Creative and Literary Studies for the Rehabilitation of Children with Special Needs in Nigeria: Implications for Curriculum Development

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Abstract

Special need students are members of society who in one way or the other deviated from normal trend of development and therefore need to be assisted in living normal lives. This paper acknowledged the great role literature plays in building both the individual and society. This is done by providing social awareness and influencing people’s perception of themselves and their general world view. This paper contends that while the Nigerian government seems to emphasize the teaching acquisition of science and technology more than the arts, special needs students just like ‘Normal students’ need to be exposed to the literary and creative arts also so that they would know more about their culture and also develop their creative potentials. This paper concludes that the curriculum used in rehabilitation centres for the special need to be reviewed to accommodate these missing links.

Keywords: Creative and Literary Studies, Rehabilitation, Special Needs Children, Curriculum Development

Introduction

The term special needs or disability has been defined and interpreted by various scholars in different ways; however, scholars agree that a student with special needs has one form of disability or another. In fact, Abang, 1996 says that the term handicapped or exceptional person refers to one who deviates from the usual norms of development either positively or negatively. This deviation may be in form of blindness, deafness, physical handicaps, speech difficulties, learning disabilities, mental retardation, behavioral problems or giftedness. This seems to sum up the concept of who a special need is operationally.

It is therefore logical that a student with special needs should be made to bring him to live a ‘normal’ life (i.e. to rehabilitate him). Rehabilitation is thus, a form of life re-organization that could assist a special needs individual to conform to a new pattern of life adjustment that affects the totality of higher personality and his role in society.

In view of the above, the paper attempt to emphasis the need for creative and literary studies for the rehabilitation of special needs children and draw the implications for curriculum development.

Sometimes government, organizations or individuals set up rehabilitation centers whereby the special needs are accommodated and given some vocational training. Rehabilitation however, does not necessarily have to be in a confined environment. Special need students could be giving some training even in the comfort of their homes, at formal school and as well as rehabilitation camps.

In his analysis of most of what special need learn in Community Based Rehabilitation Services (CBRS) Olukufun, 2006 argues that various artisanship’s such as fashion design, animal husbandry, typing, shoe making/leather work, cloth weaving, tie and dying, catering, furniture making/wood work, block making, Radio/TV/repairs and servicing, cane work, carving, patent, medicine vendor are provided. Even though that research was mainly on CBRS, but viewed this as what generally obtains in most, if not all, rehabilitation centers in Nigeria. The list also reveals that the special needs are not exposed to any serious form of creative and literary study: not to talk of encouraging them to develop their creative potentials. However, literature has a great way of influencing and even changing one’s perception of things/life in such a way that not even political pamphleteering can do.

In the rest of the paper, an attempt is made to review instances whereby creative/literary studies (literature) have played major roles in changing the world view of people. It also examined how literature could assist in the rehabilitation of disabled persons among us (especially those not mentally retarded) so that their lives would have more relevance both to
themselves and to society considering at the curriculum development implications.

Creative and Literary Studies and Rehabilitation of Children with Special needs

Creative writing and the study of such writings constitute what we generally refer to as literary studies. The term “literature” therefore refers to whatever could be valued as work of art whether oral or written. However, in this paper emphasis is on the written literature. Works of art (literature) are generally collections of social experiences. Before proceeding, there are some clarifications to make about what is meant by creative writing. There is a popular saying that “there is a book in every human being.” This may well be so but most people have little or no idea on how to get this book out of them and put it down on paper. That is precisely why there is need to expose as many people as possible to creative and literary studies so that they could realize their potentials through the literary medium. Secondly, it is generally felt that creative writing cannot be learnt or taught. However, even many of the so-called established writers normally attend one writing programme or another.

Writing being a craft, there is therefore a great deal which one who has experience can pass on to those aspiring to become writers. At least the man with experience as put by Legat (1986) “can set out useful guidelines, warn against the common pitfalls, discuss the ploys which other successful writers have found useful, encourage, enthrone and inspire.” Once an aspiring writer is aware of what it takes to be a writer, he can then try his hands-on writing. This is more so because the art of writing can only be learnt through writing.

Thirdly, it is true that writers need imagination but this can be developed through a period of writing; so those who may feel devoid of imaginative initially may eventually discover that perseverance is the watch word in any successful venture. Besides, creative writing does not only mean imaginative writing alone. It could as well refer to any form of literary composition because after all, writing generally is almost always an art of creation. Writing takes various forms depending on the motive of the writer. Some people write for the purpose of expressing their views on certain issues, others do so in order to straighten some records or to illuminate some aspects of the world or to represent a class’ particular views or experience. Most literary writings however, fall under one of the three main literary genres i.e. poetry, prose or drama.

Literature thus reflects the life of people containing images of such a people. It sometimes depicts how the people have been struggling for integration and or recognition within the larger society. Since the writer can be likened to a positive character in a fictive work, he often allies himself with the suffering of humanity in order to move society forward towards a harmonious co-existence. This imagination, exploitation and or general injustice. Having considered what creative and literary studies are and its benefits, next is what role this can play in rehabilitating the handicapped. It was a true assertion made by Abosi and Ozoji (2005), where they stated that in the past, in Nigeria, most parents of disabled children were ashamed of such children and even refused to send them to school. Such children were usually locked up in homes, hidden from visitors.

