

CHAPTER 4

WHO IS IN CHARGE OF THE INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM IN THE REGULAR CLASSROOM: THE REGULAR OR SPECIAL TEACHER?

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Introduction

Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today. Tomorrow eventually becomes our day and survival skills are basic in ensuring the desired tomorrow, which is the future before us, is secured. Education is the fundamental human right of every child. Acquiring basic education is fundamental to being relevant in the society that everyone wants to exist in. Acquiring basic education is fundamental to the development of every society, as economies are driven by high powered intellectual capabilities in various fields of endeavor.

Education is a process of teaching and receiving instruction or knowledge, such that the receiver becomes enlightened. The aim of this enlightenment is to make the educated become an independent, self-reliant and responsible member of the society. Every society and economy need proactive problem solvers, who are not afraid to show some level of initiative and confidence in key decision making, especially in the workplace and in relating with others within the society. According to Enya, Nanjwan and Amalu (2014), education equips individuals with relevant knowledge, attitude and skills, required to function as responsible citizens, while making a positive impact on social relations and development. Education opens up an individual to a wide range of opportunities to explore, harness and become productive.

The gains of education cannot be overemphasized, especially in this 21st century when nations of the world seem to be on the speed lane on their drive towards technological advancement and human capital development, all geared towards economic development. It becomes pertinent to assert that anyone without basic education may not have a place of relevance in society today. In essence, education is important and must be embraced by all for personal and national interest.

The right to education is reflected in article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the United Nations (1948) and states categorically that every child has the right to education, which shall also be free in the fundamental stages, so that the individual is fully developed in all domains of education. Furthermore, it is envisaged that no child is left behind for any reason. It is therefore the



responsibility of governments to provide basic education to its citizens, so as to drive economic development and social change. Furthermore, the importance of education to all Nigerian citizens has also been enshrined in Nigeria's philosophy of education in the National Policy of Education (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2014), thus:

1. Education is an instrument for national development and social change
2. Education maximizes the creative potentials and skills of the individual for self-fulfillment and general development of the society
3. Education is compulsory and the right of every Nigerian, irrespective of gender, social status, religion, colour, ethnic background and any peculiar individual change
4. Education is to be qualitative, comprehensive, functional and relevant to the needs of the society

To this end, teachers are trained through various teachers training colleges and faculties of education in universities with various degrees to take on the responsibility of teaching students within the walls of a classroom, as it is the fundamental right for every child to receive basic education, usually through formal settings like the schools. In school settings, social interaction is encouraged among learners, with the guidance of the regular classroom teacher. However, there is a group of learners who will want to learn but for some reasons, may not benefit fully from the educational system, unless extra and special provision is made to cater for their peculiar needs. This group of students are said to have special needs in education and cannot learn effectively in the normal or regular classroom settings without provisions of relevant structures, manpower and contents to address these Special Education needs.

Previously there had been provision for these learners to receive instructions in specialized school settings with the help of Special Education teachers, who have been trained to understand the peculiarities of these groups of students and how to provide for their educational needs. Yet because society is dynamic and evolving, there is a need to bring learners with special needs in education out of their special classrooms, to mingle, interact, socialize and learn with regular learners who have no special needs in education. Educationists have asserted that to expose these learners to the real world for adaptation and effectiveness, the regular classroom is the best place to give them education. This has given rise to the inclusion movement. The thesis statement of this paper therefore, is to review inclusion as a policy, examine its role in education as well as the roles of the regular and special teachers in an inclusive classroom and to ascertain who is in charge of the inclusive classroom.

Inclusion and its origin

Every child has the capacity to learn, yet not all learn at the same pace and style. The difference in learning pace and style can create some gap in cognition between one learner and the other. This difference or gap in cognition, may further



pose a serious setback for some learners who struggle to learn at the same pace as their counterparts in the same classroom. This is the reason that education experts and curriculum developers advocate the inclusive learning environment for regular learners and learners with Special Education needs. The aim is to consider individual differences and provide for the educational needs of each learner, irrespective of the challenges each one faces.

The whole idea behind inclusion is to prepare all learners irrespective of challenges faced in the course of learning, to enable them face the real world of work and social relations without feeling inadequate or intimidated. Inclusion is an educational policy championed to eliminate all forms of discrimination, barriers and improve outcome (Abah, Kurumeh & Yakubu, 2018). To this end, though in the regular classroom with learners of normal or exceptional abilities, learners with special needs in education are properly received. The tenets and working document that underpins the rationale for inclusive education is captured in the Salamanca Declaration of 1994, excerpts from this declaration that supports students with special needs in education reads:

1. Every child has a fundamental right to education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning.
2. Every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs.
3. Education systems should be designed and educational programmes implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs.
4. Those with Special Educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child-centred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs.
5. 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; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system integrated into the learning space, so that they learn like all others learners in the classroom.

