

Sustainable Implementation of Inclusive Education Programme for Children with Hearing Impairment in Nigeria: Strategies Involved

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Abstract

The commitment is made to equalize educational opportunities for all children, irrespective of their disabilities, but much more is needed to translate the goals into concrete action in Nigeria. This paper discussed the concept of inclusive education program as it affects children with hearing impairment and the various challenges, strategies and support services needed for appropriate implementation in an inclusive programme for children with hearing impairment. The paper concludes with suggestions to teachers, government and all stakeholders in education to put in place the necessary frame work, legislation, equipments and materials for an effective implementation of inclusive education for children with hearing impairment.

Key words: Hearing Impairment, Inclusive Education, Sustainable Implementation.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education can be interpreted as the philosophy and practice of educating children with disabilities in general educational settings. Inclusive education came as a rescue mission in the actualization of educational and psychosocial services for children with hearing impairment (Ozegya & Babudoh, 2012). One truism which finds expression readily in democratic settings is that "All men are born equal". It is pursuance of the realization of such lofty idea that led to the emergence of the concept of inclusive education.

Significantly, the Salamanca statement and its accompanying framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994) is arguably the single most important international document in the field of special education. The statement urged government to:

"give the highest policy and budgetary priority to improve education systems to enable them to include all children regardless of individual differences or difficulties adopt, as a matter of policy, the principle of inclusive education" (UNESCO, 1994).

Essentially, the Nigerian government has adopted inclusive education as a policy and through the Federal Ministry of Education, Nigeria as a country has adopted policy guidelines for inclusive education that targets the three groups (the disabled, the disadvantaged and the gifted or talented), Federal Ministry of Education, (2008).

The commitment is made to equalize educational opportunities for all children, irrespective of their physical, sensory, mental, psychological or emotional disabilities, these are lofty gals directed to the improvement of quality of special education services, but much more is needed to translate the goals into current action.

Despite the section (8) of the National Policy, Ajobiewe (2004) observed that there are still problems in implementing the policy which is in consonance with the inclusive education

programme. Most citizens in Nigeria live in the rural areas, therefore not receiving public awareness on inclusive policy. The vast majority of people living with disabilities in Nigeria, have no access to quality education, social services, etc, like their non-disabled counterparts.

Furthermore, the government has not put in place the necessary legislation, infrastructural facilities, instructional materials, equipments, gadgets and human resources to enhance the full implementation of the of the programme. As a result, children with hearing impairment among others who should benefit from inclusive education are being deprived.

Inclusive education programme and children with hearing impairment

Hearing impairment is a generic term which indicates hearing loss that may range in severity from mild to profound (Isaiah & Aderibigbe, 2013). According to them, individuals with hearing impairment can be grouped into two categories namely, the deaf and hard of hearing. The deaf are those, whose sense of hearing is non-functional for the ordinary purposes of life, while the hard of hearing are those whose sense of hearing although defective, is functional with or without hearing aid.

According to Babudoh (2008), hearing impairment may be defined using three major criteria namely: time of onset, degree of loss, and the site of the hearing problem. On the basis of degree of loss two major types of hearing loss may be identified. They are, deafness and hardness of hearing. The onset of hearing impairment refers to the period at which hearing problem starts in an individual. It could be either congenital (at birth) or adventitious (after birth). Based on the site of lesion, three major types of hearing loss may be identified. They are conductive, sensorineural and mixed hearing losses. Conductive hearing loss occurs when there is problem with either the outer or middle ear or both. It may be as a result of blockage, infection, perforation or growth which prevents the transfer of sound to the inner ear. On the other hand, sensorineural hearing loss is said to occur when the damage done is sited in the inner ear. Regardless of the nature of the hearing disability all the categories are expected to benefit from the inclusive education programme.

The practice of inclusive education is part of the universal rights to education, which is extended to all children, the youth and adults with hearing impairment inclusive. In addition, the inclusive movement believes that children with special needs should be placed in the regular school system which they would have otherwise attended, if they had been without impairment. In other words, the children with hearing impairment belong to the regular classroom and therefore, there should be no condition to exclude them from that environment (Sebba & Sachder, 1997)

In order to adequately cater for the needs of the different categories of children with special needs in the school system. Uppa and Dey (2001) as cited in Mangal (2007) reiterated that inclusive educational requirements of children with special needs include a common curriculum with a view to accommodating the differential learning needs of the children.

