

LANGUAGE, AUTISM, AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: THE HIDDEN STRUGGLES OF UNDIAGNOSED AUTISTIC CHILDREN IN SCHOOLS

Ebere Ruth Awa

Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka
Department of Modern European Languages

&

Chukwudi Isaac Awa

Universite de Lorraine Metz (France)

Abstract

Inclusive education promises every child the right to learn, yet many children with undiagnosed Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Nigerian schools remain excluded from meaningful learning. Despite Nigeria's policy commitments, inadequate teacher training, limited diagnostic services, social stigma, and cultural misconceptions hinder early identification and appropriate support. This article examines how language influences the identification, labelling, and educational experiences of children with undiagnosed autism in mainstream schools, particularly in Anambra State. It explores how expressions such as "stubborn," "dull," "disruptive," and "uncooperative" transform developmental differences into perceived behavioural problems, reinforcing stigma and exclusion. Drawing on existing literature and documented experiences, the article identifies overcrowded classrooms, high assessment costs, inadequate teacher preparation, and limited specialist services as major barriers to inclusion. The findings highlight the gap between inclusive education policies and classroom realities, demonstrating that school attendance does not guarantee meaningful participation or learning. The article contributes to knowledge by highlighting language as a significant dimension of educational inclusion and proposing teacher training, early screening, parent awareness, and respectful classroom communication. It advocates recognising children's individual needs, strengths, and communication differences to advance inclusive education and Sustainable Development Goal 4 in Nigeria.

Keywords: Autism Spectrum Disorder, language, inclusive education, stigma, discourse

Introduction

Every child deserves the opportunity to learn in an environment where they feel valued, supported, and understood. Inclusive education is founded on this principle, advocating for an educational system that accommodates learners of diverse abilities and backgrounds while recognising their individual strengths and needs. Rather than expecting children to fit into a rigid educational model, inclusive education

encourages schools to adapt their teaching practices, learning environments, and support systems to ensure that every learner participates meaningfully in the learning process. This approach aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which emphasises inclusive and equitable quality education for all. However, despite growing global recognition of inclusive education, many children with developmental conditions continue to encounter barriers that prevent them from achieving their educational potential.

Among these children are those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), a neurodevelopmental condition associated with differences in social communication, social interaction, sensory processing, and patterns of behaviour. Autism is a spectrum, meaning that individuals have diverse strengths, experiences, and support needs. While some autistic children communicate fluently and perform well academically, others may require additional assistance with communication, learning, and everyday activities. When these differences are not recognised early, children may be misunderstood, mislabeled, or excluded from meaningful educational opportunities. Bakare and Munir (2011) highlighted the challenges associated with autism in Africa, including limited awareness, inadequate diagnostic services, and the social and cultural misconceptions surrounding the condition.

In Nigeria, the challenges of inclusive education extend beyond school enrollment to the ability of educational institutions to recognise and respond to individual learning needs. Although the country has made policy commitments towards inclusive education, a significant gap remains between policy aspirations and classroom realities. Limited teacher preparation, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate specialist services, financial constraints, and social stigma continue to affect the educational experiences of children with autism. Research has also identified gaps in teachers' knowledge and perceptions of autism, underscoring the importance of specialised training and professional development for inclusive classroom practices (Iwuji *et al.*, 2024). Consequently, some autistic children attend mainstream schools without receiving the support necessary for meaningful participation and learning.

Language is an important dimension of this problem because the words used to describe children can influence how their behaviour is interpreted and how they are treated. In many school environments, children who experience communication difficulties, sensory sensitivities, or challenges with social interaction may be described as “stubborn,” “dull,” “disruptive,” “lazy,” or “uncooperative.” Such expressions may appear to describe observable behaviour, but they can also conceal underlying developmental needs. When teachers and classmates interpret autistic children's differences primarily as deliberate misbehaviour, the language of description can reinforce stigma, encourage inappropriate disciplinary responses, and undermine children's confidence and participation. Conversely, respectful and informed communication can promote understanding, support individual differences, and encourage inclusive classroom relationships. Examining the language surrounding autism is therefore essential to understanding how everyday communication practices may contribute to educational inclusion or exclusion.

