

AN APPRAISAL OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND THE ACHIEVEMENT OF MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDG) IN RIVERS STATE

Jerome Ibejika Wosu (Ph.D)¹, Prof. Iwundu Charles O² and Ubani Samuel N²

¹Department of Foundations and Management, Faculty of Education, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education Port Harcourt, Rivers State – Nigeria

²Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling, Faculty of Education, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State–Nigeria

ABSTRACT: *This study was carried out to examine the development of special education provision visa-vis the achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in Rivers State. The desire of every parent in particular and the society as a whole is to have normal and healthy children. The abnormalities that inevitably occur either by human errors or by natural imposition cannot stop the education of these ones. These abnormalities create sufficient disparities in the cognitive, psychomotor and affective development of children especially when they start schooling at various levels. It is on this premise, that this study is contemplated to assess the development of special education with the view of evaluating its parity in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals. It adopted historical survey method to assess quality education for these categories of learners. Policy provisions as well as an overview of the development of special education in Nigeria. Development of special education and the achievement of MDG in Rivers State way forward, that Government should ascertain the statistics of these persons, fund the education of these persons, enact requisite laws and there should be attitudinal change towards these people both from government and members of the public concerning persons with special needs amongst others.*

KEYWORDS: Education, Special Needs Persons, Policies, Millennium Development Goals, Inclusive Education, Appraisal.

INTRODUCTION

Generally, education is accepted as a human right that should be the express privilege of all and sundry. It is in recognition of the importance attached to education especially as a vehicle for National development that societies endeavour to educate her citizens. Education empowers the individual to be self sufficient. To that end Dienne (1998:2) stated that, “Education is the process of becoming the best we can be. It begins when we are born and does not end until we die... to be denied at any stage of our lives therefore is to be threatened with starvation”. Education is defined by Wosu (2016:122) “as a social mechanism adjudged worldover as acceptable processes designed by the society to transmit and inculcate cherished values, skills, attitudes, norms cultures etc to bring about in those submitted to it positive change that would ultimately lead to a fulfilled life”. The education process therefore is not the exclusive of one person or group of persons in the society. It is usually comprehensive enough to embrace everyone including the disabled ones.

The basic function of education is to equip an individual to be useful to himself and contribute to the development of the society. It is no gain saying that the history of man is a clear description of how man developed in his quest for survival through the processes of learning.

Quality education therefore affords man the opportunities to pursue fundamentally the satisfaction and survival needs which include food, shelter and clothing (Sibiri, 2009).

On their parts, Adima, E.E. Ladipo, S.O. and Abosi, C.O. (1981) defined special education “as an aspect of education that treats people as individuals and makes allowance for the use of special equipment and methods of teaching, according to their respective needs. Human needs are necessary but how the various individuals acquire these needs through education should be paramount.

Taking a wholistic study of the development of special education is necessary for one to assess the efforts of Rivers State Government in stimulating the productive capacities of the special needs persons. Coming to terms with the development agenda of Rivers State government on the education of special needs people would help to put in clear perspective the erroneous beliefs in some quarters that disabled people are unproductive and so, need not be educated (Adeniyi, 2007).

There are enough untapped human resources in Nigeria and a great number of them are found amongst the disabled persons. There is no society that can evolve politically, economically and socially without positively harnessing the potentials of its citizens both able and disabled persons. It is in recognition of this that Adeniyi, (2007:5) emphasized that “the able bodied need to recognize that disabled persons possess great potentials that can lead to rapid economic development, hence, there is the need to integrate them into productive work-life”.

Oyewumi and Olajide (2001) submitted that persons with one form of disability or the other if properly given adequate education, rehabilitation and sense of belonging could contribute greatly to national development. Rivers State government established one special primary/secondary school in 1985 (Rivers State Government 1985). Thirty one years than the line it is obviously imperative for a study to be carried on its development considering the importance of special education in the maintenance of peace and order in the society and the promotion of human resources needs of the state.

Definition of Key Concepts

Education: Any society without education obviously goes into extinction. Societies and its development efforts are remembered today by reason of educational system handed down from generation to generation. Education therefore is defined as a process whereby societies transmit acceptable values, skills, attitudes, knowledge etc to the young ones from generation to generation towards achieving quality life for the person in particular and the society at large.

