

Challenges of Implementing Inclusive Education: Evidence from Selected Developing Countries

Rasaq Sijuola, M.s.w; Jelena Davidova Dr. paed.
Daugavpils University, Latvia;
rasaqsijuola@gmail.com¹; jelena.davidova@du.lv²

Abstract: Inclusive education is deemed to be a lofty goal that every nation should strive to achieve. It helps people living with disabilities and people without any disabilities to have equal access to educational materials, resources, and training without any discrimination. Therefore, international advocates and governments have made conscious efforts to achieve inclusive education. However, the implementation of inclusive education and its related policies is difficult, especially in developing countries. The lofty inclusive education is challenging and almost impossible to achieve. This paper, therefore, aims to assess and highlight the challenges frustrating the implementation of inclusive education, particularly in developing countries. It is obvious that these countries are lagging behind in the achievement of inclusive education due to a wide range of challenges identified in this study. To achieve this aim, the paper employed a theoretical research method. The method allowed several extant studies, especially those published in mainstream journals, on the subject to be reviewed and explored extensively. The review of extant studies on the challenges encountered in the implementation of inclusive education produced a number of pertinent findings. So, the findings of the study revealed that societal attitude towards people living with disabilities, poor attitude of the government, inadequate infrastructure, poor funding, and a host of other reasons are the key factors frustrating the implementation of inclusive education, causing the low level of inclusiveness in the developing nations. These findings help inclusive education advocates, international organizations, and governments alike, to narrow their focus on these challenges and develop approaches to overcome them in order to achieve their end goal of inclusive education. It is therefore suggested that government should organize training programmes for teachers and headteachers on how best to manage an inclusive classroom and offer inclusive education.

Keywords: challenges, inclusive education, implementation, people, Developing Countries.

Introduction

Inclusive education has grown over the years in popularity among nations, developing and developed nations, and international organisations. Its importance stems from its focus on how people living with disabilities can have equal access to education and educational resources like any other person who has no disabilities in society. Some studies even proved that it holds the key to eradicating societal biases and discrimination among the young ones and fostering an inclusive future for the society (Begum, 2017).

In the literature, disabilities are part of human conditions, and it is expected that many people will experience some physical disabilities or impairments in their bodies during their lifetime (Uromi and Mazagwa, 2014). A disability may be temporary or permanent (Altiraifi, 2019). But once an individual suffers a disability, it makes his living conditions difficult in one way or the other. While some forms of disabilities may not necessarily alter the living condition of people, some do make people invalid, relying on other people to live a proper life. Disability somewhat limits what people living with disabilities can do and the places they can go to. And by so doing, they are unable to access existing opportunities without the help of other people. In Uromi and Mazagwa (2014), they traced the causes of disabilities to infectious, non-infectious, and communicable diseases such as malaria, epilepsies, meningitis, tuberculosis, and parasitic health problems. In some cases, people become disabled because of congenital diseases and through war, hostility, accidents, and trauma (Sareen, 2014; Finlay, Owens, Taylor, Nash, Capdarest-Arest, Rosenthal, Blue-Howells, Clark and Timko, 2019). Generally, disability poses some challenges to people experiencing it. Uromi and Mazagwa (2014) highlighted some of the challenges bedevilling people living with disabilities. These challenges include the poor level of infrastructure that makes it difficult for people living with disabilities to access some areas; discrimination regarding employment opportunities and women with disabilities experience more

discrimination in this area; economic exclusion or marginalisation which is based on the impression that people living with disabilities lack the capacity to contribute meaningfully to the economy; inadequate physical power or energy to wade off sexual advances from sexual predators; grinding poverty; restrictions on access to information and so on. But it is hoped that the challenges of people living with disabilities can be reduced through inclusive education. Education is generally viewed as a means to overcome poverty and improve the quality of life of the people. So, individuals with disabilities are believed to fair better, not just with education but inclusive education that allows them to access the same level of education and educational facilities as their counterparts.