These challenges are particularly important in Anambra State, where community-based initiatives demonstrate the potential for improving support for children with disabilities and special educational needs. The Centre for Disability and Special Needs Research (CENDASNER) at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, established in 2019, provides a relevant institutional context for promoting research, training, and support in special needs education. Similarly, God's Care School for Disabilities represents a community-level initiative addressing the educational needs of children requiring additional support. Such initiatives highlight opportunities for strengthening teacher capacity, promoting parental awareness, and developing more responsive educational practices.

Against this background, this article examines the hidden struggles of children with undiagnosed autism in Nigerian schools, with particular attention to Anambra State. It explores how language, social attitudes, and educational practices influence the identification, labelling, and treatment of autistic learners. Drawing on existing literature and documented experiences, the article identifies the major barriers to <https://journals.unizik.edu.ng/jtese>

inclusion and considers practical interventions, including teacher training, early developmental screening, parent awareness, and respectful classroom communication. It contributes to discussions on inclusive education by foregrounding language as a dimension of educational exclusion and by advocating a shift from labelling children according to perceived deficits to recognising their individual strengths, needs, and communication differences. Ultimately, the article argues that meaningful inclusion requires more than physical access to classrooms; it requires educational environments in which every child is recognised, respected, and supported to learn.

Research on Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Nigeria has primarily focused on public awareness, cultural perceptions, diagnosis, stigma, and educational inclusion. Existing studies indicate that limited public understanding, inadequate diagnostic services, and insufficient teacher preparation continue to affect the identification and educational experiences of autistic children. Although these studies provide important insights into autism in Nigeria, the role of language in shaping perceptions, labellings children, and influencing inclusive educational practices requires further attention.

Public Awareness, Cultural Perceptions, and Stigma

Public awareness and cultural perceptions are important factors influencing how autism is understood in Nigerian communities. Bakare *et al.* (2009) examined knowledge of childhood autism among health workers in southeastern Nigeria, highlighting the importance of improving awareness and understanding of the condition. Bakare *et al.* (2019) also investigated knowledge about autism and attitudes towards autistic individuals among community health workers in Nigeria. These studies contribute to understanding the challenges associated with autism awareness and the need for appropriate information and professional education.

In some communities, developmental differences may be interpreted through spiritual, religious, or cultural explanations rather than developmental and medical perspectives. Such interpretations can influence how parents seek assistance and how

communities respond to autistic children. Bakare and Munir (2011) discussed the challenges surrounding autism in Africa, including limited awareness, stigma, and barriers to appropriate services. When autism is misunderstood, children and their families may experience discrimination, social isolation, and delayed access to support.

Language is particularly important in this context because the expressions used to describe autistic children can reinforce existing misconceptions. Terms such as stubborn, dull, disruptive, and uncooperative may frame developmental differences as personal failings or deliberate misconduct. Such descriptions can influence teachers' expectations, classmates' attitudes, and parents' understanding of their children's needs. Examining these expressions provides an important perspective for understanding how language may contribute to the marginalization of autistic learners.

Delayed Diagnosis and Access to Support

Delayed diagnosis remains a significant concern in research on autism in Nigeria. Limited public awareness, shortages of qualified specialists, inadequate diagnostic facilities, and financial constraints can prevent families from obtaining timely developmental assessments. Bakare and Munir (2011) discussed the challenges of identifying and supporting autistic individuals in African contexts, while Bello-Mojed *et al.* (2017) examined issues relating to the identification of ASD in Nigeria. Bakare *et al.* (2016) investigated the age at which autism symptoms were first recognised and diagnosis was established in Nigeria. Their work highlights the importance of examining the timing of recognition and diagnosis when considering access to appropriate support. Delayed identification may limit opportunities for children and their families to obtain timely educational and developmental assistance. These challenges have important implications for inclusive education. When a child's developmental needs remain unidentified, teachers may interpret communication difficulties, sensory sensitivities, or differences in social interaction as behavioural problems. Consequently, the child may receive inappropriate disciplinary responses

instead of the support needed to participate meaningfully in classroom activities. However, teachers should not be expected to diagnose autism; their role is to recognise possible developmental concerns, respond supportively, and refer children for appropriate professional assessment.

