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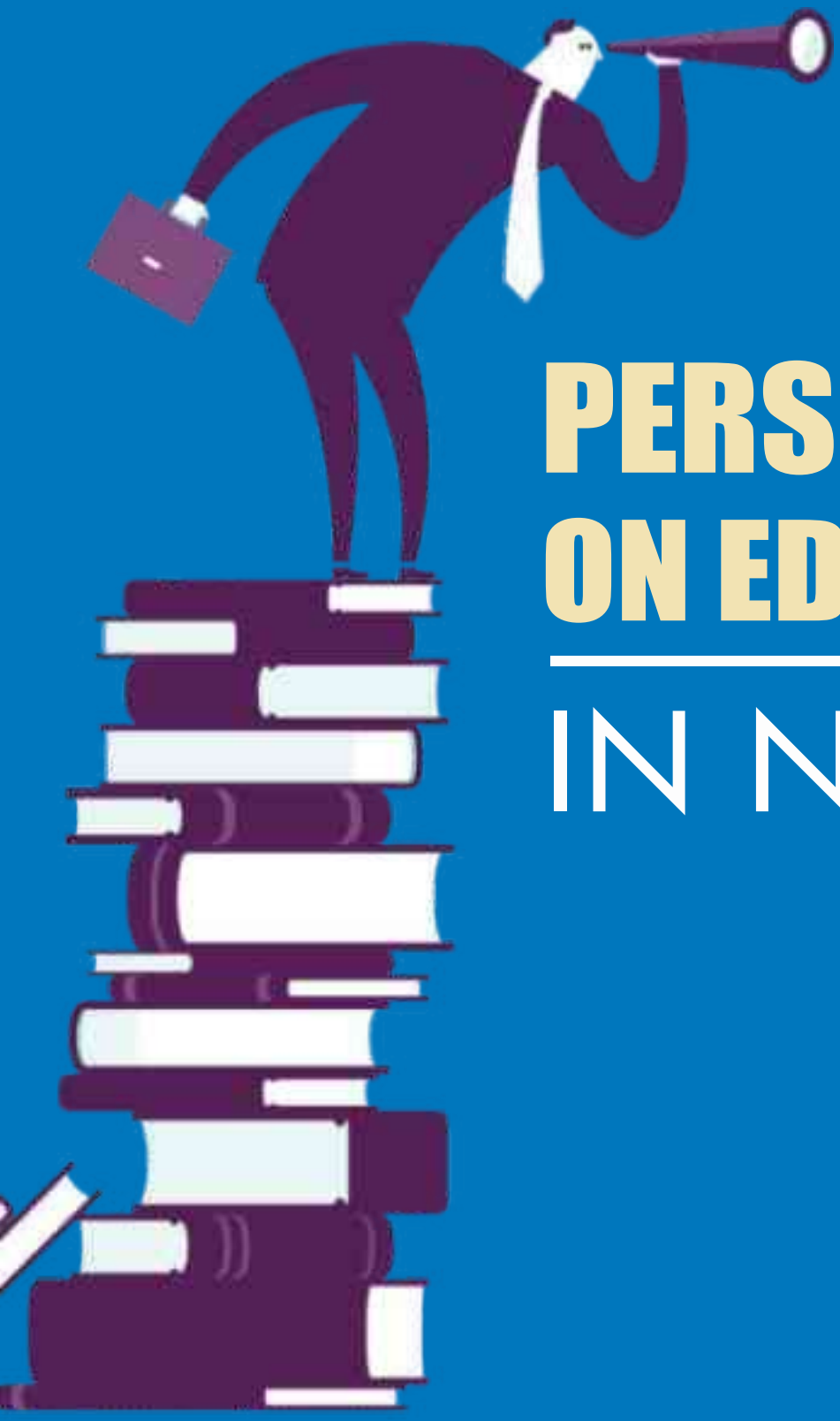

PERSPECTIVE ON EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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CHAPTER EIGHT

INCLUSION EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

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1.0 Introduction

Inclusive education has emerged as a fundamental approach to achieving equity and quality in education systems worldwide. It emphasizes the right of every child—regardless of physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other differences—to access and participate fully in mainstream education. In Nigeria, inclusive education seeks to integrate learners with disabilities and other marginalized groups into regular schools, ensuring equal learning opportunities for all. This approach aligns with international frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which advocate for inclusive and equitable quality education for lifelong learning.

