



CHAPTER 40

HISTORY OF SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Introduction

To focus the attention of our readers, the chapter starts with the definition and presentation of our key concepts and sub-themes, namely, *History* and *Special Education (SE)* now *Special Needs Education (SNE)*. Thereafter, the history of SNE in Nigeria shall follow, focusing on the traditional and modern perspectives, as well as the efforts of individuals, the philanthropists, Christian missions and government in the development of this type of education in the country. The place of SNE in the National Policy on Education and the Universal Basic Education, as well as the education of the gifted and talented will follow. Further, the challenges faced by SNE in Nigeria shall be highlighted, with some lessons for Nigerian Special Needs Educators to conclude the discourse.

Concept of History

It was Francis Arouet, the founder of the rationalist school of historians, popularly known as Voltaire, who once said 'if you want to converse with me, define your terms'. This is important to focus the attention of the readers. Thus, in the spirit of this tradition, we shall start this academic exercise by providing the definition of the key concepts of history and Special Education (SE), now Special Needs Education (SNE), as words generally do not have meaning except when properly situated in a particular context.

The word **history** came from the Greek word '*historie*', which means 'inquiry', 'learning by inquiry' or the 'outcome or result of inquiry'. Latin has it as '*historia*', meaning 'a story', or 'an inquiry'. The French word '*1 histoire*' means 'a story' or 'an inquiry', 'an investigation of man's past' (Carr 1964; Chambers 1961; Firth 1964). It is on record that Herodotus, a Greek who lived in the 5th century B. C., precisely between 484-425 B. C., is popularly referred to as the 'Father of History', as he was the first person to write an organized account of the past events or past occurrences.

Crookall (1960), in providing a definition of what history is, it sees as "the distilled experiences and wisdom of the past, relived by the historian in his efforts to grapple with the present and by so doing giving his future a better place". History, for Adeyinka (1983), is "...the study of life in society in the past, in all its



aspects, in relation to present developments and future hopes. It is a story of man in time, an inquiry into the past, based on evidence. Indeed, evidence is the raw material of history teaching and learning". Smith (1978) stressed that history deals with the explanations of *how* and *why* certain events and situations have come about in both change and stability. It is, therefore, an attempt to rethink the past in terms of *what happened, when it happened* and *how it happened*. This, in essence, is the main function of History, which Becker (1976:68), has defined as

memory of things said and done (whether in our immediate yesterdays or the long past of mankind); running hand in hand with the anticipation of things to be said and done, enables us each to the extent of his knowledge and imagination, to be intelligent, to push back the narrow confines of fleeting present moments so that what we are doing may be judged in the light of what we have done and what we hope to do.

In the same vein, Alagoa (1979:5), sees history as a written or oral record of the past of a people, their culture, customs, language and habitats, as could be ascertained from archeological findings. History has the potential to help the present generation of men and women to learn from the mistakes of those who lived in the past and so avoid repeating such mistakes and at the same time be guided by the victorious and courageous lives of some people in the past (Grenzi, 2000: 209).

Not only is history interested in the past for the past's sake, it is equally interested in examining the developments and changes that have occurred in different human societies in the past and how such changes affect, influence and determine the present conditions of life in the society. The past that the historian studies is, therefore, not a dead one; rather it is a past that is constantly impinging on the present. History is about all the records and accounts of past events that relate to the present location and lives of peoples all over the world, that is, the records of past events, in relation to the present, with a view to predicting and preparing individuals and nations for the unknown future. Paulley (2013) had argued that the historian, in looking into the past for the purpose of the future, digs into the very origin, to the earliest period that is relevant to the issue at stake. This is the utilitarian nature of History as a discipline - a value must be placed on the issue at stake to justify the historian's inquiry process. Here, the issue at stake is Special Needs Education in Nigeria.

Meaning of Special Needs Education (SNE)

Education is the easiest way to liberate the individual, including the disabled. While this is the case, Kirk (1972) has argued that the ruthless annihilation of particularly disabled children continued for many centuries before yielding to the less inhuman-practice of exploiting them for the amusement of kings and other personalities. Denying the disabled education, therefore, is synonymous with



preventing them from inhaling the free air. This justifies the need for SNE in the world.

