

# Bridging policy and practice: Evaluating inclusive education for children with disabilities in Nasarawa State, Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

This article critically examines inclusive education practices for children with disabilities in Nasarawa State, Nigeria, highlighting the persistent gap between national policies and on-the-ground implementation. Despite Nigeria's ratification of global frameworks like the Salamanca Statement and Sustainable Development Goal 4, inclusive education remains fragmented at the state level. Drawing on the *Nigerian Disability Act (2018)* and the *National Policy on Inclusive Education (2017)*, this policy-focused analysis evaluates how these instruments are applied in three selected schools based on their documented engagement with inclusive practices. Using a qualitative, policy-focused approach, the study synthesizes insights from policy documents, educational reports, and anecdotal stakeholder perspectives, including students with disabilities, parents, teachers, and community leaders. While NGO support, community-based initiatives, and faith-led programs have achieved some progress, the article identifies recurring barriers, including poor infrastructure, limited teacher training, weak policy enforcement, unreliable data, and societal stigma. The article concludes with strategic recommendations aimed at bridging policy and practice through increased budgetary allocation, targeted teacher training, robust monitoring systems, and active community engagement. Ultimately, it argues for a coordinated, multi-sectoral approach to create an inclusive education system that guarantees equitable learning opportunities for all children, regardless of ability. By addressing these systemic barriers, Nasarawa State can position itself as a model for inclusive education reform across Northern Nigeria and beyond. The study also acknowledges its reliance on secondary data as a limitation, recommending future empirical research with mixed methods.

**Keywords:** Inclusive education, children with disabilities, policy implementation, educational reform, teacher training, sociocultural barriers, Nasarawa State.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Overview of inclusive education in Nigeria

Inclusive education is increasingly recognized in Nigeria as essential to achieving equitable and quality education, particularly for marginalised groups such as children with disabilities. The concept is grounded in global frameworks like the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), which affirms the right of every child, regardless of disability, gender, ethnicity, or socio-economic

background, to learn within mainstream educational settings.

In response, Nigeria has developed key legislative and policy instruments. The Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018, mandates equal access to education and prohibits discrimination based on disability. Complementing this is the National Policy on Inclusive Education (2017; revised in 2021), which promotes the integration of learners with special needs

through inclusive curricula, infrastructure, and teacher training (Federal Ministry of Education [FME], 2021).

Despite these frameworks, implementation remains inconsistent and fragmented across states. Recent studies (Mbaba et al., 2024; Inclusive Futures, 2024) reveal persistent gaps in school accessibility, low teacher preparedness, and poor data tracking on learners with disabilities. For instance, according to the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC, 2024), fewer than 25% of public schools have basic inclusive infrastructure like ramps or accessible toilets.

Earlier analyses (Ajuwon, 2008; Omede and Bakare, 2014) had already identified some of these challenges, but recent data suggest that progress remains slow. Emerging research (Jerry, 2024; Orlunga and Alikor, 2023) emphasizes the need for stronger policy enforcement and localized strategies that address cultural and socio-economic barriers.

While Nigeria has made legislative strides toward inclusive education, there is a persistent disconnect between policy intent and school-level implementation. This study builds on the evolving discourse by critically examining how national inclusive education frameworks are interpreted and applied in Nasarawa State, an area that typifies the broader national challenges. The aim is to identify practical gaps and highlight pathways for reform through a localized, policy-oriented lens.

### **Brief on the educational situation in Nasarawa State**

Nasarawa State, situated in North-Central Nigeria, reflects many of the broader national challenges affecting inclusive education. While the state has made efforts to expand access to basic education through the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme, the quality and inclusiveness of this provision remain inadequate, especially for children with disabilities. Most public schools lack the necessary infrastructure, such as ramps, specialized learning materials, or assistive technologies, to support inclusive learning environments.

Moreover, there is a significant shortage of trained special education teachers and allied support staff across the state's schools. In many rural communities, children with disabilities are either kept at home due to stigma or enrolled in schools where their needs are unmet, leading to frequent dropouts and poor learning outcomes (Usman, 2020). The few special schools available are insufficient in number and accessibility, leaving many children excluded from formal education.

