



CHAPTER 24

ELEMENTS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHING IN ALL TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Beth N. Oluka Ph.D

Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki

Adaka Terfa Ahon Ph.D

Federal University of Lafia

Introduction

Special Education is seen and defined in various ways as perceived by various scholars in various fields of study, according to Ozoji (2016) sees Special Education as a balanced system of education that seeks to compensate for the disabilities of and facilitate learning for children with special needs. He went further to say that Special Education is the education of an exceptional child, a system of education that uses special tools to be able to address the specialized learning needs of the exceptional child. Special Education is also an individualized education aimed at compensating for the special learning problems of the exceptional child.

Special Education is that form of education specifically designed to facilitate the learning of individuals who, for a wide variety of reasons, require additional support and adaptive pedagogical methods in order to participate and meet learning objectives in an educational programme. It is also important to note that Special Education is a composition of a range of teaching practices specifically designed for the needs of children with one disability or the other, who require special learning needs, and are implemented by well-trained Special Education teachers and not normally seen or used by untrained teachers in a regular classroom (Unachukwu & Nwosu, 2019). Special Education advocates that students with all forms of learning disabilities should have access to the same curriculum, including higher order processing and problem-solving skills, as their peers without disabilities with appropriate accommodation in place. Also, the special nature of the educational programme is in the delivery of instruction, given that the needs of the students with disabilities are rarely met through the general education instruction alone. However, an important issue to note is that in our schools (Nursery, Primary, Secondary and Tertiary), a very large number of teachers are not specifically trained for the purpose of promoting inclusive education as only very few teachers possess qualifications to manage learners with all forms of special needs. Also, students with special needs can only benefit from explicit and systematic instruction that is closely related to their area of instructional needs. Thus, there is a need for identifying the challenges in the element of Special Education and potential suggestions for achieving success.



Inclusive education is the most effective way to give all children a fair chance to go to school, learn and develop the skills they need to thrive. Inclusive education means all children in the same classrooms, in the same schools within their neighborhood. It means real learning opportunities for groups who have traditionally been excluded – not only children with disabilities, but speakers of minority languages too. Inclusive education allows learners from all backgrounds to learn and grow side by side to the benefit of all. At the school level, teachers must be trained, buildings must be refurbished and students must receive accessible learning materials. According to Smith, in Ozoji (2016) identified five success marks of inclusive education:

1. Learners with Special needs should be valued, active and full members of the school community. They are truly included in their classroom only when they are appreciated by their teachers and socially accepted by their peers.
2. Appreciation of student diversity. The various types of diversity eg. racial, and ethnic , gender and sex, religious, physical, learning and intellectual disabilities linguistic , behaviour and personality differences are to recognized and celebrated Teachers and learners learn tolerance and the ability to accept differences in each other
3. Good teachers vary their curricula to meet the needs of the children. Many included children may be able to deal effectively with curricula, others need modifications. Thus, we should have curriculum Plus and curriculum minus in addition to regular curriculum to be able to meet all needs in the classroom.
4. Attention to curricular needs, diversified learning instructions and curricula
5. Personal support and collaboration. Special Education teachers, para educators (teachers' aides) and other related services, professionals such as audiologists are involved in providing support to children with special needs. This means that instructional support as specific accommodation, assistive technology; universal design complement the contribution of personal support.

The need to incorporate element of Special Education into teacher education programmes among others includes: equipping the teachers in training with the knowledge and necessary skills of identification and referral; making teachers appreciate the ever changing needs and demands posed by these special groups in the regular school system; stimulating government interest and creating awareness of the existence of these groups of children in our regular school system and to make adequate provisions for them too; and to guide those with Special Education needs through self-discovery to appreciate their worth and restore their dignity



through a more meaningful and fulfilling life devoid of dependency. (Federal Ministry of Education, 2016).

In recent times, there has been more emphasis on finding innovative approaches for teaching learners in inclusive classrooms such that learners with or without any form of disability can feel a sense of belonging in their classrooms (Brownell et al., 2019). Nigeria and other developing countries of the world have seen a rise in campaigns to promote elements of Special Education and effective teaching of school children with special needs. For example, the promotion of inclusive education has been high at all levels of education globally; albeit with special attention to children with special needs (Henderson et al., 2005; Hudson & Miller, 2006). While there is a good step to ensure inclusion and equal rights of every child to education, this chapter tries to present the challenges that may hinder the success of Special Education, and thus present effective approaches that school teachers can adopt to improve teaching in an inclusive classroom setting to create an effective level playing ground for all children with or without forms of special needs.

