



## THE CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED UNDERGRADUATES IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

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### Abstract:

It has been evidenced that inclusive education could act as a springboard for addressing the educational challenges of the vision impaired in Nigerian educational institutions. Against this backdrop, the study investigated the challenges of implementing inclusive education for visually impaired undergraduate students in Anambra State, Nigeria. The study was carried out in Federal and State owned Tertiary Institutions. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. Descriptive survey research design was adopted. 103 visually impaired undergraduate students were sampled. Simple random sampling technique was employed in the choice of tertiary institutions used for the study. The instrument for data collection was a 20 item questionnaire administered using interview method. Validation of the instrument was done by two experts in Educational Management and Policy Department and an expert in Measurement and Evaluation in Educational Foundations Department of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Data obtained were analyzed through mean and t-test statistic. The findings indicate that visually impaired students in Nigerian tertiary institutions are faced with myriad of educational challenges such as: inadequate facilities, dearth of instructional materials, unfriendly environment, lack of trained personnel. Based on the findings, the study recommended among others that, both the stakeholders and government should enhance the educational provisions for inclusive education of the visually impaired undergraduate students in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** inclusion, impairment, inclusive education, visually impaired, tertiary institution

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## 1. Introduction

Virtually all countries in the globe, developed and developing, make frantic effort to cue into the holistic system of education that accommodates all manner of human beings, able and differently able notwithstanding. This system of education is referred to as inclusive education.

Inclusion is a household concept in the education of students with special needs across the universe. Staub and Pack (2003) defined inclusion as “*full-time placement of children with mild, moderate and severe disabilities in regular classrooms.*” Similar to this are the views of Osakwe (2010) that, inclusion is a process, whereby regular education classes are combined with special education services in a regular system. He further stated that in this strategy, continued and planned interactions with contemporaries and freedom to associate in different groups are encouraged. Accordingly, Osakwe highlighted two models of inclusion as: full inclusion model which is a model where specialized services are provided within a regular classroom by sending the service worker to work with one or more students in the regular classroom setting; and partial model whereby services are provided outside a regular classroom.

However, the better trend advocated globally is full inclusion for that alone provides an educationally friendly environment devoid of stigmatization for the differently able students, of which students with visual impairment are part. Ekeh and Oladayo (2010) on their part, viewed inclusion as a new approach to education with several challenges which behoove the school authorities and teachers to ensure that meaningful and international engagement of regular and students with special needs is done in a way that provides learning opportunities/activities and ensure that the environment is conducive to all students. In addition, inclusion should also ensure equal participation of regular and special needs students geared towards progress in the differentiated curriculum which is very essential for success in an inclusive level of education.

Howbeit, the concept inclusion, mainstreaming and integration are interchangeably used by some scholars, implying to have the same connotation and at the same time synonymous. Mittler cited in Yuen and West-wood (2001) differed with the opinion that the terms ‘integration and mainstreaming’ are virtually synonymous. These concepts meant placement of a student with a disability or difficulty in ordinary school environment and regular curriculum, but usually without the curriculum being modified to any great extent. The student usually receives some additional support to help him or her do the required work in the classroom, but the intention is very much to make the student fit into the programme rather than adapting the programme to suit the student. On the other hand, ‘inclusion’ refers to a much more radical model. It implies that the regular school curriculum, teaching methods, organization and resources need to be adapted quite significantly to ensure that all students regardless of ability or disability can participate successfully in the mainstream of education. Hence, stakeholders in education had adjudged inclusion to be the panacea for handling educational problems for differently able students.

