

INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE QUALITY EDUCATION AND THE NATIONAL QUESTIONS IN NIGERIA: COUNSELLING IMPLICATIONS

Josephine Shola AINA

08036093532

Jaina@noun.edu.ng

ainajshola@yahoo.com

Department of Educational Foundations,
Faculty of Education,
National Open University of Nigeria

Abstract

Guidance and counseling are considered as the cornerstones of promoting and facilitating inclusive education in Nigeria and responding to the national questions. Studies conducted in Nigeria, revealed that obstacles that impede the efficient implementation of inclusive education include a lack of support structures for students with special needs and negative attitudes toward them. This paper looks at how national issues impact inclusive and equitable quality education in Nigeria and how guidance and counselling can be used to encourage full implementation in the curriculum, which can then be used to address a number of issues faced by learning disabled students among their peers who treat them in stereotypical ways. The study makes the premise that the inclusive education process should be framed within humanistic psychology, which cultivates the attitude that learning communities should offer humane educational circumstances to fulfill each member's requirements. The researcher has the view that counselling treatment (person-centered theory) will aid in eradicating personality prejudice and fostering an environment in which all students are treated equally. In conclusion, values of cooperation, solidarity, social justice, empathy, caring, and empowerment are the required cultural capital to improve learning in schools and play a crucial role in addressing national issues. It was recommended that Nigerian education authorities and policy makers should see to it that Guidance and Counselling is accepted as a guiding concept for the creation of methods and approaches meant to support inclusive education and address national issues.

Keywords: Inclusive, Equitable, Quality Education, Questions, Counselling Implications

Introduction

The topic of obtaining higher levels of peace, security, integration, national unity, and sustainable development among the many components that make up her society has emerged as one of the primary difficulties Nigeria as a nation must address in recent years. Unfortunately, despite having plenty of human and material resources, this has not been accomplished because of a variety of issues and difficulties, including Boko Haram, bandits, protests by the Independent People of Biafra (IPOB), Niger Delta Militants, conflicts between farmers and herdsmen, kidnappings, corruption, an economic downturn, and ethno religious and political instability (Shehu, 2022).

Independence marked the beginning of the challenge of developing a political system that would suit the interests of the numerous ethnicities who make up the "Nigerian nation." The first (Clifford) constitution was drafted in 1922, and Nigeria has had several other constitutions since gaining independence on October 1, 1960. Ninety-four years later, the country is still having trouble putting together a functioning government because the 'national question' has continued to drag on. According to academics, the national question consists of ethnic groups' political mobilizations and fights for redress in order to demand from the Nigerian nation-state more just and equal accommodations (Ayokhai and Peter, 2016). The disintegration of the state and its inability to satisfy citizens' needs is related to the national question, as seen by the unfairness in the protection of lives of those belonging to different groups that reside in the country space. Politics based on ethnicity and military meddling in politics are the issues at hand. Uneven political growth between the Northern and Southern regions of the country was created by educational levels, and this imbalance influenced national politics equal throughout the battle for independence.

The National Question, according to Ajayi (2014) is an ongoing discussion about how to organize relations between various ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groupings so that they enjoy the same rights and privileges, access to political influence, and proportionate ownership of national resources (Edewor et al. 2014). The aforementioned issues and issues demand a comprehensive change in every facet of our educational system. In other words, Nigerian educational processes must be run at a level that is more responsive and satisfying than what is currently the case if peace and national unity are to be realized (Shehu, 2022). Since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights' proclamation in article 26 (1948) that "Everyone has the right to education," school systems across the world have made great progress in making education accessible to their inhabitants. Countries are embracing inclusive education under the international agenda known as "Education For All" (EFA). The road to attaining inclusive education, it is commonly acknowledged, is lengthy and varied, with possibilities and obstacles (Gaydarov, 2014).

