Integrating the Needs of Physically Challenged Students into Contemporary Pre-Service Teacher Education Curricula

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Abstract: There is a growing body of sophisticated scholarship on the need for the preparation of preservice teachers for effective operation in diverse classrooms. Yet there is little evidence that every aspect of learner diversity has received its deserved attention in contemporary teacher education programmes. One of such areas that have not received adequate attention concerns the needs of the physically challenged prospective teachers. This paper seeks to assess the degree to which the needs of the physically challenged students are integrated in teacher education programmes. In specific terms, the paper attempts to examine the major challenges confronting the physically challenged, ascertain the benefits of integrating and including their needs into the programmes and determine some major strategies that are capable of facilitating successful integration of such needs. Four research questions were raised to guide the investigation which employs a descriptive survey design. The population consists of all the physically challenged students and lecturers in three different tertiary institutions used in the study. A total of two hundred respondents (150 students and 50 lecturers) were randomly selected. Questionnaires and interview schedules were the instruments for data collection. Some of the major findings of the study were the numerous problems hindering full integration of such needs. The problems include funding, inadequate provision of facilities and infrastructure, among others. The study recommends that the government should pursue more vigorously without delay the policy of inclusion, provide funding adequate and facilitate the exposure of teachers to a variety of strategies that are capable of aiding the realization of this laudable goal.

Key words: Special Education • Learner Diversity • Physically Challenged Students • Preservice Teacher Education • Curriculum Construction

INTRODUCTION

Learner diversity is fast gaining attention in the contemporary scholarship of teaching. This development is precipitated by the fact that need to prepare teachers to work with diverse students has become a major challenge to teacher education [1]. According to McCabe [2], universities in the United States and elsewhere now prepare teachers to cope with the challenge of learner diversity to meet requirements to graduates with cross-cultural competencies and a broad perspective of their discipline. Teicher and Stenbe [3] confirm that such provision have proved both viable and rewarding as such student teachers as having been exposed to such curricular experiences report increased abilities to navigate unfamiliar cultures, improved foreign language skills (p. 18) better understanding of students with special needs, as well as a more critical perspective in diversity and other issues in the scholarship of teaching.

According to Phillion et al. [4], teacher education institutions are developing programmes with an eye on diversity especially for preservice teachers. It is now central to teacher education in the US to offer courses and field experiences for preservice teachers to address among others two emerging challenges specific to the teaching profession namely: (1)
how to prepare white, middle class, female students enrolled in teacher education programmes to work with the increasingly diverse population of students they will teach in the future and (2) how to develop global perspectives in preservice teachers. Steeter [5] conducted an extensive study on the centrality of learner diversity to teacher preparation programme that was later reflected in the standards stipulated by the National Council of American Teacher Educations (NCATE) in [6].

However, it is obvious from research literature that learner diversity is treated as an all-encompassing concept that applies to virtually all areas. For instance, Ladson Billings [7] observes that it is well documented that the gap is widening between white, middle class females who are becoming teachers and the historically underserved, low-income, immigrant, English as a new language and other minority students they may teach”. The various issues identified in this regard represent among others the many faces of learner diversity in the contemporary scholarship of teaching. According to Phillion et al. [4], the challenge posed by the question of diversity has propelled various organizations and teacher education institutions to initiate reforms. Yet there seems to be no clearly defined standards grounded in solid theoretical foundations on how to prepare preservice teachers for diversity in the classroom [8] Similarly, there seem to be little evidence that each of the various aspects of learner diversity [5]. One of such areas of learner diversity that have not received adequate attention in teacher education programmes is accorded some recognition special education especially with regards to the needs of the physically challenged students in preserve training.

A Case for Inclusive Education in Nigeria: All over the world school development is now increasingly focused on the right to education for all. This is sequel to the Dakar World Education Forum [9] where it was stated clearly, that inclusive education is vital if the Education For All (EFA) goal is to be achieved. [10] Suffice it to say that some countries are working to help their schools become inclusive. Some of these countries include Australia, India, Lesotho, Burkina Faso etc. It is worthy of note that these countries are at different pilot stages of inclusion (of both physically challenged and non-physically challenged). Traditionally, physically challenged (disabled children) and those with other special educational needs have experienced exclusion, discrimination and segregation from mainstream education and their peer [11]. Some are placed in separate classes; others are placed in special schools. Many of them have been denied access to education of any sort.