Special Needs Education is based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as enunciated by the United Nations in 1946, and later strengthened by the Nigerian National Policy on Education (2014), that 'every Nigerian child shall have a right to equal educational opportunities, irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities' (equality of educational opportunity). The policy went further to state that the Nigeria's philosophy of education is based on the development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen; the full integration of the individual into the community; the provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the country at all levels both inside and outside the formal school system.

There are various ways of defining SNE, According to Regar, Schroeder & Usehold (1986), Special Needs Education (SNE) is 'an area within the framework of general education that provides appropriate facilities, specialized materials and methods and teachers with specialized training for children considered handicapped. Smith, as cited by Adima (1991) defined SNE as that profession concerned with the arrangement of educational variables leading to the prevention or elimination of those conditions that produce significant defects in the academic, communicative, locomotor or adjective functioning of children.

For Heward (2000), it is an individually planned and systematically monitored arrangement of physical settings, special equipment, materials, teaching procedure and other intervention designed to help children achieve the greatest possible personal actualization and academic success. Olawuyi (2008) defined SNE as an ideal general education in which individual differences, which are manifested in their abilities, aptitudes, learning styles and motivation to learn, are considered and provided for. Eteng-Uket (2022), described it as classroom or private instructions involving unconventional techniques, materials, exercises, facilities and subject matter designed for learners who have one form of disability or the other such as, behavioral disorders or learning disabilities, the gifted and talented. It is a practice of educating learners with special needs aimed at individual's full participation in school education.

Based on the works cited above, we are defining SNE as the type of education provided for children with special needs within the formal school system, either exclusively in the normal classrooms or exclusively in special classrooms. Our definition here includes the type of education provided for physically-challenged children (the partially blind, hearing-impaired-deaf, mentally challenged and the gifted and talented children of school age.

Federal Government of Nigeria's Concern for Special Needs Education

The Federal Government of Nigeria took formal interest in Special Education in 1977 with the publication of its National Policy on Education (FRN, 1977) as a fall out of the 1969 National Curriculum Conference organized by the



Nigerian Educational Research Council (NERC), now Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC). To underline the importance of this form of education in Nigeria, the revised National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) provided a comprehensive definition of Special Education (Special Needs Education-SNE) as

a customized educational programme designed to meet the unique needs of persons with special needs that the general education programme cannot cater for.

Special needs persons, as provided in the National Policy on Education, include

- a. visual impairment (blind and the partially sighted)
- b. hearing impairment (deaf and the partially hearing)
- c. physical and health impairment
- d. intellectual disability (mild, moderate, severe and profound)
- e. emotional and behavioural disorders (hyperactive, hypoactive and socially maladjusted)
- f. speech and language impairment
- g. learning disabilities (psychological/neurological phobia or challenges)
- h. multiple disabilities
- i. the gifted and talented (who are intellectually precocious and find themselves insufficiently challenged by the programme of the normal school and who may take stubbornness and apathy in resistance to it); and
- j. albinos (vision and skin problems, lack of self-esteem, myths about albinism, stigmatization and stereotype).

Special Needs Education is the education of children and adults who have learning difficulties, such as blindness, partial sightedness, deafness, hardness of hearing, mental retardation, social maladjustment, physical handicap, etc, due to circumstances of birth, inheritance, social position, mental or physical health pattern or accident in later life, as a result which a few children and adults are unable to cope with the normal school class organization and methods of teaching.

People with special needs, according to the National Policy on Education (2014), are to be provided with inclusive education services in schools, which normal persons attend, in age-appropriate general education classes, directly supervised by general teachers. For SNE persons who cannot benefit from inclusive education, special classes and units shall remain in special schools, to receive the same quality of education in the other setting.