Literature review

In order to comprehend inclusive education, several definitions are offered. Gaydarov (2014), for instance, defines inclusive education as the inclusion of all students into the neighborhood schools that they should typically attend, without exception or prejudice. According to Pautina et al. (2019), it is a type of educational service that does not differentiate between typically developing pupils and those who have special needs. Additionally, Pautina et al. (2019) demonstrate that inclusive education entails including students from isolated indigenous groups, rural locations, and regions affected by natural and social calamities. According to Boitt (2016) inclusive education "involves placing exceptional students in conventional schools with the required support services to boost their attainment and enhance their access to and engagement in education." The goal of inclusive education, according to Oluremi (2015) is to "expand access to education, promote full participation in the educational system by all students at risk of exclusion, and promote the opportunity of realizing one's own potential." According to Tlali (2018) inclusive education is "a process of identifying and reacting to various needs of all learners through boosting engagement in learning, cultures, and communities and decreasing exclusion from and within education." According to an analysis of the aforementioned definitions, educational systems should collaborate and make changes to the curriculum, material, structures, and tactics with a shared goal of including all pupils (Pautina et al., 2019; Tlali, 2018; Poulou, 2017).

To the contrary, according to Poulou (2017) "no country has yet succeeded in creating a school system that lives up to the values and purposes of inclusion as articulated by international organizations." In the context of this essay, inclusive education is defined as the practice of instructing all students, regardless of their limits. Every student should be encouraged to participate freely in their school and community through inclusive education practices. It must also provide students with the skills necessary to overcome obstacles that might hinder their ability to study and succeed in school. It is shocking to learn that some of these challenged people with impairments, poor eyesight, hearing loss, mental disability, the mute, the lame, the crippled, albinism, complex intellectual or mental health challenges are even looked down upon by their families, simply because they are regarded and considered as a disgrace or curse to their families (African Educational Trust, 2014). Because they are human beings, regardless of their circumstances, and because all people are created equal and have the same right to pursue their dreams and aspirations, these groups of underprivileged school-age children need to be secured and protected by the government, their communities, and by everyone.

Consequently, access to education for them should also be provided. Using this knowledge as a foundation, the author makes the case for improving guidance and counseling as a method of supporting students with special needs. At the same time, it is a method of reducing dangers to inclusive education, such as unfavorable

attitudes, the mistreatment of students with special needs by their normal classmates, and the emotional difficulties that are reportedly widespread among students with special needs (Boitt, 2016). One element of educational assistance that helps foster attitudes of respect, acceptance, and empathy is guidance and counselling. While treating emotions as essential to the school as a social environment, it may also foster possibilities for self-awareness and realizing one's potential (Boitt, 2016). Its improvement is seen as a component of a wisely constructed strategy to teach students with various needs inside the restructured mainstream or school communities (Gaydarov, 2014). Enhancing guidance and counseling is in line with Gaydarov's (2014) contention that inclusive education is an endeavor to overcome educational inequities and empower students with unique educational needs to be autonomous. The following essential topics are covered below.

Inclusive education and Nigeria's educational policy

The Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) recognizes Special Needs Education, which is considered as a tailored educational program created to suit the specific needs of those with special needs that the regular education program cannot accommodate for, through her National Policy on Education (2013). People with intellectual disabilities, emotional and behavioural disorders, speech and language impairments, learning difficulties, brilliant and talented individuals, and albinos are all considered special needs people according to the policy. According to the policy, these groups of people must get inclusive education services in the same setting as the typical students, in age-appropriate general education classrooms, and under the direction of general teachers. According to the policy statement above, there will be no longer being any segregation or stigmatization of pupils with special needs, and they will not perceive themselves as being different from other children. According to the National Policy on Special Needs Education from 2015, inclusive education should be supported by a school setting that allows for the inclusion of students with special needs. Additionally, it emphasizes that special needs kids and young people must have access to a fair education in accordance with the UNESCO program's guidelines for inclusive education. A barrier-free environment; equal opportunity, equity, and access for people with special needs are all goals of the policy. It was not explicitly stated in the regulation, nevertheless, that students with special needs must attend the same schools as students without.

