

## The Need for Inclusivity in Nigerian Higher Education System

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### ABSTRACT

Equity in education means education that involves special action taken to reverse the historical, personal or social circumstances such as gender, ethnic origin or family background, that are obstacles to achieving educational potential (fairness) needed for all individuals to reach at least a basic minimum level of skills (inclusion). To this end, inclusive education involves a radical reform in the school that regard the curricula, assessment, and pedagogy which welcomes and celebrates diversity when it comes to gender, race, language, social background, and level of educational achievement or disability. Inclusive education at the higher education level is meant to facilitate institutions to undertake strategic change to enable all students experience wider participation, equality and diversity, and improving student retention, success, learning experience for maximizing their personal, economic and social outcomes as graduates. Consequently, this paper's approach is geared toward establishing that, proactively making higher education accessible, relevant and engaging to all students, is anchored on curriculum design and contents, pedagogy and curriculum delivery and student assessment and feedback. More so, since teachers are the pivot on which the educational system revolves, they have the main responsibility with respect to competence in knowledge and skill for bringing about the desired or positive result for inclusive education.

**Keywords:** Inclusive education, Nigerian Universities, lecturers, teaching

### INTRODUCTION

Nigeria as a nation, have people from different ethnic groups, different background and with different challenges which may be as a result of linguistic minority, poverty, marginalization, conflicts, disaster, disabilities and they live together and struggle for survival ranging from family to school and society at large [1,2,3,4,5]. For this reason, some have less access to education than others, some attend school but are excluded from learning, some others may not complete the full cycle of education, while some do not receive an education of good quality [6,7,8,9]. The success of such a nation depends solely on taking a holistic approach to education reform and thus changing the way the educational system tackles exclusion, thus the need for inclusive education [10,11,12]. The concept and practice of inclusive education have gained importance internationally and nationally in recent years as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners [1]. Nigerian has three major languages

which are studied at university levels, which include Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba. Nelson [2] opined that taking this holistic approach to education reform must be reflected in the curriculum of these three languages especially at university level to ensure that every youth and adult have equity in education [13,14,15,16].

Equity in education means education that involves special action taken to reverse the historical, personal or social circumstances such as gender, ethnic origin or family background, that are obstacles to achieving educational potential (fairness) needed for all individuals to reach at least a basic minimum level of skills (inclusion) [3,17,18,19]. To this end, inclusive education involves a radical reform in the school that regard the curricula, assessment, and pedagogy which welcomes and celebrates diversity when it comes to gender, race, language, social background, and level of educational achievement or disability [4,20,21,22,23]. Since teachers are the pivot on which the

educational system revolves, they have the main responsibility with respect to competence in knowledge and skill for bringing about the desired or positive result for inclusive education. Teaching in inclusive classroom needs planning periods for team teaching, and regularly scheduled in collaboration with others as to exchange pedagogical and subject matter knowledge. Inclusive education is the major challenge facing educational systems around the world especially developing countries like Nigeria. The quest for equity of access to education making life easier for all children and youth, irrespective of social and physical status brought inclusive education. However it is observed that despite the Nigerian government's visions to embark on inclusion, university education in Nigeria has been perceived as a privilege of the few intellectuals or the rich and therefore children from indigent parents, children with special needs/ disabilities, racial, ethnic, health, linguistic and cultural grounds and the likes are denied accessibility especially to inclusive education. This situation jeopardizes the aim which is to give every child right to participate and being useful in the society.

Moreover, at the centre of inclusion education is the teacher. The teacher is the most crucial factor in achieving this objective, since the quality of education in any country is reflected by the quality and availability of competent teachers. Therefore, quality education especially inclusive education depends on what and how the instructors teach, which in turn depends on their knowledge, skills and commitment.

### **Conceptual Review Inclusive Education**

Inclusive education is a process that involves the transformation of schools and other centres of learning to cater for all children, both male and female, students from ethnic and linguistic minorities, rural populations, those affected by HIV and AIDS, and those with disabilities and difficulties in learning and to provide learning opportunities for all youth and adults as well [5]. Its aim is

to eliminate exclusion that is a consequence of negative attitudes and a lack of response to diversity in race, economic status, social class, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, sexual orientation and ability. Inclusive education is therefore a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners and can thus be understood as a key strategy to achieve EFA. As an overall principle, it should guide all education policies and practices, starting from the fact that education is a basic human right and the foundation for a more just and equal society. An inclusive education system can only be created if ordinary schools become more inclusive, in other words, if they become better at educating all children in their communities. Education takes place in many contexts, both formal and non-formal, and within families and the wider community. Consequently, inclusive education is not a marginal issue but is central to the achievement of high quality education for all learners and the development of more inclusive societies [6]. Inclusive education is essential to achieve social equity and is a constituent element of lifelong learning.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopted Socio-Cultural Theory propounded by [7]. This theory believes that many behavioural traits such as passivity, dependence and lack of social skills that are thought to characterize people with intellectual disabilities are the products of poor access to socio cultural knowledge, lack of social interaction and opportunity to acquire psychological tools. It emphasized that it is not a physical disability itself but its social complications that is the distortion of the relationship with more experienced people, which affects the quality of the child's development. Thus, this theory is relevant in inclusive education as it emphasizes favourable social interaction, demonstrations and teaching practices that make subject matter more relevant and meaningful. Such practices include partner learning, project- and activity-based learning, and service learning as well as positive attitudes towards the

children with special needs which promote their social skills and intellectual

developments.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Fashola [8] carried out a research on community effectiveness for inclusive education in public primary school level in Ondo state. The researcher found out that community has a vital role to play in achieving inclusive education as they are endowed with knowledge and necessary skills that promote inclusion. The researcher recommended among others the need for teachers to be a good mediator between the school and the community for adequate collaboration and effective use of resource people to promote inclusive education. Also [2] carried out a research on teachers' perceptions of social integration of the mentally retarded students in public secondary schools in Yobe state. The researcher found out that the social integration is part of inclusive education and as such, mentally retarded students are mocked in the school which discourages them in engaging in field-trip. The researcher recommended the need for social interaction from both the teacher and fellow students to enable mentally retarded students the opportunity to acquire psychological tools which will promote the quality of the child's development.