History of Special Needs Education in Nigeria

Special Education (now Special Needs Education-SNE), unlike regular education in Nigeria, is grossly misunderstood by most people. The misunderstanding is associated with many factors and most especially, with the word *special* that is used to describe this form of education. What, then, is special about this form of education? It is special because it deals with children or people



who have one form of disability or the other and with children of people who are gifted or talented. For example, Aristotle, an ancient Greek philosopher, believed that the deaf were senseless and so cannot reason. The Spartans in general, used to kill or abandon any of their children that were in one way or the other physically challenged because they placed so much value on physical abilities and agility. Later in history humanitarians emerged in Europe. Some of these humanitarians were Juan Pable Bonet, Ponce Delcon, Girolamo Gardano, Abbe Charles Delppe, Maria Montessori. Specifically, Maria Montessori believed that mental disability in children was the result of dullness of senses. She, therefore, devised the *Montessori Method* of teaching aimed at training the senses of such children.

In Nigeria, SNE as presently used may be defined as the education of exceptional children or children with special needs. The exceptional children who benefit from Special Educational practices include the deaf, blind, mentally retarded, gifted and so forth who are educated by using modified curriculum contents to provide optimum educational opportunity. However, from the views expressed in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) and the various supportive definitions, the exceptional children in Nigeria are lucky in that the government has finally realized that education should be the right of every citizen, and not just a privilege granted to some people. The historical sequence of SNE in Nigeria could be gleaned from traditional and modern perspectives.

Traditional Perspective

Most Nigerians have the idea that SNE is a new system of education in this country. SNE according to Adima (1991) is not new as its origin in the country dates back to several hundreds of years. Special Education developed with the culture of the Nigerian people. The education of the Africans before the coming of the missionary education was/is known as the African Indigenous education. It is the education Fafunwa (1982:11) defined as 'the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops his abilities, attitudes and other forms of behavior which are of positive value to the society in which he lives'. Adeyinka & Paulley (2015:170), see it as

an education of the people by the people and for the people ...which satisfied the needs of the people. In it all adult members of the society were involved in the process of transmitting the culture, values, religious and occupational activities of the people to the younger generations.

It is, therefore, a process of learning, which enables every African society to teach her younger generations the life patterns of the society. It is natural to every African society. It does not possess the art of writing. It is relatively informal in nature (even though some elements of formality are being observed in some cases such as the apprenticeship scheme as we shall see later). It was also very pragmatic. It is an educational system that adequately provided for and implemented all the domains (that is the cognitive, affective and psychomotor) and for all kind of



persons including the handicapped one that needed to be developed in an individual submitted to an educational system, even though it was laced with lots of taboos, superstition and myths. With reference to the children with various forms of disabilities, they were regarded as the physical demonstration of the anger of the gods as a consequence of their parents' transgression; hence parents of such children were ashamed of them. As a result, such physically challenged children were locked up or done away with secretly.

From the historical perspective, the nature of traditional Special Education practiced in Nigeria many years ago was more special than the modern forms of Special Education. As it was practiced, traditional education was integrated because, both the handicapped and the non-handicapped were educated together in art, music, physical education, conventions, customs, morals, superstitions and laws of their society.

Modern Perspective

From the early form (traditional) of SNE, the modern practice was born. The activities of missionaries and charitable humanitarian, voluntary organizations are very outstanding as pioneers in the promotion of Special Needs Education (SNE) in the modern context through the establishment of schools for children with special needs in the country. It is not necessary to mention all the educational facilities in Nigeria founded by the missionaries and voluntary agencies. However, mention must be made here of the pioneer institutions that in some ways influenced the modern outlook of SNE in Nigeria.

Specific Efforts in the Development of Special Needs Education in Nigeria

As stated earlier on, the development of Special Needs Education in Nigeria started with the Christian missionaries and the philanthropists. Accordingly, we shall here identify what roles they played in specific cases of physical impairment, starting with the blind.

Schools for the Blind

Gindiri School for the Blind-1953, and Others

The *Gindiri School for the Blind Children* was established in the present-day Plateau State in 1953. It was one of the earliest schools for the blind established in the country by the Sudan United Mission now Church of Christ in Nigeria (CCIN). The purpose of establishing the school was to teach vocational subjects such as crafts, typing and farming to young blind children and in some cases academic subjects with adaptation to suit the peculiar needs of the blind children. It has produced many graduates who engaged in various vocations all over the country. In 1958, the Ogbomoso Centre for the Blind was set up by the Baptists Mission.