In their evaluation of the National Policy on Education, Obi and Ashi (2016) point out the inconsistencies in the NPE (2013) and the necessity of inclusive education, which is predicated on the policy's recognition of the need for special schools. Even when accommodating learners with special needs within the same school environment as those not in need but accommodated in special classrooms and units, the provision for special classrooms and units for persons with special needs as stated in the 6th Edition of the NPE further promotes segregation and

stigmatization. The best inclusive policy has yet to be established, let alone implemented, according to conclusions drawn from the numerous Federal Government policies on education and people with special needs. In order to ensure that such a policy is properly implemented, it is thus important to establish the requisite inclusive policy and to supply the necessary material and human resources.

Importance of Inclusive Education Curriculum

The motivation to provide all children with equal educational opportunities free from stigmatization and segregation, as was done under the special education programs that were formed, gave rise to the concept of inclusive education. Scholars have argued in favor of inclusive education based on the advantages that may result from it, which would be advantageous to both the recipients and society at large. Singh (2016) discovered that inclusive education:

- a. Enhances special needs students' academic achievement since they can gain from the regular curriculum's richness.
- b. Creates enduring relationships between students with unique needs and others who don't have any difficulties.
- c. Reduces the social stigma associated with people who have special needs and makes those who are not challenged aware of the needs of others, removing the stigma and fostering a sense of love and compassion among students with various abilities.
- d. Benefits of inclusive education include a rise in the percentage of high school graduates and improved relationships with typically developing youngsters.
- e. Enhances interactions with children who are not challenged, which might have stifled their feelings of neglect under a non-inclusive approach.
- f. Enables each student to identify the diversity in themselves in terms of strengths and weaknesses, enabling them to become aware that every individual has his or her own points of strength and weakness, making them realize that difference is part of normal life and leading them to build good relationships among themselves, reducing the social differences associated with students of different abilities and disabilities.

Challenges to implementing inclusive and equitable quality education

In order to significantly reduce the number of children who are not in school and the burden of unproductive and unskilled citizens on the country, the Federal Government of Nigeria and its relevant education agencies have made all primary and secondary public and private schools inclusive of, and accessible to all children, including those with disabilities. However, the program's failure to be properly

implemented hampered this aim intention. The following are seen as the main deterrents to the adoption of inclusive education:

1. Insufficient training for teachers and marginalization of teachers' opinions and contributions.
2. Unfavorable perceptions of and stigma against individuals with impairments.
3. Sporadic interaction with local community leaders and important stakeholders.
4. Lack of resources for inclusive schools, such as insufficient money for hiring staff, training staff, and purchasing the required technology.
5. Recognizing and evaluating children's issues in several areas.
6. Children with impairments confront problems.
7. Limitations on content and professionalism in schools.
8. Lack of classroom management techniques and educational materials.
9. Educators and the general public are not given the proper training and orientation.
10. Schools lack the necessary infrastructure to provide a positive learning environment.

The above-mentioned elements function as attitude obstacles to inclusive education. Teachers who are committed, accountable, trained in that area of specialization, and prepared to have a positive attitude toward learners who are different are needed to teach students with special needs. The implementation process necessitates that teachers are aware of the prerequisites for implementation, prepare for potential challenges, and take into account the relationships that are important in producing curriculum that is inclusive of learners. Training for inclusion entails gaining the knowledge and abilities to accommodate a range of requirements, enabling a teacher to facilitate individual learning in an inclusive classroom environment. Pre-service teachers at tertiary institutions of education are probably not taught in the provision of services that would improve inclusive education in Nigeria. In addition to the aforementioned factors, teachers' negative attitudes can make it difficult to implement inclusive education successfully, especially when they label students as slow, mentally retarded, or disabled, as these characteristics themselves indicate a negative attitude toward students with special needs.

Experience has also shown that most Nigerian teachers lack the confidence and enthusiasm necessary to deal effectively with kids who don't fit their idea of what a "normal" kid should be like, especially when they harbor misconceptions or preconceptions about these children. When bias and discrimination are present in schools and education systems, it is difficult to implement inclusive education since these children feel most marginalized and are left out of the system. Given that it demands specialized human, financial, and physical resources, inadequate finance

for inclusive education in terms of resource mobilization is a key barrier to its successful implementation.

