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PROMOTING QUALITY INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN NIGERIAN BASIC SCHOOLS THROUGH RESEARCH DATA INTEGRATION

Abstract

In order to accomplish Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education for all, inclusive education for children with disabilities is a crucial problem. The purpose of this essay is to assess the adoption of inclusive education in Nigerian basic schools and analyze the research data that is currently accessible. A systematic review was conducted by examining various empirical studies on inclusive education in Nigeria, covering policies, data availability, and implementation challenges. The findings reveal that although some data on the education of children with disabilities exist, the implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria remains significantly limited. Key issues identified include inadequate supportive facilities, insufficient teacher training on inclusive education, and the minimal utilization of assistive technologies. The study also highlights a significant disparity in the provision of inclusive education services between the northern and southern regions of Nigeria. The implications of these findings underscore the importance of integrating existing research data to develop policies that support the implementation of inclusive education at the basic education level. Collaboration among the government, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and researchers is essential to improve access to and the quality of education for children with disabilities. By adopting a data-driven approach, Nigeria can accelerate progress toward SDG 4 and ensure inclusive and equitable education for all children.

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Keywords: inclusive education, children with disabilities, implementation, research data, education policy.

Introduction

Education is a fundamental right that must be accessible to every child worldwide, including children with disabilities (Alfurqan et al., 2020). In Nigeria, efforts to achieve inclusive education have been outlined in various policies, including the 2007 saw the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Of this, Article 24 convention mandates that all schools must be inclusive and accessible to all children, including those with disabilities. However, the implementation of this policy continues to face significant challenges. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reports that more than 10.5 million school-age children are out of school in Nigeria, with an estimated 5 to 7 million of them being children with disabilities (Hasibuan et al., 2022). UNICEF research shows that 90% of children in underdeveloped nations, including Nigeria, have disabilities, which exacerbates the problem even further, may never gain access to basic education in their lifetime. Empirical evidence from prior studies also reveals that while inclusive education policies have been developed, their implementation remains highly inadequate (Damanik et al., 2024).

Previous research highlights various gaps in the implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria. (Salami, 2022) found that inclusive education policies for early childhood lack adequate resources to support implementation, while (Brydges & Mkandawire, 2016) identified insufficient instructional support and facilities for children with disabilities. Similarly, (Kusimo & Chidozie, 2019) demonstrated that Nigeria's education system fails to adequately address the needs of children with disabilities, particularly in achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4. Based on these findings, this article focuses on integrating research data to support the implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria's basic schools. This approach is expected to address the gap between policy formulation and on-ground realities (Olusanya et al., 2023). By integrating

available research data, the government and stakeholders can devise more effective measures to ensure inclusive and equitable education for children with disabilities (Okere, 2023).

This research has significant implications for the development of inclusive education in Nigeria. The integration of available research data can serve as a foundation for policymakers to design and revise educational policies tailored to the needs of children with disabilities (Rotenberg et al., 2023). By utilizing empirical data, the government can identify gaps in the implementation of inclusive education, such as inadequate teacher training, insufficient facilities, and minimal use of assistive technologies. This enables a more efficient and strategic allocation of resources to support the sustainability of inclusive education in basic schools. Furthermore, collaboration among government agencies, researchers, and civil society organizations will expedite the practical implementation of measures to improve the quality and accessibility of education for all children (Handayani, 2024). The primary contribution of this research lies in providing a data-driven approach to strengthen the inclusive education system in Nigeria. By leveraging findings from empirical studies, this research not only deepens understanding of the challenges faced by children with disabilities in Nigeria but also offers practical recommendations to address these challenges (Nesterova, 2023). Additionally, this research contributes to the global literature on inclusive education by presenting a localized perspective that can be adapted by other developing countries facing similar challenges. The study also emphasizes the need for a holistic and sustainable approach to achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 at the national level (Abdulrahman et al., 2021).

