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## Teacher Training in Inclusive Education

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**PROF. E. J. IBEAGHA**

*Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education,  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka,  
Anambra State.*

And

**CHINYERE M. ULOCHUKWU**

*Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education,  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka,  
Anambra State.*

### **Abstract**

*The aim of the paper was to promote a more spontaneous and socially committed form of teacher training in relation to inclusive education. In order to develop the skills, experience and confidence to be inclusive of all children, teachers need to learn about and practice inclusive education during pre-service and in-service training, and they need to be given opportunities for continuing professional development throughout their careers not just attending training courses only. It is vital that teachers are learning about, experiencing and practicing inclusive approaches to teaching and learning from day one of (and throughout) their professional development. It was recommended that the curriculum should be modifying teaching techniques continually to accommodate learners with special needs and different learning style so as to achieve the needed change.*

**Keywords:** Inclusive, Education, Disabilities, Teacher training

Every educational system in the world needs to improve and work towards the best results. Savolainen (2009) notes that teachers play essential roles in quality education and quotes McKinsey and Company who said that ‘the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers’ (p. 16). This means that the quality of the teacher contributes more to learner achievement than any other factor, including class size, class composition, or background. The need for teachers that are equipped to meet the needs of all learners becomes apparent to provide not only equal opportunities for all, but also education for an inclusive society. Knowledge, beliefs

and values of the teacher are brought to bear in creating an effective learning environment for pupils, making the teacher a critical influence in education for inclusion and the development of the inclusive school (Murungi, 2015).

With social justice at the international forefront of educational agenda, the inclusion of students with exceptionalities in the general education classrooms has propelled a worldwide movement. Inclusive education is a major challenge facing educational systems around the world and some developing countries like Nigeria. Inclusive education is thought as an approach to serving children with disabilities within general education settings. Okwudire and Okechukwu cited in Sambo and Gambo (2015) saw inclusive education as the progressive increase in the participation of students, in lessening of their exclusion from the cultures, curricula, and communities of local schools. Sambo and Gambo (2015) further explained that with inclusive education, all students in a school despite their strength or weakness in any area become part of the school community. It is a place where children are seen as equal members of the classroom without being marginalized. Inclusive education amounts to equal opportunities for all learners to learn and succeed in the society (Murungi, 2015).

Basically, inclusive education simply means when all students regardless of any challenges that they may have are placed in general education classes appropriate for their age that are in their own community schools to receive high quality instruction, interventions, and supports that enable them to meet success in the core-curriculum. The driving rationale is to make all students feel welcomed, adequately challenged and supported in their efforts.

There is a growing recognition that including students with disabilities in general education provides them with the opportunity to learn in a natural and stimulating environment, this may also lead to increased acceptance and appreciation of differences (Ajuwon, 2008). Inclusive education is globally recognized as a philosophy for attaining equity, justice and equality in education for all children, especially those who have been excluded from education for the reason of disabilities (Christopher & Elizabeth, 2012 cited in Omede & Momoh, 2016). The aim of inclusive education therefore is to eliminate social exclusion arising from attitudes and responses to diversity in race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender and ability.

### **Components of Inclusive Education**

There are five components of inclusive education as proposed by Halvorsen and Neary (2009):

- 1) The classrooms must accommodate same aged children, with no special classes except for enrichment activities for all students.
- 2) The core curriculum must be adapted well in planning and curriculum development and participation of all learners must be solicited and encouraged.
- 3) The teachers must employ best instructional strategies and best practices in education to enhance learning of all learners.
- 4) Promotion of student responsibility for learning.
- 5) Necessary training of the teachers on inclusive practices.

Depeller and Harvey (2004) suggested that for successful inclusion favourable attitudes have to be corroborated by structures that support cooperation and problem solving amongst teachers, parents and students. These key characteristics

### **Teacher Training for Inclusive Education**

Teacher development is the bedrock of any initiative for developing inclusive practices in schools. Educational training institutions are charged with the responsibility of providing professional training for teachers in various disciplines. In Nigeria, Faculties/Institutes of Education are responsible for teacher training for all levels of schooling. This training consists of a background of general education as well as professional preparation that includes the psychology, emotional and philosophical condition of children or adolescent, the principles and techniques of teaching and the historical foundations of education. According to Anwe (2012) teacher education is a veritable tool for the successful implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria. Acquisition of effective teaching competencies begins in teacher education programs. These programs are responsible for providing basic skills to teachers that will assist them in meeting their students' academic and social needs. In inclusive education, there are three important educational aspects that every teacher needs to be inclusive identified as:

- *Equality which stands for promoting the same opportunities for all*
- *Quality which means offering functional and meaningful learning and*
- *Equity which refers to responding to special educational needs.*

In order to develop the skills, experience and confidence to be inclusive of all children, teachers need to learn about and practise inclusive education during pre-service and in-service training, and they need to be given opportunities for continuing professional development throughout their careers not just attending one-shot training courses only. Teacher education has to embrace inclusive education in order to accommodate the learning environment and curriculum that meet the needs of all learners.

