



<https://www.tspeducator.com>

Volume 24; Issue 2; October 2025; Page No. 9-17.

Transformative Solutions to Inclusive Education Practices and Accessibility for Learners with Special Needs in Nigeria

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Abstract

The education of learners with special needs in Nigeria is gradually progressing towards its objectives. To enhance the implementation rate, transformative solutions are required for inclusive education practices that address attitudes, acknowledge diversity, and ensure access to quality education. Inclusive education practices encompass strategies designed to enhance accessibility, facilitate personalized learning, and cultivate a culture of acceptance and belonging. These include actions, activities, methods, techniques, and suitable support, accommodations, and modifications intended to guarantee that all learners, irrespective of their abilities, disabilities, talents, or giftedness, have equitable access to quality education in the least restrictive environment. This paper focusses on the concept of inclusive education, inclusive education practices, learners with special needs, and transformative solutions that address strategies and practices to enhance accessibility for learners with special needs in teaching and learning environments, thereby mitigating exclusion. The proposed transformative solutions for inclusive education encompass the successful implementation of equitable policies and practices, personalized learning, integration of technology, collaborative methodologies, and comprehensive teacher preparation alongside inclusive teaching strategies. It is anticipated that the implementation of these solutions will enable learners with special needs to engage and learn effectively within an equitable, supportive, and congenial educational environment.

Keywords: Inclusive Education Practices, Transformative Solutions, Learners, Special Needs, Accessibility

Introduction

Global policy pronouncements currently highlight inclusive education (IE) as a fundamental element of educational reform, representing both a mindset and a novel approach to universal education (Kiuppis, 2010). Nigeria's National Policy on Education, as articulated by the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN, 2004) and the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013), mandates the provision of inclusive education for learners with special needs. Nonetheless, the education of learners with special needs in Nigeria is gradually progressing towards that objective, necessitating transformative solutions to inclusive education practices that tackle attitudes, acknowledge diversity, and enhance educational access and quality. In the words of Darma and Dasel (2023), learners with special needs are among the most vulnerable in Nigerian educational service delivery since most of them still face with various forms of exclusion that are related to education, social inclusion, gender equality and health. Individuals with special needs encompass both children and adults who necessitate curriculum adjustments or changes, as well as specialized services, to engage in educational and daily living activities. The delivery of educational services to learners with special needs has progressed from exclusion to inclusive education, with literature highlighting that human rights underpin inclusive education, leading to the development of transformative practices that facilitate access to appropriate education for these learners. This paper therefore, discusses the concept of inclusive education, inclusive education practices, who learners with special needs are, accessibility for learners with special needs in teaching and learning situation and transformative solutions to

inclusive education practices that address strategies and practices that can help mitigate the bottle necks in the provision of appropriate inclusive education to learners with special needs.

Concept of Inclusive Education

The education of children with special needs started with the system of segregation, after great lobbying, it was agreed that integration (mainstreaming) should replace segregation, and as the advocacy continued in recognition of human right, the system in place currently is inclusive education. Inclusive education was conceived because of the desire to equalize educational opportunities for all children globally. It integrates special needs education to address the learning needs of learners with disabilities, the brilliant and talented and all other varied learners. It is guided by the notion that diversity enriches the learning experience for all learners and that every individual has the potential to learn, grow, and succeed when provided with the right support and opportunities (Ranbir, 2024). The theory of inclusive education was conceived at the 1990 international conference in Jomtien which was designed to debate the way forward for successful education for all. The upshot of the conference was what is generally known today as Jomtien Declaration on Education For All (EFA). When the move to inclusive education commenced internationally, Nigeria likewise documented in her National Policy on Education (2004) that inclusive education will be offered by the federal government. The policy in the 6th edition (FRN, 2013) which is the current policy on education in Nigeria also underlined that:

‘persons with special needs shall be provided with inclusive education services in schools which normal persons attend, in age appropriate general education classes and directly supervised by general education teachers’ (FRN, 2013; pp. 36).

