

Inclusive Education in Nigeria: Challenges and Solutions

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Abstract. *The paper critically looked at the various challenges militating against development of inclusion education in Nigeria. The paper is a position paper. Secondary data were used in the paper. The secondary data were collected from print and online publications. The study disclosed that inadequate funding and resource constraints, poor teacher preparation and professional development, inadequate infrastructure and learning environment, insecurity programme, negative societal and cultural attitudes, weak policy implementation and institutional support, technological and digital barriers, curriculum inflexibility and assessment issues and corruption are some of the challenges facing inclusive education in Nigeria. Based on these findings, the paper recommends that increment in funding and ensuring equitable resource allocation, enhance teacher training and professional development, improve educational infrastructure and learning environment, strengthen security in educational institutions, promote positive societal and cultural attitudes toward inclusion, ensure effective policy implementation and institutional support, integrate technology and digital inclusion in schools, revise curriculum and reform assessment practices, promote transparency and combat corruption in education management and foster multi-sectoral and community collaboration.*

Key words: *Challenges, Education, Inclusive education.*

1.0 Introduction

Inclusive education is a progressive approach to learning that ensures all children, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions, have equal access to quality education within the same learning environment. It seeks to eliminate discrimination and promote participation by integrating learners with diverse needs—including those with disabilities, from disadvantaged backgrounds, or marginalized communities—into mainstream schools. The concept aligns with global commitments such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4), which emphasizes “inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all.”

In Nigeria, the pursuit of inclusive education has gained increasing attention as part of the national efforts to achieve Education for All (EFA) and bridge educational inequalities across the country. Despite several policies and initiatives—such as the National Policy on Education (NPE) and the National Policy on Inclusive Education (2017)—the implementation of inclusive education remains far from ideal. Many children with special educational needs still face exclusion due to barriers such as inadequate funding, poor teacher preparation, negative societal attitudes, lack of learning facilities, and weak policy enforcement.

Addressing these challenges requires a collective effort from the government, educators, parents, and communities to create a learning environment that values diversity and supports all learners. Therefore, this paper examines the concept of inclusive education in Nigeria, identifies the major challenges hindering its effective implementation, and suggests practical solutions to promote a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable educational system.

2.0 Literature

2.1 Review Concept of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education involves “a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners.” This definition highlights inclusion not merely as a special education strategy but as a comprehensive reform that addresses the diverse needs of all students. The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) remains a foundational document in this field, calling on all governments to adopt the principle of inclusive schooling and ensure that all children—especially those with special educational needs—learn within regular education systems (UNESCO 2009). In the Nigerian context, inclusive education is rooted in the National Policy on Education (NPE, 2014), which advocates for equal educational opportunities for all citizens, including persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups. Ainscow (2005) argues that inclusion requires a shift in thinking—from focusing on learners’ deficiencies to identifying and addressing barriers within the school environment that prevent effective participation. Similarly, Booth and Ainscow (2011) emphasize that inclusive education should be seen as an ongoing process of school development aimed at promoting participation and reducing exclusion.

Research on inclusive education in Nigeria reveals that, while there is growing awareness of the concept, practical implementation remains a major challenge. Obiakor and Offor (2011) note that inclusive education in Nigeria is often misunderstood as mere integration of children with disabilities into regular schools without the necessary structural and instructional support. They argue that true inclusion requires curriculum adaptation, teacher training, and the provision of assistive technologies to accommodate learners’ diverse needs. Omede (2015) observes that the success of inclusive education depends largely on the preparedness and attitudes of teachers. Many Nigerian teachers lack the specialized skills and training required to handle learners with disabilities, which often leads to frustration and exclusion within classrooms. Ajuwon (2012) further asserts that societal and cultural attitudes towards disability in Nigeria pose a major obstacle to inclusion, as many communities still perceive disability through stigmatizing or superstitious lenses. This negative perception affects parents’ willingness to enroll their children with disabilities in regular schools and limits opportunities for social interaction and acceptance.

