



CHAPTER 8

CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION

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Introduction

Special needs education is concerned with those persons who have physical, cognitive, language, learning, sensory and emotional abilities that deviate from those of the general population. The educators of special needs children provide instructions specifically tailored to meet individual needs, making education available to students who, if not, would have limited access to education.

Special needs persons include all children who, for whatever reasons, are failing to benefit from their right. Unegbu (2006) in Ibrahim (2019) defines special people as those with significant sensory deficits or unusual high intellectuals that are not properly addressed in the regular programmes. That means that a highly intelligent child is a child with outstanding achievement and ability who is not well catered for in the regular classroom. Moreover, Kanu (2008) sees special needs as exceptional persons which comprise children, youths and adults with one form of disability or learning difficulty or the other.

Nwachukwu (2006) in Ibrahim (2019) defined special needs child as a person who deviate from the ordinary child such that they require special attention, special services to areas that could make life more meaningful and worth living and those who require special education services in order to benefit from the regular school curriculum. These persons are those who have learning difficulties or disabilities and are required to have additional accommodations and resources in their curriculum.

Special needs education is thus seen as a formal, special educational training given to the people (children and adults) with special needs, who fall into two categories: the persons with disability (PWDs) and the gifted and talented. The disability includes the children and adults with hearing impairment, visual impairment, physical and health impairment, intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, multiple handicaps, emotional disturbance etc. On the other hand, the gifted and talented are on the other end of the spectrum of special needs. Therefore, it can be justified that the teaching and learning methods of traditional formal setting may be inappropriate for these categories of persons.



Equally, millions of Nigerians are confused about children with special needs. More so, despite the UBE policy of free and compulsory 9 years basic education for all children, millions of Nigerian children especially children with special needs still roam the streets begging for alms rather than being in schools. It is a known fact that school children in the basic levels are still unable to pay money for their education ranging from development levies to examination fees. In addition, many children with special needs have dropped out of school because of their inability to cope with the harsh situation they find themselves in both special and regular schools. Most special schools lack the basic facilities for teaching and learning. The situation is worse in regular schools where the majority of the teachers have no idea on how to teach these children or their learning method.

There has been a great discrepancy between theory and practice in the provision of educational services to children with special needs in Nigeria (Nkechi, 2013). While the government may score high on policies, implementation is virtually zero. Government budget for special education programmes is quite small. Most often even the budgetary allocation made for special education is hardly released. Also, special children are not given any special attention by the government in terms of admission, the provision of facilities and scholarships as provided for in both the blueprint and the National Policy of Education (FGN, 2013). Most of the children with disabilities in schools are courtesy of Charitable Organizations and individuals.

Today, the government of Nigeria makes pronouncements and talks about special needs education for children with special needs in major education for having been a signatory to the Salamanca Declaration. Garuba (2003) pointed out that the government of Nigeria has fared better at the level of policy formulation and not in the area of policy implementation. The poor implementation of policies for children with special needs has led to low enrolment of children with special needs in schools and other service outlets. Garuba (2003) in Obi (2007), posited that enrolment of school age children with handicaps stands at 0.42% while that of their non disabled counterpart stands at 67.05%. This shows that there is no equity in the provision of educational services to children in Nigeria. The inadequacy in the delivery of special education in Nigeria is supported by the admission of the Blue Print on the Education of the Handicapped in Nigeria that “successes made so far are minimal in terms of anticipated effect, due largely to inadequate funds”. Despite being a signatory to the special need’s education treaty, no concrete steps have been taken with regards to special needs education in Nigeria. At the implementation level, segregation remains the focus of providing special education services. One is right to say that special needs education is only the paid lip service in Nigeria. Presently in Nigeria, integration and special needs education still remain in the realm of theory and far from practice (Ainscow & Haile-Giorgis, 1998).

With the preceding concerns, the thesis statement of this chapter is revolved on the fact that, the area of special needs education for special needs learners is



always faced with different forms of challenges that ranges from physical, social, psychological, economic to attitudinal as well as religious and political issues respectively. Over the years, these problems in the field often exclude its beneficiaries from acting fully and effectively in the environments they live. Individuals with special needs lack equal access to public and basic resources in all areas such as right to education, right to employment, right to social integration, right to freedom of speech, right to political participation among others. These persons suffer stigmatization, negative attitudes from society, poor health care systems and above all, the legal support system becomes a fantasy. This is due to the non-recognition the field of special needs education faces globally. Therefore, this work will highlight the basic challenges of special needs education and proffer solutions or prospects to these challenges and beyond as well as discussing policy implementation against challenges of special needs education and implications of these challenges to Special needs Services.

