

# The Impact of Inclusive Education Practices (IEP) on Academic Achievement and Social Integration of Children with Learning Disabilities in Primary Schools in Oyo State, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** The study investigated the impact of inclusive education practice on academic achievement and social integration of children with learning disabilities in primary schools in Oyo State. Descriptive research design of the “ex-post facto” type was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted of all the 27 public primary schools in Afijio Local Government Area of Oyo State, Nigeria, which served as a case study for this work. 10 public primary schools were randomly selected for the study. 15 students were selected from each school to make 150 samples. A self-designed questionnaire was developed. The instrument was validated and the reliability coefficient of 0.87 was obtained. Three research questions guided the study. Regression analysis, t-test and Pearson Product Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) were used to analyze the data collected. Findings revealed that pupils’ disability status predicted academic performance; that pupils’ disability status contributed significantly to the prediction of academic performance and that there is significant relationship between pupils’ disability status and academic performance of pupils who are learning disabled at the primary school level. Based on the findings, it was recommended, among others, that there should be proper funding of inclusive education programs by making adequate provision for supportive personnel.

**Keywords:** inclusive education practices, academic achievement, social integration, pupils with learning disabilities.

## 1. Introduction

Education is the key to national development and everyone has the right to education irrespective of one’s status. However, despite global progress in achieving universal access to education, more than half the 65 million children with disabilities in low- and middle-income countries are not in school. They face multiple barriers to receiving an education including inaccessible schools, inaccessible teaching materials, prejudice and discrimination from teachers and bullying from peers [18]. The situation is particularly concerning girls with disabilities. Globally this group of students face learning crisis at all levels of education. Not only are children out of school, but once in school, they are failing to learn. Children experience lower levels of enrollment, attainment and literacy. The

attainment gaps between children with disabilities and children without disabilities are growing, and children with disabilities are being left behind. There is not enough investment in education and many governments consider investment in inclusive education costly, citing resource constraints. However, the opportunity costs to the economy and health sector of children being out of school provide a powerful argument for increased investment in education that promotes inclusion of all children [4].

Over the years, there has been disparity in the accessibility of education between the normal children and the children living with disabilities. Education for children living with disabilities was in segregated classrooms with inadequate attention and materials. Recently, a heated debate is ongoing on the need for inclusive education mostly in developed countries of the world. Inclusive education requires that all children with disabilities should be taught together in the same general classroom with other children who are not disabled [24] [18].

Inclusive education is an approach that ensures the presence, participation, and achievement of all students in education. This may be in formal schools or in non-formal places of learning, such as extra-curricular clubs and humanitarian camps [24]. It often involves working to change the structures, systems, policies, practices and cultures in schools and other institutions responsible for education, so that they can respond to the diversity of students in their locality. Inclusion emphasizes opportunities for equal participation, but with options for special assistance and facilities as needed, and for differentiation, within a common learning framework. The concept of inclusive education includes all learners, but it may be interpreted differently according to the context. For example, while it covers children excluded on the basis of language, gender, ethnicity, disability and other factors, it can focus on children with disabilities only. At the same time, children may be affected by more than one issue. A child with disabilities may also speak the language of a minority ethnic group, or be a refugee, or, if she is a girl, her family and society may not value girls’ education. According to [1], making schools inclusive for

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boys and girls with special needs improves all learners, including students facing exclusion because of other challenges, or more than one issue.

According to [25], inclusion refers to recognition of the right to education and its provision in non-discriminatory ways.

- 1) A common vision which covers all people.
- 2) A belief that schools and other places of learning have a responsibility to educate all children (and adults) in line with human rights principles.
- 3) A continuous process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all Learners, regardless of factors such as disability, gender, age, ethnicity, language, HIV status, geographical location and sexuality recognizing that all people can learn.

Disability is generally equated with incapacity. The impact is remarkably similar in different countries and across health conditions where the general public lacks an understanding of the abilities of people with physical impairments [10] [23]. Negative attitudes and behaviors can have adverse effects on children and adults with disabilities, leading to negative consequences such as low self-esteem and reduced participation. Persons who feel harassed because of their disability sometimes avoid going to places, changing their routines, or even moving from their homes. Example of abuse of persons with disability abound: children bullying other children with disabilities in schools; taxi drivers failing to support access needs of passengers with disabilities; employers discriminating against people with disabilities and strangers mocking people with disabilities [19], [5], [9], [22].

