Principals Leadership Roles in Inclusive Education in Secondary Schools in Kogi State; Issues and Strategies

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Abstract

Education is a means of preparing individual to be relevant to himself/herself and the society. Among the individuals to be educated are the young, the old, the vulnerable and people with special needs Secondary education is an intermediate education that prepare all categories of learners to be relevant to themselves in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domain. The study discusses secondary school principal leadership roles in inclusive education in Nigeria. The concept of leadership, inclusive education and secondary education were described. The study discussed issues in inclusive education to include; bureaucracy, staff development, psychological barriers, extra staff, cost and inclusive assessment. The study identified the leadership strategies needed by the principal to include; planning, communication, accountability, risk taking among others. The study concluded that inclusive education in the present age can only be attained through collaboration and quality assurance by school managers. Suggestions on the way forward were highlighted and these are; enforcing inclusive education at all levels of education, adequate funding of inclusive education and public enlightenment on the importance of inclusive education.

Key words: Inclusive Education, Principals, leadership, secondary schools, Nigeria**.**

Introduction

Education is an interment for social reconstruction and national development. Every country all over the world put in place the type of education that will meet the need and aspiration of the citizen for political, social and economic growth. The Federal Republic of Nigeria FRN (2014) National policy on education classify inclusive education under special need education where it states that government shall provide access to education for all persons , in an inclusive setting. Government intends to achieve this through adequate funding and proper supervision among other obligations. The provision of inclusive education will guarantee education for all advocated by government across the world

Concept of Inclusive Education

Inclusive Education is the type of education given to learners irrespective of whom they are and where they come from. Alquraini and Gut, (2012) asserted that inclusive education is the type of education received by all regardless of any challenges they may have, it is the type of education that place the learner in the appropriate classes to receive high-quality instruction, interventions, and supports that enable them to meet success in the core curriculum. These types of education guarantee education for all irrespective of age, gender, tribe disability and state or country of origin. The school and classroom for inclusive learners are organized in such a way that learners with disabilities and learners without disabilities stay and learn side by side. It also bring students from different emotional, social religious and other background together to learn and interact with their peer without fear of molestation and intimidation. Educational administrators and leaders have a role to play in the provision and management of this type of education in Nigeria. This paper addresses secondary school principal leadership roles in inclusive education in Kogi State, Nigeria.

Concept of Leadership

The concept of leadership has being given wider attention by management experts. In the view of Usman (2015) leadership is defined as exercise of authority and making of decisions. Similarly, Oguche (2014) defined leadership as a process whereby one person exerts influence social influence over the members of a group. Leadership could also be described as management which is aimed at organizing the action of subordinates. It has to do with directing the activities of individual, groups toward achieving the stated objectives. Leadership is also concerned with dominance and prestige acquired or ability to control, initiate or set the pattern of behaviour. Aleader is expected to live an exemplary life so that he/she can command the respect of the subordinates. Leadership in secondary school is headed by the principal and other supporting staff.

The Principal as a Leader in Secondary School

Secondary Education is the education received after primary education, and before tertiary education. According to Ogbonnaya (2015) secondary schools are established to provide intermediate manpower for the economy and to prepare students for tertiary education. Secondary schools in Nigeria are spread across villages and cities across the thirty six states in Nigeria and the federal capital territory. Secondary school is headed by a principal who enjoy or may not enjoy co-operation from other member of staff. According to Agenyi(2015), the principal as the head and leader of secondary school is the chief accounting officer of the school, he/she supervises the staff, manages resources in a manner that guarantee satisfaction, he/she source for funds, assign duties and direct member of staff in their activities in the day to day running of the school. The principal has a part to play in inclusive education as part of his/her leadership roles in ensuring education for all and sundry.

Issues in Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is one of the major educational programmes adopted by government across the world to ensure that the dream of education for all is achieved. As noted by Alquraini and Gut (2012), inclusive education happens primarily through accepting, understanding, and attending to students' differences and diversity which may include

physical, cognitive academic, social and emotional differences. Acceptance of each other by students from different background is key to the success of inclusive education. When there is no acceptance, there will be no coming together and there will be no inclusiveness.

Inclusive education involves support from stakeholder in the education in industry. Oguche (2016) listed stakeholder in education industry as parent, teachers, the school community, food vendors, health practitioners, security expert among others. These people are expected to partner as inclusive educators for the attainment of stated goals, for example the regular teacher and the special teacher in inclusive school are expected to prepare the students academically, the food vendors supply the needed food under strict hygienic condition, the security people ensures that food are prepared and served under hygienic condition, while parent have a responsibility to provide school fees, uniform and other conveniences for their children. Having principals, teachers, parents and others work together to determine the most effective ways of providing a quality education in an inclusive environment will fasten the process of goal achievement.