Nigeria Vocational Blind Centre, Oshodi-1958

This center was established in 1958 by Dr. and Mrs. R. C. West of the Baptist Mission, Ogbomoso, with assistance from the Red Cross Society of Nigeria,



Ogbomoso branch. The aim of establishing the centre was to provide vocational training for blind adults and where possible provide education for the young ones who were visually impaired.

Special School for the Blind at the Special Education Centre, Oji River-1960

The establishment of the centre by the Church Missionary Society (CMS), spearheaded by Dr and Mrs T. D. F Money at the Oji River (now Anambra State) was as a result of the concern for ex-patients of the leper colony, some of whom were blind, physically handicapped or deaf. Inspiration for its establishment according to Olawuyi (2003) came when the Queen of England visited Nigeria in 1956. On her visit to Oji River, she observed that many ex-leprosy patients who were blind were illiterates. She then made a promise of financial assistance for an educational programme for the blind. This centre took off under the able leadership of Ephraim Atu and later N. D. Ezenwukwe with two blind students in 1958. Deaf students were admitted in 1963. Later the centre started catering for three categories of the handicapped: the blind, the physically handicapped and the deaf.

Pacelli School for the Blind, Lagos-1962

The Pacelli School for the Blind Children, Surulere, Lagos was established in 1962 by the Catholic Mission led by late Archbishop Leo H. Taylor, the then Catholic Archbishop of Lagos. The programme of the school was threefold. These were the:

- (a) ***Primary School Programme***, which prepares blind children for the first school leaving certificate and entrance examinations into secondary schools.
- (b) ***Vocational Assessment and Guidance Programme***, which prepares students for a wide range of experience in various operations; and
- (c) ***Secondary and University Resource Programme***, which prepares students for secondary and university life.

Today, the Pacelli School for the Blind which has produced many graduates in various fields of learning in such fields as communication, education, secretarial job and many technicians in vocational fields like farming, poultry keeping, weaving, cane work, telephone and music instruction has a number of modern facilities, including a Home Economic Centre, an Outdoor Swimming pool, a science laboratory as well as a well-equipped library.

Other schools established by philanthropists in the area of schools for the Blind in Nigeria include the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind with headquarters in London: Vocational Training Centre for the Blind in Kaduna, 1953, the Ikeja Farm Craft Centre for the Blind, 1957 and the Nigerian National Advisory Council for the Blind, 1960. On 5th September, 1977, another Special Needs School, according to Emmanuel & Osokoya (2016), was opened as a unit of Masifa Baptist Day School, Ogbomoso.



Missionary/Philanthropists Interventions in the Area of Deafness

As it was with the blind, before anybody in the country ever thought of planning a special programme for the deaf, the missionaries were in charge. The following examples buttress the assertion.

Wesley School for the Deaf-1956

The school was started in 1956 in a classroom attached to the Anglican Girls School, Lagos, where classes were held twice a week in the evenings by a group of philanthropists who later formed the *Society for the Care of the Deaf*. Its history according to Olawuyi (2003) all started when a retired Chief Welfare Officer, Miss Allison Izzet had the desire to help deaf children and adults in the society. To actualize her dream, she got some people of like mind like Drs A. Ademola T. A. Jones, Hackett, Ebosie, Mr Francis and Alhaji S. ADawodu among others to form a Society for the Care of the Deaf. This effort failed, however, through the intervention of the Oba Adete 11 of Lagos, many deaf were registered in three weeks. The society also contacted hospitals and schools to be able to harvest deaf children. The Methodist Mission was very helpful in providing two classrooms and teachers. The society had no paid workers as all members gave their services free of charge. In 1957, Chief (Mrs) R. A. Adelogbe started teaching fourteen deaf children in a separate classroom within Yaba Methodist School, Lagos. The oral method was used to train the children using Yoruba language. By 1960, the number of the children in the school increased to thirty from fourteen and by 1962, deaf children were being taught in the three Methodist schools that were in Lagos namely Yaba, Ereko and Olowogbowo.