The notion of inclusive education was initially thought to be a concept in Nigerian educational system. However, inclusive education has since then witnessed some tremendous improvements in the last decade despite cultural, socio-economic, and political constraints [11]. These improvements began from the provision of Section 8 of the National Policy on Education since 1977 and have provided support mechanisms for children with disabilities. Because of governmental policies and cultural constraints, inclusive education did not witness series of advocacies, litigation, and legislation, as it was observed in large scale societies like the United States of America, which resulted in the establishment of legal mechanism to meet the needs of children with disabilities in an inclusive setting. A recent indication is the promulgation of Public Law (PL) 99-457 which, to a large extent, addresses special education concerns of young children.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

The academic performance of pupils with learning disabilities has been a source of concern to researchers in the field of special education. This is contingent upon the fact that pupils' academic performance is one of the major criteria for judging the standard and quality of any educational program. From the background information, however, it appears that the academic performance of pupils with learning disabilities has not been given much attention that other field of special needs like the visual and hearing impairment which are popular. This study, therefore, provides a causal explanation of academic

performance through the analysis of pupils with learning disabilities with a view to improving their academic performance at the primary school level in Oyo State and Nigeria as a whole.

## 3. Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of inclusive education practices on the academic achievement and social integration of children with learning disabilities in primary schools in Oyo State. Specifically, it sought to determine:

- 1) if pupils' disability status predicts academic performance at the primary school level.
- 2) the contribution of pupils' disability status (if any) to the prediction of academic performance at the primary school level.
- 3) if there is a relationship between learning disabilities and social integration at the primary school level.

## 4. Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- 1) Does pupils' disability status predict academic performance at the primary school level?
- 2) What is the contribution of pupils' disability status (if any) to the prediction of academic performance at the primary school level?
- 3) Is there is a relationship between learning disabilities and social integration at the primary school level?

## 5. Literature Review

Inclusion refers to the "full-time placement of children with mild, moderate and severe disabilities in regular classrooms" [13]. The inclusion movement believes that children with special needs should be placed in the regular school classroom they would have attended if they did not have special needs. In other words, every child belongs in the regular classroom, and no conditions should be imposed to exclude anyone from such environment.

Inclusion is a step further in mainstreaming, as it presents a means by which a school attempts to respond to all pupils as individuals, by reconsidering and structuring its curricular organization and pro-vision, and allocating resources to enhance equality of opportunity.

Through this process, the school builds its capacity to accept all pupils from the local community who wish to attend, and in doing so, reduces the need to exclude pupils". Thus, the high point of inclusion lies in its emphasis on restructuring of the entire school programs and practices. Here, the content, the process and the environment of the mainstream program are restructured" in order to accommodate a much wider range of ability" [13].

For [18], inclusion of all pupils in the mainstream schools is part of an international agenda which calls for the full inclusion of all pupils with disabilities, into all aspects of life. Inclusion is based on the assumption that:

- 1) The original place of the child with special needs is in

the regular classroom. Therefore, no condition should be allowed to remove him/her from that environment.

- 2) All children have the right to learn and play together. Inclusion is thus a fundamental human right. For instance, section 18 of the Nigerian constitution makes the provision of suitable education for all children government responsibility.
- 3) Denying opportunity to children to learn under the same roof with other children is devaluing and discriminatory.
- 4) Exclusion is inhuman and indefensible.

#### A. *Inclusive Education in Nigeria*

It is a matter of fact that no concrete step has been taken with regard to inclusive education in Nigeria. Even at policy level, integration remains the focus of planning special education programs. However, professional associations concerned with the education of people with special needs, have been addressing the issue of inclusive education in the country. For instance, inclusive education was one of the major issues examined at the 12th Annual National Conference of the National Council for Exceptional Children held at Minna, Niger State, in August, 2002. In the keynote address presented at the conference, Tim Obani (one of the pioneers in special education in the country), argued, the old special education system with its restrictive practices cannot successfully address these problems (of special needs children). The answer lies in inclusion or inclusive schooling, in changing and recognizing the entire school system to accept all children and cater for their varied 'special' or 'ordinary' learning needs and difficulties" [13].

As alluded to earlier, the education of people with special needs has received wide attention at policy level, even though it is other-wise, at the level of implementation. The following problems have been identified with special education in Nigeria.

- 1) Inadequate plans for the identification of handicapped children.
- 2) All children have the right to learn and play together. Inclusion is thus a fundamental human right. For instance, section 18 of the Nigerian constitution makes the provision of suitable education for all children government responsibility.
- 3) Most special schools are located in urban centers, egging, which is fast assuming the status of an occupation among adult persons with disabilities, as well as other adults who have children with disabilities [8].

