



# **POLITICS OF ADVOCACY FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS**

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## **Abstract**

Inclusive education is a subfield of education that seeks to give equal opportunities to every child to have access to education as a right. The United Nations through the UNESCO has give impetus to the importance of inclusive education through different conventions and treaties that most nations in the world have subscribed too, including Nigeria. The signatories to these treaties has been encouraged by global stakeholders to domesticate and implement the instruments to enable them improve on inclusive education. Irrespective of the importance attached to inclusive education, not much has been done to encourage its development. It therefore requires advocacy to sensitize the stakeholders but the politics associated with the advocacy had been a major drawback. This paper therefore examines the politics associated with the advocacy of inclusive education in Nigeria focusing on its challenges and prospects. The paper anchors on secondary information as it is mainly a qualitative analysis. The paper concludes that inclusive education in Nigeria still face a lot of challenges one of which is the politics associated with advocacy. The paper posits that the prospect of inclusive education in Nigeria is bright considering the various mechanism and instruments on ground. The paper recommends among others, vigorous campaign on inclusive education and also that government should discourage politics surrounding advocacy for inclusive education.

**Key words: advocacy, inclusive education, stakeholders, conventions and treaties, politics**

## **Introduction**

It has been established globally that education is a right to everyone and not a privilege. This was clearly specified by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, (United Nations, 1948), of which many nations including Nigeria are signatories. Since then, most countries has gone ahead to domesticate and embedded it in their educational philosophy and foundations. This has obviously explained the importance of

education to every nation. It therefore means that nations should make education accessible to every child as a way of recognizing their rights. Disallowing some categories of children to have access and opportunity to education translates to denying them of their fundamental Human Rights. Uchem et al (2014) noted that education is both a right and a foundation for sustainable social and politic-economic transformation of any society. Scholars agreed that education consists of all human activities geared toward enabling a person to develop into a well matured, fully- functioning human being in his society, a process that leads to full development of personality intellectually, physically, social, emotional and spiritually. It therefore means that education has the capacity of equipping the individual to acquire the necessary skills, reasoning and initiatives that will impact on his life, family and the general society. Adeola (2009) noted that education has both a quantitative and qualitative side. To him, the quantitative side of education refers to the economic dividends that ultimately accrue from it to both individual and their country as a result of increased earnings, while the qualitative aspect of education has to do with values culture and needs. From the above, it is obvious that education which is supposed to be a right and not privilege is very important in the life of every individual and his society. One subfield of education is inclusive education which is a system that permits every child irrespective of any limitations, to have access and opportunity to education in the mainstream setting. It allows children with disability to be educated alongside and in regular classroom with their mates who are not disabled. Inclusion emphasizes opportunities for equal participation, but with options for special assistance and facilities as needed and for differentiation within a common learning framework. According to LCD (2012) making schools inclusive for boys and girls with disabilities improves them for all learners including students facing exclusion because of other challenges or more than one issue. UNESCO (2005) remarked that inclusion is

- i. Recognition of the rights to education and its provision in non discriminatory way,
- ii. A common vision which covers all people.
- iii. a belief that schools and places of learning have a responsibility to educate all children and adults in line with human rights principles
- iv. A continuous process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners regardless of factors such as disability, gender, age, ethnicity, language, HIV status, geographical location and sexuality, recognizing that all people can learn.

It is obvious that inclusive education is a United Nation (UN) innovation through the UNESCO which is one of the major strategies that has been applied to address the global challenges of marginalization, discrimination and exclusion in response to the fundamental principle of Education for All. It has been noted that through this means, many nations has made remarkable efforts in the advancement of this innovation in the World through policy and action. Eskay (2009), Abang (1988) and Oluigbo (1986) corroborated the fact that inclusive education has since witnessed some tremendous improvements in the last decade despite cultural, socio-economic and political constraints. However, many nations especially the developing ones including Nigeria is yet to make appreciable improvements on inclusive education as a result of the politics and other

challenges. Ainscow (2004) asserted that inclusive education is the major challenge facing education systems around the World. Adetoro (2014) noted that in some developing nations like Nigeria inclusive education is thought as an approach to serving children with disabilities within general education settings. The questions which this paper attempts to answer are

1. What are the major challenges to inclusive education in Nigeria?
2. Has there been adequate advocacy on inclusive education in Nigeria?
3. What are the prospects of inclusive education in Nigeria?

