This study examines educational provisions for Deaf students. It identifies some policies: Nigeria Policy on Education (NPE) and Millennium development goals (MDG) that support the need for equal educational access and provisions for Nigerian citizens in which Deaf students are not excluded. It further determines the relationship between theory and practice in the education for Deaf students in Nigeria with a special focus on secondary school students in a selected state from among the 36 states in Nigeria. Specific objectives are on the educational models of delivery and some other basic educational needs for Deaf secondary school students in the selected state and its relatedness to the international world on educational development. Thus the school setting is the focus of this study and findings are based on a doctoral research with the qualitative study approach using focus group discussions, interviews and observation. Although, there are numerous gaps in the relationship of actualizing the existing policies in the observed state and other states in Nigeria, appropriate educational models of delivery for Deaf students are identified as a global dilemma. This research not only reveals the situation of the Deaf students, it also contributes to the study of special and general education, in Nigeria and Africa at large. Likewise, findings are not only researcher centred but also inclusive of Participants’ voices. The study serves as a springboard for further research on the importance of education for the Deaf and the practicalities of attaining “Education for All” in Nigeria and other developing countries.
Internationally, a number of developments have dominated debate about the education of Deaf children. Since it has been argued that Deafness is not a limitation to learning (Ladd 2003), so also should Deafness not be a setback to accessing education (Peters 2007). Access to education regardless of individual differences is now recognised as an international issue (Cavender and Ladner 2010) in order to enhance development. While the global trend is towards equal rights, the level of access varies according to country (Peters 2007). Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights, set out that everyone has the right to free education especially in the fundamental stages Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical, professional and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. The declaration was the catalyst for policy developments in Deaf education in many countries culminating in the Salamanca Statement and the Millennium goals for 2015 (Peters 2007, Schwartz, Blue et al. 2010).

Nigeria like many other others countries acknowledges the importance of education as a pivot to her achieving sustainable development. Hence Nigerian aspirations for education are set out in the 1977 Policy on Education (NPE) and other subsequent revisions (Aderinoye et al. 2007, Fabunmi 2009). These documents broadly set out that Education is an instrument for national and individual development, thus advocating the need for a functional education to the advancement of maintaining unity in Nigeria. Hence not only should every Nigerian regardless of any form of disability have a right to educational opportunities, each Nigerian citizen should be motivated towards education with consideration on every one’s ability. Howbeit the NPE maps out 12 areas of concern for providing functional education- Primary Education, Primary Education, Secondary Education, Basic Education, Mass literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education, Science, Technical and Vocational Education, Tertiary Education, Open and Distance Education, Special Education, Educational Services, Planning, Administration and Supervision of Education and the Financing of Education.

Nigeria has an educational system tagged 6-3-3-4: a 6-year primary education, a 3-year junior secondary school (JSS), a 3-year senior secondary school (SSS), and a 4-year minimum higher education for a first degree or its equivalent (Imam 2012), into which special education has been interwoven, with many variations (Eleweke 2002). Also, the 6-year primary and 3 year junior secondary has now been considered as the basic minimum education a Nigerian citizen is expected to have, hence the development of the Universal Basic education (UBE) (Imam2012). The Financing of Education is a joint responsibility of the Government: federal, state and local and the private sector. Public schools are run by the government while private schools are run by diverse independent individuals or bodies. Both public and private schools are expected to share a uniform school curriculum. Apart from having a policy, embracing almost all potential educational needs of Nigeria, there has been a continuous need to regularly revisit the policy, and seek for improvements. As such, not only has there been a regular five year evaluation of the NPE, there have been other types of policies initiated to ensure optimum effective educational provision for Nigerian citizens.

