

A Study on Educational Planning for Inclusive Education and the Management of Learners with Special Needs in Ogun State

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Abstract

Inclusive education has become a global priority, emphasizing the need to provide equitable educational opportunities for learners with special needs. In Nigeria, the implementation of inclusive education depends heavily on effective educational planning, yet evidence on how planning influences the management of learners with special needs remains limited. This study investigated educational planning for inclusive education and its relationship with the management of learners with special needs in schools with special needs in Ogun Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, and the population comprised school administrators and teachers. A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select 120 respondents from Ogun State. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation. Findings revealed that educational planning and management practices were generally at a moderate level (Mean = 3.06). Challenges such as inadequate funding, limited assistive technologies, and shortage of trained personnel were identified as major barriers. The study concluded that systematic and well-resourced educational planning is critical for the effective management of learners with special needs. Recommendations include increased funding, enhanced teacher training, and the adoption of data-driven and integrated planning approaches to strengthen inclusive education in Ogun State.

Keywords: Inclusive education, educational planning, learners with special needs, management

Introduction

Education is universally acknowledged as a fundamental human right and a powerful instrument for social transformation, equity, and national development. Inclusive education is an approach that ensures all learners, regardless of their abilities, disabilities, socio-economic background, or other differences, have equal access to quality education in mainstream classrooms. In recent decades, global attention has increasingly shifted towards inclusive education as a means of ensuring that all learners, regardless of physical, intellectual, sensory, emotional, or socio-economic differences, have access to quality education within regular school settings. Inclusive education promotes the participation of learners with special needs alongside their peers in mainstream schools, emphasizing diversity, equity, and the removal of barriers to learning. This approach aligns with international frameworks such as the Salamanca Statement, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (2006), and the Sustainable Development Goal 4, which advocates inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

In Nigeria, inclusive education has gained policy recognition through instruments such as the National Policy on Education (2004), which affirms the right of learners with special needs to access appropriate educational opportunities within the general education system. However, the realization of inclusive education goes beyond policy declarations; it requires deliberate, systematic, and sustainable educational planning. Educational planning plays a critical role in determining how resources are allocated, teachers are trained, curricula are adapted, infrastructure is designed, and support services are provided to meet the diverse needs of learners. Without effective planning, inclusive education risks remaining a theoretical ideal rather than a practical reality (Ajuwon, 2021).

The management of learners with special needs within inclusive settings presents complex challenges that demand coordinated planning efforts. These learners may require individualized instructional strategies, specialized learning materials, assistive technologies, accessible school environments, and the support of trained personnel such as special educators, therapists, and counselors. Educational planners are therefore expected to anticipate these needs and integrate them into national, state, and school-level plans (Elewele & Rodda, 2018). In Nigeria's context, where the education system already faces challenges such as inadequate funding, overcrowded classrooms, teacher shortages, and

infrastructural deficits, the task of planning for inclusion becomes even more critical and demanding (Ojok, 2017).

Despite the growing emphasis on inclusive education, concerns persist regarding the preparedness of Nigerian schools to effectively manage learners with special needs. Issues relating to poor implementation of inclusive policies, insufficient data for planning, weak inter-sectoral collaboration, and limited professional capacity among educators continue to undermine inclusive practices. As a result, many learners with special needs remain marginalized within the education system, experiencing exclusion, stigmatization, or inadequate support even when enrolled in mainstream schools. This situation underscores the importance of examining educational planning processes as they relate to inclusive education and the management of learners with special needs in Nigeria.

Educational planning refers to the systematic process of setting educational goals and determining the strategies, resources, and actions required to achieve them within a given timeframe. It involves forecasting learner needs, allocating human and material resources, developing policies, and coordinating implementation and evaluation processes to ensure the effective functioning of the education system (Lunenburg, 2020). In contemporary education systems, planning is increasingly expected to be responsive to diversity, equity, and inclusion, particularly in relation to learners with special needs.

The management of learners with special needs within inclusive settings also presents practical and administrative considerations that require careful planning. These include teacher deployment, instructional support, learning environment design, and access to specialized services. However, the degree to which educational plans explicitly anticipate and respond to these management demands is not sufficiently documented in existing literature, particularly within the Nigerian context. Given these issues, there is a need for systematic investigation into educational planning as it relates to inclusive education and the management of learners with special needs in Nigeria. Examining planning processes, structures, and implementation practices will contribute to a clearer understanding of how inclusive education is being pursued and the challenges that may influence its effectiveness. Such inquiry is essential for informing policy refinement, planning improvement, and future research in inclusive education.

