PROMOTING THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION IN NIGERIA THROUGH INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT
The right to education is part of social and cultural rights stipulated in the document: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Also, international conventions, regional human rights instruments as well as the Nigerian Constitution recognise and guarantee the right to education for everyone without any form of discrimination. Despite the extant conventions and constitutions that guarantee the right to education, this right has not been considerably promoted in Nigeria's primary and secondary schools. The reason is that some school systems and practices restrict equal right and access to education. Besides, teachers have not been properly trained and empowered to apply effective pedagogical methods in practice with a view to promoting this right. Against this background, this paper proposes inclusive education as a way of promoting the right to education in Nigeria. The findings show that inclusive education is a key factor in the actualization of the right to education. This is because inclusive education entails an enhancement of equal opportunity and access to quality education by identifying and eliminating all barriers that restricted children's participation in the educative process. This study therefore recommends, among other things, that schools should be more inclusive in their practices and that teachers should be adequately supported by government to work in inclusive ways by exposing them to in-service professional training and development as well as improving their working conditions.

KEY WORDS: right, education, inclusive education, promotion

1. INTRODUCTION

Education can be defined as "all activities by which a human group transmits to its descendants a body of knowledge and skills and a moral code which enable the group to subsist." (Beiter, 2005, p. 19). Simply put, it is "a transmission of knowledge, worth-while skills, values, beliefs, etc of a culture." (Okolo, 1989, p. 16). This transmission of knowledge, skill and values to individuals helps develop human potentialities and consolidate human dignity and freedom necessary for authentic self-realization.

There is a slogan that education is the best legacy any nation can bequeath to its citizenry. This is so particularly because no meaningful development can take place without education. Sound and qualitative education stimulates critical thinking which begets creativity (innovative and invention) that, in turn, drives development. In recognition of the indispensability of education for human, socio-economic and techno-scientific development, the right to education is specified in the document: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Again, International conventions such as The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Convention on the Rights of the Child and UNESCO Convention against Discrimination recognise and guarantee the right to education. Besides, regional human rights instruments like the European Convention on Human Rights, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights as well as the Nigerian Constitution enshrine the right to education for everyone without any form of discrimination. The essence of these provisions for the right to education is to ensure equal opportunity and access to education for all children.

However, this right has not been promoted substantially in Nigeria's primary and secondary schools. This problem raises the questions: How do we promote the right to education in Nigeria? Are teachers not adequately trained and empowered to promote this right? Are school systems, cultures and practices responsible for non-promotion of this right?

2. OBJECTIVES

This paper tries to show that inclusive education is an effective means of promoting the right to education in Nigeria. It contends that to work in inclusive ways is to promote the right to education since inclusive education entails equal opportunity and access to education for all children without any form of discrimination. The paper therefore intends to explore different components of inclusive education as means of promoting the right to education in Nigeria.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs the method of analysis, specifically conceptual analysis. This method enables the researcher to breakdown inclusive education into its components parts in order to comprehend how it could aid in promoting the right to education in Nigeria. Ome and Amam (2004, p. 59) assert that analysis "involves the method of mental division of a whole - either an actual whole or some mental construct – into its components. In this way, the parts which at first are known implicitly in their undivided unity are singled out and known explicitly." Data for this study are collected from textbooks, journal articles and internet sources.

The analysis and presentation of the findings of this research are guided by the theoretical framework of inclusive education developed by UNESCO. The broad definition of inclusive education will be analyzed and taken as a basis for formulating ways of promoting the right to education in Nigeria.

4. RESULTS

Meaning of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education can be defined as "a constantly evolving process of change and improvement within schools and the wider education system to make education more welcoming learner-friendly, and beneficial for a wide range of people" ("About EENET- What is inclusive education?," n.d.). This definition suggests that inclusive education is not a one-time event; it is a continuous process that seeks to enhance equal access and opportunity to education. Thus, it entails reviewing, restructuring and re-strategising school systems, "policies and practices so that they can respond to a diverse range of learners..." ("About EENET- What is inclusive education?," n.d.).

During Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education in 1994, it is stated that inclusive education means that:

"Schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalised areas or groups" ("UNESCO Office in Bangkok: What is Inclusive Education?," n.d.).

The broad definition of inclusive education developed by UNESCO-IBE encompasses the above definitions. According to UNESCO-IBE (2008, p. 3), "inclusive education is an ongoing process aimed at offering quality education for all while respecting diversity and the different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectation of the students and communities, eliminating all forms of discrimination." Despite various conceptions of inclusive education, two things can be characteristically drawn from the above definitions which form the basis of our discourse.

First, inclusive education is a conscious effort aimed at transforming education systems so as to eradicate all barriers that prevent students' participation in schools. These barriers may be based on gender, ethnicity, religion, social status and age as

well as psychological, intellectual and physical conditions. Secondly, given that inclusive education requires quality education for all children without any discrimination, it must cover or touch all aspects of children's life such as intellectual, moral, psychological, spiritual and social aspects.

Inclusive education, as a principle, therefore demands basically that: (i) There should be no discrimination in the process of admitting, teaching, and relating with students/pupils. (ii) Equal educational opportunity should be given to all students/pupils. (iii) School curriculum should adapt to students/pupils' needs.(iv) The views of the students/pupils are listened to and taken seriously.

How to Promote the Right to Education through Inclusive Education

1. Open and Transparent School Admissions

Inclusive education is education for all children without any form of discrimination. To ensure equal right and access to education, the process of admitting children must be open and transparent. Schools' admissions policy and criteria should be set by an education authority in accordance with international best practice. Each school should follow a non-discrimination policy in its admission process; school management should not discriminate in terms of giving admission. There should be entry requirements spelled out for all categories of prospective pupils/students. Once a child meets or fulfils the requirements, he gains admission, irrespective of his ethnicity, gender, religion, social status, educational background, et cetera. Therefore, school admissions must be open, and children must be admitted on merit to promote the right to education.

2. Recognising and Supporting Diversity

Diversity can be defined as the "characteristics that can affect the specific ways in which developmental potential and learning are realised, including cultural, linguistic, ethnic, religious and socio-economic differences" (OECD, as cited in Kefallinou (ed.), p.8, n.d.). Staff must recognise the fact students/pupils come from various cultural, ethnic, family, socio-economic and educational backgrounds. Hence, they are expected to behave differently, respond to learning differently, and hold diversity of opinions. A teacher should realise that he is dealing with different individuals with different characteristics. He has to understand his students/pupils and treat then accordingly. Therefore, inclusive education requires that pedagogical methods used in the classroom must take cognisance of the diversity of students/pupils. When Staff embraces diversity and individual differences, it will create a sense of belonging for all students/pupils, thereby promoting the right to education.

Therefore, to support diversity, more attention should be given to students/pupils who find

learning difficult or who are considered difficult to teach. There is need to change the negative attitudes and beliefs that brilliant students/pupils are 'worthy' of help, while those who find learning difficult are 'unworthy' of help because their difficulties are their own or their parents' fault. The Bible (Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version) quotation in Lk 5:31, Mt 9:12, or Mk 2: 17: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick" is apt for this context. Some pupils/students are sick academically, morally, psychologically, socially, or even spiritually. Teachers are their physicians to fix their problems. This can be achieved by giving more attention to those categories of learners.

Teachers must believe that all students/pupils are worth educating and that they can learn and, more importantly, that they (teachers) have the capacity to make a difference to students/pupils' lives. Teachers should not discriminate against students/pupils in curriculum and extra-curriculum activities on the basis of gender, ethnicity, social status, psychological and intellectual conditions, and so on. Sometimes, teachers need to make out time to deal with students with learning difficulties on one-to-one basis or in small more manageable groups in order to identify their problems and needs. For instance, a teacher may realise during a session with such student that his teaching methodology is not working for them and then go back to the drawing board to fashion out more effective methodology. The challenge could be that they are not actively engaged in class during lesson delivery.

