

Education of the Special Target Groups: A Panacea for Achieving the Transformation Agenda in Nigeria

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Okai Amodu¹, Padung Leonard Dokbisa², Rukaiya Sa'ad Ahmed³

^{1,2}Foundation Department, Federal College of Education, Pankshin, Plateau State, Nigeria; ³Department of Educational Foundations And Curriculum, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

¹Okai.amodu@yahoo.com, ²Leonardpadung@yahoo.com,

³rukaiyasaad@gmail.com

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Abstract - Education remains central in Nigerians social and economic development. The role of education has been adequately acknowledged in the literature. Education serves as the springboard for social and economic change. All who have meditated on the act of governing man-kind have been convinced that the fate of empire depends on the education of the youths. The National Policy on education accent that education is the right of every child and should be brought close to the environment of the child. This paper "Education of the special target groups, a panacea for achieving the transformation agenda in Nigeria x-ray the concept of special target group, literacy for special target groups: Prisoners, Sub-cultural group, Children with special need. It went ahead to identify some challenges' in the education of the special target group and recommendations made for improvement. Some recommendation include establishment of specialized training schools to train special teachers for the special target group, well developed curriculum for prison inmates etc and further conclude that government should provide qualitative education for all citizens.

Keywords: Education, special target groups, transformation agenda, in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Education involves the acquisition of certain skills and reinforces the need for adequate stimulation of young children, it exposes their senses to a series of stimulae, which will enhance and grow the mental capacity of someone, to achieve a set of, or a specific objective. It has the ability of ensuring that individuals possess the capabilities to prosper and work themselves out of poverty; to understand the dangers

of environmental degradation and the necessity to preserve the habitat many live off and seek shelter in; to understand how to protect themselves against infectious diseases. With ever increasing rate of poverty, which is partly attributable to deficient education systems, a cycle of poverty exacerbating educational deficiency becomes prominent. Repositioning the education system to develop a population that can lead and act as entrepreneurs in a global market is necessary [1].

Education is a hub on which every nations development revolved, it is also of a remarkably beneficial in terms of the institutionalization and promotion of culturally inclusive behaviour. In March 1990, the World Conference on Education for all in Jomtien Thailand adopted the World Declaration on Education for all which stated that everyone has a right to education [2]. If every citizen most contributes to national development it therefore means that all citizens must be given equal access to education irrespective of status, circumstanced of birth, place of residence and religion affiliation. This concept of the necessity of access to education is echoed in the UNESCO [2] education for all monitoring report, which aims to ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. This paper is primarily concerned with the special target group which includes; prisoners, sub-cultural groups, children with special needs in Nigeria. The paper relies on information obtained from journals, textbooks, newspapers as well as published reports from governments, multinational and non-governmental organizations.

Concept of special target groups

Special target groups are broadly understood as those whose educational needs are not sufficiently addressed by regular or mainstream literacy provisions [3]. Certain children and youth in our society face certain unique circumstances that prevent them or make their attempt to realize their potential more difficult. These groups of children and youth suffer from societal indifference and or neglect. This is reflected educationally in the fact that many if not all of these children and youth graduate out of both primary and secondary school plagued with reading difficulties and subsequent subject performance based on reading skills. Learning problems, generally we know, can be due to environmental, cultural, economic deprivation, religious beliefs etc. These groups of children and youth are not legally included in the group referred to as handicapped, and so they are not covered by any legislation. They however, should be recognized as needing inclusion in the population of exceptional children i.e. those in need of special services to realize their potentials. These children and their families are referred to by a number of different terms including educationally, culturally and socially disadvantaged; culturally deprived and culturally different [4].

Literacy for special target groups: prisoners

Prisons all over the globe are meant to be corrective, the basic purpose is to reform, rehabilitates and help inmates with their re-integration back into the society after their prison terms, though this aspect has been conspicuously missing from the Nigerian's system. This is in line with the view of Jude Ememe [5], the founder of Joy Bringers Foundations (JBE) Nigeria who says that, the Nigerian's prisons needed the character training schooling more than any other nation [5].

Education in the prison is unique compared to other educational provisions in formal school settings. The learning conditions in prison may not offer the necessary requirement for successful learning; this may be due to the following:

1. The activities in the prison environment does not free one's mind or create an environment for creativity and does not encourage reflective thinking.
2. In most Nigerian prisons, reasons for involvement in education activities are often separated from its real aim. Education is understood to the wardens

as a means to keep the inmate busy, to add something to the inmate's file for an eventual early release.

3. Professionals close to inmate underestimate the potential of education [6].

Many Nigerian inmates in the prison are still awaiting trial for years and have no determined sentence (status), this situation usually affects education of such inmates. More so, Nigerian government has no clear agenda for prison education. This is why our prisons do not have classes, training workshops and large libraries that will facilitate inmate education. Most of the desired prerequisite for meaningful education is usually not met by learning opportunities in prison, such as inmate motivation, free choice of schooling environment, teachers, curriculum content, and a context supportive of positive self-esteem.

The lack of organised curriculum for inmates' education in Nigerian prisons can be attributed to the fact that, most education activities are organised by volunteers (private individuals and NGOs) who have "the permission" to organise some educational activities in the prison. In Nigerian prison, there are no reliable data on inmate education, in prisons where information on educational activities is available; it is concerned only with the quality and description of proposed activities. Quantitative approaches, encouragement for learners, the inmate's advancement and the quest for education are mentioned. The incessant movement of inmates from one prison to another also results in a lack of participation and success, as well as absence of proper assessment of learning opportunities [6].

Literacy for special target groups: sub-cultural groups.