The cost and geographical availability of assessment services may further disadvantage families in rural and underserved communities. Consequently, strengthening referral systems, improving public awareness, and expanding access to developmental assessment are important steps towards reducing the barriers faced by autistic children.

Autism and Educational Inclusion in Nigerian Schools

Educational inclusion is another important area of research on autism in Nigeria. Inclusive education requires more than enrolling children in mainstream schools; it involves creating learning environments in which children with diverse abilities can participate, learn, and receive appropriate support. Nevertheless, many schools face challenges associated with overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teaching resources, limited specialist support, and insufficient preparation in inclusive education.

Bakare and Munir (2011) discussed broader challenges affecting autism care and support in Africa, including barriers that have implications for educational participation. More recently, Iwuji *et al.* (2024) examined secondary school teachers' knowledge and perceptions of ASD in Nigeria. According to the findings reported by these authors, teachers' knowledge and perceptions of autism remain important considerations in preparing schools to support autistic learners. Their study also highlights the relevance of specialised training in improving teachers' understanding of autism.

Teacher preparation is particularly important because educators interact with children daily and may be among the first people to notice persistent differences in communication, behaviour, sensory responses, or social interaction. However, without adequate knowledge, teachers may interpret these differences as deliberate

disobedience or a lack of academic ability. Such interpretations can affect classroom participation, relationships with peers, and access to appropriate learning opportunities.

The literature therefore suggests that effective inclusion requires continuous professional development, differentiated instruction, accessible learning environments, and collaboration among teachers, parents, and relevant professionals. It also requires a shift from viewing children's differences primarily as problems to recognising their individual strengths, needs, and ways of communicating. The Anambra State Universal Basic Education Board (ASUBEB) is an important institution for examining inclusive education at the basic education level in Anambra State. Its policies and programmes on teacher training, special needs education, and classroom inclusion are relevant to understanding the educational challenges faced by children with undiagnosed autism.

Similarly, the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), established in 1952, is relevant to the assessment of candidates with disabilities. Its examination regulations and provisions for candidates with special needs can help establish the support available to autistic learners. However, a dated WAEC document explicitly addressing autism must be identified before making specific claims about its position. Nevertheless, many schools face challenges associated with overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teaching resources, limited specialist support, and insufficient preparation in inclusive education. Research by Waita *et al.* (2015) examined the impact of pupil–teacher ratios on academic performance in public primary schools in Kenya. Although their study did not specifically investigate autistic learners or Nigerian schools, it provides a relevant comparative perspective on the relationship between classroom conditions and academic performance.

Inclusive education is founded on the principle that every child deserves access to quality education, regardless of ability or background. This principle aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which promotes inclusive and equitable quality education for all. However, global education reports continue to highlight <https://journals.unizik.edu.ng/jtese>

challenges relating to educational access, equity, and the inclusion of marginalised learners (UNESCO Institute for Statistics [UIS] & Global Education Monitoring [GEM] Report, YEAR).

Language, Labelling, and the Educational Experiences of Autistic Children

Although existing Nigerian research has examined autism awareness, stigma, diagnosis, and teacher knowledge, the linguistic dimension of educational exclusion deserves further investigation. Language does not merely describe children's behaviour; it can also influence how their behaviour is interpreted and how others respond to them. For example, a child who covers their ears during a noisy school assembly may be described as disruptive, while a child who struggles to communicate may be labelled dull or uncooperative. These descriptions may overlook sensory sensitivities or communication differences and encourage responses that fail to address the child's actual needs. Repeated negative labelling can also shape how classmates perceive the child and how the child experiences school.

From a discourse-oriented perspective, examining the language used by teachers, parents, classmates, and school administrators can help reveal how social attitudes towards autism are expressed and reinforced. Such an approach directs attention to the relationship between everyday communication, cultural expectations, and educational practices. It also creates opportunities to identify language practices that promote understanding, respect, and participation.

This perspective is particularly relevant in Nigeria, where cultural beliefs, multilingual communication, and differing levels of awareness may influence how developmental differences are described and understood. However, these relationships should be investigated through appropriate evidence rather than assuming that all Nigerian communities share the same beliefs or language practices.