The 2013 edition of the education policy also stated that normal instructors would be trained and re-trained to ensure effective implementation of inclusive education. Furthermore, the Federal Ministry of Education's National Policy on Special Needs Education (FME, 2015) said that its aim is to ensure the inclusion of people with special needs by providing equal opportunity, equity, and access in a barrier-free environment. Despite several official pronouncements and comments regarding the provision of quality education and equitable access to education, many countries around the world have yet to fulfil these objectives. In 2000, Education for All (EFA) goals were established to satisfy the needs of all children, youth, and adults by 2015, including Goal 6: "Improve educational quality". These aims were re-echoed in the new Sustainable Development aims (SDGs), which state: "to ensure inclusive and equitable education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all." However, efforts to achieve these goals are still underway (United Nations Development Programme, 2018). This statement of the National Policy on Special Needs Education in Nigeria reinforces the agreements made in the Nigerian legal acts on Special Needs Education, namely the Universal Basic Education Act (2004) and the National Policy on Education and the Disability Act (2024), that Nigeria will practise inclusive education to provide access to education for learners with special needs. According to Onwubolu (2017), inclusive education applies to all children who have been excluded from school because they have learning difficulties, are disadvantaged, or are absent due to their location, parental socioeconomic status, religion, race, or because the regular class was not challenging enough. UNESCO (2005) provided a broader concept of inclusive education, which Okobah and Onwubolu (2012) cite:

“A process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in contents, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibilities of the regular system to educate all children”.

Principles of Inclusive Education

The principles of inclusive education are a set of concepts that underpin its philosophy and practice to guide its implementation. They serve as the foundation for inclusive education practices, leading educators, policymakers, and stakeholders in establishing learning environments that recognize diversity, promote fairness, and ensure that every learner has the opportunity to engage and learn. These principles noted below were extracted from Ranbir (2024) and are crucial to revolutionary solutions to inclusive practices.

1. **Equity and Access:** Inclusion advocates for equal access to quality education for all students, regardless of their ability, backgrounds, or circumstances. It strives to remove barriers to learning and guarantee that every learner has the opportunity to participate fully and fulfil their potential.
2. **Respect for Diversity:** Inclusion welcomes the diversity of learners and recognizes that each individual is unique. It values variations in talents, cultures, languages, and identities, and encourages an environment where all students feel respected, valued, and accepted for who they are.
3. **Collaboration and Partnership:** Inclusion encourages collaboration among educators, support personnel, students, families, and communities. It understands that effective inclusive practices need the combined

efforts of all stakeholders working together to provide supportive learning environments and address the different needs of learners.

4. **Individualization and Differentiation:** Inclusion acknowledges that kids have various learning styles, strengths, and needs. It argues for tailored support and diversified instruction to match the diverse needs of students, ensuring that every learner receives the right degree of challenge and support.
5. **Universal Design for Learning (UDL):** Inclusion promotes the use of UDL principles to design learning experiences that are accessible and engaging for all students. UDL emphasizes flexibility, multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement, allowing educators to accommodate diverse learning styles and preferences.
6. **Positive School Culture and Climate:** Inclusion fosters a positive school culture and climate that values diversity, promotes acceptance, and prevents discrimination and exclusion. It fosters a warm and supportive learning atmosphere where all children feel safe, included, and empowered to study and succeed.
7. **Social and Emotional Well-being:** Inclusion emphasises the necessity of meeting the social and emotional needs of students alongside academic goals. It supports the development of social-emotional skills, empathy, and resilience, building a sense of belonging and emotional well-being for all learners..

Inclusive Education Practices

Inclusive education practices are tactics used to improve accessibility, facilitate individualized learning, participation to develop a culture of acceptance and belonging. Inclusive education practices according to UNESCO, (2005) referenced in Okobah and Onwubolu, (2012) involves changes and alterations in contents, techniques, structures and strategies that ensure that learners with special needs effectively engage in learning. They are actions, activities, methods, strategies and necessary assistance, adjustments and adaptations targeted at ensuring that all learners, regardless of their skills, impairments, talents or giftedness, have equitable access to quality education in their environment. These are briefly covered below.