## **Inclusive Education**

Several scholars have defined inclusive Education from various angles at different time. Okwudire and Okechukwu (2008) defined inclusive education as the progressive increase in the participation of students, in reduction of their exclusion from the cultures curricula and communities of local schools .Ahmad (2000) defined inclusive education as the education of all children and young people with and without disabilities or difficulties in learning together in ordinary pre-primary schools, colleges and universities with appropriate network support. According to Ejiogu (2015) inclusive education is a system or practice by which every students of school age is offered the opportunity of quality education in mainstream settings.

Some scholars differ a little bit in their opinion from the above. Adetoro (2014) citing Wikipedia the Free encyclopedia (2014) argued that inclusive education differs from previously held notions of integration and mainstreaming which tended to be concerned principally with disability and special education needs and implied accommodation of all categories of learners in the classroom. However, international organizations in which most countries had ratified their conventions, and included it in their educational policy, had given clearer definitions. According to UNECSO (2009) inclusive education is a process that involves the transformations of schools and other centres of learning to cater for all learners including boys and girls, students from ethnic and linguistic minorities, rural populations, those infected and affected by HIV and AIDS, those with disabilities and difficulties in learning and as well provide learning opportunities for all youth and adults. UNESCO (2011) further added that inclusive education is a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities and reducing exclusion from education and from within education. The national centre on Educational Restructuring and inclusion (1995), defined inclusive education as providing to all students, including those with significant disabilities, equitable opportunities to receive effective educational services with the needed supplementary aids and support services in age appropriate classrooms, in order to prepare students for productive lives as full members of society. Sambo and Gambo (2015) defined inclusive education as the full integration of learners with and without special needs into the same classrooms and schools and thereby exposing them to the same learning opportunities.

From the above definitions, inclusive education can be defined as the educational system and policy that gives opportunities to all learners irrespective of their disabilities, cultures, languages or colour to learn in the same environment without any form of discrimination.

The United Nation through her educational organ which is the United Nations Educational Scientific and cultural Organization (UNESCO) had over the years strategized on how education could be given to every child without discrimination. The UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a notion that education is for all and not for only some. This makes education a fundamental right, for every child irrespective of their limitations. By implication, inclusive education remains one of the strategies that UNESCO had used to tackle the problems limiting education as a right in the world. Various forms of marginalization, discrimination or total exclusion have been the limiting factors to the rights of the child to education. But with the principle of education for all, the children in the world have equal opportunity and access to education. Through the fundamental principle of Education For All (EFA), all children, youths and adults on the World have equal opportunities to learn comfortably in the same academic environment, no matter their physical, political and socio-economic status (UNESCO, 2000). In addition to the above, various global instruments and policies gave impetus to the realization of inclusive education in many countries all over the world.

Most countries attended the global conferences and domesticated the various communiqués as part of their educational policies. The 1990 Jomtien Declaration on Education For All (EFA), the Salamanca statement of 1994 which calls on all governments to give highest priority to inclusive education, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities 2006, and the 2009 new UNESCO policy Guidelines on inclusive education are some of the major international legislations on inclusive education (Uchem et al, 2004) The UN Convention on the Rights of persons with disabilities called on all states parties to ensure an inclusive education system at all levels (UN, 2006), Inclusive education if well implemented in various countries will bring about meaningful development, eliminate discrimination and encourage inclusive society. This may not be what is obtainable in most African states, Nigeria inclusive. Therefore in order to realize the policy of inclusive education, advocacy in legitimate form is required. Individuals, groups of civil societies and corporate bodies need to lend their voices for the promotion of inclusive education in Nigeria.

### **Types of Inclusive Education**

Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia (2014) identified two types of inclusive education.