### **Importance of addressing the needs of children with disabilities**

Addressing the educational needs of children with disabilities is both a moral and developmental imperative. Exclusion from education not only violates their fundamental human rights but also entrenches cycles of poverty and marginalisation (UNESCO, 2020). Inclusive

education fosters individual empowerment, strengthens social cohesion, and contributes to national development by enabling every child to participate fully in society.

In the context of Nasarawa State, investing in inclusive education is particularly critical given the socio-economic vulnerabilities and prevailing cultural misconceptions surrounding disability. An inclusive approach ensures that children with disabilities are not only enrolled in school but also meaningfully engaged, supported, and respected. This aligns with Nigeria's commitment to Sustainable Development Goal 4, which calls for inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, 2015).

### **Problem statement**

Despite Nigeria's growing commitment to inclusive education, as seen in policy documents such as the *National Policy on Inclusive Education* (Federal Ministry of Education [FME], 2017) and the *Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act* (2018), the practical realities for children with disabilities in mainstream schools, especially in states like Nasarawa, remain dire. A significant gap exists between policy formulation and its actual implementation. Many schools lack essential infrastructure, including ramps, accessible classrooms, and assistive technologies, hindering the participation of children with disabilities (Okoye, 2024). In addition, the majority of teachers have little or no training in special needs education, leaving them ill-equipped to deliver inclusive pedagogies or adapt curricula to accommodate diverse learners (Mbaba et al., 2024). Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing disparities, disrupting educational access and highlighting the vulnerabilities of children with disabilities in the region (Eze et al., 2021).

The absence of consistent policy enforcement mechanisms further compounds these challenges. While some public schools attempt partial inclusion, these efforts are often fragmented, underfunded, and unsustainable. Although policies exist on paper, their implementation is often inconsistent, leading to the marginalisation of children with disabilities within mainstream educational settings (Inclusive Futures, 2024). Consequently, children with disabilities are frequently marginalised within the school system, physically present but socially excluded or academically unsupported (Usman, 2020). Many drop out altogether, resulting in a cycle of educational exclusion, economic disempowerment, and social invisibility.

### **Purpose of the article**

This article seeks to critically evaluate the current practices of inclusive education for children with disabilities in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. By examining how schools and educators implement or fail to implement inclusive principles, the study aims to provide

a nuanced understanding of both the progress made and the persistent gaps in delivering equitable education.

The primary objectives are:

- To assess the extent to which inclusive education policies are being translated into actionable practices in public and private schools within Nasarawa State.
- To identify successful strategies, innovations, or community-driven models that enhance educational access and quality for children with disabilities.
- To highlight specific areas that require urgent policy attention, structural investment, or teacher capacity development.

In doing so, this article contributes to the broader discourse on educational equity and aims to support evidence-based policymaking for sustainable, inclusive education reform.

### Scope and methodology

The geographical focus of this article is Nasarawa State, located in North-Central Nigeria. The state is characterised by a mix of urban and rural communities, offering a useful case for understanding how inclusive education is implemented across different socio-economic and infrastructural contexts.

This study employs a conceptual and policy-oriented methodology, relying on a qualitative analysis of secondary sources. Key documents included Nigeria's National Policy on Inclusive Education (2017, 2021 revision), the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act (2018), educational statistics from UBEC, and reports from NGOs and multilateral institutions.

The analysis utilised content analysis techniques to extract themes related to infrastructure, teacher capacity, policy enforcement, and community attitudes. Sources were selected based on relevance, publication date, and applicability to the Nasarawa State context. Inclusion criteria emphasised credible publications from government, peer-reviewed journals, and educational development organisations.

While primary data collection was not undertaken, the study maintains ethical sensitivity by respecting the confidentiality, integrity, and cultural sensitivity of stakeholders when interpreting secondary accounts. Future research will incorporate interviews and field observations to provide deeper insight into the lived experiences of children with disabilities and their educators.

In future empirical iterations, potential methods for data collection could include:

**Semi-structured interviews** with school administrators, teachers, parents, and students with disabilities.

**Classroom observations** to assess the inclusivity of teaching practices and learning environments.

**Document review** of school records, policy

implementation reports, and local education authority guidelines.

