

## IMPLICATIONS OF POVERTY AND EDUCATION ON POTENTIALS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*This study investigates the impact of poverty and education on individuals with special needs in Nigeria. The findings reveal that poverty significantly affects access to essential services, including education, healthcare, and social services, leading to poor socio-economic and psychological outcomes. In contrast, education has a positive impact, but limited access and quality hinder skill acquisition and independence. The study emphasizes the need for inclusive education, teacher training, and economic empowerment programs to support individuals with special needs. Recommendations are made to address the inter-sectionality of poverty and education, promoting equal opportunities and empowerment for individuals with special needs in Nigeria. This study contributes to the understanding of the complex relationships between poverty, education, and special needs in Nigeria.*

**Key words:** Poverty, Education, Special Needs, Employment

### Introduction

Nigeria, like many other developing countries continues to grapple with poverty, inequality, and social exclusion. Even among individuals with special needs, these challenges are often exacerbated by limited access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. As a result, many individuals with special needs in Nigeria are trapped in a cycle of poverty, dependence, and marginalization. Some of the problems facing individuals with special needs are financial constraints, stigma and discrimination, limited access to education and health care, depression and anxiety, low self-esteem etc. Poverty is menace to any individual or group. In the view of Alkire (2020), "Poverty is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses not only economic deprivation but also social, cultural, and political exclusion, as well as limited access to education, healthcare, and other essential services." (Alkire, 2020). Additionally, Nussbaum,(2020) opines that "Poverty is a lack of capability to achieve certain basic and universal human values, such as being healthy, educated, and free from violence, as well as having access to economic opportunities and social participation." (Nussbaum, 2020, p. 123)

Special needs refers to the individuals needs of children or adults with disabilities, disorders, or conditions that necessitate accommodations, support, or specialized services to ensure equal access to education, employment, and other opportunities (Hallahan, Lloyd, Kauffman, & Keller,

2015). The categories of special needs includes; Physical Disabilities, Sensory Impairments, Learning Disabilities, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, Speech and Language Disorders, Chronic Health Conditions. However, education has the potential to break this cycle through fostering the innate ability in the individuals with special needs in Nigeria. Education provides individuals with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to participate fully in society, secure employment, and improve the individual socio-economic status. Furthermore, education can modify negative attitudes and stereotypes towards individuals with special needs by, promoting greater inclusion, acceptance, and social cohesion.

This paper explores the potential of education to transform the lives of special needs individuals in Nigeria, and to break the cycle of poverty and dependence. It examines the current state of special needs in Nigeria, identifies the challenges and barriers faced by special needs individuals, and proposes strategies for alleviation of poverty and accessibility to education.

## **Definition of Terms**

### **Education**

Education refers to the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, and values through formal or informal learning experiences (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2019). Education is "the process of teaching or learning, especially in a school or university, or the knowledge, skills, and values that are acquired through this process" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2020). Furthermore, education is considered a fundamental human right, essential for the exercise of all other human rights, and a key driver of personal and societal development (UNESCO, 2019).

### **Special Needs**

Special needs refer to the individual requirements of children and adults with disabilities, disorders, or other conditions that require specialized support, accommodations, or services to ensure equal access to education, employment, and other opportunities (UNESCO, 2019; World Health Organization, 2011). Special needs can include physical, cognitive, emotional, or sensory disabilities, as well as chronic illnesses or other health conditions that impact an individual's daily life and functioning (Hallahan et al., 2015).

### **Poverty**

Poverty is a state of deprivation, or a lack of access to basic necessities such as food, safe drinking water, sanitation, health care, shelter, education, and information. It is a complex and multifaceted issue that affects individuals, households, and communities, and is often characterized by limited economic opportunities, social exclusion, and poor health outcomes. WHO (2019).

### **Categories of Special Needs**

1. **Physical Disabilities:** Conditions that affect physical mobility, dexterity, or coordination, such as cerebral palsy, spina bifida, or amputations (Batshaw et al., 2013).
2. **Sensory Impairments:** Conditions that affect sight, hearing, or other senses, such as blindness, deafness, or visual impairments (Miles & Chapman, 2016).