Historical perspective of inclusion

Education is as old as man himself, even though not formal at the onset, because young children learnt from their homes and what they saw their parents do. In societies like Britain, before the conception and implementation of inclusion policies, Hodkinson & Vickerman, (2012) assert that learners and children with Special Education needs were cared for by their families or church usually on benevolent grounds. Thus, they were not released to attend formal schools. This narrative soon changed by the mid-1800s, where special institutions were created to cater for the social, moral and physical needs of learners. By 1760, the first school for children with visual impairment was opened, this was closely followed by the



opening of a school for physical impairment in 1851. However, these schools were mainly reserved for children of the wealthy.

The introduction of these special schools did not come without some negative labeling, categorizations and children being denied the opportunity to explore possible progress in ordinary and regular schools according to Thomas, Walker and Webb, (2005). This encapsulated the learners in a world of their own. In due course, the major challenge they stand to face is finding ways to properly integrate into the normal world of work, activities and other human relations.

In Nigeria, the implementation of the policy of inclusion in classrooms, can be traced to its adoption in the National Policy on Education (NPE) document (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014). The NPE stipulates that special needs students should be properly integrated into the regular classrooms where they would otherwise have been if they did not have certain cognitive challenges.

As Willis (2009), highlights, categories under SEN includes: children with vision impairment; children with hearing loss; children with cognitive challenges (Learning challenges); children with Atypical Motor Development; children with Communication Delays; children with Emotional/Behaviour Disorder; children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD); children with Sensory Processing Disorder; gifted and talented children. These special needs create behavioral and cognitive challenges for learners and make learning somewhat difficult to them, especially if they have to learn in the same classroom and pace as learners with normal ability. Thus, learning can become frustrating to them.

Regular / conventional classroom setting

The regular or conventional classroom in educational setting, is that classroom that is designed to meet the educational needs of students within a classroom, with the assumption that learners are of similar age group, have similar entry point to learning and can learn effectively at about the same pace, with no learner left behind. It is regular because curriculum contents, instructional materials and implementation have been so designed to meet specific needs of learners grouped according to their perceived cognitive level and ages. According to Yousufi (2020), a conventional classroom is one that is teacher centred, in which instruction is given to students to complete tasks. Thus, students have very little control of what they learn and depend on the knowledge and expertise of the teacher all the time

The role of the Classroom Teacher in Inclusion classroom setting

The classroom teacher is very instrumental to the implementation of educational curriculum and so must be fully aware of the implications of inclusive education. In the opinion of Iheanacho, Osuorji and Thompson, (2013), any classroom teacher looking to have an inclusive classroom would be required to have good understanding about inclusive education and be dynamic in approach, so as to accommodate all learners. Okoro and Anyanwu, (2013) on the other hand,



assert that since teachers are responsible for curriculum delivery even in inclusive classrooms, they must be prepared in the area of diagnosis, adaptation and modification of curriculum contents. Furthermore, Willis (2009), is quite explicit on the role of the classroom teacher in this process, stating categorically that the responsibility of making the classroom truly inclusive rests with the teacher. The teacher should bear in mind that learners with special needs in education do not need to be fixed or repaired before they can blend properly with other learners. To create an inclusive classroom, the teacher must ensure that he/she:

- a. Demonstrates that each child in the classroom is valued, thus should answer questions about pupils' challenges openly when asked by other pupils.
- b. Assist learners without special needs to accept their peers with special needs in education, by letting them know that everyone has strengths and weaknesses.
- c. Stresses that everyone has the ability to learn, some learners just need extra time, support and practice to get there.
- d. Looks for several opportunities to help learners with special needs in education learn academically and socially by encouraging them to participate in class activities.
- e. Plans activities that are concrete and specific, by using real objects in teaching because learners with Special Education needs to learn new skills better with picture cues for example.

Inclusive classroom

Inclusive education is used to refer to the philosophy and practice of educating children with special needs in education within the same classroom as regular learners. (Ajuwon, 2008). Furthermore, Umaru, Ejim and Gamde, (2013:128) opine that inclusive classroom is a "radical reform of the school in terms of educational policy and curricular framework, which includes educational content, assessment, pedagogy, systematic grouping of learners within institutional and curricular structures". In essence, all that makes for effective and smooth implementation of inclusion policy must be reformed. According to Nanjwan, Ikwen and Aderibigbe, (2019), some basic principles of inclusive education to bear in mind for effective implementation of the inclusion policy includes:

1. Teach diagnostically: Diagnostic teaching involves an initial diagnosis to identify the child's deficit. This could be general or specific skills.
2. Establish the experiential base for each lesson: The teacher should understand that just like skills facilitate task performance, learner's background facilitates understanding.
3. Use appropriate and realistic examples.
4. Demonstrations: Examples and demonstrations that are relevant to the child in his everyday life promotes understanding and aid learning.