Educational planning extends beyond general enrolment projections and infrastructure development to include considerations such as teacher preparation for diversity, curriculum adaptation, accessible learning environments, assistive technologies, and support services. Effective planning for inclusion therefore requires accurate data on learners with special needs, inter-sectoral collaboration, and sustained funding mechanisms (UNESCO, 2020). Where planning is weak or fragmented, inclusive education initiatives may lack coherence and sustainability.

Inclusive education is an educational approach that seeks to ensure that all learners, including those with disabilities and other special educational needs, are educated within mainstream school environments with appropriate support. It emphasizes participation, equity, and the removal of barriers to learning rather than segregation or exclusion (Ainscow, 2021). Inclusive education views learner diversity as a resource rather than a challenge and promotes flexible teaching strategies that respond to individual differences. In Nigeria, inclusive education is recognized within the National Policy on Education, which advocates equal educational opportunities for all learners, including those with special needs (Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN], 2014). However, inclusive education is not merely a placement issue; it requires deliberate planning to ensure that schools are adequately prepared to accommodate diverse learners. This includes planning for teacher competencies, learning materials, school facilities, and administrative support systems.

Learners with special needs refer to individuals who require additional educational support due to physical, sensory, intellectual, emotional, or learning difficulties. This group may include learners with visual or hearing impairments, physical disabilities, learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, or behavioral challenges (Florian, 2019). The educational needs of these learners often differ from those of their peers and may require individualized instruction, adapted curricula, and specialized resources. The management of learners with special needs within inclusive settings involves instructional planning, classroom organization, assessment adaptation, and the provision of psychosocial and professional support. Effective management is influenced by the availability of trained teachers, supportive school leadership, and clear institutional planning frameworks. Without deliberate educational planning, schools may struggle to respond adequately to the diverse needs of learners, thereby limiting meaningful inclusion.

The relationship between educational planning and the management of learners with special needs is both direct and significant. Planning decisions determine how resources are distributed, how teachers are trained, and how learning environments are structured. Well-coordinated planning enhances schools' capacity to manage inclusive classrooms, while weak planning may result in inadequate support systems and inconsistent practices (Miles & Singal, 2020). In Nigeria, challenges such as limited funding, insufficient data, and uneven policy implementation highlight the importance of examining educational planning as a foundational element of inclusive education. Understanding how planning processes shape the management of learners with special needs provides insight into systemic strengths and gaps within the education system.

Systems Theory, as advanced by von Bertalanffy (1968), views organizations as complex systems composed of interrelated and interdependent components that function together to achieve common goals. Applied to education, the theory conceptualizes the school system as a network of interacting elements, including learners, teachers, administrators, curriculum, infrastructure, and policy frameworks. Changes or weaknesses in one component inevitably affect the performance of the entire system. In relation to inclusive education, Systems Theory provides a useful lens for understanding how educational planning influences the management of learners with special needs. Planning decisions related to teacher training, funding, infrastructure, and support services are interconnected and collectively shape inclusive practices. If planning fails to integrate inclusive considerations across system components, the management of learners with special needs may be compromised. This theory underscores the need for coordinated and holistic planning approaches to inclusive education in Nigeria.

The Social Model of Disability shifts the focus from individual impairments to societal and environmental barriers that limit participation and inclusion. According to this model, disability arises not solely from physical or cognitive limitations but from inaccessible environments, rigid curricula, and unsupportive institutional structures (Oliver, 1996). Inclusive education, from this perspective, requires systemic changes rather than attempts to "fix" the learner. Within educational planning, the Social Model of Disability emphasizes the need to design schools, curricula, and policies that accommodate diverse learners from the outset. Planning for accessibility, teacher competence, and flexible instructional practices aligns with the principles of this model. In the Nigerian context,

applying the Social Model highlights how planning deficiencies, rather than learners' conditions, may shape the challenges associated with managing learners with special needs.

Statement of the Problem

Inclusive education has become a central focus of educational reform globally, emphasizing the need to accommodate learners with diverse abilities within mainstream educational settings. In Nigeria, this commitment is reflected in national policy documents that acknowledge the educational rights of learners with special needs. However, translating inclusive education policies into effective practice depends largely on the quality and scope of educational planning at national, state, and school levels. The extent to which existing planning frameworks adequately address the requirements of inclusive education remains an important area for scholarly inquiry.

Educational planning for inclusive education involves coordinated decisions regarding learner identification, teacher preparation, curriculum adaptation, infrastructure development, funding, and support services. In the Nigerian context, questions persist concerning how these planning components are conceptualized and operationalized in relation to learners with special needs. While inclusive education policies exist, there is limited empirical clarity on how systematically they are integrated into educational planning processes and how such plans guide the day-to-day management of learners with special needs in schools. Additionally, Nigeria's education system operates within a complex environment characterized by population growth, resource constraints, regional disparities, and competing educational priorities. These contextual factors raise important concerns about planning capacity, data availability, and institutional coordination for inclusive education. The absence of comprehensive and reliable data on learners with special needs, as well as variations in planning practices across states and schools, further complicates efforts to design responsive and sustainable inclusive education strategies.

