

The Contemporary Socio-Economic Crisis Situation and the Implementation of Inclusive Education for Nomadic Children with Disabilities in Nigeria: Implications for Guidance and Counselling

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Abstract - The present socio-economic crisis situation in Nigeria has affected so many facets of life of the people generally not least of all the life of nomadic children with disabilities. Presently, a lot of focus is being directed at the provision of educational services for children with special needs (including nomadic children) through inclusive education. This paper attempts to identify some of the ways that teaching and learning can be effectively carried out for nomadic children with disabilities in Nigeria with particular emphasis on its implications for guidance and counseling. The paper will attempt to identify the methods that can be used in the nomadic education classroom as well as establish the expected roles that guidance and counselling can play in the provision of such programmes for the enhancement of better quality of life for nomadic children with disabilities in the Nigerian educational system. Furthermore, it will strive to identify the problems emanating from the socio-economic crisis situation and how it affects nomadic children with disabilities. In particular, it will attempt to identify the counseling strategies that can be used for the insurance of better quality of life for nomadic children with disabilities generally and make far reaching recommendations to that effect.

Keywords: Socio Economic Crises, Inclusive Education, Nomadic Children, Disabilities

INTRODUCTION

In recent times, there appear to have been an unprecedented upsurge in the level of socio-economic crisis in the Nigerian polity. This upsurge is evident in the seemingly continuous happenings such as ethno religious and communal clashes, farmers/herders conflict, arsons, conflicts pertaining grazing, insurgency and migration among others. The consequences of these happenings is what we see in the deplorable humanitarian situations as evident in the huge human casualties; internally displaced populations, human rights abuses, threats to livelihood, general public insecurity culminating in dire refugee situations. There is no doubt that what is obtained today has become a socio-economic crisis that is threatening and will continue to threaten the implementation of inclusive education especially for nomadic children with disabilities in the country.

In line with the global call for 'education for all' (EFA) by the year 2000, one of the country's response to this call is the Universal Basic Education(UBE)

programme. This approach by conception and implementation is expected to provide free education to all school aged children all over Nigeria for 9 years: 6 years of primary, 3 years of Junior Secondary and another 3 years of Senior Secondary Education. In effect, this means the provision of free, Universal Basic Education for every Nigerian child of school-going age including those nomadic children with disabilities.

It has been noted that there is an upsurge in the number of children with special needs that are enrolled into the regular classroom in line with the goals of EFA. However, on casual observation, one may note that regular schools and teachers in such schools in Nigeria seem to have little or no skills at all for meeting the educational needs of these children (Adelowo, 2006; Okeke, 2006). Because all children have unique learning needs, systems and approaches in making educational opportunities meaningful for them are continuously changing.

For persons with special needs, these systems and approaches are multiple and varied. Therefore, flexibility, adaptation, innovation and ingenuity are necessary. Teachers in the nomadic education programme are expected to be ingenious and innovative as well as properly organized, have expert skills and well trained to handle children with special needs. Thus, this paper addresses the practical approaches for effective teaching and supervision of children with special needs in the nomadic education classroom in the face of socio-economic crisis.

The Exceptional Nomadic Child:

Exceptionality is a terminology in special needs education that refers to a significant deviation from the general norm of development in terms of physical and intellectual functioning. Obi (2006) posits that for the deviation to be considered exceptional, it needs to be statistically, culturally and socially significant. According to her, deviation is usually based on some cultural or societal norms or standards with a remarkable departure from this norm or standard being viewed as exceptional and therefore needing special attention.

It is pertinent to note that a greater percentage of people fall within the normal or average range of development. Therefore those who deviate either positively or negatively are said to be exceptional; a generic term used to describe a significant departure from the norm of the society. Nomadic children with special needs are those who significantly deviate from the general range of development to the extent that they need special attention and or a modification of their environment to enable them benefit from teaching and learning. In this respect, exceptional nomadic children include those with significant sensory deficits or unusual low or high intellectual functioning that the conventional/regular school programme may not be able to properly address (Ozaji, 1993).