These methods, when applied, would provide a rich, grounded understanding of the lived experiences of children with disabilities in Nasarawa's school system and the institutional responses to their needs.

## UNDERSTANDING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

### Definition and principles

Inclusive education is an educational approach that seeks to address the diverse learning needs of all students by ensuring equitable access to quality education within mainstream settings. It emphasises the removal of barriers to learning and participation, fostering an environment where every learner, regardless of ability or background, is valued and supported.

The foundational principles of inclusive education are rooted in global frameworks such as the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), which advocates for the inclusion of all children in regular schools, and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (United Nations, 2015). These frameworks underscore the importance of accommodating all learners, particularly those who are marginalised or have disabilities, within the general education system.

In the Nigerian context, inclusive education encompasses strategies to integrate learners with disabilities into mainstream classrooms, promoting equal opportunities and participation. This approach aligns with global best practices and reflects a commitment to upholding the rights of all children to education (Federal Ministry of Education [FME], 2021).

### Legal and policy framework in Nigeria

#### *Nigerian Disability Act (2018)*

The *Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act*, enacted in 2018, serves as a significant legislative milestone in Nigeria's journey toward inclusivity. This Act prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities and mandates equal access to education, employment, and public services. Specifically, it requires educational institutions to provide necessary accommodations and support services to facilitate the learning of students with disabilities (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2018).

#### *National policy on inclusive education*

In 2021, the Federal Ministry of Education launched the

revised *National Policy on Inclusive Education*, aiming to operationalise inclusive practices across all levels of the Nigerian education system. This policy outlines strategic objectives, including the development of inclusive curricula, teacher training programs, and the provision of assistive technologies. It emphasises the need for collaborative efforts among stakeholders to create an enabling environment for inclusive education (FME, 2021).

### **State-level policy implementation in Nasarawa**

While national policies provide a framework for inclusive education, their implementation at the state level varies. In Nasarawa State, efforts have been made to align with national directives. For instance, the state government has collaborated with the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) to improve access to quality education, including initiatives aimed at enhancing inclusivity (Voice of Nigeria, 2025).

However, challenges persist in fully actualising inclusive education in Nasarawa. A study by Abdulkadir (2023) highlights issues such as inadequate infrastructure, limited teacher training in special education, and insufficient funding as barriers to effective implementation. These challenges underscore the need for sustained commitment and resource allocation to ensure that inclusive education policies translate into tangible outcomes at the grassroots level.

## **CURRENT STATE OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN NASARAWA STATE**

### **Overview of educational institutions**

Nasarawa State has made efforts to promote inclusive education by integrating children with disabilities into mainstream schools. Notably, institutions such as *Bakin Ado Government Secondary School in Ado* Community and *Skylimit International School* in Mararaba have been recognised for their inclusive practices. These schools have implemented strategies to accommodate students with diverse learning needs, including those with disabilities.

Despite these efforts, the availability of special schools remains limited compared to mainstream schools. According to the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), as of 2020, there were 1,234 public and private basic education schools in Nasarawa State. However, only a fraction of these schools have the necessary facilities and trained personnel to effectively support inclusive education.

### **Infrastructure and learning environment**

The physical infrastructure of many schools in Nasarawa State poses significant challenges to inclusive education.

A study by Jerry (2024) highlighted that numerous schools lack essential facilities such as ramps, accessible toilets, and appropriate classroom layouts to accommodate students with physical disabilities. Furthermore, the availability of assistive technologies and learning materials tailored for students with disabilities is scarce, limiting their ability to fully participate in classroom activities.

### **Teacher capacity and training**

Teacher preparedness is a critical component of successful inclusive education. In Nasarawa State, many teachers have not received adequate training in special needs education. Mbaba et al. (2024) emphasized the need for continuous professional development programs to equip teachers with the skills necessary to support diverse learners. Additionally, the shortage of special education teachers and aides further hampers the effective implementation of inclusive practices in schools.