The situation has somehow changed now with most parents willing to send their disabled children to school. It is therefore necessary to give a holistic education to the handicapped instead of merely teaching them vocational trades. If a person with special needs is exposed to reading literature, literature that fights against societal ills and stigmatization of the unfortunate members of society (as it is being done with the handicapped), they will realize that they are dignified people who can contribute more to the development of the society than has hitherto been thought possible. Through the creative medium, the handicapped can also express their feelings on what it really means to be disabled. This may go a long way in correcting the age long wrong views of society about the disabled who are generally regarded as helpless and without any useful contributions to the society. When the handicapped are engaged in serious creative and literary activities, the public’s poor attitude for this class of people will definitely change for the better. Society therefore has to accept, respect and give affection to the disabled; many of who are in this state through no fault of theirs. Experiences have shown that if well exposed and give the right opportunities, the handicapped can achieve as much as normal looking people. After all, the internationally renowned music stars. Steve Wonder of the USA is a blind man. There are many professionals scattered all over the globe who are disabled. Right here in Nigeria, there are many disabled people who have made remarkable marks in their chosen fields of endeavor and have made remarkable achievements in different fields of human endeavor (Osokoya, 2007).

Handicapped people need to be integrated into the mainstream society and one way of doing this is though literary works that could depict such
disabled but hardworking Nigerians. If the ‘normal’ looking Nigerian writers feel reluctant in creating such handicapped but ‘baled’ characters in their writings that is the more reason why the handicapped in rehabilitation centers should be exposed to both literary and creative studies. This exposure to literary activities will enable them to at least be able to write about some of their disabilities creatively. Through such education, which is obviously emancipatory, the person with special needs will have been liberated from some form of ignorance about their ability to be creative. Their skills will also be generated, they will have greater freedom to creatively express themselves and most important they will have improved their ability and better self-management leading to increased social responsibility, material well-being, self-actualization and sustainable living” (Inyang, 2000).

Implications for Curriculum Development

Even though the National Policy on Education (2013) places much emphasis on the integration and equal opportunities to education to all citizens, the curriculum in place for the persons with special needs in Rehabilitation Centers does not lay emphasis on literary and creative studies. Rather emphasis is mainly on vocational training but as stated earlier, there is much the handicapped can gain from creative and literary studies. For this to be effectively exposed to them, it means the curriculum used in such centers and elsewhere that does not include literary and creative studies will have to be reviewed. Some of the salient issues that curriculum developers will have to include in the suggested curriculum review include:

1. Cultural Orientation
   The content of the curriculum for the Rehabilitation Centers should not just be about vocational subjects; aspects of Nigerian cultural values should be included. This can be reflected in the selection of texts and the examples that could be given during creative writing workshops.

2. Increasing Degree of Independence
   It should be emphasized that the inclusion of literary and creative writing in the curriculum for the Rehabilitation Centers is one sure way of making the persons with special needs more and more independent hence some of them can become authors.

3. Integration
   The social, vocational, family and political aspects of the existing curriculum will all be integrated in the suggested curriculum so that the beneficiary of such education will have integrated, hence better approach to life. Just as the special needs in Rehabilitation Centers are made to submit practical for

the various vocational courses they undertake, the curriculum should also provide for adequate practical writing workshops in order to tap and develop the creative potentials of the learners. Emphasis should therefore be evenly spread to cover both the vocational and development of the creative abilities of the learners. Practical writing could be arranged either individually or in the form of group project work. The issues treated during such practical writing lessons should be the ones that are culturally relevant to society hence this may serve as one of the ways of promoting Nigeria’s diverse cultural values.

4. Methodology
   For teaching special need learners, it varies from one special condition to another. For instance, the curriculum modification should take into consideration to incorporate aspects of sign language, finger spelling, speech reading, and total communication for the benefit of learners with hearing impairment in the rehabilitation center. While aspects of Braille reading for the visually impaired equally be incorporated. The same thing applies to other areas of special need conditions.

5. Structuring of the learning programme
   This entails that the learning programme can be restructure in such a way that the special need learners are exposed to creative and literary studies taking into consideration their specific and individual peculiarities.

6. Time allocation
   With regards to learning outcomes time allocation should be in accordance with the special needs conditions of the learners while delivering the content of the curriculum.

Conclusion

This paper highlighted the great roles literary and creative studies can play in the rehabilitation of the people with special needs. This has been borne out of the fact that in most of the rehabilitation centers, the special need learners are mainly taught vocational courses without serious attempts being made to tap and develop their creative and even literary potentials. However, it is believed that since creative writing is also a craft that could be learnt just as weaving and baskets making for example, our curriculum planners and developers have to seriously include literary and creative studies as a matter of urgency and necessity in the curriculum used in Rehabilitation Centers. Disabled people can also write, so there is no reason to exclude them from being exposed to the art of creativity.
References