

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: ENSURING EQUAL SKILLS OPPORTUNITIES  
FOR ALL LEARNERS**

**BALAMI DANIEL IBRAHIM**

College of Postgraduate Studies,  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State  
[db.ibrahim@unizik.edu.ng](mailto:db.ibrahim@unizik.edu.ng)

**ISHAYA SUNDAY SHOK**

Department of Special Education,  
Federal University of Education, Zaria, Kaduna State  
[sundeisha@gmail.com](mailto:sundeisha@gmail.com)

**Isa Umaru**

Department of Educational Management and Policy.  
E-mail: [u.isa@unizik.edu.ng](mailto:u.isa@unizik.edu.ng)

**Abstract**

Inclusive education has emerged as a transformative approach to ensuring that all learners, regardless of their diverse backgrounds, abilities and needs, have equal access to quality education and skills development opportunities. This paper explores Inclusive Education as a way of ensuring equal skill opportunities for all learners, examining key dimensions critical to fostering a just and equitable educational landscape. Inclusive education is anchored on the principle that all learners, including those with disabilities, marginalised groups and other vulnerable populations, should learn in the same setting, with appropriate support and adaptation to meet their unique needs. The relevance of inclusiveness in skill development cannot be over-stated, as that may equip every one with competences necessary for lifelong learning, employability and active participation in society. The paper critically analyses global, regional and international framework of actions, such as United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals 4, Salamanca Statement and the Convention to the Right of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) all of which emphasize the imperative of inclusion and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Despite these commitments, the realization of inclusive skill opportunities is not without challenges and limitation These include.: Inadequate teacher training, lack of inclusive curricula, insufficient learning materials, poor infrastructure, negative attitudes and limited policy implementation. The study outlines effective strategies for inclusive skills development, such as curricular differentiation, inclusive pedagogical practices, teacher training, policy reforms, stakeholder engagement and the integration of technology to facilitate learning for all. The

<https://journals.unizik.edu.ng/jtese>

paper concludes by offering recommendations and way forward for policy makers, educators and stakeholders and these include strengthen inclusive infrastructure, enhance teacher capacity, fostering community and parental involvement. Emphasising a learner centred approach and sustained multi-sectoral calibration is essential to dismantle challenges and ensure that inclusive education truly translate to equal skill opportunities for all.

## **Introduction**

Inclusive education is a fundamental principle that promotes equal access to quality education for all learners, irrespective of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. Inclusive education is built on principles such as equity, participation, respect for diversity, accessibility and learners centred teaching (UNESCO, 2017). It responds to diverse needs of all learners and at its core. Inclusive education ensures that all individuals, including those with disabilities, marginalised communities and other disadvantaged groups, are given the opportunity to develop skills that are essential for personal growth, economic empowerment and active participation in the society (UNESCO, 2009). Inclusive education is an educational approach where all learners, regardless of their abilities, background or challenges, are provided with equal access to education in mainstream classrooms. i.e. embraces diversity and promoting participation,, equity and respect for all learners (Ainscow, 2020). The concept of inclusive education has improved significantly over few decades. Initially focused on integrating students with disabilities into mainstream schools, it has since expanded to generally education. The aim of inclusive education is not only to provide access to education but also to ensure meaningful participation, active engagement in learning for all learners (Ainscow, Book & Dyson, 2006).

One of the most critical aspects of inclusive education is skill opportunities. In today's rapidly changing world, acquiring relevant skills - technical, vocational, cognitive and life skills is essential for learners to move to complex environments and contribute

meaningfully to their communities (UNESCO, 2009). To ensure equal skill opportunities, means that every learner, regardless of background or ability, should be provided with tailored support and resources to attain the skills needed for lifelong learning and employment (UNESCO, 2016). Inclusive skill opportunities fosters social cohesion, reduces inequalities and enhances the productivity of individuals and society. Hence, international framework have recognized the importance of inclusive education and equal skill opportunities. The United Nations, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG-4) explicitly, call “inclusive and equitable quality education” and the promotion of “lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030 (United Nations, 2020). The Salamanca Statement of 1994 and Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) also emphasize the right of individuals to access inclusive education systems without discrimination. These frameworks provides legal and moral backing for all Nations to implement inclusive education skill development opportunities and these framework push government and institutions to embrace inclusion and foster skills opportunities for all learners including those with disabilities.