Despite its importance, the implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria faces numerous challenges. These include inadequate funding, poor teacher preparation, lack of instructional materials, weak policy implementation, societal stigma, and insufficient infrastructure to accommodate learners with special needs. According to Obiakor and Offor (2018), these barriers have limited the effectiveness of inclusive practices, leading to persistent educational exclusion for children with disabilities and other disadvantaged learners.

Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive reforms that involve policymakers, educators, parents, and communities. Strengthening teacher training, improving funding mechanisms, enforcing inclusive education policies, and promoting public awareness are vital to achieving successful inclusion.

This chapter therefore examines the concept of inclusive education in Nigeria, identifies the key challenges hindering its effective implementation, and proposes practical solutions to promote equitable learning opportunities for all learners. It emphasizes that inclusive education is not merely a policy choice but a moral and developmental imperative for building a just and inclusive Nigerian society. Thus, this chapter is discussed under the following subheadings.

1. Concept of Inclusive Education

2. Challenges Facing Inclusive Education in Nigeria

3. Solutions to the Problems Facing Inclusive Education in Nigeria

2.0 Conceptual Terms

2.1 Concept of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education refers to a model of education where students with disabilities and special needs are educated alongside their peers without disabilities. It emphasizes the importance of equal

educational opportunities for all students, regardless of their individual differences. It involves creating classroom environments that are accessible to all students, promoting acceptance and understanding of diversity, and adapting teaching methods and materials to meet the needs of all students. Inclusive education has been shown to have numerous benefits, including improved academic and social outcomes for students with disabilities, increased empathy and tolerance among students, and a more inclusive and diverse school culture. UNESCO (2009) defines inclusive education as *"a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education."* This definition emphasizes that inclusion is not limited to learners with disabilities but applies to all forms of diversity, including gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic background. Ainscow (2005) describes inclusive education as *"an approach that seeks to remove barriers to learning and participation for all children and young people and to ensure that all learners have equal access to quality education."* This definition underscores the idea of restructuring educational institutions to meet the needs of every learner. The *National Policy on Education* (2013) views inclusive education as *"an education system that ensures equal access to quality education for all persons, including those with special needs, without discrimination."* This definition reflects Nigeria's policy commitment to the integration of learners with disabilities into regular schools. Booth and Ainscow (2011) define inclusive education as *"the process of increasing participation and reducing exclusion from the culture, curricula, and community of schools."* Their definition, which is central to the *Index for Inclusion*, highlights the dynamic and continuous nature of inclusion as a process of school improvement. Obiakor and Offor (2018) views inclusive education as *"a system of education that accommodates all learners, regardless of their physical, mental, social, or linguistic differences, and ensures that they learn together in a supportive environment."* Their definition emphasizes collaboration, accessibility, and the elimination of discrimination in Nigerian educational settings. Across these definitions, inclusive education is viewed as a right-based, participatory, and transformative process that ensures equal access to learning opportunities for all learners. The focus is on removing barriers to participation and fostering an environment that values diversity as a source of strength rather than a limitation.

Inclusive education is a philosophy and approach that aims to provide equal opportunity and access to education for all students, regardless of their background, abilities, or disabilities. It focuses on creating a learning environment that is welcoming and supportive of diverse learners, promoting their social, emotional, and academic growth. The concept of inclusive education encompasses the belief that all students should be able to learn together in the same classroom, with reasonable accommodations and supports in place to meet their individual needs. It also emphasizes the importance of inclusivity and diversity in education, recognizing that all students benefit from

learning in a diverse environment. Inclusive education has been shown to improve academic outcomes, increase social competence, and foster a sense of belonging and acceptance among students. Implementation of inclusive education practices can involve curriculum modifications, teacher training, collaboration among school staff, and the use of assistive technology.

