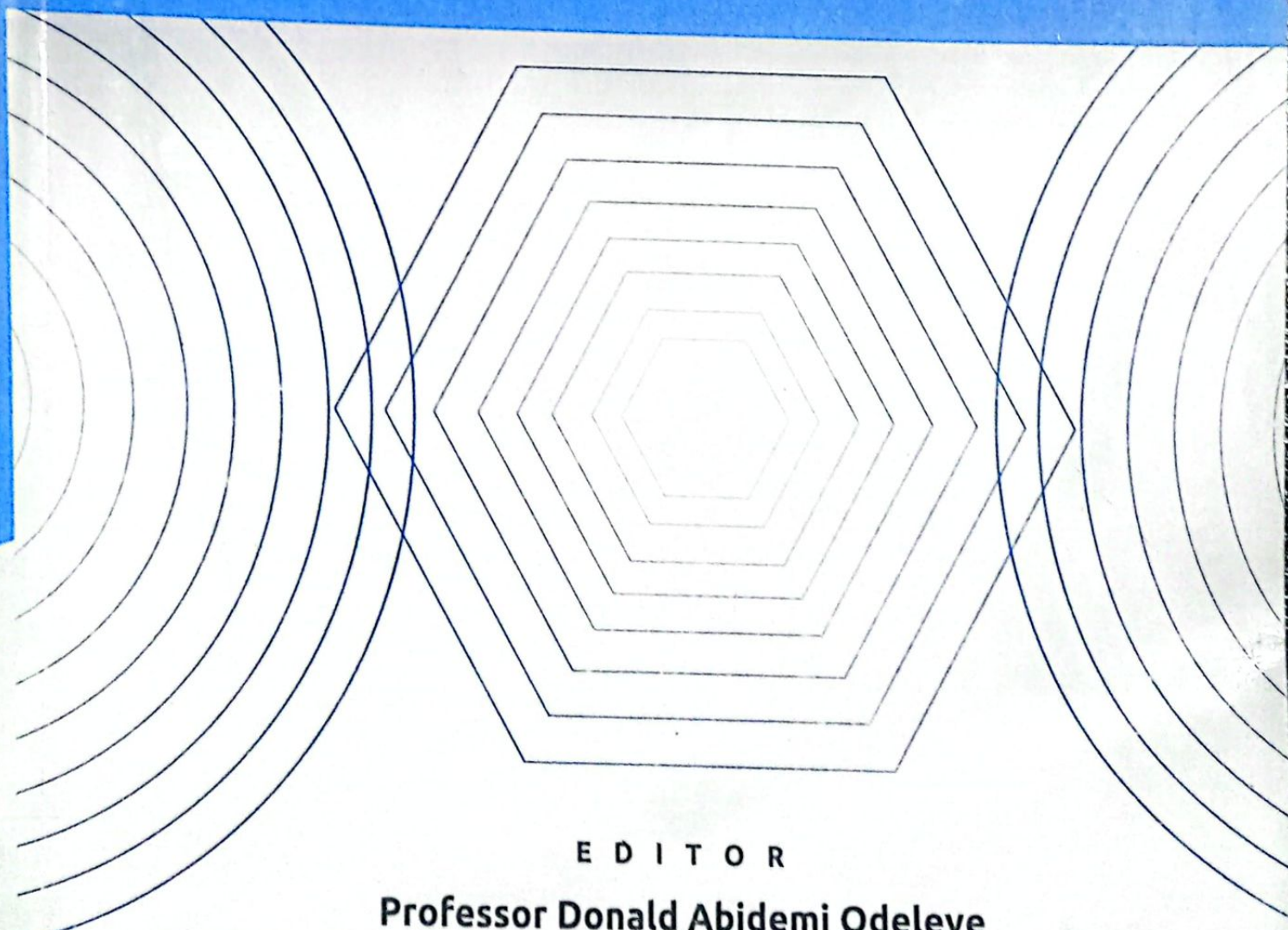

Administration and Education for Sustainable Development

Book of Readings

**in honour of
Professor Lekan Oyedeji**



E D I T O R

Professor Donald Abidemi Odeleye

Administration and Education for Sustainable Development

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in honour of Professor Lekan Oyediji

Editor

Professor Donald Abidemi Odeleye

Faculty of Arts and Education

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Ibadan, Nigeria

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ISBN: 978-978-987-348-7

Published by

College Press

Lead City University

3, Baale Mosaderin Road

Jericho GRA, Ibadan

Oyo State, Nigeria

08036694838, 08022900793

E-mail: collegepress100@gmail.com

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DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: LANGUAGE AS AN OFTEN NEGLECTED FACTOR