1. **Actions and activities:** Actions and activities of all education stakeholders that include the education policy of a country, the educational system, extent of implementation of the policy, school leadership, teacher training, teachers competencies and attitudes to learners, provision and use of teaching resources in schools and classrooms, attitudes of all education stakeholders and learners enlightenment of learning, participation and acceptance of the educational provisions.
2. **Methods and Techniques:** Teachers methods and techniques for teaching and classroom management must be inclusive, for instance, the use of differentiated instruction.
3. **Appropriate support, accommodations and modifications:** This refers to the provision of needed support to individual learner, accommodations and modifications to meet his or her learning needs such as the use of scaffolding by teachers while teaching, provision of computers for learners and teachers use, teaching at learners pace, and so on.
4. **Equal access:** All education stakeholders have the obligation to guarantee all learners has equal access to the chance to participate in learning activities and to learn.
5. **Least restrictive learning environment:** Learners with special needs should be put in the general education classrooms wherever practicable. Also, the provision of a favourable learning environment for all learners to learn is the role of all education stakeholders.
6. **Acceptance of diversity and inclusion:** This require that teachers establish a welcoming and pleasant classroom that celebrate difference among the learners and incorporate all learners while teaching and learning is happening.
7. **Educational equity:** Provision of equity in inclusive practices aims to remove barriers that prevents learners with special needs from learning. It could be system barrier, physical or psychological barriers to ensure that all learners have opportunity to study and that learning environment are physically and psychologically safe.

Learners with Special Needs

Children and adults who have unique learning requirements and challenges that can only be met by special education provisions and special educators who can use inclusive techniques to accommodate a range of learning demands are considered learners with special needs. Given the foregoing, Ozoji et al. (2016) define special needs students as extraordinary individuals whose learning requirements cannot be met by standard school procedures but necessitate customized practices. Section 7 of the Federal Republic of Nigeria's (FRN, 2013) National Policy on Education, which deals with the policy on special education, emphasizes that special education was created for students with special needs because they have particular learning requirements that the general education curriculum is unable to meet. The following categories of students with special needs were also provided by the policy: Physical and health impairment; intellectual disability (mild, moderate, severe, and profound); emotional and behavioural disorders (hyperactive, hypoactive, and socially maladjusted); speech and language impairment;

learning disability (psychological/neurological phobia or challenges); multiple disabilities; the gifted and talented; and albinos (vision and skin issues, low self-esteem, stigmatization, and stereotypes).

Transformative Solutions to Inclusive Education Practices

Individualized learning and collaborative approaches are two examples of inclusive teaching strategies and approaches that address the learning needs of students with diverse backgrounds, learning styles, and skills. These approaches are referred to as transformative solutions to inclusive education practices. The goal of these solutions is to establish learning settings where every student may realize their full potential and feels appreciated and supported. In a study published in 2024, Carrington et al. summed up the concept of transformative solutions as critical approaches that support equity and inclusive education and call for moral and professional change on the part of all education stakeholders, particularly teachers, in order to achieve access to education, learning, and classroom participation. According to Freeze (2023), revolutionary inclusive education methods entail updating instructional strategies and rethinking existing educational practices. Freeze also identifies areas for change in inclusive technology, educational methods, academic scaffolding, cooperative decision-making, and positive behavioural approaches. Educational systems may provide learning environments that are fair, inclusive, and encouraging for every student, enabling them to realize their full potential, by putting these revolutionary ideas into practice. Key transformative solutions include the following:

1. Equitable Policies and Practices

One transformative solution to inclusive education practices is the development of policies and practices that ensure equal access to quality education for all learners. This is expected to address systemic barriers and biases that may exist in an educational system, especially as the Nigerian National policy has exceeded a decade where many changes had occurred in educational service delivery all over the world. Therefore, Nigeria's educational policy should be updated to capture best practices in teaching and learning that promote inclusion, allow diversity, ensure the provision of assistive technologies and provide adequate resources for teaching and learning. It is not just developing policy, implementation is the ultimate to ensure effective policy. Implementation is a challenge in Nigeria that requires attitude change to make education of learners with special needs transform to best inclusive practices.