The Nigerian National Policy on Education [12], describes special education as the education of children and adults who have learning difficulties because of the different types of handicaps, blindness, partial sightedness, deafness, hardness at hearing, mental retardation, social maladjustment, etc, due to the circumstances of birth, position, mental and physical health patterns or accident in later life. Inclusive education is not only concerned with disabled children or with finding an alternative to segregated special schooling. Inclusive education therefore is about helping mainstream schools to overcome the barriers so that they can meet the learning needs of all children in the country.

Magrab [13], defines inclusive education as an approach that recognizes the fact that each child is a unique learner and requires ordinary schools for education in their community regardless of physical, intellectual, social, emotional, cultural, religious, linguistic or other system that removes barriers and increases educational opportunities for all children irrespective of their unique differences. Inclusive education can be said to be synonymous with Integration. Integration means the blending, fusion, unification of all disciplines, persons, etc. A fully integrated teacher education programme tears down barriers between disciplines and persons and fuses all. Integration can also be seen as a new way of thinking rather than simply overlapping of the curriculum [14]. However, whether to integrate the physically challenged and non physically challenged is an issue which poses difficulty to educators.

Teacher education involves the training of pre-service and in-service or practicing teachers. This unique function makes it mandatory to ensure that all the students are fully integrated without segregation or discrimination. This has vast implications for the future and practicing teachers, as they need to acquire the knowledge, dispositions and performances to successfully manage an inclusive classroom. Teacher education provides a unique avenue for promoting inclusive education in its entire ramification.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria sees education as fundamental to the development and growth of both individual and society. She further went to describe "education" as an instrument "per excellence" for effecting neuronal development [12]. In the same vein, a recent report of the International Commission on Education for the 21" Century (ICE) in Delbrs [15] describes education as the necessary "Utopia". This goes to buttress the indispensable role of education in promoting the ideas of peace, freedom, justice and reducing or eliminating the ugly trends of poverty, exclusion, ignorance, oppression,
war, underdevelopment, etc. The national teacher education policy [16] captures the need for more attention to the physically challenged preservice teachers in Nigeria when it states that “there is insufficient student support in the areas of scholarship medical, housing, counseling services etc, whereas the policy is intended “to ensure that teachers (the physically challenged inclusive) are adequately catered for and made adaptable to our charging world”) (p. ii) with a view to producing “highly knowledgeable, skilled and creative teachers who are capable of producing students who can compete globally” (p. ii).

In Nigeria, it has been observed that the physically challenged who managed to go through secondary education are hardly found in teacher education programmes. This is very pertinent. It appears the government has not pursued vigorously this idea of integration and inclusion of all students into teacher education programmes. It could also be as a result of their self-concept and possibly the fear of acceptability in schools. There is also the possibility of rejection in primary and secondary schools where they will teach after training.

This situation is not peculiar to Nigeria as Gaver [17] opines that it is a cruel scandal that over 90% of India's 40 million disabled children are barred from entering the nation's classrooms, in uncaring society which has earned a notorious global notoriety for hypocritical piety and institutionalized neglect of the poor and disadvantaged, it is the ultimate cruelty!

It is imperative that for the Federal Government of Nigeria to fully realize the MDGs of 2015 and 2020 vision of Nigeria, it should as a matter of urgency ensure that all the physically challenged children are fully integrated in the teacher education programme.

Statement of Problem: Access to and support in school remains problematic issues for the physically challenged. Worse still is the fact that some of them who are so fortunate to graduate from secondary schools hardly ever proceed to tertiary institutions not the least teacher education institutes or colleges. This could be as a result of the fact that the physically challenged children are often made to experience exclusion, discrimination and segregation from mainstream education, and one wonders why this is done. Is it because of their physical state or the systemic modus operandi? The soaring need for the proper integration of all students inclusively into regular schools especially teacher education programme cannot be overemphasized. It is against this backdrop of continuous neglect to develop the potentials of this large minority of physically challenged students that the study sets out to investigate how physically challenged students can be integrated fully into teacher education programme in Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study: The paper seeks to examine critically the challenges facing the physically challenged in teacher education programmes. Specifically, the study sets out to examine the major challenges confronting the physically challenged in teacher education and ascertain the benefits of integrating the physically challenged pre-service teachers in teacher education programmes. It also seeks to identify the problems inherent in integrating the physically challenged in teacher education programme and determine some major strategies to enhance integration of the physically challenged students in teacher education programme in Nigeria.

