

## IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR NIGERIAN CHILDREN: LIBRARIAN'S ROLES AND CHALLENGES

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### **Abstract**

*Inclusive education is a shift from the normal practice that has separated schools for children with special needs differently from children without any form of disability. Inclusiveness shifts the educational system and structures from segregation and discrimination but brings every learner into the mainstream of education irrespective of disability, gender, giftedness, ethnicity and other characteristics. It is against this backdrop that the role of librarians becomes inevitable in school settings and society settings at large especially when it has to do with the implementation of inclusive education in Nigerian schools. This paper therefore attempts to examine the concept of inclusive education; the librarian's role in inclusive education which include the provision information resources, organising library orientation, provision of sound library services and selective dissemination of information for study and learning. The paper pointed out some importance of inclusive education to include equal access to learning, removal of discriminatory attitudes, marginalization and practices among children in order to reduce barriers to learning. Also some of the challenges that may hinder librarians' roles in the implementation of inclusive education for Nigerian children was discussed which included inadequate funding, lack of inclusive education principles in the curriculum of library schools, inadequate infrastructures such as library buildings, internet, computers and Braille; inadequate trained teacher librarians for the implementation.*

**Key Words:** Education, Inclusive Education, Disabilities, Children, Librarian.

### **Introduction**

Inclusive education is an educational system that makes room for all children irrespective of their ability or disability. Education for All which was adopted in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 emphasised on the provision of universal access to education for all the

children, youths and adults. This can only be achieved when the authorities concern provides an enabling environment and facilities for the implementation of the system. Inclusive education goes beyond just including them in the classroom but also providing an enabling environment for them to interact with every child without any form of segregation. Inclusive education has not been wholly accepted in this part of the world. Some parents agree to that while other parents were against it because they see it as a threat to their children's social integration and future prospects. This assertion goes against the zero-reject principle which states that all children should be given equal educational opportunities despite their disability. The zero reject principle states that every student is entitled to a free and appropriate public education no matter their physical or mental state (Chin, 2020). The zero-reject principle does not discriminate between a child that is physically challenged and one that is not. Challenged children are children who have disabilities such as visual impairment, polio, autism, deafness and dumbness (International Federation of Library Association and Institutions, IFLA 2018).

Inclusive education means that all these children irrespective of their disabilities should be educated with other normal children in the same regular schools for effective integration and equal participation. This will enable each child to develop, have equal access to education and contribute to the national development. Effective inclusive learning can only be possible when there are trained teachers, inclusive curriculum and facilities to encourage and promote learning. These facilities include teaching aids, physical infrastructures and libraries.

Turnbull and Turnbull (2022) believed that disability is not a minus when it comes to education. In addition, the principle states that the child may be excluded only if he/she has a contagious disease or the disability makes them behave inappropriately; in most instances, the latter is not the case (Ozaji, 2016). In Nigeria inclusive education is centred on identification and removal of discriminatory attitudes, marginalization and practices among children in order to reduce barriers to learning and participation in the national building by all. According to Abdulmumuni (2016: 6) defined inclusive education as the "process of addressing all barriers and providing access to quality education to meet the diverse needs of all learners in the same learning environment". So inclusive education is aimed that providing equal opportunity, justice and quality education to all learners. Inclusive education is based on the zero rejects principle.

Inclusive education brings every learner into the mainstream of education irrespective of disability, gender, giftedness, ethnicity and other characteristics. A well planned and evacuated inclusive education will help to remove marginalization and segregation amongst learners. Many parents feel happy when their challenged children are given equal opportunities to learn with other children. Inclusive education creates a feeling of acceptance for the children and parents involved. It helps to promote and increase the self-esteem of the child, social skills, higher grades and better school attendance and higher homework completion. Also, it help more children to be educated to the best of their abilities and ensure that the learning

environment reduces the barriers of segregation and encourages participation of all children (Ozaji, Nwachukwu, & Nanjwan, 2020)

