

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: IMPACTS ON REDUCING THE OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This article, titled: “Inclusive Education: Impacts on Reducing the Out-of-School Children in Nigeria”. The paper focused on assessing the approaches of Inclusive Education in Nigeria in relation to redeeming the rate of out-of-school children. The article examined the concepts of Inclusive Education and concept of Out-of-school Children. It identified the goals of inclusive education. It also outlined the challenges of inclusive education in Nigeria and, it stated the impacts of inclusive education in reducing the rates of out-of-school children in Nigeria. The paper recommends among others: Government at all levels and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), United Nations Agencies, Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) should provide more infrastructural projects to schools to promote inclusive education programme; and Parents and community members through Parents Teachers Association (PTA) and School-Based Management Committee (SBMC), should provide adequate support to the school by fully involving in school affairs and education of their children, to enable them learn and realize their potentials.

Keywords: Inclusive, Education, Out-of-School Children

Introduction

Inclusive Education has been internationally recognized as a philosophy for attaining equity, justice and quality education for all children, especially those who have been traditionally excluded from mainstream education for reasons of disability, ethnicity, gender or other characteristics. While inclusive education has been implemented successfully in many countries, other countries are still in the process of achieving this goal. Inclusive education is a process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of

all learners by increasing participation in learning and reducing exclusion within and from education. This means that all children have the right to a quality education that caters, to the extent possible, to their individual needs. In some developing countries, the process of creating an inclusive system is more difficult (UNESCO in Nandini & Taj, 2014).

The major impetus for Inclusive Education was given by the World Conference on Special Needs Education I 1994. More than 300 participants representing 92 governments and 25 International Organizations met in Salamanca, Spain to further the objectives of Education for All (EFA) by considering the fundamental policy shifts required to promote the approach of Inclusive Education, namely: enabling schools to serve all children, particularly those defined as having special educational needs. The conference concluded that: Regular Schools with (an) inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system (UNESCO in Ainscow, 2020).

Children learn more from caring and motivated teachers with families and community members helping all children, (boys and girls) become the best they can in a safe and nurturing environment. Thus, education is compulsory and a right of every Nigerian irrespective of gender, social status, religion, colour, ethnic background and any peculiar individual challenges (FMOE, 2014). Against this background, therefore, inclusive education ensures quality education and positive learning for all children without regard to any peculiarity they may hold. Inclusive Education ensures, protective and healthy learning environment for all children regardless of their social background, ethnic origin, gender and level of ability. It has all the necessary facilities that make the child's school experience more effective and comfortable.

Design of the Study

In this article, a descriptive survey design was used. This is to enable the researchers to observe and describe practical situation or phenomena and collect information on what is in existence in respect of the identified problem under study.

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is centred around assessing the impact of Inclusive Education in reducing the of out-of-school children in Nigeria.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study are largely, the large number of schools in Nigeria, the number of out-of-school children in the country and the financial resource and time to use to enable the researchers to collecting adequate information.

Instrument of the Study

In this study, the researchers used personal observations, structured interview, and contents analysis tools to gather existing information on identified problem.

Concept of Inclusive Education

Inclusive Education is a philosophy that recognizes the diversity of learners and aims to provide equal opportunities for all, regardless of their abilities, disabilities, or backgrounds. The foundation of inclusive education is built on the belief that every student, irrespective of their unique needs, has the right to access quality education in a regular classroom setting alongside their peers (Gebriella, nd). An inclusive approach to education means that each individual's needs are taken into account and that all learners participate and achieve together. It acknowledges that all children can learn and that every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs. Special focus is placed on learners who may be at risk of marginalization, exclusion or underachievement. For example, where a child has an ability, he or she would not be separated from other learners in school and learning assessments and progress would take the disability into account (UNESCO, 2024). Inclusive Education means that all students attend and are welcomed by their neighbourhood schools in aged-appropriate, regular classes and are supported to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of the life of the school, in common learning environment. The demographics of the society. This means every minority group should be visible in schools. Socio-economically disadvantaged, both genders, religious groups, language groups, and students with disabilities would be a part of every class (Shastry, 2020).

In Inclusive Education, the children should never under any circumstances be discriminated, excluded or stereotyped based on their differences. Education should be free, compulsory, and affordable for those who are unable to pay for school. The inclusive school should respect the diversity of its students and treat them all equal, without discrimination towards female students, students who belong to ethnic minorities, those children who have HIV/AIDS disease, physically challenged students, victims of violence and exploitation, etc. Except that, it should be also responsive of diversity by providing children the basic needs based on their social class, gender, ethnic group, and level of abilities. It respects the equality and rights of all people regardless of gender or other biases that may be inclined to any child in the school. Inclusive Education promotes and encourages safe and non-violent environment for all children.