Nomadic children with special needs could be classified into the following groups but are not limited to such grouping:

- Those with hearing and speech impairment
- The intellectually different
- Those with visual impairment
- The physically and health impaired
- The emotionally and behaviorally impaired and
- The learning disabled.

The concept of special education:

Education has been seen as a social process in capacity building and maintenance of society from time immemorial. According to Ekemode and Oduolowu (2006) education has been seen as a weapon with which to equip the citizenry to acquire relevant knowledge, skills and habits for surviving in the modern world and to cope with the changing realities and uncertainties of human life. The world declaration on education is believed to have highlighted among other things that to satisfy basic learning needs requires an expanded vision which encompasses.

- Universalizing access and promoting equity;
- Focusing on learning;
- Broadening the means and scope of basic education;
- Enhancing the environment for learning and;
- Strengthening partnership (Bernard Van Leer Foundation, 1990).

Special needs education, according to Obi (2006) is education that is given to children with disabilities or education meant for people and children who are experiencing handicapping conditions. However, special needs education goes beyond that. It is indeed a system of education that operates within and outside the regular school system such as the case in nomadic education. In this vein it is a comprehensive system of education that considers the child, his abilities, his learning needs, tools that will enhance his learning, the learning environment that is most beneficial and the methods of teaching and learning most suitable to the child.

Special education, as a matter of fact developed out of the principles of regular and general education. It is therefore viewed as the education of children and adults who have learning difficulties because of different sorts of handicaps: blindness, partial sightedness, deafness, hard of hearing, mental retardation, social adjustment, physical handicap etc. due to circumstances of birth, inheritance, social position, mental and physical health pattern or accident in later life (FGN, 2004). This imply that special education could only be given by a special breed of specially trained teachers using special methods in scheduled settings often referred to as special schools (Obani, 2006).

All said and done, as postulated by Kirk (1972), special needs education (for the nomadic child with disabilities) must be seen in its true colours as a modification of the education given to the ordinary child that, according to him, involves practices which

are unique, uncommon and of unusual quality when compared to school practices intended for ordinary children. According to Obani (2006), it is no longer education to be given in special settings like special schools, special classes etc by special teachers only using special methods and approaches as well as special equipments. Obani insists, and rightly too, that it is now education to be given in regular neighbourhood schools by any well trained regular class teacher in consultation with specialists in classes for all children, their physical, sensory, psychological and other learning differences notwithstanding.

With this change in thinking, the concept of inclusive education emerged in the provision of educational services to persons with special needs. Following from this position, Obani, (2006) observed that the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme and indeed nomadic education currently being implemented in Nigeria would seem to be in line with the principles of inclusion. Inclusion has a values orientation based on the premise that all persons with disabilities have a right to be included in naturally occurring settings and activities with their neighbourhood peers, siblings and friends (Smith, Polloway, Patton & Dowdy, 2001). In the light of this assertion, inclusive education has grown out of the social model of disability and recognizes that all children are different and that the education system need to change in order to conform with the individual needs of such learners.

Teaching approaches with nomadic children with disabilities:

There is no gain saying the fact that there are several approaches in use in teaching children with special needs and that no single approach can be claimed as the best at all times. This is essentially correct even in the implementation of academic programmes for nomadic children with disabilities. Some of these approaches demand flexibility which has been described by Obani (2006) as the ability of the teacher to develop and adopt different forms of curricula and to present them in various ways to meet the widely differing needs of all children especially those with special needs.

The approaches employ among others behavioural and clinical tools including:-

- Individualized Educational Assessment (IEA)
- Individualized Educational Programmes (IEPs)
- Clinical Teaching Diagnostic Prescriptive Teaching (DPT)
- Task analysis

- Mastery of learning
- Collaborative team teaching
- Collaborative team learning.

