

The Schoolchild with Hearing Disability and Nigerian Special Education Provisions

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Abstract: This study presents a review on the special education provisions for the Nigerian schoolchild with hearing disability. Going by what obtains presently in the special education programmes in Nigeria, it is apparent that the same child would hardly have a future to cheerfully hope for. This is because his educational programmes are grossly deficient to adequately compensate for his deficits and meaningfully equip him to face life challenges in future. Lack of proper audiological assessment procedures and necessary therapeutic interventions, inappropriate school placements and instructional practices, failure to comprehensively identify and manage some latent disorders and unfavorable cultural norms are some problems characterizing the education of the child with hearing disability in Nigeria. Consequently, this education has been described as a rudimentary one. As a result those who graduate from it can only occupy the bottom of their societal socio-economic ladder. The study therefore, recommended that the same educational programme be reviewed and made more effective by administering it with some frameworks provided by the Education for ALL in 1990 and Special Needs Education in 1994 world conferences.

Key words: Nigerian schoolchild, hearing disability, special education provisions, educational programmes

INTRODUCTION

The school going child with hearing disability and his special education programme in Nigeria usually present some puzzling observation to any interested party. While the child himself is an enigma as a result of his disability and some associated problems (Denmark, 1994; Bond, 2000), his education too is very paradoxical. By design and execution, special education provisions for the child with hearing disability in Nigeria often misses to meet his needs (Adima, 1998). The main objective of special education for any special needs child as its client is to develop his achievement potentials (Ozaji, 2004). Understandably, this is what special education programmes in Nigeria suppose to provide the child with. Regrettably, the same child has always been unable to meaningfully benefit from the Nigerian special education services (Oyebola, 1985).

Education for children with hearing impairment in Nigeria began about three decades ago. However, in spite of its fairly long span, it is still best described as a rudimentary education which can only proffer limited opportunities for persons with hearing disability. As a result, persons with hearing disability who so far have received the same education are usually found at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, living in appalling conditions. Similarly, Nwazuoke (1998) noted that it is

very disturbing to imagine the waste of productivity caused by the failure of special education practices in Nigeria to develop the potential ability of individuals with hearing impairment. Consequently, persons with hearing impairment in Nigeria have evidently failed to offer any significant contributions to their communities and the nation (Nwazuoke, 1993).

Education for persons with hearing impairment is definitely inclusive of the Nigerian government's national policy on education (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004). This blueprint informs that the federal government intends, through special education to give concrete meanings to the idea of equalizing educational opportunities for all children regardless of their sensory or physical disabilities. Furthermore, the government pledges to provide adequate education for all people with special needs (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004), so that they too can make their own contributions towards the national development. These laudable objectives are to be realized through a diversified and appropriate curriculum for all clients of special education. It is however very unfortunate to note that since 1977 when the first edition of the national policy on education was issued till date, many objectives of special education particularly in relation to the education of persons with hearing disability are yet to be remarkably actualized. Education for children with hearing disability in Nigeria

started in 1956 at Lagos by an humanitarian group which reportedly collected and engaged three deaf children in some formal trainings (Onwuchekwa, 1985). From 1956 till date, there have been various learning institutions set up for such children and adults in Nigeria. There are about an hundred primary schools, fifty secondary schools, one polytechnic, one college of education and five universities offering different levels of education to persons with hearing disabilities (Ademokoya, 2006a). One would presume that for a developing country like Nigeria, the presented statistics suggests a moderate achievement. However, the yardsticks for determining the success or other wise of special education should rather be the quality of instructions, evaluation processes and what the grandauns can do after leaving schools than on quantity of schools available for the special education clients. This is not however, to disregard the quantity factor in educational provisions as a necessary measure for making learning opportunities readily available and accessible to the learners.

