



Access to quality education in Nigeria: Challenges of persons with special needs

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Abstract

Education as an instrument of social change must be given serious and adequate attention in order to achieve the national goals of education. Good preparation of teacher in the solid foundation for effective development of any nation. This paper examines persons with special needs and access to quality education in Nigeria. The paper itemizes persons with special needs, special needs education effective. These include economic access, sociological access, psychological access and cultural access, providing education for all its citizen. Funding, negative attitude of the society, inadequate teaching and learning in schools, lack of training in special education by most teachers are the challenges in accessing quality education by persons with special needs. It concluded with the following recommendations that quality education should be provided by government at all levels through qualified and competent teachers in order to bring out quality students with special needs as it is in developed countries of the world. Emphasis should be placed on women and girl child with special needs education, there should be proper funding of the entire education industry to make education accessible and affordable for persons with special needs and there should be good training in the field of special education for teachers at all levels of education.

Keywords: access, quality education, Nigeria, challenges, persons, special needs

Introduction

It is paramount to note that Nigeria education need to revitalize to meet the challenges of the new millennium that is, the era of ICT education at all levels of education. Therefore, the educational system of any nation is the product of the quality of its teachers Bulus (2010) [4] admits that the teacher is the hub of the education process. Education is the most important instrument of change as any fundamental step in the intellectual and sociological outlook of any society has to be preceded by an educational revolution (NPE, 2009). Accordingly, Omede (2010) [14] affirms that the importance of education to humanity and the economic sector in particular of any society cannot be over emphasized as it give ample opportunity to those that are educated to contribute meaningfully to national development be it in agriculture, health, sports etc. This scholar went further to say that in any environment where education takes place. The overall socialization of the people will definitely have a great impact on national growth and development. Oye (2007) observes that the inference from this is that effective operation of the educational system requires that quality teacher should be available in sufficient quantity at all levels of the educational system in order to meet the needs of the nation. He also said that the availability of quality teacher at lower levels will help to enhance the quality of inputs into the higher levels and consequently impact positively on the outputs of the higher levels. To ascertain qualitative teacher in our educational system in this country. It involves a lot of operational techniques and activities, which include the following:

a. Recruitment of Standard Teachers: The quality of a good teacher begins with his performance in the primary, post primary and tertiary education. Before a person could be

admitted in colleges of education or faculty of education in the university, he should get the required subject passes and credits before he should be allowed for placement to be trained as a teacher. Nwadiibia (2007) [9] opined that initial scrutiny/verification of candidates, qualifications for admission and proper placement for course will surely maintain and promote the teacher image, dignity and functionality in his/her future profession.

- b. Teacher Preparation:** Teacher preparation for quality teacher education is a difficult task that when accomplished, will develop capacity building and to keep the teachers abreast with the latest teaching techniques for quality education. The problem of quality teacher education is the inadequate provision of trained teachers to meet the needs of quality education in most states of the federation. Abdulsalam (2002) lamented that the major problems of teacher education in Nigeria is that the teachers that are being trained now are not sufficiently prepared in order to meet the complex demand of the teaching process in Nigerian schools and colleges.
- c. Level of Qualification:** Many people are in the class today not because they are qualified teachers but because they have either a degree, HND, OND in the areas they teach, how can such educators like these ones produce quality teacher education? The emphasis on certificate in education e.g PGDE, NCE or Degree in education before one will be allowed to practice as professional teacher is another problem which quality teacher education is facing.
- d. Improved infrastructure and Teacher Motivation:** To gain access to quality teacher education in this country, all

hands must be on deck. Our educational institutions should have improved infrastructure such as conducive environment for teaching and learning, good seats, enough instructional materials for learning, students should have enough accommodation, the libraries and laboratories should be well equipped.

- e. **Well Pay Package:** Teachers should have good pay package like other professions, but reverse is the case. When teacher are well paid, it will motivate them to discharge their duties adequately without complain, a good pay encourages such output in any sector therefore, a teacher who directs and instructs all classroom activities should be reinforced with good pay. As everyone in the society needs education to enhance his/her intellectual horizon, persons with special needs equally deserve education for their own intellectual developments which will enable them contribute to nation building and be self-reliant. However, the issue is that majority of persons with special need have no access to quality education in Nigeria.

