

PHENOMENOLOGY OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: ITS POSSIBILITY IN UNDERDEVELOPED ECONOMY

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Abstract

We noticed that people with special needs or disabilities are always isolated if not neglected in teaching and learning. Is this isolation only noticed in developing economy? Is it more of a thing of the developing nations? This paper therefore focused on inclusive education in relations to developing nations. It proffered solution on the way forward. The work maintained that people with special needs or disability in our school system should be considered in everything that concerned teaching and learning. The infrastructures and the teaching equipment should be provided. This will make teaching and learning attractive to them. To tinker on the topic, we employed phenomenological method. Inclusiveness of the special needs students in our school system is an existential issue. Through this method, we discovered that the possibility and functioning of inclusive education is realizable in the developing economy.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Special Needs, Underdeveloped Economy, Learning Disability

Introduction

There has been this argument whether inclusive education in its strict perspective is functional and functioning in underdeveloped economy. This argument has made schools, scholars, institutions, governments and other stakeholders in knowledge management to take this aspect of knowledge seriously. This is because, its importance will be beneficial to both developed and the underdeveloped or developing economies. The developed economy will expand their horizon on inclusive education while the undeveloped or developing will learn and advance a more particularistic, workable and contextual inclusive education with global intent. People with special needs or disabilities have been overwhelmed by being isolated and excluded in and outside educational arena. The battle in respect to inclusion and inclusive education particularly is of recent development especially in underdeveloped or developing

societies. The disabled cannot take their destinies in their hands. Their destinies and actions most often are dependent on other persons' action. Instead of the society to talk about equalization of opportunities, the society is talking about protectionism of the people living with disability. Equalization of opportunities demands fresh channels through which different areas of society such as education and other social and humanistic services are administered. This implies the rights for the special needs to remain in their domain in order to access school and social support system they require and that are available within their environment. Inclusive education as a nascent operational term in academic and professional practice in special needs education is unavoidable in this post-modern world, hence we set out to investigate its possibility in underdeveloped economy.

UNDERSTANDING DISABILITY AND LEARNING DISABILITY

Disability as defined by World Health Organization in Mariga, MC Conkey and Myezwa (2014) is an outcome of the interaction between a person with impairment and the environmental and altitudinal barrier that he/she faces. The new millennium also heralded new thinking as to what it means to have a disability. The World Health Organization classification function (2002:16) defines it as “an outcome of the interaction between a person with impairment and the environmental barriers that he/she faces” Hence, improvements in the lifestyle of persons with a disability have to go beyond remediating their impairments which has been the dominant focus of special education and therapeutic services (Mariga, MC Conkey & Myezwa 2014).

Learning disability is grouped in line with a learner's existence that they affect. There are some impediments on learning of the special need person while some impede on their social and humanistic adaptability. Learning disability as X-rayed by Hallathan and Kauffman in Ozoji, Unachukwu & Kolo (2016) succinctly classified learning disability as follows:

- 1. Perceptual, perceptual-motor and coordination problems:** Some children with learning disabilities have problems with motor coordination and visual-spatial coordination. Others have visual perceptual disabilities and auditory perceptual disabilities. That is, some can see but cannot associate what they see with the information portrayed, and some can hear but find it hard to associate what is heard with the information transmitted.
- 2. Disorders of attention and Hyperactivity:** Hallathan and Kauffman also noted that numerous studies have documented the existence of hyperactivity in a large percentage of learning-disabled children and adolescents ranging from 33-80%. A child can be attention deficit, which can bring about hyperactivity in the classroom, disabling him/her from learning alongside his/her peers.
- 3. Disorder of memory and thinking:** Children who are learning disabled often demonstrate memory deficits for both auditory and visual stimuli (Hallathan, Kauffman & Lioud, 1985). These children also have deficiencies in using the same learning strategies used by their peers. Their poor performance can be as a result of their poor language communication skills, making it impossible to concretize information from verbal material in particular. Cognitive styles used when thinking of

problem-solving are also impaired by the impulsivity of some with learning disabilities children. Therefore, instead of reflecting on various alternatives to solving problem, the CLD might impulsively address the problem, failure at which leaves him emotionally disoriented. CLD also have problems utilizing metacognitive skills (metacognition involves an awareness of skills, resources and strategies for task performance and the ability to utilize self-regulation in ensuring task completion) They might not plan their moves or reflect on the outcome of their approaches to problem solving.

