

SPORTS AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A PATHWAY TO WELLNESS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN NIGERIA.

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Abstract

Persons with disabilities have not been finding it easy to enjoy and interact meaningfully with their able-bodied counterparts in the society. Thus, marginalization, segregation and hatred birthed special schools for their peculiarities and unique characteristics. An attempt to address this discrimination necessitated mainstreaming, integration and inclusion into the general education for realization of equal rights and opportunities regardless of their physical, mental, and emotional state. This paper therefore described persons with disabilities, special education/ adapted physical education, mainstreaming, integration, inclusion and ways forward. It further reviewed the accrued benefits and wellness of the programme for the people with special needs education along with their normal counterparts in Nigeria setting.

Keywords: *Able-bodied, adapted physical education, inclusiveness, persons with disabilities, mainstreaming, special education, challenges.*

Introduction

Education is the key to achieving sustainable development and a human right that was eventually substantiated by international law with the UN Disability Convention (CRPD) in 2006 (Gordon, 2013). On this basis, inclusive education takes place, which refers to the right of all people to education ensuring the presence, participation and progress of all students and above all ensuring equal opportunities (Medina-Garcia, et al, 2020). In the process, persons with disabilities were not reckoned with in the society, opportune ones according to the nature of their deformity were exposed to special schools such as the school for the blind and deaf.

In sequence, mainstreaming idea came up for the handicapped children to play and interact with normal children in the regular classes. This idea also snowballed into integration whereby children with disabilities stay in the same environment with their normal counterparts for their academic programme but no means of interacting except during recess or break time when a minor relationship exist. All these have not met the general goal of education for all categories of people and this brought the idea that education is the right of every child irrespective of differences in physical, mental, emotional, and psycho-social condition. Despite the concerted efforts in making sure, inclusive education cut across the globe, it still serves as major challenge facing educational system around the world (Ainscow, 2004). In some developing countries like Nigeria, inclusive education is thought as an approach to serving children with disabilities within general education settings (Adetoro, 2014).

Consequently, the National Policy on Education in Nigeria states that special Education is created as a formal special educational training given to people (children and adults) with special needs (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004). This, however,

is contrary to the international practice where inclusive education is seen as a “reform that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners” (UNESCO, 2001). There is therefore, a need for country like Nigeria to re-visit and properly make some review on her national policy on education in favour of inclusive education rather than the so called “special education”, as touched briefly in the National Policy on Education (2014), section 1 of the philosophy and goals of Education in Nigeria, No. 3d states that “Education is compulsory and a right of every Nigeria irrespective of gender, social status, religion, colour, ethnic background and any peculiar challenges (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2014).

However, section 7 of the policy titled “Special Needs Education” pages 52-56, Nos. 117 – 124 states that “persons with special needs shall be provided with inclusive education services in schools which normal persons attend in age appropriate general education classes directly supervised by general teachers; and special needs persons who cannot benefit from inclusive education, special classes and units should remain in special schools receiving the same quality of education in the other settings.

If it is followed and implemented strictly as stated above in the National Policy on Education in Nigeria, there are many benefits to be derived among the persons with disabilities and those without disabilities when pulled together as inclusive education. This will equally give room for sporting engagement and other physical education programme as the curriculum permeates. This paper therefore attempted to review disability, special education, adapted physical education and sport, mainstreaming, interaction and inclusive education, benefits and wellness of the programme and ways forward for the inclusive education in Nigeria.

Disability, Special Education. Adapted Physical Education and Sports

Disability: According to World Health Organization (2001) disability is compressed into three dimensions; impairment in person’s body structures or function or mental functioning (loss of limbs, loss of vision or memory loss); activity limitation such as difficulty in seeing, hearing, walking or problem solving and participation restrictions in normal daily activities such as working, engaging in social and recreational activities and obtaining health care and preventive services. This is an area government need to stretch helpful hands and other that are socially excluded members of the society to benefit from the equal education granted individuals irrespective of their physical, mental and sensory condition.

Special Education: Special education is education of children (and adult) who deviate significantly from normal patterns of living in terms of the intellectual, social, physical, emotional attributes (Omede, 2016). Special education is therefore established for persons with disabilities as it affects them individually, whereby special schools are mounted for people with special needs, consequently, the National Policy on Education in Nigeria states that special education is created as a formal special educational training given to people (children and adults) with special needs (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2014). It further states that special need persons include these categories: visual impairment; hearing impairment; physical and health impairment; intellectual disability; emotional and behavioural disorders; speech and language impairment; learning disabilities; multiple disabilities; the gifted and talented; and albinos. These precipitated the establishment of special schools across the country such as school for

the blind; school for the deaf; handicapped schools in both public and private institutions.