The following research questions are raised to guide the study:
- What are the major challenges confronting physically challenged students in teacher education programmes in Nigeria?
- What are the problems inherent in integrating the physically challenged students in teacher education programmes in Nigeria?
- What are the benefits of integrating the physically challenged students in teacher education programmes?
- What integration strategies can be adopted to enhance mainstreaming of the physically challenged students in teacher education programmes in Nigeria?

Method: The study design adopted is the descriptive survey and the population consisted of all the teacher education students and lecturers in Nigerian institutions of higher learning while the sample consisted of 50 students and 15 lecturers each from Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Ijanikin, Lagos State and St. Augustine College of Education, Akoka, Lagos State and 50 students and 20 lecturers from the University of Lagos. The participants constituting the sample of the study were randomly selected from among the teacher education students and lecturers in the three institutions.
A set of structured questionnaire for physically challenged students and lecturers was developed and used for data collection. To probe further the information from the questionnaire, interview was employed. The questionnaire consisted of 20 statements with three point scale options of agree, disagree and uncertain. Education experts from the three tertiary institutions validated the instrument. The reliability of co-efficient was 0.80 and this was ascertained using the test-re-test method. Data generated were analysed using descriptive statistics.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows that the most pressing among the set of challenges faced by the physically challenged students in teacher education programmes is the non-availability of adequate lecture halls to accommodate all the students irrespective of their unique situations. Majority of the respondents, precisely 95% of them agreed to this view while keeping pace with normal students at listening, speaking, writing and note-taking 90%. However the feeling of rejection from course mates and lecturers ranks the least at 55%.

Table 2 indicates that inadequate provision of the necessary facilities is one of the major problems of the integration of the physically challenged in school, hence 195 (97.5%) of the respondents agree to this view. About 190 (5%) of them see the non availability of fund as the second major problem inherent in integrating the physical challenged students while 85% of the respondents are of the view that non provision of the required infrastructure is one of the problems.

Table 3 reveals that the most notable benefits of ingratiating is the promotion of equality among everybody in the society (regardless of the unique situation).

Table 1: Challenges confronting the physically challenged students in teaching education programme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>ITEMS</th>
<th>A (%)</th>
<th>D (%)</th>
<th>U (%)</th>
<th>R</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Keeping pace with normal students at listening, speaking, writing and note-taking is a challenge to the physically challenged in inclusive school</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mobility, that is ability to move from the hostels to the lecture halls, etc possess some difficulties to the physically challenged in inclusive school</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I always have the feeling of rejection from my course mates and lecturers.</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The lecture halls are not set to accommodate all students irrespective of their unique situations</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Non challenge attitude on the part of the government and the society at large is one of the major problems inhibiting integration of the physically challenged</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Problems inherent in integrating the physically challenged students in teacher education programme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>ITEMS</th>
<th>A (%)</th>
<th>D (%)</th>
<th>U (%)</th>
<th>R</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Government has not been able to enforce the 75% policy of inclusive education,</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Non provision of required infrastructure affects seriously the integration of the physically challenged students in teacher education programmed.</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Inadequate provision of necessary facilities posed a problem to the integration of the physically challenged in teacher education programme</td>
<td>97.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Availability of fund has been the major problem inherent in integrating physically challenged students in pre-service teacher education programme</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Benefits of integrating the physically challenged students in teacher education programme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>ITEMS</th>
<th>A (%)</th>
<th>D (%)</th>
<th>U (%)</th>
<th>R</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Education for all which enhances nation building will be part of the benefit of integration.</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Integration helps national development of the country – physically, socially, economically, etc</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>It promotes equality among everybody in the society (physically challenged and non physically challenged)</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Integration ensures peace and tranquility and 85% reduction of poverty.</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>It enhances family and national growth.</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Integration strategies to enhance mainstreaming of the physically challenged students in teacher education programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>ITEMS</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>R</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Teachers can foster, or hinder integration in their method of lecture delivery</td>
<td>87% (174)</td>
<td>10% (20)</td>
<td>3% (6)</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>A focus on one section (abled and disabled) of the students tend to hinder integration</td>
<td>80% (140)</td>
<td>17.5% (35)</td>
<td>2.5% (5)</td>
<td>4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>For effective teaching, teachers should present materials that will benefit every student in the classroom</td>
<td>98% (196)</td>
<td>2% (4)</td>
<td>0% -</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Equal treatment for all in the class, in terms of distribution questions, care and attention can foster integration</td>
<td>98.5% (197)</td>
<td>1% (2)</td>
<td>0.5% (1)</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Majority of the respondents that is 95% agree to that while ensuring peace, tranquility and reduction of poverty came second in that order. In addition, 70% of the respondents agree that national development of the country is one of the benefits of integration.

