



IMPLEMENTATION OF POST EDUCATION FOR ALL (EFA) GOALS IN SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

Dr. B. G. Dala*, R. A. Amwe* & V. F. Sowemimo**

* Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation Sciences,
Faculty of Education, University of Jos, Nigeria

** Special Education Department, Niger State College of Education, Minna, Niger State,
Nigeria

Abstract:

This paper seeks to examine the implementation of Education for All (EFA) goals in special needs education. The concept and goals of Education for All (EFA) will be presented to set the tone for the discussion. The paper will also highlight some realities of post 2015 EFA in Nigeria. More so, the paper outlined the steps in creativity in implementing the EFA goals. In addition, some challenges as well as the prospects in the implementation of EFA will also be highlighted. Finally, the paper will outline recommendations for the creative planning and implementation of Education for All (EFA) in Nigeria.

Key Words: Education for All (EFA), Special Needs Education (SNE) & Inclusive Education

Introduction:

Education is a fundamental human right that is key to the sustainable development and stability of any economy. The right of every citizen of a country to be educated has been recognized since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and was understood to comprise of four essential and related components: availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability (UNESCO, 2000). This implies that it is the responsibility of every country to ensure non - discriminatory inclusive education at all levels of education for all children including those with special learning needs, provide adequate funding and also provide a conducive learning environment to guarantee this.

According to the Global Campaign for Education Survey (2013), hundreds of millions of children still have no access to even basic education, and globally we are 1.7 million teachers short of the number needed to guarantee universal primary education by 2015. And it is the most marginalized and excluded – girls, children with disabilities, people from minorities, those living in fragile states who are most likely to miss out. This scenario calls for urgent attention of all education stakeholders to come up with modalities on achieving the post 2015 EFA goals

The Education for All (EFA) is an international initiative first launched in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 to bring the benefits of education to every citizen in every society. In order to realize this aim, a broad coalition of national government, civil society groups and developmental agencies such as United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Bank, bilateral donor agencies, development banks and inter-governmental agencies are actively involved and have pledged to achieve the EFA goals and targets.

The lack of access to education remains a key factor for poverty and exclusion of all children, both with special needs and those without. For children with special needs, the risk of poverty owing to the lack of education of even higher, than for children without special needs. As outlined by Penny (2003), exclusion from education results in exclusion from opportunities for further personal development, employment, active

participation in their families and also in their communities. Similarly, the much advocated need for the implementation of inclusive education has brought special needs education to limelight globally. There is need to provide accessible and qualitative education to all children irrespective of their geographical location, race, age, sex, special educational need etc.

It was to this effect that a regional conference on Education For All (EFA) in sub-Saharan Africa was held in Johannesburg, South Africa from 6th -10 December 1999 to reflect on the progress made towards achieving the EFA goals adopted in Jomtien 1990. The conference comprised of the ministers of education, representatives of civil society and international development agencies reflecting on the years since the Jomtien declaration was made. Subsequently, the World Education Forum which was held from the 26th to 28th April 2000, in Dakar, Senegal adopted the Dakar Framework for Action: Education for All (EFA). During this forum, its participants (181 countries) reaffirmed the vision of the World Declaration of Education for All adopted ten years earlier in 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand. The aim of the forum was to devise strategies for providing universal basic education for all countries of the world. The forum collectively came up with achievable goals that will be of benefit to the girl child, vulnerable and disadvantaged children, children of ethnic minorities, children affected by violence, children in affected by conflicts, children with special needs and those affected with HIV/AIDS (UNESCO, 2000, 2005).

As the target year for attaining the EFA goals draws near, the educational sector in Nigeria is so bleak that it will definitely not meet some of the EFA goals by the year 2015. Less than a year to the landmark year of its attainment, Nigeria lags behind in the attainment of some of the EFA and MDGs and is unlikely to meet the goals by 2015. However, as posited by Abayomi, (2014), when the EFA 2015 MDG goal was postulated in 2000, skeptics doubted the ability of countries like Nigeria to live up to that goal in a 15 year time frame.

As presented by the Global Thematic Consultation on Education and the post - 2015 Development Framework (2013), hundreds of millions of people globally still have no access to even basic education, and globally we are 1.7 million short of the number of teachers needed to guarantee universal primary educations by 2015. In the statistics provided above, it is the most marginalized and excluded-girls, children with disabilities, people from minorities, those living in fragile states that are most likely to miss out.

