

## CONTEMPORARY CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND REPOSITIONING STRATEGIES OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

**Abubakar Muhammad Ali**

Department of Special Education

Bayero University, Kano

[maali.spe@buk.edu.ng](mailto:maali.spe@buk.edu.ng)

2348036379358

**Barrister Khadija Shehu**

Department Special Needs Education

Aminu College of Islamic and Legal Studies, Kano

[mimfirst2012@gmail.com](mailto:mimfirst2012@gmail.com)

2348153366990

**Hassan Bukar Adam**

Post Graduate Student

Department of Special Education

Bayero University, Kano

[hassanadam321@gmail.com](mailto:hassanadam321@gmail.com)

2348062649386

### Abstract

Inclusive education represents a paradigm shift from segregation and integration toward full participation, equity, and access for all learners, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds. This paper provides a conceptual overview of inclusive education, tracing its historical evolution from special schools to integration and, finally, to inclusion. Drawing on international frameworks (UNESCO, 1994, 2023) and national perspectives (James et al., 2025; Nuhu & Bagiwa, 2025; Obani, 2006; Ozoji, 2006), the paper examines the principles, benefits, and operational requirements of inclusive education. A literature review synthesises recent evidence on policy-practice gaps, assistive technology, and teacher preparation in Nigeria. The paper highlights practical repositioning strategies, including a Child Development Centre, consultancy services, assistive technologies (sign language, Braille, enlarged print), and multiple means of representation and expression. The paper concludes that inclusive education benefits both learners with and without special needs by fostering friendship, diversity appreciation, academic gains, and social cohesion. Recommendations are offered for strengthening inclusive practices in similar school contexts.

**Keywords:** Conceptual Framework, Repositioning Strategies, Inclusive Education.

### Introduction

Inclusive education operates on the principles of promoting equitability in learning, equalizing daily life and classroom experiences, ensuring commensurate learning opportunities for all learners, prioritizing functional learning outcomes irrespective of ability or social background, and embedding special educational services within general education settings (UNESCO, 1994; UNESCO-IBE, 2022). Historically, learners with physical and intellectual challenges were placed in segregated special schools, a practice driven by the assumption that

they could not learn alongside non-disabled peers. Subsequently, the concept of integration emerged, whereby children with disabilities were placed in regular classrooms but without environmental or instructional modifications. Consequently, their educational goals remained largely unachieved, revealing a critical gap in practice. This gap has led to a deeper concern for restructuring educational approaches. Segregated special schools are now widely critiqued as discriminatory. Many nations increasingly affirm that inclusion where learners with challenges are taught in ordinary schools with appropriate support systems is preferable to segregation (UNICEF, 2010).

However, the Nigerian context presents significant challenges. Despite ratifying global frameworks like the Salamanca Statement and the Sustainable Development Goal 4, a persistent gap remains between national policies and on-the-ground implementation (James et al., 2025). Alarming, Save the Children International reports that 95.5% of children with disabilities in Nigeria lack access to education (Save the Children, 2024, as cited in AllAfrica, 2024). In response, Nigeria ratified a reviewed National Policy on Inclusive Education in 2024, representing a significant step forward at the policy level (Chibuzor, 2024). This paper explores the concept of inclusive education and examines its practical repositioning at Usman International School (UIS), a fully inclusive school in Nigeria, as a model for bridging this policy-practice divide.

### **Concept of Inclusive Education**

This section reviews recent literature on inclusive education, focusing on contemporary challenges, technological supports, and policy developments in Nigeria and globally. Recent research confirms that inclusive education in Nigeria remains fragmented and inconsistently implemented. James et al. (2025), in a policy-focused analysis of Nasarawa State, identified recurring barriers including poor infrastructure, limited teacher training, weak policy enforcement, unreliable data, and societal stigma. The study concluded that despite the existence of the Nigerian Disability Act (2018) and the National Policy on Inclusive Education (2017), a coordinated, multi-sectoral approach is urgently needed. Expanding on this, Nuhu and Bagiwa (2025) highlighted the complex interplay between policy frameworks, institutional practices, societal attitudes, and resource allocation, emphasising the urgent need for transformative change to dismantle barriers limiting the potential of inclusive education. These findings underscore the crucial role that proactive, well-resourced schools like UIS play as models of practical implementation.