The Nigerian Government has been advocating for equal rights to education in order to ensure Education for ALL. Nigeria government has been among the signatories to different conventions and declaration for the propagation of equal right to access education by all. Such declaration and conventions are the Salamanca Declaration of 1994, the Dakar Framework for Action 2000 and the United Nations Right of Persons with Disabilities 2006 which advocated the implementation of inclusive education for learners with special needs, the Nation Policy on Education and Universal Basic Education Commission Act 2004 emphasised compulsory education for all children irrespective of status and special needs. The National Policy on Inclusive education in Nigeria was approved in 2017 (UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report 2021).

Regrettably, in Nigeria and most of the developing countries in Africa are far from inclusiveness no matter the level of education. However, in Nigeria, there are schools for the blind, the deaf and dumb and so many other special schools for children with special needs. The educational platform does not provide the opportunity to mix freely and express themselves with other children without disabilities except for siblings, relatives and probably neighbours. Some of the schools for challenged children include School for the Deaf, Kaduna, Wesley School for the Blind, Surulere, Lagos, Joseph-Daycare for the Visually Handicapped, Ogbomosho, Otukpo Blind Workshop, Benue State, just to mention a few. Some of these special schools are owned by the government, churches and others are privately owned, probably by NGOs (Orubite & Maigida 2000).

Although there are efforts in Nigeria to implement inclusive education since this will help to prepare the challenged children for the outside world because no one will build another world that would shelter them differently from the seemingly harsh realities of life in which they would grow up and get used to (Ajuwon, 2008). Some of the existing schools that enroll challenged and non-challenged children are Ijokodo High School, Ibadan, Technical Secondary School, Umuoka, schools in Enugu State, Akure High School, Akure and Baptist High School, Benin City (Adetoro, 2014). These schools have helped to fully integrate challenged children into the regular classroom setting. These schools are making reasonable efforts to follow the tenets of the Nigerian Policy on Education (2004, 31) which states that “Integration is the most realistic form of special education since handicapped children are eventually expected to live in the society”. Also, Dare (2019) supported that challenged children should be placed in regular schools because they live in a regular world.

Therefore, inclusive education in Nigeria could only be effective when all the learning institutions from pre-primary to tertiary level become more inclusive in their facilities and

methods to accommodate all learners. This means that the educational needs of the poor, nomads, internally displaced persons; people living with disabilities, girl-child and women should be given paramount attention in budget planning and implementation. Inclusive education here advocates that these classes of people should be in the regular schools with other children, youths and adults who are not disadvantaged. The benefits of this are that the government will develop the school curriculum and teaching methods to respond to individual differences to suit all the children. Also, provide good school environment, train and retrain teachers to implement the system. Inclusive education will promote change of attitudes on the learners to foster non-discriminatory society for peace and economic development of the country.

Furthermore, inclusive education encourages teachers or educators to understand and treat each child peculiarly irrespective of the challenge they have. It goes beyond that to also include the challenged children to be in the same school system with the non-challenged children. According to International Federation of Library Association and Institutions (2018) children's library should include resources and services for babies, toddlers, children and young adults. To ensure inclusive education these classes of children irrespective of their abilities and disabilities should be catered for in the libraries by librarians. The librarians can promote inclusive education through the provision of a conducive learning environment, acquisition and provision of information resources and services to enhance learning and research. Hence to have an inclusive education there should be an inclusive library environment, resources and services to accommodate both normal and physically challenged Nigerian children.

### **The Librarians Roles in the Implementation of Inclusive Education for Nigerian Children**

To provide a desirable library resources and services to support flexible teaching and learning methods for all learners the government and authorities concern should develop flexible curriculum for teachers and children which will become a yardstick for the acquisition and provision of library services.

