



Roles of Government Policies on Access to Skilled and Inclusive Education for Special Needs Children in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis

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Abstract

Roles of Government policies on access to skilled and inclusive education in public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population of the study was 111. This comprised the principals and vice principals from all public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The sample size stood at 111 respondents. The census sampling technique was adopted since the population was a manageable figure. Data were collected using a self-structured questionnaire item titled Government policy on access to skilled and inclusive education for special needs children. The instrument was given face and content validity by two experts in the Department of Educational Management, Rivers State University. The reliability of the instrument was obtained using Cronbach's alpha and a reliability coefficient of 0.80 was obtained. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while z-test statistics were used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 Significance level. Findings revealed that despite the existence of Government policies, their implementation remains weak. Public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis still lack teachers who are sufficiently trained in special needs pedagogy. Curriculum adaptation for diverse categories of learners is rarely practiced. These gaps continue to limit access, retention, and effective participation of special needs children in mainstream education. The study concludes that government policies are pivotal in shaping the extent to which teacher training and curriculum adaptation influence access to inclusive education in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The study therefore recommends, among others, that Government should increase funding for continuous teacher training and curriculum implementation to ensure the realization of inclusive education goals in Nigeria.

Keywords: Government Policies, Public Senior Secondary Schools, Roles, Skilled and Inclusive Education

Introduction

In Nigeria, access to quality education remains a major concern, particularly for vulnerable groups such as children with special needs. These children include individuals with physical, intellectual, sensory, or emotional disabilities who require additional support to access and benefit from educational opportunities. Special needs children require unique educational interventions due to physical, cognitive, emotional, or sensory disabilities. Their right to quality

education is protected under global frameworks like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which Nigeria ratified. Locally, policies such as the National Policy on Education (2013), the Inclusive Education Policy (2017), the Special Needs Education Policy (2015) and the Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities Act (2018) were developed to promote inclusive practices, protection against discrimination and ensure equal opportunities in education. Despite these efforts, many children with disabilities in Port Harcourt metropolis still face barriers in accessing education. Reports revealed that schools lack inclusive infrastructure like ramps and assistive technologies, while teachers often lack the necessary skills or training to accommodate diverse learners. Moreover, societal stigma and misconceptions about disability continue to discourage parents from enrolling their children in school and limit their participation in mainstream classroom (Akinlade, & Oladipo, 2021). The work of Madume and Accra-Jaja (2022) corroborates the fact that many schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis, lack essential facilities like ramps and adapted toilets, hindering access for special needs students. Additionally, Osuji and Semenitari (2024) also highlighted that while administrators recognize the importance of inclusive strategies, inadequate resources and training impede effective implementation. Access to inclusive education for special children is a fundamental human right and a critical component of national development. It promotes equity, participation and respect for diversity and removes the barriers that hinder learning and social integration.

Government policy is the backbone of inclusive education. Policies guide the allocation of funds, development of special programmes, recruitment and training of teachers and establishment of inclusive school structures. Nigeria has adopted some policies supporting inclusive education. Such policies include: a policy on funding, policy on infrastructure, policy on teacher training and curriculum adaptation. These policies determine whether children with disabilities can access quality education, the type of support they need and the overall inclusiveness of the school environment

Government policy on funding inclusive education: Inclusion requires government's commitment to fund schools at all levels. The Federal Ministry of Education launched the national policy of inclusive education in 2017 and revised it in 2023. The mechanism for funding the programme is spread across the Federal, State and Local Government. The UBE intervention fund is the primary vehicle for funding inclusive education. The federal Government sets aside a specific percentage of the consolidated revenue fund, which is allocated to the UBEC. The UBEC, in turn, sets aside specific fund for supporting inclusive

education. This is because access in education goes beyond physical entry into a school. It includes having the right infrastructure, materials, trained teachers and support policies that make meaningful participation possible. For children with special needs, access also involves the presence of assistive devices, individualized learning strategies and safe learning spaces, all of which require money to execute.