Samson OLATUNJI

Introduction

The broad field of education has experienced a great deal of advances over the centuries. Research and challenging experience have resulted in discoveries focused on ways and measures to maximally bring out the best in every learner despite limiting circumstances. Integration was the vogue in the beginning. Both the disabled and the able were put in the same class without conscious efforts at catering for their individual differences. Various strategies aimed at accommodating individual differences have, however, been advocated, debated and adopted at different times and in different places. Exclusionist or segregationist system in which learners with similar traits are grouped together to the exclusion of learners with different traits has been practised. Streaming, in which the special learners are put in the same class as the regular ones, given the same lessons but with some doses of special attention to the examination of the special ones, is also being implemented.

Inclusion seems to have received greater research and policy focus lately. The Incheon Declaration, a product of the World Forum for Education in 2015, unequivocally attests to the global nature of the clamour for inclusive education (Ainscow, 2016). But despite this worldwide recognition of the need and call for inclusion, only few countries seem to respond positively to varying unsatisfactory degrees. Some countries seem to be unaware of this trend while others profess awareness and even have policies in place to reflect this. But nothing in practice aligns with the existence of the policies.

Equality, equity and inclusion have so often been used interchangeably as a result of their interrelatedness that their differences have been artificially blurred (Kerr & Raffo, 2016). Equity and inclusion are also inseparable from diversity, right and justice (Jaeger, Cooke, Feltis, Hamiel, Jardine & Shilton, 2015). To Simon, Malgorzata and Beatriz (2007), equity in education encompasses inclusion and fairness. Fairness entails making all efforts to reduce the challenges posed by personal and social disadvantages to the barest. Inclusion, on the other hand, means ensuring a minimum education standard level of skills for all. The fact that equity, fairness and justice are intricately and naturally involved in the issue of inclusion makes inclusion deserving of serious and committed attention. If otherwise, dire consequences may seem slow in manifesting but they are inevitable.

The concept of inclusion was initially restricted in scope to the area of special education, especially to the narrower field of education for the disabled. For example, the Alliance for Inclusive Education (2018) defines inclusive education as that in which the system adapts to the disabled rather than expecting the disabled to adapt to it. The studies by Nasibullov and Kashapova (2015), Stiefel, Shiferaw, Schwartz and Gottfried (2017) as well as a host of others also conceived inclusion as provision for the disabled in a general school setting.

In education, a fair share of attention in research and policy making has been accorded gender equity (Harper, 2017), social inclusion (O'Shea, Lysaght, Roberts, & Harwood, 2016), ethnocultural equity (Schmidt & Block, 2017), inclusive education for the disabled ((Emong & Eron, 2016; Ferri, & Ashby, 2017; Wheatley, 2017). In the same vein, Anthony, Wyatt, Abresch, Teel, Yerokun-Houessou, McGill and Benton (2016), while explaining the concepts of inclusion and diversity, pay attention to "sexual and gender minorities (LGBT), disabled, geographically underrepresented and economically

disadvantaged populations", thus excluding linguistic minorities. But Hoover and deBettencourt, (2017) submit that current challenges, which are very likely to continue to heighten, demand relentless advocacy for increasingly culturally and linguistically responsive education from the kindergarten to postsecondary level.

An inclusive education crusade is incapable of achieving considerable inclusion if certain racial and social factors are not adequately considered. Among the factors identified as often neglected is race. It should be noted that language and race are inseparable (Zion & Blanchett, 2011). It is thus unfortunate that the language factor is a subset of one of the issues that are insufficiently taken care of in the blueprint for inclusive education in most countries. A historical analysis by Addy (2015) also corroborates the claim of inadequate consideration for students from relegated cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

The foregoing is not to claim that linguistic inclusion has not received any attention at all. But studies have shown that efforts at linguistic inclusion and equity have been significantly focused on the elementary and secondary education levels (Beneke, & Cheatham, 2015; Coady, Harper, & De Jong, 2016). However, higher education institutions, especially universities, are supposed to spearhead the pursuit of inclusion because of their significant roles in providing models and community services (Powell, 2014). It is noteworthy that the need to consciously ensure equity and inclusion arises from the reality of diversity among students of an educational institution. And the probability of linguistic diversity at the tertiary level is higher than the lower stages because a university is to reflect the universe in its staff and student population composition. Where the rights of a cross-section of the members of a school community are trampled upon and justice is denied them, all cannot be well and can be a necessary step in the right direction. O'Flaherty and Phillips (2015), observing obvious felt needs, thus advocate that higher education should respond to a rising agitation for higher education institutions to adapt to current trends of public needs.

