

STRENGTHENING SPECIAL LEARNING NEEDS EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA THROUGH TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT

Duruh Benjamin Chukwuemeka

Department of Educational Foundations, Federal College of Education,
Zaria, NIGERIA.

ask4duben@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The Federal Government of Nigeria has been committed towards the provision of education to her citizenry. The special learning needs education is a very critical area of interest which often appears to be neglected or overshadowed by the greater interest devoted to the conventional system of education. This category of learners no doubt constitutes a very significant proportion of the nation's population. Hence, any education provision meant for them should be realistic purposeful and functional and in every way qualitative. This paper focused on strengthening of special learning needs education in Nigeria, through total quality management. It recommends a review of the existing educational policy statements on special learning needs education in order to inject total quality management elements into it. More so, the need to ensure active participation of the target groups in issues affecting their education, evolvement and involvement of the beneficiaries who have excelled in life in the quality assurance monitoring team and making every critical stakeholder assume responsibility for the success of this programme were stressed amongst others.

Keywords: Learning needs, National Policy on Education, Total Quality, Management and Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Education is widely accepted as an inevitable tool for socio-economic, cultural and political emancipation of an individual and by extension any given society. It is indeed an instrument par-excellence. With this realization, countries of the of world have continued to invest into education in order to improve the lots of their citizens. This effort seeks to cater for the educational needs of both the normal and the exceptional individuals. The Nigerian government has since demonstrated her resolve towards addressing the educational needs of the special learners through policy formulations and establishment of special learning needs educational facilities in the country. To this end, what are required are more practical efforts to ensure sustained success in this area. This paper focused on strengthening special learning need education programmes in Nigeria through total quality management.

The Concept of Special Learning Needs Education

Special education also referred to as special learning needs education has been defined by various authors. However, the most widely cited definition is that by Kirk in Obani (1996) which sees Special Education as: "those aspects of education which apply to handicapped and gifted children, and which comprise modification of, or additions to school practices intended for the ordinary child, practices that are unique, uncommon of unusual quality, and in particular are in addition to the organization and instructional procedures used with the majority of children". Kirks' definitions emphasizes that Special Education is nothing other

than modifications albeit unique and uncommon, sometimes, which are merely additions to the usual organizations, and instructional procedures used with the majority of children.

Smith and Neisworth in Obani (1996) proffered another interesting definition of Special Education that “it is concerned with the arrangement of educational variable leading to the prevention, reduction or elimination of those conditions that produce significant defects in academic, communicative, locomotive or adjustive functioning of children”. This view is reiterated more succinctly by Care and Maddison (1978) that Special Education is the education that is so skilfully adapted to a child’s learning characteristics that it enables it to succeed. In this case, skillful adaptation is that operative plank on which the definition rests. However, the official definition of Special Education in Nigeria as contained in the National Policy on Education (NPE: 1981) Section 8 (53 and 254) states that, Special Education is the education of children and adults who have different sorts of handicaps; blindness, partial sightedness, deafness, hard of hearing, mental retardation, social maladjustment, physical handicap, etc, due to circumstances of birth, inheritance, social position, mental and physical health patterns, or accident in later life. There are also the specially gifted children who are intellectually precocious and find themselves insufficiently challenged by the programmes of the normal school and who may take to stubbornness and apathy in resistance of it (NPE, 1981).

The document (NPE) further states that “Government had already directed that all children including the gifted as well as those with physical, mental and learning difficulties, must be provided for under the education system. Historically, the deaf, the blind, and the mentally retarded have been at the centre of these provisions. However, the UNESCO report in Obani (1996) reveals that in the last twenty years, inclusive concepts such as Special Education Needs or Special Needs Education have emerged. These new concepts have widened the ambit of those to be considered for Special Educational Provision to include the following persons:-

- I. Those experiencing difficulties in school whether temporary or permanent;
- II. Those lacking interest and motivation in learning;
- III. Those living on the streets (street children);
- IV. Those living too far from school;
- V. Those living in severe poverty conditions;
- VI. Those who are victims of war and armed conflicts;
- VII. Those simply not attending school;

With all these considerations, it would seem that every education is becoming ordinary. From this also can be gleaned the vision and mission of Special Education generally, which briefly entails:-

- a. Extending the right to education to every individual no matter the circumstances of the individuals’ life and existence.
- b. To providing education that is adequate and appropriate to every individuals’ needs and circumstances and within the inclusive or responsive regular school systems.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN MODERN TIMES

In the world over powerful social groups are in the process of categorizing and classifying weaker social groups and treating them unequally and differently. The explanations which these powerful groups offer for their actions differ from country to country and the ideologies

supporting systems of categorization also differ. For instance, according to Tomlison (1982:5), a child in his country, Britain is given Special Education if he has a learning difficult, which calls for special attention. Learning difficulty, according to the British Education Bill(1989:43) cited in Muhammed (1989) can be diagnosed if “He (the child) suffers from a disability which either prevents or hinders him from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided in Schools.