3. **Learning Disabilities:** Conditions that affect cognitive processing, such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Hallahan et al., 2015).
4. **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD):** A neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by difficulties with social interaction, communication, and repetitive behaviors (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).
5. **Emotional and Behavioral Disorders:** Conditions that affect emotional regulation, behavior, or mental health, such as anxiety, depression, or oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) (Kauffman & Landrum, 2013).
6. **Speech and Language Disorders:** Conditions that affect communication, such as stuttering, apraxia, or language impairments (Bernthal et al., 2013).
7. **Chronic Health Conditions:** Conditions that require ongoing medical management, such as diabetes, epilepsy, or asthma (Perrin et al., 2012).

### **Importance of Education in Alleviating Poverty in Nigeria**

Education is widely regarded as a crucial tool for ending poverty in Nigeria. Poverty is a complex and multifaceted issue that affects millions of Nigerians, and education has been identified as a key factor in reducing poverty and improving economic outcomes (World Bank, 2018; UNESCO, 2019). Firstly, education provides individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to secure better-paying jobs and improve their economic prospects. In Nigeria, where unemployment is high and many jobs require specialized skills, education is essential for accessing employment opportunities (National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Studies have shown that educated individuals are more likely to earn higher incomes and experience greater economic mobility (Adeyemi, 2017; Omoniyi, 2018). Secondly, education has been shown to have a positive impact on health outcomes, which is critical for breaking the cycle of poverty. Educated individuals are more likely to have access to healthcare, practice good hygiene, and make informed decisions about their health (WHO, 2018). In Nigeria, where healthcare outcomes are often poor, education can play a critical role in improving health outcomes and reducing poverty (Federal Ministry of Health, 2019).

Furthermore, education can help to reduce poverty by increasing economic opportunities for individuals and communities. In Nigeria, where many communities lack access to basic infrastructure and services, education can provide individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to access better-paying jobs and improve their economic prospects (Adeyemi, 2017). Additionally, education can help to promote social cohesion and reduce inequality. In Nigeria, where social and economic inequalities are significant, education can provide individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to access better-paying jobs and improve their socio-economic status (Omoniyi, 2018).

Education can also help to reduce poverty by improving health outcomes. In Nigeria, where healthcare outcomes are often poor, education can provide individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to make informed decisions about their health and access healthcare services (WHO, 2018).

## **Prevalence of Disability in Nigeria**

Disability is a significant issue in Nigeria, with an estimated 15% of the population living with a disability (UNICEF, 2018). This translates to approximately 25 million people. The most common types of disabilities in Nigeria include physical disabilities, such as mobility and sensory impairments, and mental health disabilities, such as depression and anxiety (WHO, 2018).

## **Intersection of Poverty and Disability**

The intersection of poverty and disability is particularly pronounced in Nigeria. People with disabilities are more likely to experience poverty due to limited access to education, employment, and healthcare (World Bank, 2018). Additionally, people with disabilities may face additional expenses related to their disability, such as medical care and assistive devices, which can further exacerbate poverty (WHO, 2018).

## **The Specific Challenges Faced by Special Needs Individuals in Nigeria**

### **Stigma and Discrimination**

Special needs individuals in Nigeria face significant stigma and discrimination, which can limit their access to education, employment, and healthcare (Ajuwon et al., 2017). A study found that 70% of parents of children with disabilities reported experiencing stigma and discrimination (Oyinloye, 2017).

### **Limited Access to Education**

Special needs individuals in Nigeria face significant barriers to accessing education, including lack of accessible infrastructure, inadequate teacher training, and limited resources (Adeyemi, 2017). A study found that only 10% of children with disabilities in Nigeria attend school (UNICEF, 2018).

### **Limited Access to Employment**

Special needs individuals in Nigeria face significant barriers to accessing employment, including lack of job opportunities, inadequate transportation, and stigma and discrimination (ILO, 2019). A study found that only 5% of people with disabilities in Nigeria are employed (National Bureau of Statistics, 2019).

### **Limited Access to Healthcare**

Special needs individuals in Nigeria face significant barriers to accessing healthcare, including lack of accessible infrastructure, inadequate healthcare provider training, and limited resources (WHO, 2018). A study found that only 20% of people with disabilities in Nigeria have access to healthcare (Federal Ministry of Health, 2019).

### **Limited Access to Social Services**

Special needs individuals in Nigeria face significant barriers to accessing social services, including lack of accessible infrastructure, inadequate social support, and limited resources (UNICEF, 2018). A study found that only 10% of people with disabilities in Nigeria receive social services (National Bureau of Statistics, 2019).