Another critical factor is inadequate funding and policy implementation. Eleweke and Rodda (2002) emphasize that inclusive education in developing countries like Nigeria is hindered by limited financial resources, insufficient infrastructure, and weak policy monitoring. Schools often lack ramps, accessible classrooms, resource centers, and teaching aids that could facilitate inclusive learning. Despite the existence of the National Policy on Inclusive Education (2017), implementation remains inconsistent across states due to lack of political will and coordination among educational agencies.

3.0 Method

The paper assesses the challenges militating against development of inclusion education in Nigeria. The paper is a position paper that adopted a systematic literature review-based method. The method allows to collect and review the related previous literature from various online sources. With the aid of digital platform, the researcher collected secondary information to generate knowledge on this topic from 2015-2025. The position paper followed qualitative narrative design method. The researcher has visited different online sites to collect the previous literature and analyze the literatures on challenges militating against development of inclusion education in Nigeria. The previous findings are critically analyzed and presented in different themes as on challenges militating against development of inclusion education in Nigeria.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion

This output of the literatures on challenges militating against development of inclusion education in Nigeria presents an in-depth study and result that can infer conclusion on the topic. The study includes: online publication; conference paper, journals sorted from reputable international journals

such as CEON, Elsevier, Hindawi, JSTOR, IEEE, Learn Techlib, SAGE, Nebraska and Springer (Adapted from Ogunode, 2025v).

Exclusion

Also, the literature review excludes information from edited books, preprints, monographs, information below 2015 and book chapters (Adapted from Ogunode, 2025).

4.0 Result and Discussion on Problems Facing Inclusive Education in Nigeria

Inclusive education in Nigeria faces numerous interrelated problems that limit its full implementation and effectiveness. Despite the presence of policies promoting education for all, many systemic, financial, social, and structural barriers continue to hinder the integration of learners with special needs into mainstream schools. The following are key problems affecting inclusive education in Nigeria:

Inadequate Funding and Resource Constraints

One of the most critical challenges facing inclusive education in Nigeria is inadequate funding. The education sector generally receives a small portion of the national budget—far below the UNESCO recommendation of 15–20% of national expenditure. Consequently, schools lack the financial resources needed to provide special facilities such as ramps, Braille materials, hearing aids, and assistive learning devices for students with disabilities. The shortage of funds also affects the recruitment and training of specialized teachers, provision of inclusive curriculum materials, and maintenance of school infrastructure. Without adequate funding, inclusion remains a policy ideal rather than a practical reality. One of the major barriers to inclusive education in Nigeria is insufficient funding and the lack of necessary resources to support learners with diverse needs. Eleweke and Rodda (2002) emphasize that in many developing countries, the implementation of inclusive education is constrained by financial limitations, leading to inadequate facilities, lack of assistive technologies, and insufficient specialized personnel. Similarly, Ogunode (2020) and Ajuwon (2012) points out that without sufficient budgetary allocation, schools are unable to provide appropriate learning aids such as Braille materials, hearing devices, ramps, and modified classrooms. The Federal Ministry of Education (2017) and Ozoji (2015) also acknowledges that poor funding has been a persistent challenge to achieving inclusive education goals in Nigeria.

Poor Teacher Preparation and Professional Development

Teachers are the cornerstone of any inclusive education system, but in Nigeria, most teachers are not adequately trained to handle diverse learners. Many teacher education programs offer limited or no coursework in special needs education or inclusive pedagogy. As a result, teachers often lack the skills to adapt teaching methods and classroom management strategies for children with disabilities (Okeke 2018). Additionally, few opportunities exist for in-service training or professional development in inclusive practices. This gap contributes to teacher frustration, negative attitudes toward inclusion, and ineffective delivery of instruction to learners with special needs. Teachers play a critical role in inclusive education, yet many Nigerian teachers are ill-prepared to handle diverse classrooms (Olanrewaju 2020). Omede (2015) notes that most teacher education programs in Nigeria lack comprehensive training on inclusive pedagogy, special education techniques, and classroom management for learners with disabilities. As a result, teachers often feel overwhelmed and underprepared to meet the varying needs of students. Obiakor and Offor (2011) further argue that teachers' limited knowledge about disabilities contributes to their reluctance to accept inclusive practices. Moreover, Ogunode, & Jegede, (2021) and Ozoji (2015) highlights the absence of continuous professional development opportunities for teachers as a major impediment to sustaining inclusive practices in schools.

