



Fairness in Testing Disabled Children for Equal Educational Opportunities in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviewed the issue of fairness in testing disabled children for equal educational opportunities in Nigeria with a view to highlighting the challenges and the prospects/way out. The paper revealed that if education for all is to be achieved disabled children should be catered for on the basis of accommodation, facilities and treatments. International policies and conventions were reviewed regarding education and testing of children with disabilities. Challenges encountered in testing this category of students were revealed and recommendations offered among which are there should be adequate funding as contained in the National Education Policy under UBE Act.

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INTRODUCTION

Classroom assessment involves much more than knowing how to develop tools for gathering information. When a teacher administers assessment procedures, he/she has the responsibility to ensure that the process is fair to all students and the outcome be will not be uninterpretable (Nitko, 2007).

Appropriate education for all cannot be provided effectively when the nature of the children's disabling conditions are not properly identified. "Identification of the disabling condition of an individual student will give a clue to an assessor to provide special facilities and treatments to the testees (Nitko, 2007). Teachers have professional and possibly legal responsibilities to accommodate and assess disabled children appropriately. As a person very close to them, the teacher has a special obligation to identify reasonable accommodation for classroom assessment activities and to seek the help of appropriate school personnel. It is high time

to fish these children out so as to consult with them before imposing any instrument on them. This is a necessary step for providing equal education opportunities.

CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Disability refers to loss of function. It also means functional limitation or activity restriction. "Disabled children are those who have impairment which significantly diminishes their ability to perform certain tasks" (Slavin, 2009). Examples of such children are visually impaired, hearing impaired, learning disabled, mentally retarded, speech impaired, physically and health impaired.

Identification of these children could be achieved through assessment. Assessment here refers to "special diagnosis which may include mental, social, psychological and educational evaluation used to determine assignment to programmes or individual strength and weakness" (Adima, 1988).



INTERNATIONAL POLICY AND PRACTICE ON THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITY

According to the United Nations (2019), over 12% or 680million people around the world live with disability among which 190million are children.

In the USA attention to the education of children with disabilities is given a top priority since 1975, when the US congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act Bill (EAHCA). The Act requires that all students with disability receive Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and that special funding be provided to assist in the cost of Special Education Programme. The Act was later renamed Individual with Disabilities Act (IDEA).

HOW TO ENSURE FAIRNESS IN TESTING CHILDREN WITH DISABILITY

According to the United States of America Individual with Disability Education Act amendments of 1991 (IDEA) and the Rehabilitation Act in 1973, the following rights ensure fairness in testing children with disabilities:

1. Right of the child to be tested in the language spoken at home.
2. Test giving for placement should not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, socioeconomic status etc. The test cannot be culturally biased.
3. Right to be tested with a test that meets special needs e.g. Braille, sign language.
4. Right to be tested in several different ways and no single test score can be used to make special education decision.

In the same vein, the American with Disability Act of 1990 (ADA) came up with the following rights to accommodations as follows:

1. The test administrator is expected to provide all necessary test locations, services, aids or accommodation at no extra charge to the examinees.
2. Right of the qualified person with disabilities to be tested in a way that he or she can understand what is being asked and in a way that he or she can respond.

The test takers right working group of the joint committee on testing practices of the United States of America 1999 has prepared test takers rights statements. A test taker has the right of:

1. Being treated with respect and courtesy regardless of personal characteristics.
2. Receiving an explanation prior to being tested about the purpose for testing.
3. Being told what accommodations are available for them.
4. Being informed in advance about when the test will be administered and when examinee will receive the result.
5. Having the test administered and interpreted by appropriately trained persons who follow professional codes of responsibilities
6. Having the test result kept confidentially and within the limits of law.

