

THE ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY IN PROMOTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN ENUGU STATE SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT: This study examined the role of educational policy in promoting inclusive education in schools in Enugu State. The research specifically focused on the extent to which state educational policies ensure the enrollment and regular attendance of learners with disabilities, the availability and adequacy of teaching aids, and the institutional challenges that hinder effective policy implementation. A descriptive survey design was adopted, and data were collected from teachers and school administrators in selected public primary and secondary schools using structured questionnaires. The collected data were analyzed using mean scores and standard deviations to determine respondents' perceptions. The findings revealed that educational policies in Enugu State are inadequately implemented, teaching aids are insufficient, and institutional challenges, such as limited administrative support, poor funding, and lack of teacher training, hinder effective inclusive education practices. The study concluded that while policies exist, their practical impact is limited due to weak implementation mechanisms and institutional constraints. It recommends strengthened policy enforcement, provision of adequate resources, continuous teacher training, and enhanced administrative support to improve inclusive education outcomes in Enugu State schools.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Educational Policy, Teaching Aids, Institutional Challenges, Enugu State

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education, which ensures that all children, regardless of their abilities or socio-economic background, have access to quality education within mainstream schools, has become a fundamental goal of educational systems worldwide. In Nigeria, inclusive education has been recognized in national policy frameworks, particularly through the National Policy on Inclusive Education, which emphasizes equitable access and quality learning opportunities for children with disabilities and other special needs (Federal Ministry of Education [FME], 2016). The policy underscores the need for all levels of government to implement strategies that facilitate the integration of learners with diverse needs into regular schools.

Historically, educational provision for children with special needs in Nigeria was segregated, mainly, and often provided by religious missions or charitable organisations. Over time, however, government policies have shifted towards promoting inclusion, reflecting global trends such as the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, which advocates for inclusive educational practices as a matter of human rights and social justice (UNESCO, 1994).

This evolution signals a commitment to ensure that learners with disabilities are not marginalized but are provided the necessary support to participate meaningfully in the learning process.

At the state level, the success of inclusive education depends on the extent to which national policies are adapted to local contexts. Enugu State, like other Nigerian states, has sought to align its educational policies with the principles of inclusion, aiming to create school environments that accommodate all learners. Inclusive education in Enugu State involves not only policy directives but also practical measures such as curriculum adaptation, provision of learning resources, teacher training, and community engagement (Okeke, 2020).

Despite these efforts, challenges persist. Studies indicate that schools often face shortages of trained teachers, inadequate learning materials, and insufficient infrastructure to support learners with special needs (Eze & Ofoegbu, 2019). Additionally, low awareness among parents, educators, and policymakers, coupled with societal attitudes toward disability, can hinder effective implementation of inclusive practices (Chukwu, 2021). Consequently, while policies exist on paper, translating these policies into functional, inclusive classrooms remains a significant task.

Understanding the role of educational policy in promoting inclusive education in Enugu State is therefore critical. Examining how policies are implemented, the support mechanisms in place, and the challenges encountered provides insights into the effectiveness of inclusion efforts. This study seeks to assess the extent to which educational policies facilitate access, quality, and equity for all learners in Enugu State schools, highlighting both achievements and areas that require improvement. By doing so, it contributes to broader discussions on educational equity, social justice, and the realization of the rights of children with special needs in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the existence of national and state-level policies on inclusive education in Nigeria, many children with special needs continue to face barriers to accessing quality education in mainstream schools. In Enugu State, efforts have been made to implement inclusive education policies. However, schools often struggle with inadequate infrastructure, insufficient learning materials, and a shortage of teachers trained in inclusive pedagogy (Eze & Ofoegbu, 2019). Moreover, societal attitudes, low awareness among parents and educators, and limited monitoring and evaluation mechanisms further impede the effective implementation of inclusive practices (Chukwu, 2021).

These challenges result in a situation where, although policies on inclusion exist on paper, their practical impact on learners is limited. Many students with disabilities remain marginalized, experience learning gaps, or are excluded from certain aspects of classroom activities. This disconnect between policy formulation and actual implementation raises critical questions about the effectiveness of educational policies in promoting inclusive education in Enugu State.

Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the role of educational policy in facilitating inclusive education, examining both the successes and shortcomings in policy implementation. By doing so, it aims to identify the barriers to effective inclusion and provide insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders on how to improve access, equity, and quality in schools for all learners.

Objectives of the Study

- i. Determine the extent to which Enugu State educational policies ensure enrollment and regular attendance of learners with disabilities in mainstream schools.
- ii. Evaluate the availability and adequacy of teaching aids in schools implementing inclusive education in Enugu State.
- iii. Identify institutional challenges hindering the effective implementation of inclusive education policies in Enugu State schools.

Research Questions

- i. To what extent do Enugu State educational policies ensure enrollment and regular attendance of learners with disabilities in mainstream schools?
- ii. How adequate are the teaching aids in schools implementing inclusive education in Enugu State?
- iii. What institutional challenges hinder the effective implementation of inclusive education policies in Enugu State schools?

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the role of educational policy in promoting inclusive education in schools in Enugu State. It is limited to selected primary and secondary schools across the state that implement or are expected to implement inclusive education practices. The study specifically examines three key areas: the effectiveness of educational policies in ensuring the enrollment and regular attendance of learners with disabilities, the availability and adequacy of teaching aids and learning resources, and the institutional challenges that hinder effective policy implementation.

The study covers contemporary practices and challenges within Enugu State schools, providing insights into how policies are translated into classroom realities. It does not extend to private special schools exclusively serving learners with disabilities, higher education institutions, or schools outside Enugu State. By focusing on mainstream primary and secondary schools, the study aims to offer a clear understanding of the successes and barriers in implementing inclusive education policies in the local context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Educational Policy

Educational policy refers to the principles, regulations, and guidelines formulated by government authorities to direct and govern the functioning of educational systems. It encompasses strategies for curriculum design, school administration, teacher development, resource allocation, and assessment standards. According to Ololube (2017), educational policy serves as a blueprint that guides decision-making processes in education and ensures that learning institutions operate in a coordinated and systematic manner. In Nigeria, educational policies are developed at both the federal and state levels to achieve national educational goals such as access, equity, quality, and

relevance. Educational policies influence how schools function, how teachers deliver instruction, and how resources are allocated, making them critical for promoting effective learning outcomes. In Enugu State, policies aligned with the National Policy on Inclusive Education guide schools in integrating learners with diverse abilities into mainstream classrooms, highlighting the role of policy as both a directive and an enabling instrument for inclusion.

Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is an educational approach that seeks to accommodate all learners, regardless of physical, cognitive, social, or emotional differences, within mainstream schools. UNESCO (2009) defines inclusive education as the process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of all learners through participation in learning, cultures, and communities, while reducing exclusion and barriers. The philosophy behind inclusive education emphasizes equal opportunities, social integration, and respect for diversity, ensuring that learners with disabilities or special needs can access quality education alongside their peers. In practice, inclusive education involves curriculum adaptation, the use of assistive learning materials, differentiated teaching strategies, teacher training in special needs education, and supportive school environments. In Enugu State, inclusive education policies are designed to create equitable learning spaces, but challenges such as inadequate resources, lack of trained personnel, and institutional barriers can limit the realization of these goals (Eze & Ofoegbu, 2019).

Theoretical Review

Social Justice Theory

Social Justice Theory emphasizes fairness, equity, and the right of every individual to access opportunities regardless of background, ability, or social status (Rawls, 1971). In the context of education, this theory advocates for equal educational opportunities and the removal of barriers that prevent marginalized groups, such as children with disabilities, from fully participating in learning (Adams, 2018). Inclusive education aligns closely with social justice principles, as it seeks to ensure that learners with special needs are not excluded from mainstream schools due to their disabilities. Policies that promote inclusive education, therefore, serve as mechanisms to uphold social justice by guaranteeing access, equity, and quality in educational provision. In Enugu State, adopting inclusive education policies reflects a commitment to social justice by recognizing the rights of all learners and striving to create equitable learning environments.

Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory posits that investment in education enhances individuals' knowledge, skills, and productivity, which in turn contributes to social and economic development (Becker, 1964). This theory underscores the value of developing the potential of every learner, including those with disabilities, through education. This perspective informs inclusive education policies, as they seek to provide learners with disabilities the skills and competencies needed to participate effectively in society. From this standpoint, educational policy plays a pivotal role in shaping human capital by ensuring that all learners receive quality instruction and support, thereby maximizing their

contribution to societal development. In Enugu State, policies facilitating inclusive education are not only a social obligation but also an investment in the state's human capital, promoting long-term social and economic benefits.

Empirical Studies

Adebayo and Ojo (2020) examined the impact of national inclusive education policies on enrollment and regular attendance of learners with disabilities in mainstream schools in Lagos State. The study adopted a descriptive survey design, collecting data from 250 teachers and 120 school administrators using structured questionnaires. Data were analyzed using mean scores and chi-square tests. Findings revealed that while policies formally guarantee access, actual enrollment and attendance of learners with disabilities remain below expected levels due to inadequate monitoring, social stigma, and limited awareness among parents. The study concluded that policy existence alone is insufficient; active implementation strategies are required.

Okeke and Nwafor (2019) investigated how state-level educational policies affect the integration of learners with disabilities in secondary schools in Enugu State. The study used a mixed-method approach, combining questionnaires for 200 teachers with interviews of 20 school principals. Analysis showed that although policies encourage inclusion, many learners with disabilities experience irregular attendance because schools lack adaptive facilities and trained personnel. The researchers emphasized the need for targeted policy implementation and regular supervision to ensure equitable access.

Eze and Ofoegbu (2019) assessed the availability and adequacy of teaching aids for inclusive education in Nigerian public schools. Using a survey design, data were collected from 150 teachers across 30 schools in Southeast Nigeria. Results indicated that most schools lacked essential assistive devices, learning materials, and adaptive teaching tools, severely limiting effective inclusive teaching. The study recommended increased funding, resource allocation, and teacher training to support inclusive classrooms.

Chukwu (2021) conducted a study on the provision of instructional resources for inclusive education in Enugu State. Using a descriptive survey design with questionnaires administered to 100 teachers in primary and secondary schools, the study found that although some teaching aids were available, they were insufficient in quantity and quality. Teachers reported challenges in adapting curriculum content for learners with disabilities due to resource constraints. The study concluded that policy directives must be accompanied by tangible support to ensure meaningful implementation.

Umeh and Okonkwo (2020) explored institutional barriers to implementing inclusive education policies in Southeast Nigeria. The study employed a survey research design with data collected from 180 teachers and 15 school administrators. Analysis using frequency counts and percentages revealed inadequate infrastructure, lack of trained personnel, and weak policy monitoring as major obstacles. The study emphasized that addressing these institutional challenges is critical to translating policy into practice.

Nwafor and Agbo (2018) investigated challenges hindering effective implementation of inclusive education policies in public secondary schools in Enugu State. The researchers used a descriptive survey with questionnaires administered to 120 teachers and interviews with 10 school principals. Findings indicated that institutional challenges, including overcrowded classrooms, poor accessibility, limited administrative support, and low stakeholder awareness, negatively affected policy outcomes. The study recommended enhanced institutional capacity and continuous professional development for teachers.

Akinwale and Balogun (2021) examined the relationship between educational policy implementation and inclusive classroom outcomes in Nigerian public schools. Using a correlational survey design, the study sampled 200 teachers across three states, including Enugu. Findings showed a positive correlation among policy awareness, resource provision, and learner participation, indicating that effective policy implementation improves inclusive education outcomes. The study highlighted the importance of aligning policy objectives with practical support mechanisms.