Challenges of Special Needs Education

The challenges to special needs education can take a variety of forms. They could be physical, technological, systematic, financial, or attitudinal, psychological, or they can arise from a government's failure to make available the needed accommodations and infrastructural provisions. However, Adebisi, Jerry, Rasaki & Igwe (2014) pointed the following as proffered challenges to special needs education in Nigeria and elsewhere.

- i. Unavailability of successful funding.
- ii. Lack of accessibility to education.
- iii. Negative attitudes towards special needs persons.
- iv. Lack of a successful policy implementation or policy issue.
- v. Unavailability of useful facilities.
- vi. The issue of parental involvement.
- vii. Lack of supporting legislation.
- viii. Unemployment of professionals in handling special needs persons.
- ix. Lack of administrative skills.

Unavailability of successful funding: For a successful development of special needs education, this could be regarded as the prime reason for the delayed and slow pace of development in special needs education services in all levels of educational system as experienced in the regular school system. As often, accommodation decisions are made based on budgetary considerations rather than on an assessment of the actual needs of students with special needs.

However, it can be identified that funding is the major constraint to the growth of special needs education in Nigeria and other parts of the world. The coordinating services and offering individual support to children with special needs demand additional money and inadequate funding hinder professional development in the field of special needs education, (Nwoagba 2003 in Adebisi, Jerry, Rasaki & Igwe, 2014). The available funds for special needs education projects are not accessed by the administrators of special needs education, thereby making



the children with special needs suffer unnecessarily in the areas of infrastructure, equipment and learning materials.

Lack of accessibility to education: In decades, the establishment of special needs schools and units in mainstream schools and rehabilitation centres accessing the country for training of vocational skills by the Federal Government of Nigeria has been a serious setback. This can be justified as no achievement has been recorded in the education of persons with disabilities, given that old buildings, equipment, materials acquired become obsolete. Many children with special needs are out of school especially in some rural areas because special needs schools or inclusive schools are not available to them. However, it can be claimed that many parents and communities are not aware of the ignorance of the education of their children with special needs. Some believe that their children cannot be educated or achieve in school. Thereby, learning with only the option of allowing them to beg on the street or keep them at home. But in other ways, the society and governments at all levels, pay attention to a particular disability for example, hearing impairment, visual impairment and physical handicap more than other disabilities.

Negative attitude towards special needs persons: According to professionals like Adebisi (2008) and Nekechi (2013) in the field, negative attitude is the greatest challenge in the field of special needs education. This undeniably is true because negative attitudes towards the fields in terms of funding and politics and poor policies with slow or non-implementation, in turn leads to negative attitudes to its clients. Students with disabilities continue to face negative attitudes and stereotypes in the education system. Lack of knowledge about the subject matter, lack of trained educators, staff and students make it difficult for persons with special needs to access educational services equally with their counterparts.

Lack of a successful policy implementation or policy issue: The stipulation of National Policy on Education (Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN), 2013) to special needs education is clear that the right of persons with disabilities is a national duty and serving these persons adequately must be a collective effort. But the Federal Government of Nigeria has failed to stipulate the administrative structures or functions of the three tiers of government, thereby making it difficult for proper funding and service delivery. This means that the document in the policy does not categorize the criteria for those personnel that would head the special needs education departments and institutions. This gives reason for some of the educational agencies, non-professionals in heading special education units and breaches. This is an unclear policy that suffers the implementation and administration of special needs education in the country. Also, the policy on UBE of free education for normal and special needs children was not successfully implemented or carried out therefore wasting a lot of time and future potentials of special needs education in meeting up with the global challenges, with negative resultant effect on the children with special needs.

Unavailability of useful facilities: Lack of facilities has been a major challenge to special needs education in Nigeria. Perhaps, the lack of support services pose a



challenge to enrolment and education of persons with special needs. Evidence exists by researchers like Anumonye (1991) in Adebisi, Jerry, Rasaki & Igwe (2014), Eleweke (1997) and Obi (2007) which suggests clearly that most students with special needs are unable to enroll into special or regular schools in the country, as they may not receive support services to assist them in the school. The lack of facilities and support services for effective inclusion imply that many academically qualified students with special needs, especially students with visually and hearing impaired may be unable to attend regular neighborhood schools, colleges and universities. However, data Ibrahim (2019) has it that the provision of support services in public special and inclusive schools are lacking.

At the tertiary level, it can be stated that many students with disabilities who enrolled into the colleges and universities in Nigeria were frustrated out of their programmes because of nonexistence of support services. Getting appropriate equipment needed for persons with special needs, which include hearing and vision aids, electronically adapted mobility devices, are continuing challenges to providing equal access for education of persons with special needs and the facilities and equipment needed for vocational and recreational education are inadequate or nonexistent.