There is also the usual problem of attitudes towards persons with disability, which in most cases, is far from being favorable. For instance, the writer was a witness to an ugly incident where parents threatened to (and some actually did) withdraw their children from school because of the presence of a child with epilepsy who was in that school. The local culture is a great influence on perception of disability and the resulting attitude towards it. Parents and other family members may be ashamed of exposing their children with disabilities, as these children might 'tarnish their image', especially in African societies where the common way of explaining phenomena are

unscientific. In addition, there is a poor awareness about special education and about the fact that some children with disability can also have an education.

Beyond this, the all-pervading problem of illiteracy and its management is more important and therefore, which is more often than not, it takes priority over special needs education. For instance, most intervention programs carried out by International Agencies and International Non-Governmental Organizations are in the area of literacy and non-Formal Education. Even the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program of the Federal Government laid more emphasis on basic education, especially regular primary education and literacy education. Where attention is focused on special needs education, it is mostly in the area of basic education for the nomadic groups and the girl-child. Little or no special consideration is given to the education of children with disabilities.

The question now, is that how realistic is the adoption of inclusion as a strategy, in an environment where special education has to contend with the earlier highlighted problems and several others that have not been highlighted here.

Given the nature of the environment of special education in the country, one will have to exercise caution in the attempt to implement inclusion, especially full inclusion. Even in the United States, from where the concept originated, many special educators like Kaufman, Hallan and Zigmond (Richardson), are still skeptical about its practicability.

One has reservations on whether the general educational system designed and implemented in its present form, has the adequate ability to cater for the special learning needs of exceptional children in Nigeria today.

#### B. *Signs and Symptoms of Learning Disabilities*

A range of environmental, biological, genetic, and prenatal conditions may be associated with the development of learning disabilities. Symptoms do not necessarily predict later learning problems or indicate the existence of a disability, particularly when only a single indicator is present [?]. Similarly, protective factors do not rule out the presence of a disability. However, the presence of risk indicators warrants substantial and serious efforts to facilitate early learning success because many children at risk respond positively to high quality instruction and support. Therefore, children at risk, who may or may not have learning disabilities (LD), need to receive carefully planned and responsive services and supports to enhance their opportunities for learning systematic observations. Systematic observations of a child's behavior and abilities over time are an important addition to examining the presence of risk indicators and protective factors. Observations may be informal or may follow a standard observation protocol; in either case, they should be conducted in multiple times and in varying contexts (e.g; home, diagnostic preschool, Head Start classroom or playgroup) to increase the reliability and validity of the hypotheses made regarding a child's behavior. In many cases, an extended period of observations will be necessary. Observations should provide a description of the frequency, consistency, and severity of the behaviors causing concerns in

relation to contextual demands. The child's family should be involved throughout the entire process. When professionals raise a question about the course of the child's development as a result of systematic observation, they should discuss the findings with the caregivers and family. When indicated, a referral should be made to appropriate professionals for further evaluation and, if warranted, provision of supports and services should be recommended.

### C. Suspected Causes of Learning Disability

It is thought that learning disabilities may be caused by hereditary, alcohol or cocaine use during pregnancy, premature birth, diabetes, meningitis of mother or offspring, and/or environmental factors of malnutrition and poor prenatal healthcare [21]. A leading theory among scientists is that learning disabilities stem from subtle disturbances in the way brain structures are formed (Jordan). Learning disabilities are not caused by economic disadvantage, environmental factors, or cultural differences. In fact, there is frequently no apparent cause for learning disabilities [20]. More generally, there are multiple factors that cause learning disabilities, including a typical brain organization. Specifically, there may be differences in cells or in the basic "hard-wiring" of the brain. One patient explained that his brain "was wired by a non-union electrician." There also may be differences in brain development due to metabolic disorders such as maternal diabetes or thyroid disease. Parental alcohol abuse and maternal smoking are well-known agents contributing to childhood learning problems. In addition, there may be stress to the baby during birth when there is sudden lack of oxygen to the baby's brain [26].

### D. Types of Learning Disabilities

There are many types of learning disabilities in school-aged children. Learning disabilities are an umbrella term for a wide variety of learning problems. A learning disability is not a problem with intelligence or motivation. Kids with learning disabilities are just as smart as everyone else. Their brains are simply wired differently. This difference affects how they receive and process information. Children with learning disabilities see, hear, and understand things differently. This can lead to trouble with learning new information and skills, and putting them to use. The most common types of learning disabilities involve problems with reading, writing, math, reasoning, listening, and speaking. Here are five of the most common learning disabilities in classrooms today:

#### 1) Dyslexia

Dyslexia (reading-based or print-based) is the most common form of all learning disabilities. It is a language-based disability in which a child has trouble understanding words, sentences, or paragraphs. The child may have difficulty identifying and comprehending words from a book or with spelling. They often have problems processing or understanding what they read or hear. Because decoding printed words from a book becomes such a struggle, they often miss the meaning of what they have read. Many dyslexic people are notably talented in arts and music, visual perception, athletic, and mechanical ability.

