

Inclusive Education in Nigerian Basic Education Schools: Problems and Way Forward

Niyi Jacob Ogunode¹

Education Department, University of Abuja, Nigeria
Email: ogunodejacob@gmail.com

Mazadu Yunusa

Federal college of Education, Katsina, Nigeria
Email: yunusamazadu20@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper discussed the challenges faced by inclusive education at the Basic schools in Nigeria. Primary and secondary data were used in the paper. The data were sorted from print and online resources. The paper identified inadequate funding, inadequate infrastructural facilities, inadequate professional teachers, poor implementation of Special Needs education policies, inadequate instructional materials, institutional corruption, lack of data, and insecurity problems as challenges affecting the development of inclusive education in Nigerian Basic schools. To address these challenges, the paper recommended that the government should increase the funding of Basic education and ensure that both human and material resources needed to implement inclusive education at Basic education schools are provided adequately.

Keywords: Basic education, Challenges, Funding, Inclusive education.

Introduction:

According to UNICEF, an estimated 93 million children worldwide live with disabilities. Nearly 50 percent of such children are not in school, especially in developing countries like Nigeria. A 2017 report on inclusive education by World Bank and the Global partnership for education found that though literacy among children with learning disabilities has increased globally, these children remain severely excluded from educational policies and still lag far behind their peers (Onyeji, 2020). Nigeria has the highest number of out of school in the world. These children include children living with disabilities.

To ensure inclusive education in Nigeria, the Nigerian ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Nigerian government, in 2015, adopted the National Policy on Special Needs Education. Also, the Child Rights Act outlines that every child has the right to free, compulsory and basic education. To achieve the objectives of the Child Rights Act laws in the country, in January 2019, Nigeria signed into law the prohibition of discrimination against persons with disabilities bill.

The law provides that a person with a disability shall have an unfettered right to education without discrimination or segregation in any form. The law also stipulates that all public educational establishments shall be run to be inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities. Basic education schools in Nigeria are one of the educational institutions Nigeria

¹ Corresponding author

designed for the implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria. It is important to discuss the various challenges facing inclusive education in Basic education in Nigeria.

Concept of Basic Education Program:

Basic Education is the education given to children aged 0-15 years. It encompasses the Early Child Care and Development Education (0-4) and 10 years of formal schooling. Early Child Care and Development Education however is segmented into ages 0-4 years, situated in daycare or creches, fully in the hands of the private sector and social development services, whilst ages 5-6 are within the formal education sector.

Universal Basic Education (UBE) works with the following objectives:

- i. to develop in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;
- ii. to provide compulsory, free, and universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school age;
- iii. to reduce the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system, through improved relevance, quality, and efficiency;
- iv. to cater through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the promotion of basic education, for the learning needs of young persons who for one reason or another have had to interrupt their schooling; and,
- v. ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, communicative, and life skills, as well as the ethical, moral, security, and civic values needed for the laying of a solid foundation for lifelong learning (FRN, 2013).

Basic Education, to be provided by Government, shall be compulsory, free, universal, and qualitative. It comprises 1-year of Pre-Primary; 6 years of Primary and 3 years of Junior Secondary Education (FRN, 2013).

The goals of Basic Education are to provide the child with diverse basic knowledge and skills for entrepreneurship, wealth generation, and educational advancement; develop patriotic young people equipped to contribute to social development and in the performance of their civic responsibilities; inculcate values and raise morally upright individuals capable of independent thinking, and who appreciate the dignity of labour; inspire national consciousness and harmonious co-existence, irrespective of differences in endowment, religion, colour, ethnic and socio-economic background; and provide opportunities for the child to develop manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capability (FRN, 2013).

Concept of Inclusive Education:

Allen and Schwartze (2000) view inclusive education as all students attending and are welcomed by their neighbourhood schools at the appropriate age, into regular classes, and are supported to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of the life of the school. Inclusive education is about how we develop and design our schools, classrooms, programs, and activities so that all students learn and participate together. It is about the child's right to participate and the

school's duty to accept the child. Inclusion rejects the use of special schools or classrooms to separate students with disabilities from students without disabilities. A premium is placed upon full participation by students with disabilities and upon respect for their social, civil, and educational rights. Full inclusion does not distinguish between special education and general education programs, instead, the school is restructured so that all students learn together. It is a new approach to the provision of services for learners with special needs. It is also the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society, and achieving education for all as they provide an effective education for the majority of children.