4. **Social adjustment problems:** Mood swings often characterize personality and social adjustment in CLD. The evidence of social adjustment is usually gotten from teacher, parental, peer and self-ratings. This enables proper planning of interventions and special programmes for proper adjustment and societal mainstreaming.
5. **Academic Achievement:** In the school setting, the presence of academic deficits is the hallmarks of CLD, as some children have deficits in all scholastic domains: writing, arithmetic and subject-specific deficits (Ozaji, Unachukwu & Kolo 2016).

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: AN EXPOSÉ

Inclusive education is the continuous process of recognizing and valuing human diversity within educational systems by providing opportunities for children with diverse educational needs to access education and it is also the acceptance of diverse educational needs and the provision of opportunities for all to participate meaningfully in learning opportunities in ordinary classrooms (Engelbrecht Nel, & Tlale, 2015, Swart & Oswald, 2008). However, definitions of inclusive education vary from country to country and there is a growing recognition that interpretations of the concept are varied and disparate as the diverse educational needs of the children that it addresses (Mitchell, 2005 Signal, 2008) Inclusion has been described as a “complex, multidimensional and problematic concept and one that resist a universally accepted definition” (Mitchell, 2005) in other words, it means different things systemic, socio-economic and cultural contexts (Articles & Dyson, 2005) in (Klinkhardt, 2016) Discusses on inclusive education circulating in both developing countries in the areas of policy, research and practice have been concerned with two broad themes namely; the justification for and the implementation of inclusive education. (Artiles, Kozleski, Englbrecht et al 2015) in (Klinkhardt, 2016). However differences in the rationale for inclusive education have resulted in certain crucial aspects of inclusion being constructed differently, not only across contexts, but also within different levels of a single education system.

The consequence of this situation is that multiple reasons are offered to justify inclusive education in different contexts. Underpinned by a right perspective, the justification discourse is connected to the idea of creating an inclusive society with an emphasis on full participation and equal recognition of all people. This discourse has indeed shape the political view of inclusive education with a broad equity agenda for all children who have traditionally been excluded from mainstream school and secondly, with the creation of inclusive classroom and communities that nurture the qualities of equity and care. For UNESCO, inclusive education is operated on the basis of principles of promoting equitability in learning; equalization of learning and daily life environment experiences; ensuring commensurate learning opportunities for all learners; Prioritization of meeting of functional learning for all learners

irrespective of their ability and social background; and inclusiveness or special educational services delivery.

For the present authors, inclusive education is that aspect of education which takes care of all persons in learning process, especially the impaired or disabling learners by providing basic learning facilities that will enhance or assist them in their learning process.

PRINCIPLES OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Inclusive education is a dynamic approach of responding positively to pupils/students with diversity and seeing individual differences not as a problem but as an opportunity for enriching learning. Inclusive education involves the processes of increasing the participation of pupils in and reducing their exclusion from cultures, curricula and communities of the school. Its aim is to eliminate exclusion that is a consequence of negative attitudes. Inclusive education has evolved as a movement to challenge exclusionary policies and practices. It is the responsibility of both the formal and informal sectors. The principles are as follows:

- ❖ **Promotion of Learning Equitability:** when prospective learners are brought together to be educated or trained in life and related skills acquisition, whether in a regular or specialized setting, the tendency is more likely to assume that they all have minimum of the average capacities to learn effectively, given that the expected provisions are made. This assumption is for all categories of learners irrespective of whether they have apparent disabilities or even presumed personality attributes often turn out to be educationally misleading and indeed does compound the challenge of making learning functional and effective. This challenge for all categories of learners (special needs averagely endowed and well endowed) is one of the learning in-equitability. To achieve equitability in learning for all learners, inclusive education is seen to be inevitable. For example, some children with mild mental retardation can cope with learning requirements in regular classrooms and do not have to be placed in special classrooms or schools. In the same way, learners who experience hardness of hearing or those who have mild visual impairment or disability need not be sent to special schools, as assisting devices can enable them learn together with their hearing and sighted peers in the same classes.

- ❖ **Equalization of learning and Daily life living Environment:** The education systems of developing countries hardly provide for what may be referred to as ideal learning environments for all categories of learners. In regular schools and classrooms for example, basic learning facilities are so short in supply that even learners endowed with full abilities can hardly maximize their potentials. For learners with special needs, extra provisions for their learning are not even available, hence the culture of the so called special schools (for children with physical disabilities and health impairments, mental retardation, visual impairments, hearing impairments etc) The inclusive education principle of equalizing the learning environment dictates that such special schools which only perpetrate exclusiveness and segregation in educational practice should be as much as possible avoided. Where they are necessitated owing to the severity of the special need conditions, contact with the regular environments

(homes, neighborhoods and nearby regular schools or special educational services centers) must be facilitated for the learners with severe special need conditions. In inclusive education practice, every facet of the environment (in public and neighborhood facilities, homes, schools and rehabilitation centers) must be designed, structured and operated in a way that as much as possible, special need persons can get along independently or can easily find assistance.