What then are the problems with the education of Nigerian child with hearing disability? The problems are indeed multifarious. For instance, Nwazuoke (1998) noted that the problems include lack of necessary supportive services, negative attitude, weak education policy and poor funding. Similarly, Alikali (1991) observed that the problems of improper assessment and placement of children with hearing disability in schools. These problems in particular culminate in the lack of appropriately differentiated curriculum and instructions for the varying categories of school children with hearing disability. Adding to the listed problems are also that of inappropriate professional preparation programmes required for providing sound education and rehabilitation services for the school children with hearing disability. (Adima, 1988). There are also the problems of poor organizational and administrative procedures for facilitating an efficient running of special education programmes for the same children (Nwazuoke, 1998).

The main purpose of this study therefore, is to examine special education provisions for the Nigerian child with hearing disability viz a viz the ascertainment of factors impeding the meaningful implementation and realization of the provisions designed for preparing the child with hearing impairment for a more impactful adult life. This study therefore, attempted this purpose by first considering factors which make the same child uniquely complex as a person and how his diverse needs could be more appropriately met through some well-conceived and purpose driven educational services.

THE CHILD WITH HEARING DISABILITY

Morethanoften, the growth of a child with hearing disability is intriguingly tempered with by a very crippling disability-deafness (Mba, 1981). Deafness is not only very limiting by its effects, it is also very difficult to understand and appreciate especially by the normally hearing persons (Walker, 1986). It is often presumed that deafness is not as handicapping as blindness but the famous deaf-blind genius, Helen Keller knew better. According to her, deafness is much more a worse misfortune than blindness. The problems of deafness are more complex, if not more important than those of blindness (Keller, 1933). Deafness is not easily noticed by many, it is, as result described as an invisible disability (Bond, 2000). Those who suffer from deafness do not readily get the sympathy and support of able-bodied persons as those with blindness do.

Not only does the child with hearing disability usually fails to get necessary assistance from others, the nature of his disability too often predisposes him to resentment and hostility from the hearing people. For instance, if someone with less severe deafness gives an inappropriate response to a hearing person who is apparently not aware of his disability, his response may be mistakenly taken as humor or worse still it could be considered as a very irritable insult (Denmark, 1994).

Consequently, the child with hearing disability is constantly misunderstood and even penalized for some habits he would not have developed or exhibited but for his hearing disability. As a result the child is oftentimes detested by the hearing people. As far as he is concerned he is very likely to develop a chequered personality informed by many factors such as the onset, type and degree of his hearing disability (Davis and Slivernam, 1970) acceptance or rejection he experienced at home and in the community he grew up in Onwuchekwa (1985) presence or otherwise of other disability besides the hearing loss (Bond, 2000), his personality and other personal characteristics such as self concept and intellectual ability (Mba, 1981a).

Having viewed the child with hearing disability in the perspectives of his disability and how it (disability) shapes or alters his development, the question one would necessarily ask is how then can this child's education be employed first to compensate for his deficient development and also to adequately prepare him for meeting future challenges. No doubt, such a child would need an appropriately designed, client-centered education. Ozoji (2004) thoughtfully submitted that the client of special education is the child with special needs. It is the circumstance of this child that determines the objectives, contents and practice of special education.

Special education should therefore attempt at transforming the same child to be well adjusted (Tallent, 1978) self sufficient (Moore, 1996), socially competent (Vernon and Andrews, 1990) and intellectually proficient. These are objectives which special education provisions should endeavor to imbue in the Nigerian child with hearing disability.

Determining how satisfactorily has special education attempted the listed objectives would again involve highlighting the structures of the special education provisions for the child with hearing disability in Nigeria. Better still, it would require turning the searchlight to identify some missing necessities in education programme for the same. This again is focused on the next part of this study.

SCHOOL ENROLMENT PROCEDURES FOR THE CHILD WITH HEARING DISABILITY

Typical of educational programmes in Nigeria and indeed some developing countries is the practice of enrolling children with hearing disabilities into schools without undertaking some necessary procedures (Alikali, 1991; Mba, 1995). Procedures for admitting these children into the school should ideally include assessing and determining their audiological status as well as considering necessary medical information on these children and their ages (Yeatis, 2000). Such information are very fundamental for placing these children in appropriate school and learning groups as well as administering them with the most appropriate instructional programmes (Bakare, 1988).

