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Managing Teacher Capacity Building for Repositioning of Special Needs Education towards Sustainable Inclusive Classroom Practices in Nigeria

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Abstract

Managing teacher capacity building is central to repositioning special needs education towards sustainable inclusive classroom practices in Nigeria. As demand for equitable and inclusive education continues to grow, the role of teachers becomes increasingly critical in ensuring that learners with diverse needs are effectively accommodated in mainstream classrooms. Teacher capacity building encompasses the development of professional skills, pedagogical knowledge, and adaptive competencies required to address the unique learning needs of students with disabilities. This paper examines the significance of teacher capacity building in enhancing inclusive education practices in Nigeria, focusing on strategies for effective management, institutional support, and alignment with sustainable educational goals. It highlights the importance of continuous professional development, access to inclusive teaching resources, and the integration of innovative instructional approaches to improve learning outcomes for students with special needs. The study also explores key challenges, including inadequate training opportunities, limited funding, and weak policy implementation, that hinder effective teacher preparation. The paper argues that strengthening teacher capacity is essential for achieving sustainable inclusive classroom practices and for ensuring that special needs education is effectively integrated into the national education system. It concludes by proposing strategic interventions to improve teacher preparedness, strengthen institutional frameworks, and promote inclusive learning environments across Nigeria.

Keywords: Capacity Building, Inclusive Classroom Practices, Special Needs Education, Sustainable Education, Teacher Development

Introduction

Special needs education in Nigeria has increasingly gained attention as part of broader efforts to promote inclusive and equitable education for all learners. Okeke and Lawal (2022) observe that inclusive education ensures learners with diverse abilities are meaningfully integrated into mainstream classrooms, allowing them to participate fully in academic and social activities. Chukwu (2020), notes that historical exclusion and marginalization of learners with disabilities significantly limited access, participation, and achievement in the national education system. The current shift toward inclusion aligns with global commitments, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (United Nations, 2015), which emphasizes equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all, including learners with special needs. This global context reinforces the urgency of adapting national educational policies and practices to accommodate learner diversity effectively. Teacher capacity building is central to achieving successful inclusive education. Sharma, Loreman, and Forlin (2018) emphasize that teachers must acquire specialized knowledge, pedagogical skills, and adaptive competencies to address the varied learning needs of students with disabilities. Similarly, Adebayo and Okafor (2021) corroborate that teachers' professional preparedness directly affects the quality of instruction, classroom management, and the overall success of inclusive practices. Viberg, Hatakka, and Mavroudi (2023) also demonstrated that data-driven teaching approaches, when combined with innovative instructional strategies, significantly improve learner engagement, motivation, and academic outcomes in diverse classroom settings. Therefore, investing in continuous

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teacher development is essential not only for instructional effectiveness but also for fostering an inclusive school culture that values all learners. Despite policy advances and growing recognition of inclusion's importance, several persistent challenges continue to hinder progress in Nigeria. Ogunyemi (2022) identifies critical gaps in teacher training, inadequate access to instructional resources, and weak institutional capacity as major barriers to effective implementation of inclusive education. Ezeani (2020) further notes that societal attitudes, misconceptions about disability, and limited awareness of inclusive education principles negatively influence teachers' ability and willingness to implement inclusive practices. These structural, social, and attitudinal barriers underscore the need for well-designed, sustainable teacher capacity-building frameworks that ensure educators are adequately prepared to meet the demands of inclusive classrooms. This paper examines how managing teacher capacity building can strategically reposition special needs education toward sustainable inclusive classroom practices in Nigeria. It identifies effective strategies, examines the challenges educators face, and explores the institutional support mechanisms needed to strengthen teacher preparedness. By analysing these dimensions, the study aims to provide insights into how teacher development can enhance the quality of special needs education, promote equitable learning opportunities, and contribute to long-term sustainability in inclusive classroom practices. Ultimately, the research underscores that the success of inclusive education in Nigeria depends on the systematic and continuous development of teacher competencies, institutional backing, and alignment with national and global educational goals.

Concept of Teacher Capacity Building in Nigeria.