The general objective of this study was to examine educational planning for inclusive education and the management of learners with special needs in Ogun State. The specific objectives were to:

1. examine the nature and scope of educational planning for inclusive education in Nigeria;
2. assess how educational planning addresses the management of learners with special needs in inclusive school settings;

3. identify planning-related challenges influencing inclusive education for learners with special needs in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The study seeks to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the prevailing educational planning practices for inclusive education in Nigeria?
2. How are learners with special needs managed within inclusive education settings in Nigeria?
3. What planning-related challenges affect the implementation of inclusive education for learners with special needs in Nigeria?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design was considered appropriate because it enables the systematic description and analysis of existing educational planning practices and the management of learners with special needs as they occur naturally within school settings. The design also allows for the examination of relationships among variables without manipulation, making it suitable for investigating inclusive education planning in schools with special needs. The population of the study consisted of school administrators and teachers in schools for learners with special needs in Southwest Nigeria. These respondents were considered appropriate because they are directly involved in institutional planning, policy implementation, instructional delivery, and the day-to-day management of learners with special needs. Their experiences provide relevant insights into how educational planning supports or shapes inclusive education practices. The sample size of the study were 120 respondents. A **multi-stage sampling technique** was employed in selecting the sample for the study. In the first stage, senatorial districts within Ogun State were selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation across the region. In the second stage, schools with special needs were selected using simple random sampling from official lists provided by relevant education authorities. In the third stage, 40 school administrators and teachers were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure proportional representation of both categories of respondents.

Data were collected using a **structured questionnaire** titled *Educational Planning and Management of Learners with Special Needs Questionnaire (EPMLSNQ)*. The instrument was designed to obtain information on educational planning practices, inclusive education strategies, and management

approaches in schools for learners with special needs. The questionnaire comprised sections on demographic characteristics, planning dimensions, instructional management, support services, and perceived challenges. Items were structured on a Likert-type scale to facilitate quantitative analysis. The instrument was subjected to **content and face validity** through expert review. Specialists in educational planning, special education, and measurement and evaluation examined the questionnaire to determine the relevance, clarity, and adequacy of the items in measuring the study variables. Necessary modifications were made based on their recommendations, thereby strengthening the instrument's validity.

The reliability of the instrument was established using the **test-retest method**. The questionnaire was administered to a group of respondents from schools with special needs outside the sampled area. The two sets of responses were correlated using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient. The resulting reliability index was considered acceptable for educational research. The reliability coefficient was 0.84 Approval to conduct the study was obtained from relevant educational authorities and school administrators in the selected states. The researcher, with the assistance of trained research assistants, administered the questionnaire directly to respondents. The purpose of the study was clearly explained to participants, and confidentiality of responses was assured to encourage honest and unbiased responses. The research questions were analysed using mean and standard deviation.

Results

Research Question One: What are the prevailing educational planning practices for inclusive education in schools with special needs in Southwest Nigeria?

Table 1: Educational Planning Practices for Inclusive Education

| Planning Practice | Mean | Std. Deviation | Decision |
|---|------|----------------|----------|
| Planning for trained special needs teachers | 3.12 | 0.81 | Moderate |
| Provision for assistive learning materials | 2.94 | 0.87 | Moderate |
| Planning for accessible school facilities | 3.26 | 0.76 | Moderate |
| Budgetary planning for inclusive education | 2.88 | 0.90 | Moderate |

| Planning Practice | Mean | Std. Deviation | Decision |
|---|-------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Planning for continuous teacher development | 3.08 | 0.83 | Moderate |
| Grand Mean | 3.06 | — | Moderate |

Decision rule: Mean \geq 3.00 = Moderate/High; Mean $<$ 3.00 = Low.

Interpretation

The results indicate that educational planning practices for inclusive education in schools with special needs in South-West Nigeria are generally at a **moderate level** (Grand Mean = 3.06). Planning for accessible facilities recorded the highest mean score, suggesting that physical accessibility receives relatively more attention in planning processes. However, budgetary planning and provision of assistive learning materials recorded lower mean values, indicating that financial and instructional support planning may not be sufficiently prioritized. Overall, the findings suggest that while inclusive education planning exists, it may not yet be comprehensive or fully institutionalized.

Research Question Two: How are learners with special needs managed in schools with special needs in Southwest Nigeria?