Inadequate Infrastructure and Learning Environment

The physical environments of most Nigerian schools are not conducive to inclusive learning. Many public schools lack ramps for wheelchair users, accessible toilets, well-ventilated classrooms, and specialized learning centers for students with sensory or physical impairments. Overcrowded

classrooms and dilapidated facilities further worsen the learning experience. Such environments not only exclude learners with disabilities but also hinder their participation and confidence. Without infrastructural reform, it is nearly impossible to create equitable learning spaces for all students. The physical environment of many Nigerian schools is unsuitable for inclusive learning. Okeke (2018) observes that schools often lack ramps, accessible toilets, adjustable furniture, and specialized classrooms that accommodate learners with mobility, visual, or hearing impairments. The overcrowded classrooms and poor maintenance culture in public schools further exacerbate the problem. According to UNESCO (2015), the absence of barrier-free environments undermines the participation and performance of learners with disabilities, violating their right to equal education opportunities.

Insecurity Programme

Insecurity has become a major threat to education in Nigeria, especially in the northern regions affected by insurgency, banditry, and kidnapping. Attacks on schools and abductions of students and teachers have disrupted learning and created fear among parents and educators. For inclusive education, the situation is even more severe, as students with disabilities are more vulnerable in conflict situations and often the first to be left behind. Insecurity also diverts government attention and funding away from educational development to security expenditures, further weakening the progress of inclusion initiatives (Isah, 2020; UNESCO 2015); Ahoata, Obi-Ezenekwe, (2021); Ogunode, Attah, & Ebute, (2023); Ogunode, Umeora & Olatunde-Aiyedun, (2022) and Ogunode, & Chijindu, (2022).

Negative Societal and Cultural Attitudes

Cultural beliefs and social stigma toward disability remain deep-rooted in many Nigerian communities. Some families view disability as a curse or divine punishment, leading them to hide or neglect their children with disabilities. This attitude affects enrollment and participation in inclusive education programs. Moreover, peers and teachers may discriminate against learners with disabilities, reinforcing feelings of rejection and inferiority. Changing these attitudes requires sustained advocacy, public education, and awareness campaigns to promote acceptance and inclusion. Cultural beliefs and societal perceptions about disability continue to pose a serious challenge to the success of inclusive education. Ajuwon (2012) reports that in many Nigerian communities, disabilities are still viewed as a curse or punishment, leading to stigmatization and exclusion of affected individuals. Parents may hide their children with disabilities due to shame or fear of social ridicule. Similarly, Ekeh and Adeniyi (2017) note that discrimination and stereotyping against people with disabilities affect their access to education and social participation. Changing these deep-rooted cultural attitudes requires persistent advocacy, public enlightenment, and community-based interventions.

Weak Policy Implementation and Institutional Support

While Nigeria has established several policies supporting inclusive education—such as the National Policy on Education (2014) and the National Policy on Inclusive Education (2017)—implementation has been weak and inconsistent. Policies are often poorly communicated to schools, and monitoring mechanisms are either ineffective or absent. The lack of coordination among government ministries, state education boards, and special education departments further undermines the system. Political will is often low, with little accountability for policy outcomes, making inclusive education progress sluggish. Although Nigeria has adopted several policies promoting inclusive education—such as the National Policy on Education (2014) and the National Policy on Inclusive Education (2017)—implementation remains inconsistent and poorly monitored. Ainscow (2005) and Omede, (2015) that inclusion is not achieved merely by policy formulation but through deliberate structural changes, adequate funding, and stakeholder commitment. Ozoji (2015) adds that weak political will and lack of coordination among education ministries, special education units, and non-governmental organizations hinder effective policy execution.