Iliya et al [4], states that the term sub-cultural refers to the practices associated with a particular group in a society. In Nigeria there are many communities that qualify to be referred to as sub-cultural groups. In this paper, sub-cultural groups refer to people who are going through these conditions:

- a. Communities that are too far away from learned societies.
- b. Communities that still live by primitive farming, hunting and other outdated economic activities.
- c. Communities that lack good access records, current vision and hope due to their disadvantage exposure with civilized societies.

- d. Communities that still exist and live in misery and in their world of primitive magic.

Most, if not all sub-cultural groups in Nigeria lives by farming, hunting and other primitive economic activities. Particularly, the people exist in relatively small groups or communities and have little contact with other civilized communities. However, some states have more sub-cultural group than others. The reason is obvious because of the uneven nature of road and other infrastructural development across the country. There are many communities in Nigeria that qualify to be referred to as sub-cultural. Examples of these communities are the:

- a. Tayin community and Garam community in Plateau State.
- b. Sukur community in Adamawa State.
- c. Koma community in Mambila Plateau of Taraba State.
- d. Goza community in Borno State.
- e. Wuran community in Niger State.

There are many other sub-cultural groups in Nigeria, whose unique culture practice deprives their children of modern educational opportunities. Education is an instrument per excellence for national growth and transformation. In the light of this, government concerted effort to educate all school age children should be embraced by all. Regrettably, there exist in Nigeria some categories of potential learners (children) who for cultural and geographical reasons cannot benefit from the regular educational programme arranged by government. The barriers for them to access the programs go from isolation and lack of transportation, other emotional barriers are lack of confidence, fear of failure and not understanding that their own skill can be improved sometimes the barrier for sub-cultural groups can be the way the society had constructed their image [7].

Literacy for special target groups: children with special needs

Gallagher in Iliya et al. [4], states that special education consists of the modification of or addition to school practices intended for the regular school child. In essence it involves practices that are unique, uncommon and of particular unusual quality in addition to the organization and instructional procedures used with the majority of children. It can therefore be said that special education is made up of instructions designed to respond to unique

characteristics of children who have needs that cannot be made by the standard, ordinary or regular school curriculum.

The term education of special target group refers to children who have learning impediment that makes it knotty for them to learn or access education like most children of the same age. Most of children with special learning needs do not have access to quality education. Some of these children branded as “Disabled”, remain in special schools without standards for education quality or remain at home without access to learning opportunities. The children who are integrated in mainstream schools often remain excluded from learning because schools, administrators, teachers and parents are not equipped to support their needs [8]. Children’s special needs are widely viewed as irreversible “defects” instead of viewing them as unique individual characteristics that creates an opportunity or starting point for quality learning and instruction. The Nigerian government have continued to reach out to children with special needs through policy initiatives, legislation, reforms to improve the quality of teaching/learning, yet this initiative require a major shift in the collective perspective on special learning needs and a new approach to instruction that encourages differentiated teaching-learning methodologies.

Children will have special learning needs of various kinds during their education. Help need to be provided in their ordinary, mainstream early education setting or school sometimes with the help of outside specialist. Children make progress at different rates and have different ways in which they learn best. When planning lessons base on the curriculum, teachers have to take this into account by looking carefully at how to organize their lessons, books and materials. The teacher need to choose suitable ways of helping the child to learn from a range of activities often describe as differentiating methodologies [9].

Challenges:

Insufficient man-power to cater for the children special needs, that is those teachers specially train to impact knowledge to the learners are not sufficient enough.

Lack of government blue-print on sub-cultural group education, which could have been fashion out by government. Such a blue-print should take cognisance there rural life, economic activities and social deprivation. This is necessary because accessibility has always been a problem of

government effort to reach all people due to its awesome financial implication.

There is no well developed curriculum by the government to educate the prisoners. Because it has been noticed that, most of the education given to the inmates are usually sponsored by the Non-governmental Agencies (NGO's) like the Joy Bringer Foundations (JBF) in Ikoyi Prisons.

Lack of qualified teachers to teach the prison inmates because it has been noticed that most of the teachers are the prison inmates themselves as practice in the Ikoyi prisons [10].

Lack of organize Structure/facilities for inmates education. These structure/facilities include buildings, instructional materials, textbooks and writing materials which aid learning in the school.

Insufficient special schools to cater for the need of children with special needs e.g physically handicap, mentally retarded, gifted and talented, learning disabilities etc.

Schools located faraway in the rural areas usually suffers in terms of structures, facilities, teaching staff etc this serve as a major challenge to sub-cultural groups. The primitive attitude and unwillingness of the people to embrace education, as most sub-cultural people preferred that there wards work on the family farms than spending the season elsewhere.

CONCLUSION

Article 26 of the human right declaration stated that education is a right of every child, it is therefore incumbent on every government to provide qualitative education for all citizenry irrespective of his place of residence, circumstances of birth, culture and ethnic background and status in the society if the transformation agenda of the present government is to be achieved.

RECOMMENDATION

Government should design a curriculum for prison inmates. Government as a matter of concerned should study the Ikoyi prison school and see how to establish same to other prison.

Government should establish a specialised training school to train special education teachers to help in meeting the need of children with special need, inmates' education and sub-cultural education.

It is important that good blue print on sub-cultural group education should be fashioned out by the government. Such a blue-print should take

cognisance of their rural life, economic activities and social deprivations.

Government should established and furnished schools in the prisons to take case of inmate education in prison.

This paper relied on information from textbooks, journals, newspapers, as well as published reports from government, multinationals and non-governmental organizations, is therefore recommended that data should be gotten from target population directly for more reliable information.

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