Adapted Physical Education: As a sub-discipline of physical education (PE), it includes instruction individually planned to meet the needs of students who require adaptations in physical education for safe, satisfying and successful participation and developmental and/or remedial activities. Adapted physical education serves individual with handicapping conditions as defined in PL 94-142; The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1977). According to this legislation, handicapped students include those who are mentally retarded, hard-of-hearing, deaf, speech impaired, visually handicapped, seriously emotionally disturbed, orthopedically impaired, other health impaired, deaf/blind, multi-handicapped, or affected by specific learning disabilities. These individuals may require specially designed programming to habilitate or remediate physical and motor functions required for continued physical education, functional skills, and physical well-being. Some institutions of higher learning in Nigeria promote and encourage this in the curriculum by including adapted physical education as a course in the Department of Physical, and Health Education.

Sports: Sport means all forms of physical activity which through casual or organized participation, aiming at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competitions at all levels. The European sport for all charter (Council of Europe, 1980) divided sport into four broad categories: (a) Competitive games and sport which are characterized by the acceptance of rules and responses to opposing challenge; (b) Outdoor pursuits in which participants seek to negotiate some particular terrain: the challenge derive from the manner of negotiation adopted and are modified by the particular terrain selected and the conditions of wind and weather prevailing; (c) Aesthetic movement which includes activities in the performance of which, the individual is not so much looking beyond them and is responding to the sensuous pleasure of patterned bodily movement, for example dance, figure skating forms of rhythmic gymnastics and recreational swimming; (d) Conditioning activity in forms of exercise or movement undertaken less for the immediate sense of kinesthetic pleasure than from the long term effects the exercise may have in improving or maintaining physical working capacity and rendering subsequently a feeling of well-being.

Adapted Sport: According to Winnick (1990), Adapted sport consists of sport experiences modified or specially designed to meet the unique needs of individuals. The settings for adapted sport may range from integrated settings, where individuals with handicapping conditions or disabilities interact with able-bodied participants, to segregated environments in which play includes only people with handicapping conditions. Adapted sport programmes may be conducted in intramural, extramural, interschool and community related settings. No matter how adapted sport is important, it should not replace or supplant mainstreamed sport participation or required instruction in physical education. An avenue for inclusive sports should be stressed and emphasized now that the world is condemning segregation of persons with unique need but encouraging inclusion whereby both people with disabilities and those without disabilities would have a place to interact meaningfully in academic and sporting activities at each merit.

Mainstreaming, Integration and Inclusive Education

Mainstreaming: According to Friend & Bursuck (2002), mainstreaming involves the physical placement of learners with disabilities in regular education settings only when they can cope with the traditional curriculum with some assistance. Bucher (1979) further states that it is a trend in education that is designed to increase the contact that handicapped children have with non handicapped children in a normal everyday environment and it would be an opportunity for the less severely handicapped children to participate more and more in regular public-school classes.

However, as educators, Mangope, et al (2018) agree with Friend & Bursuck, (2002)'s view that some learners with disabilities should be brought to regular schools more for socialization purposes so that they learn social skills from their peers without disabilities. As peer education plays a crucial and effective role in socialization through mainstreaming procedure. Therefore, mainstreaming can still be upheld where inclusion is still searching for the beam light, instead of going back to the old tradition of exclusion and segregation from their normal counterparts.

Integration: Ordinarily, integration is a process whereby learners with disabilities are confirmed to a special class/unit but within the regular school (Ajuwon, 2012). Learners only join their "normal" peers outside the classroom during recess, sporting activities and clubs as it is seen as social integration (Chhabra, et al. 2010). In this case the learners are brought together only for socialization and extra-curricular activities to develop and improve on their social skills. This is only physical integration which implies that learners with disabilities are under the responsibility of the special education teacher, pursue a different curriculum and may or may not mingle with their peers without disabilities during recess, sporting or club (Adetoro, 2014). The implication is that governments do not come up with systems that solve problems associated with learners with disabilities but come up with what they think are solutions (Mangope et al, 2018). Therefore, any learner with a disability should be dramatically fit into whatever that is being offered in the process.

Inclusive Education: Inclusive Education is a condition for all children to attend regular school, irrespective of their physical, mental, social, emotional, linguistic or other attributes. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from other remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantages or marginalized areas or groups (Ogen, 2019). According to Omede (2016), inclusive education is an approach that looks into how to transform education systems in order to remove the barriers that prevent pupils from participating fully in education. These barriers may be linked to ethnicity, gender, social status, poverty, disability etc.

Inclusive education on the other hand, emerged from 'integration' and 'mainstreaming' under the philosophy of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). The two concepts mainstreaming and integration have been sidelined in favour of "inclusive education" or "inclusion". Which is considered a more advanced and more relevant conception of the two (Adetoro, 2014). Although inclusion like its predecessors, describes an environment that is as close to 'normal' as possible, philosophically it is slightly different. Learners with disabilities are served 'primarily' in regular education classrooms, under the responsibility of the regular classroom teachers, with appropriate aids and support within the regular classrooms (Omede, 2016; Ogen, 2019).