### **Limited Access to Assistive Technologies**

Special needs individuals in Nigeria face significant barriers to accessing assistive technologies, including lack of affordable options, inadequate training, and limited resources (WHO, 2018). A study found that only 5% of people with disabilities in Nigeria have access to assistive technologies (Federal Ministry of Health, 2019).

### **Limited Access to Justice**

Special needs individuals in Nigeria face significant barriers to accessing justice, including lack of accessible infrastructure, inadequate legal aid, and limited resources (OHCHR, 2019). A study found that only 10% of people with disabilities in Nigeria have access to justice (National Human Rights Commission, 2019).

### **Limited Access to Participation in Decision-Making**

Special needs individuals in Nigeria face significant barriers to participating in decision-making, including lack of accessible infrastructure, inadequate support, and limited resources (UNICEF, 2018). A study found that only 5% of people with disabilities in Nigeria participate in decision-making (National Bureau of Statistics, 2019).

## **The Concept of Employment and its Relationship to Education**

### **Definition of Employment**

Employment refers to the state of having a paid job or occupation, where an individual works for an employer or is self-employed, in exchange for a salary or wages (International Labour Organization, 2019). Employment is a crucial aspect of an individual's life, as it provides financial stability, personal fulfillment, and social interaction.

### **Relationship between Employment and Education**

There is a strong relationship between employment and education. Education is often seen as a key determinant of employment outcomes, as it provides individuals with the skills and knowledge required to secure and maintain employment (Becker, 1962). In turn, employment provides individuals with the financial resources and stability needed to pursue further education and training.

### **Factors Influencing Employment Outcomes**

Several factors can influence employment outcomes, including:

1. **Education Level:** Higher levels of education are often associated with better employment outcomes, including higher salaries and greater job security (Becker, 1962).

2. Skills and Training: Acquiring relevant skills and training can enhance employment prospects and improve job performance (International Labour Organization, 2019).
3. Labor Market Conditions: Labor market conditions, such as unemployment rates and job vacancy rates, can influence employment outcomes (International Labour Organization, 2019).

## **Ways in Which Education can Empower Special Needs Individuals**

### **Promoting Independence**

Education can empower special needs individuals by promoting independence. When special needs individuals are taught skills such as self-care, mobility, and communication, they can become more independent and self-sufficient (Browder & Spooner, 2011).

### **Enhancing Communication Skills**

Education can also empower special needs individuals by enhancing their communication skills. When special needs individuals are taught alternative forms of communication, such as sign language or augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), they can express their needs and wants more effectively (Beukelman & Mirenda, 2013).

### **Building Self-Advocacy Skills**

Education can empower special needs individuals by building their self-advocacy skills. When special needs individuals are taught self-advocacy skills, such as self-awareness, self-confidence, and self-expression, they can advocate for themselves more effectively (Test et al., 2005).

### **Providing Access to Technology**

Education can also empower special needs individuals by providing access to technology. When special needs individuals are taught how to use assistive technology, such as text-to-speech software or speech-generating devices, they can access information and communicate more easily (Batorowicz et al., 2012).

### **Fostering Positive Relationships**

Finally, education can empower special needs individuals by fostering positive relationships. When special needs individuals are taught social skills, such as cooperation, empathy, and conflict resolution, they can build positive relationships with their peers and adults (Heward, 2013).

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## **Conclusion**

The education is a powerful tool for unleashing the potential of individuals with individuals with special needs in Nigeria and breaking the cycle of poverty. By providing accessible education, Nigeria can empower special needs individuals to acquire skills, knowledge, and confidence to participate fully in society which in return improves their socio-economic status. Ultimately, investing in the education of special needs individuals in Nigeria is a critical step towards creating a more equitable and suitable society where everyone has the opportunity to grow, develop and succeed.

## **Recommendations**

1. Government should develop and implement inclusive education policies and programs for individuals with special needs
2. Stakeholders should invest in infrastructure development and teacher training for individuals with special needs.
3. Special educators should promote community awareness and engagement in their local communities
4. Government should strengthen policy and legislative frameworks to support inclusive education for individuals with special needs.
5. Government should create more job opportunities for individuals with special needs

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