



## **Resource Availability, Awareness and Barriers to Inclusive Physical Activity and Sports For Special Needs Persons in University of Ilorin**

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### **Abstract**

The study investigated resource availability, awareness and barriers to inclusive Physical Activity and Sports for Special Needs Persons (SNPs) in University of Ilorin. Descriptive research design of survey type was used for the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 32 special-needs students based on their availability and accessibility. A validated questionnaire named resource availability, awareness and barriers to inclusive physical activity and sports questionnaire (RAABIPASQ) with a reliability coefficient of .74 was used for data collection. The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts, percentage and decision mean. Findings of the study revealed that; only halls accessibility 17 (53.1%) and co-curricular activities encouragement 18 (56.3%) are available resources; there is level of awareness for inclusive PA and sports (decision mean >2.50); there are barriers militating against the inclusive PA and sports (with decision means >2.50); there is high level of awareness on implications of disability acts towards inclusive PA and Sports (decision mean >2.50) among (SNPs) in University of Ilorin. It was concluded that; majority of the resources required for inclusive PA and Sports are not available; there is awareness for inclusiveness in PA and Sports; there are barriers militating the inclusive PA and sports; and there is high level of awareness on implications of disability acts towards inclusive PA and Sports among SNPs in University of Ilorin. Therefore, the study recommended that specially designed sports facilities and other resources should be provided by the school authority and charity organisations to facilitate PA and sports participation for health promotion and rehabilitation.

**Keywords: Adaptive sports, inclusiveness, disabilities, students' sports, university**

### **Introduction**

Resource availability, awareness and barriers to inclusive participation in physical activity and sports among people with special needs are of concern all over the world. It is one thing for the resources to be available, it is another for the end user to be aware of its availability. It is another thing altogether to see that barriers to access and utilization is controlled. That is why efforts are being made all over the world to see that not only that resources are available but also that hindrances to access is eliminated or minimized. Human beings are the most useful resources in every nation of the world but when they are not well



managed may become a threat to the tranquility of the community they reside having consequential effect on the populace. Among human being, health professional are more likely useful resource for encouraging physical activity and sports participation among SNPs. According to CDC (2018) adults with disability are 82% more likely to be physically active if it is recommended by the doctor as opposed to when there is no such recommendations. The same CDC (2024) report pointing out what doctors could do acknowledged that there are barriers to physical activity participation and recommended that doctors should discuss it with their disabled patients. If adequate care is taken there the likelihood that awareness will be created and barriers physical activity and sports among SNPs will be reduced if not eliminated even as it is reported by UNC Gilling School of Global Public Health that there is decline in percentage of children and youths who meet their daily need of physical activity. .

It has been estimated that one billion people worldwide will experience impairment at some point in their lives, with around one-fifth of those having a handicap that seriously affects their capacity to carry out daily tasks (McClain-Nhlapo, 2019). This equates to almost 15% of the world's population, with up to 190 million (3.8%) persons aged 15 and older experiencing major functional challenges and frequently needing medical treatment (World Health Organization WHO, 2021). Goryakin, (2019) expressed that 50% of persons with disabilities are physically inactive and are more likely to have chronic diseases than non-disabled adults and while on average, they are less active than people without disabilities and have higher levels of sedentary behaviour (Ryan, Kerr, Kilbride, & Norris, 2022) making this group a vulnerable population needing attention for a healthy and sustainable living. Despite being fundamental to processing learning and physical activity lifestyle, inclusion has been questioned in relation to special-need persons (Pushkarenko et al., 2020). Sport can provide a variety of mainstream and disability-specific opportunities across the inclusion spectrum for persons with disabilities. However, for 15% of the world's population with a disability, access to sporting activities can be limited (Harada, 2011).

It is a well-known fact that Physical activity (PA) is a non-pharmacological preventive, curative and health management medicine proven to be effective for behaviour modification towards sustainable lifestyle. Exposing PWDs to physical activity will promote all-round health, wellbeing and quality of life thereby having positive effect on their daily living. Inclusion of SNPs is a crucial condition for just, sustainable, and equitable development. Also, accessibility to appropriate activities in the community for people with disabilities can be improved through physical activity and competitive sports when their modified sports facilities and equipment are available.

Truly in Nigeria, policy for SNPs has been put in place with five-year agenda for effective implementation (National Assembly of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2018) but yet to be fully realized especially in areas of recreational facilities and sports for all in terms of SNPs resources needs. The lack of attention to millions of SNPs in Nigeria could lead to social exclusion, restriction or economic unproductiveness as well as unhealthy population. People with physical disabilities do not seem to be able to participate in social activities like leisure activities due to social barriers and the sort of disability they have (Aliberti, 2022). Additional barriers, such as accessibility issues, equipment, media, coaching, perceptual barriers, and so on, makes the experience of people with disabilities much more emotionally draining. This is often due to barriers preventing participation, such as lack of modified equipment for sporting activities and discrimination built on cultural and social prejudices.

