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## SPECIAL EDUCATION AND RESTRUCTURING OF NIGERIA CERTIFICATE IN EDUCATION PROGRAMME: CONSTRAINTS TO EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

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***Abstract:** The paper defined the concept of special education, its objectives, the objectives of Nigeria Certificate in Education and the term restructuring. The paper also identifies structural as some of the problems towards effective implementation of the restructuring programme. Some of these constraints include: shortage of qualified professionals, wrong deployment of trained personnel, societal negative attitudes, diversion of funds by government officials, absence of up-to-date statistics of the special needs children and structural barriers. Recommendations for better implementation of the restructuring programme are also offered.*

**Keywords:** Special Education, Restructuring, Nigeria Certificate, Education, Programme Implementation

### Introduction

The basic aim of special education is to prevent disability from becoming a handicap and handicap condition from being permanent. Also that the child concerned does not become a liability to himself, his parents and the entire society. The genesis of the field of special education could be traced back to the primitive time, when human beings first became aware of those whose appearance and behavior differ significantly from what was typical of the society (Lere, 2005). Over the past decades in Nigeria, there has been marked improvement in the provision of services for people with special education needs. Both the government and individuals have shown some level of concern towards this group of people. However, despite these Special education exists in all facets of the educational system of the world. Emerole (2005), cited Adima (1989), considers special education as an aspect of education that treats people as individuals and makes allowances for the use of special equipment and methods of teaching according to individuals need. Special education can be defined as those aspects of education that regular educators do not worry about as such or that may be overlooked in a typical classroom, Frank and Stephen (1974) in Ozoji (2005:45). The National Policy on Education defines special education as a formal special education training given to people (children and adults) with special needs, categorized into three groups:

- a. The disabled people with impairments (physical, sensory) who are: Visually impaired, hearing impaired, physical and health impaired, intellectually retarded, and emotional disturbed, and multiple handicapped.

- b. The disadvantaged: the children of nomadic pastoralists, migrant fishermen, migrant farmers, hunters etc.
- c. The gifted and talented children and adults who possess very high Intelligence Quotient (IQ) and possessed special traits in arts, creativity, music, leadership etc.

From the above classification, it can be seen that special needs children refer to those children with various unique disabling conditions which prevent them from benefiting from normal school arrangement. Therefore, they need specially modified arrangement that takes into cognizance of their needs for maximum educational benefits, etc.

### The Aims and Objectives of Special Education

The policy came up with four objectives as stated below:

- To give concrete meaning to the idea of equalizing educational opportunities for all children, their physical, sensory, psychological or emotional disabilities notwithstanding.
- To provide education for all people with special needs in order that they may fully contribute their own quota to the development of the nation.
- To provide opportunities for exceptionally gifted and talented children to develop their talents, natural endowments/traits at their pace in the interest of the nation's economic and technological development
- Design diversifies and appropriate curriculum for all the beneficiaries. It is clear from the above that, various forms of provision exist for special needs children and that the nature of their exceptionality determines the type of provision that should be made for them. The whole essence of this is to help pupils achieve those aims and objectives set out in the NPE.

### Objectives of NCE (Special) Programme:

In every classroom, there are learners who have one or more problems and difficulties or who cannot learn to their optimum level from the teaching-learning processes that go in the regular school as a result of one form of exceptionality or the other. This necessitates the inclusion of special Education in our educational system. It has the following objectives as stated-in the Minimum Standards for NCE Teachers General Education (2009:27).

- i. To provide the Special Education student teacher with a broad knowledge of categories of exceptionalities in Special Education.
- ii. To provide the student-teacher with the skills needed for screening, identifying, assessing and evaluating special needs in children.
- iii. To equip the student-teacher with necessary preliminary skills for teaching learners of all categories of exceptionalities.
- iv. To provide the student-teachers with in depth intellectual and professional skills and knowledge needed for working with children in one or two different areas of exceptionalities.

The above objectives necessitates the title of this paper in a reverse form, focused mainly on the constraints to effective implementation of the restructuring programme as explained in one of the subtopics of the paper.