- ❖ **Ensuring commensurate learning opportunities for all learners:** As much as every person (irrespective of status and ability) has right to education, the kind of education received can only be meaningful and of use to the individual if it is commensurate to his abilities (intellectual, academic and aptitude) and interest. For either of the normally endowed or other disabilities in any way (those with learning disability, neuro-psychological impairment, visual and hearing impairment, physical disabilities, intellectual impairment, etc) education or training can only make meaning to them if it is commensurate to their abilities and interests. Learners with moderate or severe intellectual retardation for instance can only find special educational training for life skills acquisition meaningful and motivating to the extent that the unique and core- curricular activities are commensurate to their intellectual abilities and dispositions. The principle of ensuring commensurate learning opportunities within the ambit of inclusive education is therefore, essentially about providing relevant teachings, training and learning facilities with which every learner including those with manifest or non-manifest special needs can maximize their potentials with adequate zeal.
- ❖ **Prioritization of functional learning for all learners:** Inclusive education requires that priority be given to making education functional for all learners, irrespective of their learning potentials and varied levels of abilities. The principle of prioritizing functional learning for all learners within the context of inclusive education practice, therefore it implies that all educational methodologies and deliveries (teaching and learning) must be such that they ensure effective learning and skill acquisition to the extent that learners (irrespective of intellectual and ability dispositions) are able to demonstrate expected learning outcomes effectively. For example, learners with severe visual impairment who requires skills like locomotion, independent mobility and orientation, they must be taught not only with special methodologies and assistive devices, but with training in the use of extra specialized efforts (concept mapping, extra sensory perception, etc) for them to be able to acquire proficiency, zeal and near perfection in the skills.
- ❖ **Inclusiveness of special educational services Delivery:** Special educational service include screening, assessment (of special learning needs) evaluation as well as resource room and individualized teaching etc. inclusiveness of these specialized services implies that they are not just meant for learners whose impairments or disabilities are obvious but for every learner with the school setting (regular,

integrated, exclusive or special). The principles dictate that in every education and training setting, learners must be screened and assessed, evaluated and taught by the most appropriate methods that would guarantee effective learning and skills acquisition outcomes.

In all, the principles of Inclusive Education dictates that segregation tendencies are discouraged and use of facilities which lessen discrimination and labeling for every learner in every learning environment are encouraged. It also requires that every stakeholder is involved in teaching and learning for every learner, irrespective of the obviousness or otherwise of their potentials and abilities. (Oziji, Unachukwu and Kolo, 2016)

PURPOSE OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Educational accessibility has always been a major concern at different levels of the society. Since educational access presents itself as a problem for many groups, anything that could address the issue of accessibility should be applauded. Strategy or purpose of the implementation of inclusive education should be programmed to consider the conditions of immediate community, learning process and schooling opportunities. We need to make sure that education will guarantee student's freedom for self-actualization of their dreams and aspirations. For Kolo (1991) education for all Mantra was based on the philosophy that an educated citizenry is the backbone of the development of every society in the world and the key to the liberation of the human kind from the shackles of ignorance and the perpetration of all evils bedeviling the world in all ramifications. If education for all is to be realized then, the most vulnerable exclusion on grounds of ignorance, poverty, discriminatory socio-cultural practices, impairments and disabling conditions, must be specifically targeted for their inclusion in all educational strategies to be deployed. Before the emancipation of education for all, integration in its different ramifications (regular class special services; regular schools resources room special services, special class in regular schools; side by side special and regular school arrangements and even reverse integration) had been advocated and tried out in different educational systems in different countries. As analysts have since pointed out, this integration measures have not entirely eliminated the exclusion of learners with special needs from schools and the education system (UNESCO, 2003). Indeed, in some occasions, blending practices may have been so misunderstood and carried in a way that the special need learners may have been more guaranteed from educational activities. Therefore, inclusive education is conceptualized on the ground of holistic teaching and learning process. The purposes are:

- 1) All children can learn and reach their full potentials when given opportunity, through effective teaching and learning with appropriate resources.
- 2) Programmes will be offered to meet the individual needs of each child and students within the school community.
- 3) A student's programme must address the intellectual, learning, communication, social, emotion and physical aspects of a child's developments.
- 4) Parents play a key role in the education of their child in that they are the most complete information source and have the greatest investment in their child's future.
- 5) All students will have equitable opportunity to be included in the typical learning

environment. This means educating children/students with special supports and service needs in inclusive settings is the first placement option, providing the opportunity to participate in regular classrooms with same aged peers in their neighborhood school.