Inclusion rejects the use of special schools or classrooms to separate students with disabilities. A premium is placed upon full participation by students with disabilities and upon respect for their social, civil and educational rights (Omede, 2016). Inclusion gives students with disabilities skills they can use in and out of the classroom. Fully inclusive schools, which are rare, no longer distinguish between “general education” and special education” programmes. Instead, the school is restructured so that all students learn together. Inclusive education is based on the right of all learners to a quality education that meets basic needs or learning needs and enriches life. Focusing particularly on vulnerable and marginalized groups it seeks to develop the full potential of every individual.

The ultimate goal of inclusive quality education is end all forms of discrimination and foster social cohesion (UNESCO 2012). According to Adetoun (2003), inclusion means more funds, additional experience to deal with new challenges, extra work, being abreast of recent information, willingness to work in collaboration with other professionals and many more. With the foregoing, this may be a substitution or replacement option for students with learning disabilities. No wonder Ogen (2019) considers an inclusive classroom as a replacement option for students with learning disabilities.

Benefits and Wellness of Inclusive Education

Participation of both persons with disabilities and those without disabilities in inclusive education offers many derivable benefits to their wellness and whole living together and sharing things in common within similar environment. Some of these may include the following:(a) Inclusive education leads to better social networking and there is less social tension among disabled children when they are placed side by side with other children without disabilities; (b) Implementation of inclusive education encourages students without disabilities to accept and tolerate children with special needs; (c)It also improves the sociability of children with special needs and reduces the cost of providing separate education for children with and without special needs; (d)Students without special needs develop positive attitudes towards fellow students and people with disabilities.

However, Bakken (2016) reports several benefits for both students with and without disabilities such as: (a) Greater social initiations, relationships, and interaction with classmates without disabilities; (b) Having students without disabilities as role models academically, socially and behaviourally; (c) Access to general education including the curriculum and instruction; (d) Setting higher expectations for SEND students; (e) The feeling of being part of both school and local community; and (f) an inclination by others to respect and develop a meaningful relationship with those who are different from themselves and accept diversity around them.

Notwithstanding, participation in sports and games by both groups (those with and without disabilities), also improves their wellbeing in this order: (a)Physical education and activity if taught in the inclusive class at a young age helps to promote healthy practices, socialization and fitness in children throughout their development (Ogen, 2019); (b)Sports contribute to the process of solving problems of social adaptation and lonesomeness among disabled children and individuals without disabilities; (c)Among the long term objectives of activities for children who need special education

are, developing positive sense of self, social competence, motor skills, games skills, and creative expressions and eliminating anxiety (Ogen, 2019); (d) Sport enables individuals become self-sufficient and maintains their lives this way, and gain social harmony (Ainscow, 2004); (e) Games played individually or in groups, contribute to muscle and bone development of disabled individuals, develop heart-lung function, increase speed, flexibility, endurance and coordination in dancing studies (Greensprings, 2019); (f) Sport is more than just a game, it is a universal language that brings people together, fosters camaraderie, and sports promote physical and mental being among the beneficiaries (Smith, 2015); (g) Participation in sport and play can helps reduce risks of obesity, increase aerobic fitness and contribute to better muscle functions in children with disabilities and those without (Cheikhmous, 2022).

Ways Forward For Inclusive Education in Nigeria

Education of the persons with special needs in the society is greatly important and there is need to bring them out of their exclusion so that they can mingle and share their feelings and experience with other normal counterparts. By therefore, promoting inclusion, we will be encouraging positive attitudes and improving educational and social frame works to cope with the new demands in educational structures and governance (UNESCO, 2009). As succinctly argued by (Mugambi, 2017 and Ajuwon, 2008) and cited by (Ogen, 2019), some important steps that could be adopted to advance the cause of inclusive education include: (a) Mass mobilization of all stakeholders on the right to education for everybody; (b) Additional legislative reforms to support inclusive education in line with international conventions, declarations and recommendations; (c) Developing ways of assessing the impact of inclusive and quality education; (d) Helping teachers to understand their role in inclusive education and that inclusion of diversity in education is an opportunity and not a problem; (e) Facilitating participation and developing awareness programmes for the parents of disabled children and the children themselves, about their rights; (f) Providing pre-service and in-service training to teachers so that they can identify and respond to the needs of each child and promote diversity in the classroom; (g) Ensure there is adequate support and expertise in skills such as Braille literacy, and provide for the training and employment of disabled teachers.

Conclusion

Education is the right of every citizen in Nigeria regardless of physical, mental, emotional, psycho-social and neurological barriers of which those with special needs are exclusively educated as against the international practice where inclusive education is seen as “a reform that supports and welcomes diversity among all learners”. Children with special needs deserve special education in intricate areas but majorly they are to be involved in general education from where they equally share huge benefits accorded their normal counterparts such as social integration, acceptance, camaraderie fostering, sporting experience and the likes. Efforts were made by the governments to improve the quality of education of the special needs through mainstreaming, integration which is not total inclusion. Efforts should be geared toward total implementation of inclusive education not minding the cost implication as the end results will yield positive improvement on the life styles of the persons with disabilities as well as those without disabilities.

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