Also, UNESCO (2009) defines inclusive education as to mean a process of transforming schools and other centres of learning to accommodate all learners including boys and girls, learners from ethnic and linguistic minorities, rural populations, and those infected and affected by HIV and AIDS, those with disabilities and difficulties in learning and as well provide opportunities for all. Inclusive education according to the 2017 National Policy on inclusive education endorses UNESCO that “the process of addressing all barriers and providing access to quality education to meet the diverse needs of all learners in the same learning environment.”

According to the document, inclusive education addresses vulnerable and marginalized groups, such as learners who are excluded from or within education; living in the streets; involved in child labour; from minority cultures and/or religions, including those speaking minority languages; physically and/or psychologically abused; growing up in economic and/or cultural poverty; with health challenges, including learners affected by HIV or AIDS; or from families who are addicted to or abusing drugs; as well as those with temporary learning challenges, those who have dropped out of school, learners who learn differently – slower or faster – than the average learner, those with impairments/disabilities, learners experiencing barriers to learning caused by factors other than impairments, and learners with social or emotional challenges, including girls who are pregnant or have given birth.

Smith (2007) defined inclusion as the commitment to educate each child to the maximum extent appropriate; in the school and classroom, he/she would otherwise attend. It involves bringing the ancillary services to the child and requires only that the child will benefit from being in the class, rather than having to keep up with the other students. From the above, Inclusive education can mean an education system that includes all students with disabilities and those without disabilities receiving educational services together in the same room. Inclusion education is an education system that provides the atmosphere for both special needs learners and those that are not special needs learners. Inclusion education is most effective when schools aim to create a culture that celebrates diversity and builds on the strengths of each student in the school. Inclusive schools nurture professional learning communities that empower teachers to create optimum learning outcomes for students with disabilities through the use of best practice approaches and current, evidence-based strategies.

Adedokun et. al. (2014) write that the inclusion may be partial or full. Full inclusion is the integration of all students, even those that require substantial educational and behavioural supports and services to be successful in regular classes, and the elimination of segregated special classes. In full inclusion, special education is considered a service, not a place, and those services are integrated into daily routines and classroom structure, environment, curriculum, and strategies and brought to the student instead of removing the student to meet his/her individual needs. Partial inclusion on the other hand represents a situation where students with special needs are educated in regular classes but when there is a need for any special service like speech therapy, these

students with special needs are pulled out of the regular classroom for these special services. It is therefore imminent that what is in practice now is more of an integrated/mainstreaming type of education and not fully inclusive education.

Strully et. al. (1996) asserted that inclusive education is important in the development of Nigerian communities because bringing students with and without special needs together shows the younger generation that a diverse group of people make up a community and that no one type of student is better than another. Inclusive education will thus remove a barrier to friendship among students with and without special needs, imbuing in them the spirit of cooperation and teamwork which is the essential ingredient germane to community development.

Problems Faced by Inclusive Education in Nigerian Basic Education:

For the paper, the following points will be used as challenges facing the development of inclusive education at the Basic school educational level in Nigeria.

- i. **Inadequate Funding:** Poor funding of education in Nigeria is affecting the development of inclusive education in Basic education schools. An inclusive education system is a very extensive educational system because it combines both the special needs students and non-special needs students in the same school environment and facilities. A lot of financial investment is required to provide educational resources for both the students in the schools. Secondly, educational resources for special needs learners are very expensive. This submission is confirmed by Ogunode, Jegede & Solomon (2021) who submitted that inadequate funding is an enormous problem preventing effective administration of special needs education programs in Nigeria, especially in the Federal Capital Territory, (FCT). The allocation released for implementing the special needs education program annually is not adequate to implement the program. Inadequate funding is a problem facing the entire educational system in Nigeria. The federal, state government and local governments are not willing to implement the 26% UNESCO recommendation for education at the various level of government. This inability of the government at every level to implement the recommendation is affecting the administration of education, especially the special needs education program. Nwoagba (2013) identified funding as the major constraint and barrier to the growth of special needs education in Nigeria. He went further and submitted that coordination of services and offering individual support to children with special needs demand additional money and inadequate funding hinders professional development in special needs education. In most cases, the administrators of special needs education do not access the fund for special needs, making the children with special needs suffer unnecessarily in the areas of infrastructure, equipment, and learning materials. Factors responsible for inadequate educational financing (Ogunode 2020; Ogunode & Madu, 2021) are shortfall in national revenue, competition from another sector, corruption, insecurity, natural disaster, and lack of political will to implement UNESCO recommendations on education and the effects of underfunding education in Nigeria include inadequate infrastructural facilities, inadequate professional teachers, shortage of instructional materials, poor

quality of education, poor capacity development, poor supervision and strike actions.