### **Pre-Service Training for Teachers in Inclusive Education**

The pre-service training prepares the prospective teacher to participate effectively in the educational system and usually involves exposure to various concepts of teaching and learning and contents of diverse subject areas depending on the area of specialization of each teacher. During this period, it is important that teachers in training learn about inclusive education from day one of their training, so that focusing on quality and inclusive teaching and learning is seen as a natural part of every teacher's job. Cardona (2009) notes that concentration on initial teacher education 'would seem to provide the best means to create a new generation of teachers who will ensure the successful implementation of inclusive policies and practices' (p. 35). Pre-service training is intended to equip teachers with attitudes, knowledge, and skills on the concept and principles of inclusive education. It will enable them to appreciate and effectively perform their role as a teacher for children with special needs in an inclusive setting (Smith & Tyler, 2011). It is evident that many university teacher preparation programs in elementary education are allocating minimal coursework to issues related

to disabilities and may not be adequately preparing their graduates for entry into today's inclusive schools (Allday, Neilsen-Gatti & Hudson, 2013).

Allday et al (2013) subsequently identified four global categories needed to prepare successful elementary education teachers for inclusive education which should be inculcated in the teachers' curriculum during this pre-service training. These categories were equally maintained by findings of Idol (2006), who noted that practicing teachers recommended the need for more professional development in each of the categories. They are:

1. Teachers should possess a basic knowledge of the characteristics of students with disabilities and an understanding of their role and responsibility in the special education process.
2. Teachers must understand how to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of students with various abilities.
3. Effective classroom management strategies to promote academic engagement and pro-social behavior while minimizing disruptions to the learning environment.
4. Elementary teachers need to learn strategies for effective communication and collaboration with special education teachers.

These can be summarized as follows:

- a) Characteristics of disabilities as it relates to special education
- b) Differentiation of instruction/inclusive practices,
- c) Classroom and behavior management, and
- d) Collaboration

### **Characteristics of Disabilities**

During teacher preparation programs, students can learn basic characteristics of various disabilities, their role in the processes by which to assist students who may have a disability, and most importantly a positive attitude in working with students with disabilities and their families. Teachers must have a basic understanding of the special education process to begin to differentiate between an educational disability and a student needing more or different instruction. Moreover, since many students with disabilities are educated in the general education classroom, teachers need to have a grasp of the characteristics of each disability group to gain a general understanding of the disability as well as the inclusive practices to use in their classrooms to serve students successfully (Allday et al, 2013). In the curricula, courses with descriptions focusing on the special education components of disabilities as well as child development should be included in the pre-service training programs.

### **Differentiation of Instruction**

Effective teachers should possess the ability to differentiate a lesson so that all students have access to the curriculum. The task of differentiation is not easily mastered and requires opportunities to practice. Teacher preparation programs can provide students with opportunities to learn how to differentiate their lessons to meet the needs of various abilities. Courses related to differentiation can include theoretical and practical application of how the content can be modified or adapted for all students (Allday et al,

2013). Teachers need the ability to alter instructions to meet student needs, interests, and abilities. Modifications and adaptations to the curriculum must be made to increase the likelihood of all students being successful. Differentiation of instruction and universal design for learning (UDL) are terms that are used when referring to these changes.

### **Classroom and Behaviour Management**

Adequate pre-service instruction in classroom management practices is crucial as a result of the growing need to meet the requirements of inclusive practices for students with behavioral difficulties (Oliver & Reschly, 2010). During teacher preparation, students can learn practical principles for teaching classroom expectations effectively and ways to address challenging student behavior to minimize classroom disruptions (Allday et al, 2012). Communicating high expectations, utilizing behavior-specific praise, and implementing antecedent and reinforcement strategies have found to be critical skills for successful classroom management. Management of student behaviour or any course related to classroom management should be among the required courses in pre-service training.