Government policy on infrastructure: The 2013 National Policy on Education in Nigeria recognizes infrastructure as a critical component for achieving quality and inclusive education. It mandates that schools must be equipped with adequate facilities such as accessible buildings, classrooms, libraries, laboratories and sanitation that support effective teaching and learning for all, including children with special needs. The policy specifically calls for modifications in physical structures to accommodate learners with disabilities, including the provision of ramps, handrails, assistive learning devices and inclusive classroom environments. The goal is to create safe, inclusive and child-friendly schools that eliminate physical barriers and promote equal access. However, while the policy lays out clear objectives, implementation across the country has been inconsistent due to limited budgetary allocations, lack of political will and poor monitoring systems.

Government policy on teacher training: Teacher training is a critical determinant of the success of inclusive education. Teachers must possess the knowledge, pedagogical skills, and positive attitudes needed to manage diverse classrooms and effectively teach students with various special needs (Egbedeyemi & Abiola, 2023). Effective inclusive education demands that teachers possess the right knowledge, skills, and attitudes. According to Okonkwo (2017), special education training improves teachers' ability to design individualized learning strategies and manage behavioural challenges. Government policy on teacher training constitutes a foundational pillar in the successful implementation of inclusive education. The capacity of teachers to respond effectively to the diverse needs of learners, particularly those with disabilities, is largely influenced by the adequacy of their professional training. Inclusive education demands not only general pedagogical competence but also specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for accommodating students with special educational needs (Kailash & Sarbottam, 2024).

Government policy on Curriculum adaptation: Policy on curriculum adaptation is vital in adapting the curriculum to suit diverse learners. Curriculum adaptation refers to the process of modifying content, teaching methods, learning materials, and assessment techniques to ensure that learners with special needs can access and benefit from the curriculum (Nwachukwu &

Ede, 2020). Ozoji (2015) defines curriculum adaptation as the modification of teaching content, assessment, instructional materials, and classroom management strategies. Adapting the curriculum to suit diverse learners is a cornerstone of inclusive education. This might include simplified texts, visual aids, alternative assessment methods, or differentiated instruction tailored to individual learning profiles. Without curriculum adaptation, children with disabilities are often excluded from meaningful learning experiences, even if they are physically present in mainstream classrooms (Akinsanya et al., 2020).

Though the National Policy on Inclusive Education was revised in 2023 to ensure that learners from all backgrounds and abilities have equal access to participate in an inclusive system with unhindered access to free quality education, much has not been achieved in guaranteeing access to inclusive education. Therefore, this study serves to examine the extent to which government policies have influenced educational access for special needs children in public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis.

This study is backed up by the social inclusion theory, which posits that all students, regardless of background or ability, should have equitable access to learning. It requires systemic shifts in school culture, pedagogy, and peer relationships to eliminate marginalization and ensure every student experiences a genuine sense of belonging. Social inclusion reflects a proactive human development approach to social well-being, focusing on more than just removing barriers or risks. It is based on the premise of a school where all children can learn with equitable support (Molla & Cuthbert, 2019). Social Inclusion in Education can be understood as a dynamic process that fosters integration and interaction among diverse student groups, aiming to enhance participation and attachment within the educational environment. Social inclusion is closely linked to access, where students from all backgrounds are given equal opportunities to learn, while acceptance refers to the nurturing of positive attitudes toward diversity. The goal of these processes is to promote achievement, ensuring all students reach their potential. In addition to networking and happiness, which highlight the value of relationships within the school community and promote a sense of belonging, coherence and dynamism in teaching techniques allow education to be adjusted to meet the diverse needs of students (Hasan & Nawrin, 2025)

