



## **INCLUSIVENESS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION IN THE ATTAINMENT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 4 IN NIGERIA.**

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### **Abstract**

*This study examines the inclusiveness of Special Education in the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) in Nigeria, with a focus on ensuring equitable, inclusive, and quality education for persons with disabilities. SDG 4 calls for free, publicly-funded, inclusive, and equitable primary and secondary education for all, without discrimination a mandate that necessarily extends to learners with special needs. Despite international frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, special education in Nigeria continues to face significant barriers including inadequate funding, negative societal attitudes, lack of trained teachers, insufficient instructional materials, and poor policy implementation. Using a descriptive survey research design, the study drew its sample from secondary schools in Lagelu Local Government Area of Oyo State, Nigeria, employing simple random sampling to select participants from five secondary schools. A self-structured, validated questionnaire with a four-point Likert scale was used for data collection, and Cronbach's Alpha was applied to establish reliability. Data were analyzed using frequency distribution tables and percentages. Findings revealed that while students with disabilities are present in mainstream schools, critical support structure including trained special education teachers, adaptive instructional facilities, and accessible school infrastructures remain grossly inadequate. Special needs students continue to experience bullying, stigmatization, and social exclusion, while government commitment to inclusive policy remains insufficient at all levels. The study concludes that special education is not accorded the priority it deserves within Nigeria's*

*educational system, thereby undermining progress toward SDG 4. It recommends that government at all levels adopt development-driven, rights-based, and contextually inclusive policies backed by deliberate political will to mainstream special education effectively.*

**Keywords:** Attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in Nigeria, Inclusive Education, Special Education,

## **Introduction**

There are different challenges facing the world at this crucial time. These Challenges seem to be very overwhelming to such a point that it is difficult for the individuals, organizations and government. These challenges range from poverty, hunger, good health and general wellbeing, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, industry, innovation, and infrastructure, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and products, climate action, life below water, life on land, peace, justice, and strong institutions and partnerships for the goals. As a result of deep concern for the improved life on human planet, the United Nations designed a framework for peace and prosperity for human beings and their environment (Giving Compass, 2021).

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were designed by the United Nations to ensure peace and prosperity for both people and the planet. The SDGs focus on seventeen goals which are interrelated in nature even though each of them is very distinct and important. The goals were set to be attained by the year 2030. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 focuses on the provision of twelve years of free, publicly-

funded, inclusive, equitable and qualitative primary and secondary education. The first nine years are compulsory, leading to relevant learning outcomes and it should be ensured for all, without discrimination. The World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) 1990 saw education not only as a social service but a transformative act which is fundamental to social development. For any community to attain a high level of development education cannot be side tracked his simply calls for universalization and equity of access to education. This is because education is a powerful instrument not only for societal growth but also for personal growth and for liberation of minds from poverty, stagnation and oppression of all forms. Education is an investment in people and one that is necessary for achieving SDGs. It is therefore the means of nurturing personal growth which culminates into the development of our communities (Adedokun & Olaleye, 2014).

Children are products from the family and they are to be adequately catered for. Around the world, children are barred from schools where they belong because of disability, race, language, religion, gender, and poverty. But every child has the right to be supported by his/ her parents and community to grow, learn, and develop in

the early years, and, upon reaching school age, such a child goes to school and is welcomed and included by teachers and peers alike. When all children, regardless of their differences, are educated together, everyone benefits, hence, this is the foundation of inclusive education (Open Society Foundations, 2019).

Children differ from one another in many ways such as physically, mentally, emotionally and socially. Most of these children can learn in regular or mainstream schools while others have some physical or mental conditions that prevent them from learning alongside with other children who are free from such challenges. These categories of children require special education (Fareo, 2015). All around the world, according to Adebisi et al. (2014), the field of special needs education and its clients always face all forms of problems and barriers that range from physical, social, economic and attitudinal. These barriers often exclude its beneficiaries from included in their environments or societies. Persons with special needs lack equal access to public and basic resources like right to education; right to employment; right to social integration. The persons with special needs suffer stigmatization, negative attitude from the society; poor health care systems and above all legal support system becomes a fantasy. All these are due to lack of total recognition of the field of special education globally. The United Nations further reported that in 2006, an international disability movement took a bold step with the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The United Nations really worked to change the attitudes and

approaches of the society and governments of all nations to special needs education issues towards ensuring that persons with special needs have full equality and participation in public and social lives. This design of the convention of the United Nations has the intention to break all barriers facing special needs education and its beneficiaries. It is also a human rights instrument that contains development dimension, which is intended to realize equality and participation of persons with special needs in all development processes. Inclusive education is the education received by both students with special needs and students without special needs in the same classroom environment. They enjoy all school activities both academics and co-curricular together.