- 6) All students shall be given the opportunity to participate in all aspects of school life, subject to limitations based on reasonableness in each circumstance. (Palliser school Division, 2020)

VARIED APPROACHES IN THE PRACTICE OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Around the world, children are excluded from schools where they belong because of disability, race, language, religion, gender and poverty. But every child has the right to be supported by their parents and community to grow, learn and develop in the early years and upon reaching school age, to go to school and be welcomed and included by teachers and peers alike. When all children, regardless of their differences are educated together with every benefit, this is the cornerstone of inclusive education (Open society foundations, 2019). Below are some of the varied approaches towards the success of inclusive education:

Assessment, Diagnosis and Identification / Prognosis Provisions in All Learning and Training Environment

This helps us to examine and put into perspective the very important things required in inclusive education. It is believed by many as pivotal in inclusive education. The essence is to study the level to which special or associated learning needs and the teaching techniques that will best suit each learner is made available.

Regular in-class Specialized Provisions:

This approach ensures that all that is required for those with special needs setting or classroom should be provided. That is, the specialized equipment for example acoustic amplifiers to boost audio levels for learners, designer seats for those with physical disabilities, ICT equipment to facilitate simulation, reading and visual effects, as well as services of sign language or total communication experts and special assistants are requirements to make teaching and learning for learners with special needs.

Learning Environment Assistive Physical Provisions

In every normal learning scenario, the approach in inclusive education depicts that the whole physical milieu like roads, pathways, staircase, utility arrangements and housing are expected to be customized to help people with special needs. Rails, ramps should be provided for use of students with physical challenge. Toilets should have fitted support gadgets for ease of use by those with physical and sight disabilities.

Linkages for Learning, Teaching and Training Collaboration

Academic synergy or linkages is necessary for the able and special needs students but more importantly for those with special needs. It is essential that any institution that engages in IE must as a matter of urgency have link with other institutions to foster learning collaboration in teaching and learning of the special needs learners. An institution operating integrated

education with students with physical disabilities and visual impairments should have linkages with a rehabilitation center to provide for specialized skills acquisitions for those requiring it.

Professional Collaboration

Inclusive education is most functional when there is professional team work in place. School psychologists, psychotherapists, special needs education specialists (sign language experts, brail-lists, special guides and assistants, speech therapists) medical personnel etc, are all required to provide critical services for facilitating inclusive special needs education. The team of specialist is expected therefore to bring their professionalism to bare in a collaborative framework in the inclusive education.

CHALLENGES OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN A DEVELOPING ECONOMY

Learners with special educational needs are very varied group. Some pupils may have multiple difficulties. It is important for teachers to identify each child's particular difficulties. Inadequate and inaccurate assessment can lead to inappropriate decisions. To cite one example, children may be wrongfully regarded as intellectually disabled when in fact their difficulties in learning may be mainly due to hearing impairment. In many societies, educational resources maybe denied the child who is considered intellectually disabled. Educational assessment has been defined as diagnosis of educational strengths, weakness and needs, defining a child's current level of functioning and leading to the appropriate placement (Mariga, Mc Conkey & Myezwa, 2014).

However certain things could pose some challenges to inclusive education. They are:

- 1) **Lack of finance and Resources:** Many school systems in developing countries do not have enough financial capita, resources or teachers trained in special education to properly assimilate special needs students into mainstream classrooms. Some of the main challenges in funding inclusive education lie in the ability to transform resource allocation into learning outcomes and to try to identify the most cost-effective interventions to improve learning according to different learners' needs in inclusive systems.
- 2) **Lack of Long-term data and clear definitions for comparisons:** Disability is not a homogeneous category, and the experience of exclusion will vary by gender, impairment type and context. Although support for inclusion of children with disabilities in regular education gains momentum, research lags behind. There is a lack of comparable data on education for children with disabilities, making it difficult to accessto what extent they are being left behind (Kuper, Saran & White, 2018) Furthermore, Dyssegaard and Larsen (2013) emphasize that it is difficult to define exactly what successful inclusion requires or which interventions are effective for the individual pupil's scholastic and social development.
- 3) **Lack of data and challenges as regards improving learning outcome:** Schuelka (2013) highlights that there is limited data and evidence around learning achievement