Teacher preparation is a critical component of successful inclusion. A 2024 capacity-building workshop by the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) trained 1,878 teachers on inclusive education, revealing a wide gap in teachers' knowledge and skills in dealing with learners of mixed abilities (THEWILL, 2024). Recognizing this, the Federal Government of Nigeria has reiterated its commitment to inclusive education, with UBEC procuring assistive technologies including Braille machines, wheelchairs, and digital materials to support learners (THEWILL, 2024). Furthermore, recent research has examined the link

---

between teacher distress tolerance, job satisfaction, and willingness to teach children with special educational needs (SENs) in Nigeria, finding that tolerance of frustration had significant positive effects on inclusive education willingness (Ogungbamila, 2024). Innovative approaches, such as storytelling workshops, have also been proposed to help teachers develop more constructive and nuanced understandings of inclusion beyond narrow, top-down curriculum reforms (Wheeler & Udegbe, 2025).

The role of assistive technology (AT) in facilitating inclusive education in Nigeria has gained significant research attention. Ayantoye (2023) found that AT plays a critical role in providing children with disabilities the tools they need to access education and participate fully in the learning process, addressing difficulties in reading, writing, and arithmetic. However, the study also reported challenges such as lack of training, poor infrastructure, cultural barriers, and limited awareness. A case study by Project Championz (2023) demonstrated that the integration of AT significantly enhances access and promotes active participation for students with physical disabilities, with tools ranging from adaptive keyboards and screen readers to mobility aids and communication devices. These findings validate UIS's strategic investment in assistive technologies.

Globally, the United Nations' Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goal 4 continue to drive the shift toward inclusive education, with a mid-term review highlighting the complexity of this shift across diverse contexts (Chambers, 2023). The World Bank (2023) recommends incentivising innovation, building capacity among policy implementers, strengthening partnerships between education and disability sectors, reinforcing the twin-track model, and generating rigorous mixed-methods evidence to identify and scale effective inclusive education models. These global recommendations align with the practical repositioning strategies implemented at UIS.

Scholars have defined inclusive education from various perspectives. According to Bui, Quirk, Almazan, and Valenti (2010) and Alquraini and Gut (2012), inclusive education occurs when all students, regardless of challenges, are placed in age-appropriate general education classes within their neighborhood schools, receiving high-quality instruction, interventions, and supports that enable success in the core curriculum. Ozoji (2006) defines inclusive education as a policy whereby all children and young people with or without disabilities or difficulties learn together in ordinary pre-schools, schools, colleges, polytechnics, and universities with appropriate support networks. Obani (2006) describes it as the admission and instruction of all children (with or without disabilities or special educational needs) in the same neighborhood schools.

It is pertinent to note that, inclusive education views all categories of learners as full-time participants and members of their neighborhood schools and communities. Inclusionists further argue that inclusive schools are grounded in the belief that the world is an inclusive community comprising people who vary not only in disability but also in race, gender, and religious background (Mercer, 1997). This conceptualization is consistent with UNESCO's

---

(2023) view that inclusive education works to identify and remove all barriers to education, covering everything from curricula to pedagogy.

### **Repositioning Inclusive Education at School**

Schools should strategically repositioned themselves to serve learners with special needs and those at risk within the regular school setting on a side-by-side basis, using referral and linkage systems. Usman International School operates a structured and programmatic functional arrangement to serve children with special needs. Key repositioning features include:

1. Consultancy Services Unit: Specialists from various fields' clinical therapists, medical doctors, and special educators are invited to address learners' special learning needs. The recent ratification of the National Policy on Inclusive Education in Nigeria (Chibuzor, 2024) emphasizes the importance of such collaborative, multi-stakeholder approaches.
2. Classroom adaptations: Sign language for the deaf, enlarged print books for the visually impaired, bold visuals, specialized library materials, and Braille-transcribed books. These adaptations are consistent with the assistive technologies procured by UBEC nationwide (THEWILL, 2024).
3. Multiple means of representation and expression: Modelling, images, objects, manipulative, graphic organizers, oral and written responses, and technology are used to support content delivery and student demonstration of learning. This reflects the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework recommended by Ayantoye (2023) for enhancing participation of children with disabilities. These provisions collectively enable the successful implementation of inclusive education at UIS and serve as a model for other schools seeking to bridge the policy-practice gap identified in recent research.