Special Needs Persons: Special needs persons are so called by reasons of their uniqueness. They are special because, they suffer from undesirable consequences arising from natural and accidental incapacitations. These disabilities diminishes the ability of the persons to perform optimally. These persons are grossly disadvantaged, discriminated against and rejected. They are the children in school who by their obvious handicaps cannot perform well at school. Children who are denied education as a result of their disabilities, and children whose mental and physical impairment makes their education difficult. It is on that note that they are given special attention and educational provisions different from other children.

Policies on Special Education: Policies generally refers to any plan of action drawn by a person, group of persons or government to carry out a task. Policy on special education therefore is the plan of action of government to educate special needs persons in the society. In

that regard, one unique policy of government on special education is to 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 (FRN 2008:67).

Inclusive Education: Inclusive education programme is an educational programme designed by government to integrate in a particular school both able and disable persons, with the same curriculum and supervised by the general teachers. Under this education system, considerations are also given to the size and ages of these students in such schools. This is a way of addressing perceived separation and discrimination often faced by special needs children.

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): World leaders considering major United Nations decades of conferences and summits, gathered at the United Nations Headquarters in New York to chart a new cause for global peace and development. It was at this meeting that, leaders adopted United Nations Millennium Declaration, committing Nations to a new global partnership in order to reduce extreme poverty across the world. It also set out deadline of 2015 as the target year to achieve the goals.

Of special interest here is, goal number two which is to achieve universal primary education by 2015. Nigeria however, increased her own target year to 2020. This goal includes every child both able and disable. It is on this premise that, it is imperative to appraise the efforts of Rivers State government towards the realization of this millennium development goal number two.

Appraisal: Appraisal as a concept is an attempt to take a critical look or consideration of a thing, event or programme and making informed or impartial judgement about it. In this case, the study attempted to take an appraisal of the efforts of Rivers State government in the development of special education.

Theoretical Framework

Education is viewed as the process whereby positive change is achieved in the life of an individual or group of individuals through teaching and learning. It is to this end that Elechi (2015:56) defined education as “the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which he lives”.

Okoh (2003:16) collaborated the above as he succinctly described education as a process geared towards the initiation of the young into activities that are worthwhile. Perhaps, one may conclude this segment with O'Connor's (1975:7) definition that “education is an elaborate social mechanism designed by the society to bring about in those submitted to it, certain skills and attitudes that are judged to be useful and desirable in that society.

Oyundoyin (2013) that “special connotes something that is outstanding or incredibly different from others”. Special education is a system of education that uses special tools to be able to address the special learning needs of the exceptional child. It is viewed within the framework of general education that provides appropriate facilities, specialized materials, methods and teachers with specialized training for those children considered handicapped (Ozogi, 2005:41-42).

Special Education is education programme designed for persons with special helps or needs. This is why Oyundoyin (2013) stated that it is the education given to children and youths that

entails modification, adaptations, adjustments, innovations and management of curriculum, methods and materials in addition to the other resources and practices of regular schools to fit and meet the special learning needs of those who present different forms of disabilities and learning difficulties. The aims of special education are to:

1. Pursue a programme of inclusiveness and access in education.
2. Equalize educational opportunities for all children, irrespective of their physical, sensory, mental, psychological or emotional disabilities.
3. 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.
4. Provide opportunities for exceptionally gifted and talented children to develop their talents, natural endowments and traits at their own pace in the interest of national development amongst others (FRN 2008:67).

One can therefore conclude, that special education is the type of education specially designed for people with unique needs towards giving them opportunities to contribute their own quota to national development. In educating these categories of learners, allowances are usually made for the use of special equipment and methods as well as special educators.

This form of education is rather special because the learners inevitably cannot cope adequately with the general education system. It is on this note that Garrison and force (1959) in Onwuchekwa (2005:3) defined special education as an ideal general education in which individual differences are considered and provided for. The learners who fall under this type of education system amongst others include:

- (a) The hearing – impaired
- (b) The visually – impaired
- (c) The physically handicapped (cripple etc)
- (d) The mentally retarded
- (e) The intellectually gifted
- (f) The emotionally disturbed
- (g) The multiple handicapped
- (h) The brain – injured

(Onwuchekwa, 2005:4)

The person who falls under these categories are special in their own rights, they need special equipment to learn, special teachers and perhaps special funds many of these people in Rivers State needs to be educated in order to contribute to national development.