3. Being Child Centred

Inclusive education demands that teachers should be child centred and not curriculum centred. A child centred teacher is a teacher whose teaching methods, contents and instructional materials recognise diversity of learners, individual differences and are culture oriented. He follows the spirit of the curriculum and not the letters of the curriculum. He is not like the Pharisees who were more concerned about the letters of God's laws, instead of the spirit of the laws. In the light of this, 2 Corinthians 3:6 states that the letter kills but the spirit gives life.(Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version) If teachers must promote the right to education, they must be willing and ready to modify the curriculum to suit students/pupils' needs. To modify the curriculum does not suggest to expunge what is on the syllabus or to skip some topics. By modification, I mean making small changes to it so as to improve it and make it more suitable and effective.

Let me illustrate this point with these two dynamic subjects, English and Government. In English, scheme of work from SS I to III, stative verbs may not be listed among the types/forms of verbs to be treated under the topic "verbs", but objective questions on stative verbs come out almost every year in English SSCE. Therefore, a child centred English teacher should be able to teach his students that stative verbs like 'see', 'hear',

'understand', 'believe', 'like', 'trust', 'measure', 'recognise', etc. should not be used in the progressive aspect or be in the *ing* form, except when they are used as a participle (verbal adjective), as a gerund (verbal noun), as an idiom or as a convention. Thus, it is grammatically wrong to say: I am not hearing you. I am not seeing what is on the board. Are you hearing me? Are you seeing me? Rather, students should say: I can't hear you. I can't see what is on the board; and so on.

Again, in SS II Government scheme of work, the sub-topics under the topic "Local Governments" are: meaning of local government, structure, purposes, and functions of local government, sources of revenue control and problems. However, it takes child-centeredness to give students names of local government areas and headquarters in their state during lesson, or ask the students to find them out as an assignment. Teachers therefore should not be fixated on the syllabus.

It is worth-mentioning here that teachers cannot be child centred, unless they are committed to research and development. Teachers should not be using a ten-year old lesson note or thereabouts to write lesson plans. They need to keep abreast of the current changes and latest developments in their subjects and familiarise themselves with the content and the organisational structure of Common Entrance Exam, JSSCE or SSCE.

4. Effective Communication

Communication involves the communicator (the sender) the message and the receiver. The teacher is the communicator. He organises what he intends to communicate in form of a lesson and then selects the means of communication such as his voice, facial expression, body gesticulation or movement, teaching aids, and so on. Students/pupils are the receivers who interpret the meaning of the message. Communication is never complete, unless there is feedback or response. Students/pupils respond by way of asking questions, nodding their heads, taking down notes, *et cetera* (Adeniran, 2014).

Teachers should communicate effectively by the diction or language the students/pupils can understand clearly. He should speak good English and ensure that his pronunciation is correct and loud for students/pupils to hear and understand. Effective communication promotes learners' participation in class and makes teaching and learning process meaningful. There is need to consider learners' needs and capabilities. For instance, when a teacher goes into a primary five class and begins to speak high sounding words as if he is teaching in a university, the pupils will find the lesson boring because they do not understand what the teacher is talking about. Therefore, teachers' diction must be consonant with the academic level of learners, if education is to be inclusive.

5. Advancement of All-Round Education

Teachers promote the right to education by developing all-round education. Education is all-round when it covers or touches all aspects of children's life such as intellectual, moral, psychological and spiritual. All-round education produces all-round individuals who are more attuned to the needs of our society. It enables individuals to realize themselves, develop their potentialities and live fully as worthy human beings. All-round education involves:

5.1 Psychological Development:

Psychological is the study of the mind and how it influences people's behaviour. Teachers need to be aware of the psychological or emotional trends of their students/pupils and then boost their morale through proper dialogue and reinforcement of appropriate behaviour. For instance, some students/pupils who live with their guardians may be passing through emotional stress as a result of inhuman treatment meted out to them at homes. Teachers can psych them up to face their studies by building a mutual relationship of love and understanding. When teachers show their students/pupils that they are loved and respected, they feel comfortable, secure and develop a stable personality. And when they feel comfortable and secure, they will be disposed to share their problems with their teachers.