So, what is inclusive education? Without any doubt, many scholars have lashed at this concept and explained it in various ways (Anupriya and Salim, 2014; Sharma, 2014). For instance, it is defined as a way of teaching all students in the same learning environment, regardless of their disabilities, granting them equal access to academic resources (Anupriya and Salim, 2014). It ensures that students of the same age group learn together and are offered the necessary support to learn and are actively involved in every aspect of school activities (Gajendrabhai and Saini, 2020). According to Ugwu and Onukwufor (2018), inclusive education is an educational approach to deal with the issue of exclusion in the educational system. It enables people to be educated within their communities and neighbourhoods with their peers without any discrimination despite possible physical disabilities and challenges (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2015). With inclusive education, learners can actively participate in learning activities despite their challenges. Inclusive education serves to help people to access education and is a tool to bring about attitudinal change toward individuals with disabilities (Dupoux, Wolman and Estrada, 2005).

Bhat and Geelani (2017) see inclusive education as a proper strategy used to make education accessible to everyone in the world regardless of the disability any learner may have and to guarantee equity in the society at large. du Plessis (2013, p. 78) explained inclusive education to be a “learning environment that promotes the full personal, academic and professional development of all learners irrespective of race, class, gender, disability, religion, culture, sexual preference, learning styles and language”. Bhat and Geelani (2017) stressed one of the benefits of inclusive education is that it enables the capacity of an educational system to be accessible to all learners. Begum (2017) narrowed his view down to internal changes in organisations such as schools which border on policies, practices and cultural perspectives and that all children are allowed to participate in the same class without any segregation (Begum, 2017). Basically, it is meant to make equal provisions for people living with disabilities to access quality education just like their counterparts.

Aside from conceptualising its benefits, some governments have advanced inclusive education beyond scholarly debates to policy formulation and implementation at the government level (United Nations, 2015). For instance, in Nigeria, the government has taken further steps to enshrine the fundamental rights of People Living With Disabilities (PLWD) in the 1999 Nigerian Constitution. The 1999 Nigerian constitution protects people living with disability from inhuman acts and offers them personal liberty to engage in productive activities including education (Nigeria, 1999a; Nigeria, 2009). Similarly, international organisations spelt out their rights too. For instance, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006a (CRPD) recognises the rights of people living with disabilities. Seven out of its eight principles make provision for people living with disabilities. These principles are (Etieyibo, 2020, p.65) “respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one’s own choices, and independence of persons; non-discrimination; full and effective participation and inclusion in society; respect for difference, and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity; equality of opportunity; accessibility; equality between men and women; respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities, and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities”. It is obvious that these rights, especially the right to “equality of opportunity” encompasses the right of people living with disabilities to full education like any other person in the society. So, inclusive education is already admitted as one of the fundamental human rights of everyone (United Nations, 2016). The provisions and knowledge of these rights and their applications protect their rights from being trampled upon; boost their confidence to clamour for their rights in the best ways they can; and equally galvanises individuals, public figures, and social activists to advocate for a better life for the affected people, including inclusive education.

Despite its importance and the provisions of the laws, the implementation of inclusive education has been slowed down by challenges, especially in developing countries. In other world, developing countries are experiencing some challenges in implementing inclusive education. PLWD in these countries are yet to benefit from inclusive education. This study, therefore, intends to highlight specific challenges of implementing inclusive education in developing countries, including Nigeria inclusive. The highlight of these challenges will help nations intending to implement inclusive education to be well prepared to face and overcome these challenges. Basically, the main problem to be tackled in this paper is the assessment of the challenges of implementing inclusive education in developing countries. These challenges are being faced in many developing countries, Nigeria inclusive, across the world. The study aims to answer a crucial question about inclusive education. The question is, “What are the challenges of implementing inclusive education in developing countries?”