- i. **Partial Inclusive Education:** This is where students with special needs are educated in regular classes for nearly all the day, or at least for more than half of the day but would receive specialized services outside the regular classroom such as speech therapy, physical therapy as the case may require.

- ii. **Full inclusion:** This refers to a situation where there is total integration of all students, including those that require the most substantial educational and behavioural supports and services in a regular class.

### **Inclusive Education in Nigeria**

The issue of inclusive education has long been globalized. Each country determines how it will be handled by them. The global policies in inclusive education have been domesticated by various countries but implementation remains a problem. In Nigeria, most of the global policies has been adopted, domiciled and domesticated to be included in Nigerian educational policy. However, no visible manifestation has been observed at the implementation level.

Garuba (2003) observed that no concrete step has been taken with regards to inclusive education in Nigeria. Folanke (2009) noted that Nigeria is known to have some of the best laws in inclusive education in Africa but their implementation has remained the main problem due to different hindrances. The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria has given inclusive education a place by virtue of incorporating the issue of education policy to cover every aspect of the child. The National Policy on Education as specified in the construction section (1) States that every Nigerian child shall have right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities, each according to his or her abilities. section 19 (1) and (3) of the same constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) states that Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy and to this end, government shall as and when practicable provide (a) free, compulsory and universal primary education (b) free secondary education (c) free university education and (d) free adult literacy programmes.

In 1993, Nigeria government made a Decree for the provision for inclusive education with clear and comprehensive legal protection and security backing (FRN, 1993). It is important to remark that such Decree did not yield any meaningful result.

Sambo and Gambo (2015) noted that the 1993 decree on inclusive education did not yield any positive result due to governmental policies and cultural constrains which remains a big problem for most special education and non-special education school administrator in Nigeria. The 12<sup>th</sup> annual national conference of the National council for Exceptional children held at Minna, Niger State in August 2002, examined the issues surrounding Inclusive Education. Garuba (2003) remarked that it was argued that the old special education system with its restrictive practices cannot successfully address the problems of special needs children.

There was a bold step towards improvement of inclusive education. This has to do with the comprehensive education reforms that were passed into law of the compulsory Free Universal Basic Education Act 2004. Some Nigeria government intervention policies targeted at inclusive education to include the enactment of three crucial activities which were (i) signing of the UNESCO National Education Strategy

(UBES) for Nigeria (2006-2015) which was the outcome of a two day UNESCO/Federal Ministry of Education stakeholders round table (ii) The Launch of community accountability and Transparent initiative (CATTI) (iii) The publication of national plan based on the education sector situation analysis which clearly reveals the serious dysfunctional state of Nigeria education. Sambo and Gambo (2015) noted that the provision of section 8 of the National Policy on Education since 1977 have provided support mechanism for children with disabilities. It is important to note that the advancement and growth of inclusive education in Nigeria is still at very low ebb mainly because of governmental policies, cultural constraints, which further constraints advocacies, legislators and litigations.

## Advocacy

Advocacy has been defined severally by different scholars at different time. No one single definition had been universally accepted as the only definition of advocacy. Advocacy is an activity by an individual or group which aims to influence decisions with political, economic and social systems and institutions. It is the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal. Advocacy is also seen as public support for or recommendation of a particular cause or policy. Advocacy is further defined as any action that speaks in favour of, recommends, argues for a cause, supports or defends, or pleads on behalf of others. Advocacy is a means of achieving equity and social justice through the empowerment of disadvantaged groups including people with disabilities so that they activity participate and are directly included in decision making processes affecting their lives. Advocacy is also a process of Supporting and enabling people to:

- i. Express their views and concerns
- ii. access information and services
- iii. Defend and promote their rights and responsibilities
- iv. Explore choices and options

Advocacy involves getting the government, business, school or some other large institutions to correct an unfair or harmful situation affecting people in community. The situation could be resolved through persuasion, by compromise or through political or legal action.

In summary, advocacy means

- active promotion of a cause or principle
- actions that lead to a selected goal
- possible strategy or ways to approach a problem
- Is not a direct service
- Do not necessarily involve confrontation or conflict

## Aims of Advocacy

The basic aims of advocacy includes among others to ensure that people especially those who are most vulnerable in society are able to

- i. Have their voices heard on issues that are important to them
- ii. Defend and safeguard their rights
- iii. Have their views and wishes genuinely considered when decisions are being made about their lives.