### **Benefits of Inclusive Education for Students with Special Needs**

1. Formation of friendships with typically developing peers.
2. Increased social initiations, relationships, and networks.
3. Access to peer role models for academic pursuit and social behavior/skills.
4. Enhanced achievement of individualized educational planning (IEP) goals.
5. Adequate access to the general curriculum.
6. Promotion of skills acquisition and generalization.
7. Greater opportunities for interaction with non-disabled students.
8. Higher expectations for achievement.
9. Increased collaboration among school staff.
10. Greater parental participation in their special needs children's activities.

Recent research affirms these benefits. A systematic review by Dalgaard et al. (2022) found that inclusion neither increases nor decreases learning and psychosocial adjustment for children with special needs in OECD countries, suggesting that inclusion does not harm and can be beneficial when well-implemented. Furthermore, research has documented positive

impacts in the domains of reading, math, and social-emotional learning for children with disabilities in inclusive settings (de Bruin, 2023).

### **Benefits of Inclusive Education for Students without Special Needs**

1. Development of meaningful relationships.
2. Appreciation and acceptance of individual differences.
3. Enhanced understanding and acceptance of diversity.
4. Increased respect for all persons.
5. Preparation for adult life in a diverse society.
6. Increased opportunities for mastering activities by practising and teaching slower learners.
7. Improved academic outcomes.
8. Better overall student support due to richer resources for everyone.

These benefits are supported by de Bruin (2023), who presented an overview of five decades of research evidence about the impact of inclusive education on students' social, academic, and post-school outcomes, as well as their personal well-being.

### **Conclusion**

Inclusive education, as operationalized at Usman International School, reduces fear of human differences among children without disabilities while increasing comfort and awareness. It fosters growth in social cognition, improvement in self-concept, development of personal principles, and the formation of warm, caring friendships. The Usman International School model demonstrates that with appropriate structures, consultancy services, assistive technologies, and flexible instructional strategies inclusive education is not only theoretically sound but practically achievable in local and international contexts.

However, the literature reviewed indicates that many schools in Nigeria still face significant barriers, including inadequate funding, lack of resources, shortage of qualified teachers, and insufficient awareness about inclusive education (AllAfrica, 2024; James et al., 2025; Nuhu & Bagiwa, 2025). The recent ratification of the reviewed National Policy on Inclusive Education in 2024 provides a crucial policy framework, but effective implementation remains the key challenge (Chibuzor, 2024). Usman International School serves as an exemplary model of what is possible when commitment, resources, and expertise align. Continued investment in teacher training, infrastructure, assistive technology, and community engagement is recommended for sustainable repositioning.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the analysis and recent literature, the following recommendations are offered for strengthening inclusive practices in Nigeria and similar contexts:

1. Policy Implementation: States should urgently adopt and implement the reviewed National Policy on Inclusive Education (2024) with clear timelines and accountability mechanisms (Chibuzor, 2024; James et al., 2025).

2. Teacher Training: Expand pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes focusing on inclusive pedagogies, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and the use of assistive technology (Ayantoye, 2023; THEWILL, 2024).
3. Assistive Technology: Increase investment in the procurement, distribution, and maintenance of assistive technologies, coupled with training for teachers and learners on their use (Project Championz, 2023; THEWILL, 2024).
4. Infrastructure: Ensure all schools have accessible physical infrastructure, including ramps, accessible toilets, and adapted learning materials (James et al., 2025).
5. Community Engagement: Launch awareness campaigns to combat societal stigma and promote the benefits of inclusive education for all children (Nuhu & Bagiwa, 2025).
6. Data Collection: Establish a comprehensive national database to track children with disabilities and monitor their access to and outcomes in inclusive education (AllAfrica, 2024).
7. Funding: Increase budgetary allocation for inclusive education at federal and state levels, ensuring that funds reach schools and translate into tangible resources (AllAfrica, 2024).

