

THE NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION WITH FOCUS ON SPECIAL EDUCATION

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Abstract

Special Education in Nigeria has witnessed active participation by non-governmental agencies, communities, and individuals as well as government intervention. The national policy on education seeks to fulfill that role. The policy sees the right to education of persons with disability as a universal mandate to provide and promote lifelong skill for self-sufficiency. In this paper, special education is a formal special educational training given to people (Children and adults) with special needs. The paper posits that inclusion skill still remains in the realm of theory and has not fully been put to practice as special needs education in Nigeria is still grappling with problem of policy implementation and practice. The paper listed the different groups of persons with special needs and the aims/objectives of Special education were also discussed. Challenges confronting the implementation of NPE as regard special education. Some suggested solutions to the problems of implementation of special education were also discussed. It was concluded that Nigeria has come a long way in policy making as regard special education. But there is a wide gap between the formulation of these policies and their implementation. It was therefore recommended that stakeholders should rise to the challenges by doing appropriate architectural modifications in schools and other public places. The government should strike to bridge the gap between policy making and policy implementation in special education.

Key words: Evaluation, National Policy on Education, Special Education

Introduction/Background

Education in Nigeria is an instrument "par excellence" for affecting national development. It has witnessed active participation by non-governmental agencies, communities, and individuals as well as government intervention. It is therefore desirable for the nation to spell out in clear and unequivocal terms, the philosophy and objectives that underlie its investment in education. The national policy on education seeks to fulfill that role.

Government has stated that for the benefit of all citizens, the country's educational goals have clearly set out in terms of the relevance to the needs of the individual and those of the society, in consonance with the realities of our environment and the modern world. In achieving this, the government had to publish the national policy on education. The first edition was published in 1977, and the latest which is the 4th edition was published in 2004. This paper therefore seeks to discuss the national

policy on education with specific reference to the place of special education in the policy. The paper also discusses the challenges confronting the implementation of the national policy on education as regards special education.

The National Policy on Education (NPE) and Special Needs Education in Nigeria

Disability is a situation that comes without one asking for it. It could be because of an accident, disease or inherited. Disabilities comes in different forms, ranging from physical, sensory, health and cognitive disabilities. Physical disability is a level Imitation on a person's physical functioning, mobility, dexterity or stamina. Other physical disability include impairments, which limits other facets of daily living, such as respiratory disorders, blindness, epilepsy and sleeps disorder. There are majorly those impairment that are observable physically. According to Nichcy, (2012) health Impairment means having limited strength, Vitality or alertness including a heighten alertness to environmental stimuli that result in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment. Cognitive disorder are a category of mental health disorder that primarily affect learning, memory, perception and problem solving and including amnesia, dementia, delirium. Individuals living with one or more (comorbidity) of the above definition are considered as persons with disability. In the actual sense all humans have one form of disability or the other, but it is prominent when it hinders the individual constantly or more often than not from performing the life required task of his or her existence effectively (Nwachukwu, Urama, and Ezenwaka, 2017).

The concept of inclusion in Nigeria really began recently with a rising global awareness and humanitarian demand, Special educators in Nigeria, in one voice began to emphasize the need for total emancipation of persons with special needs by encouraging the provision of equal educational and welfare opportunities like that of their normal counterparts. There arose a need to create platforms for awareness and sensitization of firstly the Nigerian government, and then general public on the plight of persons with special needs in the society. Moreover special educators started trying to engage government on the need to implement the provisions stipulated in the constitution and policies regarding persons with special needs which is indicative of any civilized and democratic society (Pirman, 2017).

Services in special education: A wide range of programmes and services are provided in special needs education. These services are aimed at identifying children with special needs education at an early stage so that remedial measures can be taken to prevent a mild impairment from becoming a serious or permanent one (Amwe ,Oriade and Sowemimor, (2015).