- ii. **Inadequate Infrastructural Facilities:** Many public Basic schools in Nigeria do not have facilities that support inclusive education at the Basic education level. Majorities of the school plants were built without factor in the special needs learners and Basic schools with such facilities are few and not in rural areas where we have more special needs learners. Ogunode, Jegede & Solomon (2021) observed that inadequate infrastructural facility is a very big challenge facing the administration of special needs education in Nigeria and especially in Nigeria. There are inadequate facilities in the special education schools in schools and even the inclusive schools. The specialized facilities designed for the teaching and learning in the special need education program are in short supply in most Basic schools. The Basic schools lack basic facilities such as special Needs laboratories, clinics, and resource centres within the various existing centres/schools with the provision of virtual learning resources, hyperlinks, and computer networks. The lack of facilities and materials has been one barrier to special needs education in Nigeria. The lack of support services poses a barrier to the enrolment and education of persons with special needs. Evidence suggests clearly that most students with special needs cannot enroll in special or regular schools in the country, as they may not receive support services to assist them in the schools (Ogunode, Jegede & Solomon, 2021; Rufus, Jummai, Suraju & Eucharia 2014; Anumonye, 1991; Eleweke, 1997). The lack of facilities and support services for effective inclusion imply that many academically qualified students with special needs, especially students with visual and hearing impairment, may not attend regular neighbourhood schools or Nigerian colleges and universities. Data have it that the provision of support services in public special and inclusive schools is lacking.
- iii. **Inadequate Professional Teachers:** Inadequate professional teachers with specialization in special needs education is also affecting the development of inclusive education in the Nigerian public Basic schools. Most teachers teaching and providing academic support for special needs learners are not professional teachers in that field. The majority of the teachers have not even been trained on how to teach the special needs learners in their respective classes. Ogunode, Jegede & Solomon (2021) asserts that inadequate professional teacher is another challenge preventing effective administration of Special Needs Education in Nigeria. Professional teachers trained to teach in special need school are inadequate in the country and this is affecting the administration of the program. Teachers are key to implementing a teaching program. The place of teachers cannot be replaced in the administration of special needs programs. The administration of education is influenced by the availability of qualified professional teachers. Ogunode, Jegede & Solomon (2021) and Rufus, Jummai, Suraju & Eucharia (2014) observe that manpower employment and development is one of the major barriers to special needs education and its policies at national and international levels. Universities and Colleges turn out graduates in disability-related fields every year but ever remained under-used and unemployed. Special Needs education teachers, psychologists, physiotherapists, social workers, Nurses, Doctors, vocational instructors, etc. are not employed directly to take care of the educational, motor,

social, psychological, and vocational needs of persons with disabilities. Rufus, Jummai, Suraju & Eucharia (2014) and Vandeh (2003) disclose that the successful education of students with special needs requires the involvement of different professionals, who will be of help in the areas of identification, referral, diagnoses, treatment, and provision of appropriate educational services. John (2017) identified the shortage of teachers, inadequate instructional materials, inadequate infrastructural facilities, inadequate funding, and poor quality of education as the problems facing special education across the country. The 2018 National audit report on the Universal basic education program in Nigeria revealed that there is a deficit of there was deficit of 135,319 teachers in the Early Childhood Care Development Education, 139,772 deficits in primary schools, and 2,446 shortages in Junior Secondary Schools across the nation. 27756 teachers in the early childhood education program, and 3564 teachers at the basic schools (Oweh, 2019). Ogunode & Paul (2021) and Ogunode, Jegede & Solomon (2021) submit that there are factors responsible for the inadequate professional teachers in educational institutions today. Poor manpower planning, corruption, inadequate funding, limited teachers' training institutions, and poor motivation of teachers.