Persons with special needs

These are exceptional individuals because of their uniqueness in nature. These uniqueness are characterized in the areas of visual deficiencies, hearing challenges, special mobility impaired, intellectual disabilities, emotionally imbalance a wholes of others. Persons with special needs have right to appropriate and functional education. Janney (2007) [6], notes that educators sometimes feel they need to water down the curriculum to accommodate persons with special needs. The author stresses further that curriculum should not be hodgepodge; it should make sense as a coherent curriculum. The author emphasizes that the curriculum needs to be instructional and not just an amorphous socialization objectives. To achieve the goals, general education teachers first find out what a person's Individualized Education Programme (IEP) goals are: The teacher will need to know whether persons with special needs have adopted curriculum with different goals than his or her typically developing class mates or whether the child needs modifications to the general education curriculum such as extra time on tests. Special needs persons are generally used to describe children who have significant departure from normal trends in human development and to imply the associated needs of an individual that make special education imperative for a person if he/she must live a useful life in the society. The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) states that its objectives for special need persons, is to enable them perform and benefit from adequate educational planning and welfare programme. Special needs persons are characterized with some traits, such as communication challenges, emotional and behavioural disorder; challenges with learning etc, persons with these kinds of special needs are likely to benefit from additional education services such as a different appropriates to teaching, use of technology such as assistive technology devices. Special needs persons are classified as those individuals with learning, visual and physical impairment, learning disability, emotionally disturbed, speech disorders and gifted children. These categories of individuals with special problem needs additional supportive service as a result of the inability of the regular educational programmes to meet with their basic needs, particularly in education and health, so as to be able to become useful members of the immediate community (Adamu, 2005) [2].

In all ramifications persons with special need deserve quality education to better their lives and to have a role to play in the overall development in the society.

Special needs education in Nigeria

Specials needs education is designed to provide additional services, support programmes, specialized placements or environments needed to ensure that all students' educational needs are provided. According to Ogunkunle (2011) [13], some special needs education services may involve either separate classroom for students who are unable/unready to be in a mainstream class or children with a particular issue. For a long time in many African countries persons with special needs have been marginalized. In some cases, parents regard having such children as a curse (Rukuni, 2000). Therefore, one finds that these persons are discriminated against on the job market, in the provision of facilities and programmes meant to uplift their welfare and in educational opportunities. According to Rukuni (2000), in some Africa countries, such as Uganda, derogatory labels are used to describe these people. For example in southwestern Uganda the word used to describe person with special need is "ekirema" which means "a thing which became disabled." Obviously person with physical disability resent this dehumanizing label and use the word "omurema" which means a person with a physical disability. Special needs education, like other forms of government programmes are given legal protection under the law and there are spelt out guidelines that have ethical standard to be obeyed (Obisesan, 2006) [12]. The education for persons with special educational needs. Act 2004 was passed to ensure that persons with educational needs can be educated where possible in an inclusive environment, that they can have the same rights to education as persons who do not have special educational needs and to ensure that such persons are equipped by the educational system with the skills they need to participate in the society and to live independent and fulfilled lives. The range of special needs education supports vary based on need and educational jurisdictions. Thus, each country, state or education will have different policies rules, regulations and legislation that govern what constitutes special needs educations. With respect to the United States of America, the governing law is 'Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)'. The law which categorizes special needs education is as follows; autism, deaf or blindness, developmental delays, Emotional Disturbance, Hearing impairments, mental retardation, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairments other health impairment, specific learning disabilities, speech and language impairments, traumatic brain injury visual impairments, gifted and talented.

Effective implementation of special needs education in Nigeria

For effective implementation of special needs education in Nigeria, it might be appropriate to take bearing from the World Conference of Education For All (WCEFA, 1990) and United Nations Convention on the right of the child (1989) which is addressed in several significant internationally approved declarations such as;

- The 1993 standard rules for equalization of opportunities for persons with special needs.
- The 1994 Salamanca declaration of inclusive education

- The 1998 Durban statement by African states towards making generalization of basic realities and
- The 2000 Dakars framework of action of education.

In this regards, effective implementation of special education in Nigeria would entails the following, according to Ademokoya and Oyewumi (2004)

- Establishment and adequate funding of special schools.
- Adequate provision of required facilities and personnel for teaching persons with special needs by the government.
- These should be considerate respect (positive attitudes towards persons with special needs)
- Appropriate resources, materials allocation of special education are very critical for effective implementation of special needs education in Nigeria.

Access to Quality Education

The concept “education” has been defined by many scholars with interest in teaching and learning. Considerations are given to a few of them. Ehindaro (1986) sees “education as any worthwhile and valuable cultural artifacts purposefully induced and consciously transmitted, modified and transformed from one generation to next in or outside a formalized social institution.” In the same vain, Nduanya (1986) defined it as “a process by which the individual is enabled to develop his capabilities through acquisition of knowledge; skills, values and attitudes both for his own benefit and for the benefit of his society.”