Inclusive Education refers to the process of including all school-aged children to equal access and opportunities of education and learning in order to realize their potentials in life. In this regard, teachers share responsibility for the education of all students. All teachers are responsible for all students in inclusive approach of educational system.

Concept of Out-of-School Children

Out-of-School children are children in the official primary school age range who are not enrolled in either primary or secondary school (UNESCO, 2014). According to United Nations, out-of-school children are kids who are yet to be enrolled in any formal education excluding pre-primary education. the age range for out-of-school children is 6-11 years. It is important to note that each of the children may have had varying degrees of education. Some of them may have attended school in the past (pre-primary education) but dropped out, some will attend school in the future and some will never go to school (Alawode, 2018). Out-of-School children are children who are of school age but are not engaged in learning whether in non-formal or in the formal education system (Melenya, 2020). Out-

of-School children are children whom the government and the parents have failed to provide quality basic education for. It is a term referred to non-attendance of the school-age for some established factors (Jacob, Chinwuba & Ayoko, 2022). Out-of-School children or official Out-of-School children are usually excluded from learning opportunities and are usually the most vulnerable group for underworld activities. The official Out-of-School children are easy to locate but the actual Out-of-School children are very hard to reach. Both types of Out-of-School children are usually from poor backgrounds and sometimes they have to help with domestic chores to support the family. While the government is generating home-grown data for purposes of policy formation, the school counsellors must target their interventions for every child to be in school to remain in school and to gain some knowledge and skills (Nwabahili in Garba, 2021).

Goals of Inclusive Education

While the concept of Inclusive Education is typically associated with inclusiveness of all children without regard to peculiarities in the classroom environment, the goal of inclusive education is that students are included in all aspects of the learning environment regardless of any facet of diversity. It embraces all students and involves everything that happens within the school and has direct connection with the school, the child and the community such as policies, practices and culture. It increases learners' participation in learning environment and eliminates all sorts of discriminations and exclusion from and within the system of education.

Inclusive Education aims at promoting schools' places where all members of the school community feel safe, accepted and included. Inclusive Education is to enhance the development of value, respect and support for the training and development of all students, as well as the relationships between all members of the school community.

The primary goal of inclusive education according to Amany, (2023) is to provide high-quality education for all learners without discrimination and to ensure the implementation of equal opportunity principles. He also went on identifying the followings as:

- a. Inclusive education aims to encourage the participation of persons with disabilities or children with special needs in the life of society, nation, and state;
- b. It also seeks to address structural inequalities, injustices, discrimination, and violence faced by learners from disadvantaged groups within the education system;
- c. Inclusive education is about welcoming diversity and improving the quality of education for all learners, where no one feels excluded and everyone receives support;
- d. It emphasizes the importance of full participation for all learners, both special and regular students, and caters to individual needs; and
- e. The goal of inclusive education is to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment that responds effectively to the diverse needs of all learners.

Challenges of Inclusive Education in Nigeria

1. **Poor Policy Implementation:** In Nigeria, the policy framework on inclusive education programme is just a mere blueprint but, not been implemented practically. Though, there is partial implementation in some selected schools across the country, with collaboration of UNICEF and UNESCO.

2. **Inadequate Funding:** Running a programme of this nature requires enough money, but in Nigeria today, even the conventional schools are not adequately funded so that they can achieve the goals of education. Thus, inclusive approach of an education is not appropriately funded even the intervention of United Nations Agencies towards achieving the goals of Education for All (EFA) programme. In Nigeria, chronic underfunding of education and inefficient use of available resources perpetuates the Out-of-School phenomenon (UNICEF, 2022).
3. **Inadequate Trained Teachers:** Inclusive Education approach requires adequately trained teaching personnel who can handle different children with different abilities and disabilities in the same classroom environment for the programme to achieve its aims. For instance, teachers who can teach students with special needs in learning. Selected schools to test-run the programme, in Nigeria, still require more of those teachers to effectively teach and encourage these children to learn to the expectations. Insufficient supply of trained teachers, inefficient teacher recruitment and deployment, and weak regulatory mechanisms lead to overcrowded classrooms and poor-quality teaching and learning outcomes contribute to drop out from the education system in Nigeria (UNICEF, 2022).
4. **Inadequate Infrastructure:** It is evident that in Nigeria, despite governments' efforts to provide facilities to schools, still, most schools lack enough physical facilities to run their programmes successfully. Infrastructural facilities such as classes, toilets, urinals, water facility, electricity facility, sporting facilities, ICT centres and internet connectivity, well-equipped counselling centres, and the like, are not adequately provided. The quality of school infrastructure has a significant effect on school attendance and drop-out rates. Students are less likely to attend schools in need of structural repair, schools that use temporary structures, and school have understaffed janitorial services (Branham, 2004).
5. **Socio-Cultural Barrier:** Differences in social and cultural backgrounds of the children hinder to foster social integrations, relationships and interactions among the children in inclusive education, and this would not allow the children to understand their differences as well as the purpose of the inclusiveness. Social and gender norms that place a low value on education contribute to girls, *Almajiri* children and others, not attending school or dropping out (UNICEF, 2022).
6. **Lack of Parental Involvement:** Negligence of parents to directly involve in the education of their children is not helping children to realize their potentials, despite being stakeholders. Inclusion of education requires direct involvement of parents especially whose children are in schools. Parents' involvement in the education of their children encourages children to remain in school and learn, and it fosters cordial relationships between teachers and the parents. Thus, it also encourages teachers to put in their best in the instructional activities in school.