Obi and Okafor (2022) studied the effects of state educational policy on teacher preparedness and student engagement in inclusive classrooms in Enugu State. Data were collected from 150 teachers and 25 school administrators using a descriptive survey and interviews. Results indicated that where policies were accompanied by teacher training, classroom adaptation, and adequate resources, student participation and learning outcomes improved significantly. Conversely, gaps in policy execution and resource provision limited the effectiveness of inclusion strategies.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The survey design was considered appropriate because it allows for the systematic collection of data from a large group of respondents to describe the current state of educational policy implementation and its impact on inclusive education in Enugu State schools. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), survey research is ideal for studies that seek to obtain factual information about phenomena, describe characteristics, and examine relationships between variables as they exist in the field.

The descriptive survey design enabled the researcher to gather information from teachers, school administrators, and other stakeholders regarding the extent to which educational policies promote enrollment and participation of learners with disabilities, the availability and adequacy of teaching aids and resources, and the institutional challenges affecting policy implementation. This design also facilitated the use of structured instruments such as questionnaires and interviews, ensuring that the data collected were both reliable and relevant for addressing the study's objectives.

Area of Study

The study was conducted in Enugu State, located in the southeastern region of Nigeria. Enugu State was chosen because it has made efforts to implement inclusive education policies in its public

primary and secondary schools, providing a relevant context to examine the role of educational policy in promoting inclusion. The state is composed of 17 local government areas, with a diverse population that includes learners with varying educational needs, including those with disabilities.

Focusing on Enugu State allows the study to capture both urban and semi-urban school contexts, reflecting different levels of resource availability, teacher preparedness, and policy implementation effectiveness. The research concentrated on selected public primary and secondary schools where inclusive education practices are in place or expected to be implemented. By situating the study in Enugu State, the research provides insights into local policy implementation, challenges, and opportunities, contributing to knowledge that can inform future educational planning and inclusive education practices within the state and similar contexts in Nigeria.

Population of the Study

The population of this study consists of teachers, school administrators, and other stakeholders in selected public primary and secondary schools in Enugu State that implement or are expected to implement inclusive education practices. The schools selected for the study include Government Secondary School, Enugu; Emene Model Primary School, Enugu; Isiagu Primary School in Enugu North LGA; Community Secondary School, Agbani; Abakpa Nike Primary School in Enugu East LGA; and Urban Secondary School, Awgu.

These schools were chosen to reflect a mix of urban and semi-urban contexts within Enugu State, providing diversity in terms of infrastructure, teacher capacity, and student population. The total population comprises all teachers and administrators in these schools, estimated at approximately 250 staff members. Focusing on these schools allows the study to capture a comprehensive view of how educational policies on inclusive education are implemented and the challenges faced across different school settings in Enugu State.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The sample for this study was drawn from the population of teachers and school administrators in the selected public primary and secondary schools in Enugu State. Using Cochran's (1977) formula for determining sample size in survey research, a total of 160 respondents were selected from the estimated population of 250 staff members. This sample size was considered sufficient to provide reliable and representative data for the study.

A purposive sampling technique was adopted to select the respondents. This technique was considered appropriate because it allowed the researcher to focus on teachers and administrators who are directly involved in the implementation of inclusive education policies and, therefore, possess the relevant knowledge and experience. By purposively selecting participants who are most informed about the study's focus, the research ensures that the data collected are both meaningful and relevant to examining the role of educational policy in promoting inclusive education in Enugu State schools.

Research Instrument

The study used a structured questionnaire as the primary research instrument to collect data from teachers and school administrators. The questionnaire was designed to gather information on the extent of policy implementation, availability of teaching aids, and institutional challenges affecting inclusive education in Enugu State schools. Respondents were asked to indicate their responses using a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The instrument was validated by experts in educational policy and inclusive education to ensure clarity, relevance, and reliability.