Inclusive education implies an all-round educational stride geared towards ensuring adequate inculcation of requisite knowledge through qualitative learning to all children irrespective of any known or imagined disability. Similarly, education Sector Support In Nigeria (ESSPIN), 2013 Doc No. 064 citing the UNESCO 2009 Policy Guidelines on Inclusion explains that inclusive education is a process that involves the transformation of schools and other centers of learning to cater for all children including boys and girls, students from ethnic and linguistic minorities, rural population, those affected with HIV and AIDS, those with disabilities, difficulties in learning and to provide learning opportunities for all youth and adults as well. Furthermore, its aim is to eliminate exclusion that is a consequence of negative attitudes and a lack of response to diversity in race, economic status, social class, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, sexual orientation and ability. Only a balanced focus in this dimension can provide a leeway to addressing the challenges faced by the visually impaired undergraduate students in Nigerian tertiary institutions. At the long run, frantic repositioning effort for realization of the Education for All (EFA) declaration, Millennium Development goals (MDG) 2015) and Nigeria philosophy of education would no longer be a mirage.

At the tertiary level of education in Nigeria, undergraduate students with special needs include the youth and adults challenged visually, orthopedically, hearing impaired, speech disorder, emotional disorder, mentally retarded, learning disabilities and people with multiple disabilities. For the purposes of this work, only students who have visual impairment which debar their normal academic exercises will constitute the framework for the research. Vision or visually impaired will be used interchangeably in the study. Students with visual impairment within the educational setting include the partially sighted, low vision, legally blind and totally blind. By implication, students with vision impairment seem to have had fewer opportunities to explore their learning experiences and even their immediate environment. As a result, Davis and Hopwood (2002) asserted that in assessing the curriculum, pupils with visual impairment face considerable challenges in terms of limited or no access to the curriculum via a visual medium and the extra time needed in using hearing and touch to learn. This entails that pupils with visual impairment are likely to become more fatigued than full sighted pupils. Concurring with the above listed challenges faced by visually impaired, Salisbury (2008) supporting Meyer (2001) added other challenges like, access to general and specialist support services, best practices for staff development, best practices for teaching and learning, examination and assessment, access to physical resources, physical environment facilities and equipment among others cause variety of challenging situation for visually impaired students.

The visually impaired students' challenging experiences in the course of learning may have prompted the postulation in the philosophy of Nigerian education which is anchored on the development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen; and the provision of equal opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the basic, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system (FRN, 2014 Section no. 2b). Moreover the above stance was anchored on the national education goals as

enunciated in 1999 Constitution that every Nigerian child shall have equal educational opportunities irrespective of gender, social status religion, ethnic background and any peculiar individual challenges (FRN, 2014 Section 1 no 4d). Hence, the need for inclusion in the educational institutions in Anambra State, Nigeria is imperative. Anything devoid of this poses serious challenges to the educational training of the visually impaired students. The challenges that must be addressed according to Oladejo and Oladejo (2011) span through inadequacy of educational funding, high cost of educational materials and equipment, lack of specialists and paraprofessionals among others.

To deduce from the above it seems that visually impaired in various tertiary institutions in Nigeria appear to be far from inclusive education, instead frantic efforts of the government to educate the students with vision impairment could be ascribed to integration and mainstreaming systems of education. In a bid to evaluate Nigerian implementation of inclusive education services, Garuba (2003) opined that, where attention is focused on special needs education, it is mostly in the area of basic education for the nomadic groups and the girl-child. Little or no special consideration is given to education of children with disabilities. However, inclusive education is considered the most effective means and a veritable tool for combating discrimination, stigmatization, and derogatory behaviours from the able bodied to the differently able students in schools. Adoption of this system of education is in conformity with the desired objectives of Nigerian philosophy of education.

In the light of the foregoing, Nigeria became a signatory to the (JOMETIAN Declaration of 5 to 9<sup>th</sup> March 1990) that postulates "Education for all". More so, the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Right 1948 stipulates that "*education is a fundamental human right.*" By implication the onerous task of imparting the requisite knowledge to all learners irrespective of any noticeable or imagined disability remain an imperative to stakeholders of education. This system of education known as inclusive education was defined by Osakwe (2010) as a classroom or private instructions involving unconditional techniques, materials, exercises, facilities and subject matter designed for children and adults who have physical deformities, behavioural disorders or learning disabilities.

A cursory look at the Ashby Commission's report in 1960 on "*Nigeria's needs in the field of Post-Secondary School Certificate and Higher education over the next twenty years (1960-1980)*" depicts that the education of pupils with special needs was sidelined. The commission advocated for expansion in primary, secondary and tertiary education in the country. The expansion would be in terms of number and quality of pupils, students, teachers, programmes and facilities, such as to cope with the anticipated development in Nigerian economic politics, culture and so forth (Oyelade 2004). This view simply refers to education in a normal classroom for able bodied students. The premonition that students with special needs are neither teachable nor educable mentally retarded (EMR) is a worrisome issue truncating the frantic efforts by Nigerian government to administer inclusive education for the visually impaired in tertiary institutions. The efforts so far seem to have little or few remarkable impart on the

learning experiences of these special needs students. Instances abound where the teachers who are to handle the learning challenges are unqualified to meet the special needs of the vision impaired, dearth of the needed infrastructural facilities, ICT, AS (Assistive devices) and enabling environment bedevil the efforts of the government. Dearth of qualified teachers and needed facilities, seem to incapacitate staff service delivery of credible learning outcome. At this juncture, the challenges of implementation of inclusive education for tertiary students with vision impairment in Anambra state, Nigeria should be addressed.

Implementation of inclusive education in tertiary institution for the visually impaired student in Anambra State and some developing nations still pose serious challenges. This raises the doubt whether the signing of the document of the Salamanca Framework for inclusive education advocacy on Education for all is not a futile effort. Against this background, Nguyen (2010) categorically affirmed that,

*“Even though a majority of UN member countries agreed to implement the Salamanca Framework of inclusive education, there is not enough information about the successful implementation of transformative principles of inclusion in developing countries as compared with developed countries”*

To achieve a successful implementation of inclusive education in tertiary institution for the visually impaired students, there must be a change of mindset about inclusivity.

Explicitly, Sapon-Shevin (2007) opined that,

*“...all university staff need extensive training in special needs education in order to carry out their responsibilities and make inclusion work. Giving the imperative of the scholar’s stance, no implementation can effectively thrive devoid of the knowledge and ability of the implementers regarding the basic facts. Apparently, unawareness may be one of the reasons for the inadequate implementation of inclusive education for visually impaired students by staff.”*

Accordingly, Maclean (2001) recognized that, *“It is obvious that in inclusive classrooms, students learn in different ways. This is a challenge to teachers with diverse group of learners.”* Concurring with the above view point was the opinion that *“while there is some evidence of positive effects of inclusion of students with disabilities, opponents of this idea maintain that there is less evidence of the overall benefits of inclusion on the classmates of students with disabilities”.* (Fletcher 2010) Seemingly, the unpleasant learning *“experience of vision impaired undergraduates students spurred the researcher to investigate the challenges of implementing inclusive education of the visually impaired students in Nigerian tertiary institutions.”*

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

Educationally, students with vision impairment are considered as either presbyopia (blind) or amblyopia (partially sighted). The former are those that need to read Braille while the latter are able to read large prints. In whichever category that a student belongs there is need for educational adaptation in order to cushion the challenges of visual limitations. In an inclusive educational setting, the inability of the teacher to understand that vision limitation debilitating to one student may differ with that of other students has remained a barrier to the vision impaired students' education. Hence, the coping abilities of different students differ and therefore need diverse instructional procedures to tackle their educational challenges. Myriad of challenges and educational characteristics that face learning experiences of the vision impaired students include cognitive, physical, communicative, sensory, emotional/behavioural disadvantages.

At the tertiary level in Nigeria, education of students with visual impairment and addressing their challenges in school setting pose considerable challenges. To handle the situation, proper implementation and key support must be provided which encapsulate adequate funding/provision of educational facilities, advisory roles by the specialist teacher on the physical organization, environment and provision of curricular materials by stakeholders of tertiary education.

Tertiary education implementation of inclusive education for the vision impaired appeared a herculean task due to non-provision of the needed facilities such as perking brailier, talking calculator with an earplug, white cane or guide dog for mobility purposes, brailed text books, talking watch, synthesized computer, closed circuit reading system or a scanner that changes prints to synthesized speech, audio taped, text books, tapes for lecture taking over heads and notes or accessing volunteernote takers, typewriter or writing guide, visual aids to be accompanied by description of evacuation for vision impaired from buildings and fire drills. Giving the scenario of what obtains in Nigerian tertiary institutions where some visually impaired students seem to lack friendly environment, inaccessibility to classrooms, challenges of who reads the question papers for them during examinations, who leads them to various classrooms for lectures, teaching practice exercises in facilities without ramps, working on assignments, term papers, research projects among others pose serious academic challenges. Consequently there seem to be inadequate educational provisions for the implementation of inclusive services for the visually impaired undergraduates in Nigeria tertiary institutions. The question remains whether or not Nigeria is implementing inclusion at the tertiary level of education for the visually impaired? A presentation of the challenging situation on ground in Nigeria tertiary institution spurred the research.

### **2.1 Research Questions**

- 1) What are the factors militating the implementation of inclusive education for visually impaired undergraduates in tertiary institution?

- 2) What strategies can be used to improve the implementation of inclusive education of visually impaired students in tertiary institution in Nigeria?

## 2.2 Hypotheses

Ho1: There is no significant difference between implementation of inclusive education in federal owned and state government tertiary institutions for visually impaired students.

Ho2: There is no significant difference between implementation of inclusive education provisions for male and female visually impaired undergraduates in tertiary institutions.

## 3. Method

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. An investigation of the challenges of implementing inclusive education for visually impaired undergraduates in tertiary institutions was sought. The population of the study consisted of 103 students in both federal and state tertiary institutions in Nigeria. All the respondents constituted the sample for the study. Simple random sampling was used to select the four tertiary institutions used for the study. A 20 item questionnaire validated by three experts, two from Educational Management and Policy and one expert from Measurement and Evaluation within Educational Foundations Department guided the study. A 20 item instrument was used for data collection. Interviews conducted by six research assistants for the respondents who were properly briefed guided the administration and completion of copies of the instrument. Means were used to analyze the research questions while the hypotheses were tested using t-test analysis at 0.05 level of significance.

## 4. Results

### Research Question 1

**Table 1:** Mean responses of visually impaired students in tertiary institution on factors militating inclusive education implementation

S/N	Items	$\bar{X}$	Remark
A	Undergraduate Students with visual impairment in tertiary institutions are provided with the following for inclusive education implementation.		
1.	White cane.	2.22	Disagreed
2.	A guide dog	1.44	Disagreed
3.	Close circuit or scanner that changes prints into synthesized speech.	1.77	Disagreed
4.	Audio taped text books.	2.20	Disagreed
5.	Tapes for lecture taking.	2.44	Disagreed
6.	Talking calculator with earplug.	2.19	Disagreed
7.	Typewriter or writing guide.	2.31	Disagreed
8.	Standard accessible web-site.	2.00	Disagreed

9.	Perking Braille.	1.99	Disagreed
10.	Braille books.	2.19	Disagreed
11.	Software for Braille.	2.15	Disagreed
12.	Thermoforming Duplicator machine.	1.46	Disagreed
13.	Overheads and volunteer note takers.	2.06	Disagreed

Table 1 reveals that the mean response of students to items 1-13 were less than 2.50. This indicates that undergraduate students were not provided with perking braille, braille books, software for braille, white cane, guide dog, tapes for lecture taking, talking calculator, typewriter or writing guide, standard accessible web-site, audio taped textbooks, closed circuit or scanner that changes prints to synthesized speech, overheads and these pose myriad challenges for implementation of inclusive education for the visually impaired students.

### Research Question 2

**Table 2:** Mean responses for the strategies to improve implementation of inclusive education for the visually impaired students

S/N	Items	$\bar{X}$	Remark
B	Undergraduate students with visual impairment in tertiary institutions are provided with the following for inclusive education implementation.		
14.	24 Hours Attention.	1.70	Disagreed
15.	Residential Special School with Accommodation.	1.68	Disagreed
16.	Provision of evacuation for vision impaired from building fire drills.	1.82	Disagreed
17.	Transport fare to school.	2.03	Disagreed
18.	Government subvention for school fees.	2.08	Disagreed
19.	Remuneration/Incentives for note takers.	1.83	Disagreed
20.	Reinforcement/Reward to aids/interpreters who read question papers for the visually impaired students during exams.	1.82	Disagreed

Table 2 shows that the mean responses of students on all the items were below 2.50. This implies that strategies such as adequate funding, 24 hours attention, residential accommodation in special schools, fire drills for evacuation of the vision impaired, transport fare to school, incentives/remuneration for note takers, interpreters especially during examination periods were lacking. Hence the required strategies for implementing inclusive education for the visually impaired undergraduate students are not in place.

### 4.1 Test of hypotheses

**Ho 1:** There is no significant difference between implementation of inclusive education in federal owned and state government tertiary institutions for the visually impaired.



**Table 3:** t-test of mean significant difference between inclusive education implemented for the visually impaired in federal and state owned tertiary institutions

Variables	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	DF	Sign Level	t-calc	t-table	Decision
Federal	54	1.93	0.30	101	0.05	-1.418	1.96	Not significant
State	49	2.01	0.27					

The result in table 3 shows that the calculated t-value at 101 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significant is -1.418. Since the calculated t-value is less than the critical table value of 1.96, the null hypothesis is therefore accepted.

**Ho 2:** There is no significant difference between implementation of inclusive education for male and female visually impaired undergraduates in tertiary institutions.

**Table 4:** t-test of mean significant difference between inclusive education implemented for the male and female visually impaired students in tertiary institutions

Variables	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	DF	Sign Level	t-calc	t-table	Decision
Males	38	1.90	0.25	101	0.05	-1.206	1.96	Not significant
Females	65	1.96	0.24					

From the result presented in table 4, the calculated t-value at 101 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance is -1.206. Since the calculated t-cal is less than the table value of 1.96, the null hypothesis is therefore accepted.

## 5. Discussion

From the findings and analyses given in the above tables, it is evident that educational provisions for the undergraduate visually impaired students in Nigerian tertiary institutions are poorly made. Regrettably, this pose serious challenges to the desired objectives of education stakeholders towards implementation of inclusive education for the visually impaired tertiary education students in Nigeria. Giving the situation where tertiary institutions are bedeviled with dearth of needed educational provisions, the practicality of implementing inclusive education for the vision impaired students would appear as a mirage. Against this background, ESSPIN (2013) notes that, *“inclusive education (rather than being a euphemism for disability/special needs education) could form the basis for a shift in perceptions of education sector leaders from inputs to quality of outcomes”*.

In another development, one can deduct from the findings that implementers/administrators of inclusive education in Nigerian tertiary institutions for the visually impaired students have consistently failed in their duties. This pose myriad of challenges to the vision impaired students learning experiences and dastardly affect their learning outcomes. This corroborates with David and Hopwood (2002) stance that

in assessing the implementation of the curriculum, students with visual impairment face considerable challenges in terms of limited or no access to the curriculum via a visual medium and extra time needed in hearing and touch are likely to become more fatigued than full sighted students. When inclusive education is inadequately implemented in tertiary institutions for the vision impaired students, frustration may set in and some may withdraw from participation, hence annulling the UNICEF (Bolivia) Vision 2020: "The Right to Sight" objectives.

Table 2 indicates poor implementation of inclusive education for undergraduates with vision impairment in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The mean scores representing areas such as 24 hours attention, residential special school with accommodation, government subvention for school fees, remuneration/incentives for note takers, reinforcement/ reward to interpreters who read question papers for the visually impaired students during examinations among others are very low depicting poor implementation. Against this background, Shepherd (2001) lamented that, "... the actual implementation of an inclusive approach is being challenged by the social, political and physical circumstances of higher education institutions. He further advocated that, for proper implementation of inclusion of students with impairment in higher education, enabling legal framework that lays the foundation for equal opportunities in all aspects of university life must be adopted."

On institution ownership, there is no marked difference in the type or quality of implementation of inclusive education for undergraduate students with vision impairment. This depicts that both the federal and state owned tertiary institutions in Nigeria face various challenges of implementing inclusive education for vision impaired undergraduate students. Hence, the poor implementation demands going back to the drawing board, repositioning Nigerian affirmation as a signatory to the Jometian declaration of 1990 advocacy for "Education For All" whereby inclusivity is the bedrock.

Consequently, the type of implementation of inclusive education for the visually impaired undergraduate students in federal state tertiary institutions did not show any difference; that vision impaired students in federal owned institutions receive better inclusive education than those in state owned institutions. Invariably, the challenges of poor implementation of inclusive education cut across tertiary institutions and pose serious challenges to the education attainment of the vision impaired students. Dishearteningly, the researchers met some visually impaired undergraduate students lamenting their plight regarding the challenges they are experiencing as a result of poor implementation of inclusive education in their institution.

The analyses show that there is no significant difference between challenges of implementing inclusive education for male and female undergraduate tertiary education students. This implies that gender does not determine the type of inclusive education implemented in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. As such, the same challenges are experienced by all visually impaired students irrespective of their genetic make-up. By implication also, visually impaired students potentials are poorly developed given

the unfriendly, inadequate enabling environment of their institutions and poor implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria.

## 6. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn: Visually impaired undergraduate students in Nigeria tertiary institutions face various challenges in the course of their studies as a result of poor implementation of inclusive education. Generally, there is poor and inadequate implementation of inclusiveness in tertiary institutions for the vision impaired students due to dearth of learning facilities, educational provisions unqualified personnel to handle the needs of the vision impaired students and enabling environment for special education.

Implementation of inclusive education in order to ameliorate the challenges of the vision impaired students learning is an imperative. Therefore, for Nigeria to move at par with the global trend and framework enunciated by Vision 2020, Millennium Development Goal objectives, postulations of National Policy on Education amongst others, implementation of inclusive education must be brought to fore.

However, publishing relevant facts on different international and national documents devoid of proper implementation of inclusive education may tantamount to mere dissipation of energy. Therefore, giving the findings of this research, the challenges of implementation strongly bedevil the objectives of the global vision on inclusive education for the visually impaired undergraduates in Nigeria tertiary institutions.

Many policies promulgated for education of the visually undergraduate students in Nigeria are not implemented, thereby posing educational challenges for the vision impaired students which they are meant to solve. The policy documents act as benchmark upon which tertiary institutions should base their operations for implementing inclusive education of the visually impaired students, but this study showed negligence on part of the government, stakeholders especially school management administrators.

Analyzing the findings of this study, it is pertinent to understand that the challenges accrued from poor implementation of inclusive education for vision impaired students remain the bane of Nigerian developmental strides. Hence, the researchers call on all states of the federation to borrow a leaf from Lagos and Jigawa states who had started the journey of tackling the challenges of implementing inclusive education for the visually impaired students in their midst.

### 6.1 Recommendations

Sequel to the findings of this study, the under listed recommendations were made:

1. Stakeholders of education should demand from school administrators for annual appraisal reports hinged on the benchmark for tertiary education vision impairment on the extent of implementation of inclusive education in tertiary institutions.

2. Underfunding of education in Nigeria remains cankerworm swarming the nation's developmental strides. The need for reasonable increment of budgetary allocation to education is imminent. It is based on this that tertiary institution would be equipped with the needed facilities.
3. The practicality of implementing inclusive education to address the challenges of vision impaired students should be brought to fore through enhancing adequate educational provisions. This alone will enable the implementers of inclusive education to brace up with the task and ameliorate the challenges of the vision impaired students.
4. There is ability in disability, therefore routine training, enlightenment of both the lecturers and society at large must be adopted to equip the implementers of inclusive education and change the mindset of the people on the prevailing misconception about vision impairment and the import of inclusive education implementation.
5. A more pragmatic approach should be adopted by Nigerian government on a pragmatic policy implementation for the visually impaired students education rather than mere publishing of unrealizable blueprints referred to as educational policies.

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