Rationale for Policies on Special Education

Initially special education was not recognized in the society because it deals with somewhat unpopular persons. As a result, the disabled persons were grossly discriminated against and

given all kinds of negative remarks. Worststill, they were rejected by parents and siblings, their immediate confidants, and are seen as outcast and inevitable liabilities. The need to recognize them and give this group of people due regards as human beings in the society prompted and instigated some sort of positive thinking resulting in the establishment of special education centres in Nigeria (Eni-Olurunda 2007).

It should be reiterated here that despite all that has been put in place for these persons, many still finds it difficult to accept or recognize persons with disabilities. This could probably have been so because of its late introduction in the education industry especially in higher institutions of learning. It was therefore to address many issues of rejection and neglect of persons with disability that the united nations charter in 1948 stated that “everyone has the right to education given free especially at the primary school level”.

On his part Paul (2015) disclosed that the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (1994) insist that regular schools with inclusive school are most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all. It was also in that light that UNESCO, (1994) advocated for an educational policy at all levels, from the National to the local. This policy should stipulate that, a child with a disability be allowed to attend the neighbourhood school, originally designed for children without disabilities.

In his own submission, Omede (2015:117) observed that global templates have been developed for special needs children. According to him the 1989 convention on the Rights of the child makes it imperative for every child to be educated irrespective of whether the child is able or disable. Every child in this regard should have access to education without any form of discrimination. The 1994 Salamanea Declaration which stressed that ordinary conventional schools should be equipped to accept all children regardless of physical, mental or any other forms of disabilities. However, article 24 of United Nations Rights of persons with disabilities provides that:

- (a) Children who are disable should be excluded from the free and compulsory primary education.
- (b) Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive education system on equal basis with others in the places where they live.
- (c) Reasonable accommodation should be provided to the students with disabilities.
- (d) Individualized support measures should be put in place to help the disabled especially in an inclusive educational arrangement (Omede 2015, 101-110).

In her attempt to demosticate these policies, Nigeria provided for special education in the National Policy on Education (FRN 2008:66). Initially Nigeria adopted integration or mainstreaming approach to provide education for this category of learners in regular schools. National Policy on Education, the objectives or aims of special education include amongst others:

- (a) Equalization of educational opportunities irrespective physical or mental disabilities.
- (b) Provision of adequate education for all handicapped children. The type that addresses the unique needs of special children.

- (c) Provide a diversified and appropriate curriculum for special students.
- (d) Pursue an inclusive education programme that would give access to all children (FRN 2008:67).

The Nigerian philosophy of education FRN, (2004), shall be based on the “provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the country at the primary, secondary and tertiary institutions both inside and outside the formal school system”. It was however to tally its educational practices with global best practices that the Nigerian government in section 10, sub-section 96C of the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) that she reviewed her educational provision to now include integration or inclusion of special classes or units in the public schools under the Universal Basic Education Scheme. Monitoring and gathering of data of people with special needs towards ensuring proper educational planning and welfare of all children. The review equally saw the provision of special education kits and materials for all sets of exceptional children e.g Perkin, Braille machine, mobility cane, Braille text books, caliper, wheel chair etc.

Viewing from the above, each state of the federation is expected to make her laws and policies drawing inspirations from the federal government. It is surprising that till now, one is yet to identify any records of such laws or policies from the Rivers State government since the establishment of special education school in 1985.

Historical Perspective of Special Education in Nigeria

Fundamentally speaking, the focus of special education is to educate students with special needs in a way that addresses their individual differences and needs towards helping them actualize their respective destinies and contribute to the development of the society (Dantata, 2015). It is rather special because learners are assisted to achieve a higher level of personal self fulfillment, sufficiency and success through school to be useful to themselves and to the society at large (National Council on Disability 1994).

Special Education like every other education in Nigeria started with the Nigerian people before the missionaries arrived. In the original traditional education setting, there was no partial or full separation from the non disabled persons. Both able and disabled persons were given the same and equal education. Success in education in the traditional sense of it was measured by one's ability to meet up with the society's expectations. This societal expectation comes irrespective of whether you are able or disable. If the handicapped persons, for instance fails to meet up with these expectations, it meant that, he or she could not benefit from the education given to all persons (Ozaji, 2015).

Worthy of special mention here is that, the Nigerian concept of communal living facilitated the development of special education. This is because, a virtues or complete person is one who shares the burdens of his neighbours as could manifest in sorrow and joy and the overall care for one another. This philosophy which permeated the lives of the people therefore instigated unity and integration in a true Nigerian traditional setting. This undoubtedly encouraged the development of special education whereby both the disabled and the non disabled persons were educated together.