### E. Common Signs Include

- 1) Reading painfully and slowly.
- 2) Difficulty with basic letter sounds.
- 3) Trouble decoding; the order of letters becomes mixed up.
- 4) Cannot recall known words.

#### 1) Dyscalculia

Dyscalculia is a lifelong learning disability that affects the ability to grasp and solve math concepts, which results in a child having trouble recognizing numbers and symbols and understanding basic math concepts. There are many different types of math disabilities, and these can affect people differently at various stages of a child's life. People with dyscalculia often have difficulty manipulating numbers in their head and remembering steps in formulas and equations. Just like dyslexia, people with dyscalculia can be taught to achieve success.

### F. Common Signs Include

- 1) Difficulty recalling number sequences.
- 2) May mistake numbers that look similar in shape.
- 3) Cannot retain patterns when adding, subtracting, multiplying, or dividing.
- 4) Difficulty with handling money or estimating costs.

#### 1) Dysgraphia

Dysgraphia is a writing disability, which means a child may not have the complex set of motor and information processing skills to write their thoughts down on paper. Children find it hard to form letters and write within a defined space. Many people with dysgraphia have handwriting that is uneven and inconsistent. They struggle with writing complete and grammatically correct sentences and often have poor handwriting. Many are able to write legibly but do so very slowly or very small. Typically, people with dysgraphia are unable to visualize letters and do not remember the motor patterns of letters, which makes writing require a lot of energy and time.

### G. Common Signs Include

- 1) Awkward pencil grip.
- 2) Illegible handwriting.
- 3) Frustration with writing thoughts on paper.
- 4) Can talk about an idea but cannot write it down on paper.

#### 1) Dyspraxia

Dyspraxia is a disorder that affects the development of motor skills. People with dyspraxia have trouble planning and executing fine motor tasks, which can range from waving goodbye to getting dressed. Dyspraxia is a lifelong disorder with no cure, but options are available to help improve a child's ability to function and be independent. Dyspraxia is not a learning disability, but it commonly coexists with other learning disabilities that can affect learning ability.

#### 2) Attention Deficiency Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

ADHD is a disorder that causes people to lose focus on tasks easily. ADHD has two main types, with a third being a combination of the two. Hyperactive-Impulsive ADHD is

distinguished by the child's excessive amount of activity. This may include constant fidgeting, non-stop talking, problems with Soing quiet activities, trouble controlling their temper, and more. Inattentive ADHD causes people to not put the needed attention into a required task. People with inattentive ADHD may struggle with paying attention to instructions, daydream often, process information slowly, become bored easily, and be oorly organized. ADHD is not a learning disability, but it can cause people to struggle with learning and is commonly linked to other learning disabilities.

#### *H. Psychological Effects of Children with Learning Disability*

The feeling of trauma appears vivid in children with disability. This trauma could be either social or psychological [17]. The victims are usually occupied with thoughts of anger, fear of death, guilt of having to pass it on to others, thoughts of how to fit into the society or cope with work. Children with disabilities could be having physical disability. Such children will need help with self- care, mobility and decision making. They, therefore, require special care. To ensure their safety, laws have been enacted by the Federal Government of Nigeria [2] [14]. The continuous negative perceptions of children with disabilities have made accountability difficult to achieve, especially when Federal, State and Local responsibilities are misappropriated. The deep misrepresentations of cultural beliefs about children with disabilities and their alleged maltreatment by society cannot be allowed down the drain without being challenged. The immediate impact of these negative societal perceptions is that teacher training and certification in special education are not maintained.

Ignorance, superstition and societal taboos have also contributed immensely to the lack of care of children with disabilities. [3] further found that cultural behaviors resulting from superstition and negative perception of these children have led to poor identification, evaluation, placement and instruction. Furthermore, the absence of legal mandate indicates that parents of disabled students lack the legal rights to due process, and as a result, cannot initiate litigation against any form of discrimination against their children in terms of admissions into schools, manpower placement and service delivery.