1. **Provision of Information Resources in different Format for Children:** Information resources for children in libraries include collection of books, magazines, newspapers, films, computers, filmstrip, videotapes, educational recording of all types, poetry, songs, audiovisuals (Benard&Dulle, 2014, Pandey, 2015). According to International Federation of Library Association and Institutions (IFLA, 2018:10) library materials provided in an ideal children's library should include; fiction and non-fiction to suit all ages, reference works, resources in the primary language of the community, resources in minority languages in the community and computer games. Other library materials include; toys, games and puzzles, musical instruments, study materials, audio books, and sensory materials, treasure baskets for babies, equipment, tools and DVDs in sign

language or books in Braille. Librarians need to provide information resources and services in preferred formats within the collection to support physical and virtual access to information resources. Information resources that are in printed format should be digitalized and transformed into e-books, audio books, talking books and for easy access to children. These information resources are meant to be stored in the CDs and uploaded to library website. Subramaniam et al (2013) stressed that intellectual access should be made inclusive as such any information in one mode format (print) should be encoded in two or three multimodal formats to ensure a multisensory experience which promotes inclusive learning. For proper training of children, it is important that they possess the power to access and harness learning resources and services available in the library. Such learning resources should be available in the libraries and in instructional resources centres for inclusive access to information (Ezeani et al. 2017).

2. **Establishment of Libraries in Schools:** At all levels of education, there should be a library that provides services to children. In addition, the children's library houses should give access to information resources and services to help every child attain his/her individual information needs. Library resources and services should be organised and managed by professional librarians.
3. **Librarians Manage the School Libraries:** These librarians are experts that have undergone training and acquired educational qualifications in the field of library and information science. Their main duties are to select, acquire, organise and make information resources and services available to the user to meet his/her learning and information needs. These librarians organise and manage the acquired information resources to promote inclusive education.
4. **Provision of Access to Digital and Electronic Resources and Services:** The librarians also provide access to suitable digital and electronic resources and services to children in the schools. All these services provided by librarians are aiming at informing, educating and entertaining their users to become useful to themselves. Inclusive education is essential in any nation for sustainable development and participation of the citizenry. For effectiveness, the libraries in Nigeria must ensure equal opportunity for every Nigerian child to have access to information to support study and learning. This can only be possible through the provision and accessibility of information resources and services by all teaming Nigerian children. According to IFLA (2018) to support inclusion in library services to children librarians should reach out to educators who are the people who identify children with learning disability so as to help the librarians in acquisition and provision of resources and services.
5. **Librarians Provide Support Services to the challenged children:** To deliver effective information resources and services to all library users with special needs and normal children in the same educational settings in Nigeria, the librarians should be

knowledgeable, trained, and ready to identify all classes of children in order to address and meet their information needs. To satisfy their information needs, librarians must provide for the disabled and stable children. This consideration starts from the selection, acquisition, storage and dissemination of information resources and services. Librarians should provide support services to the challenged children to enable them to utilize library resources equally with other children.

6. **Inclusive Architectural Design for the Libraries:** A library should be open to all. A library that serves inclusiveness is supposed to have an architecture that supports it. The design of the library building should provide easy access to all categories and classes of children. There should also be suitable and adequate multimedia resources to serve them. Librarians should ensure that when constructing physical libraries, that the architectural design must include the provision of wheelchairs, lifts and ramps in their structure for the challenged.
7. **Provision of Mobile Library Services:** Librarians should provide mobile library services to rural communities to help children have access to educational resources from the library for reading, doing their assignment and carrying out research. Also during holidays, the children will access to information for reading, recreation and carrying out holiday assignments.
8. **Development of School Library Websites:** Librarians in Nigeria should endeavor to develop school library websites to support inclusive education for children through inclusive access to information and learning resources as UNESCO (2015:17) noted that “an accessible website provides equal opportunity for everyone to get information, learn, work and communicate.” So that children who cannot visit the traditional/physical libraries can chat with the librarian online and access information electronically from the library database. The library website offers many opportunities for children to learn and enhance their knowledge, skills and competencies in research and studies at all levels. Through the library website, children can embark on an online tour and orientation of the library. This orientation/user education will help to expose the children to the services and resources the library can provide and how they can access these information resources and services.
9. **The Use of Assistive Technology and Equipment:** Librarians should also acquire and master the use and the provision of library resources and services to children through assistive technology and equipment to enhance inclusive education. Assistive technology as defined by Goddard in Ahmad (2015:65) refers to the use of “information communication technologies (ICT), universally designed technologies, educational