Ozaji, (2015:104), on his part emphasized that the protection of family name and image also made it imperative for families to educate both the able and disable in the society. In the view of Ozaji, (2015) no family would allow his family member to go out begging. It therefore

becomes incumbent on the families to make sure that every member of the family was educated and made to be functional in order to protect the family image and contribute to the development of the society.

Basically, special education these periods was organized in an informal way. The parents, adult members of the society and individual educators were all involved. Onwuchekwa (2005:9) stressed that the native doctors established or opened custodian centres for the lepers and the lunatics. The deaf and the crippled on the other hand were naturally integrated in the communal cultures and activities without discrimination. There were usually two phases, the healing phase which deals with plan for curative activities and the training phase which involves the development of skills of the patients through apprenticeship (Onwuchekwa, 2005).

There are opposing versions to the missionary or voluntary agencies aspect to the development of special education in Nigeria. Onwuchekwa (2005:9) on his part had insisted that the first special school in Nigeria was the Lepers Colony at Sacred Heart Hospital in Abeokuta, established by the Roman Catholic Church in 1914. Ozoji (2005:106) on the other hand argued that, the first mission to start special education of the handicapped in Nigeria was the Sudan United Mission in 1953. The Sudan interior mission, the Baptist Church, Methodist Church, church Missionary Society (CMS) and other philanthropic groups at various times joined to set up schools, rehabilitation centres and formal institutions for the disabled people.

Government intervention marked the third stage in the evolution of special education in Nigeria. In the views of Ozoji (2005:112) and Onwuchekwa (2005:12), the incorporation of equal educational opportunities in the third National Development Plan (1973-1980), marked a turning point in the rapid development of special education in Nigeria.

Government in the National Policy on Education, FRN, 1977, revised 1981 on special education. In the view of Onwuchekwa (2005:123) provided amongst others that:

1. Consideration be given to special education as an integral aspect of the UPE programme.
2. Planning, supervision and financing of special education at the state level should be in the responsibility of the state ministry of education.
3. The officials of the special education unit of the federal ministry of education should be responsible for the co-ordination of all projects and facilities of special education.
4. Each state of the federation should access the needs, age and statistics of special need people.
5. The level of assistance to be rendered to the disabled and the condition of service for staff should also be the responsibility of the state government.

The above provisions on special education makes it implicit on the state government to make laws and policies on special education and also implement same. It is on the basis of the above submission that one would want to ascertain through this study the development of special education in Rivers State to which we now turn.

An Appraisal of the Development of Special Education and the Achievement of Millennium Development Goals in Rivers State

Mrs. Catherine James, Chairperson of National Association for Exceptional Children Rivers State chapter on the occasion of her 25th Annual National Conference held in Rivers State between 5th – 9th August, 2015 (National Association for Exception Children 2015) lamented;

“Following our complaint of marginalization and the urgent need to fast track the development of special education in Rivers State to put the state at par with other states in Nigeria, in special education matters”.

This explains the sad and epileptic development of special education in Rivers State. The Millennium Development Goal number two clearly defined the global mandate of achieving universal primary education across the world by 2015 which Nigeria extended to 2020 (United Nations 2005). The focus here is to equip every child with or without incapacitation with proper knowledge, values and requisite skills to enable the child contribute to the development of the society. It is crystal clear that the planning, supervision and financing of special education at the state level is the responsibility of the state ministry of education (Onwuchekwa, 2005:13).

The big question now is, what has Rivers State government done to develop special education towards achieving universal primary education in the State? The federal ministry of education through its agency, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council saddled with the responsibility to co-ordinate, provide guidelines and supervise special education programmes across the states of the federation, made sure that, special education centres are opened in each of the respective state of the federation.

The State Government in a quick response to this federal directive, established special primary/secondary school Rivers State at Creek Road in Port Harcourt Township on 25th October, 1985 (Rivers State Government 1985). The school which has existed for about thirty one years has not made much significance impact in the education of the disabled people. There is gross shortage in everything especially infrastructure. As a result of their incapacitations, varied environmental demands are placed on the persons with special educational needs leading to the requirement of different learning tools. Persons with disability have learning difficulties, special tools are obviously desired to meet up with their learning needs (Siyanbol and Osobisi, 2013, Adeniyi, 2007).