and outcomes for learners with disabilities. This makes it difficult to enact systemic changes to the education system that would improve learning achievements for children with disabilities. Examinations and tests rarely make the necessary accommodations for learners with disabilities, putting them at a disadvantage. Most international achievement tests often exclude students with disabilities. This reinforces attitudes of low expectations and that students with disabilities do not belong in a culture of achievement. Kuper, Saren & White (2018) argues that the lack of data comparing different approaches/ interventions that try to improve educational inclusion and outcomes for children with disabilities makes it difficult to judge what is optimal. They further elaborate that most studies have focused on comparing enrolment in school for children with and without disabilities. This metric alone ignores the importance of frequency of attendance and progression through the system or academic achievements (e.g graduation). There has also been little focus on the classroom experience of the child, such as whether they are provided with a quality education, are socially included and feel safe at school and whether they experience stigmatizing attitudes. There is hence a need for more research.

- 4) **Acquisition of both Regular and Specialized Equipment:** Standard prescribed text books, regular teaching aids and equipment, standard furniture, standard architectural prescribed classes, restructured out-spaces and environments, etc are expected to be available for all learners. Inclusive education requires that in addition to standard prescribed equipment for regular learning, specialized ones such as customized books and equipment for special learners, developmental and learning need assessment tests, assistive devices for the learners with disabilities etc are equally provided in the same school environment. (Ozaji, Unachukwu & Kolo, 2016)
- 5) **Developing regular and Specialized Capacities:** An integral part of the success of inclusive education is the institutionalization of the development of capacities of both regular and specialized personnel. Capacity development should focus on both the specialty competence and complementarity abilities of all staff in making IE practice functional. Both special needs personnel and regular personnel must have opportunity for improving their respective capacities in the IE environment as well as their complementarity roles for all children, especially those at risk of being left out or left behind as well as those with special needs. (Ozaji, Unachukwu & Kolo, 2016)

CONCLUDING REFLECTION: POSSIBILITY OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN A DEVELOPING ECONOMY

Inclusive education is possible if only we employ the indices that will enhance its possibilities. The developing countries such as Nigeria should be able to accept that inclusive education is possible. This is the first step in the right direction. When this is done, then pragmatic policies and laws should be enacted to make it functional. For inclusive education to work, everyone has to be involved – the government, teachers, students. Special care,

attention and facilities should be provided for the special needs persons. We emphasize here that there is need to reform the way local communities treat persons with disabilities. We should accept their differences, that will enable us to provide them with the opportunities of fulfilling their dreams and aspirations in life. The secret of a successful inclusive education programme is in the training of teachers, the preparation of conducive learning environments in schools, the empowerment of parents and the education of community members and professionals in service systems. It is important also to keep the policy makers well informed through running workshops for them and giving them progress reports on regular basis. The more they understand, the more supportive they become. When policy makers understand issues of different disabilities, their causes, their rights and inclusiveness, issues of inclusive policy are then better handled (Linkhardt, 2016)

There should be intentionality by everyone to make inclusive education work. Government and other educational related stakeholders, should, in building infrastructures, take notice and be intentional by making provision for the special needs persons in teaching and learning process.

In erecting a classroom where effective teaching and learning should take place, special needs person's comfort and accessibility must be taken into consideration. It is when we are intentional about this, then can we say that inclusive education is attainable. Education is the right of every child both able and disable children. It must be inclusive. The goals of education should be pursued at various stages of educational system. The inability of our educational system to create development in a developing country like Nigeria is not as a result of planning, but implementation. Good planning will increase the realization of education objectives. (Anyanwu, Ofoegbu & Azuike, 2017). Nwazuoke & Kolo in Ozoji, Unachukwu & Kolo (2016) opined that inclusive special needs education as holistic practice of least restrictive environments and integration in its various ramifications for ensuring functional learning and training for all learners with special needs. As we tried to describe inclusive special needs education elsewhere, it is the culmination of all shades of least restrictive environment and integration practices in a way that ensures the maximization of the learning potentials, abilities and social capacities of all learners, irrespective of their social backgrounds, learning and life adjustment capacities. Ozoji, Unachukwu and Kolo further said, inclusive education is the educational practices which ensure that in every situation (schools, homes and communities) learning and training is facilitated for every learner by minimizing hindrances or handicapping conditions unconditionally for every learner. Whether a learner has an obvious impairment/disability or not, inclusiveness means that the required conditions for functional learning are provided and facilitated for everyone without any form of discrimination. In sum, it is the strong position of this paper that inclusive education is possible and tenable in a developing economy if all the recommendations stated herein are properly implemented.

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