The Reality of Undiagnosed Autism in Nigeria

The literature reviewed indicates that the challenges associated with autism extend beyond diagnosis to the everyday experiences of children and their families. For some families, finding a school willing and adequately prepared to support an

autistic child can be difficult. Communication differences may lead to misunderstandings, while limited teacher preparation and inadequate support systems can increase the risk of exclusion and bullying.

The experiences of families caring for autistic children also highlight the demands associated with navigating educational and support services. Parents may assume additional teaching and caregiving responsibilities when schools cannot adequately accommodate their children's needs. Financial constraints, limited access to assessment, and social stigma may further complicate their efforts to obtain appropriate assistance.

These experiences illustrate an important distinction between school attendance and meaningful educational inclusion. A child may be physically present in a classroom without receiving the communication support, teaching adaptations, or understanding necessary to participate effectively. Where developmental differences remain unidentified, the child may be blamed for difficulties that could be addressed through appropriate educational support. However, national prevalence estimates, the proportion of autistic children who remain undiagnosed, and claims concerning the availability and cost of diagnostic services require reliable, verifiable sources. Such evidence is essential for establishing the scale of the problem and avoiding generalisations that are not adequately supported by research.

The reviewed literature demonstrates that autism in Nigeria has been examined in relation to public awareness, cultural perceptions, delayed diagnosis, stigma, and educational inclusion (Bakare & Munir, 2011; Bakare *et al.*, 2009, 2016, 2019; Bello-Mojeed *et al.*, 2017; Iwuji *et al.*, 2024). These studies provide a foundation for understanding the difficulties autistic children and their families encounter in accessing appropriate recognition and support. Nevertheless, there remains a need to examine more closely how everyday language contributes to the identification, labelling, and educational treatment of children with undiagnosed autism. In particular, further attention should be given to how teachers' descriptions of children's behaviour influence disciplinary responses, classroom participation, and perceptions

of ability. The relationship between language, cultural attitudes, and inclusive educational practices also warrants investigation within specific Nigerian contexts, including Anambra State. This article addresses this gap by bringing language into discussions of autism and inclusive education. It examines how negative labels may reinforce misunderstanding and exclusion while considering how respectful communication, teacher training, early identification, and parent awareness can support more inclusive learning environments. By foregrounding language as a dimension of educational inclusion, the article seeks to contribute to efforts to create Nigerian schools in which autistic children are recognised, respected, and supported to learn.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative documentary research design to examine the relationship between language, stigma, and the educational experiences of children with undiagnosed Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Nigeria, with particular attention to Anambra State. Data are drawn from relevant academic publications, government policies, institutional reports, and documents on autism and inclusive education. Particular attention is given to Nigeria's National Policy on Inclusive Education and relevant publications from the Anambra State Universal Basic Education Board (ASUBEB) and the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), where available.

The collected materials are analysed thematically, focusing on three major areas: the language used to describe autistic children, institutional responses to inclusive education, and the barriers to early identification and educational support. Expressions such as stubborn, dull, disruptive, and uncooperative are examined to understand how language may reinforce stigma and influence perceptions of children's behaviour and learning abilities.

Analysis

The analysis also considers teacher preparedness, cultural misconceptions, limited diagnostic services, and the gap between inclusive education policies and <https://journals.unizik.edu.ng/jtese>

classroom practices. Sources are selected based on their relevance, credibility, and contribution to the research objectives. The study does not claim to provide clinical diagnoses or measure the prevalence of autism. Instead, it uses documentary evidence to explain how language and institutional practices may contribute to the exclusion of children with undiagnosed autism. The findings are discussed in relation to inclusive education and Sustainable Development Goal 4, which promotes equitable and quality education for all.