Lack of study on the cost-effectiveness of monies granted and supplied to schools to promote inclusive education in Nigeria, irregular cash allocation to the education sector, and irregular teacher salary payments across the nation are all indicators of obstacles to the program's implementation. For their education, students with special needs need more specialized materials and resources than their classmates without disabilities.

The provision of resources in the form of services, additional instructional staff, specialized equipment, to name a few, is crucial. Due to the lack of clarity that results when diagnostic criteria are not accessible, curriculum creation and adjustments also serve as barriers to the effective implementation of inclusive education. Chimhenga (2016) asserted that the non-categorical functional model of disability has evolved due to the inclusive education's all-encompassing character. Relevant services in the areas of learning styles, instructional training techniques, customization, and potential adjustments required by people with special needs are required for this approach to be successful.

The inclusive education system in Nigeria has not fully adapted to identifying individual learning styles and appropriate instructional methods that take into account the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning modes relative to various instructional methods such as printed materials, verbal teaching materials, workbook sheets, audio-visual materials, and demonstration using vocational tools and concrete materials. There are gaps in the field of curriculum creation and its accompanying adaptation when taking the aforementioned demands into consideration.

One of the biggest obstacles to the effective implementation of inclusive education is the assessment of different student category groups in such settings. Inclusion encompasses more than just promoting the participation of disabled students in mainstream classes. All students should be expected to advance in their education, but the advancement can only be measured by means of testing, observational checklists, and questionnaires, to name a few. However, in Nigeria, giving certificates entails evaluation that makes use of a curriculum that is knowledge-based and may include formal, standardized tests that are more content-oriented than success-oriented. In an inclusive educational environment, obstacles to students' advancement must be found, and a strategy must be put in place to assist them. Flexible inclusion curricula are necessary for inclusive education since conventional standardized tests may promote bias, particularly in the case of kids with special needs.

Theory-based application

Scholars have advised adopting a humanistic approach to education in an effort to make the reforms necessary for inclusive educational practices (Galaterou, 2017; Poulou, 2017; Gaydarov, 2014; Freire&Koller, 2005). These academics agree with Firdaus&Mariyat (2017) that humanistic education offers a foundation for individual growth and development so that learning can continue throughout life in an independent manner. The researcher of this paper makes the underlying assumption that issues such as emotional difficulties, poor self-image (Gaydarov, 2014; Zyoudi, 2010), negative attitudes and behaviors by teachers, as well as normal learners (Boer et al., 2012; Chiiran, 2014; Mosia, 2015; Galaterou, 2017; Poulou, 2017; Nath et al., 2017), as well as injustices (Gaydarov, 2014; Munr In addition to changing the learning paradigm, counseling services are required, according to Mohammad-aminzadeh et al. (2019), to give the finest service for inclusive education in schools.

This paper examines how guiding and counseling might help to resolve national questions from the viewpoints of humanistic psychology and education. According to Nath et al. (2017), the humanistic approach to education is a positive development that will aid in addressing the long-standing difficulties of inclusive education. According to Mosia and Lephoto (2014), inclusive education is the outcome of the evolution of human ideals based on the unique worth of human personality, uniqueness, and the right to a decent existence. Therefore, humanistic psychology, which encourages congenial learning communities and encourages learners to develop their creative capacities, has to be the guiding principle for tactics and approaches meant to enhance inclusive education (Nath et al., 2017). According to Nigmatov (2014), inclusive education refers to a community of learners that is equal and in which no one group is excluded from the others. It means that no group's interests are stifled by the requirements and interests of another. According to Nath et al. (2017), the goal of humanistic education is to lay a foundation for individual development so that learning can continue throughout life under the control of the learner. This article has adopted Person-Centered Therapy of Carl Rogers as frameworks for resolving national questions through inclusive and equitable quality education.