Methodology

The main question that this study aims to answer is “What are the challenges of implementing inclusive education in developing countries?” In this study, a systematic literature review method is employed to achieve its aim and answer the research question. The research method enables a series of extant studies to be reviewed, and pertinent findings are drawn out from them to answer the study’s research question. Tawfik, Dila, Mohamed, Tam, Kien, Ahmed and Huy (2019) posited that the primary strength of this approach is that it gleans recent happenings about a subject from extant studies and keeps readers updated about the experiences. Snyder (2019) stressed that it enables the occurrences to be narrated systematically and with clarity. In other words, it unearths existing challenges confronting governments and advocates of inclusive education in the process of implementing it. It then implies that systematic literature review is one of the tested methods capable of bringing pertinent findings out of the review of a series of extant studies. The method enables the findings of many studies to be synched together to show a pattern or any discrepancies. So, like the popular quantitative, qualitative and mixed research methods (Creswell, 2014), a systematic literature review provides unquestionable and objective findings for any study where it is judiciously applied.

In this study, the systematic review is limited to studies done between 2013 and 2021. Since the current study aims to highlight recent challenges, several studies were explored and reviewed to discuss the concept of inclusive education, the rights of people living with disabilities, and critical challenges which have beleaguered several attempts made to implement inclusive education. This approach highlights the challenges of implementing inclusive education in many countries and is found in the studies considered. Also, the selected studies employed popular research methods – qualitative, quantitative, and theoretical research methods (Egaga and Aderibigbe, 2015) and obtained pertinent data from respondents who are stakeholders in the field of education, from students to teachers to principals or headteachers of schools in various developing countries. This method enables the study to focus on the objective findings of each study. Lastly, the review was done in a systematic way starting with the study area, the randomly selected respondents and suitability for the respective studies; and specific findings of each study are pointed out. The review was not clumsy, and their conclusions entailed critical challenges facing the implementation of inclusive education.

Lastly, this method helps to highlight a vast number of challenges facing the implementation of inclusive education in many developing countries from India to Swaziland, Lesotho, South Africa, Zambia to Nigeria. It can be said that there is an exhaustive list of challenges frustrating the implementation of inclusive education in developing countries around the world.

Results and Discussions

In answering the central question of this study, which was stated above, the works of different scholars, within and outside Nigeria, are explored and reviewed. In the study conducted by Delubom, Marongwe and Buka (2020) on two Technical Colleges, they found out that the implementation of inclusive education was stalled by the low level of infrastructure, lack of funding, and inadequate staff to help students with disabilities. They recommended that technical colleges should either train their staff or employed competent staff to achieve inclusive education. Gajendrabhai and Saini (2020)

identified negative attitudes of people, families of PLWD and teachers impaired the implementation of inclusive education. Sharma (2015) stressed that modern facilities are required to achieve and implement inclusive education, that is, to integrate PLWD into the mainstream classrooms. In other studies, Chibwe and Mulenga (2021) opined teachers are not adequately trained and available buildings did not make provisions for PLWD. Hence the implementation of inclusive education appears impossible. Mpu and Adu (2021, p. 225) highlighted “overcrowding, insufficient training, lack of knowledge and skills of educators” as the challenges impeding the implementation of inclusive education. Overall, inclusive education is beneficial to PLWD and their counterparts. However, its implementation is bedevilled by several challenges as revealed in the reviewed studies.

So, the implementation of inclusive education is challenging for countries experiencing the problems identified to be confronting inclusive education. Ugwu and Onukwufor (2018) investigated one of the major challenges of implementing inclusive education which is principals’ attitude toward inclusion in one of the states in the South-South region of Nigeria. They administered a survey instrument to 116 principals, via stratified random sampling, in public and private in Rivers State, Nigeria. The data collected was analysed through descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings, then, revealed that principals with adequate knowledge of inclusive education showed a positive attitude towards it and vice versa. It implies that the knowledge of present principals in schools can serve as a mechanism to promote inclusive education in schools.