Presently in Nigeria, inclusion skill still remains in the realm of theory and far from practice, special needs education in Nigeria is still grappling with the problem of policy implementation and environment that is not conducive for practice and a lackadaisical attitude of people and government, implementing inclusion in such environment may be unrealistic and counterproductive (Izah,2015

Formulation and History of the National Policy on Education

After the national curriculum conference, a seminar of experts drawn from a wide range of interest groups within Nigeria was convened in 1973. The seminar, which included voluntary agencies and external bodies, deliberated on what a national policy on education for an independent and sovereign Nigeria should be.

The outcome of the seminar was a draft document which, after due comments were received from the states and other interest groups, led to the final document, the National Policy on Education, first published in 1977.

Since the publication of the first edition in 1977, the 2nd and 3rd editions were published in 1981 and 1988 respectively in keeping with the dynamics of social change and the demands on education. The 4th edition was necessitated by some policy innovations and changes, and the need to update the 3rd edition (1998) accordingly.

According to section one of the national policy on education, NPE (2004) the five main national goals of Nigeria, which have been endorsed as the necessary foundation for the national policy on education, are the building of:

- a) A free and democratic society
- b) A just and egalitarian society
- c) A united strong and self-reliant nation
- d) A great and dynamic economy
- e) A land full of bright opportunities for all citizens.

The place of special education in the national policy on education

The Government and the public spirited individuals should take keen interest in the affairs of children with special needs this they could do by demanding the implementation of the law to the letter as well, as ensuring that appropriate procedure for identification as long as education programmes are made available for this children (Bakhalpup and Njkanjo, 2015).

Right to Education of persons with disability is a universal mandate to provide them with functional skills capable of promoting lifelong skills for self-sufficiency, self-dependence and self-sustenance (Nanjwan and David, 2014).

The National Policy on Education states in clear details how Special Education shall be administered. It states in details the following about special education.

Special Education is a formal special educational training given to people (children and adults) with special needs. This group of people may be classified into three categories:

- i. The Disabled** People with impairments (physical, sensory), and because of this impairment/disability cannot cope with regular school/class organization and methods without formal special educational training. In this category, we have people who are:
 - a) Visually impaired (blind and the partially sighted);
 - a) Hearing impaired (deaf and the partial hearing);
 - b) Physically and health impaired (deformed limbs, asthmatic);
 - c) Mentally retarded (educable, trainable, bed ridden);
 - d) Emotionally disturbed (hyperactive, hypoactive/the socially maladjusted/behaviour disorder)
 - e) Speech impaired (stammer, stutterers);
 - f) Learning disabled (have psychological/neurological educational phobia or challenges,
 - g) Multiple handicap
- ii. The Disadvantaged** - The children of nomadic pastorals, migrant fisher folks, migrant farmers, hunters, etc. Who, due to their lifestyles and means of livelihood, are unable to have access to the conventional educational provision and therefore require special education to cater for their particular/peculiar needs and circumstances?

- iii. **The Gifted and Talented:** People (children and adults) who have/ possess very high intelligent quotient and are naturally endowed with special traits (in arts, creativity, Music, leadership; intellectual precocity, etc) and therefore find themselves insufficiently, challenged by the regular school/college/university programmes.

The aims/objectives of Special education are to:

- i. Give concrete meaning to the idea of equalizing educational opportunities for all children, their physical, sensory, mental, psychological or emotional disabilities notwithstanding.
- ii. Provide adequate education for all people with special needs in order that they may fully contribute their own quota to the development of the nation.
- iii. Provide opportunities for exceptionally gifted and talented children to develop their own pace in the interest of the nation's economic and technological development.
- iv. Design a diversified and appropriate curriculum for all the beneficiaries.

The Federal Ministry of Education has responsibility for coordinating special education activities in Nigeria in collaboration with relevant Ministries and non-governmental organizations and international agencies (UNESCO, UNDP, WHO, etc).