The issue of parental involvement: Families and communities are seriously expected to be involved and participate more actively in service provision for persons with special needs as it has been in the affairs of others. The family is the first and basic institution in our culture and the primary place in which children learn to interact with their environment. Therefore, the important position of the family in the development of the individual cannot be quantified.

It is an undeniable fact that the family, especially parents, always have better insight regarding the uniqueness and needs of their children which can be of assistance in planning treatment and educational programmes. That is why a change in attitude towards the persons with special needs start from the parents since most of the superstitious beliefs, values and customs that powerfully affect the persons with special needs negatively are rooted in the communities.

Lack of supporting legislation: Lack of legislation provision to special needs education is a serious challenge. The passage of the disability bill by the National Assembly awaiting assent by the president is dragging on too long (Adebisi, Jerry, Rasaki & Igwe, 2014). This delay and insensitivity on the part of the government hampers the implementation of the formulated policies for the rights, education and inclusiveness of persons with special needs.

Evidence has speculated that most of the promises in the National Policy on Education document, relating to the implementation of plans and programmes for special needs education and provision of other essential services have remained at the theory level due to lack of mandatory legislations to give support to their implementation. Therefore, without supporting legislation, the implementation of the provisions in the NPE document is not essential obligatory on the Nigerian government. In the nonexistence of the supporting legislation, it can be disputed



that the contents of the NPE document lacks organizational backing and administrative clear-cut line of action. As a result, it can be determined that explanation and achievement of programmes and policies contained in the NPE and other documents remain subjective.

Unemployment of professionals in handling special need persons: Unemployment of personnel, training and retraining form the major challenge or hindrances to special needs education in Nigeria. The massive recruitment of professionals in the education of learners with special needs would make a great impact in the identification, referral, diagnosis, treatment, and provision of appropriate educational and related services. An adequate number of trained professionals is required in the provision of meaningful educational services to students with special needs.

Universities and colleges turn out graduates in disability related fields every year but they remain underutilized and unemployed. Special education teachers, psychologists, physiotherapists, social workers, nurses, doctors, vocational instructors, counsellors among others are not really employed directly to take care of educational, motor, social, psychological, vocational needs of persons with disabilities. Emphasis has been made by Eleweke (2003) that a successful education of students with special needs requires the involvement of different professionals who will be of assistance in the area of identification, referral, diagnoses, treatment and provision of appropriate educational services.

However, evidence indicates that Nigerian schools are faced with shortage of qualified teachers and support personnel and where it exists, professionals leave the job for other greener pressure as a result of lack of better treatment on the parts of the employers. With this effort it remains to be seen that most of the schools in the country do not have adequate numbers of qualified teachers. The programmes of the training of support personnel such as educational audiologists, psychologists, special and language pathologists and communication support workers such as interpreters are not offered in most of the institutions of higher education in Nigeria respectively.

Lack of administrative skills: This challenge manifests in the area of allocation, administration and distribution of funds and resources. Lack of interest and passion on the part of administrators of special needs related boards or agencies could be the sole problem of this bureaucratic bottle net. This means that the implementation of special needs education services lay in the hands of political will. It can be maintained that if there is political will by the policy makers, things would be done in favour of persons with special needs. A great measure of improvement must have been made for their benefit, but since the reverse seems to be the case, the interest of what those policy makers seem to be on what to gain, other than wellbeing of the beneficiaries.

In most cases, people in charge of policy making and the administration of special needs education at various levels of policy implementation are non professionals. Desks officers in most local, state and federal units are managed by



nonprofessionals, who do not have passion for the needs of persons with special needs. However, these arrangements have greatly jeopardized planning, monitoring, data collection, training and retraining of special needs teachers, social mobilization, improved infrastructural facilities, improved funding and management among others.

Barriers Face by the Gifted in the Classroom Sitting

In the same vein, Iwuamadi & Obasi (2015) examine some problems of the gifted in an inclusive education as:

- i. **Expensive Nature of Inclusive Education:** As was indicated earlier, a lot of resources are required for inclusive education programmes to enable children with special education needs to benefit maximally. It has not been quite easy for the government to provide the needed resources in the general education system let alone the inclusive education which requires extra and more expensive human and material resources.
- ii. **Teachers' Inability to use Individualized Instructional Method of Teaching:** The children with disabilities need special attention in many ways. They need to be allowed to proceed at their own pace and to do this requires that the teacher should create more time for them using other methods that suit their conditions.
- iii. **Lack of Understanding of the Concept and Definition of Inclusive Education:** Poor understanding of what constitutes inclusive education tends to make the adoption difficult. Many people understand this concept quite differently. Some understand it to mean integration while some see it as mainstreaming. Therefore, a clear clarification of the concept is necessary for effective planning and implementation to take place.
- iv. **Ridicule by Other Students:** Putting these children with special educational needs with normal children is sometimes demoralizing to them. Other children without disabilities sometimes see them as objects of ridicule. This type of attitude keeps them uncomfortable and can even lead them to dropping out of school.