3.0 Challenges Facing Inclusive Education in Nigeria

Inclusive education in Nigeria is designed to ensure that all children—regardless of physical, intellectual, emotional, or social differences—have access to quality education in regular school settings. However, the implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria faces numerous obstacles that hinder its effectiveness. The major challenges include:

Inadequate Funding

Inadequate funding is a significant challenge facing inclusive education in Nigeria. This issue has a direct impact on the quality and accessibility of education for students with disabilities and special educational needs (UNESCO, 2020). The lack of adequate funding prevents schools from providing necessary resources, accommodations, and support systems for these students, making it difficult for them to fully participate in the education system. Inadequate funding also leads to a shortage of trained and qualified teachers and therapists, further hindering the progress and success of inclusive education in Nigeria (Omede, 2015). Without proper funding, it is challenging to implement effective strategies and initiatives that can support the diverse learning needs of students with disabilities. This not only affects the students' academic performance but also hinders their overall development and inclusion in society. One major challenges of inclusive education in Nigeria is insufficient financial support (Okeke, 2015).. Most schools do not receive adequate funding to provide special instructional materials, assistive technologies, or infrastructural adjustments such as ramps and accessible classrooms. As a result, many learners with disabilities are excluded from effective participation. According to Adebayo (2020), lack of financial commitment from government and inadequate budgetary allocation to the education sector have severely constrained the progress of inclusive education in Nigeria.

Shortage of Qualified Teachers

The shortage of qualified teachers is a major challenge facing inclusive education in Nigeria. This issue has been a constant struggle for the country, as it has a significant impact on the quality of education that students receive. Due to the limited number of qualified teachers, many students with special needs are unable to receive the necessary support and accommodations in the classroom (Adebayo, A. (2020). This shortage of qualified teachers also affects the overall inclusivity of the education system in Nigeria. Without enough trained educators, it becomes

challenging to cater to the diverse needs of students from different backgrounds and with different learning abilities. As a result, many students are left behind and are not able to reach their full potential (Afolabi, 2020). Another challenge that stems from the shortage of qualified teachers is the lack of adequate resources and materials for inclusive education. Without enough trained teachers, it becomes difficult to implement effective teaching methods and strategies for students with special needs (Obiakor, & Offor, 2018).. This, in turn, leads to a lack of proper resources and materials for these students, making it even harder for them to succeed in the classroom. The shortage of qualified teachers also hinders the professional development and training opportunities for educators in Nigeria (Ire & Osuji, 2024). With a limited number of trained teachers, it becomes challenging to provide ongoing support and training for teachers to improve their skills and adapt to the changing needs of students. This, in turn, affects the overall quality of education in the country. The implementation of inclusive education requires teachers who are trained in special and inclusive pedagogies. Unfortunately, most teachers in Nigeria's public schools lack such training. Many have little understanding of how to manage learners with diverse educational needs. Obiakor and Offor (2018) note that the lack of adequately trained teachers has led to poor classroom practices and ineffective inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream education.

Inadequate Infrastructure and Learning Resources

The inadequate infrastructure and learning resources in Nigeria have been identified as major challenges facing inclusive education. These issues hinder the progress and development of inclusive education in the country. Lack of adequate infrastructure, such as accessible schools and classrooms, makes it difficult for students with disabilities to attend school and access the necessary resources (James, 2025). This results in exclusion and discrimination, preventing them from receiving a quality education. The lack of learning resources, such as textbooks, computers, and assistive devices, further impedes the learning process for students with disabilities. These resources are essential for facilitating inclusive education and fostering an environment where all students can learn and thrive (Ogunode, et al 2022). Without these resources, students with disabilities are unable to fully participate in the educational experience, leading to a significant achievement gap between them and their peers. Inadequate infrastructure and learning resources also affect the quality of education for all students, not just those with disabilities. The lack of proper facilities and resources can hinder the overall learning environment and limit the opportunities for students to excel academically (Peter, 2020). Physical and learning environments in many Nigerian schools are not conducive for learners with disabilities. Classrooms are often overcrowded, and essential resources such as Braille materials, hearing aids, and visual aids are lacking. Okeke (2015) asserts that the absence of supportive infrastructure and learning materials makes it difficult for inclusive education to thrive in Nigeria.