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5. Actively involve the learners: Teachers should involve learners in class activities to facilitate active learning.
 6. Use appropriate questioning techniques: Effective questioning encourages active children's participation in learning.
 7. Provide appropriate practice and generous review:
 8. Practice reinforces learnt concepts while review helps learners to master skills and concepts already learnt. Review should be done periodically.
 9. Build interest and enthusiasm: Teachers should understand that unless children are interested in what they are learning and doing, learning cannot effectively take place. .
 10. Collaborate and coordinate efforts with others: Inclusion generally calls for collaboration between special and general education teachers.

Bearing the afore mentioned in mind, the role of the Special Education teacher in an inclusive classroom according to Ipatenco (2017) includes:

1. Working with the regular class teacher to modify lesson plans and come up with a suitable plan for both learners without disabilities and those with special needs in education, including adaptive materials.
2. Classroom support: Special Education teachers provide one-on-one help to special needs students. Once the classroom teacher has completed a lesson, the Special Education teacher will help her students complete any assigned classwork, as well as provide additional instruction when necessary.
3. Behavior intervention: Some learners with special needs in education have disabilities that can lead to disruptive behaviour in an inclusive classroom. This can affect the teaching and learning. For example, a student with autism might panic if the classroom gets too loud or if the classroom routine changes unexpectedly. Special Education teachers are trained in their students' disabilities and can help calm them or put a stop to poor behavior when it arises.
4. Additional responsibilities: The special teacher has the additional responsibility of personally monitoring each learner with special needs in education and giving timely reports to both parents and the school management.

Teaching in an inclusive classroom: A collaborative approach

Collaboration is working with people in a team to achieve a common goal. Collaborative approach in inclusive classroom is a platform where all parties involved according to National Centre for Learning Disabilities (2021), collaborate and allows all stakeholders that is: general educators, special educators, learning specialists and administrators to work together to meet the needs of the learners in the smooth running of the classroom, as no single educator should be responsible for holding expertise within the inclusive setting. Both regular and special teachers within the inclusive classroom should work together in mapping out activities and curriculum content delivery for the common good of all learners, irrespective of the



differences. The inclusive classroom will become an effective place of learning for learners with or without Special Education needs if both regular and Special Education teachers adopt a collaborative approach. While the regular teacher does the work of curriculum implementation by focusing mainly on the regular learners, the Special Education teacher provides the same service by providing necessary support for those who need extra help in the course of teaching and learning.

Implication for Special Need Education/ Persons with Disability

The implication of this chapter to special needs in education is far reaching. Owing to the fact that learners with Special Education needs would need be taught in regular classroom, the following are implications to this chapter:

1. **Equality and equity:** inclusion will provide a platform for equality in learning, while also giving the learners an environment free of discrimination to learn with their counterparts without special needs in education.
2. **Ease of learning:** Learners or people with disabilities will no longer be frustrated while learning, as their peculiar needs will be catered for.
3. **Social and emotional intelligence:** the inclusive classroom is a socially friendly environment, void of discrimination and provides opportunities for learners to interact freely. This can boost the confidence of learners with special needs and make them interact more.
4. **Collaboration:** Both the regular teacher and the special teacher would learn to work in the same classroom as collaborators and not competitors, bearing in mind that the responsibility to get learners to learn effectively lies with them.
5. **Decorum:** Having learnt in a friendly and welcoming environment, learners with special needs would have been able to adapt to certain ways of doing things, they may have received caution for some behavior and in due course learnt acceptable ways to behave in public.
6. **Critical thinker and problem solvers:** The essence of education is to produce individuals who are knowledgeable and have the right attitude to be able to function as critical thinkers and problem solvers in the society, inclusive learning, would have inculcated the right knowledge, value and attitude with which they can be gainfully employed in the real world, thus contributing meaningfully to the economy and national development.

Conclusion

The focus of this chapter was to establish the role of both regular and Special Education teachers in inclusive classrooms. To this end, the chapter reviewed key variables as it relates to the topic. Historical perspective to the emergence of inclusion was discussed alongside proclamations from policy documents. The chapter also discussed the concept of regular classrooms, the roles of regular teachers in inclusive classrooms, inclusive classrooms and the role of Special Education teachers in inclusive classrooms. Furthermore, having extensively discussed the roles of both teachers within the inclusive classroom, the chapter



discussed the position of each teacher and who is in charge. It was concluded that a collaborative approach to teaching in inclusive classrooms will make learning interactive and effective for learners with special needs education.

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