2. Personalized Learning (Individual learning)

Personalized learning refers to inclusive education practices that are tailored to the individual requirements of students. When educators and other people involved in children's education create a customized plan that gives each student access to learning, it is a game-changing answer. It focusses on tailoring education to each student with special needs, taking into account their interests, strengths, and learning needs. It is not a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching. Teachers can promote individual participation, learning styles, and paces by utilizing technology, differentiated instruction, multisensory teaching, personalized learning media assessment (LMA), and flexible grouping.

3. Incorporating Technology (Assistive Technology)

Presently technology development have evolve new ways of doing things. Using devices and software to assist with communication, mobility, hearing and learning, such as hearing aids, text-to-speech software, speech-generating devices, and adaptive keyboards act as transformative solutions in inclusive practices. These could be referred to in special education as assistive technologies that teachers and parents can leverage on to provide access to diverse learning resources and personalized learning tools.

4. Effective Teacher Preparation, Training and Professional Development

Continuous training, retraining and professional development are key transformative solutions to inclusive practices for learners with special needs. Effective teacher preparation that equip teachers with the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to support learners with special needs is crucial to accessing learning. The provision of training and retraining on inclusive practices such as Universal design for learning, differentiated instructional strategies, inclusive teaching strategies can help teachers provides accessibility for learners with special needs.

5. Pull-out Programmes

According to Smith and Tyler (2010), pull-out programmes provide special services outside the regular education classroom. It offers special education services such as the resource rooms services, partially self-contained special classes, and special therapy settings. The resource room services is where children with special needs receive intensive instruction, supports, tutoring and assistance (Smith & Tyler, 2010).

6. Teacher Inclusive Teaching Practices

The main implementer of inclusive education are teachers who ensure that inclusive teaching strategies are employed to meet the diverse learning needs of all learners including those with special needs. The use of inclusive teaching practices helps the teacher to effect transformative solutions that will improve learner's behaviours and academic achievement. Some of the inclusive teaching practices are briefly discussed below:

a. Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

A framework for creating curricula and instruction that are inclusive and accessible to all students, regardless of their skills or disabilities, is known as universal design for learning. The design allows for flexibility in evaluation, instruction, and content. According to Flinders University (2016), this approach is a collection of curriculum development concepts that provide equal learning opportunities for all students (National Centre on Universal Design for Learning, 2011). Curriculum adaptation was thought to be accomplished by the use of the three Universal Design Learning (UDL) principles—engagement and motivation, representation, action, and expression—as stated by McKinney (n.d.). To involve students in the learning process and inspire them to learn, the first premise of engagement and motivation is to make learning engaging. This is made feasible through differentiation, which entails using various instructional strategies, techniques, resources, technology, and activities that are more visual in order to spark students' interest and hold their focus throughout the learning process. The second concept, representation, calls for presenting information and content in a variety of ways. Additionally, in order to enable accessibility to the lesson's content, the teacher must employ suitable language to make learning possible, such as identifying instructional items and utilizing Sign Language for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Giving children the chance to exhibit their learning in a variety of ways is the third principle, action, and expression.

b. Differentiated Instruction

This method of instruction is characterized as being sensitive to each student's needs. In order to accommodate the various learning styles, cultural norms, and support needs of all students—gifted and talented youngsters as well as those with or without disabilities—teachers differentiate their education.

c. Utilization of Variety of Teaching Strategies

Including a range of different learning, teaching and assessment approaches and providing students with options to choose which they feel suit them (Flinders University, 2016). Use a variety of teaching strategies, activities and assignments that will accommodate the needs of students with diverse learning styles, abilities, background and experiences (Cornell University, 2016).

d. Computer-Based Instruction

Computer-Based Instruction is a teaching approach that leverages computer technology to teach school subjects contents and lessons to learners. A wide range of computer applications, online courses, interactive tutorials, simulations, instructional games, drill and practice are used to meet learner's individual learning needs (Adeniyi, 2022).

e. Team Teaching

A regular classroom teacher and a special education teacher are both teaching in the class. While one teacher presents information, the other could do further explanation while displaying pictures, maps and graphs or interpreting with sign or attending to a special needs child (Brandt, 2007).

