

GLOBAL ISSUES IN SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION: A HINDRANCE TO DISABILITIES

By

UZOR, MARGARET O.

e-mail: margaretuzor@gmail.com, 08068953729

&

EBUARA FELICIA U.

Department Of Special Education

Federal College Of Education Obudu, Cross River State.

Abstract

With preceding concerns, the paper presume to the fact that the area of special needs education for special needs learners is always faced with different forms of global issues that ranges from physical, social, psychological, economic to attitudinal as well as religion and political issues respectively. However, these issues in the field often exclude its beneficiaries from acting fully and effectively in their environments they lives. Person with special needs lack equal access to public and basic resources in all rounds such as right to education, right to employment, right to social integration, right to freedom of speech, right to political participation among other vital issues concern. Moreover, with the effective utilization of the valuable human and material resources in the field of special needs education, and with the proactive government in initiating policies for the welfare of persons with special needs, the programme will remain unabortive. Therefore, this paper titled; global issues in special needs education: Hindrance to disability; it discusses, what makes a special needs education and its effects to person with disability, causes of disabilities that leds to special need; and also suggests ways of resolving issues in special needs education. Conclusion was drawn accordingly as the paper recommends that; efforts should be geared into making special needs education possible through funding and the provision of the needed facilities.

Keywords: Global issues, special needs education, hindrance to disability, persons with special needs

Introduction

Globally the field of special needs education and its clients always face all forms of problems and issues that range from physical, social, economic to attitudinal. These issues in the field often exclude its beneficiaries from acting fully and effectively in their environments or societies. Persons with special needs lack equal access to public and basic resources like right to education; right to employment; right to social integration. These persons suffer stigmatization, negative attitude from the society; poor health care systems and above all legal support system become a fantasy. All these are due to the non recognition the field of special needs education face globally.

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 individualized 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) define special people as those with significant sensory deficits or unusual high intellectual 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 of 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 requires 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.

Accordingly, an international disability movement in 2006 took a bold step with the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Adebisi, Jerry, Rasaki & Igwe, 2014). The United Nations really work to change the attitudes and approaches of the society and governments of all nations to special needs education issues towards ensuring that persons with special needs have full equality and participation in public and social lives. This design of the convention of the United Nations has the intention to break all issues facing special needs education and its beneficiaries. It is also a human rights instrument that contains development dimension, which is intended to realize equality and participation of persons with special needs in all development processes.

Recently, the UN General Assembly has emphasized that the genuine achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Education For All (EFA) and other globally agreed development goals, needs the integration and inclusion of the rights and opinion of persons with special needs in all endeavours at national, regional and international levels. The General Assembly, in realizing this goal, convened high level meeting of disability in 2011 at the level of Head of Government to discuss the way forward towards 2015 and beyond. The aim of this target as adopted as an action – oriented document that provides policy guidance that will assist in translating the international commitment for a disability – inclusive society and strengthen global effort to ensure accessibility for inclusion of persons with special needs in all areas of development. Looking at the effort of the UN in the Convention, its laudable intention is to promote accessibility, remove or break all kinds of issues and to achieve the full and equal participation of persons with special needs in our society.

The trend in social policy in many countries of the world during the past three decades in the special needs education has been on promoting inclusive programmes and how global issues facing person with special needs are removed, and to combat exclusionary and discriminatory practices (Disabled People International, DPI, 2005; Lindsay , 2007; and Adebisi, Jerry, Rasaki & Igwe, 2014). The fundamental principle of special needs education is that all children with special needs learn in a least restrictive environment, regardless of any difficulties and differences they may have (UNESCO, 2013). But, throughout the world, children with special needs are often marginalized within or, indeed, even sometimes excluded from the scheme of things (Igwe, 2014).

With the preceding concerns, the paper presumed on the fact that, the area of special needs education for special needs learners is always faced with different forms of global issues that ranges from physical, social, psychological, economic to attitudinal as well as religious and political issues respectively. perhaps, these issues in the field often exclude its beneficiaries from acting fully and effectively in their environments they live. Individuals with special needs lack equal access to public and basic resources in all rounds such as right to education, right to employment, right to social integration, right to freedom of speech, right to political participation among others. These person suffer stigmatization, negative attitude from the society, poor health care systems and above all, the legal support system become a fantasy. This is due to the non recognition, the field of special needs education face globally.