Accordingly, Braille or audio materials may be provided for the child who cannot read. This requires different therapies and technology that can impact on the child's ability to produce functional response to the environmental demand. Atteng (2015:12) lamented “... special primary/secondary school situated at creek road is in a deplorable condition and has been so neglected that it was not even amongst the hundreds of schools rebuilt or renovated by the last administration”.

At Rivers State Ministry of education, there is no special education unit or department and there is also no desk officer. It is also sad to note that there is no special education department in all the tertiary institutions in the state. The result of this, of course, is that, there are no specialist teachers, no proper sensitization of the public on the education of these categories of people.

Inclusive education programme, a major directive of the federal ministry of education is yet to be implemented in Rivers State. The National Policy on Education section 2 (FRN, 2008)

provided for the inclusion in the special education programme all categories of persons, the family, teachers, allied workers with the disabled persons, all stakeholders in education and the society at large. It was expected that everyone or group of persons would play their roles in the education of people with special needs under the inclusive education system. This programme is yet to be implemented in Rivers State.

Worthy of note is the fact that special primary/secondary school in Port Harcourt is currently hosting two schools, Junior – primary to JSS 3 and Senior Secondary SS1 – SS2. There are 19 academic staff and 9 non academic staff in primary and junior secondary school session. There are also 15 academic staff and 9 non academic staff in senior secondary session. The total population of students in primary and junior session is 186 and the total students' population in the senior secondary is 30, SS1 – SS2 (Rivers State Government 2015).

It is sad to note that the special education senior secondary school session is yet to have a centre for the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) in her over thirty years of existence. The senior secondary ends in SS2, as students supposedly meant to be in SS3 are sent out to yet to be identified schools to write the Senior School Certificate Examinations or the West African Examinations Council. Okay, granted that these SS3 are sent out to other schools to write these examinations how do these schools provide the special equipment needed by these students to effectively write these examinations.

The few available facilities for teaching and learning at the school include Audio metre, Braille machine, speech trainer, but till now there are no projector, no wheel chair and no white cane. As a result of exceptional attitudes of government towards the school in funding and provision of sensitive learning materials. The special school in Rivers State has not measured up to acceptable standards.

Policies and legislations according to Obi (2013) will probably address the many issues of rights and privileges of the special needs children. This is not so as the Rivers State Government is yet to enact a disability law on education. In the absence of practical legislations, special needs children rely on the general Laws such as Human Right Laws, Child Right Act and general provisions on the constitution. Provision of enabling laws no doubt would have given special children proper right to education. Also, laws would have made government to be aware of its responsibilities on the need to provide education for the special children. Till now there are no enabling laws or policy on special education in Rivers State.

Rivers State government is yet to develop any plausible plan to provide access and improve the quality of special education towards the realization of the millennium Development Goals. The insignificant number of both junior and senior students in Rivers State special education centre speaks volume of the non-challant attitudes of the government towards the development of special education.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the above submissions, the aim of every society is to equip its members with worthwhile skills that would enable them become responsible to themselves and the society where they live. The Millennium Development Goal number two gives a global sensibility on universal education of everyone irrespective of physical or mental status. This is far from being realized in Rivers State as persons with disability are yet to be given the required recognition

they deserve. In this regard, for Rivers State to achieve goal two of the Millennium Development Goals agenda in the area of special education as well as meeting the global mandate on special education, the consideration of the following points is imperative:

1. Government should develop enough political will to fund special education.
2. Government should carry out a comprehensive census of disabled persons in the state. This will enable her ascertain the statistics and make adequate provisions in terms of infrastructure and others.
3. Government should make the education of special children free.
4. Government should establish special education departments in the higher institutions in the state to train special education teachers.
5. There should be enacted, enabling laws and legislations on the development of special education in Rivers State.
6. Through adequate sensitization, government should make inclusive education compulsory in Rivers State.

CONCLUSION

The paper has been able to pontificate in concrete terms that by giving meaning to equalization policy of government on education that government of Rivers State will be required to see education as a basic human right and the foundation for a more just and equal society (UNESCO, 2005). If Rivers State seeks to achieve the objectives of special education as articulated in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2008), there should be proper funding of the special education programme, enactment of relevant Laws. Apart from the provision of enough facilities for teaching and learning, government should carry out sensitization campaigns to be able to encourage not only the disabled persons to attend school but also to persuade parents and the general public not to discriminate against the incapacitated but rather to accept them as important members of the society.

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