technologies, emerging and innovative technologies, and accessible technologies; they can be any item, piece of equipment or product system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities, and help them to work around or compensate for a disability.” Other assistive technology devices as listed by Petty (2012) includes, speech-to-text word recognition tools, scanners, compact disc recording (CD-R and CD-RW) drives, speakers, headphones, touch control devices, computers, keyboards and mice. All these devices can be used by librarians to provide efficient inclusive library services such as orientation and information literacy skills which can be listened to by all children. In order to encourage effective reading in the library, the librarians should provide speech software, electronic books, talking electronic devices/software and scanners to these library users for them to access and utilize the information resources and services provided in the collections.

10. **Organisation of Integrated Library Programs:** In addition, librarians should organise library programs that encourage the interaction of disabled and abled children in studying and learning such as story-talk hours, and library clubs to attract children to reading and use of library resources and services. Ludago, (2020) in a research carried out on practices, challenges and opportunities of inclusive education implementation in Kambata Tambaro Zone, Ethiopia indicated that understanding each learner’s background, strength, unique abilities, needs and barriers are vital information for the planning and implementation inclusive education. Such information when made available to the librarians will help the librarians to determine the type and format of providing information resources and services to suit every child. This service can be carried out through the use of selective dissemination of information.
11. **Provision of Internet in Children’s Library:** There should be provision of internet in children’s library to enhance the access to information for all children to promote inclusive education. Pandey (2015) stated that children use internet for educational purposes. The content these children access are subject websites for self-learning, online tutorial, dictionaries, encyclopedias, maps, e-books, magazines, movies and readymade assignments Pandey (2015:50).
12. **Organisation of Special Training Programs for Teachers’ Childcare Workers:** Moreover, librarians could offer special training programs for teachers’ childcare workers on how to improve the children’s reading skills through storytelling and read-aloud programs. Also, teachers could borrow audiovisual resources to teach these children in the classroom environment.

### **Challenges that may Hinder Librarians’ Roles in Inclusive Education for Nigerian Children**

School libraries in Nigeria should strongly support the implementation and of inclusive learning opportunities for all children. This is because the aim of school library is to promote and support teaching, learning, entertainment and research through the provision of information

resources and services equally to all members. In performing these roles for the implementation of inclusive education librarians may be faced with myriad of problems which are discussed below.

1. **Lack of flexible curriculum:** The curriculum of study in use in Nigerian schools does not reflect inclusiveness, librarians are unfortunately not well guided on the information needs of these children. So the rigidity of the curriculum that accommodates all learners in the classroom also affects the provision of adequate library services and resources provided by librarians. The selection and acquisition of library materials and services provided to children in inclusive education should be based on the curriculum content. So librarians should be included in the development of the curriculum to give advice on the quality of information resources to promote the implementation of inclusive education among Nigerian children.
2. **Lack of school libraries:** is a major problem in the implementation of inclusive education is the absence of functional library in public and private schools in Nigeria. What is seen are collection of books and audio-visual material displayed in a corner of a house or class rooms during school inspections. Many times pupils are not allowed to touch these resources. The need for the establishment of school libraries is overlooked by policymakers (Hossain 2018). As a result, there is no government policy compelling school governing bodies, principals and proprietors to have school libraries in their schools. There is need for the government both at federal and state level should make the establishment of library services compulsory in schools and they should employ teacher librarians to manage these libraries.
3. **Availability of Obsolete Information Resources:** In schools where libraries exist, some of the teachers cannot use the resources in the library for teaching and learning because the existing information resources are obsolete and not relevant for inclusive learning. In support of this Shonhe (2019) stated that teachers in Katlehong do not use school libraries because the libraries do not provide relevant information services due to lack of space, out-dated collection, poorly organised books and lack of network computers.
4. **Lack of Awareness:** Children are not aware of the services and resources they could access from the school libraries. This is because the resources and services are not marketed to these users. The school librarians lack the marketing skills to create awareness on the available services and resources for inclusive education. Also, some of the school librarians are not knowledgeable in the selection of library services and resources to acquire for effective implementation of inclusive education.
5. **Management of School Libraries by Unqualified Librarians:** Many of the school librarians are not trained in different methods of impacting library orientation or information literacy to various types of children catered for in the inclusive educational