In order to get the school registered for the purpose of undertaking the normal school curriculum, the Methodist Mission was contacted through its secretary, Mr. Hughes, who after consultation registered the school under the Methodist Mission. The school moved to its present location in January, 1962. That same year all the deaf children in all the Methodist schools listed above were moved to a permanent building built by the Federal Government at Ajao Road, Surulere, Lagos, at which time the school was named Federal School for the Deaf. It was in 1974 that the school was renamed and called its present name 'Wesley School for the Deaf.

Ibadan Mission School for the Deaf-1960

In 1960, Rev. Andrew Foster, a deaf black American missionary started the Ibadan Mission School for the Deaf under the auspices of Christian Mission for the Deaf Africans. He was assisted by Messrs J. O Olayede, S. O Adesina and M. B. Ariobasa, the two of whom were themselves, deaf persons. This school according to Olawuyi (2003) became the *Ibadan School for the Deaf* when the *Home School for the Young Deaf* and the *Ibadan Mission School* were merged.

In 1975, the Roman Catholic Mission under the leadership of Rev. Sir Gwen Leguult established a school for the Deaf at Vandeikya in Benue State.



Missionary/Philanthropists Interventions in the Area of the Physically Handicapped/ Mentally Retarded

Mental retardation in this context could manifest in the areas of communication, self-care home living, social skills, self-directive, health and safety, functional academic leisure and work. Such persons also deserve intervention.

The first move towards caring for the physically handicapped according to Akinpelu (1994) was made by Rev Father Conquered of the Catholic Mission who established a centre, the Iberekodo Leprosy Centre, in 1913. The Catholics called it the *Sacred Heart Hospital Camp*. It was a settlement catering for lepers who were seen around the rocks in Abeokuta. The camp catered for the needs of the patients by providing them with food, accommodation and treatment for their diseases with farming as the major form of training given to the inmates of the camp.

In the North, the Sudan Interior Mission established a *Leprosarium at Vadakuya* near Kano in 1925 specifically for the treatment of leprosy and the resettling of lepers on their discharge as workers on farms and plantations. The settlement was greatly assisted by the Northern Regional Government even though it was a centre established by a Christian Mission. At a later date, the Kano State Government eventually took over the settlement and converted it to a hospital and dispensary for lepers. The same Sudan Interior Mission again established the *ECWA Leprosarium* at Omu-Amu in the present day Kwara State in 1943. The aims of this settlement were to provide treatment for leprosy patients and provide facilities for the rehabilitation of the disabled who were provided with such vocational training as tailoring, weaving and some less strenuous types of work.

School for Handicapped Children, Ibadan, 1964

In 1964, the School for Handicapped Children Ibadan was founded by Mr&Mrs Patey. The sole aim of the school was to provide educational and vocational training for the social and economic adjustment of the children who were referred to the school by parents, hospitals, individuals and religious organizations.

Cheshire Home Ibadan, Port Harcourt and Lagos

A renowned philanthropist, Group Captain Leonard Cheshire, established the Cheshire Home in Ibadan in 1959. In 1961, he established the Cheshire Home Port Harcourt and in 1962, he established the Cheshire Home, Agege, Lagos. The purpose of these homes was to care for the disabled children. The Homes are presently funded mainly through donations and gifts from philanthropist organizations and individuals.

Child Treatment and Placement Home School, Lagos-1965

In 1965, Elizabeth Torrey founded a new home/school for the mentally retarded and distributed children in Idi-Araba Lagos. The main aim of the Home was to help young handicapped children to advance in personal and social relationships to develop the mental skills required to achieve the maximum academic goals



possible. Tireless in her efforts to raise funds for the cause, Elizabeth Torrey was eventually able to have a permanent home for the children at Apapa. Mentally retarded children were soon referred to her for admission from many sources and from several states.

