

Repositioning Special Education in Nigeria for Sustainable Development

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Abstract—In Nigeria, as in many countries of the world, education as one of the social institutions has been a subject constant debate and discussion among stakeholders. It has continued to attract the attention of everybody and has experienced series of changes and reforms. The paper therefore, reiterates the deplorable and despicable state of special education in Nigeria. Effort was made on how to reposition special education to make it play its role as a tool for sustainable development. The paper concludes that government should involve persons with special needs in making decisions on issues that concerns and affect them.

Keywords— Repositioning, special needs, special needs persons, sustainable development, Nigeria.

I. INTRODUCTION

IN Nigeria today and elsewhere in the world, there are large number of children who differ so markedly in mental, physical or behavioural characteristics from their normal peers as to require special help in realizing their optimum potentials (Lere, 2007). Education in general, is widely used as a means to develop human capacity and capital, to improve economic potentials, and to build up people's idiosyncrasies. The topic 'Repositioning Special Education in Nigeria for Sustainable Development' could not have come at a better time than now. This is because the global advocacy for educating children with special needs is very strong and compelling.

The important of education to any government cannot be overemphasized that is why many nations of the world have embraced it. Nigerian government has equally embraced education in all its totality. Nigeria has come to appreciate the focal position of education as an instrument per excellence for achieving individuals and societal development (Ogundare, 2006). Kirk and Gallagher's (1986) comments that for many years ago, the goodness of fit and efficacy of any education systems is in the extent to which it is able to meet the needs of learners on the two extremes (high flyers and learners with disabilities) as much as it is designed to meet the needs of those clustering at the middle of the continuum (all average learners) is still extremely valid today. The sad story about the Nigerian educational system is that it is not meeting the needs of learners at the extreme ends, neither is it sufficiently educating the average ones (Kolo, 2008). In other words, special education in Nigeria, has been shackled in chains

reduced to the tokens approach in terms of funding, provision of infrastructure and facilities, as well as capacity building and appropriate welfare for professional teachers and the target students. It also noteworthy that this group of individuals are most underserved in the educational provision. This has greatly contributed to potential waste and has retarded the national growth (Yewchuku, 1989).

It is against this background and considering the enormous challenges for the special education subsector in Nigeria today that it has become desirable to reposition it in order to meet the needs of persons living with disabilities so that they can equally make their contributions to the nation's building.

II. SPECIAL EDUCATION

The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) defined special education as the education of children and adults who have learning difficulty because of different sorts of handicaps such as blindness, partial sightedness, deafness, hardness of hearing, mental retardation, social maladjustment, physical handicaps etc. due to circumstances of birth, inheritance, social position, mental and physical health pattern or accident in later life. Also included are children who are intellectually precocious and find themselves insufficiently challenged by the programme of the regular school. Roger, Schroeder and Unschooled (1969) in Adeniyi (2005) defined special education as an area within the framework of general education that provides appropriate facilities, specialized materials and methods and teachers with specialized training for children and adults considered to handicapped.

III. THE SPECIAL NEEDS PERSONS

The special needs are the segment of people with diverse disabilities, which set limitations in performing certain task in a given society. For instance, individuals with visual impairment are faced with the challenge of vision. Also, individuals with hearing impairment cannot understand the use of language except through some modes such as sign language, finger spelling, etc. Eze (2007) defined special needs persons as those who have some forms of disabilities that are capable of frustrating them in benefiting fully from the regular physical education program meant for those children without disabilities. Similarly, Ogbonna (2004) reported that individuals with disabilities are found in every community and school system and included are those with one or more of the following; learning disabilities, mental retardation, emotional

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disturbance, auditory impairment, speech impairment, orthopedic and visual impairment. Some persons are born with the problems while a great number of them affected from the environment they live in.

In spite of the limitations identified with such special needs persons, they still possess the ability to acquire education and this will go a long way in making them globally useful and give them a better chance to contribute their own quota to the growth of the nation's economy.

IV. CURRENT CHALLENGES TO SPECIAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

A. Fund

Huge sums of money is required to implement any educational programme .And in this era, the funding responsibility in the entire education sector has been grossly inadequate thus, this has made special education subsector in Nigeria to suffer neglect. Many schools are overcrowded and poorly equipped ,unattractive and not conducive to learning .Furthermore, many buildings are dilapidated and they are in deplorable condition, all these and some other factors have made special education subsector to suffer neglect and this calls for repositioning .

B. Dearth of Personnel

Teachers are in the forefront of the execution of any educational programme.In Nigeria today, there is a dearth of special education personnel the reason for this is that there is only one tertiary institution (Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo) in the country that is committed solely for the production of personnel for special education. However, they are not enough to cater for teeming learners with disabilities that are in school to acquire knowledge and skills with which they can improve themselves as individuals and prepare themselves for self-sustenance.

C. Inability to Identify the Population Size of Persons with Disabilities

In Nigeria, the National Population Commission (NPC) has not be able to come up with accurate figure of persons with disabilities, age of the onset of disabilities, male and female with disabilities, and type of disabilities. This has greatly contributed to the problems of special education in Nigeria and it requires repositioning.

V. REPOSITIONING SPECIAL EDUCATION

In the process of repositioning special education for sustainable development, the following key areas must be revitalized:

- Funding
- Personnel
- Infrastructure
- Curriculum
- Regular assessment of teachers
- Favourable government policy.

VI. CONCLUSION

As persons with special needs are increasing in our society, the need to make education accessible to them so that they can give back to the society their own contributions for the sustainable development should be paramount in the agenda of the government .Lastly, persons with special needs should be involved in making decisions on issues that concern and affect them.

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