Institutional Responses to Autism and Inclusive Education

Nigeria's commitment to inclusive education is reflected in the Federal Ministry of Education's National Policy on Inclusive Education (2017). However, translating policy into classroom practice remains a challenge, particularly for children with undiagnosed Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and the Anambra State Universal Basic Education Board (ASUBEB) are important institutions to examine regarding teacher preparation, basic education, and support for children with developmental differences. Their policies and programmes should be assessed to determine the extent to which autism awareness and inclusive teaching practices are incorporated into teacher development. The West African Examinations Council (WAEC), established in 1952, is also relevant to the assessment of candidates with disabilities. Its official examination guidelines should be examined to establish the arrangements available to eligible autistic candidates. Similarly, the Centre for Disability and Special Needs Research (CENDASNER) at Nnamdi Azikiwe University and God's Care School for Special Needs in Anambra State provide relevant contexts for examining disability support and educational inclusion.

Although these institutions have different responsibilities, their policies and activities can help explain the relationship between educational commitments and the practical support available to children with autism. Their specific autism-related initiatives, however, must be established through official documents and other verifiable evidence.

Discussion

Language, Labelling, and the Construction of Autism in Schools

Language is central to understanding the educational experiences of children with undiagnosed autism. In Nigerian classrooms, expressions such as stubborn, dull, disruptive, slow, and uncooperative may be used to describe children whose communication styles, sensory sensitivities, or patterns of behaviour differ from those of their peers. From a discourse-oriented perspective, these expressions do more than describe behaviour: they can shape how teachers, parents, and classmates perceive a child. When a communication difficulty is interpreted as stubbornness or a learning challenge is described as dullness, the child may be regarded as the problem rather than as a learner who requires appropriate support. Such labelling can influence classroom interactions, teacher expectations, disciplinary practices, and opportunities for participation. A child who struggles to respond to verbal instructions, for example, may be punished for apparent disobedience when clearer instructions or alternative communication strategies might be more appropriate. Similarly, a child who covers their ears during a noisy assembly may be misunderstood as deliberately disruptive rather than experiencing sensory discomfort.

Language can therefore reinforce stigma when it reduces children's identities to perceived deficits. Conversely, respectful and descriptive language can encourage understanding by focusing on individual needs, strengths, and barriers to participation.

Institutional Discourse and Inclusive Education

The language used in educational policies and institutional communications also matters. Inclusive education requires institutions to recognise differences among learners and promote equitable participation. However, policy commitments alone cannot guarantee inclusion if classroom practices continue to portray children with developmental differences as incapable, troublesome, or unsuitable for mainstream education. UBEC, ASUBEB, and the Anambra State Ministry of Education have <https://journals.unizik.edu.ng/jtese>

relevant responsibilities in basic education and teacher development. Examining their official policies, training materials, and implementation reports would help establish how disability and inclusion are represented and addressed.

WAEC's examination regulations are similarly relevant to understanding how assessment systems accommodate candidates with disabilities. Meanwhile, institutions such as CENDASNER and specialised schools may offer useful examples of disability-related support, subject to verification of their documented activities. The central issue is the relationship between institutional commitments and everyday practice. When inclusive education is understood merely as admitting children into schools, their communication needs, participation, and learning experiences may be overlooked. Meaningful inclusion requires both appropriate educational support and language that recognises children as learners with individual rights and abilities.

Language, Culture, and Parental Awareness

Cultural beliefs and community attitudes can influence how autism is understood. In some settings, developmental differences may be interpreted through moral, spiritual, or behavioural explanations. Where such interpretations encourage blame or concealment, families may delay seeking professional assessment. Language can reinforce these perceptions through expressions that associate developmental differences with poor upbringing, family shame, or deliberate misbehaviour. Such descriptions may discourage open conversations about autism and prevent families from accessing appropriate information and support. Nevertheless, cultural beliefs should not be treated as uniform across Nigerian communities. Understanding local interpretations requires evidence from the relevant communities and sensitivity to linguistic and cultural differences.

Parent education, community engagement, and communication in familiar local languages can help improve awareness of autism. The objective should not be to condemn cultural beliefs but to promote accurate information, respectful dialogue, and access to professional assessment. Overall, language is not merely a means of describing children's behaviour; it can influence how their needs are interpreted and

how they are treated. Addressing exclusion therefore requires changes in both educational provision and the language used by teachers, families, institutions, and communities.

