INCLUSIVE EDUCATION : A CATALYST FOR POVERTY ALLEVIATION AMONG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Most Nigerians struggle daily to make ends meet, these hardship becomes consistent in order to provide basic needs of life for themselves and their family. Inability to meet these needs put them at risk of poverty. People with disabilities are not exempted from this situation. Individuals with disabilities are more vulnerable to poverty based on the fact that they face discrimination, stigma, ridicule, marginalization, and rejection which predispose them to various form of exclusion in the society. Majority of people with disabilities are deprived access to basic education despite the fact that education of learners with special needs is free at elementary level. People with disabilities engaged in menial job due to lack of formal education and inability to secure better lucrative job. This paper provides insight into the concepts of Inclusive education benefits and obstacles within the Nigeria context. Inclusive education is designed to educate, empower, provide job opportunities and alleviate poverty that defined people with disabilities in most developing countries, including Nigeria. To tackle this ugly situation, there is need for more concerted efforts in ensuring quality inclusive education to alleviate extreme poverty among millions of people with disability. Through full implementation of inclusive education and collaboration of stakeholders, these menace can be drastically reduced.

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Introduction

Poverty has become a household name among individuals with disabilities, most people with disability are unable to meet the basic needs of life and the unfavourable socioeconomic environment has been a militating factor against their survival. World Health Organization (2020) revealed that about 29 million Nigerian out of 195 million are living with disabilities and most of them are living below the poverty level of $1.90 per day and could not meet the basic needs of life. There is no doubt that people with disabilities continue to live in poverty based on the fact that they experience various forms of exclusion from full and active participation in social, economic, educational, and political engagements (Yu, Qi & To, 2020). Several efforts have been made to address the issues of social and educational exclusion.

William (2021) defines poverty as a state of being poor and lacking the basic needs of life such as food, health, education, clothes, and shelter. This situation arises when people and community could not meet standard of living because they lack the resources and income. According to World bank (2020) global poverty is the number of people worldwide who live on less than $2.15 per day. An individual who live less than that is classified as being extremely poor. This situation is more prevalent in developing countries where citizen are less productive as a result of unemployment, lack of education and poor economic growth and development.

According to World Poverty Clock (2023), Nigeria is rated as the world capital of poverty with 71 million of the citizen living in extreme poverty and 133 million are are categorized multidimensional poor (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Despite the fact that both present and past government in Nigeria lay more emphasis on reducing poverty among the citizens of the country. Over the years, both military and civilian government have established various agencies such as Family Support Programme, Poverty Alleviation Programme, National Agency for Poverty Alleviation Programme, N-Skills, among others (Oladejo, 2019). All these programmes were launch to tackle poverty and improved standard of living for the general public, including people with disabilities. However, it is unfortunate that the issue of poverty continue to threaten the entire population with increased suffering and intimidation. According to Abdullahi (2019), most poverty alleviation programmes do not produce impact on people with disability because it did not specifically targeted on inclusion basis. Data of people with disabilities and their specific needs are unavailable. It become obstacle to meet their needs due to lack of inclusion

The global community is concerned about the alarming rate of poverty among people with disabilities in developing countries, particularly Nigeria, the international development target of the sustainable development goal (UN, 2015) aimed at ensuring full commitment to reduce poverty and accelerate economic, social and human development. Poverty is a global challenge needs to be tackled in all forms and dimensions considering its monumental effects on human development. For global community to succeed in eradication or alleviating poverty, people with disabilities who are the most vulnerable should be adequately involved and engaged. The educational policy of inclusive education must be adopted and implemented as best practice to fight poverty among people with disabilities in low and middle income county like Nigeria. According to Smith (2007), inclusive education aimed at establishing a society where both learners with special needs and those without special need receive a comprehensive educational training that enable them to be independent, have access to good job and maintain meaningful progress to the overall development of the country.

Educational Provision for People with Disabilities

The call for quality, equitable and inclusive educational as best practice educational provision by the global community is based on the right and privilege to provide free, quality and accessible education for all irrespective of gender, sex, ethnic, race, disabilities, among other. Plethora of studies have revealed the relationship that exist between education and poverty alleviation. Recent literature has shown that provision of quality and inclusive education in secondary schools and tertiary institutions reduce poverty

among individuals with disabilities due to access to employment and acquisition of skills which provide opportunity for gainful employment.

Hofmareher (2021) conducted a study to determine the relationship that exist between education and poverty reduction. The findings revealed that with increase level of education, poverty was reduced among participants. The author stressed the fact that any additional year of education reduce poverty and enable people to live above poverty line. In a study conducted by Lupeja and Gubo (2017) to determine the nexus between education attainment of secondary school students and poverty alleviation in Tanzania. The study revealed that secondary school graduates are able to get employed after graduation from high school and earn a living which enable them to escape poverty. This implies that education has a positive significant effect on poverty reduction among the secondary school students.