### **Restructuring Nigeria Certificate in Education Programme**

Educationally, restructuring Nigeria education programme can start by ensuring that every Nigeria child (normal or abnormal) has access to free education to the last level of secondary school. This is so because development in the world is knowledge-based and driven (Thomas, 2000). Therefore, there is nothing wrong in the concept of restructuring and even the methodologies. Nations do it, companies do it to push the acceptability levels of their products as well as their perception. Even individuals restructure themselves for more marketability in the world of work and for other purposes. According to Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (2005:7<sup>th</sup>ed), to restructure means to organize something such as a system or a company in a new and different way. Structuring Nigeria certificate in education is a necessity, since the standards of education is waning, most government institutions malfunction due to group of problems (the Jomte in statement on quality assessment of 1990, the Salamanka 1994 policy pronouncement of Education for All (EFA) and the UBE in Nigeria, launched in 1999). The concept that summarized these is inclusive education –stressing that all students in a school regardless of their strengths and weakness in any area, become part of the school community. They should be included in the feeling of belonging among other students, teachers and support staff.

The National Policy on Education (2004:96 a/b) states that the education of children with special needs shall be free at all levels. All necessary facilities that would ensure access to education shall be provided. But reverse is the case since the NCE special education programme still battles with some attitudinal and structural constraints to successful implementation of any restructuring programme. Specifically, schools meant for special needs children (regular or special) are not well equipped in most respects. Historically, the topical issue began since 1976 as Universal Primary Education (UBE), later changed to UBE in 1999, evolved one from the other and non-fully completed and with the elements of each restructuring or reform found in the next. If positive mind is intensified in a special needs individual, he will think positive, a good idea and inspirations from a negative and battered mind cannot be expected. A special needs child who is entitled to basic needs of life will always think negative in the land of plenty (Salend, 1999 & Stanley 1993). Therefore, restructuring the Nigeria Certificate in Education Programme represents such exciting opportunity, because it will allow us to redefine ourselves and what we are all about.

### **Constraints to Effective Implementation of Restructuring Shortage of Professionals**

It is common to find that unqualified, incompetent and uncommitted practitioners engage in teaching the special needs children. Since teaching has become an all-comer'

profession, many teachers do not major in special education. Onyachom (2010) added that, they did not satisfy the minimum requirement of Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE). Special Education requires highly trained personnel to handle the various areas. Some other professionals relevant in the field of Special Education include such as: Social workers, counselors, speech-language therapists, audiologists, occupational therapists, and so on. These personnel are scarcely available in required numbers in various schools in the country. As a result, Lere (2005) stressed that if there are any policies for implementation at all, they are hazard. Beside, many professionals of education quit the field of the vocation. This leads to prevalence of shortage of professionals in the field of special education.

### Wrong Deployment of Trained Personnel

Sometimes, the personnel trained for exceptional children hardly stay to teach these children. They either opt for other disciplines or the government deploys them to teach other children. This situation, according to Ozoji (2005), is a slap on the face of government policy or programme to provide adequate teaching and support staff for special needs learners. In the absence of positive attitude from the government as regards this area, we should expect this constraint to manifest.

### Social Negative Attitudes

According to Abang (2003), there is little difference in people but that little difference makes great difference. The difference is attitude; the big difference is whether it is positive or negative. Attitude is an expression that is made of beliefs, feelings and behavior. The most grievous of these is the favourable attitude of society towards the special needs children and special education. The way the society talks, feels and treats the exceptional children levels much to be desired, constraints rather than dilate the life space of the exceptional children (Ozoji, 2005). Terms used to describe special needs individuals tend to portray them as second class citizens, those who are generally looked down upon and considered ourselves better. Eleweke (1994), cited Abang (1991) stated that because of the negative ways special needs people are described and labeled by the society, in most cultures they do not take part in the administration of affairs in their own families, not to talk of in the society at large. Kirk and Gallager (1989) described the many problems involved in labeling people by their disabilities. These are summarized as follows:

- The label becomes the person
- Labels affect self-image
- Labels can increase sub-group discrimination

When those in authority have positive attitude towards person with special needs and special education programmes generally, then the implementation would equally have a positive attitude and approach. The situation in Nigeria is that of negative attitude. This is seen in the way most government program get frustrated at the point of implementation (Lere, 2005)

### **Diversion of Funds by Government Officials**

Special education is an expensive enterprise in terms of instructional materials, equipment and teacher-pupils ration. It is common to find that funds meant for the implementation of special education programme are diverted to other purposes. Funds meant for the provision of instructional materials, training of specialist teachers, payment of salaries and other related issues may be diverted to other issues such as payment of allowances for officials, giving loans to themselves and the like. This kind of negative attitude affects the development of special education programme, no matter how good the intentions. Lere (2005) also stressed that, in some cases, before such funds are released, some form of inducement would be required and this depletes the little that has been approved.