Method of Data Collection

Data for this study were collected using the structured questionnaire administered directly to teachers and school administrators in the selected schools. The researcher personally distributed the questionnaires to ensure high response rates and provided explanations where necessary to clarify items. Respondents were given sufficient time to complete the questionnaire, after which the instruments were retrieved for analysis. This method enabled the accurate and timely collection of information on the implementation of inclusive education policies, the availability of teaching aids, and institutional challenges in Enugu State schools.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically mean scores and standard deviations, to summarize respondents' opinions and perceptions on the implementation of inclusive education policies, availability of teaching aids, and institutional challenges in Enugu State schools. The mean scores were used to determine the level of agreement or disagreement among respondents on each item, while the standard deviation measured the variability of responses. A cut-off point of 2.50 on a four-point Likert scale was used to interpret the data, with mean values above 2.50 indicating agreement and mean values below 2.50 indicating disagreement. The results were presented in tables and accompanied by prose interpretations to provide clear insights into the findings.

RESULT PRESENTATION, ANALYSES AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents on the Extent to Which Enugu State Educational Policies Ensure Enrollment and Regular Attendance of Learners with Disabilities.

S/N	Items	N	Mean (\bar{x})	SD
1	Educational policies in Enugu State effectively support the enrollment of learners with disabilities in mainstream schools.	250	2.12	0.84
2	Policies are adequately implemented to promote regular class attendance among learners with disabilities.	250	2.08	0.79

3	Schools receive adequate policy directives on inclusive admission processes.	250	2.20	0.91
4	Monitoring mechanisms exist to ensure that schools comply with inclusive education enrollment guidelines.	250	2.05	0.88

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

The results in Table 1 show that respondents generally disagreed that educational policies in Enugu State sufficiently ensure the enrollment and regular attendance of learners with disabilities in mainstream schools. All mean scores ranged from 2.05 to 2.20, which are below the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating negative perceptions across all items. The low mean scores suggest that current policy frameworks and their implementation processes may not be adequately supporting inclusive enrollment, policy-guided admission procedures, or effective monitoring mechanisms. The standard deviation values, which ranged between 0.79 and 0.91, reflect moderate variability in responses, indicating that while most respondents expressed similar views, some differences in perception still existed. Overall, the findings point to a gap between policy intentions and practical realities in promoting inclusive education in Enugu State.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents on the Adequacy of Teaching Aids in Schools Implementing Inclusive Education.

S/N	Items	N	Mean (\bar{x})	SD
1	The school provides sufficient assistive learning devices for learners with disabilities.	250	2.18	0.82
2	Teaching materials are regularly adapted to meet the needs of diverse learners.	250	2.14	0.76
3	There are adequate visual, audio, and tactile instructional resources to support inclusive learning.	250	2.09	0.88
4	Teachers have access to specialized instructional aids that enhance learning for students with disabilities.	250	2.11	0.90

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

The results in Table 2 indicate that respondents largely disagreed that teaching aids available in Enugu State schools are adequate for supporting inclusive education. All mean values ranged between 2.09 and 2.18, which are below the criterion mean of 2.50, demonstrating that most respondents perceived a shortage of essential instructional materials. These results suggest that assistive learning devices, adapted teaching materials, and specialized instructional resources are insufficient in schools implementing inclusive education. The standard deviation values, which range from 0.76 to 0.90, indicate moderate variability in responses, showing that although most respondents shared a similar view, some differences in opinion still existed. Overall, the findings highlight a significant gap in the provision of necessary teaching aids required to effectively support learners with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents on Institutional Challenges Hindering Effective Implementation of Inclusive Education Policies

S/N	Items	N	Mean (\bar{x})	SD
1	Schools have sufficient administrative support to implement inclusive education policies effectively.	250	2.16	0.87
2	Teachers receive regular training on inclusive education practices.	250	2.12	0.83
3	Funding provided for inclusive education is adequate to meet school needs.	250	2.09	0.91
4	There is effective supervision and monitoring of inclusive education implementation across schools.	250	2.07	0.85

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

The results in Table 3 reveal that respondents disagreed that institutional structures in Enugu State schools adequately support the implementation of inclusive education policies. All mean scores fell between 2.07 and 2.16, which are noticeably below the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating respondents' perception of significant institutional weaknesses. The low mean values show that administrative support, teacher training, funding, and supervision mechanisms are perceived as insufficient for achieving effective inclusive education. Standard deviation values ranging from 0.83 to 0.91 indicate moderate variation in respondents' views, suggesting that while there is broad agreement on the challenges, some individuals offered slightly different perspectives. Overall, the findings point to deep-rooted institutional constraints that hinder the full realization of inclusive education goals in Enugu State schools.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study provide important insights into the role of educational policy in promoting inclusive education in Enugu State schools. Across the three objectives, the results consistently reveal gaps between policy intentions and practical realities within the school system.