Olaniyan investigated the hearing levels of children with hearing impairment enrolled in a Nigerian special primary school. Conducting an audiological assessment on all 63 school children with hearing impairment in the purposively selected school, he detected that 3.2% of them have moderate hearing loss (41-55dBHL), 7.9% with moderately severe hearing loss (56-70dBHL), 12.7% with severe hearing loss (71-90dBHL) and 76.2% with profound hearing loss (91dBHL or more). He also discovered that these children were admitted into the school without requesting for or insisting on their audiological reports. Ditto for their medical reports. School children with diverse hearing levels were as a practice placed in the same classrooms. This suggests the lack of differential placement programmes for children with varying hearing levels. Furthermore, the age range of these school children was discovered to be between 11 and 26 years old. This is suggestive of late presentation of children with hearing disability at schools. Many of such children who suppose to be in higher schools are still in the

primary schools. Parents are usually very reluctant to enroll their children with disabilities in school partly because they are often ashamed of being identified with special needs children with disabilities (Ademokoya, 2006a) and because of hopelessness which some parents often entertain about investing their resources in the education of such children (Nwazuoke, 1998). More than often, parents of children with disabilities consider it as a waste of resources to register such children in schools.

Similarly, Adekola *et al.* (2006) investigated the audiological evaluation practices in some selected primary and secondary schools in southwest Nigeria. Their findings showed that none of the engaged schools undertakes audiological assessment of pupils or students they enrolled. One primary school and one secondary school have neither facilities nor audiologists to conduct audiological assessment on pupils/students. One primary school however has facilities which have broken down for years and have not been repaired since.

Consequently, the Nigerian schoolchild with hearing impairment is usually offered an education which design is not properly informed by his needs. His needs would definitely request for an education appropriately conceived and suitably administered in line with his hearing levels, age, emotional requirements and his future aspirations (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004). It is appalling as an instance to note that speech therapy is not taught in many schools for the hearing-impaired children, yet speech therapy is a very vital subject for developing and improving verbal communication skills of children with usable residual hearing. Auditory training is also minimally practiced in a few schools. In schools where they are practiced they are done more or less as a routine. Almost all schools for children with hearing impairment in Nigeria are manual (they virtually make use of sign language as their communication mode). What this implies is that every child with hearing disability regardless of his residual hearing potential or possession of useful verbal skills is unavoidably made to attend manual based schools and chose sign language for instructional and communication purposes.

DIFFERENTIATED CURRICULUM

Educational provisions for the child with hearing disability so far in Nigeria do not operate with the necessary differentiated curriculum for such a child. As a result, the same child encounters some sort of double jeopardy in his schooling. First, the child is more than often taught with curriculum designed for his hearing counterpart. Such a curriculum therefore fails to consider

his unique nature. Second, he is also placed and instructed in the same classrooms alongside other children whose hearing levels were not properly determined and as a result do not receive instructions or have curriculum contents which are appropriately applicable to their hearing levels and educational needs.

Any group of children with hearing impairment is usually made up of two major classifications—the deaf and hard-of-hearing (Mba, 1991). The deaf according to Bakare (1988) have some significantly profound degrees of hearing loss (65 dBHL above) while the hard of hearing have mild to moderate degrees of hearing loss (25-64 dBHL). Each category requires a differentiated curriculum, placement programmes and instructional methods (Nwazuo, 1998). These differentiated educational procedures are to be regarded as a matter of necessity and not just a mere educational routine. This is because each group deserves an educational program which considers adequately the severity of his hearing disability (Davis and Silverman, 1970). It is when that is done that a more meaningful learning inputs and outputs of the children with hearing disability can be guaranteed.