One of the purposes and objectives of Special Education, as contained in the National Policy is among others; to provide adequate education for all handicapped children and adults in order that they may fully play their roles in the development of the nation. A crucial factor in Special education is that, unlike other parts of the education system, the children concerned cannot speak for themselves, and despite the growth of parental pressure groups, parents still have little influence on Special Education processes. The clients of Special Education have the least say and influence over what happens to them, and are subjects to most pressure, repercussions, and coercion of any group in the education system. For education systems, as Archer (1979:6) observes, normally develop their characteristics because of the goals pursued by the people who control them and who have vested interests in their development. They change because of debates, arguments and struggles. In fact, Archer goes on to observe that. “Changes in the form, organization and provision of Special Education are not the result of mysterious process of evolution, nor are they benevolent adaptation to new social requirements. Change happens because certain people want it to happen and can impose their views and goals on others.

The above assertion is true to the Nigerian context as it is to Britain to which Archer refers to. Thus, we find in Nigeria that changes in the Law relating to Special Education in statutory categories in separate or integrated provision occur as a result of deliberate decisions by people who have power to make the decisions. In short, Special Education Schemes as we have them in Nigeria today are Sub-systems of the wider normal education system, which has been deliberately developed to cater for children who are categorized out of the ordinary education offered to the majority of children in the society. However, we need to remember that, the processes of Special Education are very complex as are most social processes. Theory and practice in Special Education are informed by a variety of discipline and approaches some of which Tomlison (1982:182) List to include as Medical, Psychological, educational, administrative and technical, but as a sociologist he stresses that the sociological input, which is currently very limited needs to be adopted for good results to be achieved.

ADAPTATIONS OF GENERAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION

Curriculum adaptations are indispensable for the realistic and meaningful provision of education for the exceptional children. Affirming this, Obanya (1988) states that if exceptional children were exposed only to the educational experiences and materials used with normal children in regular schools, there would be no need for special education. Over and above the experiences and materials developed for all children including the exceptional, adaptations in forms of special methods, materials and equipment, must be employed, utilizing the senses of hearing, touch, smell and even taste. He noted that most of the adaptations necessary for exceptional children stem from an effort to prove comparable experiences which can be achieved by using their limited residual ability. The need for Special Education in this connection is that adaptation in the form of factual experiences and verbal explanations must be provided in certain instances.

The need for Special Education is particularly highlighted in the special methods of making adaptations in various subjects. Abel (1959) analyses the general curriculum and provides extensive suggestion on how adoptions of the curriculum in the practice of Special Education can make it relevant to the blind. His suggestions are as follows:-

In teaching Science, Social Studies, or other subject matter which requires demonstrations or laboratory experiments, it is important that the teacher;

- a. Prepares the child for the experience by sufficient previous orientation.
- b. Arranges for a sighted child to interpret parts of the experience which were not clear and;
- c. Evaluates what the blind child desired from the experience.

In subject involving Mathematics, number manipulation should be preceded by adequate number experience and an understanding of number concepts. In subjects such as Home Economics, Arts and Crafts and Industrial Education, considerable instruction and careful selection of equipment are important. Care must be taken not to develop over-dependence.

Physical Education for the blind has been emphasized. Residential schools have demonstrated that a great deal can be done in this area. Careful orientation techniques can alleviate teachers fear for their safety. Obanya (1988) maintains that adaptations of the curriculum in Special Education are by no means limited to the blind child. Special Education also needs to adapt curriculum for children with multiple impairment. Although children with the problem of hearing impairment should be encouraged to attend regular schools with the provision of specialist teachers to help the children individually, the special need of Special Education in the process of educating the children cannot be overemphasized.

The training of the hearing impaired in the sense of hearing aids, auditory training, lip-reading and special correction would require the adaptations or modifications of the curriculum to permit these additional services. The need for Special Education to provide these additional services has been recognized for many years. Education of the mentally retarded for instance generally favours a different development curriculum rather than a remedial adaptation of a normal curriculum for the curriculum. Social and vocational competences, broadly conceived are the major goals for such as programme. Obanya (1988) indicates that the need for Special Education is immensely felt in the adaptations of the general curriculum in physical education for exceptional children. The need for Special Education can be appreciated from a programme of adapted physical education curriculum which will help the exceptional individual increase his strength, range of movement, improve coordination and endurance. Any programme of education that can achieve all these issues can be seen to be rendering an invaluable service.

SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

Special Education Services for Children with special hearing needs are varied. Some are comprehensive, others limited, some are private and others are not so effective. Some services seem to overlap each others, and in others there seem to be a serious gap. Adima, Abang, Nwanbor, and Ogbue (1988) indicate that educational services for children with Special Needs include the following; special residential schools, special day schools, self confined classes, part-time special classes, integrated programme, resource room services, itinerant teachers services and regular schools, he identifies other related services to include transportation, medical, counselling services and psychological services.

Adima et al (1988) further explain that in special schools, the children learn under the direction of a specifically trained staff, so designed to assist children specific learning problems. Children with handicaps which are relatively severe are served in special schools. These include the Orthopaedically handicapped, emotionally disturbed and multiple handicapped children. Special schools for the disabled could be either day or residential. In either case, the children with Special Needs are excluded from other children for education purposes. Adima et al (1988) remark that in recent years, society's response to the handicapped has began to shift away from exclusion and move toward acceptance and integration. There must be serious reasons before placing any child in a residential school. Children who may come under this caption are those children with extensive medical or health problems. Hence, the arrangement eliminates the problem of transportation due to the tedious problems of having to care for the disabled child.

The self-contained classrooms are an alternative to special schools. Most writers have argued as to why self-contained classrooms are of importance. The stigma associated with special class or self-contained classroom placement and the consequent rejection of special class as a preferred educational plan, have been well documented, for one thing, it promotes labeling, an indelible stamp, which is no badge of distinction. However, these cannot be substitutes by any other arrangement as the children can only function adequately in such an environment. Similarly, the hospital and home bound services are meant for the cases of these children who due to the nature of their temporary or permanent disabilities must be confined either in a hospital or at a home. These children cannot be excluded from education for no fault of their own. Thus, in some industrialized countries, electronic advancement aids to a more integrated educational experience. For example, in some cities in the United States of American there are television and telephone services available to such children. With these aids, they are able to view and communicate with their classmates. These no doubt reduce the isolation aspect in the lives.

More so, main streaming has been a major trend in education of handicapped children in recent years. It refers to the instructional social integration of handicapped and non-handicapped children in a regular school setting under these arrangement children with learning difficulties have their needs met by special education experts in the regular school arrangement, without having to be labeled blind, deaf, mentally, retarded or such like labels. Under this arrangement, teachers in the regular classrooms adapt instructional material and procedures which are beneficial to each individual child in the classroom according to his or her academic level.

STRENGTHENING QUALITY IN SPECIAL LEARNING NEEDS EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA

The concept quality in education refers to some clearly established standard or degree of excellence of an educational system in meeting up with its desired goals. Wakjissa and Ahupa (2008) indicate that quality education covers the curriculum content instructional strategies, assessment and evaluation, policies and procedures which determine the achievement/performance of learners. In their view, Ugodulunwa and Mustapha (2005) conceive quality as fitness of purpose that entails the ability of an educational programme to fulfil its purpose. They continued that quality education would include factors such as well articulated national goals, well planned curriculum, assessment procedures and instruments, capacity to process examination data, how to utilize assessment results and quality of students enrolled.

Furthermore, other quality inputs would include the selection and calibre of personnel involved, instructional facilities, funds, school morale, supervision procedures and instructional leadership. Thus, quality education does not just occur in a vacuum, it requires a very strong political will on the part of any responsive government. Hence, there must be a very clear evidence of realistic commitment towards taking the education plans through the required processes in order to achieve the expected goals. The Special Learning needs education no doubt is an area that covets more serious attention on the part of government and other stakeholders. There has been much concern expressed by well meaning citizens and this target group in particular over the nature of planning, availability, accessibility, affordability and total quality base of the education offered to the special learners. There is the feeling by some critics that the special learning needs education in Nigeria is still not accorded the same level of attention given to the conventional educational system. Thus, much of what is done in this area is a replication of the existing practices.

In this regards, the questions that should agitate our minds are as follows: Who does what in the special learning needs education programme? What is the level of synergy that exists among the critical stakeholders of the programme? How adequate and relevant are the existing physical infrastructural facilities and material meant for the special learning needs? What are the monitoring mechanisms put in place for the programme? How is the programme funded? Are there well trained and qualified personnel in adequate number involved in this programme? Are the target groups themselves adequately involved in this programme and curriculum design meant for them? to what extent is the general public involved and responsive to the special learning needs education in Nigeria? To ensure a more relevant, realistic and viable special learning needs education in Nigeria, it is obvious the entrenchment of a total quality management principles into the programme are inevitable.