Client-Centered Therapy

The client-centered therapy developed by Carl Rogers is a humanistic method of counseling and guiding that places a strong emphasis on respect for the individual. Positive is how it sees human nature. It sees a person as a distinct, autonomous, and different entity (Austad, 2009). The actualizing tendency, according to Rogers, is the key idea in this theory. Rogers describes it as an innate, self-directed urge for the human organism to evolve and reach its full potential (Austad, 2009; Freire&Koller 2005). Rogers believed that everyone has the tools

needed for self-actualization. Conditions of worth, which are unique norms that are put on a person when their value is assessed by others, and conditional positive regard are examples of external factors that might prevent a person from realizing their potential (Austad, 2009). Even while external obstacles may prevent an actualizing propensity from activating; this tendency does so in a setting that is marked by sincerity, caring, empathy, and nonjudgmental interactions.

Application of client-centered therapy in inclusive schools guidance and counseling programs strive to create a healthy interpersonal environment by having a congruent attitude, unconditional positive regard, and empathy for each learner's needs and obstacles (Austad, 2009; Freire and Koller, 2005). In this kind of counseling setting, students may experience acceptance, which helps them become more tolerant of themselves. The ability to embrace one unconditionally enables students to progress toward self-fulfillment. In African schools, client-centered therapy is based on the premise that the relationship between a teacher and students is more significant than the skills and methods that are valued in other counseling philosophies. According to Freire and Koller (2005), the learner's inner resources and intrinsic ability to determine the best way to survive and enjoy life may be stimulated by this caring interaction between the teacher and the counselor. Improved self-concept, better self-exploration, more pleasant sentiments, and increased self-understanding are all goals of client-centered therapy. It may be used as a method in inclusive schools to foster students' resilience in the face of and within the context of a variety of challenging circumstances (Freire and Koller, 2005).

Conclusion

The goal of inclusive education is to provide education for everyone while tackling the societal problem of bias and marginalization on multiple levels, which characterizes Nigerian national questions. As a result, the tools needed for teachers and counsellors to carry it out successfully should be made available. The issue of leaving out crucial teacher components or marginalizing such parts should also be addressed in order to provide effective instructional procedures and relevant implementation reports on inclusive education in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The best teaching and learning practices are necessary for the successful implementation of equitable and inclusive education in Nigeria because they give teachers the skills, flexibility, and resources they need to work with students who have different needs and learning preferences. It is crucial that both pre-service teachers and practicing teachers use inclusive pedagogy. To educate children with a variety of requirements and learning styles, teachers need to possess the training, adaptability, positive attitude, and adequate resources through the help of school

counsellors. These might be accomplished by giving teachers who are currently on the job in-service training, seminars, and workshops to improve their knowledge, competence, and appropriate attitude for conducting inclusive education efficiently.

In order to help with the implementation process, schools should hire knowledgeable staff (counsellors, computer technicians, and remedial teachers) as backup services. Furthermore, their pre-service training should provide them with the tools they need to meet the variety of educational requirements that arise in the classroom. There should be no longer any resistance to working with or instructing students with exceptional needs. All required resources must be available in sufficient quantities for teaching and learning to be effective, with a focus on fostering a good learning environment. Tenacity to excellent teaching and inclusive education are resources and learning facilities that might improve learning and be advantageous to many types of learners in terms of their varying requirements and interests. As a result, all student categories should be catered for in the facilities and supplies that will be made available in classrooms and the school setting. Classroom, common, library, transportation, and cafeteria facilities are just a few of the amenities needed for inclusive education.

Madrid (2015) lists other facilities and resources for inclusive education, including accessible sinks and drinking fountains, accessible sinks where there are steps, classroom clutter like games, bags, rugs, and toys, and suitable table, seat, and shelf heights. In order to successfully implement equitable and inclusive education in Nigeria, it is crucial to promote students' interactions with their peers. This might be done by offering curriculum adaption that is child-centered, flexible, interactive, and partnership-oriented toward peers in order to increase learning outcomes. Through tailored education, the child-centered curriculum would take the needs of varied learners into account. Additionally, there is a need for conscious curriculum that is precise, visible, quantifiable, realistic, relevant, and current. When it comes to students' interactions with their classmates, there should be a good working connection with parents and the larger community.

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