

**Public Private Partnership:
A Strategy for Enhancing Access to Quality Education
in Special Needs Education in Nigeria.**

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Abstract

The rationale for establishing Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in special needs education is revolving around maximizing the potential and expanding equitable access to schooling as well as improving qualitative education outcomes to individual with disabilities. This paper clarified the concepts of special needs education, exceptional learners, access to quality education for exceptional learners and most importantly examined the need for encouraging public-private partnerships with special needs education to augment government's limited capacity and thus expand other private organizations support to the special needs education sector through philanthropic activities and high engagement ventures. However, the paper recommended that while partnering with private sectors, government should emphasized on the provision of appropriate physical resources such as buildings, classrooms, resource rooms, library facilities, laboratories, game activities, audio-visual centers, which are stimulating and conducive to learning and above all avoiding architectural barriers should be a priority in order for exceptional learners enjoy easy access to the learning environment, among others.

Keywords: Public-private partnerships, access to quality education and special needs education.

Introduction

Too often, the heavy expectation that government is assumed the responsibility for providing and financing education at all levels in Nigeria and the education of the exceptional learners in particular, brought about persisted challenges in the provision of comprehensive access to quality education. This responsibility is large and complex one for any government to meet adequately, which is why it is important for governments to explore diverse ways of financing and providing educational services. Categorically, Special needs education suffered a lot as a result of inadequate funding which subsequently affects the provision of the special equipment; learning materials, facilities as well as infrastructural development to suit the needs of individual special need persons. Nwoagba (2013) stated out clearly that funding is the major constraint and barrier to the growth of

special needs education in Nigeria. Nwoagba further mentioned that coordinating services and offering individual supports to children with special needs demand additional money and inadequate funding hinders professional development in the field of special needs education. In most cases, the available fund for special needs education projects are un-accessed by the administrators of special needs education, thereby making the children with special needs to suffer unnecessarily in the areas of infrastructure, equipment and learning materials.

Corroborating Nwoagba (2013), Adebisi and Onye (2013) identify the problem to always be the federal government who failed to stipulate the administrative structures or functions of the three tiers of government, thereby making it difficult for proper funding and service delivery. Adebisi and Onye further said that the document in the policy does not categorize the criteria for those personnel that would head the special needs education departments and institutions. This gives the reason that in some of the educational agencies, non-professionals are heading special education units and branches. This is unclear policy that suffers the implementation and administration of special needs education in the country.

Ishwaran, Dhawan, and Jain (2014) pointed out that public-private partnerships are also being used to build school infrastructure. PPPs are a useful way to increase the funding available for constructing or upgrading school buildings and often yield better value for money than traditional public sector investments.

Hubert (2002) asserted that the need to create opportunities for eliminating key constraints and developing the capacity for real and effective ownership, management and funding of education necessitated the approval of private secondary education. This position of government was also based on the fact that private sector operations are more often than not, infused with an overriding concern for standards. The private sector is also forced to constantly evaluate and implement new ideas; it has a sense of urgency for pursuing and attaining results. In a study conducted by Woessmann (2005) showed that publicly operated schools deliver lower test scores than privately operated schools, but privately funded schools are associated with higher academic achievement than publicly operated institutions (Woessmann, 2005). Patrinos, Barrera-Osorio, and Guáqueta (2009) revealed that PPPs in education are schematically portrayed as a cost-effective policy solution to address the access and quality problems faced by many education systems, especially in developing countries.

Special Needs Education and Exceptional Learners

It is relevant to note that special needs education has come to replace special education due to its broader and inclusive coverage (Obaje, 2007). Special needs education is described as the education of children who are adversely affected by physical, physiological, psychological, social, emotional and cultural factors (Obani, 2004). Special education covered a specially designed instruction that meets the

unusual needs of an exceptional student and that might require special materials, teaching techniques, or equipment and/or facilities. Students with visual impairments might require reading materials in large print or braille; students with hearing impairments might require hearing aids and/or instruction in sign language; those with physical disabilities might need special equipment; those with emotional or behavioral disorders might need smaller and more highly structured classes; and students with special gifts or talents might require access to working professionals, students with learning disabilities may need extra time to complete an exam (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2014, Richard & Emily, 2018).

It is imperative to note that exceptional learners/persons, exceptional children or special needs persons are often used interchangeably in literatures to refer to individual children or adults with special learning needs. Swanson (2000) used special needs persons to describe those who due to anatomic, organic defects, dysfunctional and psychic disorders, retardation and giftedness encounter great difficulties in availing themselves of the normal form of schooling, family life, vocational and leisure time activities. They are handicapped and this creates a need for special books and equipment to further growth and achievement.

