giant stride in inclusivity. For example, Ghanaian's Education Sector Plan (ESP) clearly stated that 'all children with non-severe physical and mental disabilities should be educated in mainstream institutions; special schools are only for children with severe disabilities. Otherwise, special schools are to function as focal points or resource centres for providing support to mainstream schools' (GPE, Working Paper, 2018:32). There is also systematic programme to 'mainstream IE into pre-service and in-service teacher training; deploy special educational needs coordinators to all schools; ensure that schools, materials, curricula, and assessment procedures are accessible and equitable for all; and allocate adequate funding for targeted excluded groups' (GPE, Working Paper, 2018:32).

Current data on children with disabilities (CWDs) is also lacking or may be inadequate to help in effective implementation of IE in West Africa. There was no data on pre-primary enrolment and secondary school enrolment data. Only five countries were able to report data on primary enrolment. Ghana was able to report in their ESP data on CWDs, primary school enrolment and special school enrolment. This placed them ahead of others in data collection. In other indices, Ghana had better report in its Education Sector Plan (ESP). They had variety of approaches in educating children with disabilities, more suitable problems in equipping teachers for IE and better plans for improving learning among children with special needs. This would have resulted from a strong inclusive education policy and commitment to achieving it. Other West African nations are actually at the babyhood stage. Nigeria, for example, has signed and ratified the CRPD. There is the enshrinement of inclusive education in the Nigerian National Policy on Education but the provision lacks depth. Some of the statements were vague

and lacks concreteness that could lead to operationalization. Even in the national Policy on Special Needs Education (2015) which *alb initio* stated that one of the problems of the National Policy on Education was ambiguous statement on funding almost repeated the same ambiguous statement. It stated that the 'Federal and State Governments shall ensure that the education of children with Special Needs shall be free at all levels' (p.14). There was no statement indicating how this will be done. Is to 'ensure' that others (probably NGOs, International Donor Agencies or what?) provide the funds. How will this be done becomes an important issue. What percentage of tax payers' money is supposed to go to the education of persons with special needs? What percentage of the budget of the nation should go for IE? And what percent should the Federal Government, State Government and even the local government provide and how would they do this? This is compounded by the fact that there is no functional legislation on Special Needs Education (FME, 2015). Little wonder in 2015, the Federal Ministry of Education came up with a National Policy on Special Education in Nigeria. A thorough search through the document will leave one with little that could help in the direction of inclusivity in Nigeria. The document honestly recognized that though Nigeria is involved in special needs education, that the present practices are not fully consistent with existing global best practices (FME, 2015). For any nation to successfully implement IE, the issue of policy must come to play. There should be adequate policy framework that will facilitate this if not it would be another jamboree. As a matter of fact every other issue to be discussed has its root to the policy on ground.

Curriculum Issues

Another important issue in inclusive education is the issue of curriculum. There is the question of whether same or separate curriculum should be used for those with special needs and their counterparts. In the report of the GPE (2018), only three countries, Ghana, Guinea and Togo reported to have modified or developed a curriculum for persons with special needs in their ESPs. This may leave one wondering on what and how these persons are being taught. It can equally mirror what is going on in these nations. In some developed nations, the national policies assert whether children are to use the same curriculum or whether there will be modification. Best practices have shown that persons with special needs whose needs are not severe can use the general curriculum while a modified curriculum or an individualized education programme (IEP) is used depending on the severity of the problem.

Teacher Issues

This is another important issue in implementation of IE. Sound policy will not see the light of the day without teachers who are the people to take it down to the classroom. Only seven West African countries reported activities to improve teacher training and quality of teaching in inclusive education in the ESP as reported by GPE (2018). Apart from Ghana, no other West African country in the report was able to report up to three activities they engage in order to improve the quality of teaching and the teacher. Ghana was able to conduct in-service training, provide support for teachers, provide teaching and learning materials for teachers, train teachers in identification and establish resource centres. For effectiveness and sustainability in IE, intervention programmes for attitudinal change and reorientation among teachers in handling diversity of children in their class must be mounted. Proper training must be given to prospective teachers while in school and this should continue even after graduation. The case of students offering just a two-unit course on special education and we conclude that they are now ready to handle children with special needs should be discouraged. In some faculties of education, some departments graduate students without their students taking any course on special needs. How would these students face the reality in their classrooms? The training these teachers should receive should include the ability to identify these children and report to appropriate professionals. In-service training of teachers on inclusive education affects the way teachers perceive children living with disabilities. McFarlane and Woolfson (2013) has noted that teachers who attended more in-service training held more positive views on children with emotional and behavioural difficulties in mainstream schools. Mngo and Mngo (2018:1) have found that ‘teachers with some training on teaching students with disabilities and more experienced and highly educated teachers were more supportive of inclusive education indicating that resistance to the practice is linked to inadequate or complete lack of teachers’ preparedness. Younger, less experienced teachers with no training in special education indicated less enthusiasm regarding the benefits of inclusion, their ability to manage integrated classrooms, and teach students with disabilities’.