Some other students/pupils may have come from background where they are not encouraged to speak freely with adults. When a teacher shows interest in them and by being friendly and asking them about themselves and their problems, they tend to open up and response positively. They will be motivated to listen attentively in class and earn what the teacher teaches (Adeniran, 2014). To ensure students' proper psychological development, greater emphasis should be placed on reinforcement of appropriate behaviour, rather than punishment. A good teacher must reward or praise good behaviour and accomplishments. He must not condemn but offer suggestions as corrections. A teacher should approach crises with wisdom and calmness and avoid punishing students arbitrarily. There is an Igbo adage that there is no place you see a fenced house without a lizard. So, there may be recalcitrant students/pupils who exhibit unruly behaviour. If they must be punished, the punishment should be proportionate to the offence committed.

Punishment is meant to serve as a deterrent to others, and not as a vendetta against a student/pupil. Once punishment goes beyond corrective measure, students/pupils tend to construe it as hatred. The result is that the students will hate the teacher and the subject. They may be calm during lessons but they are not attentive; they are just marking time. Students/pupils can also develop good relationship by engaging them gainfully in extra-curricular activities like literacy and debating, young farmers clubs, science, cultural and other societies.

5.2.   Intellectual, Moral and Spiritual Development

Education has two aspects: The first is related to external and worldly education, sometimes referred to as 'book knowledge'. The second aspect is related to human values. In this sense, education etymologically comes from the Latin word 'educare' which means "to bring out human values which are within." The second aspect suggests that education serves as a route not only to intellectual development, but also to the moral and spiritual development of individuals.

It is regrettable that western education we pursue today focuses on intellectual and scientific knowledge while moral education is put at the back burner. This is why educational institutions keep churning out graduates that are morally bankrupt, despite the claim on their certificates that they are worthy in character and in learning. To offer all-round education which inclusive education demands, we need to review and improve our moral instruction as a subject. It cannot be rightly gainsaid that the incorporation of moral instruction in the secondary school curriculum has not made significant impacts on the moral values of our society. The reason is that the so called moral instruction focuses too much on religion and pays little attention to morality. It is religious in character. It is based on doctrine and faith aimed at deepening the understanding of catechism and propagating religious dogma.

But religion and morality are not the same. Though religion is concerned about the morality of human conduct, "morality is not dependent on religion nor is it based on religion." (Omeregbe, 1993, p. 8). It is not necessary for one to be religious in order to be moral. There are many people who profess no religious beliefs and belong to no religion but they have "a high sense of morality and live exemplary lives of high moral standard." (Omeregbe, 1993, p. 7). Christian religion, for instance, has absolute moral codes known as God's laws or Ten Commandments which are absolute, that is, they must be obeyed in all circumstances and at all cost. In other words, it eliminates choice.

Now, when individuals are in moral dilemma or conflicting situations, they will be morally handicapped to make moral decisions. For instance, when a student of NAU has to choose between showing a *Boko Haram* terrorist the VC's office and taking the risk of losing his life. If he refuses to show the terrorist the VC's office, he will be shot. But if he shows him the office, it will be bombed and many lives may be lost. Again, when a doctor has to choose between treating a person suffering from a contagious disease and refusing to treat him. If he treats him, he is likely to contact it, but if he refuses, then the person may die. Only morally educated person can address these moral dilemmas.

If students are to be morally educated, they must have some understanding of the moral frameworks that will guide them in making moral decisions when they are faced with the moral ambiguities of life. This is possible through moral philosophy/ethics.