However, exceptional learners are those who require special education and related services if they are to realize their full human potential (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005). They require special education because they differ markedly from most students in one or more of the following ways: They may have intellectual disabilities, learning or attention disabilities, emotional or behavioral disorders, physical disabilities, disorders of communication, autism, traumatic brain injury, impaired hearing, impaired sight, or special gifts or talents (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2014).

Access to Quality Education for Exceptional Learners

The right to education on the basis of equality of opportunity imposes obligations on states to establish the legislative and policy framework, together with sufficient resources to ensure access for every child with a disability (UNICEF, 2012). Quality education takes into cognizance the variables leading to the attainment of the ultimate goal of imparting sound knowledge and skill to the learner. It is a type of education that employs the complete teaching learning apparatuses to enable the learners make optimum and maximum benefits of knowledge acquisition and transformation to an enlightened, literate, civilized and productive individual beneficial to the economy and the society at large (Andrew, 2012). For education to be ascribed with quality, the following ingredients must be ascertained according to Dakar Framework for Action (2000) and Federal Ministry of Education Roadmap (2004) for instance: Improvement in learner characteristics motivational and cognitive levels, resourcefulness, supply of competent teachers using active pedagogies, use of relevant curriculum, putting in place good systems, good

governance and equitable resource allocation, provision of a conducive learning environment and adequacy of outcomes acceptable level of passes, employable products.

It is relevant to note that teachers across the world are teaching in classrooms with diverse learners, so it is promising to see them express interest in professional development opportunities that can help them respond to the needs of integrated classrooms. Support with classroom management, differentiated instruction and specific pedagogical approaches for students with special needs can make professional development activities more impactful for teachers especially if they are designed to allow teachers to collaborate at the school level and share classroom experiences. Notably, in schools where principals actively support teachers in improving their teaching practice, teachers feel better prepared to teach special needs students. System-level support is equally important for ensuring quality-learning opportunities for students with special needs through, for example, the allocation of school resources and more experienced, better-trained teachers for more consistent periods (Kalra, 2018). However, education has to be of the highest possible quality to help every child reach his or her potential, and to achieve effective transitions both from pre-primary to primary and from primary to secondary school. Governments must ensure that children with disabilities in all schools, including pre-schools, are able to receive the same quality of education as all other children (UNICEF, 2012).

Achieving the right to quality education of children with disabilities, the following steps were provided by UNICEF (2012):

- i. Positive learning opportunities.
- ii. Securing the appropriate individualized support for children with disabilities.
- iii. Developing inclusive curricula, teaching and learning methods.
- iv. Creative use of assistive technology.
- v. Rights-based and inclusive assessment.
- vi. School self-assessment.
- vii. Investment in and support for teachers.
- viii. Support within schools for teachers.
- ix. Establishing resources to provide specialist support.
- x. A child-centered, safe and healthy environment and
- xi. Basic health and safety standards.

Why Public- Private Partnerships in Special Needs Education System?

Public-private partnerships are collaborations between public and private sectors with a focus on system efficiency, innovation and accountability. In education, they bring together the scale of the government system with the innovation of the private sector to improve the quality of the system as a whole (Ishwaran, Dhawan, & Jain, 2014). According to the World Bank (2006) cited in

Patrinós, Barrera-Osorio, and Guáqueta, (2009), the main rationale for developing public-private partnerships (PPPs) in education is to maximize the potential for expanding equitable access to schooling and for improving education outcomes, especially for marginalized groups.

It should be noted that in many different settings, PPPs are increasingly perceived as an innovative policy approach to provide education for all, and especially to provide the most vulnerable population with new educational opportunities. Many governments, international organizations and other key education stakeholders consider that, by partnering with the private sector, countries can expand their education systems in a more efficient, flexible and effective way (Robertson, Mundy, Verger & Menashy, 2012). Earlier on, Oni & Akinbinu (2005) pointed out that nowadays, experiences across the globe revealed that the attainment of meaningful and sustainable development requires the genuine participation of the public, the organized private sectors, donor agencies, individuals and civil society. Public-private partnership therefore is one of the new trends in partnership strategies; it is being popularized as an alternative approach to the delivery of goods and services. It refers to contractual arrangement between the public sector and the private sector to achieve well-defined and shared objectives in a cost effective, efficient and sustainable manner. This arrangement always specifies targets, responsibilities, priorities and feedback processes. It primarily involves sharing of resources, knowledge and risks between the two sectors so that the country at large can benefit from the arrangement.

Ishwaran, Dhawan, & Jain (2014) *stated that* involvement of private players in education service delivery does not imply the withdrawal of government from providing education, rather it signals an evolution in the role of the government from an administrator to a facilitator and regulator. However, while encouraging on the need for establishing firm collaboration with private sector for educational sufficiency to the special needs persons, Adedoja (2006) pointed out that there is need for active involvement of non-governmental organizations, multinational organizations and the private sector in the provision of education for the disabled. These organizations, in some parts of the country are closer to the people than the government. If encourage, they could help in the provision of effective services for the disabled.