According to the EFA Nigerian Report Cards for 2005, 2006, and 2007 in Iwuamadi & Obasi (2011) several important challenges still persist in the education of special needs which include:

- i. Massive neglect in the development of functional school libraries over the years
 - ii. The need for the integration of learning in the non-formal setting into formal context, which would enable learners to transit from formal education/learning context
 - iii. The HIV/AIDS challenges are highlighted in terms of urgent need to ensure that school intervention programmes are implemented
 - iv. Enforcement of instruction in the mother tongue
 - v. Erratic and inadequate funding of projects and programmes
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- vi. Lack of adequate available reliable and up-to-date baseline data to facilitate effective planning
 - vii. Inappropriate socio-cultural and religious practices.
 - viii. Providing unhindered access to about seven million school age children
 - ix. Providing child-friendly environment through the renovation of dilapidated physical structures and home-grown school feeding and health programme for learners
 - x. Providing 251,031 classrooms to meet the expansion in access
 - xi. The non-formal sector faces the challenges of repositioning in order to address the world of work and economic empowerment. It has to develop programmes that are flexible so as to cater for the needs of out-of-school youths including pregnant girls and young mothers.

Prospects of Special Needs Education

To make the education of special needs a success, it requires the attention of practitioners and policy makers in schools, local authorities, the health service and the voluntary sector as well as other stakeholders in special needs education working in collaboration. However, this action also requires governments' vision for the education of children with special needs to provide clear national leadership supported by an ambition programme of sustained action. This implies that the challenges to special needs education can be curbed using the following strategies which are supported by Ibrahim (2019), Adebisi, Jerry, Rasaki, Igwe (2014) as well as Nkechi (2013)

- i. Ensuring that children who have difficulties in learning receive the help they need as soon as possible and that parents of children with special needs have access to suitable childcare.
 - ii. Developing teachers' skills and strategies for meeting the needs of children with special needs.
 - iii. The government mobilizes people to form more NGO, to pursue the cause of people with special needs.
 - iv. Ensuring that adults with special needs living on the streets need to be rehabilitated and gainfully engaged.
 - v. Delivering improvements in partnership with NGOs and other National and International agencies on approaches to improve special needs education.
 - vi. Ensuring the healthcare, educational and social care systems are organized around the needs of children and their families, with better information, sharing and assessments leading to early intervention.
 - vii. Ensuring people with special needs are allowed to have access to good quality childcare and early years provision in their local community.
 - viii. Ensuring that the legislative provisions cater for the health, education, social welfare, removal of stigma, negative attitudes and other benefits that will enable social inclusion.
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- ix. Making sure that government funding should be increased and disbursed appropriately to schools to support special needs education and effective management of resources, through practical guidance, expert advice and support programmes.
 - x. Ensuring that the government cuts bureaucracy on issues and decisions affecting persons with special needs by helping them to focus on the essentials and make better use of the available resources.
 - xi. Local authorities to extend special needs education advice and support services to early years settings in developing the skills and awareness on issues related to disabilities.
 - xii. Ensuring schools with the skills and resources are built to enable them to take prompt action to help children who are falling behind their classmates.
 - xiii. Ensuring the need to get the machinery going towards the process of monitoring, in order to enable effective implementation of special needs education for children with special needs.
 - xiv. Enabling professionals and other stakeholders to work towards getting the National Assembly to legislate the creation of a special fund for the education for children with special needs.
 - xv. Providing opportunities for exceptionally gifted students who were also considered disabled within the Nigerian society to develop at their own pace in the interest of the nation's economic and technological development.
 - xvi. Given concrete meaning to the idea of equalizing educational opportunities for all children's physical and emotional needs.
 - xvii. Introduction of Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) programmes by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1976 should become relevant. This programme will be done to embrace vital issues such as social, economic and education integration among others.

Policy Implementation against Challenges of Special Needs Education

The Federal Government of Nigeria offers free education, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) to every Nigerian child from primary to junior secondary education. However, the implemented documents emphasize access, equality, equity, inclusiveness, affordability and equality of education among all Nigerian children (Osuji 2006 in Nkechi, 2013).