Technological and Digital Barriers

Inclusive education requires the integration of digital tools and assistive technologies to support diverse learners. Unfortunately, many Nigerian schools lack access to these technologies due to poor funding, inadequate electricity supply, and limited internet connectivity. Learners with visual or hearing impairments especially need assistive devices like screen readers, audio textbooks, and captioning systems, which are rarely available. Teachers also lack ICT training, making it difficult to use technology effectively for inclusive learning. This digital divide widens the inequality gap in education. In the digital age, access to educational technology is essential for inclusive learning, yet most Nigerian schools lack the infrastructure and digital tools needed to support learners with disabilities. Olanrewaju (2020) and Oluremi, (2015) noted that the integration of assistive technology—such as screen readers, captioning tools, and digital Braille—is critical to enabling full participation. Unfortunately, poor internet connectivity, high costs of digital devices, and lack of ICT training for teachers further widen the gap between policy intent and practice (Vandeh, 2013).

Curriculum Inflexibility and Assessment Issues

The Nigerian curriculum is often rigid and not designed to accommodate the learning needs of all students. It emphasizes uniformity in content delivery and standardized testing without provisions for differentiated instruction. As a result, students with disabilities or learning difficulties struggle to keep pace with others. National examinations such as WAEC and NECO rarely offer alternative assessments or reasonable accommodations, leading to poor performance and exclusion. For true inclusion, the curriculum must be flexible, learner-centered, and adaptable to varying needs. Another challenge lies in the rigidity of the national curriculum, which is often designed without considering the learning needs of students with disabilities. Booth and Ainscow (2011) and Omede, (2015) submit that inclusive education requires adaptable curricula that reflect diversity and provide multiple learning pathways. In Nigeria, however, the one-size-fits-all approach to teaching and assessment disadvantages learners with special needs. Okoli and Ozoji (2018) and Adedokun, & Olaleye, (2014) highlight that standardized examinations, such as WAEC and NECO, fail to make reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities, further excluding them from fair evaluation.

Corruption

Corruption is a pervasive problem in Nigeria's education system, affecting the effective implementation of inclusive education policies. Funds allocated for special education programs are often mismanaged or diverted by officials. Procurement of assistive materials and construction of special classrooms are sometimes inflated or abandoned mid-way (Ogunode, Josiah, & Ajape 2021). Corruption also manifests in the recruitment of unqualified teachers and favoritism in staff deployment. Such unethical practices erode public trust and hinder the sustainability of inclusive education initiatives (Ozoji 2015).

4.1 Finding

The study revealed that inadequate funding and resource constraints, poor teacher preparation and professional development, inadequate infrastructure and learning environment, insecurity programme, negative societal and cultural attitudes, weak policy implementation and institutional support, technological and digital barriers, curriculum inflexibility and assessment issues and corruption are some of the challenges facing inclusive education in Nigeria.

4.2 Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper critically look at the various challenges militating against development of inclusion education in Nigeria. The study disclosed that inadequate funding and resource constraints, poor teacher preparation and professional development, inadequate infrastructure and learning environment, insecurity programme, negative societal and cultural attitudes, weak policy implementation and institutional support, technological and digital barriers, curriculum inflexibility and assessment issues and corruption are some of the challenges facing inclusive education in Nigeria. Based on these findings, the following are recommendations proposed to overcome the major challenges confronting inclusive education in Nigeria

Increase Funding and Equitable Resource Allocation

The government should substantially increase budgetary allocations to the education sector, especially for special and inclusive education programs. Adequate funding is necessary to provide assistive technologies, learning aids, and infrastructural adjustments such as ramps, accessible classrooms, and inclusive sanitation facilities. Both federal and state governments should create special intervention funds dedicated to inclusive education, similar to the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Fund. Transparent and accountable mechanisms should be established to ensure that these funds are properly utilized. Partnerships with private organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international bodies such as UNICEF and UNESCO can also provide financial and technical support to sustain inclusive initiatives.