CHALLENGES IN TESTING CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN NIGERIA

It is challenging that in Nigeria testing children with disabilities is not guided by the standards set and administered. It is evident that the children with disabilities found in the regular schools are not well catered for. It seems the whole exercise is an exclusive preserve of the so-



called experts, when and where there is the commitment on the part of the authorities concerned to carry it out. More often than not, testing them ends up in vain (Panda, 2008). It has therefore been all motion without movement when we talk of equal educational opportunities given the continued decay and stagnation in the country's education sector. The following are a few among the challenges faced in testing children with disabilities in Nigeria:

The Testing Environment

"One source of defect in testing children with disability in Nigeria is the inappropriateness of the testing environment in which the assessment is conducted. Environment in this context relates not only to physical attributes such as temperature, space, furniture, ventilation and lighting, but also the psychological and social relationships between the testee and the tester conducting the assessment (Emeka, 1993).

The Tester/Testee

Usually the testee comes to the assessment session with all personal attributes – biological, psychological and socioeconomic. The presence of any form of deficiency or impairment in one form or the other on these attributes may impinge on the performance of the individual. In Nigeria, they are left to themselves, for it seems like the whole exercise used to be the exclusive preserve of the so-called "experts" when and where there is commitment on the part of authorities to carry out. It has been all motion without movement for the professionals charged with the responsibility are few unmotivated. The other teachers who are not motivated and are nonprofessionals but are charged with the responsibility of assessing the disabled children don't take care at ensuring that the purpose and areas

of interest the assessment affects are carefully determined beforehand.

Bias in Assessment

Bias in assessment has been a subject for a regular debate in Nigeria. Parental power labeling has a tremendous effect on teachers' expectation and assessment of cognitive confidence and achievement of their students. If the test instrument makes heavy financial demand on the testees, those who could not afford it are left behind. Test should not only be non-discriminate but decision makers should not be biased while making decision. They should not base their judgment on race, sex, socio-economic status or physical characteristics.

Test Effectiveness and Feasibility

For the test to meet the special needs of the students, students could be tested with multiple skills test. The disabled children in Nigeria especially those in regular schools do not enjoy the privilege to be tested in several different ways so as to meet their special needs.

Nigeria is a signatory to many international conventions and agreements concerned with educating children with special needs. Prior to 1980, the education of children with disabilities was through humanitarian and voluntary private organization (Garuba, 2003 in Agunloye, 2011).

The Federal Government began paying attention to the education of children with special needs after the civil war, which in its aftermath left the country with critical number of persons with disabilities.

Today, like in most developing countries, serious developmental policy in Nigeria are driven by international trends, treaties, agreements, manifestos and directives.



For the above reason(s), special educators (teachers, psychologists, guidance counselors etc) concerned with diagnostic tests of people with disabilities, should as a matter of urgent necessity, develop appropriate test items capable of identifying such individuals and provide conducive accommodation/atmosphere for their education and subsequent formative and summative assessment such that Education in Nigeria will be, truly, for ALL irrespective of gender or disabilities. It is only then such challenges as disabilities, would have been adequately challenged for national development.

In 1999 the Universal Basic Education (UBE) policy was adopted and enacted into law in 2004 as the UBE Act. This provides for free basic education for all children from ages 5-16.

Currently, the policy of inclusive education was officially and formally adopted as an integral part of the UBE policy. If the provision made for funding of the education of children with special needs as a National Education Policy under the UBE Act is put into effective use, and the international policies are sincerely followed with some modification to meet our socio-cultural peculiarities, the disabled could compete comfortably with the so-called 'normal'.

CONCLUSION

Conclusively, it is noted that the goal of realizing education for all children in Nigeria could only be achieved when we recognize that the right to education extends to all and when all governments, stakeholders, regions, tribes and religions come together to act unanimously with a view to reform the public education system to appropriately accommodate individuals with disabilities. If the education of children with disabilities is left in the hands of few opportunists, the nation will continue to

have the disabled advertising their deformities on the streets, as beggars, in most of our major cities, and this will be greatly unproductive for the nation.

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