

Implementation of Information and Communication Technology in Inclusive Education in Nigeria: Future Perspective

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Abstract

Integration of learners with and without disabilities into Nigerian educational system had been on the track few decades back. Satisfaction or dissatisfaction on implementation of inclusive education can only be achieved through today's understanding of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Future trends on implementation of inclusive education will have more meaning when various strategies are sought and are given priority. Awareness is high everywhere in the world that human success and prosperity can only be achieved through new ideas, new designs and innovations which are associated or anchored through collaborative, cooperative and consultative partnership. It has therefore become imperative for government to begin to embrace a new paradigm shift in the training of teachers and education of learners with disabilities in this technological age.

Key words: ICT, *litigation, collaboration, future perspective, implementation, inclusive education and creativity.*

1. Introduction

Education generally is a process of preparing individuals for sound and effective social living. Education embodies the major Nigerian values of freedom; equity and cohesion. Education needs to reach out to the entire human capital of a country and must not reject any talent, no matter how hard it is to encourage and no matter how peripheral it may seem. This is due to the fact that unequal access to education technology is an incalculable loss of human potential and threatens social cohesion. It is a means of social mobility.

Generally in Nigeria, Education through the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has been mainly for the normal children with few schools for the challenged or disabled children. Currently, there has been the realization that the disabled children need to be equally educated through the use of ICT because the few schools in existence do not cater adequately and effectively for about half a million disabled persons in Nigeria out of which one hundred and seventy thousand, five hundred and seventy seven (170,577) are of school age (Alao 2006). Thus, Education must be planned and organized to cater for all categories of children irrespective of their abilities and disabilities (Taura, 2011). This planning entails the application of ICT training in inclusive education setting.

2. Concepts Surrounding Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is of paramount significance in achieving the goals of Education for All (EFA). It involves pursuing excellence without sacrificing integration, offering all students equal opportunities in educational computer technology regardless of their difficulties, expecting the best of each student and developing their full potential, while taking special needs into account. Expanding further, Acedo, Operti, Brady and Duncombe (2011), stated that inclusive education involves the conversion of schools into learning communities that could foster a sense of inclusion and mutual support. To achieve this, schools have to recognize that every person, students, teachers, parents, school staff and members of civil society with whom they interact, is a valued member of the community and have not only roles to play but also talents that can help in ensuring the success of all its components irrespective of whether they are physically disabled or have high skills. Contributing, Okuoyinbo (2001) asserted that ICT in inclusive education means bringing students with disabilities regardless of the nature and severity of their disabilities into all activities of general education such as schools, classroom and the surrounding communities. In effect, ICT in inclusive schools integrates, enrich and celebrate diversity and intercultural difference.

Ademokoya and oyewumi (2001) affirmed that an inclusive school is an educational institution in which all available resources, including the use of ICT are collaboratively utilized to meet the educational needs and challenges of all children who reside in its catchment area. According to this, Acedo and Operti et al (2011) stated that inclusive education has to be developed in close cooperation with all authorities, institutions, associations and civil society, as

well as embedded into all policy areas. They further stated that participation is not only essential and necessary, but also a matter of rights and essential to national development.

Afoi, Saad and Atukum (2008) had earlier expressed the opinion that the use of ICT in inclusive education is essentially a program that enables all learners to participate fully in the life and work of mainstreamed settings to meet the learners' needs through technological innovation. They went further to say that inclusive education is a continuous process of breaking down barriers to learning and active participation for learners with disabilities. It can also be said that inclusive education is concerned with a system of education which gives equal opportunities for all learners to jointly undertake learning activities without discrimination. From these definitions it is clear that emphasis is on giving everybody in the society an equal opportunity to benefit from formal education. Placing the disabled children into the numerous public schools in Nigeria entails providing the needed technological equipment, support services and popularization of special education.

Special education is an aspect of education that appreciates and recognizes the needs of disabled people and makes allowances for the use of special equipment such as computer technology and methods of teaching according to individual needs. However, the educational system in Nigeria which gives room for segregation which is a system of separating persons with disabilities from their normal peers for the purpose of educating them and integration, has not only deprived many disabled persons the opportunity to be educated formally, but also hindered many normal persons from gaining relevant information about the potentials and capacities of persons with disabilities.