Therefore this paper will discuss the field of special needs education and its position in the Nigeria's national education policy. It will discuss the global issues facing special needs education and its effects on persons with disabilities. Causes of disabilities that leads to ways of resolving special needs, there issues in special needs education.

What makes a special needs education

Special needs education is concerned with those persons who have physical, cognitive, language, learning, sensory, and/or emotional abilities that deviate from those of the general population. Special needs educators provide instructions specifically tailored to meet individualized needs, making education available to students who if not, would have limited access to education. However, the Nigerian National Policy on Education (2004) in Adebisi, Jerry, Rasaki & Igwe (2014) defined Special Needs Education (SNE) as the: Education of children and adult who have learning difficulties because of the different kinds of handicaps blindness, partial sightedness, deafness, hardness of hearing, mental retardation, social maladjustment, limb deformation or malformation etc; due to circumstances of birth, inheritance, social position, mental and physical health patterns, or accident later in life. As a result such children and adult are unable to cope with the regular school class organization and methods.

Special needs education in the above definition is a formal, special educational training given to the people (children and adults) with special needs, who fall into two categories: the disabled and the gifted and talented. The disabled include the children and adult with hearing impairment, visual impairment, physical and health impairment, intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, multiple handicap... emotional disturbance. On the other hand, the gifted and talented are in other end of the spectrum of special needs. Their teaching and learning methods of traditional formal setting may be inappropriate. Nigeria's National Policy on Education (2013) stated the three key objectives of special needs education as to:

- i. To 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.

But one of the areas where the policy became a global issue is that, the federal government did to 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 (Adebisi & Onye, 2013). More so, the policy does not classify the criteria for those personnel that would head the special needs education departments and institutions. That is why you can see in some of the educational agencies or non-professionals heading special education units.

Global issues in special needs education

Special needs education has revolved around several key issues since the first edition of the national policy on Education in 1977. These are:

- i. That government has the responsibility of taking care of its citizens and providing the best means and opportunities to enable each individual maximize his/her abilities and potentials
- ii. That access to education is a fundamental human right of the child
- iii. That the recognition and identification of the range of needs –common and special is the key strategy in planning for and meeting the needs of all categories of learners
- iv. That there is ability in disability

- v. That there are about 10,000,000 Nigerian children who are out of school
- vi. That HIV/AIDS continues to be a major issue among out of school children who are orphaned.

The National Policy on Education has always recognized the issues and different needs of potential groups of learners- their physical, social, mental, economic status notwithstanding and in relation to the formal education system. Section 1 (c) states that every Nigerian child shall have a right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities, each according to his or her abilities. Section 19(1) and (3) of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) states that "Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy, and to this end, government shall as and when practicable provide: (a) free, compulsory, and universal primary education, (b) free secondary education, (c) free university education, and (d) free adult literacy programmes.

In recognition of the existence of people with disabilities, the Federal Ministry of Education (2004) classified such as; the disabled, the disadvantaged and the gifted and talented.

- 1. The Disabled: These are people with impairments (physical or sensory) who because of these impairments/disabilities cannot cope with regular school/class organization and methods without formal training. People under this category include,
 - i. Visually impaired (blind and partially sighted)
 - ii. Hearing impaired (deaf and the partially hearing)
 - iii. Physically and health impaired (deformed limbs, asthmatic, mentally retarded)
 - iv. Emotionally disturbed (hyperactive, hypoactive/the socially maladjusted/behaviour disorder)
 - v. Speech impaired (stammerers/stutterers)
 - vi. Learning disabled (psychological/neurological educational phobia and challenges)
- 2. The Disadvantaged: These are the children of the nomadic pastorals, migrant fishers, folks, migrant farmers, hunters etc, who due to their life styles and means of livelihood, are unable to have access to conventional education provision and therefore require special education to cater for their particular/peculiar needs and circumstances.
- 3. The Gifted and Talented: These are people who are endowed with special traits (in arts, creativity, music, leadership, intellectual precocity etc) and therefore find themselves insufficiently challenged by the regular school/college/university programmes.