Thus Education for all is not a concept that is new to the Nigerian society. Policies such as the development of the Universal Primary Education (UPE), and then the UBE describe the regard for education for all movement. Apart from being nationally endorsed, Nigeria has joined international forces to advocate equal and quality educational access worldwide. However emphasis is now on developing countries especially African countries leading to the Salamanca decree in 1994. In that when compared to the initiation of this concept especially in Nigeria, its actualization process is at a snail pace,
hence the dire need for immediate intervention and the introduction of MGD 2015 goals for Nigeria. Over 10 million children are out of school despite the formulation of the NPE and other education policies in Nigeria (UNICEF-NIGERIA). This situation extends to early childhood education for children with special needs (Akinsanya 1997). While much has been done in relation to policy for special education, there is little evidence of implementation (Garuba 2003, Uwakwe, Falaye et al. 2008, Eskay, Eskay et al. 2012).

Deaf education, being an aspect of special education has a long history of provision since the first influx of missionaries into Nigeria. Nevertheless, educational provision for Deaf people in Nigeria is relatively recent when compared with the developed world (Eleweke 2002). Since the first Nigerian Policy on Education (1975–1980), the Nigerian government recognised the need for special education and by the 1980s they had not only taken over all missionary schools, they established many schools for the Deaf, even up to the tertiary level (Ojile 1994, Kiyaga and Moores 2003, Ajavon 2003, 2008). Notwithstanding, the situation for the education of the Deaf has assumed an upheaval status. More so, special needs education provided by government is now being complemented by diverse private organisations.

There are four major delivery models of education, in both private and state sectors: separation, inclusion, residential and non-residential in which every citizen should be eligible to access. (Peters 2007, Akach 2011, Duncan 2012, Marschark and Hauser 2012). Separate schools, otherwise known as special schools, are often designed either for a particular group, need, purpose, or for diverse special needs (Millar and Morton 2007). Inclusive schools are almost the direct opposite of the special schools in that they are designed to accept all types of needs and groups of students. Residential schools are designed to accommodate students usually within the school premises to sleep over, having other less formal social and learning activities after the formal routine teaching and learning in the day. Non-residential schools are the alternative to residential schools in that students have to commute from their homes to the school. Separate, residential schools have had a longstanding association with the education and socialization of the Deaf. However, advocacy for inclusive schools has recently reduced this provision in the developed world (Marschark 2007).

The question of whether the education of Deaf children should be separate or inclusive is a matter of considerable controversy in the developed north. (Abbott, Morris et al. 2001), for instance, identify two main issues in the UK context: the difficulties of mainstream schools in meeting children’s needs; and the educational benefits associated with specialist schools. These are also issues for education in Nigeria, though the two situations are clearly not directly comparable. Internationally, there has been an important shift away from the segregation of children with disabilities in ‘special’ schools to meeting their needs in the mainstream, where students with special needs spend most or all of their time with non-disabled students. Article 24 (Education) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (2006) asserts the right of every child to an appropriate and efficient education in his or her local mainstream school. In the UK, the inclusion of disabled children in mainstream schools has been officially promoted since the early 1980s. Its implementation, however, has been more problematic. According to the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (www.csie.org.uk/inclusion/disabled-children.shtml); “Successive governments … have been criticised for inadequately resourcing this policy, for lack of political will to enforce it and for maintaining a legal framework which renders inclusive education inaccessible to some learners. This is like issuing a ticket but keeping the door locked.

In most cases, while mainstream provision is offered to students with mild to severe special needs, it is recognised that inclusion may not offer an appropriate education for Deaf children and those with multiple disabilities”.

In Nigeria, the questions are rather different: Will the Deaf child go to school at all? If so, that school will, like all other schools in Nigeria, accept both day and boarding students because of the distances involved. If they go to school, will it be a special school or an inclusive school? If a special school, will it be only for the Deaf or a whole range of special needs in the same setting? The tensions between the ideal and reality are thus even more apparent in Nigeria. A close look at one of the 36 states in Nigeria can give us an insight to the models provided for Deaf students. The selected state has an approximate population
of 3,423,535 (Osun 2015). Findings from this state were gathered with a qualitative research approach. Focus group discussions, observation, and interviews were instruments used and participants included Deaf and hearing students, Deaf and hearing teachers, Deaf and hearing parents of a secondary. Although Distance, funds and time were some factors influencing my choice of the state, the school selected was on the basis that it was the only public secondary school that accommodated Deaf students. Astonishingly, there were no private secondary schools that catered for Deaf students in that state. Besides, it was the only school that catered for all special education needs and not only the Deaf. In addition, it is a residential school because students come from distant places to the school and students attend the school free of charge. The school had approximately 200 students. The school housed a mixture of impairments. However, the majority of the students were Deaf with different degrees of hearing losses. There was only one blind student. In each of the classes, there was at least a student but not more than four, using wheel chairs. There were also some of students that had multiple disabilities with or without Deafness included. No student using a wheelchair in the school was Deaf. Hence they were considered as the Hearing students.