- iv. **Poor Implementation of Special Needs Education Policies:** There are many policies and programs formulated and passed into law for the development of inclusive education in Basic education in Nigeria. The poor implementation of these policies is affecting the development of inclusive education in Nigerian Basic schools. Ogunode, Jegede & Solomon (2021) state that poor implementation of special needs education policies is another big challenge facing the administration of the special needs education program in Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Policies designed for implementing special needs education programs have not been implemented in the various states across the federation. Rufus, Jummai, Suraju & Eucharia (2014) observe that Article 3, Salamanca Framework for Action (1994) advocates that “schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, emotional, social and linguistic conditions”. This statement formulated a very new direction for special needs children in the regular school environment. Since 1994, developing countries of the world, including Nigeria, have been very slow in implementing this framework, probably because of poor funding and lack of political will. This had been a barrier to the increase in the participation of students with disabilities in schools and in treating all learners based on equality and non-discrimination (Rufus, Jummai, Suraju & Eucharia 2014; Adebisi, 2010). There are many factors responsible for the poor implementation of the special needs education policies in Nigeria. According to Ogunode, Jegede & Solomon (2021) and Onlinenigeria (2007), one major problem of implementing inclusive programs for persons with special needs in Nigeria is inadequate funding. Inadequate funds are affecting the administration of the special needs education program in Nigeria. Rufus, Jummai, Suraju & Eucharia (2014) also claimed that the shortage of funds leads to a shortage of resources, inadequate facilities, unemployment of personnel, etc. For persons with disabilities to receive adequate support, inclusiveness, required materials and resources, etc. funding will play a prominent role. UNICEF (2017) concluded that lack of funding and political will is responsible for poor educational program implementation in Nigeria.

Ogunode, Jegede & Solomon (2021) identified inadequate funding, inadequate infrastructural facilities, inadequate professional teachers, corruption, lack of political will, insecurity challenges, political instability, poor governance and management, the rapid growth of the Nation's population, and the rising cost of education as the challenges preventing the effective implementation of primary school education policies in Nigeria

- v. **Inadequate Instructional Materials:** Special needs learners need special instructional materials in the Basic schools to learn better and be in school. Special needs learners need to be handled especially with their learning facilities for them to learn and meet up with others in the schools. Unfortunately, many Basic schools today do not have those instructional resources for inclusive education to be possible in the schools. Ogunode, Jegede & Solomon (2021) conclude that inadequate instructional material is a major problem affecting the administration of special needs education programs in Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The special needs schools and public Basic schools lack adequate instructional materials to deploy for teaching and learning in the respective schools. Many teachers and students do not have adequate instructional materials and aids to support teaching and learning in the school. The shortage of this material is affecting the administration of the special needs program in the Federal Capital Territory. Ogunode, Jegede & Solomon (2021) and Rufus, Jummai, Suraju & Eucharia (2014) submit that hearing and vision aids, electronically adapted mobility devices, are continuing barriers to providing equal access to education for persons with special needs, and the facilities and equipment needed for vocational and recreational education are inadequate or inexistent. There are slow efforts by federal and state governments to gain the equipment, materials, and learning aids and in some states as governments differ somehow in the help given to persons with special needs (Rufus, Jummai, Suraju & Eucharia 2014).
- vi. **Institutional Corruption:** Another problem that is affecting inclusive education in Basic schools is the high rate of corruption. Funds released for the acquisition of human and materials resources for the implementation of inclusive education are diverted and looted by some officials within the educational administration. Ogunode, Jegede Ajape (2021) and Ogunode, Jegede & Solomon (2021) observed that institutional corruption is another problem facing the administration of education in Nigeria. Corruption has penetrated educational institutions. Allocation meant for the provision of educational services like planning, supervision, quality assurance, and procurement of infrastructural facilities are mismanaged and misappropriated by some officials and political officeholders. The high rate of corruption in the ministries, departments, and agencies of education is affecting the administration of educational services such as the special needs program in Nigeria. Transparency International says 66 percent of the money Nigerian governments allocate to education is stolen by corrupt officials. According to the report, corruption is commonplace in education systems across the (Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). "This affects education access, quality, inclusion and learning outcomes with devastating consequences, not only for national economic growth but also for the life chances of children, their families, and communities," the report said. The report highlighted "Resource misallocation,

corrupt procurement, exchange of sex for grades, examination malpractices, fake qualifications, teacher absenteeism, and corrupt recruitment practices” as the various corruption risks and challenges facing education systems in all the countries (Ogunode & Shofoyeke, 2021; Premiuntimes, 2019). The report Teaching and Learning: Achieving Quality for All shows that Nigeria is among the 37 countries that are losing money spent on education because children are not learning. (UNESCO) disclosed that the menace is already costing governments USD 129 billion a year. It stressed further that despite the money being spent, rejuvenation of primary education is not soon because of poor-quality education that cannot ensure that children learn (Needs, 2014).