### **Curriculum and pedagogy**

Adapting the curriculum to meet the needs of all learners is essential for inclusive education. However, in Nasarawa State, the standard curriculum often lacks flexibility, making it challenging to accommodate students with varying abilities. Differentiated instruction techniques, which involve tailoring teaching methods to individual learning styles, are not widely practiced. This gap underscores the need for curriculum reforms and teacher training to promote inclusive pedagogical approaches.

## **VOICES FROM THE FIELD: LIVED EXPERIENCES**

Understanding the lived experiences of stakeholders in inclusive education provides invaluable insights into the practical realities of implementing inclusive policies. In Nasarawa State, the perspectives of children with disabilities, their parents and caregivers, as well as teachers and school administrators, shed light on both the challenges and successes of inclusive education initiatives.

### **Children with disabilities**

#### ***Daily challenges and coping mechanisms***

Children with disabilities in Nasarawa State encounter numerous obstacles in their educational journey. A study by Jerry (2024) highlighted that school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted inclusive education services, particularly for children with hearing impairments. Remote learning platforms lacked

accommodations such as sign language interpreters, hindering effective engagement. Additionally, the absence of face-to-face interactions affected their social development.

Despite these challenges, many children adopt coping mechanisms to navigate their educational environments. Peer support emerges as a critical factor, with classmates often assisting in note-taking or clarifying instructions. Such informal support systems play a vital role in fostering an inclusive atmosphere within classrooms.

### ***Participation in class and social activities***

The extent of participation in academic and extracurricular activities varies among children with disabilities. While some schools have made strides in promoting inclusivity, others lag due to infrastructural and attitudinal barriers. For instance, the lack of accessible facilities and specialized equipment limits the involvement of students with physical disabilities in sports and other physical activities. Moreover, societal stigma and misconceptions about disabilities can lead to the marginalisation of these students, affecting their self-esteem and willingness to participate.

### **Parents and caregivers**

#### ***Perspectives on school access and support***

Parents and caregivers play a pivotal role in advocating for and supporting inclusive education. However, many express concerns about the adequacy of resources and support systems in schools. A study by Adamu (2023) revealed that parents often perceive a lack of specialised training among teachers and insufficient infrastructural accommodations as significant barriers to effective inclusion. These challenges compel some parents to seek alternative educational arrangements, including specialised institutions or homeschooling.

Furthermore, financial constraints exacerbate the difficulties faced by families. The cost of assistive devices, transportation, and additional support services can be prohibitive, particularly for low-income households. This economic burden underscores the need for government interventions and subsidies to alleviate the financial strain on families pursuing inclusive education for their children.

### **Teachers and school administrators**

#### ***Practical challenges in implementing inclusive education***

Educators and administrators are at the forefront of implementing inclusive education policies. However, they often grapple with practical challenges that hinder

effective execution. Mbaba et al. (2024) identified a shortage of trained special education teachers, large class sizes, and limited access to teaching aids as significant impediments. These factors contribute to the difficulty in addressing the diverse needs of students within a single classroom setting.

Moreover, the lack of continuous professional development opportunities limits teachers' ability to adopt innovative and inclusive teaching methodologies. Without adequate training and resources, educators may struggle to create an environment that accommodates all learners effectively.

### **Success stories and resistance**

The analysis reveals a significant gap between inclusive education policy and practice in Nasarawa State. While national laws mandate inclusion, implementation varies widely. Approximately 78% of surveyed public schools in the 2020 UBEC report lacked ramps, accessible toilets, or assistive devices. Less than 12% of teachers had any formal training in inclusive pedagogy. These structural gaps are more pronounced in rural areas.

Despite the challenges, there are notable success stories that exemplify the potential of inclusive education when adequately supported. For instance, some private and public schools show promise by integrating children with disabilities and adopting peer support programs. However, these successes are not widespread or scaled. For example, Green Wood Isle Academy in Nasarawa reported a 30% increase in enrollment of children with disabilities following community sensitization programs and infrastructural upgrades.

Resource shortages and cultural stigmas remain key barriers. Teachers reported large class sizes (often exceeding 60 pupils) and a lack of instructional aids. Parents, especially in rural communities, expressed concerns about the social acceptance of their children in schools, leading to low enrollment. These challenges suggest a need for state-wide teacher training, infrastructure upgrades, and community awareness campaigns.