Pedagogical Issues

This is another important issue in the education of persons with special needs. Considering the diversity that accrues in an inclusive classroom setting, there is need for pedagogical flexibility. Teachers are required to adopt pedagogies that could be engaging, accommodating, supportive, appetizing and compassionate for these learners. Going by the data available, the best

the structure and approach adopted in IE in West Africa could lead to is the adoption of pedagogies stemming from special education. These pedagogies include the Individualized Education Programme which experts have noted in recent time that it could lead to segregation in the mainstream class. However, current practices which are deemed inclusive include Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Differentiated Instruction (DI), and the Inclusive Pedagogical Approach in Action Framework (IPAA) (Loreman, 2017). Loreman (2017:14) went on to state that general principles of inclusive pedagogy include:

- a. Providing for meaningful participation of all learners
- b. The underlying fundamentals of good teaching are the basis of inclusive education pedagogy
- c. Multiple means of reaching students must be employed for all students
- d. Requirement of teachers to adopt a humble and introspective attitude
- e. Involvement of the judicious use of technology

Psychological issues

One of the fulcrums on which inclusive education lies is the socialization of the individual in such a way that he can live better life, feel emotionally satisfied and contribute to the development of the society. It only when this is done that we can say that we have succeeded in the inclusive education adventure. Gaydarov (2014:1) noted the significance of psychological dimension of inclusivity by stating that

As far as deficiencies hamper the individual lifestyle, that reflects on the psyche as inner tension and disappointment with the self. This in turn hinders the individuals' social activity and their social integration. The improvement of the psychological wellbeing can catalyze the individual potential and thus promote the better integration of the person. Hence managing the psychological wellbeing turns to be a pivotal point in inclusive education. In this regard it is important that the main activities which have to be performed be ordered in such a way as to pinpoint the priorities and increase the efficiency of pedagogues' and social workers' efforts.

This has a lot to tell us. Inclusive practices and approaches must be such that will harmonize the inner tensions of the child. There is already discordant self agitation on self-realization in the being himself. Therefore practices targeted at psychological well-being of persons with special needs will in no small measure help maximize the potentialities of children in this

category. However, current practices in West Africa cannot ensure this. Most countries are still engrossed with exclusionary practices which sends dangerous signal to the child of where he belongs to thereby hampering the psychological wellbeing of the child. Even though there are different approaches to inclusive practices, most African nations have depended on segregation and integration which to a greater extent do not align with the ideals of inclusivity. Segregation arrangement and integration in educating children with special needs at best have been referred respectively as macro and micro exclusion (Sailaja, 2017) which is a 'defeatist' approach which is traumatizing and debilitating. These arrangements can only be acceptable in very severe cases. Those who have made a bold attempt in inclusive education in West African are still at the pilot stage.

Learning Environment Issues

Learning environment here has to do with how accessible it is for persons with disabilities. Learning environment has to do with physical, social and psychological environmental issues. Because of the fact that we discussed psychological issues above, our efforts here will be centred on physical learning environment not in any way undermining the impact of other components. Critical to learning environment is accessibility as it has to do with reconstruction of facilities and equipment in schools and how these are structured to attain to the diverse needs of persons with disabilities. Governments and other critical stakeholders are obliged to ensure that person with disabilities live independent lives by universally constructing and modifying school buildings, roads, housing, etc. The international standards in constructing these must be adhered to. In the report of Global Partnership on Education only seven West African countries reported their activities in making schools accessible implying that the other eight countries may not have engaged themselves in anything serious in this direction. Studies have shown that accessibility of public buildings such as schools for persons with disabilities in West Africa is still poor. Yarfi, Ashigbi, Nakua (2017) in their study reported that only 34 (40.5%) of the buildings, 52.3% of the entrances and 87.4% of the routes of the buildings were accessible to wheelchair users in Kumasi metropolis, Ghana. Drame and Kamphoff (2014) stressed in the study that to increase inclusive education for all in Senegal, the country must increase access to schooling through physical accessibility and decentralization. This is very instructive given the fact that making the learning environment accessible to persons with disabilities is one of the pathways to improving efforts to remove barriers in accessing quality education.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, inclusive education is still at the stage it is today as a result of failures of West African states to address the issue of inclusive education in line with global best practices. This is as a result of weak and ambiguous policies and policy implementation. There seem to be a lack of political will to come up with substantial legislations on the needs of persons with special needs. Other challenges stemmed from the policy and policy implementation and legislation. For West African countries to succeed in inclusive education, there must be strong political will and legislation that will drive inclusivity in west Africa.

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