6.   Empowerment of Teachers/Staff

There is no gain saying the fact that staff cannot effectively promote the right to education through inclusive education unless they are empowered. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, 'empower' means to make (someone) stronger and more confident. In this paper, it means increasing teachers' confidence to include all learners in their classes. There is need to empower teachers through in-service professional training and development such as workshops and conferences to address the diversity of learners. It is said that *"Nemo dat quod non habet"* ("no one gives what he doesn't have"). Teachers can only be more inclusive in their practices if they are engaged in training that will equip them with skills, knowledge and understanding needed to respond effectively to increasing diversity of students.

During the UNESCO-IBE meeting held in Paris, France in 2014, experts that attended the meeting agreed that inclusive education, among other things, is "a strategy to prepare all learners for 21st century globalized society" (UNESCO-IBE, as cited in Kefallinou (ed.), p.8, n.d.). They recommended that in order to facilitate the development of inclusive education systems, different regions and countries should create a global knowledge base that will "provide opportunities for knowledge sharing and learning" (UNESCO-IBE, as cited in Kefallinou (ed.), p.8, n.d.) and "strengthen the practice-policy research connections" (UNESCO-IBE, as cited in Kefallinou (ed.), p.8, n.d.).

UNESCO's Advocacy Guide (2013, pp.5-6) clearly states that:

> Educating teachers for inclusive education means reconceptualising the roles, attitudes and competencies of student teachers to prepare them to diversify their teaching methods, to redefine the relationship between teachers and to empower teachers as co-developers of the curriculum.

It will be difficult to implement inclusive education if teachers are not sufficiently well prepared and supported to work in inclusive ways. According to Rouse, (2008, p. 12) developing effective inclusive education practice is "not only about extending teachers' knowledge, but it is also about encouraging them to do things differently and getting them to reconsider their attitudes and beliefs. In other words, it should be about 'knowing', 'doing' and 'believing.'" I have argued elsewhere that knowledge of goodness does not automatically follow by doing the good. The knower must believe and be convinced that he needs to do good and nothing but good. Accordingly, teachers may acquire the necessary skills and knowledge and still fail to apply them in classes if they feel that their working

conditions make the application of such skills and knowledge unwarranted. Currently, a high percentage of teachers is approaching retirement age and many have recently retired, but, unfortunately, government is not employing new teachers to replace them. Consequently, schools are understaffed and teachers are overworked. This adversely affects staff's commitment to inclusive education.

SUGGESTIONS

Teachers need to be encouraged and motivated to implement their new skills and knowledge in their teaching methodology. Therefore, in-service professional development is indispensable for empowerment of teachers and their capacity to meet more diverse students' needs. Beyond this, there is need to improve teachers' working conditions through promotion, improved salaries, reduction of workload and provision of incentives.

Besides, the education authority needs to develop syllabus on moral philosophy or ethics to supplement what moral instructors teach during moral instructions. It is worthy of note that the knowledge of what it means to be good does automatically follow by good actions. Students may learn virtue and still fail to live virtuous life. Like immoral lives, moral lives are infectious. Students must be shown that acquired moral values are practicable through trainers' exemplary lives of high moral standards. In this way, students would be deeply convinced and disposed to love the good and do the good.

CONCLUSION

We have demonstrated that the right to education can be promoted through inclusive education. This is because inclusive education is an approach that embraces diversity and students' differences and promotes equal opportunities for all children. Thus, to promote the right to education through inclusive practices, all hands must be on deck. Staff should recognise and support students' diversity, be child-centred, communicate effectively in class and be committed to all-round development of students. The education authority must also support staff. They should be provided with opportunities and resources that develop, strengthen and renew their skills, knowledge and abilities to enable them prepare effectively and respond to the increasing diversity of today's classrooms and provide high-quality education for all students. The working conditions of staff should also be improved for effective teaching and learning. It is also recommended that the incorporation of ethics in moral instruction syllabus will go a long way towards producing men of character with high academic excellence that will be more attuned to the needs of our society.

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