### **Collaboration**

Teaching has been taking from a solitary enterprise to one in which general and special educators are mutually involved and collaboration is at the forefront. Effective collaboration between general and special education teachers requires that all teachers work together to meet the diverse needs of students with and at risk of disabilities (Arthaud, Aram, Breck, Doelling, & Bushrow, 2007). During basic teacher preparation programs, basic skills of how and when to collaborate, write and implement lesson plans, provide interventions, as well as carry out differentiated instruction can be learnt. In as much as collaboration is needed, it should be minimal and only when necessary, classroom activities normally should be carried out by the general teacher. How and when to collaborate with the special education teachers is of utmost importance, because one of the aims of inclusive education is to minimize the feeling of being different among the students. This Curriculum capturing collaborative strategies involving students in pre-service training, general and special education teacher as well as their supervising teachers is expected among the courses offered during the pre-service training.

### **In-Service Training for Teachers in Inclusive Education**

It is crucial that teachers already teaching be provided with skills and techniques for inclusive education. Hence, these teachers need training about inclusive principles and the basics of disability to ensure that their attitudes and approaches do not prevent disabled children from gaining equal access to the curriculum. It is equally vital for existing teachers to participate in ongoing professional development that helps them to constantly reflect on their attitudes and performances and strive to improve the inclusiveness of their schools. Such professional development can include formal in-service training courses and ongoing learning opportunities, such as having access to

relevant reading materials and being given the time for individual study, participating in action research initiatives and engaging in teacher discussion groups. Offering one-off or stand alone courses on inclusive education is not sufficient. Training should be ongoing, provided in short courses (or modules) and should take place within a local school environment preferably their own school. This equips them for and updates their knowledge and skills in meeting the needs and aspirations of a diverse school population.

However, it costs more to provide in-service courses (both in terms of the cost of the training and the costs to schools when staff are taken away from core duties to attend courses). Because of the cost and logistical implications, such programmes are usually not available to every teacher in a given country. Also, in-service training on inclusive education may be met with resistance from teachers, in a way that may not happen when introducing concepts of inclusive education through the core pre-service teacher education curriculum. Experienced teachers may feel they know their jobs and resent any implication that they have significant gaps in their competence. They may not welcome the perceived new expectation that they will teach students from difficult circumstances or with disabilities. They may also be concerned that they will be asked to take on what they perceive to be extra duties once they embrace inclusive education. This can be mitigated by provision of stipends and allowances to the teachers undergoing in-service training.

### **Teaching Practice**

The importance of teaching practice is echoed by all. Teachers' school-based learning should be organized as a planned curriculum with carefully designed diverse learning experiences to develop appropriate expertise, rather than largely incidental learning occurring through participation in the teaching work of the school. Teacher education programmes need to consider practical placements in schools and classrooms where inclusion has been embraced as a philosophy and in practice, where there is also enough appropriate support to ensure a successful experience for pre-service teachers. Jordan et al. (2009) stressed the need for practicum experiences in opportunities to examine and foster their beliefs as well as learn about how to address the needs of diversity in the classroom abounds; a dimension which is neither usually or carefully addressed in teacher education programmes. Loreman (2010) writes that teacher preparation institutions might consider building elements of what constitutes an inclusive environment into their criteria for selecting a practicum school. Teaching practice should therefore be designed and well-focused to meet professional competences and standards.

### **Conclusion**

Primarily, inclusive education has come to stay and is being implemented in Nigeria. Schools need restructuring, teachers prepared in pre-service training and educators need in-service training for a successful inclusive school to become a possibility. Pre-service teacher training on inclusive education is likely to meet with less resistance or uncertainty, and result in more flexible and creative teachers entering the profession. It

is vital that teachers are learning about, experiencing and practicing inclusive approaches to teaching and learning from day one of (and throughout) their professional development.

### **Recommendations**

- 1) The inclusive education program should begin with the primary schools education as the formation level for formal behavioral development.
- 2) A special directorate of inclusive education should be created in federal, state ministries of education charged with the responsibilities of planning, strategizing, implementation, and supervision of inclusive education activities in Nigerian schools, carrying-out of follow-up studies that track pre-service teachers and assess as well as evaluate their inclusive practices when they start their full-time teaching after employment.
- 3) Initial training and retraining of general and special education teachers to partake in the principles and practices of inclusive education must be put in place prior to their utilization.
- 4) The curriculum should be modifying teaching techniques continually to accommodate learners with special needs and different learning style so as to achieve the needed change.

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