The overall principles in all of the above are the principles of parsimony and over learning which have in-built elements that ensure children experience some degree of success in order to strive to learn. Note that the principle of parsimony requires that knowledge and information be carefully dispensed in small dose in a sequentially ordered manner starting from simple easy-to-learn tasks and progressing to more difficult and complex tasks and in the process incorporating task analysis, mastery of learning and the chaining of sub-tasks to arrive at targeted objectives.

In this respect, active learning, which is a learning process in which a learner is actively engaged in planned learning activities in a conclusive, gender sensitive school environment where the teacher acts more prominently as a facilitator (Anikweze, 2007 & Usman, 2007) must be considered. According to Fabes and Martin (2000) in this type of learning, students are encouraged to actively participate in their own education. However, as cautioned by Andzayi and Yakwal (2008) it is pertinent to remember that in dealing with special needs children, it may not be that easy to expect them to be merely encouraged to discover and transform complex information for themselves. Considering the complex nature and degree of their handicapping or challenging situations, much more need to be included in the process of using active learning techniques as classroom pedagogy in order to enhance learning for children with special needs.

Therefore, as observed by Yakwal (2008) it is necessary to point out the fact that based on the theories and characteristics of active learning, one may be right to conclude that it is a combination of numerous techniques of teaching and learning that could be highly useful with nomadic children with special needs.

Strategies For Implementation of Inclusive Education for nomadic children with disabilities:

These strategies are imbedded in active learning as identified by Anikweze (2007) which include:

- **Teachers responsibilities**
 - Facilitates learning activities
 - Prepares classrooms
 - Plans the lesson
 - Motivates learners and
 - Creates an appropriate and safe learning environment.

- **Learners' roles**
 - Independence
 - Initiate activities
 - Take increased responsibility for their learning
 - Participate fully
 - Write (In appropriate medium suitable for his/her nature and degree of exceptionality).
 - Think and conclude
 - Talk and listen
 - Asking questions
 - Contribute
 - Argue
 - Brainstorm
 - Work in groups
 - Being physically active
 - Manipulate etc.
- **Learning methodologies/activities**
 - Brainstorming
 - Collaboration in learning
 - Minute papers
 - Writing activities
 - Student-led review sessions
 - Games
 - Debates
 - Analyzing case studies
 - Concept mapping
 - Case studies
 - Focused listening
 - Exploration
 - Role playing etc.
- **Learning environment**
 - Learners' initiatives should be encouraged.
 - Excitement should be maximal but contained.
 - Classroom seating should be flexible and space adequate for required activities.
 - Equipment and materials needed should be available.
 - Time should be properly apportioned and managed.
 - Required resource persons should be available and adequately briefed.
 - Rules/instructions or tasks should be available to learners.
 - All safety requirements should be met.

From all of the above, one can no doubt deduce that much need to be provided if active learning

techniques are to be effectively used for practical and effective teaching and supervision of nomadic children with disabilities in our inclusive educational settings (Andzayi & Yakwal, 2008). According to Fabes and Martin (2000), active learning techniques have been used effectively for teaching many different topics including science and reading. Some active learning techniques identified (Fabes & Martin, 2000) as highly useful to encourage students, including nomadic children with special needs, to become actively involved in learning include:

- Cooperative learning in which students work together in groups to solve problems;
- Discovery learning in which students are encouraged to discover principles and indeed new information for themselves; and
- Generative learning in which students are taught how to effectively use specific methods of problem solving to integrate new information with pre-existing information (Fabes & Martin, 2000:328).

Six active learning strategies that could be effectively adopted for use with nomadic children with special needs to promote learning for them (Usman, 2007; Yakwal, 2008) are as follows:

- Cooperative learning in which the teachers' role is to provide structure and guidance for specific kinds of tasks to groups of students/pupils. This is used to design classroom activities that allow learners to discover answers on their own as well as allow student – student interaction to occur;
- Multi-sensory learning since nomadic children with special needs vary in their styles and learning channels;
- Student self-assessment in a in a process that involves learners (nomadic children with special needs) in the assessment and evaluation of their own work by drawing upon their past experiences, interests and abilities as a point of reference;
- Continuous assessment which is a practice of evaluating learners on a regular basis in individualized ways beyond mere testing. Usman (2007) assures that this active learning strategy helps in tracking the progress of each individual learner and gently but firmly correct learners when necessary.