Collaborative and Interactive Instructional Approaches

Collaborative approaches involve collaboration with other professionals that provide needed services to learners with special needs. It also involve the use of collaborative teaching, co-teaching, team teaching and parent-teacher partnerships are transformative solutions in inclusive education practices. The approaches ensure collaboration among teachers, learners, parents and other stakeholders in the planning, decision making and implementation of inclusive practices to create a more supportive and friendly learning environment. The teacher creates classroom situation where teaching and learning takes place while the learner interacts with the teacher, instructional materials and class mates. The teacher uses these approaches to help learners to be active while learning and makes teaching learner centre by aiding learners' participation. Such interaction and exchange of ideas bring about better organization of thoughts, elaboration of ideas, discovery of inconsistencies and readdressing the inconsistencies to arrive at better understanding of the topic lesson being taught. Examples of interactive instructional approach are teacher questions, class discussion, cooperative learning approach and peer tutoring.

f. Instructional Scaffolding

In order to help students complete new assignments and grasp concepts they would not be able to acquire on their own, teachers employ instructional scaffolding, which are temporal support structures, throughout new classes. It is a process in which teachers instruct, coach, prompt and demonstrate how to solve a problem or perform a task for learners to learn through his or her support and allow learners practice to do what was demonstrated overtime while the teacher removes the support gradually (Onwubolu & Omodaranle, 2024). There are different types of instructional scaffolding used to achieve different types of instructional objectives in the classroom namely; sensory, graphic and interactive scaffolding.

g. Instructional Accommodations

This strategy focuses on the actions teachers take within an inclusive classroom to minimize distractions and promote equitable access to learning, particularly for learners such as slow learners, those with sensory impairments, and those diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). According to Smith and Tyler (2010), teachers can provide various instructional accommodations to support these students effectively. Such accommodations include allowing extended time for the completion of assignments, breaking instructional sequences or academic tasks into smaller, manageable parts to help maintain attention, and scheduling shorter but more frequent study sessions to sustain focus. Teachers may also use timers to structure specific tasks, explicitly teach and practice organizational skills, read directions aloud to help students refocus, and utilize computer-based word processing programs to support writing activities. These accommodations create a structured and supportive learning environment that enables all learners, especially those with attention or sensory challenges, to participate actively and achieve success in inclusive classrooms.

h. Positive Behaviour Supports

A friendly, positive and supportive learning environment provides some solution to manage learners with behaviour and emotional disturbances instead of exclusionary discipline practices such as asking a learner to kneel before the class and the use of sticks to beat learner's body. Teachers rather use behaviour modification techniques like the use of various forms of positive reinforcements, making the learner a group leader that moderates or note the group activities. Also, learners should be given opportunities to practice social skills in the classroom or during plays to build relationships.

i. Brain-Based Instructional Approach

According to Okeke-Oti (2009), research indicates that learning involves both hemispheres of the brain—the left and the right. Therefore, effectively addressing the diverse needs of learners in an inclusive classroom requires thoughtful instructional planning that engages both sides of the brain to create balance and support various learning styles. Learners who are left-brain dominant tend to be logical and analytical thinkers, showing strength in subjects such as language, mathematics, and science. Conversely, right-brain learners are often more creative and holistic in their thinking, displaying a natural inclination toward music, art, and other expressive disciplines. To cater to these diverse learning preferences, teachers can apply brain-based instructional strategies that activate and connect both hemispheres of the brain. Examples of such strategies include: Brainstorming, Mind Mapping, Graphic Organizers, Picture Prompts, Write/Draw–Share Activities and Question Construction Exercises. Armstrong (2008) proposed several reflective questions that teachers can use while planning and delivering lessons to ensure brain-based principles are effectively integrated:

- a. Are students engaged in meaningful work?
- b. Do I design lessons in ways that allow students to take charge of their own thinking?
- c. Do I consistently connect learning activities to students' everyday experiences?
- d. Do I teach in a manner that makes failure not an option?