Alikali (1991) alerted the stakeholders in Nigerian special education that education for the hard-of-hearing children has become a forgotten alternative. This suggests a special education system which is essentially designed for the child with profound hearing loss and not for hard the child who is hard of hearing. The hard-of-hearing child is therefore helplessly left to choose the available education provisions. By implications, the hard-of-hearing child oftentimes suffers from inappropriate identification and classification. Little wonder then he is often placed in the same class with the deaf child. This malpractice according to Guilloford (1981) amounts to creating another handicap by wrongly labeling a special needs child. An erroneously labeled special needs child would be inappropriately placed and unsuitably instructed. Adima (1988) metaphorically described this practice as a process of handicapping the already handicapped persons via the in Nigerian special education provisions.

THE CHILD WITH MULTIPLE DISABILITIES

One of the very factors which usually makes the child with hearing disability a complex personality is the possibility of having additional disability coexisting with the hearing-impairment. For instance, Adima (1988) identified that the child with hearing disability could possibly have one additional disability and an exceptional disability, meaning that the same child could suffer from two or three disabilities. A child can therefore, suffer from

hearing and visual disabilities as well as mental retardation. Another similar child could combine hearing disability with epilepsy or some chronic diseases which that could render him hospital bound (Reiner, 1975).

Ademokoya (2006b) identified 32 deafblind school children in 9 schools for the deaf pupils/students located in southwest Nigeria. All identified school children have hearing disability as their major disability and visual disability as the minor one. Similar studies (Mba, 1995; Ademokoya, 1998) have confirmed that children in some Nigerian special schools for the children with hearing disability do have other disabilities too.

A very constant feature in children with multiple disabilities is that they usually present some behavioral and emotional problems which are usually more difficult to understand and manage than those presented by children with singular disability (Vernon, 1969). The same applies to the learning needs of such children. For instance, the deaf mentally retarded children would manifest some intellectual deficits including difficulty in acquiring language, developing memory and reasoning skills and forming concepts (Bakare, 1977). It is therefore, very pertinent that schools for children with hearing-impairment should have teachers specifically prepared to teach and manage both educational and emotional needs of such exceptional children. Similarly, there should be specialized instructional strategies and aids as required by such children conditions.

One would at this juncture wish to know if the Nigerian special education provisions for the child with hearing impairment could adequately meet the multifarious needs of the child with multiple disabilities. Again, the same education practices appear to be inappropriately designed and equipped to satisfactorily meet the diverse needs of the child with multiple disabilities. For instance, a meaningful planning for the education for the child with multiple disabilities should begin by undertaking an early audiological. This exercise is very fundamental since it is a vital prerequisite to some other educational and rehabilitative procedures for the same child. Determination of the type and degree of the child's hearing loss, presence of other disabilities, educational or rehabilitative placement needs and intervention are primarily premised on the outcomes of early audiological assessment of the child.

Owolawi (1998) reported that early audiological assessment for children with hearing impairment in Nigeria is a mirage considering the lack of adequate audiological assessment centers or clinics, necessary audiologists. There are also some prevailing cultural practices which often make parents conceal their children with disabilities rather than promptly presenting them for early diagnosis

and commencement of necessary interventions (Ademokoya, 2006b). In addition, there is a common trend of presenting children with disabilities late for medical examinations (Ijaduola, 1982). Subsequently, Holborow (1983) and Owolawi *et al.* (1996) put the average age of presenting children with hearing disability in Nigerian hospitals for medical attention at 2 years 9 months. Furthermore, Nigeria as a nation lacks necessary policy required for effecting early and compulsory disability screening for Nigerian children at the neonatal (mass), selective (at risk) or at preschool entry points. This unfortunate development according to Miles (1984) is a common trend in some developing countries.