Concept of Inclusive Education

According to UNICEF (2017), Inclusive education refers to an educational programme that provide an "All" which welcomes all and sundry and include all learners irrespective of their nature and provide adequate support to learn whatever they are capable of learning where they are. This implies that diverse needs such as curriculum modification, adequate facilities, school building, enabling environment and mobility are appropriate for all learners It further stressed that an inclusive education prohibit discrimination, eliminate exclusion of all vulnerable, including individuals with disabilities and provide access to free primary and secondary with adequate learning resources. Inclusive education is an approach that provides equal level of opportunity to explore and give thoughtful meaning to existence. Ashi (2010) posited that inclusive education focuses on capacity building and breaking the cycle of poverty and social discrimination which disability has inflicted on people with disabilities in the society. Adoption of inclusive education by the global community to ensure justice and eliminate inequalities lend credence to the fact that inclusive education aimed at providing the social, emotional. Economical and Psychological balance for individuals with disabilities.

Shyman (2013) observed that for any inclusive educational system to be effective, the fundamental provision of an inclusive settings must be integrated into the culture of the school community. A successful inclusive programme must be anchored on four main features. Firstly, All students with special needs have the right and capability to be educated in inclusive classrooms for at least some part of the day. Secondly, Inclusion of students with and without special needs in the same classroom without any discrimination or intimidation to the integrity of the education provided to any student and does mutually benefit both students with and without special needs. Thirdly, adequate provision should be put in place to ensure that a learner with special need is fully accommodated through modification of the curriculum content in order to be accessible to the learner. Lastly, each learner is privilege to learn at his/her pace without ridicule. Assessment lay emphasis on behavioural changes and focus on acquisition of skills for future independence.

Obi and Ashi (2016) highlighted the rationale behind inclusive education. The authors noted that learners in an inclusive settings are expected to have access to : broader educational opportunity for all people with disabilities and disadvantaged ones; fostering innovative programmes for maximum skills acquisition and ensuring access to all learning and facilities that would benefit learners

Benefits of Inclusive Education

The importance of inclusive education cannot be undermined when considering the enormous benefits that learners with disabilities derived from it. Some of these benefits are explained below.

1. Inclusive education provides learners with disabilities the opportunity to break the cycle of poverty by providing the necessary tools to fight and overcome poverty (Howgego, Miles and Mayers, 2014).

Children with disabilities acquire necessary skills and knowledge germane to their potentials and help them develop mental skills that prepares them for their future career. Exposure to learning and experience guarantee better employment opportunity and serves as insurance against poverty. Most adults who are educated with highly paid salary are exonerated from poverty and live an independent life even at retirement without being on social support.

According to Groce and Kent (2017), education is the key to poverty reduction among adults with disability. People with disability are predisposed to poverty and could deprived them of quality and equitable education, to acquire necessary intellectual and social skills and get job that match their academic status with higher income. People with disabilities without basic education are at risk of poverty in their adult and in developing country like Nigeria, most adults live in extreme poverty without any social support.

2. Inclusive education ensures access to quality education through effective pedagogue and learning as well as adequate provision for the number of learners in the classroom. This education system serves as a catalyst for improved quality of education for all students. The advantages are enormous. Good quality inclusive education produce highly competent potential graduates who are ready to clinch high paying job and display their high level skills acquired during their in service training. Access to quality education will increase productivity and create more employment opportunities and invariably reduce poverty among people with disability. Inclusive education provide more access to a lucrative job and adequate income which helps in tackling poverty, inequality and social exclusion like their non disabled counterpart who have easy access to job and improved standard living (Dugarova, 2015).

3. Inclusive education promote equality and integrity consciousness and eliminates negative attitudes towards people with disabilities. Discrimination is consequence of lack of awareness , misinformation and misconception about nature of people with disabilities. The African communities hold the belief that disability arise from evil deeds and disobedience to supreme being and anyone that infringe these rules or commandment will face the wrath of the deity. A lot of prejudice, stereotype stigma and discrimination are associated with people with disabilities in our society. The issue can be simply arrested by providing an inclusive educational programme wheres children with disabilities have the privilege to associate with their non disabled counterpart at an early stage of life. When people without disability are in the same educational settings with people with disabilities, there is high tendency of eliminating discrimination and stigma. Inclusive education brings every learners together from basic educational provision to University level. Learning together fosters understanding and cooperation which is carried from one generation to another. Both children with disability and without disability learn and make career choice together, becoming the next generation of law-makers doctors,teachers lawyers, teachers and administrators. Poverty among people with disabilities can can be reduced to the minimum level when they receive training through inclusive educational provision.