Enhance Teacher Training and Professional Development

Teacher quality is at the heart of effective inclusion. Teacher education institutions should integrate inclusive education and special needs pedagogy into their curriculum. All pre-service and in-service teachers must receive training on differentiated instruction, classroom management, and the use of assistive technologies. Regular capacity-building workshops and refresher courses should be organized for teachers, administrators, and counselors to improve their competence in managing diverse classrooms. In addition, incentive schemes such as allowances, scholarships, and promotion opportunities can be introduced to encourage teachers to specialize in inclusive education.

Improve Educational Infrastructure and Learning Environment

There is an urgent need to remodel and upgrade school facilities to accommodate learners with physical, sensory, and cognitive disabilities. Schools should be equipped with accessible ramps, elevators, tactile signages, sound-amplification systems, and inclusive libraries. The government should also ensure that every school has at least one resource center or special education unit to support learners with disabilities. Adequate classroom spacing and proper ventilation should be prioritized to create a conducive learning atmosphere for all learners.

Strengthen Security in Educational Institutions

The ongoing insecurity in several parts of Nigeria has disrupted learning and discouraged school attendance, especially among vulnerable children. The government must strengthen security measures by deploying trained security personnel to schools and establishing early warning and response systems in communities prone to violence. Community policing and school safety committees should be established to monitor threats and promote a safe learning environment. Rehabilitation and psychosocial support programs should also be implemented for students affected by insecurity and displacement, including those with disabilities.

Promote Positive Societal and Cultural Attitudes Toward Inclusion

Public enlightenment campaigns and community sensitization programs are essential to combat negative cultural beliefs and stigmatization of people with disabilities. The Ministry of Information and Culture, in collaboration with civil society organizations, should launch nationwide awareness programs promoting disability rights and inclusive education. The media can play a vital role in changing public perception by highlighting success stories of individuals with disabilities who have excelled in education and society. Furthermore, religious and traditional leaders should be engaged to promote empathy, acceptance, and inclusion at the grassroots level.

Ensure Effective Policy Implementation and Institutional Support

Policies promoting inclusive education must move beyond rhetoric to concrete action. The Federal Ministry of Education and relevant agencies should establish strong monitoring and evaluation frameworks to ensure compliance with the National Policy on Inclusive Education (2017) and related legislation. Each state should create a Directorate of Inclusive Education to oversee program implementation, resource management, and performance evaluation. Policymakers should also engage education stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and learners, in designing and reviewing inclusion strategies to ensure that policies reflect ground realities.

Integrate Technology and Digital Inclusion in Schools

The integration of digital technology into inclusive education is vital in the 21st century. The government should prioritize investment in ICT infrastructure, assistive devices, and internet connectivity in both urban and rural schools. Students with disabilities should be provided with adaptive technologies such as screen readers, Braille displays, and speech-to-text software. Teachers should be trained in digital pedagogy to enhance teaching effectiveness. Partnerships with technology firms can be leveraged to produce affordable and locally made assistive devices suitable for Nigerian learners.

Revise Curriculum and Reform Assessment Practices

The existing national curriculum should be reviewed to make it more flexible and learner-centered. Curriculum reform should focus on differentiated instruction, allowing teachers to modify content, teaching methods, and assessment techniques to suit the abilities of each learner. Examination bodies such as WAEC, NECO, and NABTEB should incorporate alternative assessment methods that consider the needs of students with disabilities. Inclusive education principles should also be embedded into teacher education curricula and school management practices.

Promote Transparency and Combat Corruption in Education Management

Corruption undermines the effective use of resources meant for inclusive education. Strong anti-corruption measures and accountability frameworks should be enforced in all education projects. Audit reports on special education funds should be made public to ensure transparency. Establishing independent monitoring committees comprising civil society members, parents, and community representatives can help oversee fund utilization and ensure that educational projects are implemented according to approved standards.

Foster Multi-Sectoral and Community Collaboration

Inclusive education is not solely the responsibility of the education sector—it requires collaboration across multiple sectors. The Ministries of Health, Women Affairs, Information, and Youth Development should work together to support inclusive education through health screenings, counseling services, and public advocacy. NGOs, faith-based organizations, and international development partners should also be involved in awareness creation, teacher training, and provision of educational materials. Community ownership should be promoted so that local stakeholders actively participate in sustaining inclusion programs.

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