Elizabeth Torrey also founded schools for mentally retarded children in Zaria (1968, 1973) and Enugu (1975). The efforts of Elizabeth Torrey complemented those of the Roman Catholic Mission which in 1964, established the Child Guidance Clinic in Yaba, Lagos.

Atunda-Olu Day Primary School, Lagos, 1965

In 1965, the Atunda-Olu Day Primary School, Lagos was established by the Anglican Diocese of Lagos, in conjunction with the Federal Ministry of Education. It was a school for the physically challenged children who have normal intelligence. The school has various facilities including physiotherapy rooms. The Institute of Child Health, University of Lagos provides medical care for the children here, some of whom were referred by the Orthopedic Hospital, Igbobi and University of Lagos Teaching Hospital.

Government Involvement in Special Needs Education in Nigeria

Government Involvement in the Area of the Deaf

The first notable involvement of government in the education of the deaf was the award of scholarship to regular classroom teachers in 1958 to study education of the deaf which was followed by the building of a permanent site in Surulere, Lagos of a school for the deaf by the federal Government, whose facilities were formally opened for use by the then Minister of Education, Hon Aja Nwachukwu on 22nd September, 1962. Earlier on, both the Western and Eastern Regional Governments had in 1960 as noted earlier on given annual grants to the then Ibadan Mission school for the Deaf and the Oji-River Rehabilitation Centre for the disabled respectively. In 1974, the Western Region Government again donated staff quarters to the Ibadan School for the Deaf. In 1976, when the Federal Government's Universal Primary was initiated, the government donated a dormitory block for sixty students of the school and provided granting of more grant-in-aid to the school.

Government Involvement in the Area of the Blind

In 1948, through a legislative Act (1948 Education Ordinance) the Colonial Government made provision for the education of the handicapped in the country as the Ordinance stated that government grants may be paid to a Local Authority or to approved Voluntary Agency for among other purposes, special school equipment, medical supervision and any other Special Educational needs which may from time to time be regarded as calling for financial support.

In both the former Western and Eastern Regions, Government support for the education of the blind came in the forms of legislative support and the provision of grants-in-aid to existing schools for the blind and the establishment of government schools for the blind.



Government Involvement in the Area of Mentally Retarded

Government's involvement in the establishment of schools for the mentally retarded first came in 1974 when the Special Education Centre at Ogebele, Enugu was established to cater for the Deaf and the mentally retarded. In 1978, the School for the Handicapped at Jada in the then Gongola State was established basically to cater for the deaf but was later expanded to provide services for the mentally retarded children. Other schools across the country include Kwara State School for the handicapped which came on stream in 1974 but had services for mentally retarded children added in 1982, the Special Education centre in Benin City and Orlu among others.

The Nigerian Civil War and the Development of Special Needs Education

Another factor contributing to the development of the modern form of SNE is the Nigerian Civil War. The Civil War, like an ill wind, left thousands of people wounded. Some of the wounded lost their eyes, some became deaf and others lost their legs and hands. Many children were maimed from bomb explosions and other weapons of death and destruction. Children of high social class families as well as children of low social families were victims of the Civil War.

This catastrophic situation, brought about by the Civil War, led to the rise of national consciousness for handicapped persons, irrespective of differences in tribe and social status. The increase of the population of disabled soldiers and young children gave birth to the creation of centres for them in some parts of the country. At first, the centres were for treatment and feeding of the injured. Later, the Federal Government introduced into the centres specialized forms of education and rehabilitation. The blind amongst the people at the centres were taught how to type and weave foot-mat and other simple crafts.

As the impact of the Civil War was being felt positively in the development of SNE, the introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in September 1976, came with more blessings for SNE for the handicapped. Universal Primary Education is the greatest factor in the development of SNE in Nigeria. The five main national objectives of Nigeria as stated in the Second National Development Plan, and endorsed as the necessary foundation for the National Policy on Education are the building of a:

- a. free and democratic society;
- b. just and egalitarian society;
- c. united, strong and self-reliant nation;
- d. great and dynamic economy; and
- e. land of bright and full opportunity for all citizens.