### Achieving Inclusive Education in Nigeria Higher Education System

Inclusive education at the higher education level is meant to facilitate institutions to undertake strategic change to enable all students experience wider participation, equality and diversity, and improving student retention, success, learning experience for maximizing their personal, economic and social outcomes as graduates [9]. UNESCO [3] equally noted that as inclusive approach strives towards proactively making higher education accessible, relevant and engaging to all students, institutional commitment to and management of inclusive learning and teaching is anchored on curriculum design and contents, pedagogy and curriculum delivery and student assessment and feedback. The research synthesis defines

inclusive teaching as the ways in which pedagogy; curriculum and assessment are designed and delivered to engage students in learning that is meaningful, relevant and accessible to all. It embraces a view that diversity stems from individual differences that can enrich the lives and learning of others.

However, the literature on inclusive education is undisputed about no matter how excellent the educational infrastructure might be, how well articulated educational policy might be, how well resourced a program might be, effective inclusion does not take place until regular classroom teachers deliver relevant and meaningful instruction to students involved. In other words, teachers play a pivotal role in mainstreaming inclusive education as mediators of learning, disciplinarians, parent substitute, and judges of achievement, curriculum developers and the likes. Teaching inclusive education in Nigerian universities should be anchored on twenty-first century skills which have more emphasis on practical acquisition. Therefore the teacher has to provide high quality, holistic support and focused involvement with the children with special needs based on a joint perspective, mutual understanding and networking. In line with the above, [3] suggests a number of requirements from teachers, from the perspective of inclusive curricula such as, teachers participation in curriculum development at local level, their skill development for curriculum adaptation, management of a composite range of classroom activities, providing support to students' learning, working outside the traditional subject limitations and in culturally sensitive ways. Teachers need to be knowledgeable about the learning styles and the motivational patterns of differently abled children and a clear understanding of the resources and support systems which are available to help them for working with students with disabilities. They should present information to the students in a

manner which enables them to assimilate the information easily. The inclusion of differently abled students in regular education classrooms requires regular school teachers to upgrade their skills in order to respond to the new challenges provided by their changing roles and responsibilities [10]. Inclusive education classrooms regular school teachers are required to teach content differently which must be integrative, flexible and interdisciplinary. In contrast to traditional, teacher centered instructional approaches in which the teacher stands in front of the classroom and delivers lectures to the entire class; in the inclusive classroom the focus shifts from teaching to learning so teachers are now required to create situations in which students' learning is maximized. The regular classroom teacher is capable of understanding the relationship between teaching and learning as well as develops the cognitive functioning of the differently abled students. Thus, such teacher needs to be a professional diagnostician, a decision maker and an instructional manager in order to deal effectively with the challenges posed by exceptional/gifted learners. This situation will help these students in working with the group, to follow routines and to follow the accepted standards of group behavior. This way the roles and

responsibilities of regular school teachers will be comprehensive after the introduction of inclusive education programs. It now includes the responsibility of meeting the needs of the differently abled students in addition to meeting the needs of their normal peers. It is therefore vital that regular school teachers have the appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes to fulfil these roles and responsibilities.

Furthermore, to support an inclusive teacher, an inclusive school must offer possibilities and opportunities for a range of working methods and individual treatment to ensure that no child is excluded from companionship and participation in the school. This implies the development of rights-based, child-friendly schools. A rights-based education helps children realize their rights. It is not only academically effective but also inclusive, healthy and protective of all children, gender-responsive, and encourages the participation of the learners themselves, their families and their communities. Support from the teachers and head teachers is essential, but support from the communities close to the school is also vital. All must be able and willing to ensure inclusion in the classroom and in learning for all children regardless of their differences.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing, in designing inclusive curriculum for higher education, institutions should consider the diversity of the student body and embed principles of equality in the design, planning and evaluation of programmes, courses and modules [11]. In designing process learning outcomes, content and choice of pedagogical, assessment approaches as well as students' entitlements, previous experiences, current interests and future aspirations will be taken into account [8]. This is in line with the three-dimensional approach to curriculum design in which skills are embedded as 'process knowledge' in subject-based teaching, learning and assessment. Therefore, an inclusive curriculum in higher education should address the individual's cognitive,

emotional, social and creative development. It should be based on the four pillars of education for the twenty-first century which involves learning to know, to do, to be and to live together [12]. As such, higher education curriculum for inclusion education should comprise both the theoretical and practical aspect of subject areas.

## Recommendations

Based on the forgoing, the researcher recommended as follows:

There is the need for professional training or development opportunities to be made available for lecturers to embrace the current trend in inclusive education in university system.

1. University system should find a way of checkmating lecturers to

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- ensure that they not only reflect more positively on their competence, but also adopt a more positive attitude toward inclusive practice.
2. University system should liaise with the community, government and NGOS for resources and tools

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as lack of it affects their productivity.

3. University system should organize conferences, seminars and workshop to enlighten and keep lecturers abreast on the effective pedagogical and strategic skills in inclusive education.

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