Despite these global commitments there remain significant barriers to achieving inclusive education and skill equity. These challenges include inadequate teacher training, lack of inclusive curricula, insufficient learning materials, poor infrastructure, negative social attitudes and limited policy implementation (OECD, 2020). Many learners are still excluded from skill acquisition programmes due to systemic inequalities and socio economic challenges. To overcome these challenges, education system must adopt deliberate strategies aimed at promoting inclusive skills opportunities for all learners. These strategies may include curriculum adaptation, use of assistive technology, differentiated instruction and strong partnerships with communities and stakeholders.

However, there must be a shift in mindset, increase funding and strong political will to achieve the set objectives.

### **Relevance of Inclusive Education**

One of the importance of inclusive education practice in Nigeria, as cited by Olure (2015), is that inclusive education is important in the development of the individual, community and Nigeria at large because bringing students with and without special need to learn together shows younger generation that a diverse group of people make up a community and that one types of group is not better than other. The introduction of inclusive education will thus remove barrier imbibing in them and the spirit of togetherness which is essential ingredient that aid community development. Thus, it is not a huge surprise that the Federal Government in the National Policy on Education adopts the policy of inclusion (FRN, 2013). The commitment is made to equalize educational opportunities for all learners irrespective of their physical, sensory, mental, psychological or emotional disabilities, these are lofty goals intended to improve the quality of inclusive education services.

### **Developing Skill Opportunities: A Path Way to Successful Inclusive Education**

Equal skill opportunity, refers to the provision of equal access to skill acquisition programmes, regardless of learners' backgrounds or abilities. Skills are critical for survival, personal development and contribute to national growth. Inclusive skill opportunities ensures that all learners develop competencies needed for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Equal skill opportunities, according to UNESCO (2017), simply means equal opportunities in education. It encompasses fair access to resources, learning tools and teaching tailored to diverse needs, ensuring that no one is left behind in their academic journey. Equal skill opportunities refer to equitable access to the acquisition of knowledge, competencies and practical abilities, socio-economic status, gender or other

potential barriers. It is rooted in the idea that every learner should have the chance to discover and cultivate their talents in a supportive resource-rich environment (UNESCO, 2017). Equal skill opportunities, in terms of skill acquisition, implies that learners are provided with the appropriate support and materials to develop relevant, remarkable and life sustaining skills. Skill development plays a private role in empowering individuals to achieve personal fulfilment and economic independence. In today's dynamic and technology-driven world, the capacity to adapt, learn new skills and apply knowledge practically is fundamental to lifelong success most especially in technology driven world (UN, 2015).

According to World Economic Forum (2020), the future of work will be shaped by critical thinking, creativity, digital literacy and emotional intelligence. These competences, when developed and nurtured early, it enables individuals to navigate various life roles be it professionals, citizens or family members. Moreover, skill opportunities enhances employability, promote innovation and strengthens social cohesion. The International Labour Organization ILO, (2019) emphasizes that a well-designed skill development system is not only to fuel economic growth but also reduces inequality by creating pathways systems that will integrate skill development as a central component of curriculum design and instructional practices.

### **Equity Vs Skill Based Education**

According to Okeke (2020), skill based education emphasizes measurable competencies and practical knowledge while equity ensures that all learner have the necessary support to achieve those skills. Incorporating both equity results in a more just and sustainable system. It equips all learners to select tools to successes in life and contribute meaningfully to the society. Therefore, ensuring equal skill opportunities is not merely a pedagogical imperative, it is a moral and socio economic necessity (ILO,

2020). Skill development equips individuals with technical, cognitive and life skills necessary for employment, entrepreneurship and active citizenship. It promotes independence and lifelong learning (Okebukola, 2021). However, equality implies giving every learner the same resources, equity involved tailoring support to ensure all learners achieve comparable outcomes. Inclusive education emphasizes equity, ensuring learners get what they need to succeed.