Teacher capacity building refers to the continuous development of teachers' knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for effective teaching and learning. Sharma, Loreman, and Forlin (2018) define it as a structured and systematic process that enhances teachers' ability to address the diverse needs of learners, including those with disabilities, special educational needs, and other learning challenges. Capacity building encompasses both the acquisition of pedagogical knowledge and the development of practical skills that enable teachers to plan, implement, and evaluate inclusive instructional strategies effectively. Adebayo and Okafor (2021) emphasize that teacher competence is directly linked to classroom effectiveness, student engagement, and academic achievement, making professional development an essential element of educational quality. Teacher capacity building in Nigeria occurs through a combination of pre-service and in-service training programs designed to strengthen instructional delivery and classroom management. Pre-service training, typically provided in teacher education institutions, equips prospective teachers with foundational knowledge in pedagogy, curriculum design, and learner assessment. In-service programs, on the other hand, provide practicing teachers with ongoing opportunities to upgrade their skills, adapt to changing educational demands, and incorporate inclusive teaching practices into their classrooms, as in Ogunyemi (2022). Despite these initiatives, significant gaps remain, including inconsistent access to training, limited professional support, and insufficient monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, which collectively, according to Ezeani (2020), constrain teachers' ability to implement effective teaching strategies. Continuous capacity-building interventions, however, have been shown to improve teacher confidence, motivation, and instructional competence, thereby fostering more effective learning environments. Okeke and Lawal (2022) further opined that teachers equipped with inclusive education skills are better positioned to manage classrooms characterized by learner diversity. These skills include differentiated instruction, adaptive assessment techniques, classroom collaboration strategies, and the use of technology to support learning. Beyond technical expertise, teacher capacity building also nurtures attitudes of empathy, patience, and problem-solving, which are crucial for fostering supportive and inclusive learning environments. Consequently, the process of developing teacher capacity extends beyond mere technical competence to encompass holistic professional growth that aligns with broader educational goals and societal expectations. The strategic importance of teacher capacity building cannot be overstated. It serves as the foundation for sustainable educational development, ensuring that schools can meet the evolving needs of learners and comply with national and international standards for inclusive education. Effective capacity-building programs empower teachers to become agents of change, driving innovation, improving student outcomes, and promoting equity in education. Hence, investment in teacher development contributes to long-term systemic improvements, as skilled and confident educators are better able to mentor colleagues, influence educational policy, and foster collaborative professional communities that support continuous learning and improvement (Sharma, Loreman and Forlin, 2018; Adebayo and Okafor, 2021).

Concept of Managing Teacher Capacity Building in Special Needs Education

Managing teacher capacity building involves the careful planning, coordination, implementation, and evaluation of professional development initiatives designed to enhance teacher effectiveness, competence, and instructional quality. UNESCO (2021) emphasizes that effective management requires not only structured and systematic training systems but also ongoing, context-specific professional development programs that are responsive to the dynamic needs of learners and the realities of contemporary classrooms. This involves identifying skill gaps, designing targeted interventions, and ensuring that teachers acquire both theoretical knowledge and practical strategies for effective instruction.

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King and Winthrop (2018) highlight that collaboration among multiple stakeholders, including government agencies, teacher training institutions, schools, non-governmental organizations, and community partners, significantly enhances the effectiveness and reach of capacity-building programs. Such collaboration ensures efficient resource allocation, consistency in training approaches, and alignment with broader national educational policies. Moreover, it facilitates knowledge sharing, mentoring opportunities, and peer learning among teachers, which reinforces the practical application of inclusive teaching strategies in diverse classroom contexts. For Sharma, Loreman, and Forlin (2018), their stress on the importance of sustained and continuous professional development serves as a cornerstone for effective teacher capacity management. One-off workshops or isolated training sessions are often insufficient to equip teachers with the adaptive competencies required for inclusive classrooms. Instead, structured programs that integrate follow-up support, reflective practices, and iterative learning cycles create enduring professional growth and build teacher confidence in managing diverse learners. This continuous approach ensures that teachers can adapt to evolving classroom challenges, integrate innovative instructional methods, and respond effectively to individual learning needs. For teachers in special needs education, capacity building requires a more specialized focus. It encompasses equipping educators with adaptive teaching strategies, differentiated instruction techniques, inclusive pedagogical approaches, and classroom management skills tailored to learners with varied cognitive, sensory, emotional, and physical abilities. Effective management also entails monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that track teacher progress, measure the impact of training interventions, and ensure accountability at both institutional and systemic levels. By embedding these structures within the education system, teacher development programs, according to UNESCO (2021), King and Winthrop (2018), and Sharma, Loreman and Forlin (2018), can achieve long-term sustainability and scalability, thereby enhancing the overall quality of inclusive education. Moreover, well-managed capacity-building programs address not only pedagogical skills but also teacher attitudes, motivation, and professional identity. Teachers trained under such frameworks are more likely to embrace inclusive values, demonstrate commitment to equity in learning, and foster supportive classroom environments. In Nigeria, where historical challenges such as inadequate training opportunities, societal misconceptions, and limited institutional support continue to affect special needs education, effective management of teacher capacity building is particularly crucial for repositioning the system toward sustainable inclusive classroom practices. By integrating planning, stakeholder engagement, continuous training, and evaluative oversight, educational managers can create a professional environment where teachers are consistently empowered to meet the complex and evolving demands of inclusive education.