It is important, at this juncture, to delineate the concept of linguistic inclusion and define it operationally in the context of the current study. Florian (2014) has rightly observed that inclusive education assumes so many forms that it is appropriate to seriously engage the question of what actually constitutes it. Firstly linguistically inclusive is conceived as the system in which a student who wishes to make a recourse to his or her indigenous language at any point during classroom session is encouraged to do so rather than intellectually bullied. The following extract expresses it aptly:

Students have a right to their own language, their own culture.
We must fight cultural hegemony and fight the system by
insisting that students be allowed to express themselves in their
own language style. It is not they, the students, who must
change, but the schools (Delpit, 1995)

The above means that if a student wishes to be taught the current learning content in his indigenous language, the school should be ready to oblige him or her. In this case, it not the student but the school that bends backwards to accommodate the student's preference.

Linguistic inclusion also entails allowing students to code-switch from a major language of instruction, perhaps English, to a students' preferred language. It could be codeswitching from one dialect of a language to another in the same language without being browbeaten by the teacher or any fellow student. After all, such codeswitching is natural to students (Curtis, 2013)

The foregoing shows that linguistic inclusion is primarily aimed at removing any linguistic barrier to a student's understanding of a learning task. This means there should be a

O'Leary (2013) identifies "existing attitudes" as contributory to the smallness of the results being yielded by the American government's investment into the teaching and learning of foreign languages. As many Americans really do not see any reason for promoting foreign languages since every one of them gets to learn the English language, anyway, this general attitude cannot but filter into any provision for linguistic inclusion in a school system.

Paucity of Adequately Trained Teaching Personnel

No government policy, no matter how well conceived, planned and provided for, can implement itself. Even where all material needs for inclusion are provided, lack of human capital will render all provisions underutilised or even completely wasted. In Canada, for example, the wide gap between the government's laudable inclusive education policy and actual practice is majorly caused by deficient understanding of inclusion by many school principals in Finland and Alberta (Jahnukainen, 2015).

Katz (2015), too, stress the importance of highly skilled teachers to successful execution of inclusive education. Where teachers are trained to teach general classes but without being adequately equipped to employ strategies that are specially required for inclusive education, linguistic disadvantage will be inevitable.

Economic Challenges

Bonin (2017) agrees that any additional provision in education to cater for the needs of linguistically diverse population automatically translates into additional cost though such would prove to be economically rewarding in the long run. Countries that have not been able to meet the United Nation's recommendation of 26% allocation to education from their national budget and that still have high basic illiteracy rates may find it extremely difficult to set any goal of linguistic inclusion in education at any level. The idea of linguistic inclusion would be too lofty in a country where over 70% of the population lives below the poverty line (Cobbinah, Eradiaw-Kwasie & Amoateng, 2015). Attention thus has to be paid to Park and Mercado's (2015) study on financial inclusion, poverty, and income inequality and take care of their findings before any headway in inclusive education implementation can be made.

Lack of Political Will

"Where there is a will, there is a way" is a truism. Feats that seemed absolutely impossible have been achieved in most difficult circumstances as a result of personal or collective will power. But a lot of government policies, especially in developing or third world countries (Srivastava, de Boer & Pijl, 2015), have remained elusive as a result of the governments' lack of political will. Emong and Eron (2016), too, have observed disparity between inclusive education and its implementation in terms of admissions, access to lectures, assessment and examinations, access to library services, halls of residence and other support services in Uganda. This is a flagrant manifestation of lack of political will to follow up on a policy decision already professed to be laudable.