Accessibility for Learners with Special Needs

Accessibility refers to the extent to which something can be reached, used, understood, and enjoyed by everyone. In the context of education, accessibility ensures that all members of society have equitable opportunities to participate and succeed (FME, 2015). According to Anyuabaga (2024), accessibility in education involves designing and implementing inclusive learning environments, providing accessible resources, and integrating technology that can be effectively used by all learners, including those with disabilities. This implies that educational access for learners with special needs should cover several dimensions, including physical accessibility, collaboration among stakeholders, the use of adapted curricula and teaching resources, assistive technologies, inclusive teaching practices, and individualized educational plans (IEPs). Furthermore, accessibility extends beyond physical structures—it encompasses the removal of physical, psychological, and cultural barriers. It also involves continuous training and retraining of teachers, support staff, and other professionals; adequate funding to provide assistive technologies; and the elimination of all obstacles that limit curriculum accessibility. Adesina (2020) emphasized that accessibility entails dismantling all barriers that hinder the participation of

learners with special needs in the educational process. These barriers may include physical obstructions, inaccessible learning materials, lack of necessary accommodations, and insufficiently trained teachers. The key factors that contribute to accessibility for learners with special needs are discussed below.

1. **Physical Accessibility:** Physical accessibility refers to ensuring that the physical environment of schools can be safely and comfortably accessed by all learners. This may require the restructuring of regular schools and general education classrooms to include features such as ramps, elevators, accessible restrooms, and appropriately designed seats and tables. Such facilities support learners with physical or visual impairments and those with developmental disabilities who may have difficulty with mobility.
2. **Collaboration:** Collaboration involves joint efforts among schools, teachers, parents, and other professionals who work together to support children with special needs. In inclusive education, collaboration is essential—regular classroom teachers must work closely with special education teachers and multidisciplinary professionals such as therapists, sign language interpreters, braillists, psychologists, physiotherapists, guidance counselors, nurses, and nannies. This teamwork ensures that learners receive the necessary care, support, and accommodations. Smith and Tyler (2010) highlight that collaboration is a fundamental aspect of inclusive education, as it enables multidisciplinary teams to collectively address the diverse learning needs of children with special needs.
3. **Curriculum Adaptation:** Curriculum adaptation focuses on modifying learning content, materials, and teaching methods to ensure that learners with special needs can effectively engage with the curriculum. In inclusive classrooms, while the general curriculum remains the foundation, specific adjustments are made to accommodate individual differences. For example, learners with visual impairments may require instruction in additional areas such as daily living skills, posture and movement, and orientation and mobility. Teachers or individualized education program (IEP) teams modify or adapt curricular content to align with each learner's unique learning needs.
4. **Teaching Resource Adaptation:** Adaptation generally refers to adjusting materials or environments to make them more suitable for a specific purpose. In inclusive education, **teaching resource adaptation** involves modifying instructional materials and tools to ensure equal access to learning opportunities. For instance, for learners with visual impairments, adaptations may include converting written materials into Braille, providing tactile learning aids, enlarging print for students with low vision, or offering audio recordings of lessons. Teachers should also ensure that their voices are clear and audible, and classroom seating arrangements may be adjusted to improve accessibility. Specialized furniture and strategically placed seating are additional examples of adaptations that enhance participation for learners with special needs.
5. **Application of Technologies:** Technology is the practical application of knowledge and the capacity given by the practical application of the knowledge to achieve a purpose. The use of technology, hardware and software, to aid teaching and learning have been for decades and is an invaluable factor in providing access to learning in the classroom for all learners with special needs. For teaching and learning purposes, teachers use the technology used by everyone such as the computers and projector and assistive technology to assist learners with special needs participate in learning and provide them educational access. Assistive technologies can significantly aid learners with special needs by providing tools that enhance learning and accessibility such as hearing aids, specialized computers, lightings, projectors, screen readers and Braille display that have tools to convert text into speech or braille, making written content accessible.
6. **Individualized Educational Programme (IEP):** Individualized educational programme is an individualized plan use in teaching that focuses on adapting instruction and materials to meet each learner's unique learning needs, strengths and interests. It could be referred to as personalized learning that involve the use of varied assistive technologies, sensory experiences or concrete teaching, differentiated instruction, flexible grouping to support learning and fostering social interaction to enhance understanding and participation.
7. **Inclusive Practices:** Inclusive practices involve varieties of methods of instruction, techniques or strategies that can meet the individual and collective learning needs of every member of an inclusive classroom. Researchers and teachers have used the following methods successfully according to Lain, (2006) and Brandi (2007). When implemented properly, an inclusive classroom environment can help learners with special needs develop both cognitively and socially (Reinhart, 2012).
8. **Removal of physical, psychological and cultural barriers:** Access to education for learners with special needs encompass the removal of physical, psychological and cultural barriers, training and retraining of teachers, support staff and collaborative personnel to become acquainted to best practices that ensure accessibility. Removal of physical barriers was discussed as restructuring school and classroom environments. Psychological barriers are barriers created by parents, teachers, peers and other people around learners with special needs. This can be removed by developing a welcoming environments with