Consequences on Children

The failure to identify and support children with undiagnosed autism can contribute to three major consequences.

Poor Academic Performance: Children whose communication, sensory, and learning needs are misunderstood may experience difficulties participating in classroom activities. When teachers interpret these difficulties as laziness, stubbornness, or lack of intelligence, children may receive punishment instead of appropriate educational support. Negative expectations can further limit their opportunities to learn and demonstrate their abilities.

Emotional Distress: Repeated criticism, humiliation, and negative labelling can undermine children's self-esteem and sense of belonging. Expressions such as dull, useless, and uncooperative may contribute to feelings of rejection, particularly when used repeatedly by adults or peers. These experiences may increase the risk of anxiety, social withdrawal, and emotional difficulties, although individual outcomes vary.

School Disengagement and Dropout: Persistent academic difficulties, stigma, and inadequate support may discourage children and their families from continuing formal education. When schools fail to respond to individual needs, some families may conclude that mainstream education is unsuitable for their children. Consequently, children may become disengaged or leave school prematurely, reducing their future educational and social opportunities.

These consequences demonstrate that enrolment alone does not guarantee meaningful participation. Children must also be recognised, supported, and given opportunities to learn in environments that respect their differences.

Recommendations

Strengthen Teacher Training: UBEC, ASUBEB, and relevant education authorities should provide continuous professional development on autism awareness, inclusive <https://journals.unizik.edu.ng/jtese>

teaching, classroom communication, and early identification. Teachers should learn to recognise possible developmental differences and refer concerns to qualified professionals rather than attempt clinical diagnosis.

Introduce School-Based Identification and Referral: The Anambra State Ministry of Education, ASUBEB, and relevant health authorities should establish appropriate developmental screening and referral pathways. These should involve qualified professionals, protect children's privacy, and ensure parental involvement. Screening should facilitate support rather than become a means of labelling or excluding children.

Promote Respectful Language in Schools: Schools should discourage derogatory labels and encourage language that describes observable behaviour without making assumptions about a child's intelligence, intentions, or character. Teacher training should include practical examples of replacing judgemental expressions with respectful, needs-focused communication.

Improve Access to Assessment and Support: Government should collaborate with teaching hospitals, universities, and disability-support organisations to improve access to affordable developmental assessment, therapy, and educational support. Partnerships should also strengthen referral services for families in rural and underserved communities.

Increase Parent and Community Awareness: Schools, parent associations, community leaders, and disability organisations should provide autism-awareness programmes in accessible languages. These programmes should challenge stigma, explain the importance of professional assessment, and encourage supportive relationships between families and schools.

Strengthen Examination Accommodations: WAEC and relevant examination authorities should communicate their special-arrangement procedures clearly and ensure that eligible candidates with disabilities can access appropriate accommodations under applicable regulations. The specific arrangements available to autistic candidates should be verified against current official guidelines.

Monitor Inclusive Education Policies: Education authorities should regularly evaluate teacher training, referral services, classroom adjustments, and the participation and retention of children with disabilities. Monitoring should assess not only enrolment but also whether children feel safe, participate meaningfully, and receive appropriate educational support.

Conclusion

Nigeria's education crisis extends beyond school enrolment to the exclusion of children whose needs differ from the norm. For children with undiagnosed autism, negative labels, inadequate teacher training, limited diagnostic services, and cultural stigma can undermine academic performance, emotional well-being, and school participation. Language plays a significant role in this exclusion by turning developmental differences into perceived behavioural problems. Addressing these challenges requires inclusive teacher training, accessible screening and referral services, and community awareness. Ultimately, inclusive education is not charity but a right and a foundation for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). Early identification, respectful language, and appropriate support are essential to ensuring that every child is recognised, included, and given the opportunity to learn.

References

- Anambra State Ministry of Education. (2024). *Teacher-pupil ratio in Anambra State*. AnambraFirst.ng.
- Bakare, M. O., Ebigbo, P. O., Agomoh, A. O., & Menkiti, N. C. (2009). Knowledge about childhood autism among health workers. *African Journal of Psychiatry*, 12(3), 162–167.
- Bakare, M. O., & Munir, K. M. (2011). *Autism spectrum disorders in Africa*. In Comprehensive guide to autism (pp. 2083–2102). Springer.
- Bakare, M. O., Ebigbo, P. O., Ubochi, V. N., & Aguocha, C. M. (2016). Age of first recognition of symptoms and diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder in Nigeria. *African Journal of Psychiatry*, 19(3), 172–177.