Advocacy can be most useful in situation where you find it difficult to make your views and when you need other people to listen to your so as to take your views into account.

Altmanet al (1994) noted that the basic components of advocacy includes.

- Survival skills for advocates
- Recognizing allies
- Identifying opponents and resistance
- Encouraging involvement of potential opponent and allies
- Developing a plan for advocacy.

As supported by the UN convention on Rights of person with disabilities (CRPD) with particular focus on article 8, advocacy is to challenge barriers to inclusion and improve policy, environmental and attitudinal factors so that people with disabilities are fully supported, enabled, included and empowered to participate fully on an equal basis in society.

## Forms of Advocacy

There are many forms of advocacy which includes.

- social justice advocacy
- Lobbying where direct approach is made to legislators or an issue which plays a significant role in modern politics.
- Budget advocacy
- Bureaucratic advocacy
- Express and issue advocacy
- Health advocacy
- Ideological advocacy
- Interest groups advocacy
- Legislative advocacy
- Special Education advocacy with focus on educational Rights of the students with disabilities.

Advocacy for inclusive education is a process whereby groups of concerned stake holders come together with the aim of influencing the government policy to create or increase opportunities for successful inclusion of children with disabilities in regular education classroom.

### **Politics of Advocacy of Inclusive Education in Nigeria**

Advocacy for inclusive education in Nigeria has not witnessed adequate prominence, as it is in the developed world. This could be largely attributed to the nature of politics surrounding it. Nigeria has signed and ratified the UN Convention on Rights of persons with Disabilities Article 24 of which provide that all schools must be inclusive of and accessible to all children including those with disabilities. The Autism care and support initiative (ACSI) in conjunction with National Universities Commission organized a conference on the 5<sup>th</sup> of March, 2015 which focused on the training of special education teachers and professionals. ACSI is an organization set up to solve the problem of non-availability of access to early, inclusive education and intervention. This organization has championed the course of the children with Autism and Down syndrome to be given equal opportunity in the educational system to learn in the same environment with normal children. Other advocacy groups such as the Albino children, the Deaf and Dumb children as well as the lame children has groups but not much is usually heard from them with regards to advocating for their inclusion in the mainstream of education with every other children. Despite the domestication of international conventions, successful governments in Nigeria failed to encourage advocacy for inclusive education. Politics has formed the main reasons behind low advocacy of inclusive education in Nigeria. Most states and local governments in Nigeria do not have the presence of inclusive education and therefore cannot encourage its advocacy. In addition, there are many other challenges to inclusive education in Nigeria.

### **Challenges of Inclusive Education and its Advocacy in Nigeria**

Inclusive education entails that; there should be homogeneity of children with disabilities and children without any form of disabilities in the learning process. In other words, both children should be allowed to learn in this same environment. Making the above effective in Nigeria has been challenged seriously by certain factors. In addition creating awareness of the agenda has also been limited by several factors. According to Eskay and Oboegbulum(2013) some numbers of challenges that have been treating the implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria are as follows:

1. Inadequate plans for the identifications of children with special learning disabilities
2. Most special needs schools are located in urban centers
3. Parents lack adequate information and guidance on available special education services
4. Begging for aims seems to be a lucrative business among adults with disabilities and children with disabilities and children with special needs as they even run away from rehabilitation centers
5. Lack of adequate provision for the maintenance and education centres.

6. Parents are not even able to provide for the education of normal children even under the Universal Basic Education.
7. Government has no definite strategy to search for and identify children not attending school whether normal or disabled.