In less than a year to the 2015 deadline, a report by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 2014 states that it would take more than 70 years before all children (with and without special needs) will have access to primary education in sub Saharan Africa. Despite the progress made so far there is crisis in the Nigerian educational sector that can be characterized both in terms of quantity.

This paper seeks to examine the global perspectives in the implementation of Education for All (EFA) goals in special needs education. Some realities of post 2015 EFA in Nigeria as well as challenges as well as the prospects in the implementation of EFA will also be highlighted. Recommendations for the planning and effective implementation of Education for All (EFA) in Nigeria are also outlined.

Concept and Goals of Education for All (EFA):

Education for All (EFA) is a concept that evolved from the promotion of equal rights for all children irrespective of their special learning needs, geographical location, race etc. it is an initiative that was launched in 1990 by 155 countries and international

organizations (UNESCO, 2009). It is a global movement aimed at ensuring educational equality and also meets the learning needs of all children. However, the adoption of the EFA indeed was a great world achievement in the year 2000 and complemented the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which was also adopted the same year. Six EFA goals were aimed at providing free and qualitative primary education for all, expending early childhood care and education, increasing adult literacy, achieving gender equality as well as other salient issues that concerns educational development globally. The six (6) expanded Dakar EFA goals of April 2000 as outlined in the UNESCO Report (2000) are as follows:

- ✓ Expanding and improve comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children;
- ✓ Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality;
- ✓ Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes;
- ✓ Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults;
- ✓ Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2015, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality;
- ✓ Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measureable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

Consequently, the six Educations for All (EFA) goals outlined above have helped to drive remarkable progress in education since they were established in 2000. It is all inclusive and is aimed towards promoting sustainable development in education globally. Therefore achieving these goals will provide a breakthrough in general education globally and most especially in special needs education. It will promote inclusive education, eliminate education barriers, promote full participation of all stakeholders as well as ensure that adequate funding is provided for its full implementation and sustainability.

However, some major educational needs have not received the attention they deserve as fresh priorities have also emerged over the past decade. These include curriculum reforms (designing the general curriculum to suit learners with unique learning needs), provision of adequate teaching and learning materials, funding, elimination of architectural barriers, attitude change etc. Similarly, the Education For All Global Monitoring Report (EFA, GMR 2013), have also noted a global limited progress in narrowing inequality gaps in education, despite it being a key feature of EFA agenda. Therefore it is necessary for all stakeholders of EFA to strategize on modalities that will lead to the achievement the EFA goals.

Realities of Post 2015 EFA in Nigeria:

Globally, 2015 marks the deadline for achievement of both education for all (EFA) Dakar Framework for Action as well as the Millennium Developmental Goals (MDGs) (Global Campaign for Education Survey, 2013). However, globally there has been a significant transformation in the education sector since 2000, when the governments of the world agreed on then EFA framework and the MDGs. Yet there is

still the unfinished business of the EFA agenda and newly emerging challenges to tackle in the educational sector (regular and special education).

In assessing the major progress made so far, latest data by the US Database (2014), show that there are almost 70 million fewer children missing out on primary and lower secondary school than in 2000. There are also more than 100 million fewer adults who cannot read and write compared to the early 90s. Another estimate by UNESCO (2014) estimates that since 2008, the number of children not in primary school has not shifted in sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly, girls are still out of school than boys (due to early marriage) and also an estimated third of children now out of school have special needs.

In looking forward, Nigeria as a country must take into account not only the unfinished business of grossly inadequate budgetary allocation of funds by the government in special needs education, gender inequality (especially in the northern part of the country), negative attitudes towards persons with special needs, discriminatory practices as well as policy and right issues. According to the Nigerian Education Summit Group (2011), the grossly inadequate funds being allocated are not budgeted, tracked and managed to ensure the proper utilization of resources for educational purposes. Similarly, the Universal basic education schemes have no consideration for providing equal access to education for students with special needs. Whereas, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) has outlined in the UBE implementation guidelines that "persons in all manners and conditions of physical, spatial and psychological existence will benefit from the programme".

Challenges in the Implementation of EFA in Nigeria:

Achieving 50% of the EFA goals in Nigeria by 2015 are unrealistic and far from being achieved due to the deplorable state of education and the laize-affair attitude of the government in implementing the goals (Otive, 2006). This is due to the numerous challenges facing the general education system as well as special needs education in Nigeria. However, it is not impossible if the government will give it the utmost priority as most of these challenges can be overcome if the right mechanisms are set in place.