Accounts from the head and teachers in the school reveal that, prior to the foundation of this school, there were other secondary schools all over the state with a resource base for students with special needs and Ojile (1994) corroborates these accounts. A specialist primary school for students with diverse special needs is situated on the same campus, but separated by some bush and a small flowing stream and served by a separate entrance. The secondary school girls reside in the primary school hostel because, as various staff members explained, the secondary school is still “quite young” and “needs money”. Both schools have provision for boarders but also admit day students from families living near the school. However, because all facilities including and accommodation are free, even those who live near, still stay in the boarding site. On the subject of integration versus separate provision, all participants commended the efforts of both the previous and current government in providing a dedicated school for those with special educational needs. Most believed this approach was better than the previous arrangements in mainstream schools. Teachers considered that student confidence, stability and acceptance of their hearing loss were best achieved in the context of a ‘special school’ and that feelings of solidarity are fostered by separate provision. Many of the teachers reported bullying and abuse on the part of both the regular students and teachers in mainstream settings. An example is a statement from a teacher; “If there is a problem, the special teachers will be shouted upon by the non-disabled students and their colleagues that they should come and carry their children. Like if the child is epileptic. But in this school it doesn’t happen because they see themselves as one”. Inadequate qualified personnel for all the needs as identified by teaching participants was also a major influence to having one central centre for special needs students.

Closely related to the question of separation and inclusion is that of residential and non-residential. Residential schools are more widespread in Africa than in developed countries: transportation fees and safety are factors in the choice of schools for all children across the continent (Ajavon 2008). Many of the children in the case study school came from other states and many of those from within the state needed to travel long distances to get there. Although some teachers recognised the benefits of non-residential schooling in maintaining parent-child relationships and improving communication in the home, most argued that residential education was more appropriate for Deaf students. The reasons for this preference, however, were very different from those offered in the developed North. The arguments included the need to reduce begging, the poor levels of care offered by parents, and widespread superstition surrounding children with disabilities. Many of the teachers claimed that many of their Deaf day students when in the mainstream schools as day students, begged for alms at the roadside after school and this considerably curbed especially during term time. They however acknowledged the impracticality of monitoring them all the time. They further alleged that the children begged because they were left unattended at home and that the parents did not cater for their essential needs. They claimed that some parents used their children’s Deafness as a means to make money by sending them out to beg for alms or to request for money from the wealthy. Some hearing Parents’ comments offered some support for this position: Most expressed their fear of what will become of their children when they leave school because they feel that the school can control and take better care of them than they and also they are not being able to interact effectively with their Deaf children.
These models and the attitudes of participants towards these models notwithstanding cannot be divorced from the physical environments and conditions that they are placed in. Inadequate and dilapidated infrastructure and amenities are a normal feature of the Nigerian education system. While the quality of provision varies from state to state (Ajayi and Adeyemi 2011), the general picture falls far short of the aspirations of successive governments. Amongst other scholars, Ige (2011) and Ige (2013) describe Nigeria’s educational infrastructure as requiring immediate intervention; the classrooms (as well as the entire learning environment) need to be safe, neat, creative and functional; the laboratories need to be equipped to world class standard, libraries must be able to update and replenish their acquisitions, and ICT and related equipment needs to be fully deployed. The situation in the study school attracted much critical comment from the teachers. Inadequate classrooms and overcrowding were matters of concern for most of the teachers including the head and deputy. Large class sizes are the norm across Africa (Opoku-Amankwa 2010) and Nigerian schools are no exception. Although the number of students in some of the classes in the case study school was much smaller than the target of 40 for Universal Basic Education UBE (Ejere 2011), their additional needs created many associated challenges for classroom management. Teachers in the study complained that many students are not on task and that it is usually very difficult for them to pay adequate attention to the ‘serious’ students perceived as wanting to learn. Teachers highlighted the importance of replacing the dilapidated furniture on a regular basis and for teaching and learning materials appropriate for Deaf students.

