

Creating Inclusive Learning Environment in Post Insurgency Communities' Schools in Borno State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper examined the need for creating inclusive learning environment in the post insurgency communities' school in Borno State. The review was based on Social Learning theory proposed by Albert Bandura in 1977. The theory states that learning takes place through association, observation, modelling and imitation. Inclusive learning environment has the capacity to provide an opportunity for the categories of school age children to learn as a group and to learn living together. Inclusive school environment, Inclusive classroom, teachers' roles in creating inclusive learning environment, relationship between teacher and students in inclusive learning environment were discussed. It was concluded that the nature of school and classroom environments in Borno State is not inclusive and physical structures are threats to special group, more especially the physically challenged, like the cripples. Among other suggestions proffered was that Borno State Ministry of Education should include the creation of inclusive learning environment in its State Education Sector Plan (SESOP).

Keywords: Inclusive, learning, environment, post insurgency, special, group

Introduction

Inclusive learning environment is perceived to be a solution to challenges faced by learners in post insurgency communities' school in Borno State. The remarkable effect of insurgency in the North-East and Borno State in particular on all the social service centres including schools has left many untold stories. Schools were razed down by fire and in some communities like in Gwoza Local Government Area, all government structures had been demolished by the insurgents.

The insurgency had left teachers, students, parents, school managers devastated as physical structures, materials and equipment were all destroyed. Some teachers, students and their parents/guardians could not escape from the danger areas as some were trapped and abducted. Students abducted and later on rescued by the Nigerian Army are now living with their parents/guardians in the host communities, liberated settlements and/or in camps. There are orphans whose parents were killed by the insurgents as a result of attacks on their communities. These children suffer from

various degrees of harassment and stigmatization with both physical and mental disabilities. These are challenges that could hamper a particular child to obtain admission, stay, remain and complete school like other normal children in the communities.

Borno State Government (BOSG, 2017) in its State Education Sector Plan (SESOP) 2017-2019 highlighted on destructions caused by Boko Haram insurgency to the education sector in the State. The insurgency destroyed 451 public primary and secondary schools, 14 private primary and secondary schools and two tertiary institutions. The document showed that about 19,000 teachers were displaced in the North-East, 600 teachers killed and out of which 480 teachers killed were from Borno State. Several secondary schools were attacked with abductions like that of the Government Senior Secondary School Chibok (Borno State Government (BOSG), 2017).

As a policy document, the SESOP provides for the reconstructions of the destroyed schools, provision of secure and safe school environment particularly in the rural areas to increase enrolment and constructions of sporting facilities for normal students. Special attention will be paid to the needs of traumatized pupils/students especially the orphans and creating school security to build confidence in the safety of the school environment among students and their parents (BOSG, 2017). In response to this, orphanage school has been established in Borno State under the office of Mr. Vice President and there was already a special school for the blind. However, there was no mention or attempt for the construction of sporting facilities for the disabled and making the school environment inclusive. The building specifications and equipment to be procured as contained in the SESOP did not appreciate inclusiveness of a school. This article discussed the possibilities of creating inclusive learning environment, the categories of learners that will benefit from the inclusive learning environment, teachers' roles and contributions in keeping and managing the categories of learners in the inclusive learning environment, to achieve proper development and realization of their potentialities in life.

The National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, FRN, 2013) had clearly provided for equality of educational opportunities for all children, their physical, mental and emotional disability notwithstanding. The United Nations convention on the right of the child 1989 spelled out children's right to education and freedom from all sort of discriminations. This was supported by the United Nations convention on the right of persons with disability in 2006 which stressed the need for inclusive education at all levels of education as against the practice of special education which promote segregation and discriminations among children (Reddy, Ramar & Kusuma, 2000; Buchalz & Sheffler, 2009; Dixon, 2015).

Theoretical framework

This exposition depends on Social Learning Theory proposed by Albert Bandura in 1977. The theory explained that learning takes place through association, observation, modelling and imitation; that learning is a causal model that depends on the behaviour – person -environment arrangement (Miller, 2011). Inclusive learning environment has reached fascinating and stimulating situation which in turn stimulates the learners' intellectual abilities. The disabled children that are admitted along with the normal children will observe and imitate the required behaviours and develop friendship with the normal students. The normal children on the other hand will also learn to appreciate differences they observe between them and the disabled and will render assistance when required.

The theory emphasized that behavioural modelling takes place through communication. The diverse nature of an inclusive school and classroom will develop both verbal and non-verbal (sign) forms of communications among students (Saunders & Kardia, 2014; Reddy, Ramar & Kusuma, 2000). The decoration in the inclusive classroom will motivate, relate and appeal to the consent of the students and therefore stimulating their curiosity and creativity.