- a) The Federal and State Ministries of Education shall, in collaboration with appropriate bodies, provide special programmes for gifted and talented people e.g:
 - i. Early age identification and nurture
 - ii. Early age admission into primary, secondary and tertiary institutions;
 - iii. Early completion of educational programmes at the three educational levels.
- a) The education of children with special needs shall be free at all levels.
- b) All necessary facilities that would ensure easy access to education shall be provided; e.g:
 - i. Inclusive education or integration of special classes and units into ordinary/public schools under the UBE scheme,
 - ii. Regular census and monitoring of people with special needs to ensure adequate educational planning and welfare programme,
 - iii. Special education equipment and materials e.g.
 - Perkins braille, White/mobility cane, textbooks, abacus, Braille, talking watch. Audiometers, speech trainers, hearing aids, ear mould machines etc.
 - Educational/psychological toys, for the educationally mentally retarded.
 - Calipers, crutches, wheel chairs, artificial limbs, etc. for physically handicapped.
 - Standard library; audio-visual equipment, internal facilities, etc for the gifted and talented children.
 - iv. Special education training e.g.
 - Braille reading and writing;
 - Mobility training; use of regular typewriter; for the visually impaired.
 - Total communication technique-speech, sign-language, the 3 Rs, etc. for the hearing impaired;
 - Daily living activities or skills for the mentally retarded,
 - v. Special training and re-training of the personnel to develop ' capacity building and to keep abreast of latest teaching technique, for the various categories of disabilities, the gifted and talented.

- vi. The teacher/pupil ratio in special schools shall be 1:10.
- c) Federal, State and Local Governments shall fund these programmes within their areas of jurisdiction. Architectural designs of school buildings shall be barrier free i.e., they shall take into account special needs of the persons with needs e.g., Ramps instead of steps; wider doors for wheel chaired, lower toilets etc.

Schools shall be required to arrange regular sensory, medical and psychological screening assessments to identify any incidence of handicapping condition.

Challenges confronting the implementation of NPE as regard Special Education

The provision of special needs education requires heavy funding and comprehensive planning, especially when the population of those requiring such services increases day by day.

From NPE, it can be seen that the NPE has clearly stated how special education will be run in Nigeria. However, the problem is with implementation as there is a wide gap between implementation and statement of the policy. Izah, (2015) observed that the following are some of the challenges confronting the implementation of the policy.

- 1) **Funding:** Special education is not adequately funded in Nigeria, in practical terms, special education is more expensive than other types of education because of its nature and the kind of people educated under it.
- 2) **Problem of paper work:** It is better said than done, special education is not implemented as stated in the paper (policy). Nigerians respect paper work than the real or actual work.
- 3) **Lack of personnel:** There is shortage of special educators in Nigeria as most universities in Nigeria do not offer special education.
- 4) **Inadequate supervision:** Special education is not adequately supervised as the government is careless about what is actually going on in special schools and this makes people to act outside what is written in the policy.
- 5) **Embezzlement and fraud:** Most of the funds released to special schools do not really get to them as they are mostly embezzled by few individual at the corridors of power.

Suggested Solutions to the problems of implementation of Special Education

The following solutions are suggested as a solution to the above identified problems of implementation of special education.

- 1) The federal, state and local government should collaborate effectively in the funding of special education.
- 2) There should be a general campaign by special educators and all stakeholders on the need to look into the plight of special need children.
- 3) The national university commission (NUC) should accredit more universities to study special education.
- 4) The ministry of education should organize seminars, training and workshop for both special; education teachers and regular teachers in order to get more personnel involved in special education.
- 5) The ministry of education and other financial crime institutions should ensure that the funds released for special education are properly utilized.

Conclusion/Recommendations

In summary, persons with special needs are usually discriminated amongst their peer group. It can be said that Nigeria has gone a long way in policy making as regard special

education. But there is a wide gap between the formulation of these policies and their implementation as the country is still backward in terms of implementation of the policies. All stakeholders in the education industry should therefore rise to this challenges by doing appropriate architectural modifications in schools and other public places as we strike to bridge the gap between policy making and policy implementation in special education.

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