The philosophy of integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and equal educational opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels gave a new vigour to Special Education development. This dynamic philosophy of education carries a message of hope to the thousands of children with special needs throughout the country.



Place of SNE in the National Policy on Education and the Universal Basic Education Programme

Special Needs Education occupies a prominent position in both the National Policy on Education (FRN; 2014) and the Universal Basic Education Act of 2004 as both of them are committed to equalization of educational opportunities for all children in the country, irrespective of their physical, sensory, mental, psychological or emotional disabilities. They, in fact, constitute the two policies in Nigeria which guide implementation of Special Needs Education (and inclusive Education) in the country. This is in tune with the general aim of education to provide the child the opportunity to fully develop his abilities - mentally, physically, socially and morally in order for him to make worthy contributions to the society in which he lives. In section 8 of National Policy on Education, the government directed that all children, including the gifted as well as those with physical, mental and learning difficulties, must be provided for in the educational system. The place of SNE in the National Policy on Education therefore, is to complement general education. This being the case, it must be noted that as Akinpelu (1994: 167) had opined, the successful implementation of the provisions of Special Needs Education component as contained in the National Policy on Education requires the

- a. specially trained professional educators with additional competences for serving a certain type of exceptional children over and above those possessed by regular classroom teachers;
- b. special curricular contents to suit special needs, such as for the deaf and the blind;
- c. special methodology, such as behavior modification techniques for children with the severe learning disabilities; and
- d. special instructional materials such as Braille and large type books for the visually impaired.

The concept of Special Needs should encourage the education and training of children with disabilities alongside their non-disabled peers, in regular schools, under such concepts as integration or mainstreaming, normalization and whole school approach as highlighted above. The Special Needs concept guarantees to every child an education that is appropriate to his/her needs, interests, abilities and weaknesses giving credence to the Individualized Educational Programmes (IEPs) in modern society.

In SNE, the emphasis is, therefore, to help all children to achieve that aim which has already been set out in general education. SNE performs this function by

- a. identifying / diagnosing the problem each child encounters that would deter him from the aim;
 - b. devising well planned instructional programmes (curricula content) suited to his ability;
 - c. utilizing appropriate instructional materials - visual aids and special equipment to meet his needs;
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- d. employing special methodology to teach the child; and
 - e. providing reinforcements that will enable him to retain the appropriate behavior which he has acquired.

The special educator is in a sense a regular educator who understands the children and their problems and helps them overcome the problems. For instance, with the application of Special Education principles, more children who are likely to have dropped out of school will now remain in the school to take the full advantage of the curriculum. SNE strives to make the handicapped (the level of handicap notwithstanding) become self-reliant, instead of being economically dependent on others or on the government, for care and survival by teaching him career and job skills that will prepare him to take up jobs as an adult within the community. SNE complements regular education by taking care of the gifted and the talented by providing them with challenging situations so that they may through problem solving techniques improve themselves and the society.

The Education of the Gifted in Nigeria

All along in discourse, we have only concentrated our searchlight on various aspects of the handicapped, but there is this aspect of SNE that is usually not given prominence. This is the education of the Gifted and the Talented, which is aptly captured in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 1977, 2004 & 2014). The Gifted and Talented children are those who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance, thereby requiring any or a combination of the following abilities and aptitudes of

- a. general intellectual ability;
- b. specific academic aptitude;
- c. creative or productive thinking;
- d. exceptional visual ability; and
- e. psychomotor aptitude.