- Bakare, M. O., Ubochi, V. N., Ebigbo, P. O., & Orovwigho, A. O. (2019). Knowledge about autism and attitudes toward autistic persons among community health workers in Nigeria. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 31(2), 133–142.
- Bello-Mojeeed, M. A., Bakare, M. O., & Munir, K. (2017). *Identification of autism spectrum disorder in Nigeria*. In *Autism spectrum disorder: Recent advances* (pp. 3–14). IntechOpen.
- Battistutta, L., Commissaire, E., & Steffgen, G. (2018). *Specific learning disabilities and emotional-behavioral difficulties: Phenotypes and role of the cognitive profile*. [Journal details to be verified]. PMC. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>
- BusinessDay. (2023, August 7). *2023 SSCE results show 79.81% pass rate*. <https://businessday.ng/>
- Child Mind Institute. (n.d.). *Learning disabilities and depression*. <https://childmind.org/>
- DevReporting. (2025). *WASSCE 2025: WAEC records its worst performance in years, with only 38%*. <https://devreporting.com/>
- Federal Ministry of Education. (2013). *National policy on education (6th ed.)*. NERDC Press.
- Igetafrica.org. (2023). *Nigerian education conundrum: The quality gap*. <https://igetafrica.org/>
- Independent Nigeria. (2023). *WASSCE 2023: WAEC releases results, records 79.81% pass rate*. <https://independent.ng/>
- Iwuji, D. C., Eze, J. E., & Nwosu, N. (2024). Secondary school teachers' knowledge and perceptions of autism spectrum disorder in Nigeria. *Journal of Special Education and Rehabilitation*, 25(1), 45–62.
- Mulei, K. O., Waita, J. K., Mueni, B. K., Mutune, J. M., & Kalai, J. (2016). *Relationship between class size and students' academic performance*. CUDIMAC, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

- National Bureau of Statistics. (2015). *Attendance: Primary school dropouts in Anambra*.
- The Guardian Nigeria. (2022, September 1). *Nigeria now has 20 million out-of-school children, says UNESCO*. <https://guardian.ng/>
- The Guardian Nigeria. (2024). *33.3% of Nigeria's basic school teachers lack proper qualifications*. <https://guardian.ng/>
- Tribune Online. (2024). *At 0.2%, Anambra State has the lowest number of out-of-school children in Nigeria—Education Commissioner*. <https://tribuneonlineng.com/>
- UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report as the corporate authors.
- UNICEF. (2021). *Lagos State Eko Learners Support Programme pilot report*.
- UNICEF. (2022). *The rate of out-of-school children in Nigeria is alarming*. SJAI Nigeria Health Watch. <https://sjai.nigeriahealthwatch.com/>
- Universal Basic Education Commission. (2022). *National personnel audit report*.
- Anambra State Universal Basic Education Board (ASUBEB). (n.d.). Official website and publications. Retrieved from <https://www.asubebportal.org.ng/>
- Vanguard. (2024). *Nigeria's out-of-school children now 18.3m—UNICEF*. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/>
- Waita, K. J., Mulei, K. O., Mueni, K. B., Mutune, M. J., & Kalai, J. (2015). Pupil-teacher ratio and its impact on academic performance in public primary schools in Central Division, Machakos County, Kenya. *European Journal of Education Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.54767>
- West African Examinations Council. (n.d.). *Official website and publications*. <https://www.waecnigeria.org/>
- Whitney, D. G., Shapiro, D. N., Peterson, M. D., & Warschausky, S. A. (2019). Factors associated with depression and anxiety in children with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 63(5), 408–417. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jir.12583>
<https://journals.unizik.edu.ng/jtese>

World Bank. (2018). *Facing forward: Schooling for learning in Africa*.

World Health Organization. (2020). *Early childhood development and disability: A discussion paper*.