Policy changes in Nigeria are a big challenge to the achievement of the EFA in special needs education. The country's educational policies have experienced drastic changes which have led to little impact in the actualization of EFA goals in Nigeria. In addition, the passing of legislation mandating education for all is often not enforced in Nigeria despite the fact that the World Bank has promised funding to 23 countries with strong national EFA plans. The aim is to fast track their education plans if countries are willing to include children with special needs in their EFA Plans.

In addition, the reluctance of the government in implementing the UNESCO recommendation of 16% of annual budgets for education and the current 2% allocated to special needs education is far from being realistic. The challenges of inadequate funding include issues relating to the expensiveness in special needs education (it is more expensive to train a child with special educational needs than a child without special needs). Therefore, adequate funding is required in providing specialized educational services and the non-challant attitude of the government and most Nigerians to special education. (Otive, 2006; Bila, 2010).

Similarly, the availability and accessibility to education in Nigeria is still challenge in equalization of educational opportunities especially for the marginalized, girl child, children with special needs, children in rural areas, children of nomads, etc. Access to education is not possible due to the lack of data on the number of children with special needs in the country, the proportion enrolled in and out of school, data on

the number of children in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps around the country, number of children in rural areas, children of migrant farmers, children of nomads etc.

Furthermore, the lack proper monitoring and evaluation strategies aimed at identifying constraints and impediments to effective implementation of goals are usually not feasible. This has led to a decline in effective service provision as well in taking necessary measures to solve problems. Similarly, training and retraining of personnel in the field of special needs education should be carried out periodically to keep them abreast with recent practices and innovations in special needs education globally

Prospects in the Implementation of EFA in Nigeria:

Globally, there has been a significant transformation in the education sector since 2000, when the governments of the world agreed both the EFA framework (in collaboration with civil society and other stakeholders) and, subsequently, the MDGs. There has been progress, in particular on access to education. Yet it is important not to overstate this progress, nor to deny the complexity of the challenges remaining, which encompass both the unfinished business of the EFA and MDG agendas, and newly emerging challenges (Global Campaign for Education Survey (2013).

Despite the challenges faced in the area of special needs education in Nigeria, it has a lot of prospects especially in achieving the Education for All (EFA) goals. As posited by UNESCO, 2000, it is the responsibility of every country to ensure non - discriminatory inclusive education at all levels of education for all children including those with special needs, provide adequate funding and also provide a conducive learning environment to guarantee this. Presently, inclusive education is practiced in the pilot basis and has not been fully implemented. It therefore it is necessary that a policy on inclusive education be implemented to benefit a large number of children with special needs education in Nigeria.

Globally, ensuring the inclusion of disabled children is critical to achieving the goals of EFA. Engelbrecht and Green (2006) asserts that there is growing evidence showing that inclusive education can work in developing countries such as Nigeria. This is solely dependent on the level of commitment from the government and stakeholders' cooperation to make it a global action programme in education reforms. If inclusive education will work in the Nigerian context, then the EFA goals are attainable if not all then a few of the goals can be achieved. Similarly, according to Obanya (2013), the Nigeria's' Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in its original conception tried to mirror the EFA goals as can be seen in its objectives and scope. However, there is need to consider an expanded portfolio for the UBE to shift from reporting expenditure and interventions to reporting the progress attainment of the EFA goals.

In addition, Iheanacho, (2014) maintained that the special needs sector of the Federal Ministry of Education came up with a plan of action on how to promote inclusive education in Nigeria. To this effect a National Curriculum Training Manual was produced training sections have been carried out to ensure full implementation. Similarly, a second line of action is the establishment of the draft National Policy on Special Needs Education which is aimed at recognizing special needs education as well as facilitate the achievement of EFA goals in Nigeria.