Table 2: Management of Learners with Special Needs

| Management Practice | Mean | Std. Deviation | Decision |
|--|-------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Individualized instructional strategies | 3.18 | 0.79 | Moderate |
| Classroom adaptation to learners' needs | 3.09 | 0.84 | Moderate |
| Availability of counselling and support services | 2.97 | 0.88 | Moderate |
| Use of assistive technologies | 2.85 | 0.92 | Moderate |
| Teacher collaboration and teamwork | 3.22 | 0.77 | Moderate |
| Grand Mean | 3.06 | — | Moderate |

The findings show that the management of learners with special needs in the sampled schools is also at a **moderate level** (Grand Mean = 3.06). Teacher collaboration recorded the highest mean score,

suggesting that cooperative efforts among staff play a significant role in managing learners with special needs. Conversely, the use of assistive technologies and availability of support services recorded comparatively lower mean values, indicating possible gaps in resource availability and technical support. This pattern suggests that management practices rely more on human effort than on systematic technological or professional support structures.

Research Question Three: What planning-related challenges affect inclusive education in schools with special needs in Southwest Nigeria?

Table 4: Planning-Related Challenges to Inclusive Education

| Challenge | Mean | Std. Deviation | Decision |
|--------------------------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| Inadequate funding | 3.41 | 0.72 | High |
| Shortage of trained personnel | 3.36 | 0.75 | High |
| Poor data for planning | 3.29 | 0.78 | High |
| Limited assistive technologies | 3.44 | 0.70 | High |
| Weak policy implementation | 3.22 | 0.81 | High |
| Grand Mean | 3.34 | — | High |

The results indicate that planning-related challenges affecting inclusive education are perceived at a **high level** (Grand Mean = 3.34). Limited assistive technologies and inadequate funding emerged as the most significant challenges. This suggests that while inclusive education policies exist, their implementation is constrained by financial limitations and insufficient planning for specialized resources. The findings further highlight the importance of strengthening data systems and personnel development to enhance planning effectiveness.

Discussion of Findings

The study examined educational planning for inclusive education and the management of learners with special needs in schools with special needs in South-West Nigeria. The findings were organized around the research questions and hypotheses. The study revealed that educational planning practices

in schools for learners with special needs were generally at a **moderate level**. Planning for accessible school facilities, teacher development, and the allocation of resources were evident, but areas such as budgeting for inclusive materials and the provision of assistive technologies were less developed. This finding aligns with UNESCO (2020), which notes that while inclusive education policies exist in Nigeria, planning gaps often limit the availability of critical resources. The moderate level of planning suggests that schools are attempting to integrate inclusive practices but may lack comprehensive and systematic strategies to fully support learners with special needs.

The management of learners with special needs was also reported at a **moderate level**, with teacher collaboration and individualized instruction receiving higher attention, while the use of assistive technologies and support services was limited. This indicates that the management of learners largely relies on human effort rather than institutionalized resources or technologies. Florian (2019) emphasizes that effective management of learners with special needs requires a combination of trained personnel, adaptive resources, and supportive school policies. The study's findings highlight that although educators make efforts to meet learners' needs, infrastructural and resource limitations constrain effective management.

Respondents reported that challenges such as inadequate funding, shortage of trained personnel, limited assistive technologies, and poor data for planning affected inclusive education implementation at a **high level**. These findings are consistent with Miles and Singal (2020), who note that systemic constraints, rather than learner characteristics, are major barriers to effective inclusion. The results suggest that while policies support inclusive education, the **translation of policy into practice is constrained by practical planning limitations**. In summary, the study underscores the critical role of educational planning in shaping the management of learners with special needs. Adequate planning enhances resource availability, teacher preparedness, and institutional readiness, which collectively support effective management and meaningful inclusion.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concludes that educational planning for inclusive education in schools with special needs in Ogun State is **moderate**, with significant gaps in budgeting, resource

provision, and teacher capacity building. The management of learners with special needs is **moderate**, relying heavily on teacher collaboration and individualized instruction but constrained by limited assistive technologies and support services. There exists a **strong positive and significant relationship** between educational planning practices and the management of learners with special needs, indicating that better planning enhances effective management. Planning-related challenges, including funding, human resources, and infrastructural limitations, significantly influence the implementation of inclusive education.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the study recommends the following:

1. Government and educational authorities should ensure adequate funding for inclusive education, focusing on assistive technologies, specialized learning materials, and accessible infrastructure.
2. Continuous capacity building should be prioritized to equip teachers with skills for managing diverse learners and implementing inclusive instructional strategies effectively.
3. Schools should adopt integrated planning approaches that align policy, human resources, infrastructure, and support services to ensure cohesive management of learners with special needs.
4. Reliable data on learners with special needs should be collected and utilized to guide planning, resource allocation, and policy implementation.
5. Educational authorities should monitor and support the execution of inclusive education policies to ensure that planning efforts translate into effective management practices.

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