In order to legalize inclusion, Decree 3 of 1993 provides the rights and privileges for people with disabilities including Education, rehabilitation, health, vocational training, counseling and employment among others. The national policy on education (FRN, 2004) equally stipulated that the Federal ministry of education shall provide special education in collaboration with appropriate bodies for disabled people irrespective of type and severity. The aim of the special education include to integrate special classes into public schools, monitor people with disability so as to plan for their welfare, provide needed materials and ICT equipment that will enhance their learning.

3. Implementation of Inclusive Education

Special education started to gain recognition in Nigeria in the 70s during the regime of General Gowon as the military head of state (Ademuyiwa and Oseni, 2006). Following this, the federal government made provisions for special education in the National policy on education with the following sum-up objectives:

- To give meaning to the idea of equalizing educational opportunities
- To provide education for all disabled children through the use of ICT
- To provide opportunities for exceptionally gifted children to develop at their own rate.

This policy suffered a setback because of government's inability to fulfill recommendations in the policy. For instance, the suggested ten percent (10%) of funds for programs in education required to be spent on persons with disability was not provided for the purpose. Besides, the ten percent (10%) of Employment in the public sector expected to be reserved for the persons with disability is on paper only. The establishment of the national commission for people with disability is yet to be implemented. The problem of finance and lack of special education commission for persons with disabilities has hindered inclusive education program in Nigeria. Efforts were made by government to expand facilities for the education and training of disabled persons especially in primary schools while in the secondary school, integration is mostly vogue. Part of the achievement is the promulgation of Degree 3, of 1993 which gave legal backing to the demands and mandates of previous special education policy.

4. Future Perspectives: Shifting Paradigm

Through the years, implementation of ICT in inclusive education in Nigeria has come a long way; however, it still has a long way to go. For example, the only special education mandate comes from Section 8 of the National Policy on Education. As a result, accountability for inclusive education is affected and services for people with disabilities are not reachable. For instance there is no mobility cane for the blind, talking watch, typewriter and audiovisual equipment to mention a few. Counseling services are not provided to help early identification of disabled children, and enhance the adjustment of those already identified. Consequently, these learners are left without much assistance in learning. Disability can be identified through observation of the children both inside and outside the classroom setting, scrutinizing school results, consulting the teachers and

individual counseling with the child. Sometimes, tests are administered to complement the non-test results obtained. The counselor will then be able to facilitate immediate intervention strategies that can influence the adjustment of the identified disabled person. JOHN D. KRUMBOLTZ, THIERRY G. KOLPIN School counselors help to make learning a positive experience for every student. They are sensitive to individual differences. They know that a classroom environment that is good for one child is not necessarily good for another. Counselors facilitate communication among teachers, parents, administrators, and students to adapt the school's environment in the best interests of each individual student. They help individual students make the most of their school experiences and prepare them for the future. The duties and roles of many counselors began to change considerably. Counselors started finding themselves as gatekeepers to Individualized Education Programs (IEP) and Student Study Teams (SST) as well as consultants to special education teachers, especially after passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. School counselor now has a working relationship with students' families and with community social agencies. Although the roles of school counselors vary among settings, common tasks include individual counseling, small-group counseling, large-group or classroom presentations, involvement in school wide behavior plans for promoting positive and extinguishing negative behaviors, and consulting with teachers, parents, and the community. Additional duties might include developing classroom management plans or behavior plans for individual students, such as conducting SST and IEP meetings. Without a clear understanding of the various socio-economic and cultural characteristics of diverse learners, it is difficult to evolve strategies and develop plans at classroom, school and system levels to teach children from diverse backgrounds. It is therefore necessary that relevant data and information on diverse learners is collected, examined and analyzed in order to inform and shape policies and practices to make 11 classrooms and schools inclusive and responsive to the learning needs of children from diverse backgrounds.

Child profiles can be an important and effective tool to promote inclusive classrooms. There is first a need to recognize the changing social composition of learners in the classroom resulting from an inflow of children from diverse backgrounds in terms of caste, class, gender, ethnicity, language and religion. This increased diversity presents new issues and challenges in curriculum design, teaching-learning practices and processes, learning materials, and teacher education that

meet the different learning needs of these children. These issues and challenges cannot be addressed unless they are first recognized by policymakers and practitioners. Read more: <http://www.answers.com/topic/school-guidance-and-counseling#ixzz2WDVNQHGJ>, read more: <http://www.answers.com/topic/school-guidance-and-counseling#ixzz2WDU7wWcy>. To look at the future, Nigeria must shift its paradigms and join other progressive nations to advocate for the rights of learners with disabilities and help them join the mainstream society (Mukuria & Obiakor, 2004).