Total Quality Management in Special Learning Needs Education in Nigeria

The concepts quality control and quality assurance convey different meanings which often may not be obvious to a layman. While quality control is seen as a retroactive action used to determine the quality of a product or a system after processing and during which wastage would have occurred and what is left is to reject and/or battle with rectification. It is however, better more rewarding and less costly to take steps to prevent failure and wastage before they happen. Hence, the need for quality assurance which is preventive rather than corrective (Cole 1996). The effectiveness and efficiency of any management is revealed in its consistent ability to produce quality products and satisfy clients and other stakeholders. Its tasks, therefore, include identifying and solving any problem that militates against quality service delivery. Such a problem solving approach will be directed at taking preventive measures against wastage. Hence, prevention is therefore the basis of quality Assurance or Total quality management (West-Burnham, 1994).

Consequently, in any effort to provide quality education to special learning needs in Nigeria, there are pertinent questions to be raised such as; who should ensure quality? Who should be held accountable? And with what consequences, it could be observed that the issue of educational accountability has not been given a serious attention in Nigeria school system. This situation may be responsible for the myriads of problems bedeviling the entire system. Total quality management works to ensure that every aspect of the organization and every employee is focused all the time in meeting and then exceeding customer requirements. Therefore, a very realistic total quality management in special learning needs education must

- I. place emphasis on prevention of wastage,
- II. involvement of students, teachers, head teachers, inspectors and parents in the quality process;

- III. securing the right attitude and commitment of all concerned to quality so that quality becomes the concern of all and sundry.

The process of Total Quality Management (TQM) can be an internal arrangement by each Special School to prevent Wastage rather than rectify it. It recognizes the autonomy of the school to handle its own affairs. The main features of TQM according to Cole(1996) include, Prevention of errors rather than detection and correction, right first time as the motto, total commitment by Management to TQM policy, Meeting requirements, quality as defined by the customers, each employee is a customer to every other employee, quality implies continuous improvement, review and measure performance including all quality processes as well as the delivery of the final product or service and quality is everyone's responsibility.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to strengthen the special learning needs education programme in Nigeria through total quality management efforts the following recommendations are made;

1. There is an urgent need to review the existing educational policy statements as it affect the special learning needs in Nigeria in order to inject into it total quality management elements.
2. The provision of special learning needs education in Nigeria should be considered as a legitimate need in the educational quest of the citizenry and not just an afterthought. Therefore, equal attention and commitment should be given to Special Learning needs education as any other.
3. There is an urgent need to encourage and enhance the active involvement and participation of the target group in the issues affecting their education as direct beneficiaries of the system.
4. There is the need to evolve and involve the products of this educational arrangement who have excelled in life, as members of the quality assurance monitoring team.
5. More effort should be placed on the provision of an inclusive School facility for categories of special and normal learners as this arrangement fosters mutual understanding and respect for one another.
6. Every stakeholder of the special learning needs education programme, should be made to understand that they have responsibility for the success of this programmed in Nigeria.
7. The process of checks and balances should be worked out by Managers of this programme. The idea is to ensure that no stone is left unturned towards ensuring quality education for the special learning needs in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

Since the different categories of special learning needs in Nigeria constitute a significant proportion of the Nations populace, any education programme meant for them should be thoughtful, realistic and purposeful. Therefore, the quality base of such programme should not be sacrificed on the altar of sentiments and stigmatization. This expectation therefore underscores the need for application of total quality management in this sector of our educational system.

REFERENCES

- Abel, G.L. (1959). The Education of Blind Children. In *Education of Exceptional children and Youths* Englewood Cliffs, Prentice and Hall, inc.
- Adima, E., Abang, T., Nwanbor, D. & Ogbue, E. (1988). *Fundamentals of Special Education*. Ibadan, Heinemann Educational Books, Nigeria.
- Archer, M.S. (1979) *The Social Origin of Education system*. London. Sage.
- Care, C. & Maddison, C. (1978). *A survey of recent Research in Special education*. Windsor Berks NFER.
- Cole, G.A. (1996) *Management Theory and Practice*. London DP Publications.
- Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) *National Policy on Education*, Lagos Federal Government Press.
- Obani, T.C. (1996). The Vision and Mission of Education in Nigeria. *A Lead paper presented at the National Commission for colleges of Education (NCCE) National Conference NTI, Kaduna 1st – 5th July*.
- Obanya, P. (1988) *Fundamentals of Special Education*. Ibadan. Heinemann.
- Ugodulunwa, C.A. & Mustapha, A.Y. (2005) *.Strategies for quality assurance in educational assessment at the University level*. Paper presented at the Curriculum Organization of Nigeria (CON).
- Tomlison, S. (1982). *A sociology of Special Education*. London; Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Wakjissa, S. & Ahupa, V.I (2008). Reforms and implications for quality education in Nigeria. *Nigeria Journal of Sociology of Education (NJSE)*, ii (2) 195 – 200.
- West-Burnham, J. (1994) Inspection, evaluation and quality assurance. In T. Bush and J. West-Burnham (eds). *The Principles of Educational Management*, pp. 157-176. Harlow: Longman.