The first objective examined the extent to which Enugu State educational policies ensure the enrollment and regular attendance of learners with disabilities in mainstream schools. The mean scores for all items under this objective were below the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating that respondents largely disagreed that existing policies are sufficiently effective in promoting inclusive admission and attendance. This suggests that while inclusive education policies exist at both national and state levels, their operationalization at the school level remains weak. Policy directives appear not to have translated into concrete practices that guarantee access and continuity for learners with disabilities. This aligns with scholarly views that inclusive policies in Nigeria often remain theoretical due to limited implementation structures and monitoring mechanisms (Ajuwon, 2018; Omede, 2020).

The second objective focused on the availability and adequacy of teaching aids in schools implementing inclusive education. Again, all mean scores fell below 2.50, indicating that respondents perceived existing instructional resources as inadequate. The low scores reflect limited

availability of assistive devices, adapted learning materials, and specialized instructional aids essential for addressing diverse learning needs. This finding underscores a structural challenge commonly reported in literature, where schools are often under-equipped to support inclusive teaching strategies due to constrained funding and lack of supply of disability-friendly learning materials (Eze, 2019; Okeke & Muthukrishna, 2021). Without appropriate teaching aids, the effectiveness of inclusive education is significantly diminished, regardless of policy provisions.

The third objective assessed institutional challenges hindering the implementation of inclusive education policies. The mean scores here were also below the criterion mean, indicating respondents' disagreement with the view that institutional conditions in their schools support policy implementation. Key issues identified include inadequate administrative support, limited teacher training, insufficient funding, and weak monitoring systems. These findings reinforce the argument that successful inclusive education depends not only on policy documents but also on functional institutional frameworks that provide operational support (Igbokwe *et al.*, 2020). The lack of regular training for teachers, in particular, highlights a major gap, as teachers are the primary drivers of inclusive practices within classrooms. Without adequate professional development, effective implementation remains compromised.

Conclusion

This study investigated how educational policies support inclusive education in Enugu State schools. The findings show that although inclusive education policies exist, their implementation is weak. Respondents indicated that the policies do not adequately ensure the enrollment and regular attendance of learners with disabilities. Teaching aids necessary for inclusive instruction were also found to be insufficient, and several institutional challenges, such as inadequate administrative support, limited teacher training, poor funding, and weak monitoring, hinder effective implementation. The study concludes that inclusive education in Enugu State is still far from being fully achieved. Strengthening policy enforcement, improving school-level support systems, providing adequate resources, and enhancing teacher capacity are essential steps toward ensuring that learners with disabilities benefit meaningfully from inclusive education.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are offered to enhance the implementation of inclusive education policies in Enugu State schools.

- i. The government and education authorities should strengthen the enforcement of inclusive education policies to ensure that schools admit and support learners with disabilities, backed by clear monitoring mechanisms that promote compliance and accountability.
- ii. Adequate resources and teaching aids such as assistive devices, adapted instructional materials, and specialized learning tools should be provided to schools, with consistent funding to address resource shortages that hinder effective inclusive teaching.
- iii. Teachers should receive continuous professional development focused on inclusive teaching strategies, management of diverse learners, and the use of assistive technologies, ensuring they have the competence required to implement inclusive practices.

iv. School administrators should be supported and empowered with the knowledge and tools necessary to provide effective leadership for inclusive education, thereby strengthening institutional capacity to create learning environments that are responsive to the needs of learners with disabilities.

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