Further studies on the challenges of implementing inclusive education in developing countries are explored. Among these studies are the studies were done by Khoaeane and Naong (2015); Bugti and Kazimi (2021); Adebayo and Ngwenya (2015) and a host of others. Specifically, Khoaeane and Naong (2015) explored the challenges bedevilling the implementation of inclusive education in Lesotho and ways to overcome these challenges. The authors obtained data from 256 randomly selected teachers from two distinct districts of Lithabane and St. Bernadette in Lesotho. The findings unfolded critical challenges facing the implementation of inclusive education in the country. They found out that the primary stakeholders such as teachers were finding it difficult to handle students with disabilities; schools in the country still lacked the basic infrastructure for the initiative, and the students did not receive adequate financial stability. All these challenges frustrated the implementation of inclusive education in the two districts of Lesotho.

Similarly, in the study done by Beyene and Tizazu (2010), 63 per cent of the participant teachers confirmed that there was no adequate training for teachers on how to manage learners with challenges and disabilities. More so, they experienced challenges like lack of teaching materials and poor attitude of parents and authorities towards the idea of inclusive education. All these challenges make inclusive education a pipe dream in the country. Causton and Theoharis (2013), in their study, argued that teachers were unable to manage the increasing number of children with disabilities especially behavioural difficulties in the classroom. For instance, they disrupt classes and undermine the learning climate of the classroom. They posited that teachers, on their part, did not have sufficient knowledge and skills to offer necessary help to learners with disabilities and the lack of knowledge usually lead to frustration.

Bugti and Kazimi (2021), in Karachi, examined the challenges and opportunities inherent in the implementation of inclusive education in Sindh, Pakistan. The study focused on selected primary schools in the capital of the country – Karachi. Data was obtained for the study from two main schools using the Likert scale type of questionnaire. Senior teachers and school principals, who knew much about inclusive education, were the participants. The outcomes of the study pointed to certain challenges. These challenges included a lack of commitment and unity among teachers and parents regarding inclusive education for children with disabilities. It was suggested that adequate funding should be made for the implementation of inclusive education to cover equipment, teachers’ learning programmes, and materials for the programme.

In Swaziland, Adebayo and Ngwenya (2015) explored the subject of inclusive education and the challenges impeding its implementation in the country, drawing evidence from the Elulakeni Cluster Primary Schools situated in the Shiselweni District of Swaziland. With headteachers from 14 schools participating in the study, findings showed a list of challenges impeding the implementation of the inclusive system in the country. The challenges include a lack of competence on the part of the

teachers, poor financial and material support for the programme, poor administration, poor attitude of the teachers, lack of collaborative efforts, unfair treatment of students and a host of other challenges. The ministry of education was counselled to organise adequate training programmes for teachers on inclusive education. Similarly, Thwala (2015) conducted a solo study on the same subject of inclusive education in Swaziland but focused on teachers who oversaw the programme in the country. He was particular about the challenges they encountered in managing the inclusive programme. Data was obtained from the participants through a focus group discussion in which teachers were engaged in productive conversations on the issue of inclusive education. Results show that a common problem of lack of training for teachers was the main challenge teachers were facing in running an inclusive educational system. So, the Ministry of Education was advised to organise courses, conferences and programmes for teachers on inclusive education.

In South Africa, Mpu and Adu (2021) elicited data from three schools in the Buffalo City to find out the challenges of implementing inclusive education in the country. Like many of the extant studies, findings showed that low level of training, overpopulation of the classroom, and inadequate knowledge and skills of the educators made the implementation of inclusive education challenging and difficult. In India, Bhat and Geelani (2017) identified poor attitude from teachers, non-compliant curriculum, inadequate resources and infrastructure, ignorance of parents, poor planning and poor execution of the inclusive educational policies as the challenges frustrating the implementation of inclusive education in the country. In Zambia, Chibwe and Mulenga (2021) researched the challenges of implementing inclusive education in the country with evidence being drawn from selected Primary Schools in the Kitwe District of the country. With the use of a semi-structured survey, data obtained from the selected respondents revealed challenges similar to the challenges of other countries that are finding it difficult to implement the inclusive educational programme. Some of the challenges encountered in the country are the lack of trained personnel and the inadequacy of the school buildings for the programme. Gajendrabhai and Saini (2020) posited that negative attitudes of the families of people living with disabilities and the general public; poor attitude of teachers toward inclusive education; inadequate facilities for learning are critical challenges in implementing inclusive education. Begum (2017, p. 6563), while exploring the issues and challenges of inclusive education in India, stated that “A limited understanding of the concept of disability, negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities and a hardened resistance to change” are the major challenges impeding the implementation of inclusive education in the country.