According to National Policy on Education (2013), special education is a customized educational programme, designed to meet the unique needs of persons with special needs that the general education programme cannot cater for. These categories include persons with visual impairment, hearing impairment, physical and health impairment, intellectual disability, emotional and behavioural disorders, speech and language impairment, learning disabilities, the gifted and talented and the albinos. Special education is the individually planned and systematically monitored arrangement of teaching procedures, physical settings, special adapted equipment and materials, and other interventions designed to help learners with special needs achieve the greatest possible self-sufficiency and academic success (Disabled World, 2019). Fareo (2015) reporting the work of Olukotun (2004)

stated that the education of children with special educational needs started with segregation, however; segregation system has its disadvantages, because it fails to recognize the fact that children with special educational needs are part of the community and the society at large. This implies that segregation places more restriction and social handicap on the social needs of youths and adults in their later years. The goal of education is to introduce measures that would benefit the child maximally in the learning environment. The nature of students with special educational needs precludes access to learning conditions; it becomes imperative to design alternative strategies for assisting students with special educational needs. One such strategy is inclusion which is an educational arrangement that brings both students with special educational needs and regular students together under one learning environment. By this school programme, students with special educational needs lived with their parents or guardians and attend school in the neighbourhood.

According to Open Society Foundation (2019), inclusive education means different and diverse students learning side by side in the same classroom. They enjoy field trips and after-school activities together. They participate in student government together and they attend the same sports, meets and plays. In the clime where inclusive education is being properly implemented, it values diversity and the unique contributions which each student brings to the classroom. In a truly inclusive setting, every child feels safe and has a sense of belonging. Students

and their parents participate in the setting learning goals and take part in decisions that affect them. School staffs have the training, support, flexibility, and resources to nurture, encourage, and respond to the needs of all students.

According to Adedokun & Olaleye (2014), 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 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 integrated or mainstreaming type of education and not full inclusive education. In view of the above submission, it is imperative to know that students with special needs also require special attention.

Dark (2018) commented on a 2017 report on inclusive education by the World Bank and the Global Partnership for Education which 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. The study, conducted in 19 middle- and low-income countries, concluded that 3 in 10 children with disabilities have never been enrolled in school and just about half of those who were enrolled completed primary school. This implies that there is still much to be done in the enrolment of special needs students. Oluremi (2012) is of the opinion that, every parent wants his or her children to be happy and accepted by their peers, have a healthy life and education. Allowing a child with the special need to interact and learn with other students in the school positively improves their academic performance, their personality and the expectations of the parents. Introducing inclusive education in the classroom will reduce stigmatisation and help such children attain their highest heights. There are however some hindrances to proper implementation of the objectives of special needs education. Such as funding; because Special education requires adequate funding. This has formed a major hindrance to the achievement of the objectives of special needs education. This was corroborated by Nkechi (2013) who identified funding as the major constraint and barrier to the growth of special needs education in Nigeria. She found that the funds required to train a child with disabilities can be used to train four children without disability. To coordinate services rendered for special needs students and to offer individual supports to them demand additional money and adequate funding because inadequate funding hinders professional development in the field of special needs education. In most

cases, the available fund for special needs education projects are un-accessed by the administrators of special needs education, thereby making the children with special needs to suffer unnecessarily in the areas of infrastructure, equipment and learning materials.