Teacher Capacity Building for Repositioning of Special Needs Education

Special needs education in Nigeria is a critical component of the broader effort to ensure equitable, inclusive, and quality learning for all students, particularly those with disabilities and diverse learning challenges. Okeke and Lawal (2022) define special needs education as an approach that ensures learners with physical, intellectual, sensory, and emotional differences are provided with tailored support to meet their unique educational requirements. This recognizes that learners with disabilities are not a homogeneous group and that effective education must respond to the varied and individualized needs of each student. Chukwu (2020) further emphasizes that special needs education serves as a corrective framework to address historical exclusion and systemic inequalities in access to education, promoting meaningful participation and equitable opportunities for all learners. Paramount to the success of repositioning special needs education in Nigeria is the role of teachers, as effective special needs education cannot exist without trained, competent, and committed educators who possess the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to manage inclusive classrooms. Adebayo and Okafor (2021) highlight that teacher capacity building is fundamental in equipping educators with adaptive instructional methods, specialized pedagogical strategies, and classroom management competencies that respond to diverse learner needs. Ogunyemi (2022) notes that well-prepared teachers who have undergone continuous professional development are better able to implement inclusive practices, monitor learner progress, and adjust instructional approaches to ensure that no student is left behind. Teacher attitudes, confidence, and preparedness are equally critical in shaping learning outcomes for students with special needs. Buttressing this, Ezeani (2020) opined that positive teacher attitudes, underpinned by knowledge and practical training, significantly influence learners' engagement, motivation, and academic achievement. Teachers who are confident in their ability to accommodate diverse learners are more likely to foster inclusive environments where all students feel valued and supported. Conversely, insufficient teacher preparation often leads to classroom practices that inadvertently marginalize learners with disabilities, undermining the goals of inclusive education. Sharma, Loreman, and Forlin (2018) further argue that integrating inclusive pedagogical strategies into teacher practice enhances engagement and academic outcomes for all students. This includes differentiated instruction, collaborative learning opportunities, individualized assessment methods, and the use of assistive technologies to support diverse learners. Teacher capacity building, therefore, is not merely about knowledge acquisition; it involves cultivating adaptive competencies, reflective practices, and problem-solving skills that enable educators to anticipate and respond to the dynamic needs of inclusive classrooms.

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Repositioning special needs education therefore requires that teacher capacity building be continuous, contextually relevant, and strategically managed to align with national educational policies and international best practices. Teachers need ongoing mentorship, access to updated instructional resources, and exposure to innovative teaching approaches that reflect the evolving landscape of inclusive education. By strengthening teacher capacity in these ways, our society can create a sustainable model of inclusive education in which special needs learners are fully integrated, supported, and able to achieve their full potential academically, socially, and emotionally.

Teacher Capacity Building toward Sustainable Inclusive Education

Sustainable inclusive education is a holistic framework that ensures every learner, regardless of ability, has equitable access to quality learning opportunities within mainstream classrooms. At the heart of this framework lies teacher capacity building, which equips educators with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to manage diverse learners effectively and foster learning environments that are adaptable, inclusive, and sustainable. Teacher capacity building encompasses not only technical pedagogical skills but also reflective practice, problem-solving abilities, and the ability to create inclusive classroom cultures that support students with diverse learning needs. Sustainable inclusive education relies heavily on continuous teacher development, access to adequate resources, and adaptive instructional approaches that respond to the evolving needs of learners. Capacity building therefore empowers teachers to implement differentiated instruction, employ collaborative learning strategies, and design flexible assessment methods tailored to the unique abilities and learning styles of each student. Ainscow (2020) emphasized that these practices are sacrosanct to promoting participation, equity, and meaningful engagement, ensuring that inclusive education is not simply a policy ideal but a lived experience in every classroom. Ongoing professional development is a critical component of sustaining inclusive education. Teachers who engage in continuous learning, mentorship, and reflective practice develop increased confidence and competence in addressing learner diversity. Viberg, Hatakka, and Mavroudi (2023) agreeably are of the opinion that such professional development enables educators to identify learning gaps early, adapt instructional strategies responsively, and foster an environment where all students can thrive academically and socially. Similarly, Okeke and Lawal (2022) demonstrate that teachers who are continually supported in building their capacity are better equipped to integrate innovative teaching techniques, manage classroom dynamics, and utilize technology effectively to enhance accessibility and learner engagement. UNESCO (2020), underscores that sustained capacity building is pivotal in maintaining the quality, equity, and inclusivity of education systems. Teachers are not merely implementers of curriculum; they are central agents of change who translate policy into practice, model inclusive attitudes, and create the conditions necessary for all learners to succeed. Without structured, consistent, and contextually relevant capacity-building initiatives, inclusive education risks being superficial, fragmented, or unsustainable, leaving learners with special needs marginalized. Effective teacher capacity building for sustainable inclusive education, therefore, requires a multi-layered approach. This includes pre-service and in-service training programs, mentorship opportunities, access to resources such as assistive technologies, and supportive institutional policies that reinforce inclusive practice. Collaboration among schools, teacher training institutions, government agencies, and non-governmental organizations strengthens these efforts, creating networks of professional support and knowledge sharing that enhance teacher readiness and classroom effectiveness. By investing in continuous capacity development, Nigeria can ensure that its teachers are not only skilled but also empowered, adaptable, and motivated to uphold the principles of sustainable inclusive education.