Negative Attitudes and Societal Stigma

Negative attitudes and societal stigma towards disabilities have long been identified as major challenges facing inclusive education in Nigeria. These negative attitudes and societal stigma are often rooted in cultural and traditional beliefs, creating barriers for children with disabilities to access education. These challenges not only affect the attitudes of parents and educators, but also limit the opportunities for students with disabilities to fully participate in the classroom and society. Inclusive education aims to provide equal access and opportunities for all students, regardless of their disabilities (UNICEF Nigeria. (2023). However, negative attitudes and stigma towards disabilities can lead to segregation and exclusion of students with disabilities from mainstream classrooms. This not only deprives them of the benefits of inclusive education, but also perpetuates the societal view that individuals with disabilities are incapable of learning and contributing to society (Ire, et al 2024).. One of the main reasons for these negative attitudes and stigma is the lack of awareness and understanding about disabilities. Many people in Nigeria are not educated about disabilities and therefore, hold misconceptions and stereotypes about individuals with disabilities (Olaniyi Bouwoye, & Adedayo Adesokan 2024). This lack of knowledge also translates into the education system, where educators may not be equipped to effectively teach students with disabilities. Societal stigma towards disabilities can also be attributed to the lack of support and resources for individuals with disabilities. In Nigeria, there is a lack of infrastructure and accommodations for students with disabilities, making it difficult for them to access education (James, 2025). This lack of support further reinforces the negative attitudes and stigma towards disabilities, creating a vicious cycle. Cultural beliefs and negative societal attitudes toward disability remain major obstacles to inclusion. Some parents and teachers still view children with disabilities as incapable of learning, leading to discrimination and exclusion. According to Eleweke and Rodda (2010), stigmatization and misconceptions about disability contribute to the marginalization of children with special needs within the Nigerian school system.

Weak Policy Implementation and Monitoring

In the context of inclusive education in Nigeria, two main challenges have been identified as weak policy implementation and monitoring. Weak policy implementation refers to the failure of policy measures and interventions to effectively address the issues facing inclusive education in Nigeria. This is often due to a lack of resources, political will, or proper coordination among relevant stakeholders. On the other hand, monitoring refers to the process of evaluating the progress and effectiveness of policies and interventions (Federal Ministry of Education. 2023). In the context of inclusive education in Nigeria, monitoring is crucial in ensuring that the policies and interventions are achieving their desired outcomes and making a positive impact on the education system. However, due to various factors such as a lack of data, inadequate monitoring systems,

and insufficient funding, monitoring efforts in inclusive education in Nigeria have been limited and ineffective (UNICEF Innocenti. 2025). The combination of weak policy implementation and monitoring presents significant challenges in achieving inclusive education in Nigeria. Without effective policy implementation, the education system will continue to face barriers and discrimination towards marginalized groups, making it challenging to achieve inclusive education. Additionally, without proper monitoring (UNICEF Nigeria. 2023), it is challenging to assess the progress of policies and interventions and make necessary adjustments to improve their effectiveness. Although Nigeria has developed several policies to promote inclusive education—such as the *National Policy on Education (2013)* and the *National Policy on Special Needs Education (2015)*—implementation has been weak. Many state governments lack the political will, data systems, and monitoring mechanisms to ensure compliance. Omede (2015) observes that policy failures and poor governance structures hinder the institutionalization of inclusive education in Nigeria.

Inadequate Public Awareness and Parental Involvement

Many parents, especially in rural areas, are unaware of the importance of inclusive education or the rights of children with disabilities to attend regular schools. This lack of awareness leads to low school enrollment among children with special needs. UNESCO (2020) emphasizes that community sensitization and stakeholder engagement are crucial for the success of inclusive education initiatives. Inadequate public awareness and parental involvement have been identified as significant challenges facing inclusive education in Nigeria. These issues have led to a lack of understanding and support for inclusive education, hindering its implementation and effectiveness. Inadequate public awareness results in a lack of knowledge and understanding about what inclusive education entails, causing misconceptions and negative attitudes towards students with disabilities. This ultimately leads to discrimination and exclusion of these students from the education system. Additionally, UNESCO. (2024) noted that parental involvement is crucial for the success of inclusive education, as parents play a vital role in supporting and advocating for their children's education (Federal Ministry of Education, n.d.). However, in Nigeria, many parents are not adequately involved in their children's education due to a lack of awareness and understanding about inclusive education and its benefits. This lack of involvement has a detrimental impact on the students' academic and social development. Without proper awareness and parental involvement, the implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria will continue to face significant challenges (Olaniyi & Adedayo 2024).

4.0 Solutions to the Problems Facing Inclusive Education in Nigeria

Inclusive education in Nigeria faces numerous challenges, including inadequate funding, lack of trained teachers, poor infrastructure, societal stigma, weak policy implementation, and limited public awareness. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach involving government, schools, communities, and international stakeholders. The following solutions are recommended:

Increased Funding and Resource Allocation

Adequate funding is crucial for implementing inclusive education effectively. The government should prioritize budgetary allocations for education, particularly for inclusive education initiatives. Funding should support the provision of assistive devices, specialized learning materials, and infrastructural adjustments such as ramps, accessible classrooms, and adapted furniture. TETFund and other donor agencies can provide targeted grants to enhance resource availability in schools (Adebayo, 2020).

Teacher Training and Professional Development

Teachers play a central role in inclusive education. Continuous professional development programs should be organized to equip teachers with the skills to handle learners with diverse needs. This includes pre-service and in-service training in special needs education, adaptive teaching methods, and classroom management for inclusive settings. Obiakor and Offor (2018) emphasize that well-trained teachers are key to successful inclusion and effective classroom practices.

Improvement of School Infrastructure and Learning Resources

Schools must be made physically accessible and equipped with adequate learning resources. Braille materials, hearing aids, tactile learning tools, and digital devices should be provided for learners with disabilities. Classrooms should be designed to accommodate learners with mobility challenges, and libraries should include materials suitable for students with visual or hearing impairments (Okeke, 2015).

Sensitization and Attitude Change

Addressing societal stigma and negative attitudes toward children with disabilities is essential. Awareness campaigns should target parents, teachers, and communities to promote understanding, acceptance, and support for inclusive education. Cultural and religious leaders can be engaged to advocate for the rights of children with special needs (Eleweke & Rodda, 2010).

Effective Policy Implementation and Monitoring

Strong policy frameworks exist, but weak implementation remains a major challenge. The Federal and State Ministries of Education, in collaboration with the National Commission for Special Needs Education (NCSNE), should monitor schools to ensure compliance with inclusive education policies. Policies should include clear guidelines on enrollment, teacher qualifications, resource provision, and evaluation of inclusion outcomes (Omede, 2015).

Community and Parental Involvement

Parents and communities should be actively involved in the educational process of children with special needs. Schools can establish Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) that include stakeholders of children with disabilities. Community support enhances enrollment, retention, and overall participation of learners in inclusive settings (UNESCO, 2020).

Promotion of ICT and Digital Learning

Integrating information and communication technology (ICT) into inclusive education can address some of the barriers to learning. Assistive technologies, e-learning platforms, and online resources can help learners with disabilities access the curriculum more effectively and foster independent learning (Afolabi, 2020).

Collaboration with International and Non-Governmental Organizations

Partnerships with international agencies such as UNESCO, UNICEF, and NGOs working on disability and education can provide technical support, training, and funding for inclusive education programs. Such collaborations can help introduce best practices and enhance capacity building in Nigerian schools (UNESCO, 2020).

5.0 Conclusion

The challenges facing inclusive education in Nigeria are multidimensional—spanning financial, institutional, and socio-cultural barriers. Addressing these challenges requires strong government commitment, increased funding, teacher training, community sensitization, and effective policy implementation. Strengthening these areas will help Nigeria move closer to achieving equitable and quality education for all learners.

Addressing the challenges of inclusive education in Nigeria requires coordinated action by all stakeholders. By increasing funding, improving teacher training, enhancing infrastructure, promoting public awareness, enforcing policies, and leveraging ICT and international partnerships,

Nigeria can create an inclusive education system that guarantees equitable access and quality learning for all children.

Revise Questions

1. Define Inclusive Education

2. Discuss five challenges Facing Inclusive Education in Nigeria

3. Explain five solutions to the Problems Facing Inclusive Education in Nigeria

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