It worthy to note, while emphasizing on the need for financial responsibility of special needs education, the National Policy on Special Needs Education in Nigeria (2015) concluded that funding required for special needs education shall be provided by the federal government, state government, local government, government agencies or parastatals, private Sector, international development partners, non-governmental organizations (local and international), corporate organizations, civil society organization, faith based organizations, individuals and philanthropists. It is interesting to note that Olatunji (2003) had since emphasized

that that the partnership envisaged should cuts across different but mutually inclusive groups of stakeholders, including International Non-Government Organizations and Development Agencies such as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Culture (UNESCO), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Multinational Corporations such as Alesco Cooperation Limited, Shell, Chevron, Taxaco, Total Final ELF, Exxon-Mobile and others Organized Private Sector (OPS) such as Nigerian Association of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Marine and Agriculture (NACCIMA), MAN Global and selected Non-quoted private sector companies such as Econet, Minneapolis Telecommunications Network (MTN), Globalcom, Etisalat, Zain, Dangote and Folawiyo Groups. Professional Bodies such as Council for the Regulation of Engineering in Nigeria (COREN), Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN), and Nigerian Institute of Management (NIM), among others are not left out. It is relevant to note that partnering with the aforementioned private sectors will undoubtedly upsurge tremendous opportunities in appropriate provision of adequate special learning materials, equipment, facilities as well as infrastructural development so that effective teaching and learning process can take place while interacting with special need persons.

Stressing on the need to infuse public-private partnerships in special needs education system, Bhatt (2015) pointed out that the following advantages could be achieved:

- i. Public-private partnership can increase access to quality schools in underserved communities with special educational needs. They can help build model schools, which can serve as innovation centers for improving the quality of education.
- ii. Public-private partnership can widen access and utilization of existing assets. In rural areas where there is lack of infrastructure and access to resources, it will rejuvenate the system with optimum utilization and effective collaboration to set up new schools.
- iii. Through the Public-private partnership route, an ideal model for concerning support and collaboration between various agencies depending on the specific requirement of the child can be created. This ideal mix will be greatly contribution to increase the retention rate of special educational needs in inclusive set up where their drop rates are high.
- iv. Through Public-private partnership model, the quality of education can also be improved. It will be the perfect marriage of the merits of the public and private systems bringing forth innovation such as multi differentiated instruction or activity based instruction.
- v. Through Public-private partnership model, the choice for low-income parents can also be increased. These parents are mostly laden with the medical costs that can at times fail to provide quality education to special educational needs. It will

provide them with a range of options to choose from in the best interest of the child
vi. This model will also strengthen accountability of government system as they operate under strict performance standard.

Conclusion

A public private partnership is one of the new trends in partnership strategies; it is being popularized as an alternative approach to the delivery of goods and services. Special needs education on the other hand encounters problems in terms of inadequate infrastructures, equipment, facilities, learning materials and most importantly funding. By partnering with private organizations will undoubtedly reduce some burden to the government thereby ensuring qualitative and effective teaching and learning activities. Many researches have indicated that the attainment of meaningful and sustainable development requires the genuine participation of the public, the organized private sectors, donor agencies as well as individuals and civil society. *Ishwaran, Dhawan, & Jain (2014) concluded that* when a PPPs is implemented correctly, it can increase efficiency and choice and expand access to education services, particularly for households that tend to be poorly served by traditional delivery methods. PPPs could also allow governments to take advantage of the specialized skills offered by certain private organizations and to overcome operating restrictions.

Recommendations

1. While partnering with private sectors such as international agencies, NGOs, community members and individual philanthropies, government should emphasized on the provision of specialized physical resources such as buildings, classrooms, library facilities, laboratories, game activities, audio-visual centers, which are stimulating and conducive to learning of the special needs persons and above all avoiding architectural barriers should be a priority in order for exceptional learners enjoy easy access to the learning environment.
2. The government contract with private organizations should promote quality teaching and learning process with individualized instruction appropriate to each exceptional learner's developmental level, abilities, and learning style with active cooperative and democratic learning methods.
3. The partners should emphasize on employing adequate qualified special education teachers where they are not available so that they can be able to handle the learning needs of the exceptional leaners. It should also enhance the capacity of the teachers, morale, commitment, status and income. The World Bank (2006) stated that the position of special school in Nigeria indicated that, the number of special education teachers is grossly inadequate.
4. The collaboration should also focus on the establishing well-equipped resource rooms, which they do not have presently, capable of catering the needs of

each individual exceptional learner. The resource rooms should include modern assistive technology specially designed for exceptional learners to enhance quality teaching and learning activities.

5. The partnerships should provide adequate health policies and practices that will ensure safe supportive and protective learning environment to each individual exceptional learner.

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