However, resistance to inclusive education persists in some quarters, often stemming from deeply ingrained societal attitudes and misconceptions about disabilities. Some educators and parents harbor doubts about the feasibility of inclusive education, fearing that it may compromise academic standards or require disproportionate resources. Addressing these concerns necessitates comprehensive awareness campaigns and stakeholder engagement to foster a more inclusive mindset.

### **Successful strategies and good practices**

Despite the challenges facing inclusive education in Nasarawa State, several successful strategies and practices have been implemented by various

stakeholders, including communities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), faith-based organisations, educators, and governmental bodies.

### ***Community and NGO involvement***

Community engagement and NGO participation have been pivotal in promoting inclusive education. Organisations such as The Irede Foundation have initiated programmes like the Limitless Project, aiming to sensitise teachers, parents, and communities about inclusive education practices. This project seeks to reach over 1,000 children with disabilities in public schools across Nigeria, including regions like Nasarawa State (The Irede Foundation, 2022).

Faith-based organisations have also contributed significantly. For instance, Winners Chapel and Christ Embassy have established special education units within their educational institutions, providing tailored learning environments for children with disabilities. These initiatives not only offer academic support but also foster social inclusion within the community.

### ***Inclusive classroom practices***

Educators in Nasarawa State have adopted various inclusive classroom practices to accommodate diverse learning needs. Peer support programs have been implemented, where students assist their peers with disabilities in academic tasks, promoting a collaborative learning environment (UNESCO, 2021).

Additionally, the use of inclusive teaching aids and locally made adaptations has been encouraged. Teachers utilize materials such as tactile learning tools and visual aids to enhance comprehension for students with different learning abilities. These resources are often developed using locally available materials, making them cost-effective and culturally relevant (Mbaba et al., 2024).

### ***Teacher development initiatives***

Continuous professional development for teachers is crucial for the successful implementation of inclusive education. In Nasarawa State, training workshops and seminars have been organized to equip educators with the necessary skills and knowledge. For example, the Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) has conducted Mandatory Continuing Professional Development Programs (MCPDP) focusing on inclusive teaching strategies (TRCN, 2023).

These training sessions cover topics such as differentiated instruction, classroom management for diverse learners, and the use of assistive technologies. Such initiatives have led to improved teacher preparedness and confidence in handling inclusive classrooms.

## **GAPS AND AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT**

Despite the commendable strides made towards inclusive education in Nasarawa State, several critical gaps hinder its effective implementation. These challenges span policy execution, resource allocation, sociocultural perceptions, and data management.

### ***Policy implementation gaps***

While Nigeria has established comprehensive policies promoting inclusive education, such as the Revised National Policy on Inclusive Education (2023), a significant disconnect exists between national directives and local execution. In Nasarawa State, the translation of these policies into actionable programs remains limited. Factors contributing to this gap include inadequate dissemination of policy information, lack of localised implementation strategies, and insufficient monitoring mechanisms (Orlunga and Alikor, 2023).

### ***Resource constraints***

The successful implementation of inclusive education is heavily reliant on the availability of resources. In Nasarawa State, schools often face shortages of essential teaching aids, assistive technologies, and adequately trained personnel. A study by Mbaba et al. (2024) highlighted that many secondary schools lack specialized materials necessary for accommodating students with disabilities. Furthermore, budgetary allocations for inclusive education are often insufficient, leading to compromised service delivery (Mbaba et al., 2024).

### ***Sociocultural barriers***

Sociocultural perceptions significantly influence the acceptance and effectiveness of inclusive education. In many communities within Nasarawa State, stigma and misconceptions about disabilities persist, leading to the marginalisation of children with special needs. These attitudes not only discourage parents from enrolling their children in schools but also affect the self-esteem and participation of the students themselves. Udeobi (2024) emphasizes that community sensitization is crucial in altering these perceptions and fostering a more inclusive environment.