METHODS

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Research Data in Education

This study employed a systematic review methodology to examine existing research on inclusive education for children with disabilities in Nigerian basic schools. The review followed a structured process to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings. Inclusion criteria were defined to select studies that specifically focused on inclusive education practices, challenges, and policies in Nigeria, particularly at the basic education level. Empirical studies published in peer-reviewed journals, government reports, and credible institutional publications between 2010 and 2023 were included. Studies with ambiguous methodologies or lacking relevance to the Nigerian context were excluded to maintain the specificity and applicability of the findings. Data sources included academic databases such as PubMed, Google Scholar, and JSTOR, as well as official reports from organizations like UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank. Key search terms included "inclusive education in Nigeria," "children with disabilities," "basic education challenges," and "education policy in Nigeria." The initial search yielded 120 publications, of which 60 met the inclusion criteria after a detailed screening process. These studies were reviewed systematically to extract relevant data on policy implementation, resource availability, teacher training, and assistive technologies. Thematic analysis was employed to synthesize the findings, focusing on recurring themes such as policy gaps, resource inadequacies, and regional disparities. Data were categorized and compared across different regions and levels of education to identify patterns and inconsistencies. This rigorous and systematic approach ensures that the findings provide a

comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities in implementing inclusive education for children with disabilities in Nigeria.

RESULTS

Availability of Data on Inclusive Education

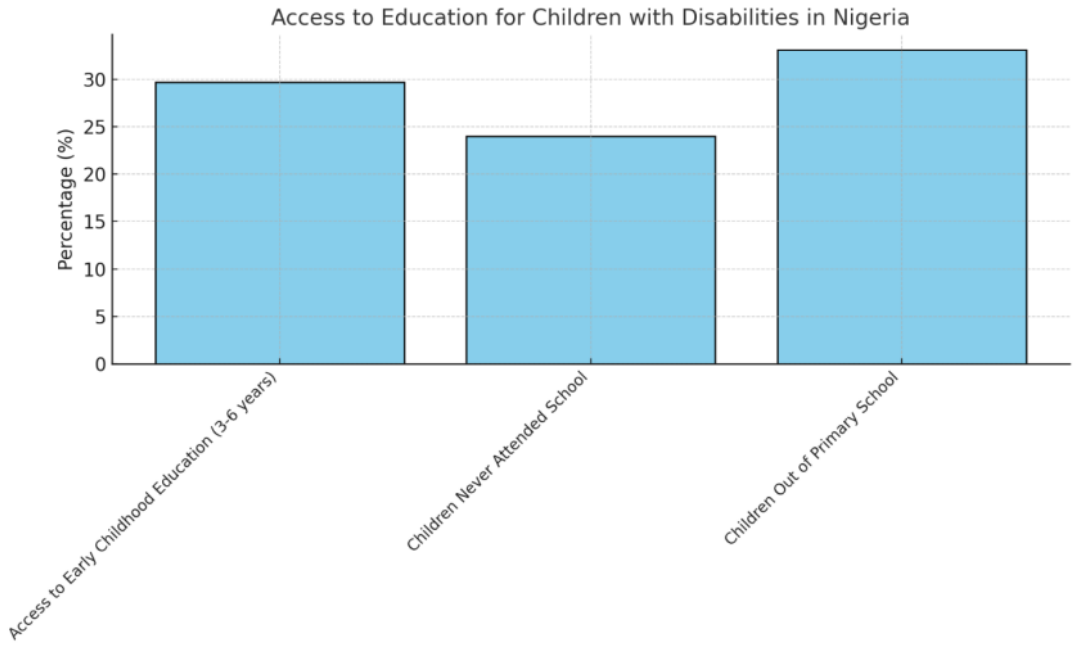
The review reveals that while data on children with disabilities in Nigeria exists, it is fragmented and often inconsistent. For instance, UNICEF (2023) reports that 29.7% of children with disabilities aged 3-6 had access to early childhood education programs, while 33.1% were out of primary school. Similarly, data from the (Bieliaieva, 2020) highlights the lack of sufficient inclusive schools and facilities tailored to the needs of children with disabilities. These findings indicate that although some progress has been made, the availability and accuracy of data on inclusive education remain significant challenges.

hallenges in Implementation

Empirical studies reviewed indicate several barriers to the implementation of inclusive education. (Salami, 2016) found that policies for inclusive education lacked specificity and resources, resulting in poor implementation. (Brydges & Mkandawire, 2016) reported inadequate instructional support and a lack of proximity between schools and children with disabilities' residential areas. Furthermore, (Ewa, 2016) identified insufficient availability and utilization of assistive technology devices, particularly for children with hearing impairments.

Regional Disparities in Educational Services

The findings also reveal significant regional disparities in the provision of inclusive education. Studies such as those by (Temitope & Opeyemi, 2023) show that inclusive schooling practices are almost non-existent in many public schools in the southwest of Nigeria, with similar observations in other regions. This indicates uneven implementation across geopolitical zones, further exacerbating inequalities in access to education for children with disabilities.