Steps towards Effective Implementation of Linguistic Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education

Linguistic equity and inclusion in education cannot occur automatically. It has to be correctly conceived, consciously made a policy and meticulously implemented with adequate political will. Clearly stated steps have to be taken and progress must be measured continually for proper and useful feedback. Among the steps necessary for a successful implementation are the following:

Putting in Place Equity and Inclusion-Centred Teacher Education

As observed by Mahlo (2017), the movement towards inclusive education (IE) in South Africa translates into increased demands and "unreasonable amount of stress" on the teacher. Initial teacher education must be equity and inclusion-centred in principle, content and implementation (Cochran-Smith, Ell, Grudnoff, Haigh, Hill, & Ludlow, 2016). Efforts should not stop at this level but continue through various in-service teacher education programmes for the academic as well as administrative staff in nation's higher education programmes. Doing this will ensure that teachers at the higher education level will not just be learning what pertains to inclusion when it is almost late to imbibe inclusion mindset. They would have been properly immersed in skills necessary for successful implementation of linguistic equity and inclusion-centred curricula from the outset of their career. The observation by O'Leary (2013) that in cases where similar language programmes are delayed, the results is mere familiarisation that is too shallow for any effective and efficient functionality. The constant update of their expertise along this line as the beneficiaries of timely training in the linguistic inclusion scheme would make career progress would also be greatly advantageous.

Serious Advocacy for Holistic Approach to Inclusion-Centred Higher Education

Jaeger, Cooke, Feltis, Hamiel, Jardine & Shilton (2015), in recognition of the fact that neither the educationists nor professionals can achieve inclusion and equity in school settings without the inputs of the other group, recommend a strong advocacy for synergy between the two sectors. All possible ways of attracting positive contributions to the goal of linguistically inclusive higher education from all sections of the society should be religiously explored. In response to this need for synergy, a lot of professional organisations currently augment the American government's effort at providing foreign language literacy (Li, 2013). These combined efforts can be harnessed for successful linguistic inclusion in higher education.

Very rich individuals as well as national and multinational organisations can be encouraged to make financial and material contributions to the pursuit of linguistically inclusive higher education. They can also be asked to sponsor major research activities and other manpower development schemes towards the scheme. But this requires passionate and well-articulated appeals from the government.

Making only Modest and Achievable Linguistic Inclusion Goals

Li (2013) recommends that the United States should endeavour to know the languages and cultures of all world countries. But Anthony, Wyatt, Abresch, Teel, Yeroḱun-Houessou, McGill and Benton (2016) recognise the need to differentiate between domestic and international diversity/inclusion. Heeding this advice will help a nation avoid the pitfall of setting overambitious linguistic inclusion-centred goals in education and formulating bogus policies around such impossible goals. Countries that attract immigrants and emigrants in large numbers from many less privileged countries are most vulnerable to the error of setting overwhelming inclusive education goals. For example, the United States of America cannot reasonably aspire equally cater for the inclusion of all linguistic communities represented her education system. So, it will be commendable adapt the linguistic provisions in education to as diverse nationalities as possible while expecting learners from others to adapt themselves to the system.

A dignified government would, however, ensure successful pursuit of satisfying domestic linguistic equity and inclusion of its diverse constituent ethnicity in higher education. There is wisdom in avoiding the grave mistake of biting more than can be chewed. But this

should not preclude the government's efforts at catering for a level of international diversity and inclusion so as not to limit the benefits derivable from such a noble venture.

Political Will for Successful Implementation of Equity and Inclusion Policy in Education

In many countries, especially in the third world category, gross disparities between policy formulation and implementation in various sectors has been reported. In Nigerian language in education policy implementation, among the expressions used to express this discrepancy are "policy summersault" (Patrick, Mingcai, Didam, & Ojo, 2014), "lack of political will" (Owolabi, 2006), "effeminate and escape phraseology" (Emenanjo, 1998), and so on. There has, therefore, been sustained advocacy for bridging of the obvious gap between rhetoric and practice of inclusive education in many nations (Hayashi, 2015; Armstrong, Armstrong & Barton, 2016; O'Shea, Lysaght, Roberts, & Harwood, 2016).

Knight (2015) acknowledges that not only academics but even politicians also have realised the imperative of internationalization of higher education. It is noteworthy that for this internationalization agenda to work, inclusion cannot be relegated.

Conclusion

The study has shown that linguistically equitable and inclusive education is desirable and highly rewarding. It is capital intensive but the benefits will justify any heavy investment into it in the final analysis. Unfortunately, though inclusion is gaining more attention in research and policy making, there has not been any desirable degree of political will towards its implementation where it exists in policy form.

Suggestions

1. More research is required to make the benefits of linguistic inclusion more apparent.
2. Advocacy at local and international levels for governments, individuals and corporate organisations to synergise efforts towards successful implementation of inclusion at the higher education level as well as other levels should be intensified.
3. Emphasis should be placed on making pre-service and in-service teacher education compliant with adoption of linguistically inclusive strategies.

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