Nigeria has not focused adequately to full inclusion but this notwithstanding; a lot of energy and resources has been dissipated on studies, researches and writings by educationists towards drawing the attention of stakeholders in education to the need for special needs programmes in Nigerian. This has led to organization of a number of conferences and seminars. It is argued that the old special education system with its restrictive practices cannot successfully address these problems of special needs children. The answer thus lies in special education or special needs education in changing and reorganizing the entire school system to accept all children and cater for their varied special or ordinary learning needs and difficulties Obani (2002). The big question is, how possible is it to adopt special needs programme in Nigerian in the face of numerous teething issues ravaging the system.

However, supporters of inclusive education take the position that homogenous grouping impedes equal education for all. There are lots of issues to be considered and conditions to be met in order to make special need effective. These groups of children with disabilities have special needs in many areas of life as it affects their physical ability. Some are deaf, dumb, lame, blind and other forms of disabilities. Therefore, some of these issues can be as follows:

Unsuccessful 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 supports to children with special needs demand additional money and inadequate funding hinder professional development in the field of special needs education. The available fund for special needs education projects are not accesses by the administrators of special needs education, thereby making the children with special needs to suffer unnecessarily in the areas of infrastructure, equipment and learning materials.

Unaccessibility to education: In decades, the establishment of special needs schools and units in the mainstream schools and rehabilitation centres across the country for training of vocational skills by the Federal Government of Nigeria has a serious setback. This can be justified as no achievement has been recorded in the education of persons with disabilities, given that old building, equipment, materials acquired become obsolete. Many children with special needs are out of school especially in some rural areas because, special need schools or inclusive schools are not available to them. However, it can be claim that many parents and community 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 option of allow them beg on the street or keep them at home. But in other way round, 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: 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.

Insuccesful 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.

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 challenge to enrolment and education of persons with special needs. Evidence exist 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 neighbourhood schools, colleges and universities. However, data Ibrahim (2019) have it that the provision of support services in public special and inclusive schools are lacking.

Lack of knowledge from the parents: Families and communities are seriously expected to be involved and participated 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.

Unsupportive legislative law: The passage of disability bill by the National Assembly awaiting assent by the president is dragging too long (Adebisi, Jerry, Rasaki & Igwe, 2014). This delay and insensitivity on the part of government hamper the implementation of the formulated policies for the rights, education and inclusiveness of persons with special needs. Evidences 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 supports to their implementation. Therefore, without a 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 determine 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 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 remained 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 have 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 aborted that most of the schools in the country do not have adequate number 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 manifest in the area of allocation, administration and distribution of fund 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 hand of political will. It can be maintained that if there are 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.

Causes of disability that leads to special needs

Some people have been disabled since birth, other become more disabled over time while some are disabled suddenly, because of an accident or disease. But many disabilities in children are caused by harmful conditions of women's lives. If they can get enough nutritious food to eat, can protect themselves from work with toxic chemicals, and can get good health care, including care at the time of childbirth