Building on earlier research by James et al. (2025), children with disabilities in Nasarawa State face what has been described as "triple marginalisation," where disability intersects with poverty and climate vulnerability to intensify educational exclusion. Beyond economic hardship and the absence of learning resources, climate-related disruptions such as flooding and prolonged heatwaves damage school infrastructure and contribute to irregular attendance. These environmental and socio-

economic pressures compound existing systemic barriers, including the shortage of assistive devices, limited teacher training in special needs education, and entrenched social stigma (James, Mariam, Esor and Amaefule, 2025). Addressing inclusive education in this context, therefore, demands multi-sectoral strategies that integrate poverty reduction, climate adaptation, and disability rights into state-level education planning.

### **Data deficiency**

Accurate data is essential for planning, implementing, and monitoring inclusive education programs. However, Nasarawa State faces challenges in collecting and managing data on children with disabilities. The absence of reliable statistics hampers the ability to identify needs, allocate resources effectively, and measure progress. Initiatives like the piloting of the Child Functioning Module in Nigerian schools aim to address this gap, but widespread adoption and consistent data collection practices are still lacking (UKFIET, 2023).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Policy and governance**

#### ***Strengthen enforcement of inclusive education policies***

To bridge the gap between policy formulation and implementation, it is imperative to establish robust enforcement mechanisms. This includes:

**Legislative backing:** Ensuring that inclusive education policies are enshrined in state laws to provide a legal framework for enforcement.

**Monitoring bodies:** Establishing dedicated units within the Ministry of Education to oversee the adherence to inclusive education mandates at all school levels.

**Stakeholder engagement:** Involving stakeholders, including NGOs and community leaders, in monitoring and reporting non-compliance.

Such measures will ensure that inclusive education moves beyond policy documents into tangible actions within schools.

#### ***Allocate budget specifically for inclusive education***

Adequate funding is crucial for the successful implementation of inclusive education. Recommendations include:

**Dedicated budget lines:** Allocating specific funds for inclusive education within the state's education budget to ensure resources are available for necessary accommodations and support services.

**Transparent utilization:** Implementing transparent financial management systems to track the utilization of funds allocated for inclusive education.

**Capacity building:** Investing in training for financial planners and school administrators on inclusive budgeting practices.

These financial strategies will provide the necessary resources to support inclusive education initiatives effectively.

### **Teacher training and recruitment**

#### ***Introduce mandatory training on inclusive education for all teachers***

Teachers play a pivotal role in the success of inclusive education. To equip them with the necessary skills:

**Pre-service training:** Incorporating inclusive education modules into teacher education curricula to prepare future educators.

**In-service workshops:** Organising regular professional development workshops focusing on inclusive teaching strategies and classroom management.

**Collaborative learning:** Encouraging peer learning and sharing of best practices among teachers to foster a community of inclusive educators.

These training initiatives will enhance teachers' competencies in managing diverse classrooms effectively.

#### ***Recruit special education professionals***

To address the shortage of specialized personnel:

**Targeted recruitment:** Implementing recruitment drives aimed at attracting qualified special education professionals to work in inclusive settings.

**Incentive programs:** Offering incentives such as housing allowances, professional development opportunities, and recognition programs to retain special education staff.

**Collaborations:** Partnering with universities and training institutions to create pathways for graduates in special education to enter the teaching workforce.

These measures will ensure that schools have access to the expertise required to support students with diverse needs.

### **Community engagement**

#### ***Sensitise communities about disability rights***

Community perceptions significantly impact the success

of inclusive education. To foster positive attitudes:

**Awareness campaigns:** Conducting community-based campaigns to educate the public about the rights of individuals with disabilities and the importance of inclusive education.

**Media engagement:** Utilising local media platforms to disseminate information and success stories related to inclusive education.

**Cultural integration:** Incorporating messages about inclusion into cultural and religious events to reach a broader audience.

These initiatives will help in reducing stigma and promoting acceptance within communities.

### ***Encourage parental and community involvement in school management***

Active participation of parents and community members can enhance the implementation of inclusive education. Strategies include:

**School committees:** Establishing inclusive school management committees that involve parents, especially those of children with disabilities, in decision-making processes.

**Volunteer programs:** Creating opportunities for community members to volunteer in schools, providing support and fostering a sense of ownership.

**Feedback mechanisms:** Implementing systems for parents and community members to provide feedback on inclusive practices and suggest improvements.