### **Absence of Up-to-Date Statistics of the Special Needs Children**

Effective implementation of any programme for special needs children cannot be possible without authentic data. Authentic data are lacking in Nigeria, and efforts to obtain are often made difficult due to political constraints. Inaccurate statistics before programme restructuring and implementation hampers the success of any programme.

### **Structural Barriers**

The blue-print on education of the handicapped in Nigeria clearly states that: education of the special needs children needs children and adults requires special facilities to facilitate mobility and learning, depending on the category of the handicapping conditions, government shall make efforts to ensure that:

*All facilities (public buildings, highways, schools, health institutions, public parks and centers, swimming pools, recreational areas, markets, etc, in each community all over the federation shall be built and or modified/where and when feasible to accommodate the special needs persons in Nigeria).*

The blue-print further stressed that, the structure of education of the special needs individuals shall remain the same as in the regular school system with flexibility to take care of the degree of special needs conditions. From observation, it will be apparent even to the man on the street that many places mentioned above have not been designed with the special needs people in mind. Many buildings are not accessible to them, specifically those on wheelchairs, due to the presence of high steps, curbs and narrow walks, very narrow doors, small toilet stalls and so on. For this reason, Eleweke (1996) also states that, many old buildings and even newly designed ones can be seen with:

- Steps and Curbs instead of ramps.
- Bare floors without carpets which increase the chances of slipping and making fall more serious.
- Non use of safety glass doors and accessible windows
- Narrow classroom entry ways without doors that control auditory and visual exposure to the corridors which restrict access.
- Lack of conventional toilets with space and facilities to permit independent use of special needs students on wheelchairs.

- Lack of facilities on doors (example, Braille letters or numbers), sinks and cabinets that are usable by all disabled people.
- Lack of switches, controls, fire alarms and the like that are within the reach of students on wheelchairs, etc.

Apart from the above obvious barriers, there are quite a number of other subtle barriers erected consciously by the society. Even the staff quarters meant for specialist teachers, specifically the disabled special education teachers who serve as role model to the special needs children are erected without considering them in mind (Joram and Asabe, 2010). These barriers affect special needs persons in so many adverse ways and restrict the development of their potentials and full participation in the society with normal people on equal basis and as productive and useful members.

### The Way Forward

The factors affecting the provision of adequate services for individuals with special needs in Nigeria educational system necessitates the consideration for alternative approaches to ensure effective implementation of Nigeria Certificate in Education restructuring program.

1. **Architectural Design:** These should be universal design to provide people with special needs greater access to the community and the workplace by removing or reducing barriers found in the environment. Removing barriers is necessary so that people with special needs can participate more fully in events and activities of daily life. In the real sense, the principle of universal design to instruction seeks to remove all barriers that an individual with special needs might face when participating in instruction or learning activities. This is why Ozoji (2005) states that architectural designs of school buildings shall take into account the special needs of the special children. All necessary facilities that would ensure easy access to education shall be provided, including free education for such children at all levels.
2. **Funding:** Special Education is an expensive enterprise in terms of equipment, materials and so on. Unless funds are provided, it may be impossible that good special education programme can be provided. Therefore, the entire tiers of government should provide adequate funds for the procurement of these items for effective implementation of the programme. Adequate funding will also help to curb the problem of shortage of professionals that adversely mar the progress of special education in Nigeria.
3. **Personnel:** The authority concerned should try its best to recruit enough trained personal and post them appropriately. The wrongly deployed, should be properly deployed to special education institutions.
4. **Stigmatization** of labeling the special needs children should be stopped because these labels create problem to such individuals. Let us accept the special needs

people as unique individuals who have their own differences just as the so-called normal people too have their own differences.

5. **Data:** On absence of up-to-date statistics of the special needs children, adequate census needs to be done to determine the accurate number of children with special needs in Nigeria. The actual figure will help to provide adequate facilities based on their unique needs.

### Conclusion

For successful implementation of special education programmes, attention should be focused on the major constraints pointed out in this paper. Specifically, the availability of funds, adequate professionals, proper deployment and building disabled-friendly atmosphere in the field of special education can be a gate way to success.

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