The above strategies obviously agree with the principles of individualization of instruction; concreteness, unified instruction, provision of additional stimulation and encouragement of self-

activity propounded by Sykes and Ozoji (1992) as very useful in teaching and supervision of special needs children generally.

Instructional implications for exceptional children:

As far as it is known, most exceptional children not least of all nomadic children with disabilities require instructional strategies and considerations in:

- Curriculum modification.
- Special facilities, materials and equipment.
- Use of specialized methods.
- Professional handling and the understanding of professionally trained personnel.
- Counseling activities.
- Supportive services.

As pointed out by Ozoji and Mugu (1999), instructional implications may be required based on the areas of exceptionality eg.

- Nomadic children with visual impairment will need the use of Braille materials, training in orientation and mobility, daily living skills, type writing, removal of architectural barriers, social skills etc. through individualization, concreteness, additional stimulation etc.
- Those with hearing impairment will need training in sign language, speech training, use of hearing aids, sequencing order of lessons etc.
- Those with physical and health impairment will need instructional help in movement of materials, removal of architectural barriers and good human interaction with peers and teachers.
- The mentally retarded will need emphasis on skills for daily living through proper adjustment and individualization of instruction.
- The gifted and talented will require instructional consideration in programme enrichment, acceleration, grade skipping, mentorship and exposure to much needed facilities, accelerated and content expanded programmes which should be individualized for such a child.
- The learning disabled may have instructional implications in proper arrangement of class instruction: they also need teachers with experience in tactical and schedule of reinforcement, individualization of instruction etc.
- The multiple handicapped would need inter disciplinary approach and team cooperation so as to cater for their multiple needs. Psychological therapies and periodic assessments and evaluation of progress would also be required.

Implications for Guidance and Counseling:

It is not difficult to observe the implications of guidance and counseling to nomadic children with disabilities in the face of the existing socio-economic challenges being experienced in Nigeria especially in the adequate implementation of inclusive education for such children. Guidance and counseling, which is a very important discipline in the provision of educational services for nomadic children with special needs, is expected to play a crucial role in this process in several ways. These include but are not limited to the following:-

- Coping strategies - An effective collaboration between teachers, students and parents will help students learn in a practical way. It is noteworthy that young people whether in the urban, rural areas or even in the bush have developed a degree of freedom in their lives as they become aware of available options and take advantage of them. At best, helping hands should enable them throw off chains and manage life situations effectively.
- Identification – It is important for the society to be able to effectively identify its citizens that may be having one problem or the other. Guidance and counseling can make a big difference in the identification of nomadic children with special needs which may require immediate or long term intervention.
- Motivation – This is very important if a child with a disability can keep him/herself in optimal state of mind and body to be able to benefit from inclusive education.
- Evaluation – In child development, it is agreed that periodic evaluation of the developmental pattern of children is a necessity. By and large, guidance and counseling will enable us to evaluate the nomadic child with disabilities in relation to his/her own growth and progress compared to other children in his/her own age group.
- Advisory – Sometimes, it is important to stabilize the parents in an acceptable environment to their child to be taught in a normal classroom environment with other children in order to make adaptation easier for them.
- Opportunities available for crisis management and resolution can be pointed out to all the stakeholders involved in the inclusion of nomadic children with disabilities as a deliberate strategy for containing the spate of insecurity.
- Personal and social counseling will assist in awakening students to educational and vocational

opportunities and will help arouse their interest to develop positive attitudes towards themselves with a marked ability to acknowledge areas of expertise as well as make positive choices.

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