Figur 1. Access to Education For Children with Disabilities in Nigeria

The bar chart above illustrates the access to education for children with disabilities in Nigeria, highlighting significant gaps in early childhood and primary education **29.7%** of children with disabilities aged 3-6 have access to early childhood education programs. **24%** of children with disabilities have never attended school, reflecting a major barrier to educational inclusion. **33.1%** of children with disabilities are out of primary school, emphasizing the challenges in transitioning to or sustaining education at this level.

DISCUSSION

Addressing Data Fragmentation

The fragmented and inconsistent nature of data on inclusive education in Nigeria poses a significant barrier to informed policymaking. For inclusive education to succeed, stakeholders must prioritize the creation of a centralized and reliable database. This aligns with the article's objective of integrating research data to support better decision-making processes.

Enhancing Policy and Resource Allocation

The lack of specificity and resources identified in inclusive education policies highlights a need for targeted reforms. Policies must not only address the physical inclusion of children with disabilities but also their active participation through adequate teacher training, the provision of learning aids, and the establishment of inclusive school environments. These steps would bridge the gap between policy formulation and implementation, as emphasized in the findings.

Tackling Regional Inequalities

The regional disparities in educational services for children with disabilities demand immediate attention. A coordinated effort involving local governments, educational stakeholders, and

community-based organizations is essential to ensure equitable access to inclusive education nationwide. By addressing these disparities, Nigeria can move closer to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4, as advocated in this study.

Data Availability on Children with Disabilities in Nigeria

Citing statistics from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) 2021, World Population Dashboard as well as the (United Nations Economic et al., 2023) report on disability, Save the Children International (SCI) noted that Nigeria is home to an estimated 32 million people with disabilities, most of whom are children. (WHO et al., 2020) through data gathered from MICS report that between 2015-2022 percentage of children between ages 2-4 that has disabilities in Nigeria was 7.6% while those above age 5 were 15.5% this data is in agreement with World Bank and WHO projections. The report further indicate that 29.7% of CWDs who is between the age of 3-6 had access to early childhood education programme, 24.0% never attended school, 33.1% of the children were out of primary school in Nigeria. From the aforementioned, it is evident that there is availability of data on CWDs in Nigeria, although the data may not be solely accurate but to some extent it has provided major information that will be needed to make educational provision for CWDs in the country.

Data Generation on Inclusive Education in Nigeria through Empirical Studies

(Salami, 2022) investigated the implementation of Nigeria's policies of education on provision of inclusive early childhood education in Nigeria. The study adopted both qualitative and quantitative research methodology. In the quantitative method, the study gave analysis of inclusive early childhood education policy documents while for the quantitative aspect of the research questionnaire was used to gather data. The population of the study comprised of the special needs education officers in the state universal basic education boards, the head teachers in public primary schools and special education lecturers in tertiary institutions across the six geo-political zones in Nigeria. The findings of the study revealed that the statement of the policies were not well specified, resources were not provided for children with disabilities and no inclusion was being practiced in Nigeria.

(Ewa, 2016) in her study evaluated service provision that is available for pupils who have hearing impairments and the conditions that were established to ensure that Nigeria's inclusive education program was implemented successfully. The investigation was guided by the formulation of six hypotheses. Study participants included students with hearing impairments, their parents, organizations, school agencies, and individuals tasked with delivering services to these students. Seven thousands and four hundred (7400) respondents from the six geopolitical zone in Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory Abuja were used for the study. Questionnaire, anecdotal records and interview were used as instrument for data collection for the study.

The findings showed a strong positive correlation between the use of assistive technology (AT) devices by students with hearing impairments in inclusive secondary schools, the training of teachers in regular classroom settings, and the availability of supportive staff in regular classroom settings and the successful execution of inclusive education programs in Nigeria. It also showed that inclusive education was successfully implemented in Nigeria and that there were no appreciable differences in the resources provided for educational services between the country's northern and southern geopolitical zones.

(Brydges & Mkandawire, 2016) examined the understanding of inclusive education in Lagos state which was based upon thorough interviews with students with visual impairments. The findings revealed that despite the long periods of formulation of inclusive education policies, Nigerian children living with disabilities continue to encounter non-availability of instructional support. The study suggested that inclusive education programmes in Nigeria must be the type that would attend to both school and immediate environments of the children. For children with disabilities to enjoy their rights to equal educational opportunity with their peers who have no disabilities, the government at all levels are meant to establish schools close to learner's residential environment for easy access to education and also put into consideration their level of ability to assimilate during teaching and learning process. This is to explain why adequate provision of special teachers and other specialist are very important for children with disabilities in both inclusive and special school.