Strategies for implementing inclusive education for children with hearing impairment

Children with hearing impairment can be effectively taught alongside their hearing counterparts in the inclusive classroom setting through various communication and educational strategies. Ozegya & Babadoh, 2012 and Isaiah & Aderibigbe (2013). Such strategies include oral, manual, total communication, amplification system, visual aids, etc.

The Oral Method: This method involves the use of speech by the teacher, and the use of residual hearing by the children. However, the oral approach is more successful among those with residual hearing (hard-of-hearing) and among those who are post linguallly hearing impaired. Consequently, this method leads to poor academic achievement if used without complementary methods (Okuoyobo, 2006) asserted.

The Manual Method: This involves the use of sign language, fingers spelling, facial expression and pantomimes in communicating with the hearing impaired in the classroom. Instructing the hearing impaired in an inclusive education setting can best be achieved through a communication process that is understandable to the learners and manual method (which is regarded as the first language of hearing impaired children) is one method that can lead to such success.

Total Communication: The approach recognizes the use of speech, sign language, finger spelling, body language, drawing, writing, painting, gestures, pantomimes, and aided hearing. In Nigeria, total communication is widely used as it is regarded as the most effective modality for teaching children with hearing impairment.

The utilization of lecture and discussion strategies by the teacher should consist of assignments for the drill, practice or homework to the hearing impaired children in a written format (by writing on blackboard, presentation on a transparency through an over head projector, etc). The class teaching, instructions and other activities should also be conducted by making use of multisensory approach.

Instead of using lectures and whole class discussions, attempts should be made in using such teaching strategies that include exhibits, demonstrations, experiments and simulation for seeking proper involvement of the hearing impaired children in the teaching-learning process.

The instructional strategies employed by the teacher must follow other modes of communication than the oral. In making use of written materials, attempts also should be made for its modification in terms of graphic-pictorial forms such as pictures, diagrams, maps, graphs and graphic outlines.

Other strategies that may be employed for the hearing impaired in an inclusive setting are amplification system to aid classroom instruction. The system consists of a teacher's microphone with an associated radio transmitter in a single unit and a number of students' radio receivers with audio amplifier units. The teacher can reach the learners with hearing impairment with amplified speech. Other support equipments and materials are overhead projector, cassettes, computer assisted instructional television, etc.

Challenges of teaching children with hearing impairment in an inclusive education setting

The fundamental problems of children with hearing impairment are communication and language deficiencies. Most of them find it difficult to express and receive information clearly in speech and writing. Added to the aforementioned, are other external challenges inhibiting the successful inclusion of the children with hearing impairment.

1. Inadequate infrastructural facilities

Presently, there is large population of students in classroom in the regular school due to inadequate infrastructural facilities. This goes a long way to hinder the inclusion of the hearing impaired children in the regular school environment.

2. Inadequate Specialist

In the regular schools, there are not enough support specialist staff to complement the service of the regular classroom teachers to make teaching and learning activities effective in an inclusive environment.

3. Irregular Staff Training

The regular classroom teachers in the inclusive classroom need regular training. Most of them, do not know the characteristics of the hearing impaired children, their needs and

how to communicate with them.

4. Inadequate Teaching/Learning Materials

There is paucity in the provision of appropriate and adequate teaching and learning materials, equipments, and gadgets in the regular school for the successful implementation of inclusive education programme.

Other challenges inhibiting the successful implementation of inclusion policy are communication problem, lip reading complexity, delay in legislation backing, inadequate public awareness etc.

CONCLUSION

The children with hearing impairment are capable of maximizing teaching and learning outcomes alongside their normal hearing counterparts in an inclusive educational setting if given an appropriate learning environment with adequate provisions of supportive specialist staff, gadgets, equipments and materials that will enhance the implementation of the inclusion programme for children with hearing impairment.

Recommendations

To realize maximum learning outcomes by children with hearing impairment in an inclusive education programme, the following recommendations should be observed and implemented by the governments at all levels, the parents, NGOs, teachers, policy makers and all stakeholders in education:

- There should be provision of adequate infrastructural facilities. More classrooms should be built to prevent congestion of students in the classroom.
- Regular classroom teachers should be given regular in-service training on the methods and approaches of handling children with hearing impairment.
- Enough support specialist staff such as sign language interpreter should be employed to complement the effort of the regular teacher.
- There should be adequate provisions of teaching and learning equipments, materials, gadgets in the regular school for an effective implementation of inclusive programme.
- Also, there should be quick release of a legislation backing and a strong framework for inclusive education programme. There should be adequate public awareness, appropriate communication channels for the children with hearing impairment.

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