## References

- AllAfrica. (2024, October 29). Nigeria: The neglect of children with special needs in Nigeria - A call for urgent action. <https://allafrica.com/stories/202410290045.html>
- Alquraini, T., & Gut, D. (2012). Critical components of successful inclusion of students with severe disabilities. *International Journal of Special Education*, 27 (1), 42–59.
- Ayantoye, S. K. (2023). Role of assistive technology in enhancing participation of children with disabilities in basic education in Nigeria. Exploring the perspective of special education teachers [Master's thesis, University of Gothenburg]. GUPEA. <https://gupea.ub.gu.se/handle/2077/77652>
- Bui, X., Quirk, C., Almazan, S., & Valenti, M. (2010). *Inclusive education research and practice*. Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education.
- Chambers, D. (Ed.). (2023). *Progress toward Agenda 2030: A mid-term review of the status of inclusive education in global contexts*. Brill.
- Chibuzor, O. (2024, February 28). NCE ratifies new policy on inclusive education. *ThisDay*. <https://www.thisdaylive.com/2024/02/28/nce-ratifies-new-policy-on-inclusive-education-2/>
- Dalgaard, N. T., Bondebjerg, A., Viinholt, B. C. A., & Filges, T. (2022). The effects of inclusion on academic achievement, socioemotional development and wellbeing of children with special educational needs. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 18 (4), e1291. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cl2.1291>
- de Bruin, K. (2023). Inclusive education: A review of the evidence. In *The Routledge Handbook of Inclusive Education for Teacher Educators* (pp. 7-22). Routledge.
- James, P., Esor, P. D., Mercy, O. B., Grace, O. Y., & Mariam, B. F. (2025). Bridging policy and practice: Evaluating inclusive education for children with disabilities in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. *African Educational Research Journal*, 13 (3), 352–361.
-



- Mercer, J. R. (1997). *Labeling the mentally retarded*. University of California Press.
- Nuhu, B. M. & Bagiwa, Z. L. (2025). Barriers to inclusive education in Nigeria: Policy, practice and counselling perspectives. *Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies*, 51 (7), 1048–1055. <https://hal.science/hal-05147237>
- Obani, T. C. (2006). *Foundations of special education*. Heinemann.
- Ogungbamila, B. (2024). Teacher distress tolerance and willingness to teach children with special educational needs in Nigeria: Teacher job satisfaction as a mediator. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 15 (3), 45–58.
- Ozaji, E. D. (2006). *Special education: A global perspective*. Deka Publications.
- Project Championz. (2023). *Using assistive technology to support students with physical disabilities in Nigerian inclusive classrooms: A case study*. Retrieved June 15, 2026, from <https://projectchampionz.com.ng/project-category/nigerian-inclusive-classrooms/using-assistive-technology-to-support-students-with-physical-disabilities-in-nigerian-inclusive-classrooms-a-case-study>
- THEWILL. (2024, September 21). *FG reiterates commitment to inclusive education for special needs children, trains 1,878 teachers*. <https://thewillnews.com/fg-reiterates-commitment-to-inclusive-education-for-special-needs-children-trains-1878-teachers/>
- UNESCO. (1994). *The Salamanca statement and framework for action on special needs education*. UNESCO.
- UNESCO. (2023, June 26). *Inclusion in education*. <https://www.unesco.org/en/inclusion-education>
- UNESCO-IBE. (2022). *Reaching out to all learners: Inclusive education resource pack*. UNESCO.
- UNICEF. (2010). *Inclusive education: Children with disabilities*. UNICEF.
- Wheeler, G., & Udegbe, I. (2025). Teaching inclusively in Nigeria: New framings of inclusion surfaced through a collective storytelling approach. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 1–18. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2025.2470939>
- World Bank. (2023). *Approaches to deliver inclusive education in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia*. International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank.