Teachers' Inclusion of Students with Sensory Disability in Nigerian Classrooms: A Review

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Abstract
This study reviews the inclusion of students with sensory disability in Nigerian classrooms. It examines the challenges, strategies, and practical realities faced by educators in implementing inclusive education for learners with visual and hearing impairments. Despite supportive policies like Nigeria's National Policy on Education (2014) and international frameworks, the integration of students with sensory disability into regular classrooms remains limited due to factors such as inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teacher training, societal attitudes, and lack of appropriate teaching resources. The review highlights the importance of inclusive curriculum design, multi-sensory instructional approaches, differentiated assessments, and assistive technologies in enhancing the learning experiences of students with sensory impairments. The paper concludes by recommending stronger policy enforcement, targeted teacher training, provision of learning resources, and increased societal awareness. By focusing on teachers' roles and challenges, this review contributes to the ongoing discourse on inclusive education in Nigeria and provides practical insights for policy and practice.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Sensory Disability, Education, Regular Classroom, Hearing Impairment

Introduction
Sensory disability is a disorder that affects the ability of the human brain to process or interpret sensory information using the human sense organs: vision, taste, hearing, smell, or touch. A disability to any of these sense organs can cause an individual to lose sensation in one or several senses, leading to a unique way of perceiving and experiencing the world. In the classification of disability, sensory disability is recognized as a distinct category, as the disability may require significant support to fully participate in everyday living. The most common sensory disability is the sense of hearing and vision, which are non-functional for the ordinary purpose of life, posing specific challenges in classrooms, especially in Nigeria, where resources and specialized training might be limited. Abdullah (2021) opined that sensory disability refers to conditions that affect vision and hearing, leading to challenges in processing sensory information. Learners with such disabilities often require individualized teaching strategies and classroom modifications to ensure effective participation in educational activities.

Across the world, countries are working to advance their education structures to guarantee healthier learning outcomes for all students. The essence is to brand education more inclusive, to enable every child with disability or without a disability to benefit equally from schooling. Inclusive education means that children with diverse kinds of disabilities, whether mild or severe, learn along with their peers in the same classroom, instead of being placed in separate classrooms or schools. This tactic is grounded on the belief that all children have the right to learn together in a setting that supports their individual needs. It's not just about putting students with disabilities in regular classrooms, it also involves changing how teachers teach, how lessons are planned, and how schools are structured so that everyone can participate, learn meaningfully, and feel welcomed and supported.

UNESCO (2020) describes inclusive education as the process of responding to and addressing to diverse needs of all learners, children, youth, and adults through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing exclusion within education. Inclusion encompasses adjusting and adapting curriculum, school environments, teaching methods, and organizational structures to meet the needs of every learner, especially those

with disabilities, by increasing the participation level in school life and reducing any form of exclusion from the educational system. In Nigeria, the National Policy on Education (2014) supports inclusive education by encouraging schools to integrate students with special needs into regular classrooms whenever possible. These privileges are preserved in the rights of the child, addressed in the international declarations like Education for All (1990), Salamanca Framework for Action (2000), and the Equalization of Educational Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993). However, integrating this policy into practice has been challenging due to a lack of resources, limited infrastructure, and cultural beliefs. The essence of inclusive education is to reach out to students with diverse learning needs and improve their social and learning experiences in the regular classroom as inclusive education is considered an educational philosophy and practice that aims to improve a country's education system, which ensures learning and active participation of all students in the educational context (UNESCO, 2020). Jummai (2022), citing Staub and Peck, emphasized that inclusive education entails the full-time inclusion of students with disabilities of all severity levels in regular education classrooms as it seeks to provide equal learning opportunities for all students, regardless of their physical, sensory, or cognitive differences as it's a teaching approach that accommodates learners of all abilities in the same classroom environment.

Curriculum Considerations in an Inclusive Environment

A responsive curriculum is central to inclusive education. Inclusive curriculum design is all about making learning content and delivery accessible and engaging for every student, no matter their abilities or learning style, through the practice of practical strategies to create educational environments where all students feel valued and supported, and where everyone has a fair chance to excel. Pugach et al., (2020) opined that the important part of an inclusive curriculum is ensuring that the course content reflects a variety of perspectives and experiences, including deciding on instructional books, materials that represent different cultures, ethnicity, and languages. This singular act motivates and nurtures a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives, which develops a deeper appreciation for different ways of thinking and living. Real-world examples and ideas from multiple disciplines can also make lessons more engaging and rewarding (Mhlongo et al., 2024). Real-world examples and ideas helps students connect what they are learning to their own lives, interests, and communities, in turn developing motivation and curiosity. An inclusive curriculum integrates different teaching methods such as lectures, open-ended inquiries, group work, problem-solving activities, and hands-on projects to reach all types of learners (Hafeez, 2021). These active learning strategies involve every child and encourage collaboration, critical thinking and multiple means of assessment to accommodate students' preferences or needs, talents, knowledge, and skills. Standardized exams don't always show the full potentials of a student's abilities or knowledge, talent, skills (Castilla-Earls et al., 2020). Flexible assessment methods like performance tasks, portfolios, or creative projects ensure students demonstrate their knowledge, especially for students who might not do well on timed tests. Teachers should give students clear and supportive feedback because it helps them track their progress, build confidence, and set personal goals (Addy et al., 2024).

According to Olateju et al., (2024), creating an inclusive environment is also important as an inclusive curriculum. Teachers can foster a sense of belonging by making the classroom a welcoming space for everyone and setting clear expectations, encouraging positive social interactions, and showing inclusive attitudes through their own behaviour (Akinrinola et al., 2024). When students feel safe and respected, they're more likely to participate fully and take risks in their learning.

Characteristics of Sensory Disability

Sensory disability and characteristics are defined as follows:

Visual Impairment

Decrease or severe reduction in vision that cannot be corrected with standard glasses or contact lenses, which reduces an individual's ability to function at specific or all tasks that involve reading standard print, interpreting visual cues, and navigating the classroom. Learners with visual impairments often require braille materials, magnification devices, or audio support tools. A visual impairment results when an eye condition affects the visual functioning of one or more of a person's vision. (WHO, 2019).

According to Besser Eye Care Team (2023), the following are characteristics of children with visual impairment:

- Objects appear heavy or out of focus.
- Difficulty adjusting to low or dim light.
- The patient has difficulty seeing objects from near or close vision.
- Bumping into objects.
- Moving hesitantly or hugging the walls.
- Touching or grabbing objects uncertainly.
- Squinting or tilting their head to see things.

- Having trouble distinguishing faces.

Hearing Impairment

The word hearing impairment (HI) is an umbrella concept that embraces other types of hearing impairment, such as hard of hearing (loss of hearing), hearing loss (absence of sounds), deafness, etc. This is the reduction in hearing sensitivity at any level, which affects learners' ability to integrate spoken language, peer interactions, and classroom instructions. This ranges from mild hearing loss to complete deafness. According to Ubani (2023), hearing impairment is a comprehensive concept encompassing all disorders affecting the auditory system. Hearing impairment is a generic term covering various types and degrees of hearing loss, emphasizing the necessity for specialized assistance in educational development. The following are characteristics of children with hearing impairment:

- Attentively looking at the face or mouth of the speaker during conversations, probably to read the lips of speaker.
- Speaking very loudly or very low, always, because they lack auditory feedback
- Turning the ear to face the speaker, indicating the presence of a better ear.
- Having speech or language problems.
- Demand for repetition of words.

The Nigerian Education System

Implementation of inclusion in Nigeria remains inconsistent, as many schools are still without the necessary infrastructure, trained personnel, and assistive devices to support learners with sensory disabilities, even though policies like the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014) advocate for inclusive education.The inclusion of students with disability remains largely aspirational in Nigeria, where a legal and policy foundation for inclusive education is laid down but not fully integrated. Poor teacher preparation, negative social attitudes, and a lack of appropriate infrastructure continue to hinder the full implementation of inclusive policy. Regardless of these policies, implementation has been fragmented and inconsistent due to a lack of sufficient funding, poor monitoring systems, and political will (Enyiazu, 2022). However, with sustained investment, policy enforcement, and stakeholder engagement, including parents, teachers, and students, Nigeria has the potential to fully integrate a supportive, inclusive educational system.

Contributing factors to the integration of inclusive education

1. **Funding, Infrastructure and Resources:** Nigeria's school infrastructure does not generally support the needs of learners with sensory disability as most classrooms due to no funding have scarcity of equipment or tools such as assistive listening devices, mobility aids, visual aids, braille books, special educators, interpreters, and resource centers within inclusive schools. Schools are naturally overloaded, making individualized attention difficult for both teachers and children (Oladipo, 2020).

2. **Teacher preparation and training gaps**: The efficacious inclusion of students with sensory disability is highly dependent on teacher preparedness. Unfortunately, most Nigerian teachers are not trained to teach students with sensory needs, as only a few teachers possess competencies in braille literacy or sign language. Uko (2018) revealed that most teachers in Nigeria feel incompetent to handle students with sensory disability and would prefer that these learners be taught in special schools. Even where inclusive policies exist, they often fail to translate into classroom-level practices without sustained teacher capacity-building. This lack of training results in:

    - Poor lesson adaptation,
    - Ineffective classroom communication,
    - Incapability to use assistive technologies like hearing aids, braille or technologies,
    - Lack of differentiated instruction strategies.

3. **Societal Attitude:** This comprises the family, teachers, peers, and people's attitudes toward children with disabilities. Some families hide children with disabilities or refuse to enroll them in school. Learners often face bullying and isolation in classrooms and society. Teachers may hold negative or pity-based attitudes toward students with disabilities, affecting the quality of instruction delivered. The society portrays behaviour that affects the child's development. Stigmatization and lack of public awareness remain major obstacles to inclusive education in Nigeria.

4. **Teaching Strategies:** Use of assistive devices (e.g., magnifiers, braille, sign language, visual aids, etc). Emphasis on multi sensory teaching approaches, peer tutoring, and differentiated instruction. especially visual aids for hearing-impaired and auditory cues for visually impaired students are commonly employed strategies. Teachers who attempt to support students with sensory disability in inclusive settings rely on adaptive teaching strategies, although these are often improvised due to a lack of formal training. However, the effectiveness of these strategies is often limited by:

    - Overcrowded classrooms

- Lack of support staff (e.g., special educators, sign language interpreters),
- Inadequate learning materials tailored to students' needs, such as hearing aids, braille books, magnification devices, etc.

Strategies of Teaching Children with Sensory Disability

The physical and virtual teaching space significantly helps integrate learning in students with sensory disabilities to engage with the curriculum. A few important considerations include:

Visual Impairment

1. Teachers should mix palpable methods to convey written content such as Braille, large print or high-contrast visual aid materials to assist students with partial vision. Additionally, using audio descriptions for visual elements in lessons helps students understand the content more fully (Nephat and Martin, 2021).
2. Teachers ought to ensure that students effortlessly navigate the classroom by keeping passageways clear, and using palpable markers to enhance accessibility to the physical setting of the classroom and school.
3. Screen readers that allow students to access text-based data through speech amalgamation, audiobooks can replace traditional textbooks, and braille e-books, and electronic note-takers can be used for note-taking.

Hearing Impairment

1. The use of visual cues, such as captions, written instructions, and gestures, to reinforce spoken language by teachers should be encouraged, thus allowing students to use assistive technologies like hearing aids or FM systems which make a significant difference. Sign language interpreters may be needed to facilitate communication in some cases (Ekpete, 2024).
2. Integration of classroom seating arrangements that allow students to see the lip movements, facial expressions, and sign language of teachers and interpreters for advantageous learning.
3. Captioning software, video tutorials with sign language interpretation, and visual feedback systems that assist students with hearing impairments in engaging with lesson content should be available. Devices such as cochlear implants or hearing aids can be integrated into the classroom for better reception of sound. Provision of digital tools that deliver interactive learning, such as touchscreens, can be used to engage students irrespective of their disability and ability by catering to both auditory and tactile senses (Ekpete, 2024). Ekpete &Diodemise (2023) opined that information and communication technology (ICT) ought to be integrated into teaching students with special needs as it holds an immersive potential to elevate outcomes for students with diverse educational requirements or needs

Recommendations

1. Incorporating a mandatory special needs education training programme that offers continuous professional development on inclusive teaching and handling of students with special needs into teachers' curricula.
2. Schools should be equipped with inclusive tools such as tactile materials, braille textbooks, hearing aids, and appropriate ICT resources. The integration of interpreters, special educators, and sign language instructors in inclusive schools should be made a necessity.
3. Policy support and funding strengthen the enforcement of inclusive education policies. Stakeholders such as Federal and State Governments, NGO's, School administrators, equipped/meaningful citizens, and parents should allocate dedicated funding for inclusive education resources and teacher support.
4. School-wide, community, and nation-wide sensitization programs will reduce stigma and encourage peer support and promote collaboration between inclusive schools, special educators, and the community.

Conclusion

The successful inclusion of students with sensory disability in Nigerian classrooms depends significantly on the readiness and support of teachers. Although many challenges exist, ranging from training gaps to infrastructure deficits practical, however, practical interventions can empower teachers to deliver quality education for all. A true culture of inclusion begins in the classroom, and teachers must be central to that change. sensory disability as a major learning barrier requiring accommodations, and the teaching perspective as a linchpin for successful inclusion, allows us to frame the issue accurately. Teachers are central to the success of inclusive education in Nigeria as their attitudes, competencies, and challenges directly influence the learning experiences of students with sensory disability. While many teachers express a willingness to include, this intent is often undermined by inadequate training, poor infrastructure, and lack of support. As such, any meaningful inclusive education reform must prioritize teacher empowerment through professional development, policy support and capacity building.

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