While the provision of the male hostel built with the collaboration of World Bank and the surrounding community was appreciated, most staff and students felt the residential facilities were unsatisfactory: there were no hostels for the female students within the school so they had to share facilities with primary school boarders in a different environment. Although both students and teachers indicated the urgency of building more hostels for the students, the teachers also expressed the need for appropriate accommodation for staff within the school to ensure good care for the resident students. Boarders were monitored after school by non-qualified staff (cooks). There was a high demand from both staff and students for improved eating areas and more water outlets in order to reduce queues and long walks. Teachers expressed embarrassment about needing to eat in the staff room when visitors come in to see their colleagues. The students complained about eating in the kitchen or having to walk with their food from the kitchen situated in the primary school to their hostel. Presently water outlets are provided in just one location. Other basic amenities, such as bathroom and toilet facilities, washing machines, barbing machines, lawn mowers (or personnel to assist in washing or cutting the grass) were considered necessary by the students to ensure privacy, comfort and a sense of belonging. For instance, some of the students raised objections to using cutlasses even for the maintenance of the grass growing very close to their hostels and the school buildings. They longed for mechanised means of cutting the grass and bushes surrounding their school and other mechanized instruments for ease of performing activities.

Although there were two ramp accesses to the classrooms, most teachers and students complained about the rough access for those with wheel chairs to the main entrance of the school. They added that the sandy area around the school compound spoils the tyres of their wheel chairs. Hence, they advocated for more ramps and tarred areas around the school compounds and buildings. In a similar vein, serious concerns were raised about the fact that electricity was available in just some parts of the school and that supplies need to be provided, in particular, to the science laboratory and the library. According to many of the staff, the laboratory, which currently caters only for biology, was not suitable for even the easiest science practical as the room lacks the main amenities (electricity and water) of a standard science laboratory. Many of the students complained that after sun set and on cloudy days, the library was dark and unusable, which corroborates the observation of Igwe (2011:3) that “The Libraries in most primary and post primary schools are so poor that they impede rather than promote learning and knowledge acquisition…. There is no clear cut policy on funding school libraries and so those libraries are generally ill-equipped, lacking proper accommodation, qualified staff, relevant information resources such as books and other educational materials”.

Some of the staff talked on the issue of facilities for the blind. In that they had one very old braille machine and that they need current new machines and relevant accessories so that their school can assist more blind students. A few of the staff also expressed the need for an audiology centre in the school with qualified personnel able to diagnose and preferably offer treatment/ intervention strategies for the students. Some also expressed the need for amplification in the classroom to enhance the ability of the partially hearing to learn.

**Conclusion**

One of the clear implications of this study is the importance of quality education for the overall development of a Deaf child and the involvement of the entire society in that process (Giroux 2003, Antia, Jones et al. 2011). Progress in this direction for all children has been frustratingly slow as demonstrated, for instance, by the abysmal failure to reach the millennium goals (Ojogwu 2009). In the context of Nigeria, therefore, any recommendations for how educational provision for Deaf children can be improved will need to distinguish between rhetoric and reality, between policy and practice and between what is ideal and what can realistically be achieved. Nigeria shares international concerns about the most appropriate model of education for Deaf students. However, some challenges are peculiar to the Nigerian context. These include the fact that special education in Nigeria generally targets children with a wide range of special needs in the same class rather than only on Deaf children; and the very poor level of basic learning infrastructure and facilities. Recommendations from participants including observations from the researcher, for the success of “Education for all” indicate the immediate need for more provisions of quality educational delivery models for the Deaf and all special needs even if they are specialized. Affirming comments from Obiakor (1998) on the problems of admission to schools for special needs students, parents and some staff commented that admission to the school was difficult, as demand had exceeded the number of places available.
References