Inclusive Learning Environment

Inclusive learning environment means any space created for teaching, learning and interaction between teachers and students. It could be a conventional four wall classroom or a Temporary Learning Space (TLS) created for that matter. Inclusive learning environment, according to Peebles and Mendaglio (2014), agrees with the admission of students with exceptionalities alongside the normal students in the same school and classroom. The school and classroom will comprise of students with special needs, emotional and behavioural problems (Lamport, Graves & Lard-Wood, 2012). The objective of inclusive learning environment is to give access to education to all school age children irrespective of their difficulties. Inclusive education is an approach that provides all children with greater opportunities for academic and social achievement. Inclusion is about making sure that each and every child, male or female, feels accepted and that their unique needs and learning styles are attended to and valued (Lamport, Graves & Lard-Wood, (2012). The practice of inclusive education has been in existence long ago. The researcher attended school where disabled children were admitted as students. The researcher saw and had students who were of the special groups and those hard of hearing and with sight problems as classmates. But then, the admission of those special group were not known as inclusive until when United Nations Children's Education Fund (UNICEF) swung into action in 2005 after 'No Child Left Behind' United Nations Act of 2002 (UNICEF, 2015). However, the schools and classrooms situation by then were not inclusive in nature and the special groups were not treated on individual bases.

Inclusive School

An inclusive school environment accepts all categories of learners irrespective of their abilities or disabilities. This environment is conducive for every child of school age to attend, stay and complete prescribed school years, and be able to proceed to another level of education. It is where all barriers to the participation of all children have been reduced or eliminated. Inclusive school has a secure school compound where students do not feel threatened, harassed and/or stigmatized against. It is a well fenced and protected environment with exit gate to a safe Heaven. The school is free of injurious objects like broken blocks, irons, glass and stones, and it is flat with absence of potholes (UNICEF, 2017). All students in the school are aware of the security tips, have developed Evacuation and Lockdown drills and could identify and locate the safe Heaven even if lost on the process of evacuation.

An inclusive school environment has sporting facilities for all the categories of students in the school. These include:

1. sporting facilities for boys and girls
2. sporting facilities for the physically challenged; such as protected and secure football court for the Blind with a bell ball
3. sporting facilities for the special groups, including both track and field events
4. Separate playing ground for boys and girls other than conventional games (Bokko, 2015).

These facilities are intended to reduce isolation on part of the disabled since they cannot play together with the normal students. It is also to create sense of belonging in the orphans and the liberated children in the school and the society through the development of friendship as game mates. Dixon (2015) emphasized that for a school to create an inclusive learning environment, the following stakeholders have to be involved. They include:

1. Parents/guardians whose children attend the particular school
2. Board of trustees/management, in case of public schools, School Based Management Committee (SBMC)
3. Students of the school
4. Teachers of the school
5. Parents' Teachers' Association of the particular school
6. Supporting Agencies (NGO, CBO etc)
7. Local Government Education Authority (LGEA)
8. State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB)
9. State Ministry of Education (SMoE)

Inclusive Classroom

Inclusive classroom is a place in which thoughtfulness, mutual respect, and academic excellence are valued and promoted. In an inclusive classroom, a child with physical

challenge, mental or behavioural problems are part and members of the class together with normal children. Bokko (2015) emphasized that an inclusive classroom comprises students with disabilities (special needs), orphans, street children, accompanied and non-accompanied children and girls, who are all accommodated in the same classroom. Other categories of beneficiaries of inclusive classroom are the marginalized groups, such as religious, racial, ethnic, and linguistic minorities, immigrants, girls, the poor, and students with disabilities, HIV/AIDS patients, remote populations, and more. In some places, these people are not actively included in education and learning processes (Dixon, 2015; Saunders & Kardia, 2014). Children of different age grades, mental age and background will be accommodated; that makes the class inclusive (combination of students with diverse backgrounds). Once a child could come to school and go back home, he/she can be a member of an inclusive classroom. However, the presence of such students should not create security threat or be harmful to other students. Inclusive classroom is intended to make normal students realize what children with disability could do better and to appreciate their contributions to the development of the society (Dixon, 2015). Bokko (2015) expatiates that the objective of creating inclusive classroom is based on friendliness, caring and supportive, and that inclusion allows students to explore the relationship between course materials and learning, and personal and social experiences enhance learning rather than undermines students' learning.

Inclusive classroom environment has features like:

1. There should be sloping entrance for students on wheel chairs to get into the class
2. There should be more than one teacher in the class for team teaching
3. There should be equipment like Braille machine, writing and reading materials
4. There should be hearing aids and eye glasses of different sizes and lengths
5. Projectors and relevant teaching/learning equipment and materials should be available

In an inclusive classroom, instructors attempt to be responsive to students on both an individual basis and group; cultural and social levels. Broadly speaking, the inclusiveness of a classroom will depend upon the kinds of interactions that occur between and among the teacher and students during teaching and learning interactions in the classroom (Bokko, 2015). These interactions are influenced by:

1. the course content
2. teacher's prior assumptions and awareness of potential multicultural issues in classroom situations
3. teachers' planning for class sessions, including the ways students participate in learning
4. teachers' knowledge about the diverse backgrounds of students
5. teachers' decision, comment, and behaviour during the process of teaching.