Inclusive education if properly implemented could bring about academic gains and improved students performances. Inclusiveness involves staying together, working together and studying together by students with disability and students without disabilities. As noted by Buiet (2010), both students without disability do collaborative learning with students with disability. The more students without disability teach, the more they learn from their peers, thus they may have higher achievement.

Inclusive education takes cognizance of teachers who needs to be supported to implement classroom teaching and learning. According to deBoer, Piji&Minnaret(2011), these are experienced teachers, teachers who are properly trained to handle inclusivity, teacher who is competent and confident to handle inclusive children. In addition to training and support, positive attitude toward inclusion, understanding of best practices in teaching and adapted instruction are among issues that can bring about inclusivity. Positive attitude to inclusive education bring about commitment and dedication on the part of teachers, in other words, positive attitude is like a vision, when one has a vision, he will be committed to it.

In trying to implement and improve inclusive education in secondary schools, predicting barrier is important, barriers that come from the teacher, from children with disability, from the medium used for classroom instruction and from the type of educational system practised in the area. These barriers can be proactively removed through identification of resources to remove it (Oguche, 2017). Removing barriers to inclusive education will increase the opportunities and capacities to meet the needs and interests of all learners in inclusive school.

Inclusive education is the type of education that is used to address the diversity of needs of all children, youths and adults through increasing participation in learning and community engagement(UNESCO, 2009). Teachers needs to be trained to handle inclusive classrooms, the curriculum needs to be revised to integrate both learners, the school plant should be organized in such a manner that can accommodate both learners This calls for modifications, changes and revision of curriculum content, approaches to teaching, structures and strategies required for implementing inclusive education. This should be done with a common vision that covers all children of appropriate age range and a conviction that it will work for all

Some of the requirements for inclusive education are human right, equality, justice and struggle against segregation, all these values are meant to improve the society and to make the child good to himself and the society. Education planners should incorporate civic education in inclusive education curriculum subjects so as to be able to teach the above values in schools, this values will help to transform schools into better places for all and sundry. They should also be aware that there could be value conflicts, value conflict occur when there is racial integration or integration of the disadvantaged in the normal school. When this happens, managers of inclusive education should find a way of surmounting it.

Inclusive education just like any other educational innovations could be resisted by teachers, parent, educationist and the entire society. The resistance may not be based on a very strong philosophical argument, but out of the fact that people resist changes even though it does not challenge them. Adaptation is necessary to accommodate changes that might come from innovations. Adaptation facilitates academic needs of both staff and students and can bring about breakthrough in inclusive education.

Academic achievement forms the basis of inclusive education in schools and colleges. Academic achievement has been described by Guskey (2013) as the accomplishment of articulated learning goals. This achievement takes place in an environment that is conducive to teaching and learning such as good classrooms, serene learning environment, good instruction and proper use of instructional materials. Academic achievement should be the watchword of managers of inclusive education and should be pursued at any level of inclusive education.Co-operative learning can bring about academic achievement. Cooperative learning according to Makuku (2020) refers to group of learners working together to solve a problem, complete a task or accomplish a goal. All inclusive learners should be involved in teamwork through interdependence to bring about academic achievement.

Having strong leadership for inclusion from school principals and other administrators is important for the growth of inclusive education. Leadership is important to the growth of organizations and schools (Oguche, 2016). The principals and other school administrators as leaders must be tactical enough to ensure that the stated goals are achieved. The discourse on leadership stem from the fact that in an inclusive school, the school head and other administrators have to adopt the leadership style that is most rewarding. Questions like should i use democratic leadership style, what charismatic qualities do i have? Will inclusive students benefit if iam autocratic? How can i ensure stability in inclusive school through leadership? Providing answers to the above question will enable the principal and school administrators to take a stand on the issue of leadership.

Secondary School Principal Leadership Strategies in Inclusive Education.

As noted earlier in this work, an organisation like school can only grow if it is blessed with good leadership. According to Oguche (2014) good leadership and choosing the best leadership styles will bring about the achievement of stated goals. The principal leadership strategy in inclusive education can bring about the growth of inclusive education.