These approaches will build stronger school-community relationships and support inclusive education efforts.

### **Monitoring and evaluation**

#### ***Establish clear metrics to assess inclusion in schools***

To measure the effectiveness of inclusive education initiatives:

**Develop indicators:** Creating specific, measurable indicators to assess various aspects of inclusion, such as enrollment rates of students with disabilities, accessibility of facilities, and teacher preparedness.

**Regular assessments:** Conducting periodic evaluations to monitor progress and identify areas needing improvement.

**Data management systems:** Implementing robust data collection and management systems to track and analyse information related to inclusive education.

These evaluation mechanisms will provide insights into the successes and challenges of inclusive education,

guiding future interventions.

Implementing these recommendations requires a collaborative effort among government agencies, educational institutions, communities, and other stakeholders. By addressing policy enforcement, resource allocation, teacher preparedness, community involvement, and monitoring processes, Nasarawa State can make significant strides toward achieving effective, inclusive education for all learners.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **Recap of key findings**

This article has critically examined the state of inclusive education in Nasarawa State, focusing on the lived experiences of children with disabilities, the effectiveness of current practices, and the broader institutional and socio-cultural contexts. While there have been commendable efforts by certain schools such as Bakin Ado Government Secondary School, Skylimit Int'l School, Green Wood Isle Academy and contributions from NGOs and faith-based organisations, the educational system remains fraught with substantial gaps.

The article revealed some strengths, including emerging models of peer-support programs, the growing involvement of NGOs, and isolated examples of adaptive teaching strategies and community-driven inclusion initiatives. However, these pockets of success are undermined by a lack of consistent policy enforcement, chronic underfunding, limited teacher training, inaccessible infrastructure, and persistent sociocultural stigma surrounding disability. Furthermore, the absence of comprehensive and up-to-date data on children with disabilities continues to hinder targeted interventions and policy development.

### **Recommendations and call to action**

Advancing inclusive education in Nasarawa State requires coordinated, multi-sectoral action involving government, schools, civil society, and local communities. The following steps are recommended:

- **Mandatory teacher training** – The Nasarawa State Ministry of Education should require all teacher colleges to integrate inclusive education training into their curricula by 2026.
- **Infrastructure investment** – Local governments should allocate at least 10% of school infrastructure budgets to accessibility improvements, ensuring compliance by 2027.
- **Capacity building and pedagogy reform** – Schools should host peer mentoring sessions and inclusive pedagogy workshops on a semi-annual basis to strengthen teaching practices.
- **Community engagement** – NGOs, faith-based organisations, and media outlets should lead quarterly

campaigns to reduce stigma and foster inclusive attitudes.

In parallel, the state government must operationalise and enforce the provisions of the National Policy on Inclusive Education (2017) and the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act (2018) at both state and local levels. Schools must cultivate environments that celebrate diversity and ensure equal learning opportunities, while NGOs and faith-based organisations continue bridging service gaps.

Equally critical is the active participation of parents, caregivers, and community leaders, whose attitudes can either reinforce exclusion or catalyse change. Building the capacity of both mainstream and special educators should be prioritised as a core element of education reform, ensuring sustainable, systemic transformation for all learners, regardless of ability.

### Limitations

This study is based solely on secondary sources, which limits empirical verification. The absence of field interviews or direct classroom observation restricts the depth of lived experience analysis. Future research should adopt a mixed-methods approach, including qualitative interviews and quantitative assessments of school performance indicators.

### Vision for the future

The vision moving forward is clear: an educational system in Nasarawa State and indeed across Nigeria where no child is left behind, regardless of their physical, intellectual, or sensory abilities. This means classrooms where differentiated instruction is not a special provision but the norm; communities where children with disabilities are celebrated rather than marginalised; and systems where data, monitoring, and accountability drive continuous improvement.

By embracing inclusive education not as an optional ideal but as a fundamental human right and developmental necessity, Nasarawa State has the opportunity to become a model for educational equity in Northern Nigeria. Through committed action and sustained collaboration among stakeholders, we can ensure that every child, regardless of ability, has access to a quality education that empowers them to thrive.

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