THE ROLES OF REGULAR TEACHERS IN FACILITATING INCLUSION OF 
CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN REGULAR SCHOOLS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The Salamanca framework for Action (1994) has mandated that all children should be accommodated in all regular schools, their disabilities notwithstanding. This means that special needs children are to be accommodated in regular schools. This paper looks at the roles of regular teachers in facilitating inclusion of special needs children in regular schools. The paper highlights the qualities of a good teacher and his roles in facilitating inclusion of children with special needs in regular schools. It also examines the likely problems the regular teachers may encounter in inclusive setting. The paper also suggested some solutions to the problems and finally concludes that what children need to succeed in inclusive schools are the understanding and contributions of regular teachers who are the stakeholders in the implementation of inclusive education.

Introduction

The Salamanca statement on inclusion (1994) has set forth a new direction in the education of children with special needs within the nation’s educational system. This marks a radical change in the traditional special education system which sees children with special needs from segregated angle and utilizes teachers from special education specializations. The philosophy of inclusive education recognizes the regular schools as a working ground for professionals from different areas to work together for the success of children with special needs.

Inclusive education also reduces the burden of the special teacher, thereby involving the regular teachers and other professionals in the welfare and education of children with special needs. Although inclusive education appears to lead to interdisciplinary conflicts on the one hand, yet it also provides opportunity for interdisciplinary cooperation among related disciplines on the other.

Regular teachers are highly involved in the implementation of inclusive education. Their roles in facilitating the inclusion of children with special needs are of a vital importance to the education of the learners and total success of the programme. Teachers’ roles require activities such as assessment and reassessment of learners’ programme and curriculum design and modification, teaching and remedial activities, counseling, etc. With the effort of the regular teachers, the inclusive process will be successful. Before presenting the role of regular teachers, there is the need to understand what inclusive education is.
**Concept of Inclusion**

Inclusion means bringing things or persons of different characteristics together. Bateman (2001) described inclusive education as the meaningful participation of students with disabilities in general education classrooms and programmes. Inclusion implies that all teachers (regular and specialists) are responsible for the education of children with special needs. It also requires that all children regardless of their abilities or disabilities are to be educated in the same classroom setting. In inclusive setting, regular teachers stand to gain more knowledge on the characteristics of children with special needs and also methods of teaching them.

**Principles of Inclusive Education**

Inclusion in education for children with special needs holds to the principle of education for all. The community in which we live is that and comprises all categories of people – able bodied and those with disabilities. Thus, there must not be discrimination in educational and social services. For effective inclusion of children with special needs, Giorcelli (1995) postulated the following principles guiding inclusive education:

1. Placement of special needs children in the neighborhood schools. Every child has the opportunity of attending any school nearest to him or her;
2. Zero Rejection. No school age child will be rejected for the reason of disabilities;
3. Appropriate age and grade placement: Every child under inclusive education is placed in classes appropriate to his or her age and mental ability;
4. No need for special class or school. There will be no need for admitting in special school or class. All children can attend the regular school without discrimination.
5. Cooperative learning: In inclusive system all children whether normal or with disabilities learn together in groups. The more brilliant ones can peer-tutor other children.
6. Support by Special education teachers: The regular teachers who are not trained in Special Education will receive support from Special Education services. The regular teachers will also receive support from specialist teachers or itinerant teachers or personnel.

Forlin (1995) also stressed that the philosophy of inclusive education was developed from a strong human right and social justice view and that inclusion was based on the principle that teachers would accept students with disabilities into regular classes and be responsible for meeting their needs:

- a. Children should not be devaluated, or discriminated against, by being excluded or sent away for the reason of their disabilities.
- b. There is no legitimate reason to separate children for the period of their school. All children are to come together to study in the same classroom setting.

**What are the qualities of a good teacher?**

The qualities of a teacher can be seen in two dimensions (1) Personal Qualities (2) Professional Qualities (Obani, 2004). Both are highlighted below:

1. A teacher who is interested in working with children
2. A teacher should have personal qualities like neatness, patience, sympathy, empathy, slow to anger, kind, gentle, has good communication, considerate, stable emotion, dependable, tolerance, cheerful, good humours.
3. Teacher should be mentality alert or mentally competent in handling all school children.
4. A teacher should have good knowledge of the subject matter and methods.
5. A teacher should be resourceful, ability to provide solutions to the problems or needs of the children in the classroom.
6. He should be flexible. He should be able to understand and handle individual differences in the classroom.

**Roles of the Regular Teachers**
Inclusive Education provides opportunity for children with special needs to study together with the able-bodied children in the regular class rooms. In order to assure success in the education of children with special needs in regular classroom, the teachers have the following roles to play in facilitating inclusive education (Mba, 1995: Ojogwu, 2005). The teachers should be involved in identification, assessment and placement of children of special needs in classrooms. This is important because, identification and assessment are the first steps in the education of children. The teachers should provide adequate teaching instructions to all the teachers. Within the inclusive setting, the regular teachers should monitor and maintain the progress of their children.