Other challenges to inclusive education in Nigeria includes the following

Government policies on inclusive education in Nigeria have only reached initiation level and no actual implementation. Corollary to the above is the fact that inclusive education in Nigeria lack adequate legislation. According to Ejiogu (2015) the Nigerian Constitution of 1999 makes no direct reference to inclusive education and it merely mandates government to direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels (chapter 11, section 18 (1)) and chapter IV sections (33-46) mandates the protection of human rights while section 15 of chapter II which prohibits discrimination fails to expressly mention disability as a basis of discrimination. Another challenge is that individuals and groups are not lending their voices well in terms of advocacy for inclusive education. The initiation and implementation of policies on inclusive education needs to be lobbied. This is better done by advocates, to draw the attention of the government to the condition of inclusive education in Nigeria.

Stigmatization of the disabled children is a big challenge to inclusive education in Nigeria. This stigmatization does not affect only the children but also the parents and other members of the family. They prefer keeping their disabled children indoors or taking them to grandparents in the villages to avoid the ridicule from the society. When in the same class or learning environment with normal children the disabled face constant ridicule from the normal children. This makes them uncomfortable and chooses to remain out of schools. Naming of schools after the type of disabilities is a further stigmatization. According to Adetoro (2014) sometimes, schools are named after particular disability to further stigmatise whoever attends such schools such “schools for the blind”, schools for the Deaf and dumb, schools for the handicapped.

The culture of most ethnic groups in Nigeria limits exposing some disabled children in the society to mingle with normal children. It is a taboo for some to sit in the same classroom with normal children. Their presence in a school is enough for parents of normal children to withdraw their wards from such school especially in private schools. The proprietors will not admit the disabled child in the same class with normal child so as not to lose money. Another challenge is that the policy on inclusive education in Nigeria is only at the federal level and implemented by only few states. Other levels of government have not domesticated the policies to be implemented at their levels. As a result of the above, the operations of schools that need to absorb the children with disabilities are done without taking into considerations what the regulations specified.

Inadequate funding of education generally by the federal government of Nigeria has resulted into obvious neglect of inclusive education. Sambo and Gambo (2015) noted that lack of adequate funding has

created problems for school administrators to effectively carry their administration duties well. The paucity of fund has affected education generally and inclusive education in particulars. Poor Economy and parental background affects funding of inclusive education as it is capital intensive which cannot be left alone for either the government or the parents/guardians of the children with disabilities. But most parents are very poor to the extent that they cannot afford to send their disabled children to school. For example, the cost of purchasing wheel-chair, Braille, speech signs, hearing aids, artificial limbs, crutches etc are high. This has in no small measure challenged inclusive education in Nigeria.

Corollary to the above is inadequate provision of instructional materials for the disabled children. Even when these are provided, it is difficult to use them in the same classroom with children who are not disabled.

**None availability of data:** The demography of the disabled children to be included in the schools is not known. It becomes difficult to make appropriate plan for inclusive education. Sambo and Gambo (2015) noted that government has not come up with an accurate number of those in need of special education funding. In other words lack of accurate data on the number of children with disabilities aggravated the situation of inclusive education in Nigeria There is the problem of the gifted children being in the same class with children having low learning ability. The idea of inclusive education is for both impaired and normal children to be grouped in the same learning classroom. This is a problem for both the teacher and the learner. The method of teaching will be difficult to select. The gifted and the fast learners will see the slow learners as drawing them back in their learning. There will be disillusion among the learners both gifted, average and the children with disabilities.

Lack of trained teachers as professionals in the area of special education is a problem to inclusive education in Nigeria. People are not interested in specializing on special education because teachers in other fields tend to look down on them. They are even stigmatized by calling their names such as the Dumb and Deaf teacher, the blind teacher, the wheel chair teacher as if they are physically challenged themselves. This makes the discipline unattractive to new comers.

Apart from lack of trained teachers, inclusive education requires the services of other professionals such trained nurses, psychologists, therapist among others who are supposed to be closed to the disabled. Some cultural and religious practices limits the implementation of inclusive education policies. Some cultures and religions practices disallow the disabled child to sit and learn together with children who do not have disability. Most schools are located very far away from the homes of the children with disabilities. For example, a child who is blind or crippled needs to be aided to walk to the class. So when the distant is too far, it becomes a problem. This limits inclusive education.