With the recent calls for inclusive education in Nigeria, the teachers are often under some sort of pressure to assist every child to attain academic success despite their level of special needs (Gabby and Lawrence, 2008). This is important given the evidence in the literature that the majority of students with special needs may likely not measure up in terms of academic success with their counterparts who do not require special needs in the same class (Eskay et al., 2012). Meanwhile, Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1949, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) of 1989, the Education for All of 1990, and the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education of 1994, granted all students with special needs the right and access to education in an inclusive classroom (Ikediashi, 2012; Osokoya, 2008); and access to training for career readiness. However, a major point in the debates is understanding how teachers who apparently do not have Special Education qualifications or had undergone further Special Education training could cope with teaching students with special needs. This is pertinent considering that in typical Nigerian school settings, teachers teach every child in the same classroom irrespective of learning needs of various impairments, disabilities and handicapping conditions of children with exceptional care or not.

Special Needs Education

This is the education designed to facilitate the learning of individuals who, for a wide variety of reasons, require additional support and adaptive pedagogical methods in order to participate and meet learning objectives in an educational programme.

Education of persons with special needs, education that addresses the specific area of want, deficiencies, deviations and exceptionalities. Practice of educating



students in the way that accommodates their individual differences, disabilities, and special needs that includes:

Autism, Auditory Impairment, Deaf-Blindness, Emotional Disturbance, Learning Disability, Intellectual Disability, Multiple Impairment, with the following specific characteristic like: Academic learning problem, Language disorder, Perceptual disorder, Meta cognitive deficit social – emotional difficulty, Problem with memory, Motor difficulties, and Attention and Impulses control deficiencies.

Thesis Statement

This chapter focuses on the challenges of teaching elements of Special Education and strategies to enhance the teaching of elements of Special Education by teachers.

Challenges of Teachers' in Teaching Element of Special Education

Teachers' in Special Education in Nigeria are currently faced with many challenges as discussed by Dienye (2011); one major challenge of teachers in Special Education in Nigeria has been that of quality control in teacher education institutions. Maintaining the required standards to ensure that quality education is given to teachers concerning Special Education has not been completely attained. Some government agencies responsible for regulating teacher education programmes include the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) which coordinates and regulates colleges of education ensuring that the number of qualified lecturers and the required infrastructure for effective running of the institutions are available. The Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) is the body responsible for accrediting university programmes in the faculties and institutes of education in the universities. The National Teachers Institute (NTI) is the body responsible for pre-service and in-service training programmes, teachers who wish to get National Certificate of Education (NCE) and most recently Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) programmes. The Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) is responsible for maintaining teachers register and code of conduct for teachers.

Even though these bodies have been given the responsibility to monitor and maintain standards in the various schools responsible for providing teacher education including Special Education, they have not been doing their jobs the way they should. Inspections are not being properly done. Inspections are flossed over after inducements by heads of education institutions to get their programmes accredited. The outreach programmes of the NTI are poorly monitored, inexperienced officers are put in charge of their outreach centres scattered all over the country, especially in the rural areas. Poor quality teachers who do not have the technical knowledge of special education are posted to schools to teach these children. Even the TRCN has not been able to stop non educationists from teaching.



The inability of these regulatory agencies of government to perform their duties effectively is inimical to the growth of teacher education in Nigeria.

Special Education teachers in Nigeria are bedeviled with poor quality candidates. Stakeholders in the education system have expressed concerns about the poor quality of education graduates from most teacher training institutions and universities. It is common knowledge that most candidates who opt to train as Special Education teachers in the faculties of education in the universities and colleges of education do so reluctantly. Most candidates see Special Education as the last option when they fail to secure admission into other courses of their choice. The result is that such students do not commit their time to the programme but want to get the degrees to look for greener pastures. Besides, admitting poor students into Special Education programmes also affects the final output. Poor quality candidates will make poor quality teachers in Special Education. Undeserving candidates who indulge in examination malpractices to gain admission may not be amenable to learning because they are ill prepared for rigorous academic work. The result is poor quality teachers in Special Education.

Special Education teachers suffer from poor enrolment. The poor condition of service over the years has made Special Education teaching very unattractive to the best brains in the country. There is nothing to entice and retain the best brains in the profession. The low social status of teaching in Nigeria has made it very unattractive to younger ones. The problem of attrition in the teaching profession is a huge challenge to Special Education teacher Nigeria.

The challenge of globalization is an impediment to Nigerian teacher education; when the world is driven by information and communication technology (ICT), most institutions that provide teacher education do not have the technology and personnel to train teachers who can teach students using the latest cutting edge gadgets of modern science and technology. Training and retraining of Special Education teachers to cope with the dynamic trend in Special Education through acquisition of competency in multimedia which will help facilitate interactive communication among individuals. ICT enables Special Education teachers to use the web and this process expands the teachers' horizon as it keeps them abreast of new trends in Special Education. The absence of ICT facilities in most teacher education training institutions has a negative impact on the quality of both the teacher education and education in general.