Recommendations for the Effective Planning and Implementation of Education for All (EFA) in Nigeria:

There is need to provide a way forward for the actualization of the post 2015 EFA goals in Nigeria by ensuring that realistic measures to set in place to curb some of the challenges presented above. According to the World Education Forum (2000), in

order meet some of the challenges outlined above, it is all the more important to learn from the many examples of good practice and successful policies that have proven to be effective in the African context. These include:

- ✓ Accelerated access, with particular reference to policies of equity and female enrolment, including affirmative action;
- ✓ Community involvement in school decision-making and administration;
- ✓ Employment of teachers in their own community of origin;
- ✓ Curriculum reform toward locally relevant subjects;
- ✓ Affordable teaching materials and textbooks;
- ✓ Use of mother tongue as the language of instruction;
- ✓ The use of schools as community learning centres;
- ✓ Evaluation based on an action-research-action paradigm;
- ✓ Management/statistical information systems in planning, evaluation, etc.

Similarly, the forum also asserts that all African governments should ensure that at least 7 % of GDP is allocated to education within five years and 9% within ten years. This will go a long way in providing adequate funding in the general education system as well as special needs education in Nigeria as it is practiced in developed countries.

In addition, the active collaboration of all stakeholders in the educational should be encouraged to boost speedy implementation of EFA goals. The Nigerian government should liaise with other Non-Governmental Agencies (NGOs), associations of persons with special needs, private organizations, religious bodies etc. in order to actualize the EFA goals. As outlined by the Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2000), achieving the EFA goals is a collective process with the involvement of the governments, organizations, agencies, groups and associations. A representation of these groups at the Dakar forum presented a way forward on the future planning of EFA to include the following strategies to include mobilize strong workforce as well as involvement of all stakeholders and also including appropriate and sufficient financing in the educational sector among others.

Finally, governments at all levels should ensure that education for children with special learning needs should be free at all levels. This will promote gender equality, ensure educational access and also facilitate the actualization of EFA goals in Nigeria.

Conclusion:

It is noteworthy to mention that the actualization of the EFA Goals in Nigeria is feasible despite the fact that it seems unrealistic and unattainable. In Nigeria, as well as other developing countries it is presented to look more of a mirage than a reality. However, there is need for collaborative efforts geared towards the attainment of these goals no matter how long it might take. The much advocated inclusive education in Nigeria will surely facilitate the attainment of the EFA goals when fully implemented. Similarly, the attainment of 70% of the EFA goals will become a milestone as well as a great achievement in special needs education in Nigeria.

References:

1. Bila, G. J. (2010). Access and quality in basic education in Nigeria: A critical analysis. Deka publications.
2. Engelbrecht, P. & Green, L. (2006). Responding to the challenges of inclusive education in South Africa. Pretoria: Van Schaik. Retrieved from <http://www.inclusive.ap.org/monitor>.
3. Global Campaign for Education Survey (2013). Making Education for All a reality-Beyond 2015. Global Thematic Consultation on Education and the Post--2015 Development Framework. Position Paper.

4. Iheanacho, I. J. (2014). Experience sharing on trends in special needs education in Nigeria with focus on the National Diagnostic Centre for Persons with Disabilities. A paper presented at the 24th Annual National Conference of National Association for Exceptional Children (NAEC) Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria.
5. Nigerian Education Summit Group (NESG, 2011). Sustainable funding framework for the Nigerian education sector. An executive summary of the Education Sub-Committee of the NESG Human Capital Development Policy Commission, March 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.nesgroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Executive-Summary-of-Funding-Framework-Sustainable>.
6. Obanya, P (2013). Education for All equals our children learning. A paper presented on the 8th May 2013 at the 10th annual conference of the Primary and Tertiary Teacher Education Association of Nigeria (Pattean).
7. Otiye, I. (2006). The state of education in Nigeria. A keynote address delivered at a roundtable organized by civil society action coalition on education for all (CSACEFA) held at Rockview hotel. Abuja on the 3rd July 2006.
8. UNESCO (2014). EFA Global Monitoring Report (EFA, GMR): Youth and skills: Putting education to work. Paris: UNESCO. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002180/218003e.pdf>.
9. UNESCO (2009). Education for all assessment. Retrieved from http://www.unesco.org/uk//educationfor_all/Jomtien.
10. UNESCO (2005). A report of 181 countries adopted framework for action at world forum. Retrieved from www.unesco.org.
11. UNESCO (2000). The Dakar framework for action. World education forum held in Dakar Senegal from 26-28 April 2000. Retrieved from <http://www.unesco.org>.
12. World Education Forum (2000). Dakar Framework for Action Education for All: Meeting our collective commitments. Including six regional frameworks for actions. Adopted by the World Education Forum Dakar, Senegal, 26-28 April 2000.