From the researchers' perspective, Nigeria must build on the foundational knowledge that it has established. Proactive efforts must be made to:

- *Enforce a national policy on inclusive education*—currently; there are no laws that enforce a national policy on special education. Unlike other countries that have special education laws that guide their special education activities, Nigeria still struggles with this issue. Even the Section 8 of the National Policy does not provide room for due process. The lack of legal enforcement on special education makes it difficult for people with disabilities and their parents to fight for their rights and gain public support.
- *Institute legitimate advocacy groups*—an institution of advocacy groups will be extremely helpful. Individuals must lobby for the rights of persons with disabilities. Additionally, parent advocacy must be established.
- Telephone communication devices for the deaf (TDDs) should be procured for students use.
- Purchase of other hearing enhancement systems for the use of the deaf patrons who do not have.
- Maintain an extensive collection of books and information for people with disabilities
- *Recognize and accommodate various forms of exceptionalities* - At present, some exceptionality such as blindness and deafness are recognized in Nigeria. There is need to broaden the scope.

- *Give quality and equal educational opportunities to all learners* -All learners deserve quality and equitable treatment and education. The local, state, and federal governments must be involved in these processes.
- *Encourage positive societal attitudes to disability and the disabled* – In all human societies, people value respect and positive attitudes. If the government of Nigeria could institute public education on special education through media and other channels, it would go a long way in bringing respect to the special education community.
- *Be independent, think independently, and talk independently:* Nigeria’s independence must be reflected in her words and deeds. Not only does she need policies that depict her independence from colonial domination, but also Nigeria’s educational language must also be independent.

5. Conclusion & Recommendation

Implementation of Information and Communication Technology in inclusive education in Nigeria, like in many African countries that were former colonies, is a post-colonial phenomenon. In relative terms, it has remained rudimentary in its operation and limited in its functionality. Historically, inclusive education was instituted as an excellent path for providing equal education to all Nigerian citizens, a fact that has been more theoretical than pragmatic. Thus, it has found itself struggling with how best to make it better for learners who are disenfranchised. It is not surprising that for decades such struggle has not produced any measurable progress in the education and service delivery for all learners. By all standards, inclusive education has continued to flounder in mediocrity. To join other progressive countries in recognizing, protecting, and maintaining the rights of persons with and without exceptionalities, it is imperative that Nigeria begins to shift its paradigm in the twenty-first century by embracing and educating all learners through Information Technology and putting away the old tradition of negative perceptions on these learners. It is important that to institute ways to include all learners in Nigeria’s mainstream activity and help them maximize their fullest potential, as no nation has ever gravitated towards reaching its maximum potential without putting into consideration all the human capital with which it is endowed.

6. Future of Inclusive Education in Nigeria

In addition to the scholastic views, National policy on Education and decree 3 of 1993 supported inclusive education in Nigeria. Blue prints on special education also amplified some of the issues raised in the National policy on Education and made new proposals to the National Board for the Education of disabled persons through new technological innovations and gave legal basis to special education policies through appropriate and effective legislation (Ayoku 2007). This is to postulate that future inclusive education in Nigeria can be improved. It is obvious that things have not been working well in the field of special education. However, if mistakes made can be corrected along with the under listed recommendations, the hope of inclusive education is brighter.

- There should be serious effort to ensure that issues contained in the decree 3 of 1993 are implemented by relevant agencies without delay.
- Participation of relevant stakeholder in the execution of policies related to special education should be by merit.
- Telephone communication devices for the deaf (TDDs) should be procured for students use.
- Purchase of other hearing enhancement systems for the use of the deaf patrons who do not have.
- Maintain an extensive collection of books and information about deafness
- Curriculum content that will serve the needs of learners with and without disabilities should be designed by experts.
- there should be supervision by government agencies to reduce poor standards
- Counseling services recommended in the 1993 decree has to be established to organize and mount periodic programs both to raise the consciousness of people about persons with disabilities and help the disabled persons adjust to the normal school environment. It will also enhance the early identification of persons with disability so as to ensure early intervention and subsequent early completion of education at all levels as stipulated by the national policy on education.

Future of inclusive education will be better and encouraging when classrooms, good environment, enough funds is spent on special education and employment after each level of education is guaranteed. Besides, when the national commission for people with disabilities is established and

headed by disabled person who is believed will be capable of handling matters that related to disabilities, things will work better.

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