Sustainable Inclusive Classroom Education for Special Needs Education in Nigeria

Sustainable inclusive classrooms represent a transformative approach in education, designed to integrate learners with diverse abilities, including those with disabilities, into mainstream educational settings. These classrooms are not merely physical spaces where students sit together; they are dynamic learning environments that prioritize equitable access, meaningful participation, and individualized support to ensure that every learner can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. Ainscow (2020) emphasizes that sustainable inclusion involves the creation of environments where barriers to learning are systematically identified and addressed, while Artiles, Kozleski, and Waitoller (2021) note that adaptive pedagogical methods and differentiated instructional strategies are essential to meet the varied learning needs of students. Teacher preparedness forms the cornerstone of sustainable inclusive classrooms. Well-trained educators possess the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to manage heterogeneous learning groups effectively. This includes understanding individual learning profiles, employing flexible teaching approaches, and fostering collaborative and participatory classroom cultures. Without such preparedness, even well-resourced classrooms may fail to achieve meaningful inclusion, as the capacity of the teacher determines the extent to which learners with special needs can engage, participate, and succeed. The realization of sustainable inclusive classrooms faces multiple challenges. Ogunyemi (2022) identifies limited access to professional training programs and a shortage of continuous development opportunities as major challenges to effective teacher preparation. Others include insufficient institutional support and weak policy implementation further constrain educators' ability to practice inclusive teaching consistently. Societal attitudes,

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misconceptions about disability, and low awareness about inclusive education exacerbate these challenges, often leading to marginalization of learners with special needs in both urban and rural settings (Yusuf & Afolabi, 2019). Furthermore, financial constraints, inadequate teaching materials, and lack of assistive technologies hinder the creation of inclusive learning environments that can be sustained over time. Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated and multi-faceted approach to teacher capacity building and classroom management. King and Winthrop (2018) emphasize the importance of mentorship programs, hands-on training, and collaborative learning networks that connect educators to peers, experts, and policy frameworks. UNESCO (2021) advocates for the integration of digital tools and innovative technologies to enhance accessibility, support individualized learning, and facilitate data-driven instructional strategies. These measures not only enhance teacher effectiveness but also create resilient systems capable of sustaining inclusive practices despite structural, financial, or societal constraints. Sustainable inclusive classroom education is therefore both a goal and a process. It demands ongoing teacher professional development, robust institutional backing, policy alignment, and active engagement with stakeholders at all levels of the education system. By systematically addressing capacity gaps, providing supportive resources, and promoting inclusive mindsets among teachers and communities, Nigeria can establish classrooms where learners with special needs are genuinely included, valued, and empowered to achieve their full potential academically and socially.

Conclusion

Teacher capacity building is central to repositioning special needs education and achieving sustainable inclusive classrooms in Nigeria. It improves instructional quality and ensures learners with diverse needs are effectively included. Ogunyemi (2022) and Adebayo and Okafor (2021) note that gaps in training and weak institutional support leave teachers ill-prepared for diverse classrooms. Structured, context-relevant training enhances teacher competence, confidence, and adaptability (Sharma, Loreman, & Forlin, 2018; Ainscow, 2020). Viberg, Hatakka, and Mavroudi (2023) highlight the importance of technology and learner-centered strategies in meeting diverse needs. Sustainable inclusive education is an ongoing process requiring continuous professional development, supportive policies, and institutional commitment.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made

1. Strengthen regular, structured teacher training to address diverse classroom needs.
2. Increase funding for instructional materials, assistive technologies, and training facilities.
3. Promote collaboration among government, institutions, and stakeholders for better resource use.
4. Improve monitoring and evaluation with clear indicators and accountability mechanisms.
5. Integrate digital tools in teaching, equipping teachers to enhance accessibility and engagement.

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