- i. **Poverty and malnutrition:** Poverty is one of the biggest causes of disability. Poor people are most vulnerable to disability because they are forced to live and work in unsafe environments with poor sanitation, crowded living conditions, and with little access to education, clean water, or enough good food. This makes diseases such as tuberculosis, polio and the severe disabilities, cause much more common because diseases get passed from one person to another more easily. Many children who are born in poor families may be born with disabilities or may die in infancy. This may be because the mother did not get enough to eat when she was pregnant. Or it may be because she did not get enough to eat when she was a girl. Starting in childhood, a girl is often given less food to eat than a boy. As a result, she may grow more slowly and her bones may not develop properly, which can later cause difficulty during childbirth especially if she does not receive good health care. If a child does not get enough good food to eat, she or he may become blind or have trouble learning or understanding.
- ii. **War:** In today's wars, more civilians than soldiers are killed or disabled, and most of them are women and children. Explosions cause people to become deaf, blind, and lose their limbs, as well as causing other injuries. Their mental health is also badly affected by the violence. The destruction of homes, schools, health centers, and means of livelihood that results from conflicts and wars leads to increased disability, poverty, and disease. Land mines, cluster bombs, bullets, and chemicals used in wars cause more disabilities in the world today than anything else. They often injure women who are carrying out their daily activities, such as farming, or gathering water and wood.
- iii. **Poor access to health care:** Good health care can prevent many disabilities. Difficult labor and birth can cause a baby to be born with a disability such as cerebral palsy. Trained birth attendants who can identify risks and handle emergencies can prevent babies from being born with many disabilities. Immunization can also prevent many disabilities. But many times vaccines are not available, or people who are poor or live far from cities cannot afford them.
- iv. **Illness:** Some illnesses, a pregnant woman may get can cause physical or learning problems when her baby is born. Illnesses that can cause birth defects include German measles (rubella), which is a common cause of deafness in newborn babies. There is a

vaccine that gives protection against rubella, but a woman who gets an immunization of the rubella vaccine should not get pregnant for one month after ward. Some illnesses a baby or small child may get can also cause disability, such as meningitis, polio, and measles. It is important for newborn babies to get immunizations for protection. Children who live in places where leprosy (Hansen's disease) is common need to be tested as early as possible.

- v. **Accident:** Many women and children get disabling injuries at home by burns from cooking fires, falls, road accidents, and breathing or drinking toxic chemicals. Workplace accidents, especially in less regulated sectors such as construction, agriculture, mining, and smaller businesses, are a common source of disability.

Ways of resolving issues confronting 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 programmes 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 to mobilize 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 needs 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 system are organized around the needs of children and their families, with better information, sharing and assessments leading to early intervention.
- vii. Ensuring person 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 are cater for the health, education, social welfare, removal of stigma, negative attitudes and other benefits that will enable social inclusion.

Conclusion

Globally, the most devastating issue in special needs education is the low literacy rate that continues to lag below poverty line, making the scenario in services a complex situation. Compounding this situation, are the issues of HIV/Aids, war, insufficient number of required trained professionals, lack of prescribed standard in the delivery systems and quality control, policy implementation and inadequate resources among others. With the effective utilization of the valuable human and material 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 will meet to curb issues in 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 needs to be provide with necessities of life from early intervention to quality service delivery.

Recommendations

The following recommendation are made in line with the discussion above:

- i. They should be consistency in government educational policy. If the government emphasis and effective policy is on special need children, the establishment of new special schools by either the federal or state government should be stopped as they 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 need to understand that the success of special needs education is hindered by other challenge 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.

References

- Adebisi, L. O., Jerry, J. E., Rasaki, S. A. & Igwe, E. N. (2014). Barriers to special needs education in Nigeria. *International Journal of Education and Research*, 2(11), 451-462.
- Adebisi, R. O., Jerry, J. E., Rasaki, S. A. & Igwe, E. N. (2014) barriers to special needs education in Nigeria. *International Journal of Education462 and Research*, 2(11), 451-
- Disabled People International (DPI, 2005) DPI Position Paper on Inclusive Education. Retrieved on 15/9/2022 from <http://www.dpi.org/lang-en/resources/details.php?page=75>
- Federal Government of Nigeria (2013). *National Policy on Education*. Lagos: NERDC, 1(2), 99-108.
- Ibrahim, K. (2019). Challenges hindering effective implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria. *National Journal of Inclusive Education*, 2(1), 101-105.
- Nkechi, C. M. (2013). Education of the disabled in Nigeria: Access and perception. *Journal Plus Education*, 10(1), 133-142.
- Nwuamadi, F. N. & Obasi M. O. (2015). Challenges of adopting inclusive education in Nigerian school system. *Journal of Assertiveness*, 1(1), 1-12.
- UNESCO (2003). *Overcoming exclusion through inclusive approaches in education: A challenge and a vision*. Paris: NY: Author