Teacher's Roles in maintaining Inclusive Learning Environment

Inclusive approach in education does not end in admission only, but it includes teacher's behaviours and techniques in the classroom with his/her students. Buchalz and Sheffler (2009) explained that teachers at the beginning of every session should organize, arrange and decorate the learning environment. Fascinating school compound and classroom environments create the feeling of ownership of the school and classroom by the students.

Dixon (2015) highlighted on some basic roles teachers should have to control the inclusive classroom. These include:

1. the teacher should clearly explain the classroom norms to the understanding of every student in the class
2. the teacher should consider all the categories of students in the class when deciding a kind of penalties for defaulters
3. he should treat students as individuals
4. the teacher needs to be comfortable with students of different disabilities.

Department of Education (2007) in its attempt to establish an inclusive classroom states that inclusive classroom environment should be well structured and organized, with adequate seating arrangement, suitable learning materials, curriculum-related displays with wide space to allow teachers' easy access to all students' work. It emphasized that the classroom situation will be conducive when the teacher has:

1. clear strategies for classroom management
2. clear standards of behaviours and encourages students to meet those standards
3. the need for school rules and regulations are reiterated from time to time to students
4. basic classroom rules/norms were set together with the students and are agreed on
5. students are treated with respect and are afforded equal opportunities to engage in learning process
6. students are given degrees of responsibilities and are held responsible and accountable for their behaviours.

Inclusive classroom demands team teaching where more than one teacher is teaching in a classroom at a time. Team teaching is when teachers of different discipline teach in the same class at the same time and same topic and communicate with same group of students. Other than the general education teacher, there are other specialists (teachers) that collaborate and assist the general education teacher in either communicating with students such as sign language teacher and/or specialist like braille teacher (Saunders & Kardia, 2014). There are also specialists trained in managing the mentally and emotionally retarded students. They will be working together with the general education teacher in the same class at the same time. The sign language teacher communicates what the general education teacher is teaching to the deaf students, while the braille teacher assists the blinds students in locating and writing using braille machine.

Teachers in an inclusive classroom use different teaching techniques to cater for the diverse interest of the students in the class. They may use group work technique with students, individualized teaching, cooperative teaching and any other type of child centered approach in teaching the students. Child centered approaches promote the development of friendship, collaboration and team spirit. Inclusive classroom allows the normal students to work with students with disability with whom they may not otherwise have contact. This contact will prepare the normal students to experience an inclusive nature of society (Pawlowiz, 2001).

Teacher/Students relationship in inclusive classroom

Part of good teaching in inclusive school and classroom involves spending some time focusing on building relationships with the students. It is important to know students that the teacher is teaching to demonstrate caring and genuineness to them. The teacher may have more positive experiences with students if he/she invests some time and energy into becoming informed and more aware of issues affecting them. One way to get to know the students better early in inclusive school and classroom is to have students say or write their brief autobiography. It could be as short as to ask the child to say where the child comes from, former class if he had attended school before, members of the family, living with parents or guardians and whether the two parents are alive and so on. The autobiography can be framed in such a way that it is relevant to the course content under discussion. For example, if a teacher is teaching Mathematics or Science courses, he can ask students to share their early experiences about Mathematics and Science. They could also be asked to reflect on their previous experiences about Mathematics or Science to suggest about how they learn best. From this brief narration, the teacher would receive some valuable information about students' attitudes about the content and some of their instructional needs. This kind of assignment could help the teacher to explore, early on, some of the assumptions he might have about the students and their experiences. It may also help students feel that real interest is being shown in them.

Conclusion

Based on the materials reviewed, the nature of school and classroom environments in Borno State is not inclusive. The physical structures are threats to special group, more especially the physically challenged. Learning facilities, materials and equipment are also not inclusive where the blinds and those with mild vision and hearing problems cannot be assisted. There is no admission of students with special needs along with normal students. In general, there is no inclusive school or classroom in learning environment in Borno State. It was concluded that inclusive learning environment needs to be created for the benefits of the special groups in line with the provision of Nigerian National Policy on Education (NPE), that every child irrespective of its disability must attend school. Inclusive learning environment addresses the practice of segregation of children based on their disability.

Suggestions

1. Borno State Universal Basic Education Board should create inclusive learning environment for the benefit of students at the basic education level.
2. Borno State Ministry of Education should include the creation of inclusive learning environment in its State Education Sector Plan (SESOP).
3. Non-Government Organizations and Community Based Organizations working on education should assist in creating inclusive learning environment in Borno State.
4. Teachers should try to assist those students with mild disability in their classes.

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