Before these sets of children were given special consideration, they were usually lump together in the normal schools but were given double or accelerated promotion in order for them to be able to function at their own proper level. All these changed with the coming on board of the National Policy on Education, which spelt out as one of the objectives of Special Needs Education as that of 'providing opportunities for exceptionally gifted children to develop at their own pace in the interest of the country's economic and technological development'. Even though this idea was mooted in 1977 when the Policy was first published, it was not until 1982 that the Federal Government of Nigeria set up a committee under 'Operation Catch a Genius', whose sole aim was that of identifying and educating the gifted Nigerian child. This again, very typical of the Nigerian policies, did not go beyond the level of pronouncement as it was lost in the bowls of bureaucracy. The Federal Ministry of Education, in April 1986, set up a National Planning Committee on the Education of the Gifted and talented Children. The Committee, unlike the previous ones, tried to identify gifted children with a



cognitive test by conducting a National Common Entrance Examination. The purpose of the examination was to screen the 'supposed gifted children' before selection was to be done. This is in fulfillment of one of the national goals of Nigeria, as contained in the National Policy Education, namely, the provision of equal access to qualitative educational opportunities for all citizens at all levels of education. Hereafter, those who passed the entrance examination were subjected to oral examination, leading to selection and placement of candidates. All such candidates that were selected at the selection stage, based on performance, were placed in Junior Secondary School (JSS) 1 at the Academy of Science, situated at Suleja, Niger State. The school had been in operation since 1986. Teachers for such children are being trained at the Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo, Universities of Ibadan and Jos.

Eteng-Ukets (2022:540), in providing the history of government's involvement in the promotion of SNE in Nigeria, has highlighted the following major landmark events in Special Education Needs, Disability Policy and Implementation:

- a. 1975-1976: Government policy on SNE was conceived in the National Policy on Education by the Federal Ministry of Education.
- b. 1977: National Policy on Education created a limited section for SNE.
- c. 1978-1979: Implementation Blueprint on the National Policy on Education stated that there would be a Joint National Commission on SNE.
- d. 1978-2013: Implementation activities and various reviews of the National Policy on Education took place. Implementation has been subjected to various interventions, which include; teacher development, institutional development framework, establishment of special schools, curriculum reviews and other initiatives by the Government and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).
- e. 2015: The first detailed and comprehensive National Policy on SNE in Nigeria (NPSNEN) was developed.
- f. 2016: A National Policy on Inclusive Education in Nigeria (NPIEN) was developed.

Challenges of SNE in Nigeria

In spite of the role of SNE in the overall development of Nigerian society, it is faced with several challenges. Ozoji (2005) and Eteng-Ukets (2022) identified some of the following as some of these challenges:

- a. official recognition of the area without providing facilities for implementation;
- b. problem of funding which has made operators not being able to execute policy blueprints in the country;
- c. absence effective legislation in favour of SNE;



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- d. reliance on the use of imported technology in its implementation in the schools in Nigeria;
 - e. inadequate development of trained personnel;
 - f. dearth of researchers in the area in the country;
 - g. limited involvement of parents in the implementation process;
 - h. low ebb of voluntary help in the sector in the country due to lack of sufficient knowledge of the area as was the case in the era of missionary efforts in the sector;
 - i. scarcity of relevant literature;
 - j. inadequate plans for identification of children with special learning disabilities in the country;
 - k. government not having a definite strategy to search for and identify children not attending school, whether normal or disabled; and
 - l. unfavourable attitude of the society towards the area largely due to lack of proper understanding of what it could offer in the overall development of the society.

Nigeria's challenge as it relates to policies is that of implementation. The National Policy on Education has excellent provisions for this aspect of the country's education needs. Therefore, as a way forward, it is suggested that government as the ultimate beneficiary of the products of the school system should be proactive enough to reverse the already identified challenges through having a political will to respect what it has put in place by way of implementing the submissions of the National Policy on Education and that of the Universal Basic Act of 2004 particularly in the area of funding. This way, all other things needed to make Special Needs Education work in the country for the benefit of all shall be added on to the Nigerian state as it has done for other countries of the world.

Lessons for Special Needs Educators

From our presentation on the history of SNE in Nigeria, Special Needs Educators should work on the premise that their task is not, and should not be, limited to that of facilitating the learning of physically challenged children; rather, they should involve themselves in assisting the high-flyers - the gifted and talented children - to learn in such environment that their pace of learning would not be retarded by the slow learners - the physically challenged children. This could be achieved through streaming into exclusive learning environments or through special treatment (for example, double promotion) in the inclusive classroom arrangement.

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