Special Education in Nigeria has always experienced very poor funding. According to Briggs (2010), the federal government has never been able to get to the 26% budgetary allocation stipulated by UNESCO to education, the highest being 6.4% of the budgetary allocation to the education sector. The result is an education sector bedeviled with industrial actions due to non-provision of the infrastructure required to provide quality education in teacher training institutions. Lifelong teacher education model is almost non-existent in Nigerian teacher education programmes. There is the need for lifelong education for Special Education teachers. This includes vertical integration- education throughout life.



Teacher education should include inculcating in the teachers the attitude of continuous learning. Fadina (2004) emphasized the need for more in-service and on the job training to help raise the quality of teachers in Nigeria. In the same vein Olude (2004) saw in-service training as a lifelong education process for the improvement of teacher education in Nigeria. In-service training for teachers is not given the attention it deserves because teachers do not get sponsorship.

Government has always paid lip-service to the implementation of policies that will promote the quality of Special Education teachers in Nigeria as stipulated in the national policy. Special Education teachers in Nigeria also suffer from the problem of poorly trained teachers due to the problem of examination malpractice. Student teachers who cheat their way through training programmes will naturally get into the system as half-baked and poor quality teachers of Special Education. This trend has continued to ruin the teaching of elements of Special Education in the Nigerian Teacher education program in Nigeria.

1. Lacking Experience in an Inclusive Setting .Some teachers have not been exposed to special-needs classrooms, and this can be a disadvantage. None Special Education teachers may find the first year to be especially difficult. Educators need to coordinate efforts and understand the needs of the classroom in terms of developing appropriate skills and lesson plans.

2. Dealing with Parents of "Typically Developing" Students

Just like the students, some parents are not used to dealing with persons with special needs. Teachers need to convey to parents how the classroom is conducted, and they need to reassure parents that every student's needs will be met.

3. Addressing Individualized Lesson Plans

Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) are important for helping special-needs students succeed. Because there are varying abilities in an inclusive classroom, teachers need to balance multiple IEPs while addressing individual academic needs based on ability.

4. Coordinating Therapies. A special-needs inclusive classroom needs to be well organized and allow for students to attend therapy sessions. However, this becomes a challenge in planning day-to-day activities and keeping all students engaged and learning.

Strategies of Teaching Element of Special Education in Teacher Education Program in Nigeria

For Nigeria to remain relevant in the comity of nations, the quality of its education must be seen to be at the same level as the developed nations, teacher education at all levels must be geared towards producing a crop of well-motivated teachers to participate in the developmental revolution which is sweeping through Nigeria in recent times. Without well trained teachers to help educate the masses, the various economic reforms and even other socio-political and economic reforms will not make any impact in the developmental process. An improvement on the quality of teacher education will ensure that teachers are equipped with the



specialized knowledge and capability to achieve the nation's educational goals which is an efficient, relevant and functional education system.

Achievement Testing

For students who do not take the same assessment as their grade mates, in many cases they take their state's alternate assessment. It assesses the same standards of the grade level but at a very basic level. Special needs students cannot be assessed on the same standards as traditional students, and Special Education teachers should not be held to the same measure either. These teachers, as are all teachers, are operating on overdrive to cope with the demands of the children they teach and the system should reward these efforts rather than marginalize them.

Different Skill Levels within a Classroom

In an integrated classroom, special needs students receive extra support through paraprofessionals or teaching assistants who are assigned to the classroom. In a Special Education classroom, the children will have different capabilities and disabilities. The teacher is expected to create an environment that is conducive to learning and is supportive of all students regardless of their skills and mobility level. Each student has an individualized education plan (IEP) as required by federal laws. Special Education teachers must follow the requirements outlined in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) regardless of the classroom format.

Managing Children with Behavioral Issues

Children with special abilities require sensitive yet firm attention. They are prone to overstimulation and are easily upset over stressors that would be minor annoyances to other children. Make sure to have a calm-down area in the classroom. This section should provide a safe yet comforting atmosphere to allow learners to find their balance. It should not seem like a time-out corner but rather one that is cozy and peaceful. This way, teachers can carry on with the rest of the class even in the face of distractions.

Documenting the Issues

Children react differently to different circumstances. Special needs children express anger, sadness, joy and other emotions just as well as other children although the triggers may be less obvious. It is important to document these instances judiciously to understand the factors that may trigger aggression and emotional breakdowns. These records may also be useful to counselors and parents.

Consistent Schedules

Various studies have shown that special needs children thrive in an environment that respects their patterns and need for consistency. A minor change



in the pattern of activities can be upsetting to special needs students. Make sure to create classroom schedules ahead of time and maintain a pattern of activities that children can easily get used to while ensuring a calm atmosphere.

Parent Engagement

Communication channels between parents and teachers of students with special needs and abilities should be open, honest and supportive at all times. Communicate by phone, email or written notes to provide parents with an update on their child's progress or an insight into the child's behavior patterns. Encourage parents to keep teachers informed about any factors that may be affecting their child's temperaments.