### **6. Methodology**

Descriptive research design of the "ex-post facto" type was adopted for the study. This is because none of the variables of the study could be manipulated by the researcher. The study population consisted of all primary school pupils in the 27 public primary schools in Afijio Local Government Area of Oyo State, Nigeria, which served as the case study for this work.

10 public primary schools were randomly selected for the study. The focus was targeted at the primary four pupils because they have spent some years in the school and have been exposed to different class/subject teachers which can influence their academic performance and different methodologies. Primary five and six pupils were exempted too because some of them are preparing for external examinations to proceed to secondary schools. From each school, an assessment test was conducted

for the pupils to determine the learning disabled ones for proper representation for the study. 15 pupils were selected from each school to make 150 samples.

A self-designed questionnaire was developed titled "Impact of Inclusive Education Practices on Academic Achievement and Social Integration of Children with Learning Disabilities (2IEP2ASICLD)". The instrument was validated by two experts in the field of learning disability from the Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo and an expert in measurement and evaluation from the same school. The instrument was administered on 20 pupils in Durbar Special School, Oyo, Oyo State. A reliability coefficient of 0.87 was obtained using Cronbach alpha which connotes that the instrument was reliable.

The permission of the head of the schools used was sought before administration of the instrument and the purpose was explicitly explained to them.

Regression Analysis was used to determine the contribution of the pupils' disability status (x1) in predicting learning disabled pupils' academic performance (x2). The criterion variable was, therefore, regressed on the explanatory variable. The study adopted t-test to determine the significant difference in pupils' academic performance and Pearson Product Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) was used to determine the relationship.

### **7. Results**

This section presents the analysis of the collected data basically to answer the three research questions used for this work.

#### *A. Research Question 1: Does Pupils' Disability Status Predict Academic Performance at the Primary School Level?*

Table 1 showed the prediction of academic performance by pupils' disability status. From the table, it was revealed that pupils' disability status predicted academic performance. The B value (prediction) was shown as .052. There was also a significant relationship between the two constructs .016;  $p < 0.5$ .

#### *B. Research Question 2: What is the Contribution of Pupils' Disability Status (If Any) to the Prediction of Academic Performance at the at the Primary School Level?*

The table 2 revealed that the beta weights () of the paths (path coefficients) give the estimates of the strengths of the causation. It was revealed, therefore, that the disability status of pupils contributed significantly to the prediction of academic performance ( $\beta = .068, p < .05$ ).

#### *C. Research Question 3: Is There a Relationship Between Learning Disabilities and Social Integration at the Primary School Level?*

The table 3 shows that there is a strong positive relationship (0.694) between pupils' disability status and their social integration at the primary school level in Oyo State. Therefore, the researcher rejects the null hypothesis and accepts the alternative hypothesis, which states that there is a significant relationship between pupils' disability status and social

Table 1  
Prediction of academic performance by pupils' disability status

N	Academic Performance	Sig (1-tailed)
150	Pupils' Disability Status .052	.016

Table 2

Factor	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	T	Sig.
(Constant)	2.431	.505	.068	4.566	.000
Pupils' Disability Status	8.652E-02	.130		2.136	.024*

\*Sig. (P<0.05)

Table 3  
Correlations

		Pupils' Disability Status	Social Integration
Pupils' Disability Status	Pearson Correlation	1	.694**
	sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	150	150
Social Integration	Pearson Correlation	.694**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	150	150

integration of pupils who are learning disabled at the primary school level.

### 8. Discussion of Findings

From the analysis so far, it was revealed that disability status had not just ordinary relationship with academic performance, but a significant one. This finding, therefore, lends credence to [16] assertion that the academic performance of learning-disabled pupils has been a source of concern to researchers in the field of special education. On the findings discovered in the research question, whereby the disability status of the pupils contributed significantly to the prediction of academic performance lends credence to the work of [12] which reported that children with disabilities usually recorded less success. The rationale behind the finding of the present study might not be probably unconnected with the fact that adequate support facilities and personnel were not provided for the children with disabilities in academic programs. The study further revealed that there is significant relationship between learners' disability status, that is, pupils with learning disability and social integration at the primary school level.

### 9. Conclusion and Recommendations

There is no doubt that special education, especially education for students with learning disabilities, is gaining ground in educational delivery globally. It is in fact, paying vital complementary roles in this regard. Inclusive education practice is, however, likely to be the order of the day, since we now have both the abled and the non-abled persons patronizing education programs.

This study had underscored the need to consider learners with learning disability status during curriculum planning and instructional delivery because of the serious implications they have for inclusive education. The researcher, therefore, believes that the authorities concerned need to be aware of these implications and be more supportive of the learners with learning disabilities.

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