Statement of the problem

Many schools in Port Harcourt lack the infrastructure, learning aids and trained personnel required to support children with disabilities, irrespective of numerous government policies aimed at promoting inclusive education in Nigeria. Children with special needs in Port Harcourt still face significant barriers to accessing quality education. Additionally, inconsistent

government funding, poor monitoring and negative societal attitudes continue to hinder access to inclusive education. Teachers are often not adequately trained in the use of media in teaching techniques and curriculum adjustments are rarely made to accommodate diverse learning needs. As a result, children with special needs remain marginalized, with low enrollment, poor retention and limited success in education. These gaps between policy and practice raise concerns about the effectiveness of existing government interventions in ensuring inclusive, equitable education for all. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine the roles of government policies in access to skilled and inclusive education for special needs children in public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of National Policy on access to education for special needs children in Port Harcourt Metropolis. Specifically, the study sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. Investigate the extent to which the Special Needs Education Policy on Teacher training influences access to inclusive education in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis.
2. Examine the extent to which the Inclusive Education Policy on curriculum adaptation influence access to inclusive education in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent does the national Policy on teacher training influence access to inclusive education in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt metropolis?
2. To what extent does the national Policy on curriculum adaptation influence access to inclusive education in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt metropolis?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female Administrators /Principals on the extent to which special needs education policy on teacher training influences access to inclusive education in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female Administrators/Principals on the extent to which inclusive education policy on curriculum

adaptation influences access to inclusive education in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive survey design. The population of the study was 111 Principals comprising 37 Principals, 37 Vice-Principals Administration and 37 Vice-Principals Academics, in all the public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The sample size of the study was 111. The study adopted the census sampling technique. Data were collected using a self-structured instrument titled Roles of Government Policies on access to skilled and inclusive education for special needs children (RGPASIESNC). The instrument was given face and content validity by two experts in Department of Educational Management, Rivers State University. The reliability of the instrument was determined using the Cronbach's Alpha reliability method after a pilot study was conducted with respondents outside the population of the study. A reliability coefficient of 0.80 was obtained. Data were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while the z-test statistical method was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Z test was deemed appropriate by treating the current cohort as a representative manifestation of the broader institutional framework governing educators in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1: To what extent do National Policy on Teacher Training influence access to inclusive education in public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis?

Table 1: Mean Rating on the extent Government policy on Teacher training influences access to inclusive education in Public Senior Secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis

S/N	Influence of Government Policies on Provision of Teacher Training on Access to Inclusive Education	Male Admins			Female Admins		
		$\bar{x}$	S.D	Remark	x	S.D	Remark
1	Teachers are adequately trained in inclusive education practices.	3.01	0.82	HE	3.12	0.85	HE
2	There are regular professional development opportunities on special needs education.	2.85	1.05	LE	2.98	0.80	LE
3	Teachers show confidence in handling students with diverse needs.	3.15	0.80	HE	3.10	0.91	HE

Grand Mean & S.D**3.00 0.89 HE****3.06 0.85 HE**

Table 1 shows the mean responses of male and female administrators on the influence of Government policies on Teacher training on access to inclusive education for special needs children in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The findings revealed a grand mean of 3.00 for male administrators with a standard deviation of 0.89, and 3.06 for female administrators with a standard deviation of 0.85. Both results fall within the "High Extent" range, indicating that respondents generally agreed that teacher training significantly contributes to access to inclusive education. However, some specific areas showed mixed results. For instance, while both male and female administrators rated teacher confidence and adequacy of training highly (mean scores above 3.00), the item on regular professional development opportunities fell below the expected benchmark, with mean scores of 2.85 and 2.98, respectively, which indicates a "Low Extent". This suggests that although teachers may have some foundational training, ongoing professional development and capacity-building opportunities remain limited.

The overall findings demonstrate that government policies on teacher training have a positive impact on access to inclusive education, but there are gaps in continuous development programs that are essential for sustaining effective inclusive practices. Thus, the study reinforces the argument that government policies must not only mandate teacher training but also ensure sustained professional development and monitoring mechanisms to equip teachers for long-term inclusive practice in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Research Question 2: To what extent do the Inclusive Education Policy on Curriculum Adaptation Influence Access to Inclusive Education in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis?