Impacts of Inclusive Education in Reducing the Out-of-School Children in Nigeria

The impact of Inclusive Education in reducing the rate of out-of-school children include the following:

1. **Promotes Equality to Education:** Inclusive Education provides more opportunities to access to quality education. It promotes social justice by removing the barrier in

children, especially, those marginalized due to disabilities, poverty, gender, social and cultural factors. It promotes equal opportunities for students with and without disabilities to participate in collaborative learning experiences, which fosters academic growth and the development of vital social skill (Lemmon, 2023).

2. **Improves Learning Outcomes:** Inclusive Education improves learning outcomes of children as it provides them support to learn and progress at their own pace by subjecting them to different instructional activities, using relevant learning resources in a supportive classroom. This makes children feel supported and helps one another in a supportive classroom environment. It promotes peer support and mentoring by providing opportunities for students to support and mentor each other, which can lead to increased encouragement and better academic outcomes (Gebriella, nd).
3. **Enhances Social Relationships:** Inclusive Education promotes and encourages social relationships through interactions, integration, collaboration and understanding among different groups of learners in a school environment. This helps children to develop social skills, values and empathy as well as sense of belonging among themselves. It promotes acceptance and understanding of students' differences and diversity, when students from various backgrounds and diverse abilities learn together, they develop a broader perspective and a deeper appreciation of each individual's unique qualities in the learning environment. This fosters empathy, mutual respect, a sense of belonging among students, creating a more harmonious and supportive educational atmosphere (Lemmon, 2023). This makes children develop the spirit of togetherness and see themselves as equal. Thus, this common understanding enhances retention of children and increases enrollment rates in school.
4. **Involves Parents and Communities:** Inclusive Education promotes involvement of parents and community members in the education of their children. It emphasizes awareness on the value of education for all children without regard to any difference that a child may have. This will encourage parents and community members to see their children are provided and supported with accessible education. parents' involvement in the work of school leads to numerous benefits for their children, for example, academic (Berkowitz in Glenys, Lynsey & Gilmore, 2024).
5. **Increases Enrollment and Retention Rates:** Inclusive Education helps to reduce the rates of out-of-school children and increases the rate of retention in schools, by providing a safe, secure, supportive, nurturing and flexible as well as a welcoming, accessible and adaptable learning environment for all children learn and realize their potentials.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research came out with the following findings, that:

Inclusive Education promotes equality to education, giving all children an equal and a fair chance to go to school, learn and develop the skills they need and realize their potentials to thrive. It improves learning outcome of children through the use of different instructional activities, using relevant teaching and learning resources in a supportive classroom. This makes children feel supported and helps one another to learn more effectively.

Inclusive Education promotes social relationships skills among school children, instilling in them positive change by allowing learners of all backgrounds to associate, assimilate

integrate, learn and grow side by side, to the benefit of all. This enhances sense of belonging and participation in learning of children.

It emphasizes on involving parents and community members to engage in the education of their children. Inclusive Education enhances enrollment rates and improves the retention rates of children in schools. Thus, fosters children to learn towards achieving the goals of education in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations are made:

1. Educational administrators and managers should ensure adequate and effective implementation of educational policies and programmes in schools especially, inclusive approach in education.
2. Government at all levels should provide adequate funds to enable stakeholders handle inclusive education programme efficiently and effectively.
3. There should be adequate provision of trained and qualified teachers in inclusive education approach to care, nurture and teach the children who have different learning abilities and disabilities, to learn and thrive.
4. Government at all levels and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), United Nations Agencies, Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) should provide more infrastructural projects to schools to promote inclusive education programme.
5. Parents and community members through Parents Teachers Association (PTA) and School-Based Management Committee (SBMC) officials, should provide adequate support to the school by fully involving in school affairs and education of their children, to enable them learn and realize their potentials.

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