The regular teachers should develop the weekly lesson plans, enrich the curriculum and also ensures that such lessons are adequately carried out. The teachers should be responsible for the development, implementation and evaluation of the students’ individualized Educational Programme (IEP). This is a daily or weekly educational Programme that takes care of individual’s uniqueness.

The regular teachers should maintain update register of students with special need in their classroom. The teacher should establish cordial relationship between children with special needs and their normal counterparts. This is to ensure there is no discrimination among all categories of children. The regular teachers should in addition establish good relationship with the parents of children with special needs. This enhances full parent’s involvement in the education of their children.

The regular teachers should establish necessary functional relationship between regular schools and other non-governmental agencies that are involved in the education of children with special needs. Within the school system, regular teachers should work together with specialists in the field of special needs education, work with itinerant teachers and other supportive personnel involved the welfare of children with special needs.

The problems the regular teachers may encounter
Handling children with special needs is not an easy task. The presence of a child with special needs in regular classroom may pose some challenges to the regular teacher. Some of these problems are as follows:

1. Lack of adequate knowledge of the learning characteristics of children with special needs
Most regular classroom teachers are not trained in special education programmes. Thus, they do not have knowledge of the nature and learning characteristics of children with special needs. For example, most children with special needs (those with blindness, deafness, intellectual and physical disabilities) learn at a slow pace. Most regular teachers may not be patient enough to help these children move at their own pace. A child with physical impairment needs help and extra time to complete a writing task or assignment.

2. Communication Problems
Most regular teachers are not trained in either Braille writing or sign language or other methods used in teaching children with special needs. They may find it difficult to communicate effectively with such special needs children. This may lead to ignoring or isolating the children during classroom teaching and learning. For instance, where there are no sign language interpreters, the child with deafness will not be able to cope in regular class teaching. The fact is that regular teachers in inclusive classrooms are not well equipped for task of educating special needs children. Regular teachers should be trained to acquire skills in communicating with children with special needs.

3. Non-availability of special equipment and materials in regular classroom
Most Nigerian schools are poorly funded. Because of poor funding, learning equipment and materials, particularly special ones may not be available for the education of different categories of children with special needs. Agomoh, (2006) found that most schools that accommodated children with special needs in Eastern parts of Nigeria lack essential facilities and equipment necessary for learning.

4. Lack of expertise or skill in the use of special equipment and materials for teaching

Some equipment such as Braille machines, Taylor Frames, Graemer Abacus, etc. require skillful handling. Regular teachers are ignorant of the special equipment and materials and how to use them for teaching children with special needs. Since the regular teachers are not trained in special education, they may not know how to use equipment such as Braille machines, abacus, Taylor Frame, etc.

5. Dual role in handling all children together.

The task of teaching both normal and children with special needs is not an easy one. Regular teachers seeing children with special needs in their class could be afraid that these children will overwhelm the class organization with changes in assessment, methods and teaching aids. Handling all categories of children in the same class will be seen as an additional burden. Ozoji (2005) observed that regular teachers complain of lack of knowledge about how to teach children with special needs.

6. Additional Expenses

Some children come to school either without food or learning and writing materials. This is a common case in rural communities where poverty and ignorance of the importance of learning materials are high. In such situations, some tender hearted or caring teachers may spend their personal money to buy food and writing materials for their students. This means that a teacher may spend more to cater for different categories of students who might have come to school without their basic needs.

Recommendations

1. Currently, most regular teachers are not trained to handle children with special needs. If inclusive education should succeed, these regular teachers need explicit training in the principles and methods of teaching children with special needs in regular classrooms.
2. There is need for adaptation of regular school curriculum and teaching materials to suit the needs of children with special needs.
3. Government should mount adequate awareness campaign on inclusive education. People should be enlightened on the benefits of educating children special needs in the regular classrooms.
4. There is need to provide adequate special educational equipment and materials in regular schools, to enhance the learning ability of children.
5. Government should provide adequate funds for all regular schools in Nigeria. Separate fund should be set aside for implementation of inclusive education.
6. Inclusive education demands dual roles by the teachers. There is need to motivate regular teachers by providing extra allowance tagged ‘Special Education Allowance’.
7. Trained Supportive personnel should be available in all regular schools such as Braille Instructions, sign Language Interpreters, Orientation and Mobility Instructors, Special Educators and Guidance Counselors.

Conclusion

The education of children with special needs has come a long way since the seventeenth century. This has been made possible by the roles of certain individuals who took the challenge of educating children with special needs. What
children need to succeed in inclusive schools are the understanding and contributions of regular teachers who are stakeholders in the implementation of inclusive programme. It is therefore suggested that since regular teachers are the primary facilitators of the education of special needs children in regular schools, emphasis should be placed on the roles they play.

REFERENCES