Coupled with the poor screening procedures is the fact that whenever screening is done, it is often done with the nonparticipation of some key experts from relevant disciplines who should compose a comprehensive interdisciplinary team vital for undertaking a thorough, comprehensive and detailed assessment of the child with hearing disability (Ademokoya, 1996). Possibility of identifying children with multiple disabilities and the recommendation of necessary therapeutic interventions are essentially hinged on a assessment exercise undertaken by a team of special educators, audiologists, speech therapists, rehabilitation counselors, psychologists, orthorinolarygosts, peadiatrists, socioworker, occupational therapist and others (Nottidge, 1996). It is very rare to find a screening exercise in Nigeria where half of the listed experts are assembled (Mba, 1995).

The very consequence of the various lapses identified above is that the child with multiple disabilities in Nigeria suffers more deprivations than his counterpart who has only hearing-impairment to contend with. This is because if anything, the existing special education services in Nigeria are essentially planned for children with singular disabilities and not for those with multiple disabilities. Therefore, his multiple disabilities are not usually identified as early as necessary to warrant for some timely interventions. More than often, when his diverse disabilities are eventually discovered they would have become almost intractable and as a very difficult to reverse.

CULTURAL AND TEACHER FACTORS IN THE EDUCATION OF THE CHILD WITH HEARING-DISABILITY

Among other things, education is expected to prepare the child with hearing disability to become what he is potentially capable of Oyewumi (2004). This is to be attained through an educational system which has proper understanding of the child and his needs and as a result prepares an appropriate programme to meet his needs

(Backorby and Wagner, 1996). So done, the child with hearing impairment can then be adequately equipped to transit smoothly and competently from a well administered childhood/adolescence to a fulfilled adulthood (Edgar, 1991).

Regrettably, the future of the Nigerian child with hearing disability is often threatened by an education which appears grossly inefficient to impact meaningfully on his life. Added to some lapses which characterize the education of persons with hearing disability in Nigeria (as discussed earlier in this study) are that of negative cultural practices and poor preparation of special education teachers cum support staff (Adima, 1988). As expected, education as a process requires a robust support from the community where members are willing to assist the neighborhood schools in cash and kind to achieve its goals (Macbeth, 1994). Special education in Nigeria does not often enjoy necessary support from the public simply because many Nigerians condole some stereotypes or prejudices towards the disabled persons who are indeed the clients of special education (Ademokoya, 2003). Nigeria typifies a society where disabled person are considered as ineligible for schooling (Mba, 1995). How does one describe the response of some parents students in a secondary school in Ibadan, a southwestern city in Nigeria which threatened to withdraw their hearing children from that school when the state government in 1984 planned to integrate hearing and non-hearing students in the same school.

The special education teacher has the dual responsibility of making education very stimulating to the child with hearing impairment as well as serving as the very agent for translating into realities, some noble objectives of the national policy on education for the same child (Nwazuoke, 1998). The same teacher can impressively perform these functions if he is soundly prepared and is well motivated to discharge his duties. Unfortunately, students usually admitted to read special education at colleges of education and universities are those with very low college and university admission scores. Adima (1988) reported that students are usually admitted to read special education at colleges and universities do not usually score high marks in admission examinations. This practice is indeed very suggestive of turning out low quality special education teachers who will eventually end up teaching the school children with hearing disability. This untoward practice will not prepare the same child for a very competitive child.

Conversely, providing qualitative and compensatory education for the child with hearing impairment is a task that should be determinedly entrusted to teachers and trainers with superb professional preparation and robust experience.

TOWARDS AN IMPROVED EDUCATION FOR NIGERIAN CHILD WITH HEARING DISABILITY

In Nigeria, the growing child hearing-impairment faces a future where his personal adjustment, effective integration with the hearing world and having a deservedly rewarding education are serious challenges to him, his parents, teachers, the public and the government (Nwazuoke, 1998). There are therefore, needs to review his education programmes as a means for bringing about the desire improvement in the same child.

Happily enough, two landmark conferences held about one and half decades ago appear to have all what it takes to make special education provisions the necessary transformative process for the Nigerian child with hearing disability. The World Conference on Education for ALL held at Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 and the World Conference on Special Needs Education held in Salamanca, Spain, 1994, if religiously adopted and implemented in Nigeria can indeed prepare the child with hearing disability for a proud future.