Another important challenge to inclusive education is the inherent contradiction created in the general education policy in Nigeria. The government has established some schools at the primary, secondary and college of education level as special schools. There is the school of the gifted children at Abuja, College of

Education (Special) Ilesha, and school of the Blinds etc. This has negated the philosophy behind inclusive education, which advocates the provision of equal access to education irrespective of any form of barrier. Also, it will be another segregation policy to give free education opportunity to only the children with disabilities. It is actually a difficult decision to make on this policy by the government. Arising from the above challenges it is obvious that inclusive education in Nigeria has not been implemented to appreciable level, notwithstanding the efforts so far made by the government and other stakeholders advocating for inclusive education.

### **Prospects of Inclusive Education in Nigeria**

Presently, plethora of challenges stands before inclusive education in Nigeria. That is not enough to conclude that inclusive education cannot grow beyond the level it is now in Nigeria. It is a process that required developmental approach. The area of inclusive education in Nigeria is presently attracting vigorous researches from experts through conferences, workshops, publications of position and policy papers as well as empirical research papers. Some of the works on inclusive education are comparative in nature with inclusive education in other countries. This has exposed the nature and stage of inclusive education in Nigeria to advocacy groups, government, civil society organizations and other stakeholders. This portents positive trends in inclusive education for Nigeria.

The growth of technology and the globalised nature of the world entitle that no country can afford to lag behind while other nations are moving steadily and fast too. Nigeria will key into the bandwagon of the nations that are on the fast lane in terms of educational development. The democratic practice that Nigeria presently enjoys makes the future of inclusive education in Nigeria to be bright. Democracy will enhance legislation and implementation of laws that will boast inclusive education. It also awakens the various arms of government to perform their various duties as it concerns inclusive education in Nigeria. Nigeria is presently canvassing for human capital development as panacea for national development. This is more or less education that embraces every fact of the country including inclusive education.

Advocates for inclusive education have started sprouting from different angles such autism group, Albino, Sickle cell anemia. The advocates are ready to take up the issues of inclusive education to the level it requires. Again, advocates as lawyers who are prepared to take up any impending litigations or lobby are also coming up gradually. Religions organizations and missionary groups are making themselves readily available to take up the challenges on inclusive education in Nigeria. Big churches are ready to make funds available especially for inclusive education in Nigeria especially if their attention is drawn to the plight of inclusive education.

More importantly is the fact that Nigeria belongs to UN, UNECSO and other international bodies that have signed difference memorandum, conventions, charters and agreements on inclusive education policy

Nigeria will not like to be in the black book of nations that are not honouring the various agreements signed by way of implementations.

## **Conclusion**

It is obvious that presently in Nigeria, inclusive education is still very much below expectation especially when compared with some advanced countries. This is so because it is navigating between theory and practice. The policy instruments are there but there are no implementation mechanisms. The government has not expended its political will and power to lift inclusive education up in Nigeria. It is the position of this paper that except there is a turn around by the government and other stakeholders with regards to education in general and inclusive education in particular, the future of inclusive education looks bleak.

## **Recommendations**

Arising from the identified challenges to inclusive education, the following are recommended to solve the problems of inclusive education in Nigeria.

1. Government and stakeholders should discourage any form of politics associated with advocacy and advocacy of inclusive education devoid of politics should be encouraged. This will awaken all stakeholders to rise up to their responsibilities.
2. Experts and specialist in the field of special education should be encouraged to attend refresh courses. New specialist should also be encouraged into the area. This could be done through agency like TETFUND to give special attention and recognition to persons who want to do researches and higher degrees in special education.
3. Government should summon political will in terms of funding and provision of logistics to support inclusive education. Teaching aids and individualized instruments needed to be made available to the disabled children. This will encourage them to go to school.
4. Public enlightenment and orientation should be embarked upon from time to time to solve the problems of culture, language, stigmatization and religious beliefs.
5. The Federal Government should domesticate and encourage state government to do likewise the various laws, and agreements reach at the international level. This will enhance implementation at all levels.
6. Federal government should realize and encourage state government to know that education is a right to all children and not privilege and so should be treated as such. By this, the rights of every child whether disabled or normal should be protected including allowing a child access to education.

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