

# **Towards providing Inclusive Education for School-Aged Visually Impaired Children in Nigeria: The Ijanikin Experience**

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## **Introduction**

As in other countries of the world, the development of educational programmes for children with Special Needs in Nigeria has undergone series of changes in the past forty years. Like many other countries in Africa, the educational provision for Children with Special Needs Started with “Segregation”(whereby disabled children were educated in Residential Special Schools catering for their type of Disability).

These schools tended to be “all age schools” .They were special schools as they provided the disabled with an education i.e. the disabled were able to acquire Literacy and Numeracy skills,acquire Living Skills, learn Orientation and Mobility and also learn a trade (Olukotun & Oke,2005)

In 1981,“Integration” was introduced in the National Policy on Education (National Policy on Education 1981,Revised).This Policy document states in part that

*“Government has decided that integration is the most realistic form of special education since handicapped children are eventually expected to live in the same society with their able –bodied counterparts...”*

This now meant that in selected regular schools across the country, the Visually Impaired, the Physically Handicapped and the Deaf/Hard of Hearing were mainstreamed with their non-disabled peers at Post-primary school level. Special schools were (and are) still the norm at Pre-primary and Primary School levels.

### **National Policy on Education (2004) and Handicapped Children**

The concept of Inclusive education is entrenched in the National Policy on Education as one of the ways that would ensure easy access to education for all Nigerian children- the disabled inclusive. To this Resource teacher, this is a welcome development as this is an improvement over the Segregation and Integration models of previous years.

The term "Inclusion: is rather "elusive"(Ainscow,1999)and amorphous. To understand and adopt it, each Resource teacher has to de-construct it to establish what it means in his/her environment and then see how it can be 'set-in-the- life' of the Community to the benefit of the children in the locality-disabled or not. This is what this Resource Teacher did.

### **Inclusion in Ijanikin**

To set a philosophical framework for the scheme, I borrowed from Tilsone, Florian & Rose ,(1998) in 2004, the concept that Inclusion

*" refers to the opportunity for all persons with a disability to participate(as fully as possible) in all the educational employment, Consumer, Recreational Community and Domestic activities that typify every society."*

and modified it to suit the local environment.

Federal Government College, Ijanikin, Lagos is a School owned, staffed and funded by the Federal Republic of Nigeria through the Federal Ministry of Education. It is one of the hundred schools of its type set up as Model/Demonstration Post-Secondary Schools to set standard and act as agencies for the enunciation of the Nation's policy on Education. The school is situated in the Ojo Local Government area of Lagos State on the outskirts of Lagos.

The Special Education Unit currently resources twenty-two Visually handicapped boys and girls, one Mentally retarded girl, one physically handicapped girl. The staff include one qualified and experienced resource teacher, one part-time teacher of Mathematics to the Blind, one Support teacher and one Clerical Assistant.

We set about the transformation of the Unit from a fully integrated Unit to an Inclusive and Child-friendly center by holding brainstorming sessions with the Unit's personnel before seeking permission from the school's proprietors. Tacit approval was given (although not in writing) and we were told not to expect any extra funding.

Papers on Inclusion were written by this writer and sent to all Stakeholders viz The School's Principal officers: The Principal, Vice-Principals, Heads of Department and other members of the School Management Committee. Papers were also sent to the PTA Executive committee, the Old Students' Association and Parents of the Handicapped students. This was followed by a series of meeting with the stakeholders and the handicapped students themselves. A workshop was also conducted for the Academic staff on the benefits of Inclusion. Another one was held on curriculum adaptation in selected subjects where the visually handicapped encounter problems e.g. Introductory Technology, Mathematics and other subjects that require practical sessions as part of the teaching-learning process. One also had to negotiate Curriculum changes, teaching seminars and classroom support. These were relatively easy to accomplish as the school has always had handicapped students so many teachers welcomed the idea of having support for their work. This however, meant more work for the Unit's staff.

Unemployed teachers of the handicapped in the locality were invited to work on hourly basis and were paid by the PTA although the remuneration is poor.

Parents were also very helpful. Although many parents of the handicapped are poor, their response to Inclusion has been encouraging. This has led to them agitating at the local levels for improved services for their children. They now have more input into how their

children are educated They come in to ask how they can fit in. They see the Unit as "theirs" and "Mama Blind"(the Resource Teacher) as a friend of the community.

### **Problems**

Although the scheme has recorded much success, there are some teething problems to be solved. Among these are

Staff wariness to the scheme: Some teachers see the Inclusive project as much work as they have to plan their lessons on several levels to cater for all students including the gifted and the slow learners.

Problems with Course Evaluation: This is a problem because the National Curriculum is fixed and requires extensive continuous Assessment of the students. With a negotiated curriculum, there are no uniform tests in some subjects and these may pose problems with national examining boards

Access to all subjects on the Curriculum: Not all subjects can be accessed and those accessed by the handicapped students here may not be fully accessed as there are not enough equipment for the purpose. We are working on this, though.

**The way forward:**

The scheme is on course and we expect that some of the pressing “teething problems” will be solved. In addition to the above, teachers need to update and improve their teaching skills. In-service training organized by experts /those with experience in Inclusive education will be most welcome. We also require regular fora/seminars to bring together various groups of people working / teaching the disabled children together to share experiences and work out solutions to difficult areas especially the identification and baseline assessment of would-be beneficiaries of the scheme and evaluation of academic work.