It is has been established by World Health Organisation (2010) that physical activity of aerobic nature, minimum of 150 minutes of moderate exercise or 75 minutes of vigorous exercise has exponential effects on health and wellbeing of individuals of all ages, special-needs persons inclusive. Participation in sports by SNPs also provides platforms for healthy living, participation and economic empowerment, hence the fundamental requirement of



acknowledging sports persons with impairments as athletes too in order to enable equal participation in such activities (Dominic, 2020). Even though playing sports is a fundamental human right, many special needs persons still have limited access to sporting events compared to their abled counterparts (Kiuppis, 2018). Physical activity and sports have positive effects on the perception of quality of life of PWDs thereby offering the chance to establish and strengthen social relationships for people with disabilities. Not only this, higher scores in the psychological domain suggest that active people including SNPs have a better control on their emotions and a better relation with their own body image and look and higher self-esteem levels than inactive people (Biagini, Bastiani & Sebatiani, 2022) Additionally, by putting more of an emphasis on participants' strengths than their limitations, adapted sports enable people with physical impairments become physically and psychologically stronger and gain greater independence.. This helps the individuals to be more focused on their capabilities, rather than disabilities, thus improving the way they cope with aversive situations and in particular with their disability.

Non-participation in recreational activities and 'sports for all' have negative impact on SNPs resulting to discrimination and segregation which most times, separate them from involvement in activities alongside mainstream population. Furthermore, SNPs experience long term been sidelined when examining the policy of 'sport for all'. This could be attributed to barriers such as lack of qualified coaches, limited availability of equipment, inadequate or lack of facilities and lack of financial resources which are major determinants of sports participation or non-participation for this vulnerable group. This is compounded by policies geared towards inclusion of vulnerable persons, observed to be non-existent, in terms of implementation within this context (Blauwet & Willick, 2012) in terms of the Nigerian society. To date, only few studies have investigated the association of physical activity and sports with the enhancement of quality of life and life satisfaction of special needs persons and no systematic studies have been carried out in the Nigerian population (Lape et al., 2018). Therefore, this study aimed to examine the availability of resources, awareness of and barriers militating against inclusive participation in physical activity and sport for special needs persons in University of Ilorin.

This study is based on Critical Disability Theory (CDT) to expatiate the link between the Physical Activity (PA) and health. Inactivity and social isolation coupled with any form of impairment has been observed to have tremendous effects on quality of life of individuals of all ages over time. Millions of SNPs may experience social isolation, limitations, or decreased economic productivity if their needs are not met. Inclusion of SNPs is a crucial condition for just, sustainable, and equitable development. Barriers militating social participation of SNPs could be as a result of lack of financial strength, support ratios, adequate infrastructure, transportation, and equipment; enduring stigma and prejudice, lack of confidence and self-esteem, communication difficulties, lack of awareness of opportunities, and dearth of believable role models ( ). Eliminating or controlling these barriers could only be achieved when they are identified in organised organisation such as academic community and addressed. This is imperative to provide cushioning effects to the experience of PWDs which are much more emotionally draining with ill designed equipment and discrimination built on cultural and social prejudices.

Physiologically, PA and Sports enhance the cardio-respiratory system's performance, strengthen bones, muscles, and joints, and maintain a healthy body weight, hence lowering the risk of and preventing chronic diseases (Piercy, et al., 2018). Physical activity helps PWDs maintain their psychophysical health, which is currently a widely held belief. Physical inactivity is very common in people with disabilities, which raises the risk of secondary health issues like cognitive, sensorimotor, behavioural, and social issues that can lower



quality of life (Stocchetti & Zanier, 2016). Sport is an effective tool to overcome these barriers providing platform to surmount the negative impacting factors.

Sport provides a context to highlight ability rather than disability and this increases the self-confidence of groups of women with disabilities as well as enables sports-based interventions aimed at challenging and changing the negative attitudes of society (Connell, Brazier, O'Cathain, Lloyd-Jones & Paisley, 2012). Inclusive PA and Sports programmes, promotes transformation not just for the participants, but also for families, coaches, administrators, spectators and event or programme sponsors. However, progress in developing sports for individuals with a disability is beset with barriers that limit or impede their participation and these barriers need to be addressed. Most policy attention to address these issues has focused on merging disability sports organisations and their participants into non-disabled sporting organisations through a process termed vertical integration or mainstreaming. Mainstreaming aims to include people with disabilities in all aspects of governance and operations. To create accessible and inclusive spaces, people with disabilities need to be offered a choice of participation options (Iman & Abdulraheem-Mustapha, 2016).

The classification of PWDs revealed that physical impairments accounted for the highest form of disability (34%), followed by visual impairments (22%) and hearing difficulties (15%). Other impairments include mental, speech and learning disabilities (WHO, 2021). People with disabilities seem to have fewer opportunities than able people, and their employment rates and educational attainment remain lower. Delivered in an adapted and inclusive way, sports programmes can help combat their marginalisation and change the negative perceptions frequently associated with disability. Disability participation in every aspect of society, access to equal opportunities and control over resources for all persons regardless of ability are hallmarks of disability equity. These are premised on well-known human rights principles of non-discrimination and equality (Connell et al., 2012). Able-bodied people tend to focus on a person's disability rather than on an individual's abilities or skills and this is a form of discrimination that keeps able-bodied persons from appreciating and experiencing the full potential of PWDs, further perpetuating the negative attitudes.