system. This deficiency may have been caused by the non inclusion of library services to disadvantaged group in the curriculum of some library and information science programmes. Lack of knowledge and adequate trained librarians in pre-primary, primary and secondary schools to handle the selection and acquisition of relevant information services and resources will hinder the implementation of inclusive education in Nigerian educational system.

6. **Poor Funding of the School Libraries:** The provision of relevant information resources and services are hindered by poor funding of the school libraries in Nigeria. The primary and post primary school receive little allocation of funds for the implementation of the policy. Inadequate funding affects the provision of adequate classrooms, libraries and reading materials that will take care of the diversity of the children's information needs.
7. **Absence of Information Communication Technologies:** Some these school libraries do not have computers and internet connective for the children to access and retrieval information. To worsen the situation some of the school librarians and teachers are not computer literate, you cannot impact the knowledge you do not know.
8. **Lack of Library Period in The School Timetable:** There is also an absence of library period in the school timetable for the children to actually utilize the available information resources and services for their study. This may be because there is no policy guiding the development and use of the school libraries by these children in the educational policy of the country. To fully involve the school libraries and the librarians in the implement inclusive education a period should be allocated to use of library in the school timetable.

## Conclusion

Nigerian schools libraries should be suitable for all children irrespective of their diverse needs. Quality library services provided by librarians in the school and public libraries will cater for all categories of children in promoting learning and research to reduce risks in life situations. Inclusive education with quality library resources and services provided by librarians will also enhance the acquisition of technological skills and lifelong learning in all children. The need to promote inclusive education at all levels in the Nigerian educational system requires the establishment of quality library resources and services in Nigerian libraries which must be organised and managed by professional librarians. The government should increase the funding of the school libraries. Increased funding will help the provision of relevant and current information resources and services. So, libraries in Nigeria should use the guideline for providing information resources in children's library as stated by IFLA to ensure unhindered access to essential resources needed by any child irrespective of the child's physical and mental status. In doing so, the library and the librarians will contribute effectively to inclusive education and encourage social inclusion among Nigerian children.

### Suggestions

However, for effective implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria schools every party should be involved in planning both the librarian, government at all levels and school management authorities. The following should be implemented;

1. There should be establishment of school library department in the federal and state Ministry of Education headed by a librarian to oversee the establishment and supervision of school libraries in the country.
2. Library period should be included in the school time table to allow the children time to visit or access the information resources online using the available internet and facilities in the library.
3. Librarians should organise library instructions and library week to market and create awareness to children on the services and resources available in the library.
4. Qualified librarians should be employed to manage the school libraries. These librarians should be given support to attend conferences and seminars to improve on their skills.
5. Schools library should be equipped with current ICT and Assistive Technology to help the school children get access to the needed information from the library.
6. Nigerian School library associations should be more proactive in supervising and monitoring the employment and standards practices employed in school libraries. Their observations should be reported to the government for necessary actions.
7. Librarians should be involved in curriculum development level of inclusive education to ensure that the current information resources are used during the planning to ensure effective implementation.

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