The principal is the chief accounting officer of the school, he gives account of the day to day management of the school in the areas of finance, school plant, number of teachers in the school, number of students in the school, the academic progress so far attained and successes recorded in other areas of management. Accountability is a very important strategy

because it will make the led to have confidence on the leader. Secondary school teachers, parent and other stake holder in inclusive schools may give their support to the principal if he gives account of his stewardship to them. This will bring about the achievement of stated goals.

In addition to the above, the secondary school principal has to be courageous to deliver the goods. In the view of Usman (2015),courage is one of the most import leadership role needed to accomplish organizational goals. Having the qualities entails taking risks to get the job done.Risk is taking a step without assurance of success. A committed school principal goes extra miles to do what others may think is an illusion, for example borrowing money to run a school anticipating that there might be a return after student have paid school fees. This is a risk, student might refuse to pay within the stipulated time and the principal may run into trouble especially with the banks. Risk taking is necessary because life itself is all about risk.

One of the principal's major strategies is proper planning. Planning for the future is a predominant role he/she has to play to bring about the attainment of stated goals. In the view of Usman and Tsav (2015), planning has to do with preparing in advance what one want to do or the goals he/she want to attain. The principal as a planner think about what to do to bring about success in external examinations, positive attitude on how to improve staff personnel services, positive attitude on how to improve students personnel services. He thinks about possible opportunities for improving co-operation among staff and students, how to build up an enviable entrepreneurial centre for the inclusive children among others Planning that leads to the achievement of stated inclusive educational goals don't believe in limitations and failure but rather the principal engages in long term thinking.

Furthermore, the principal role as a good communicator will bring about the achievement of stated goal in inclusive schools. Communication has been described by Agenyi (2015) as the interactional process between two or more people. The principal as head of inclusive secondary education can bring staff together and brief them during staff meeting on the way forward in the area of curriculum planning, student teacher relationship and student hygiene. He/she can also communicate with the supervising body, members of parent teacher association, or engage in school-community communication or maintain association with professional bodies through written and electronic medium. In communication for inclusive education growth, the school principal is expected to be relentless, simple and direct, listen and encourage input, illustrate by bringing the process of communication to specific notation and affirm actions that will bring about the stated goals in inclusive education.

Influencing other people could bring about the achievement of stated goals. The principal is expected to influence other staff and members of the group within and outside the school. In the view of Agenyi (2015), leaders can increase their influence by making others feel important and asking for suggestions and input from them. Secondary school principal can through staff meetings seek the opinion of other member, connect with people emotionally, and make other people feel important, build lasting relationships, and create awareness on matters of importance. Influence comes through relationships and the principal's ability to build up other people.

Decision making for inclusive education, the principal in inclusive school is expected to take the right decision for the actualization of stated educational goals. Decision making

involve finding alternative course of action for the achievement of stated goals (Oguche, 2014). Decisions in inclusive schools are made during staff regular briefing and when there is need to call a meeting. Issues like result consideration, sanitation, co-operation of members of staff, schedule of duties and staff and students welfare are considered and concession reached on the way forward for the achievement of stated goals.

Lastly, innovation and creative thinking is also part of the role of the principal in inclusive education. Innovation has been described as bringing in new idea or having a vision to improve a place (Oguche, 2017). Innovation can take place in the area of Information and Communication Technology, electronic learning, storage of data and computerising the operations of people with one disability or the other. Innovations will bring about effectiveness in the operations of inclusive education and attainment of stated goals

Conclusion

Considering the potential of inclusive education to the growth of individual and the society, it is expedient that the various stakeholders in education should join hand to encourage its provision and management. Adequate release of funds by government at all levels, proper supervision by designated authorities, public enlightenment on the benefits of inclusive education is required. The principal has a vital role to play since he/she connects the other segments of education, supervises the programme in his domain, encourages teacher to teach very well and also ensures that the goals of inclusive children are attained through empathy and possible collaboration with other partners to make inclusive education in Kogi State a reality.

Suggestions on the way forward

The following suggestions are made as way forward for inclusive education in secondary schools

(i)   Government at all levels should enforce inclusive education in their domain.
(ii)   Adequate funding and proper utilization of funds meant for inclusive education should be provided on regular basis.
(iii) Secondary school principals should enlighten the public on the benefits of inclusive education since secondary education is the connecting rod between primary schools and higher education.

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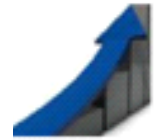
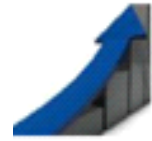Guskey, A,(2015) Issues on inclusive education. *Electronic Journal for Inclusive Education, Vol. 3, No. 4 [Available at https://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/ejie/vol3/iss4/8*

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