Table 2: Mean Rating on the extent Inclusive Education Policy on Curriculum Adaptation influences access to inclusive education in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis

S/N	Influence of Inclusive Education Policy on Curriculum Adaptation on Access to Inclusive Education	Male Admins			Female Admins		
		$\bar{x}$	S.D	Remark	x	S.D	Remark
4	Curriculum content is adapted to meet the needs of children with disabilities	2.95	0.93	LE	2.90	0.95	LE

5	Assessment methods are flexible to accommodate special needs students	3.25	0.95	HE	3.30	0.90	HE
6	Instructional materials are adapted for learners with disabilities.	3.15	0.85	HE	3.01	0.81	HE
Grand Mean & S.D		3.12	0.91	HE	3.07	0.89	HE

Table 2 showed the mean responses of male and female administrators on the extent to which the Inclusive Education Policy on curriculum adaptation influences access to inclusive education for special needs children in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The findings revealed a grand mean of 3.12 (S.D = 0.91) for male administrators and 3.07 (S.D = 0.89) for female administrators. These values indicate a “High Extent” overall, meaning that respondents generally agreed that curriculum adaptation contributes significantly to inclusive education. Specifically, both male and female administrators rated curriculum content adaptation relatively low (mean = 2.95 and 2.90 respectively, “Low Extent”), suggesting that while policies emphasize inclusion, there are gaps in actual curriculum restructuring to meet the diverse needs of learners with disabilities. On the other hand, flexible assessment methods and adapted instructional materials were rated highly (mean scores above 3.00), reflecting that schools are beginning to implement measures that support equitable evaluation and teaching aids.

The results suggest that while inclusive education policy has made some progress in areas such as flexible assessments and instructional support, there remains a shortfall in fully revising curriculum content. The implication is that government policies in Port Harcourt must go beyond rhetoric by mandating curriculum reforms that integrate disability-sensitive learning content across all secondary school levels.

Hypotheses Testing

HO₁: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female Administrators/Principals on the extent to which Special Needs Education Policy on teacher training influences access to inclusive education in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Table 3: z-test Analysis of the mean ratings of difference between male and female principals on the extent to which Special Needs Education Policy on teacher training influences access to inclusive education in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis

Group	N	$\bar{x}$	S.D	α	DF	z-cal	z-crit ($\pm$)	Decision
Male	64	3.00	0.89	0.05	100	-0.339	± 1.96	Ho
Female	38	3.06	0.85					Failed To Reject

Table 3 shows that the calculated z of -0.339 is less than the z-critical two-tailed of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female principals on the extent to which Special Needs Education Policy on teacher training influence access to inclusive education in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis is accepted.

HO₂: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female Administrators/Principals on the extent to which Inclusive Education Policy on curriculum adaptation influence access to inclusive education in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Table 4: z-test Analysis of the mean ratings of difference male and female principals on extent to which Inclusive Education Policy on curriculum adaptation influence access to inclusive education in Public Senior Secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis

Group	N	$\bar{x}$	S.D	α	DF	z-cal	z-crit ($\pm$)	Decision
Male	64	3.12	0.91	0.05	100	0.272	± 1.96	Ho
Female	38	3.07	0.89					Failed To Reject

Table 4 shows that the calculated z of 0.272 is less than the z-critical two-tailed of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis, which states there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female principals on the extent to which Inclusive Education Policy on curriculum adaptation influences access to inclusive education in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis, is accepted.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that government policies are pivotal in shaping the extent to which teacher training and curriculum adaptation influence access to inclusive education in Port Harcourt Metropolis. However, the existence of policies without proper implementation limits their impact. Infrastructure inadequacies continue to exclude children with disabilities from learning environments. Teachers remain ill-prepared to meet diverse learning needs due to insufficient training opportunities. Curriculum adaptation is not uniformly practiced, limiting the inclusivity of classrooms. Thus, for inclusive education to become a reality in Port Harcourt, there is a pressing need for effective implementation, adequate funding, strong monitoring, and collaboration among all stakeholders.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that;

1. Regular and compulsory professional development programs should be organized to train teachers on inclusive education practices and equip them with practical strategies for handling diverse classrooms.
2. Curriculum adaptation should be integrated into school programs, with flexible assessments and adapted teaching materials that accommodate the diverse needs of learners with disabilities.

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