Accessibility of an education to a student including access to appropriate educational institutions, materials and personnel is what we mean by “access teacher education” (Nyako and Ochoyi, 2011). It is a concept that goes beyond mere enrolment or physical access to attendance, progression and successful completion. It also includes equality of after-school experience and covers all opportunities for self-fulfillment, through opportunities for lifelong learning and the pursuit of careers and other forms of socio-economic life. Four dimensions of access where distinguished in earlier work of Obanya (2004) ^[11]. these include:

- a. Economic Access:** Poverty and poor economic situations especially at the household level, create problems in generalizing access to basic education. Even though basic education is meant to be free, education always has some over/hidden, direct/indirect, legal/illegal cost for individual families.
- b. Sociological Access:** Even when educational facilities may be physically (or geographically) with reach, the potential beneficiary’s social conditions could be either a help or hindrance. Problems related to sociological access can be seen in the following examples; groups that have excluded from formal education for generations. Groups, which normally do not come together but are forced to share common educational facilities, children who are forced or tempted to leave school prematurely most usually for petty employment or commercial/family activities, or to contribute to household work.
- c. Psychological Access:** Educational facilities are “accessible” only when the school is able to respond appropriately to children’s learning needs and learning styles. Problems related to PSYCHOLOGICAL ACCESS (children being physically in school! But not learning

sufficiently well) are common features of the educational scene of Nigeria and the following are illustrative examples under aged and over aged children, both of whom are likely to have a feeling of not fitting in; children with disabilities and special learning needs, children who are new comers to the community where the school is located etc.

- d. Cultural Access:** Cultural issues are barriers to access seemed to have derived mainly from aspects of post-independent reforms. The following are notable examples of the phenomenon. The school day and the school calendar do not always match with the cultural day and the traditional societal calendar.

Challenges of access of quality education and persons with special needs

- 1. Funding:** Funding as a major concern of education. Fund is needed to start and sustain the education sector with effectiveness. According to Agbade and Olorunmolu (2003) fund is needed to pay teachers salary, supply equipment and teaching materials and build solid structures where learning can take place. Lack of fund can hinder proper teacher education for special persons.
- 2. Negative attitude of the society:** In most African societies Nigeria inclusive, people believe that persons with special needs are redundant; irrelevant and incapable human beings in the environment where there lived. Therefore, the idea of providing education to person with special needs is always considered as a waste of resources and time that if they are educated, how can they be equal to the task in the labour market? What kind of job can they do? This underlined philosophy of attitude hinders them to have access to quality education in Nigeria.
- 3. Inadequate teaching and learning resources in school:** These contribute to hinder most schools from practicing effective inclusive education in Nigeria. Mandyata (2002) ^[8], found out that, inadequate provision of specialized resources to equip teachers in handling person with special educational needs in ordinary classes contributed to many of them from accessing quality education.
- 4. Economic Barriers:** Most parents of persons with disabilities were unemployed and poor. Kelly (1991) reported that persons with disabilities especially girls where victims of poverty in developing countries like Zambia and Nigeria were poor and had to struggle to feed and clothe them. Paying school fees was a luxury for such parents.
- 5. Unsuitable Infrastructure in Schools:** Despite efforts by ministry of education to introduce inclusive education in Nigeria, infrastructure was not yet modified to accommodate persons with special need. For example, there were no ramps; no rails along the corridors and no acoustic materials in most schools. Doors in most school buildings did not allow wheel chair to pass. This situation made the learning environment somewhat hostile to persons with special needs.
- 6. Lack of training in special education by most teachers:** In Nigeria, most teachers lacked training in special education and this contributed greatly to access to quality education by persons with special needs especially those with hearing and visual impairment. According to Mandyata (2002) ^[8], the non-acceptance of persons with disabilities by ordinary teachers in developing countries like Zambia and Nigeria

where mostly due to lack of raining and resources to equip teachers in handling children with special needs in ordinary classes.

Conclusion

Education brings awareness, knowledge, freedom, and development. The value of persons with special needs will manifest if given adequate education either vocational or institutional rehabilitation. This paper portrays that education is instrumental to social changes of special needs persons and so Nigeria must pay adequate and serious attention to production and retention of qualified teachers in the industry to pave way for access and quality education to persons with special needs.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are put forward in order to ascertain access and quality education for person with special needs in Nigeria. Quality education should be provided by government at all levels through qualified and competent teachers in other to bring out quality students with special needs as it is in other developed countries of the world. More emphasis should be placed on women and girl child with special needs education to enable them contribute meaningfully to the overall development of nation building. It is often say that when you educate a woman you have educated the nation, meaning women have a great role to play either socially, politically and other wise. There should be proper funding of the entire education industry to make education accessible and affordable to persons with special needs for their reforms and which in turns the development of nation's economy. There should be good training in the field of special education for teachers at all levels of education as this will go a long way making them to discharge their duties efficiently and effectively, since the desired quality education rest upon the teacher's shoulders.

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