(Kusimo & Chidozie, 2019), examined the prospect of inclusive education for physically challenged children in Nigeria using the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals with major reference to goal number four (SDGs) which laid emphasis on quality and equal education for all children. The study adopted quantitative method of investigation. The study administered

questionnaires to 200 respondents. The finding of their study reveals that in Nigeria the education system provided for physically challenged children is in serious hazard which urgent calls for revalidating policy of education as there is no traces of SDGs implementation. The study concluded that every child including those with challenges must have access to education if the country truly wants to achieve any development on equal educational opportunity for all children.

(Nanjwan et al., 2021) investigated availability and utilisation of assistive technological devices (AT) and its implication on execution of an inclusive education program in Nigeria's Cross Rivers State for kids with hearing impairments. A survey research design was used in the study. Fifty hearing-impaired pupils were chosen at random from the secondary schools in the study area to make up the sample size. Three hypotheses were generated for the study and a questionnaire was used to obtain data. The findings revealed that the provisions, availability and utilisation of assistive technology devices is grossly inadequate among secondary school students with hearing impairment in Cross Rivers State.

In same vein, (Temitope & Opeyemi, 2023) carried out an investigation on reality of equal basic education opportunity for children with disabilities in Southwest Nigeria. The study adopted qualitative research. The study adopted survey research design. The sample size consists of public basic schools in three selected states in southwest Nigeria. The result revealed that very low percentage of the schools practices inclusive schooling in southwest Nigeria.

Data Availability on Implementation of Inclusive Education at Basic education level

It is not a gainsaying that there is no accurate data that has been generated which could be used for integration and proper implementation of inclusive education at the basic level of education in Nigeria. It is evident from the empirical studies reviewed above that information is available through researches but need to be gathered to become a data set that would be used to address challenges that may be facing the implementation of quality and effective inclusive education for children with disabilities in Nigeria Basic schools.

In 2018, National Personnel Audit (NPA) generated data which showed that both the public and the private sectors were involved in the provision of education to children with disabilities. It further revealed that the number of ECCDE and Basic Schools available were very few and not commensurate with the population of children with disabilities as expected. The data generated by NPA also revealed that in many states in Nigeria, children with disabilities lack access to ECCDE and Basic school due to lack of suitable types of schools for them. The data generated by NPA did not feature inclusive education for CWDs but it can be captured on the data generated on accessibility to type of school suitable for CWDs in the country.

Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the significant challenges in implementing inclusive education for children with disabilities in Nigerian basic schools. While data on children with disabilities exists, it remains fragmented and insufficient to inform effective policies. The review reveals critical gaps in the availability of resources, teacher training, and assistive technologies, alongside pronounced regional disparities in the implementation of inclusive education policies. These challenges hinder Nigeria's progress toward achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education for all. Practical Implications and Policy Recommendations to address these challenges, the Nigerian government and stakeholders must prioritize the integration of existing research data into actionable policies. Specific policy implications include Establishment of a Centralized Education Data Repository: A reliable and comprehensive database on children with disabilities should be developed to guide

evidence-based decision-making and resource allocation. Targeted Teacher Training Programs: Teachers must be trained to deliver inclusive education effectively, focusing on strategies for managing diverse classrooms and utilizing assistive technologies. Investment in Infrastructure and Assistive Technologies: Adequate funding should be allocated to develop inclusive school facilities and provide essential learning aids, particularly in underserved regions. Regional Equity in Policy Implementation: Regional disparities must be addressed through tailored interventions that consider the unique challenges faced by different geopolitical zones. Proposed Actions , Establish partnerships between the government, NGOs, and international organizations to mobilize resources and expertise for inclusive education. Conduct regular audits of schools to evaluate their readiness for inclusivity and address identified gaps promptly. Create public awareness campaigns to promote societal acceptance of inclusive education and encourage community involvement. Future Research Directions future studies should focus on longitudinal evaluations of inclusive education policies to measure their effectiveness over time. Additionally, research exploring the lived experiences of children with disabilities and their families can provide deeper insights into the practical challenges of accessing education in Nigeria. Comparative studies between Nigeria and other developing nations may also offer valuable lessons and strategies to improve inclusivity. By implementing these recommendations and addressing the gaps identified, Nigeria can accelerate progress toward an inclusive and equitable education system, ensuring that every child, regardless of their abilities, has the opportunity to learn and thrive.

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