Challenges of Inclusive Education in Nigeria

 The practice of inclusive education within the context of Nigeria had been a challenging one based on many factors . Most of these factors ranges from attitudinal barriers to lack of funds, These include

1. Negative attitudes of stakeholders is one of the militating factors towards inclusive education practise in Nigeria. Some parents feel uncomfortable seeing their wards receiving instructions in the same classroom with children with disabilities. Others stakeholders that may exhibit these negative behaviour teachers, itinerant officer, non-teaching staff and student. Social skills are developed through positive interaction among peers. When children with disabilities are excluded from attending school in order to avoid shame of having a child with disability. Negative attitudes can also impact on children's self-confidence and own sense of identity. Negative attitudes breeds neglect and various vices among students.On academic issues, parents are concerned that their child's academic performance may get

worse when learning together with children with special needs while parents of children with disability are concerned about bullying and ridicule their children will experience in an inclusive settings (Deluca. Pinilla, Roncaccio and Kent 2016)

2. Structural, physical and environmental barrier

Physical, structural and environmental barriers do stand as obstacles for children with disabilities from full inclusion in classroom.s These include difficult terrain and poor quality of access roads, distances that children have to travel long distance to school and with learner with physical disability this will post a challenge to them and prevent them from attending school. This phenomenon is even worse in riverine area where transportation is a huge barrier to overcome. Students are supposed to have access to schools within their respective community in compliance with the education for all principle. Filmer (2008) noted that learners in developing countries encounter challenges of mobility which prevent them access to education

3. Funding of Inclusive education

Funding of inclusive education in most developing countries where implementation has begun had been underfunded According to EFA Global monitoring reports (2018) investment is growing by only 1% per year on average since 2009. This development calls for attention and concern on hoe the global agenda of sustainable development goal for inclusive education could be met before 2030. Lack of adequate funding and resources is a critical barrier to achieve inclusive education (Okoli, 2014).

4. Teachers expertise and curriculum modification

Lack expertise and adequate training on curriculum modification is a key factor to inadequate curriculum design by educational officers saddled with the responsibilities. Standard curriculum design help teachers to navigate a well-design approach for effective pedagogue. Most teachers in inclusive setting lack this skills and are unable to meet the needs of different learners within the classroom. According to Ozoji, Unachukwu and Kolo (2016), modern educational practice demands teachers effectiveness in understanding the curriculum and how to modify or adapt it to meet the basic needs of differential programme and learning style of learners in the classroom. In-service trainee are expected to be conversant with the ideal pedagogue to be adapted, breaking down content to match individual needs of learners is important in inclusive setting in order to attain the overall goal of inclusive education. Okoli (2014) observed that most institution for training teachers lack appropriate modules in initials teaches education for general teachers in order to understand proper approach to curriculum modification.

Tackling poverty through Inclusive Education

Practice of inclusive education had been identified as an indispensable tool in tackling poverty among people with disabilities. The strength of equal opportunity and eliminating barriers have provided equal access which invariably provide equal participation. The following are ways by which inclusive education can tackle poverty.

1. Inclusive education leaves no one behind. When people with disabilities are encourage to acquire knowledge and skill through free and accessible education provision they become more conscious of the need to be education and obtain skills that will qualify them for job opportunity. Groce and Kent (2017) highlighted the importance of basic educational programme and secondary school education in poverty reduction among people with disability.

2. Adoption of Vocational and Technical Education. Ojimba (2012) posited that VTE should be a compulsory component of inclusive education as it prepares youth and adults, particularly persons with

disability for employment in recognition of occupation. Access to technical training provides skills and employment opportunity to eradicate poverty in life. According to Ajuwon (2012), one of the fundamental ways by which inclusive education can provide positive outcome for learners with disabilities is through prioritization of vocational training for people with disabilities

3. Transformation of regular school to inclusive education system. It is obvious that poverty is more rampant in rural area that urban in Nigeria. Most people with disabilities who dwell in rural areas encounter more difficulties in accessing educational than those in urban. According to World Bank (2017), majority of people with disabilities (children, youth and adults) lack access to education, health delivery services, potable water and employment opportunity, consequently they wallow in extreme poverty

4. Adequate funding of inclusive education: Funding of inclusive education should be a concerted efforts. From the Nigeria contexts, partnership and collaboration is needed among stakeholders to achieve provision of quality education. Lawal and Isah (2022) recommended that for successful implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria, Nigeria government needs to provide adequate funds to address the basic issues of lack of facilities, training and re-training of teachers

Conclusion

Access to quality inclusive education is an indispensable catalyst to poverty alleviation among people with disabilities. This is evidence from reviewed of relevant literature. When people with disability have access to free, quality and inclusive education within their reach, they become aware of their inherent right to be educated and participate in developmental agenda that will transform their lives. Inclusive education promote access to social interaction, quality education, skill acquisition, self discovery and poverty alleviation among people with disabilities who face myriads of challenges, ranging from discrimination to extreme poverty. There is no doubt that illiteracy is one of the contributing factors to extreme poverty among people with disability in Nigeria.

Recommendations

1. Inclusive education should be adequately funded. Programmes that target skill acquisition should be given priority coupled with quality academic task.

2. Education programme for people with disability at foundation and secondary school level should be free and incentive can be provided as motivation to allow them stay in school.

3. Government should ensure that policy on inclusive education are implemented and lip services Should not be paid to inclusive education will provide access to all without leaving anyone behind.

4. Vocational training in inclusive education should be mandatory. Educational programme that provide access to employment is key to poverty reduction.

5. Social support service for children with disabilities should be encouraged to serve as motivation to children with disabilities. This strategy will no doubt keep them in school with regular attendance.

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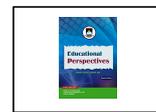
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