words and attitudes. Teachers are responsible for creating an inclusive learning environment where learners with special needs feel safe, respected. Educators recommended that teachers greet their learners at the door and check them in regularly, give them undivided attention and use positive reinforcement instead of punishment because there are evidence that positive reinforcement techniques have greater success in molding classroom behaviours. Another barrier is lack of adequate funds to access assistive technology and removal of all other sources of barrier to curriculum accessibility.

Competencies for Teachers in Inclusive Classrooms

To effectively implement inclusive education and apply transformative solutions that meet the needs of learners with special needs, both regular classroom teachers and special education teachers must possess the following competencies:

1. Problem-Solving and Informal Assessment Skills: Teachers should be able to identify the skills each learner needs through informal assessments and apply creative problem-solving strategies to address those needs.
2. Use of Learners' Interests and Motivation: Teachers should tap into students' personal interests and intrinsic motivation to help them develop essential academic and social skills.
3. Setting Realistic but High Expectations: Teachers must set appropriately high expectations tailored to individual learners by developing alternative forms of assessment suited to each student's abilities.
4. Creating Inclusive Expectations for All Learners: Teachers should establish fair expectations for every learner, regardless of ability, to ensure all students feel included within the classroom and school community.
5. Adaptation and Differentiation of Instruction: Teachers must know how to modify assignments and design classroom activities with multiple levels of difficulty so that every student can meaningfully participate. This often requires a shift toward more hands-on, activity-based learning rather than traditional seatwork.
6. Valuing Diverse Skills: Educators should recognize and celebrate the wide range of skills students bring to class—not just academic abilities—thereby reinforcing the idea that all contributions are valued.
7. Ensuring Daily Success: Teachers should strive to create opportunities for every student to experience daily success, helping to counter the negative message students may receive when some peers are frequently removed from class for special instruction.
8. Taking Full Responsibility for All Learners: Teachers must view every child in the classroom as their responsibility, actively seeking ways to support each learner rather than waiting for external direction.
9. Collaboration and Teamwork: Working collaboratively with parents, special education teachers, and other professionals is crucial to identifying each child's needs and providing effective instruction.
10. Viewing Challenges as Growth Opportunities: Teachers should see each child, regardless of difficulty, as a chance to grow and improve professionally, rather than as a problem to be avoided or delegated.
11. Flexibility and Tolerance for Uncertainty: Inclusive education demands adaptability and the ability to work effectively in situations that may lack clear solutions.
12. Competence in Individualized Teaching: Teachers should possess the skills necessary to design and implement individualized education programs (IEPs) tailored to each learner's unique needs.

Conclusion

The education of learners with special needs in Nigeria is gradually progressing toward full inclusion. To accelerate this progress, it is essential to adopt transformative approaches to inclusive education that promote positive attitudes, respect for diversity, equal access, and quality learning experiences. This discussion has emphasized the importance of inclusive education principles, practical strategies, and transformative solutions that enhance accessibility and reduce exclusion in teaching and learning environments. Key transformative practices include implementing equitable policies, promoting personalized learning, integrating technology, encouraging collaboration, providing effective teacher training, adopting pull-out programs where necessary, and applying inclusive teaching practices. When these strategies are effectively applied, learners with special needs will be better able to participate and thrive in an equitable, supportive, and welcoming learning environment.

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