This paper, therefore, attempts to assess and highlight the challenges of implementing inclusive education in developing countries with the sole aim of drawing out these challenges and helping stakeholders to come to terms with the problems making inclusive education difficult in some countries. The findings of the study will, therefore, help to design a roadmap on how to best implement inclusive education and overcome its challenges. It is believed that with a clear view of what the challenges of implementing inclusive education are, stakeholders will be able to navigate these challenges and provide adequate education for everyone regardless of their physical challenges.

The study results show that the implementation of inclusive education is difficult because of several factors or challenges. These challenges range from government-based to individual persons in the educational sector. In other words, some of the challenges stemmed from teachers and headteachers of many schools and civil servants working in the Ministry of Education of affected developing countries.

The review of the selected studies shows some patterns in terms of the nature of the challenges undermining the implementation of inclusive education in developing countries. Premised on the findings of the selected studies, the challenges impeding the implementation of inclusive education include inadequate funding, poor attitude of the society, poor attitude of the parents of People Living With Disabilities (PLWD), inadequate infrastructure, inability to manage the increasing number of PLWD, inadequate learning materials, lack of trained personnel, and failure of available facilities to accommodate People Living With Disabilities (PLWD) (Sharma 2015; Delubom, Marongwe and Buka, 2020; Chibwe and Mulenga, 2021; Mpu and Adu, 2021). These challenges stem mainly from the poor attitude of the government to the issue of inclusive education. While the government makes policies to ensure the realization of inclusive education, it fails to back it up with necessary financial provisions.

Other challenges confronting the implementation of inclusive education are poor attitudes from the parents of the People Living with Disabilities (PLWD) towards inclusive education (Gajendrabhai and Saini, 2020). Principals are the main stakeholders in the pursuance of inclusive education among the people. So, any attitudinal change towards the issue of inclusive education has a direct bearing on whether it will be realized or not.

Premised on the findings of the study, it is valid to suggest that individuals, educational establishments, and government should collaborate to overcome these challenges and implement inclusive education for the good of everyone in the society. Also, adequate training must be given to teachers and headteachers to keep them abreast of what inclusive education means and learn the skills needed to manage classrooms consisting of all students from different backgrounds without any discrimination.

This current study employed a theoretical research method to achieve its objective and answer the research question. It is suggested that a mixed research method should be used in subsequent research in order to generate more robust findings.

Conclusions

Implementing inclusive education would be difficult due to the lack of clarity and uncertainty on what it entails. Teachers deal with several hurdles in their experience of implementing inclusive education and learning to integrate into the teaching can be a particularly challenging process, especially given the number of new initiatives launched in local education. In addition, working with parents - the first point of contact with the community outside the school - is another challenge of inclusive education. Parents are the principal stakeholders outside the administration circle of the school. Aside from these, teachers face numerous obstacles in providing quality education to all students as disparities in our society increase.

Overall, inclusive education is suitable for society because of its capability to integrate all people regardless of their disabilities into a single learning system. However, its implementation is impeded and challenging because of the aforementioned factors such as lack of training for teachers, poor attitude, inadequate infrastructure, and a host of other challenging situations. It is imperative that all stakeholders in education make conscious efforts to overcome these challenges and implement inclusive education. Hence government, the ministry of education, educational donors, domestic and international organizations, actual and prospective teachers, parents, the society, and the students should embrace the concept of inclusive education and their respective roles to make it a reality around the world, especially in developing nations.

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