### **Challenges to Implementation of Inclusive Skill Opportunities**

There are no any programme that has no challenges /limitation and these challenges that affects the full implementation of inclusive education for sustainable skill opportunities for all learners includes:

- 1. Funding:** A major constraint or challenge of effective implementation of inclusive education that ensure skill development is inadequate funding. It is disheartening to note that, most of the available funds meant for the execution of effective implementation of inclusive education that ensure children with special needs access skills that leads to future skills opportunities is embezzled and squandered (Ibok, 2015). Hence, some of the facilities meant for special needs children are not provided. The Federal Government takes the lead in setting policy and financing between state and local governments; in some cases, funding existing school structures (Salilu and Jamil, 2015). According to Richard-Tutor, Aceve and Rese (2016), most special schools have dilapidated structures with no libraries, laboratories and other support facilities. Though the federal Government take the lead through setting policy and financing education through transfer to states and local governments. Laudable policies, according to Dike as cited in Cornelius, Ukpepi and Opuwari (2019), and inadequate funding have been the major barrier

to impede effective implementation of inclusive education skill development in Nigeria.

- 2. Inadequate provision of infrastructure facilities:** Inadequate provision of infrastructure facilities is one of the challenges to full implementation of inclusive education practices. According to Okeke (2020), who assessed the effectiveness of inclusive education in schools and the availability of infrastructure needed for its implementation, the authors noted that infrastructure such as classroom, books and other learning materials are insufficient to meet the goal of the programme and to endure access by everyone. The implementation of Inclusive Education could be confronted with lack of infrastructure such as braille, typewriter, environment friendly walk ways for the visually impaired and those on wheel chair. Shortage of equipment such as, text books and instructional materials could be undermining the success of implementation of inclusive education.
- 3. Inadequate Teacher Training:** This challenge runs across the continent of African and even beyond (Iniye and Benson, 2020). These researchers reported that teacher training programmes in inclusive education setting are still very low and not much is done in preparing them for diverse learners; and this to a large extent constitutes a problem as these teachers on graduation are not ready for inclusive classroom practice in school settings.
- 4. Lack of Inclusive Curricular:** Experts such as Iwuamadi and Mana (2019) reported that the curriculum for inclusive education are yet to meet the needs of learners with and without special needs and this poses a challenge to teachers and all learners for the realization of the full implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria.

**5. Attitudes:** Negative Attitudes of teachers and other relevant authorities toward inclusive education, has affected the implementation of inclusive education practices. Research shows that teachers and relevant stakeholders do not have positive attitude toward inclusive education (Salilu and Jamil, 2015). This to a large extent impacts negatively on the process of inclusion. In terms of attitudinal change, there is need to have positive attitude toward people with disabilities and this involves stakeholders rather than seeing such learners with special needs as outcast. Otor, (2015), stated that a member of schools in Nigeria are characterize by limited resources, overcrowded classrooms and dilapidated buildings. Otor observed that schools in the country especially the ones located in rural areas are plagued with inadequate infrastructural facilities in addition, there is insufficient provision for introductory technology and modern information technology facility. Many researchers such as Mezieobi & Mezieobi (2013) revealed that overcrowded and shortage of classroom situation where students learn under tree shade, poor sanitation facilities and lack of Equipment and facilities are militating against effective teaching and learning in inclusive school settings. Other barriers that posed challenges and limitations to inclusive education practices that hinders an equal skill opportunity to full implementation of inclusive education in school settings are:

- **Socio-economic Disparities:** Poverty limit access to quality education, materials and technology needed for skills acquisition (Obi, 2019).
- **Gender, language and cultural Barriers:** Gender stereotypes, language limitations and cultural exclusive marginalize learners, especially girls and linguistic minorities (UNESCO, 2022).

- Weak policy implementation hinder inclusive practices, especially in rural areas (Ijaiya, 2016).

### **Recommendations**

To effectively realize the goal of Inclusive Education: Ensuring equal skills opportunities for all learners, the following recommendation are essentials.

1. **Enforcing Existing inclusive education policies:** Strengthen, monitoring and enforcement mechanism to ensure full implementation of current inclusive education laws and guideline at all educational level.
2. **Allocate budget especially for inclusion:** Designate and protect funding for inclusive programmes, accessible learning, materials, assistive technologies and infrastructure to support diverse learning needs.
3. **Maintain inclusive practices across all schools:** Establish compulsory inclusive standards in public and private schools, requiring the integration of learners with diverse abilities into inclusive education classrooms.
4. **Regular training for all teachers:** Institutionalize continuous professional development focusing on inclusive teaching strategies, differentiated instruction and classroom management for diverse learners.
5. **Inclusive education design:** Promote curriculum and school environment designs that consider physical, sensorial, cognitive and emotional accessibility, enabling all learners to participate fully.
6. **Learner centred assessment:** Adopt flexible and personalized assessment methods that recognize individual learning paths, strengths and progress rather than relying solely on standardized testing.