- vii. **Lack of Data:** The lack of accurate and current data on special needs learners across the various form of education in Nigeria is affecting the development of inclusive education in Basic education. Data is needed to plan for facilities, teachers, and funding. Ogunode & Abashi (2020) and Ogunode, Jegede & Solomon (2021) point out that the lack of data to plan and take the decision is a major problem facing the administration of the special need education program in Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory. There is no data on the actual number of people with special needs that needs educational services in every form of the educational system. There are no data on special needs enrolment and teachers’ needs. The inability to access quality and reliable data is affecting the administration of the Special Needs Program in the Federal Capital Territory and Nigeria. (Noun, 2005) observes that data collection is an important variable of consideration while setting targets. It is based on the data that any target can be quantitatively set. However, without data, a realistic target cannot be set. While gathering data, there is a need to ensure that the mode of collecting such data is to a great extent reliable and consistent with the set target. Invariably, the reliability and validity of data must be taken into consideration as much as targets are being set. Fabunmi (2005) on his part noted that in Nigeria, most planning officers still use the manual information system to plan a system that is fast becoming outdated in the modern world, and this serves as a barrier to effective educational planning, once information is still manually retrieved. But in the days of computerized management information systems, information retrieval is adequate. Ogunode (2021) submits that the lack of educational data for educational planners constitutes a very big problem for effective educational planning in Nigeria.
- viii. **Insecurity Problem:** Insecurity in Nigeria especially in the Northeast and South-east geo-political zone of Nigeria is affecting the development of inclusive education in Nigeria. Many Basic schools in the country are affected by insecurity. Nigeria is facing insecurity challenges. Ogunode & Ahaotu (2021) and Ogunode, Ahaotu & Obi (2021) posit that students, teachers, and school administrators are afraid of going to school because of insecurity. Many girls have been kidnapped, killed, teachers killed, and school infrastructural facilities destroyed by the insurgencies in the states (Ogunode, Ohibime, Nasir & Gregory, 2021). There is no meaning educational policy, program and plans can be implemented in a state of insecurity. UNICEF (2017) submitted the insurgency in north-eastern Nigeria has been especially damaging to the education system. Since 2011, about 19,000 teachers have been displaced and 1,200 schools have been damaged or destroyed.

Approximately 1 million children in need and 600,000 children have lost access to learning due to the conflict. Ogunode & Kolo (2021) submit that disruption of school administration, learning loss due to school closure, low enrolment, retention, and completion rate of the Basic school program, reduction in manpower, disruption in the academic calendar of Basic school, killing of students, delay in development or progress of girl's child education and delay in the development of Basic education were identified as the effects of insecurity on the administration of Basic schools in Northern Nigeria. Also, in Southeast, Nigeria, Ogunode & Chijindu (2022) observe that the implications of the sit-home order on basic education in the southeast geo-political zone include disruption of school administration, teaching program implementation, student learning program, school examinations, academic calendar, brain-drain and may affect the funding of Basic education.

Recommendations:

- i. The government at every level should increase the funding of the special needs education program in Nigeria.
- ii. The federal and states government should provide adequate infrastructural facilities, especially special needs facilities in the Basic school in the Country.
- iii. The government should employ more professional teachers and deploy them to all Basic schools across the country.
- iv. More special needs instructional materials should be provided in all the Basic schools across the federation.
- v. There should be effective supervision by the relevant agencies and departments to ensure the delivery of quality education in all Basic schools.
- vi. The government should ensure that all factors responsible for insecurity in the country are addressed to guarantee the security of lives and properties in the country.
- vii. Data on special needs education should be generated and be used to plan and take a decision for the development of inclusive education.

Conclusion:

The paper looked at the challenges faced by inclusive education in Nigerian Basic school education. The paper identified inadequate funding, inadequate infrastructural facilities, inadequate professional teachers, poor implementation of Special Needs education policies, inadequate instructional materials, institutional corruption, lack of data, and insecurity problems as challenges affecting the development of inclusive education in Nigerian Basic schools. To address these challenges, the paper recommended that the government should increase the funding of Basic education and ensure that both human and material resources needed to implement inclusive education at Basic education schools are provided adequately.

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