Lack of proper accountability is another imperative hindrance that makes implementation of special needs education difficult. Accountability can be diagnostic, formative, and summative in nature because of lack of accountability in Nigeria, special education programmes and service delivery systems have embraced sluggish progress (Eskay, 2012). Adebisi et al. (2014) found that experts in the disability-related fields consider negative attitude as the greatest barrier to the field of education of special needs. Negative attitudes towards the fields in terms of funding and political will to implement its policies. Students with disabilities continue to face negative attitudes and stereotypes in the education system. Some special needs students refused to accept their condition thereby finding it difficult to be well integrated in the educational programme provided. Lack of knowledge about and sensitivity to disability issues on the part of some educators, staff and students can make it difficult for students with special needs to access educational services equally with the students without such challenges. Some parents of the special needs students are also having negative attitude towards their children thinking they might just waste money training them. Orakpo & Abayomi (2016) reported that in Nigeria, many children who live with physical or learning disabilities are often

shunned by their family or community; many of them are left isolated, and are discouraged from attending regular school. They end up feeling confused, alone and frustrated.

Poverty is another hindrance discovered to be a serious challenge. Transporting the children to and from school is a tremendous challenge for many families, especially for children who cannot sit on their own (Orakpo & Abayomi, 2016). Some physically challenged students could not continue their education due to the paucity of fund of parents. All these and some other challenges are impeding the successful attainment of Special education and inclusive education in attainment of sustainable development goals in Nigeria among persons with disabilities

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to investigate special education and inclusive education in attainment of sustainable development goals in Nigeria among persons with disabilities

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

Descriptive survey research design was employed in the study, the population of this study comprised of all students in secondary schools in Lagelu local government area of Oyo state

While simple random sampling was used to select students from five selected secondary schools in the local government area.

#### **Instrument**

A self-structured questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. The instrument was made up of two sections with section A containing demographic information and section B containing twenty (20) items which are on four-level likert scale of strongly agreed (SA), agreed (A), disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD).

#### **Validity and Reliability**

The instrument was given to two experts in the field of educational evaluation to ensure face and content validity. In order to establish the psychometric properties, 30 copies of the instruments were administered to similar respondents and 0.76 reliability coefficient as obtained, using cronbach alpha.

## Results

### Research Question 1

Does inclusiveness of special education in the mainstream of education improve learning?

**Table 1: Improvement of learning through inclusiveness of special education in the mainstream of education**

ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.
There are students living with disabilities in my school	37 37%	20 20%	18 18%	25 25%	2.69	1.21
There are trained special education teachers in the regular schools	31 31%	45 45%	16 16%	7 7%	2.98	0.92
There is availability of instructional facilities for special needs students in regular schools	13 13%	40 40%	32 32%	13 13%	2.49	0.95
There are reading materials e.g braille machine, for the visually impaired in my school.	18 18%	7 7%	48 48%	26 26%	2.15	1.04
Our school buildings can allow students on wheel chair move freely.	11 11%	9 9%	42 42%	36 36%	1.91	0.99
There is special allowance to encourage special education teachers	6 6%	21 21%	46 46%	27 27%	2.94	0.85
I feel free to relate with other students irrespective of their disability	19 19%	43 43%	22 22%	15 15%	2.64	0.99
Special needs students should not be allowed to learn with students without special needs	16 16%	36 36%	26 26%	22 22%	2.46	1.01

Special needs students are usually bullied in a regular school	21 21%	37 37%	22 22%	19 19%	2.58	1.06
I like to make friends with special needs students	26 26%	53 53%	14 14%	6 6%	2.97	0.86
I am always eager to assist special needs students	29 29%	58 58%	9 9%	2 2%	3.10	0.80
I do not mind being in the classroom with physically challenged students	20 20%	49 49%	17 17%	13 13%	2.74	0.96

Table 1 shows results on improvement of learning through inclusiveness of special education in the mainstream of education. The result reveals that 57% of the respondents agreed that they have students with disabilities in their schools while 43% disagreed. 76% of the respondents agreed that there are trained special education teachers in their regular schools while 23% disagreed and 1% did not respond. The result also presents that 53% of the respondents agreed that there are instructional facilities for special needs students in regular schools while 45% disagreed with 2% not responding. Moreover, 25% of the respondents agreed that there are reading materials, for example, braille machine, for the visually impaired in their schools while 74% disagreed and 1% not responding. The result obtained in another item indicates that 20% of the respondents agreed that their school buildings can allow students on wheel chair move freely while 78%