However, when these recommendations are fully implemented it will bridge skill gaps, promote equity and ensure that no learner is left behind in the pursuit of quality education.

Also, to move inclusive education from vision to reality, stakeholders- Educators, policy makers, future researcher's curriculum planners, school administrators, Ministry of Education and parents and the community must collaborate to eliminate systemic barriers. This includes revising curricula to reflect diverse learning needs of children, investing in teacher training, improving accessibility in schools and ensuring assessment methods are inclusive. Continued advocacy, adequate funding and integration of inclusive practices at all levels of educational system are essential to truly ensure equal skill opportunities for all learners. Let us commit to building educational system where no learner is left behind.

### **Conclusion**

Inclusive education is not merely a policy or strategy—it is a fundamental human right and a powerful driver of equitable learning outcomes. Ensuring equal skill opportunities for all learners requires a commitment to recognizing and valuing diversity, dismantling barriers to participation, and providing appropriate support tailored to individual needs. By embracing inclusive practices, educators empower all students—regardless of ability, background, or circumstance—to access quality education, develop essential life skills, and reach their full potential. Achieving true inclusion calls for collaborative efforts among educators, families, policymakers, and communities to build learning environments where every learner feels respected, supported, and capable of success. Ultimately, inclusive education lays the foundation for a more just, compassionate, and skilled society.

## **References**

- Ainscow, M. (2020). *Promoting Equity Education: Lessons from in Educational Experience*: Landon, Routledge
- Ainscow, M. and Miles, S. (2008). Making Education for all Inclusive. *Prospect*, 38 (1), 5-20.
- Anambra State Universal Basic Education Board (ASUBEB) (2022). Annual Report on Inclusive Education Pilots in Anambra State.
- Ainscow, M., Booth, T., & Dyson, & (2006). *Improving Schools, Developing Inclusion*. Routledge.
- Federal Ministry of Education (2014). Nation Policy on Education. Abuja. NERDC
- National Commission for Person with Disabilities (2021) Annual Report on Inclusive Education
- Otor, D (2015). Attitudes towards inclusive education in African scale (ATIAS): An instrument to measures teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education for students with Disabilities. *Journal of Research and Development in Education* 5: 1-15
- Okeke, C. (2019). *Barriers to Inclusive Education in Nigeria*. Enugu: Unique Educational Books.
- Obi, U. (2019). Socioeconomic factors affecting skill development in Nigerian schools. Nigerian. *Journal of Educational Research*, 17(2), 62-70
- Okeke, C., (2020). Equity and Access to Skills Development through Inclusive Education in Nigeria: Nigeria. *Journal of Special Education*. 19(2), 33-45.
- Richard. Tutor, C. Accuse, T. and Rese (2016). 'Special learners' in K. Harris, *Power of Peers*. Pp 251-287
- Salamanca Statement (1994). The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education. UNESCO.

- Salihu, J. and Jamil, T. (2015). *Wide Education*. Paris: Kaven Publication
- International Labour Organization (ILO). (2029) skills and the future of work. strategies for inclusive growth in Asia and the Pacific. <https://www.ilo.org/global/publications> Imperative; It is a moral and socio-economic necessity. (ILO, 2029)
- Iwuamadi, F.N and Mana, O.O (2019), Challenges in adopting inclusive Education in Nigeria school system. *Journal of Assertives*
- Iniyee, I. D & Benson, G. P. (2020). 'Inclusive Education: Challenges and Prospects in its implementation in Nigeria school system' In *Changing Landscape in Educational Practices*, Enugu: Trimax Printing and Publishing Company.
- UNESCO. (2016). *Global Education Monitoring Report: Education for people and planet* Paris: UNESCO
- UNESCO (2017). *A Guide for Ensuring Inclusion and Equity in Education*. Paris. UNESCO.
- UBEC, (2020). *Inclusive Basic Education Guidelines*: Abuja.
- World Bank. (2022). *The Cost of Exclusion: Education for Children with Disabilities*. Washington DC.
- World Economic Forum (2020). *The Future Job Report 2020*. Retrieved from. <http://www.weforum.org/reports/the.future-of-jobsreport-2020>.