By implication, persons with disabilities (PWD) are entitled to free education that should guarantee sufficient level of literacy for future learning in vocational or academic pursuit. The UBE has led to astronomical increase in school attendance, yet they are captured by the programme which does not have an inclusive backing. But before the implementation of UBE, a Federal Government Document (FME, 1986) on special education in Nigeria clearly outlined steps and procedures that are in time with current international recommendations and best practices and which ought to have ensured early intervention and effective inclusive education if



implemented. World Bank (2003) claimed that “early intervention in small, multi-ability groups is important when children are still in the formative stage of development.

As speculated, the National Policy on Education (Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN), (2013) stated three key objectives of special needs education to be:

- i. Give concrete meaning to the idea of equalizing educational opportunities to all children, disabilities notwithstanding.
- ii. Provision of adequate education for all people with special needs in order that they may fully contribute their quota to the development of the nation.
- iii. Diversified and appropriate curriculum for all the beneficiaries.

In a nutshell, the policy on special need education was not carried through as expected and the momentum of that decade was lost. Also, one of the areas where the policy became a barrier to it is that the Federal Government did not specify the administrative structures or functions of the three tiers of government. This failure made it difficult for proper funding and service delivery and has consequences to the welfare package of the people with special needs. Also, the policy does not classify the criteria for those personnel that would head the special needs education departments and institutions.

Implication of these Education Challenges to Special Needs Delivery

The following has been mapped out as the implications of the educational challenges and prospects of persons with disabilities in special needs delivery:

- i. The shortfall stipulated on the challenges of special needs education paves way for the government, non-governmental organization and other relevant agencies to provide recommended services to the persons with disabilities (PWDs). This anchored precisely on progressiveness, recognition and maintaining the basic and needful right of learners with exceptionality or disabilities in the society.
- ii. Education for persons with disabilities (PWDs) which began as an excellent path for providing equal education to all Nigerian citizens has found itself struggling with how to make it better for learners who are disenfranchised. It is not surprising however that if this can be given a needful periodic and successful attention by the government and ministry of education at federal and state level will produce measurable progress in the education and service delivery for these learners.
- iii. By ensuring the objective work of the challenges and prospects to special needs education, the Federal Ministry of Education must set up a committee to coordinate special education activities. This coordination of activities would be a joint collaboration with the Ministry of Health, Social Welfare, and Labour in taking a census of all children and adults by age, sex, health, and type of disabilities.



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- iv. It can be found that the inadequacy of care of learners with disabilities is attributed to ignorance, superstition and taboos as a result of different cultural groups in Nigeria.
 - v. To look at the future of PWDs Nigeria must join other progressive nations to advocate for the rights of learners with disabilities and help them join the mainstream society.
 - vi. From other perspectives, Nigeria must build a foundational knowledge where proactive efforts can be achieved such as: institute advocacy groups, shift paradigm, enforcement of NPE, recognition and accommodation of various forms of disabilities or exceptionalities, give quality and equal educational opportunities to all learners among others.
 - vii. Also, inclusiveness can increase as experience is gained about disabilities and education of those with special needs. Meanwhile, henceforth universal design must be employed in future construction of buildings, roads and provision of various/necessary amenities for persons with disabilities (PWDs).

Conclusion

The challenges of special needs education with low literacy rate continues to lag below the poverty line, making the scenario in services a complex situation. Compounding this situation are the challenges of insufficient number of required trained professionals, lack of prescribed standard in the delivery systems and quality control, and inadequate resources among others. With the effective utilization of the valuable human resources in the field of special needs education, and with the proactive government in initiating policies for the welfare of persons with special needs and with many more provision of good services and centres being established with programme and services to meet the numerous challenges on ground, the sky's the limit for the field of special needs education in Nigeria.

The legislation, if assented to by the government, will in all certainty, strengthen its measures in making available quality services. In this endeavour, the non-governmental organizations are partners with the government in making it a reality for every child in need to be provided with necessities of life from early intervention to quality service delivery.

Suggestions

In the above all, the writer suggests that:

- i. There should be consistency in government educational policy. If the government emphasis and effective policy is on special needs children, the establishment of new special schools by either the federal or state government should be stopped as there are currently enough special



schools to cater for children with severe cases of disabilities while emphasis should be on sustenance of the already built schools.

- ii. Efforts should be geared into making special needs education possible through funding and the provision of the needed facilities.
- iii. Also, there is a need to understand that the success of special needs education is hindered by other challenges like community's attitude towards special needs, lack of adequate involvement of all stakeholders among others. As such, special needs delivery services should be done in order to ensure that the best is achieved from the objectives of special need education.

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