Fostering a Collaborative Environment

Special Education teachers are at the front line of a very trying function: educating and nurturing children who have disabilities. This is a task that requires patience, persistence and dedication. Make the most of available resources, including tapping into the expertise of general education teachers, therapists, counselors and administrative support. Collaboration generates creative solutions while lightening the burden on Special Education teachers.

Conclusion

No Nation can rise above the quality of its teachers Omoegun (2022) the quality of education of any nation depends on the quality of its teachers, efforts should be made by the government to employ all modern methods available in teacher education in teaching elements of Special Education to produce qualified teachers. This will ensure a high quality education system which will compete positively in the global community as teacher preparation for quality education. Government should not pay lip-service to the implementation of policies that will promote the quality of teacher education in Nigeria as stipulated in the national policy as it enhances the teaching of elements of Special Education.

Implications

The chapter has the following important implications:

1. Teachers will benefit from continuous professional development training and retraining programmes on how to progress instruction for positive learning outcomes.
2. The Special Education teacher can structure their teaching plans following the Gagne's nine events of instruction and active learning activities to facilitate students' learning in an inclusive classroom as this will give all learners a sense of belonging.
3. The administrators realize they are capable of creating a conducive school environment to strengthen Special Education programmes and enhance effective student learning via inclusive education.



-
4. To facilitate quality teaching in inclusive classrooms, it is important that school management should establish quality assurance mechanisms, monitoring and evaluation framework to help Special Education teachers engage with innovative teaching practices that will foster instructional quality to ensure that all learners benefit.

Suggestions

To enhance quality of teaching of element of Special Education in teacher education in Nigeria, the chapter recommends the following;

- i. Teacher education programmes should be subjected to proper supervision by the appropriate bodies to ensure the achievement of goals in line with the standard benchmark for achievement of quality teaching of element of Special Education in teacher education to equip teachers in the delivery of knowledge required for survival in globalized world
- ii. The period of students' teaching practice should be extended to enhance professional preparation of the teachers. Also, the possibility of a probation system of prospective teachers should be considered on its own merits for the production of competent teachers.
- iii. Government should award scholarships to student teachers as an incentive. Exceptional students with cumulative grade points of 4.5 and above should be encouraged by awarding them free university education so long as their grades do not drop.
- iv. The government and curriculum planners should ensure that the teacher trainers who teach elements of Special Education in our teacher education institutes are themselves professionals. Also, the professionals in teacher education should regularly organize seminars and workshops to update teachers on the new methods in teaching at various school levels and
- v. The government should increase the funding of the teacher education institutions by providing modern facilities in teaching elements of Special Education especially in the area of ICT should be made available by the government to enhance the quality of teacher education in Nigeria at various school levels.

References

Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004). National policy on Education. Lagos: NERD Press.



-
- Fadina (2004) A new teacher education paradigm in a globalized world. TND press Ltd. Rivers State Nigeria.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004). National policy on Education. Lagos: NERD Press.
- Federal Ministry of Education (2009), National policy on education, Lagos: NERDC press
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2016). Education reform act. Abuja.
- Unachukwu & Nwosu, (2019). Development of teacher education In Nigeria. Enugu: Sepp Publisher
- Gabby, I. E and Lawrence, R.E (2008). Trainees' perceptions of Inclusive Education in Nigeria: A preliminary report. In Barga, U (eds), *Contemporary Issues in the education of persons with visual Impairment*. Ibadan, Nigeria. *Glory-land publishing Co.* 6-24.
- Ibidapo-Obe, O. (2007). The challenge of teacher education in Nigeria. UNESCO Forum for higher education, Research and Knowledge in Accra Ghana
- Olude (2004) Family health for quality education. Journal of Education
- Ugwu, C. J. (2015). Special Education. *Study of Differences*. (2nd Edition) TND press Ltd. Rivers State Nigeria.
- Unachukwu, G. C., & Nwosu, K. C. (2019). Considerations in inclusive education in West Africa: What challenges really exist? *Journal of the Nigerian Academy of Education (Special Edition)*, 15(1), 34-53.
- Westwood, P. (2011). *Commonsense methods for children with Special Educational needs* (6th ed.). New York: Routledge development. 7 (1) 12 - 20
- Ozaji; E.D. (2005). Special needs education and rehabilitation for beginner professionals. Jos: Department Publication.
- Osuji, S. N. (2009). Teacher Education in Nigeria. Journal of International Social Research. 168 (2) 54 - 69
- Ikediashi, 2012; Osokoya, 2008). The Social System, Glancoe, Ill. The free Press
- Punwar, R E (2014) The Senate: National Assembly Federal Republic of Nigeria. Retrieved from <http://www.nassnig.org/nass/news>