disagreed with 2% not responding. 27% of the respondents agreed that special allowance is being paid to encourage special education teachers while 73% disagreed. Also, 62% of the respondents agreed that they feel free to relate with other students irrespective of their disabilities while 37% disagreed and 1% did not respond. In addition, 52% of the respondents agreed that special needs students should not be allowed to learn with students without special needs while 48% disagreed. The result of another item indicates that 58% of the respondents agreed that special needs students are usually bullied in a regular school while 41% disagreed and 1% not responding. In another item, the result shows that 79% of the respondents agreed that they like to make friends with special needs students while 20% disagreed with 1% not responding. 87% of the respondents agreed that they are always eager to assist special needs students while 11% disagreed and 2%

did not respond. The result further shows that 69% of the respondents agreed that they do not mind being in the classroom

with physically challenged students while 30% disagreed and 1% did not respond.

## Research Question 2

Does negative attitude act as barrier to the education of special needs students?

**Table 2: Negative attitude acting as barrier to the education of special needs students**

ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.
People around me motivate me to do well academically	45 45%	49 49%	3 3%	2 2%	3.35	0.73
My disability makes me withdraw from other students	11 11%	24 24%	34 34%	28 28%	2.12	1.04
I do not like to participate in group assignments	7 7%	23 23%	47 47%	23 23%	2.14	0.85
I learn better in the midst of other students	31 31%	53 53%	14 14%	2 2%	3.13	0.72
I feel ashamed to borrow anything from anyone	8 8%	35 35%	34 34%	17 17%	2.22	1.02
Begging for alms by special needs students is more profitable than schooling	8 8%	11 11%	32 32%	49 49%	1.78	0.94
I feel inadequate when I am learning with students without special needs	11 11%	32 32%	38 38%	18 18%	2.34	0.93
Special needs students are more obedient to	27	47	17	8	2.91	0.92

school rules and regulations	27%	47%	17%	8%		
I do not feel comfortable in the midst of other students	18 18%	14 14%	37 37%	31 31%	2.19	1.07

Table 2 presents results on negative attitude acting as barrier to the education of special needs students. The result shows that 94% of the respondents agreed that people around them motivate them to do well academically while 5% disagreed with 1% not responding. 35% of the respondents agreed that their disability makes them withdraw from other students while 62% disagreed with 3% not responding. 20% of the respondents agreed that they do not like to participate in group assignments while 70% disagreed with 10% not responding. 84% of the respondents agreed that they learn better in the midst of other students while 16% disagreed. 43% of the respondents agreed that they feel ashamed to borrow anything from anyone while 51% disagreed with 6% not responding. 19% of the respondents agreed that begging for alms by special needs students is more profitable than schooling while 81% disagreed. 43% of the respondents agreed that they feel inadequate when I am learning with students without special needs while 56% disagreed and 1% did not respond. 74% of the respondents agreed that special needs students are more obedient to school rules and regulations while 25% disagreed and 1% not responding. 32% of the respondents agreed that they do not feel comfortable in the

midst of other students while 68% disagreed.

### Discussion

The results show that majority of the respondents are in agreement that students with special needs should be allowed to co-learn with other students. This is in agreement with Open Society Foundation (2019), which revealed that inclusive education means different and diverse students learning side by side in the same classroom. They enjoy field trips and after-school activities together. They participate in student government together. And they attend the same sports meets and plays. The findings of this study still revealed that there are still challenges in proper implementation of inclusiveness of special education into the mainstream and this agrees with Adebisi et al. (2014), who found out that the field of special needs education and its clients always face different problems and barriers that range from physical, social, economic to attitudinal.

### Conclusion

The summary of the results shows that majority of the respondents are in agreement that students with special needs should be allowed to co-learn with other students. The outcome of the results

also supports that inclusiveness of special education into the mainstream will improve learning of both special needs and non-special needs students.

### Recommendations

The results presented above gave rise to the following recommendations:

1. Government should introduce the education of special needs students into the mainstream.
2. More trained special education teachers should be employed and infrastructures that will accommodate special needs students should be put in place.
3. Students should be given proper orientation to accept one another irrespective of physical disabilities.
4. Adequate instructional materials should be provided to make learning more effective.
5. Assistive technological gadgets should be provided for special needs students.

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