Table 4 indicates that almost all the respondents that is 98.5% are of the view that equal treatment for all in the class, in terms of distribution of questions, care and attention is the best strategy to foster integration while the need for teacher to resent materials that will benefit every student in class comes second with 98%.

**DISCUSSION**

The findings of the study show that the respondents recognize the need for the integration of the physically challenged students. However, they are quick to point out the numerous problems hindering the full integration of this group of students in teacher education programme in Nigeria. Some of these problems range from funding, inadequate provision of facilities, poor infrastructure and attitude of teachers, feeling of rejection among themselves and from the lecturers and the society at large.

The problem is further compounded by the non-challant attitude on the part of the government. This is quite pertinent because Nigeria is one of the signatories to Education for all (EFA).

It is imperative to emphasize what the physically challenged and the society at large stand to benefit from the integration of the physically challenged into the teacher education programme. This is in line with Alur [18] cited by Gaver [17] that the inclusion of the disabled into mainstream schools will inevitably result in the acceptance of this group by the society and also by their own families many of whom still hide away children with disabilities. In other words if all students are integrated in the same school setting, there will be less likelihood of resistance and ostracism of the physically challenged. This means that teachers require additional knowledge, skills and competencies to a wider range of diverse needs which is core in a teacher education programme.

However, the way teachers respond to this will be critical. As indispensable agents of change, teachers are capable of enhancing or obstructing the success of integration. Teachers’ attitude and behaviour are closely interconnected and act as significant prediction of their willingness to implement inclusive practices. This is because teachers whose beliefs and practices clash with principles of inclusion and who are unwilling to adapt their pedagogy to meet diversity of learning often become a threat to inclusion.

In providing good practices for teachers some strategies have been advanced by Perkins and Salmon [14] who identified two major methods which teachers can use to foster instruction. These are hugging and bridging. In hugging, the future teachers are trained to teach all the students the same way without any special consideration while in bridging the teacher mediates between the physically challenged and the non-physically challenged and make the students work together in a team. Other strategies include team teaching, differentiated teaching and peer teaching.

Teacher educators hold responsibility for providing pre-service teachers with quality experiences which prepare them for teaching. It is the teacher who is in position to make decisions about course contents, align the course with larger departmental or disciplinary contexts and address students perceptions that help shape their learning.

**CONCLUSION**

This paper examined the degree to which the needs of the physically challenged students are integrated in teacher education programmes as well as the major challenges confronting the physically challenged preservice teachers. The paper also articulated the benefits of integrating and including their needs of the physically challenged into teacher education.
programme as well as some major strategies that are capable of facilitating successful integration of such needs. The study found as part of the challenges facing the physically challenged prospective teachers, such factors as funding, inadequate provision of facilities and infrastructure, among others. The paper found that there is an urgent need for the government to set in motion the machinery for the integration of the needs of the physically challenged students in teacher education programme. The study therefore recommends that the government should pursue more vigorously without delay the policy of inclusion, provide more adequate fund and facilitate the exposure of teachers to a variety of strategies that are capable of aiding the realization of this laudable goal.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study makes the following recommendations towards the inclusion of the needs of the physically challenged students in teacher education.
- The government should pursue more vigorously without further delay the policy on inclusive education.
- All teacher education institutes (Faculties of education in the universities and colleges of education) should be restructured to enable them admit both the physically challenged and the nonphysical challenged in the programme.
- There should be a more aggressive sensitization of the parents, teachers (able and disabled) and all the stakeholders about the need for inclusive education.
- The government should provide enough enough funding for inclusive teacher education programmes.
- Adequate facilities should be provided in the classrooms to accommodate all the students irrespective of their unique situation.
- Conveniences in the schools (toilets, play grounds, theatres, classrooms etc) should be made to suit all the students in the school
- The teachers should be exposed to a variety of strategies which the trainees can use in teaching such as hugging, bridging, team teaching, differentiated teaching, preferred teaching etc.
- Nigeria should attempt to model some of the best practices in Inclusive Education especially with regards to the needs of the physically challenged students from various parts of the world.

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