These two conferences are very united in their resolves to ensure that all children with disabilities including the one with hearing impairment enjoy as much as all educational opportunities made available to their able-bodied counterparts. If the Nigerian government as a matter of policy adopts and implements the principle of equalizing educational opportunities for all school children disability notwithstanding, then the common practice of underfunding, poor supervision and the deployment of low quality teachers and staff to the schools for special needs children would be considerably eliminated. Furthermore, such new education programmes would involve the inclusion of necessary audiological evaluation practices, proper placement programmes and administration of appropriate instructional activities which are in accordance with the child's hearing level and his emotional needs.

Another remarkable resolve resulting from the same conferences concerns the practical implementation of necessary social integration strategies between abled-bodied and those with disabilities. Necessary social fusion between these two groups of learners are to be achieved through education and accessibility (Ademokoya, 2003). Using education as a tool, both abled-bodied learners and their counterparts with disabilities are to be integrated and jointly educated in the same learning environment (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004). This is what inclusive education is all about (Avoke, 1995). By accessibility, it implies that all member of states of the United Nations should embark on removal of various obstacles depriving persons with

disabilities and their abled-bodied counterparts equal access to important amenities, places and functions in their communities. Such obstacles could also be cultural activities depicted by practices which socially alienate persons with disabilities or some architectural structures preventing them from having an unaided access to some public buildings. The goal to be achieved by accessibility is to facilitate an undiscriminatory and unhindered co-participation of all citizens, regardless of their conditions in all societal activities be it educational, social, political or recreational (UNESCO, 1994).

Again, if the Nigerian government can adopt the principle of accessibility as a policy, then all sorts of stereotyping, stigmatizations and discriminations associated with the school child with hearing disability and his education will be considerably eliminated. Creating an inclusive learning environment for normally-hearing school children and their colleagues with hearing disability will reduce the perceived biases which they have against themselves. It will also engender better understanding, acceptance and support for one another. The child hearing disability would have an improved self-concept and achievement motivation, thereby facilitating better achievement in his academic, social and occupational endeavors. He would indeed hope for a future where all citizens are treated as equals regardless of their peculiarities and where merits are rewarded and not physical conditions.

Furthermore, parents of children with hearing disabilities will no longer feel so much ashamed to present their children for early audiological examination and enrolments in school. They would rather feel more encouraged to provide necessary supports for their children education. In addition, teachers of the school children with hearing disability will no longer be bothered by the usual inferior mentality and a sense of self devaluation when compared to his colleagues teaching normally hearing children (Adima, 1988).

There will also be a need to improve personnel training programmes for teachers and support staff who will be working with the child with hearing disability. Since it usually takes more maturity and expertise to work with special needs persons than it takes to work with able-bodied persons, it therefore suggests that only teachers, specialists and support staff who have successfully worked with the able-bodied persons should be recommended for specific trainings which will qualify them for working with special needs individuals such as the child with hearing disability. This is because such prospective workers would need their experiences gathered from working with normal persons to meet whatever challenges they eventually face while working with special persons.

The current practice of recruiting low quality applicants for special education personnel training programmes is an unfortunate norm. It would end up in proffering special needs persons with low quality services. This situation should therefore, be reversed by developing a more rigorous and quality training curriculum for prospective special education professionals. This recommendation is inclusive of special teachers, speech therapists, audiologists, counselors and all other specialists working with the Nigerian child who has hearing impairment.

CONCLUSION

It is very apparent that the current education practices for the school child with hearing disability in Nigeria would not sufficiently prepare him to satisfactorily meet his future challenges. This situation is indeed an unfortunate one since most of nowadays events are very suggestive of a highly competitive future where everybody's resourcefulness (no matter his condition) will greatly determine his relevance. There is therefore, a dire need to urgently review the special educational practices and introduce or reintroduce into it some features that would guarantee a very promising future for the Nigerian child with hearing disability.

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