Sports have the potential to break down negative attitudes by changing the community's perceptions of PWDs' capabilities; participation contains not only articles about options of sporting activities for people with disabilities together with non-disabled peers and competitors (Kiuppis, 2018) but also contributions that emphasise disability sports in segregated settings. Sport can help eliminate obstacles and barriers in the environment, transportation, public facilities and services to ensure that people facing those barriers such as persons with disabilities can access sports and physical activities. However, opportunities to participate in athletics for students with disabilities are virtually non-existent (Pushkarenko et al., 2020).

Typical barriers for people with disabilities to participate in sport may include a lack of awareness on the part of people without disabilities as to how to involve them in teams adequately; lack of opportunities and programmes for training and competition; too few accessible facilities due to physical barriers; and limited information on and access to resources (Dada & UKpata, 2017). Sports give persons with disabilities the opportunity to gain a sporting identity and at the same time serve to distance them from their worthless disabled identity. There have been recommendations on institutional policies and guidelines on support services for special needs in higher education but there is the need to ensure their inclusion in physical activities and the establishment of disability sport and PA support centres that is yet to be implemented. According to Ryan, Kerr, Kilbride and Norris, (2022), disability and physical activity scientific evidence is accumulating but at the same time, important gaps in knowledge remain hence the importance of this study in Nigerian



community. This study hopes to identify available resources, awareness and the challenging barriers to advocate for these essential needs of SNPs.

### Materials and Methods

The research design adopted for the study was descriptive research design. Out of the population of 52 Special-Needs students spread across different faculties in University of Ilorin, as at 2022/2023 session, 32 Special-Needs students were recruited based on availability and accessibility due to the nature of their impairments as at the time of data collection. The services of two (2) sign language interpreters for the hearing impaired respondents; two (2) readers for visually impaired respondents; and two interviewers were sought. A validated and tested structured questionnaire named resource availability, awareness and barriers to inclusive physical activity and sports questionnaire (RAABIPASQ) with a reliability coefficient of .74 was used for data collection. The instrument which was administered on the respondents were retrieved immediately. The data were analysed using The SPSS version 25. The descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentage were used to answer research questions. The and decision mean of 2.5. This is a baseline study to determine awareness by the SNPs within the university.

### Results

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

S/N	Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender			
1.	Male	19	59.4
2.	Female	13	40.6
	Total	32	100
Marital Status			
1.	Single	31	96.9
2.	Married	1	3.1
	Total	32	100
Type of Impairment			
1.	Hard of Hearing	16	50
2.	Blind	13	40.6
3.	Amputee	3	9.4
	Total	32	100

The table one depicts the gender, marital status and type of impairment of the respondents. The table indicates that 19 males and 13 females served as the student participants. The table also shows that 31 of the participants were single while 1 of them is married. The table equally shows that intense of type of impairment 16 of them were hard in hearing, 13 were blind while 3 were amputees.

Table 2: Descriptive analysis of resources for Special-Needs Persons' Inclusive PA and Sports in University of Ilorin (N = 32)



S/N	Items	Yes	No
1.	Building Accessibility	15 (46.9%)	17 (53.1%)
2.	Lecture Halls Accessibility	17 (53.1%)	15(46.9%)
3.	Ramps Installation on Campus	15 (46.9%)	17 (53.1%)
4.	Elevators Installation on Campus	7 (21.9%)	25 (78.1%)
5.	Mobility Assistance on Campus	13 (40.6%)	19 (59.4%)
6.	Co-Curricular Activities Encouragement	18 (56.3%)	14 (43.7%)
7.	Sports Facilities on Campus	9 (28.1%)	23 (71.9%)
8.	Qualified Sports Coaches	11 (34.4%)	21 (65.6%)
	<b>Total</b>	<b>105 (41%)</b>	<b>151 (59%)</b>

Table 2; depicts the percentage of available and unavailable resources for the inclusive participation of SNP in PA and Sport in University of Ilorin. Out of the 8 items on the table only 2 items of lecture hall accessibility (53.1%) and co-curricular activity encouragement (56.3%) have higher percentage of yes response as against no response. The other 6 items range between 53.1% - 78.1% accounts for no responses. This indicates that majority of the resources needed for inclusive PA and sports by special-needs persons in University of Ilorin are not available.

**Table 3: Mean Analysis on awareness of inclusive PA and sports for Special-Needs Persons in University of Ilorin**

S/N	Items	N	Mean	Remarks
1.	Coaches are knowledgeable on inclusion of Special-Needs persons		3.97	Aware
2.	Assistive devices are provided by the University		2.03	Not aware
3.	Specially designed sports facilities are available	32	1.88	Not aware
5.	Social justice and inclusive learning are promoted through PA and sports		3.03	Aware
6.	Inclusive PA and sports enhances health status and well-being of SNP		3.09	Aware

**Decision key; (Mean = 0 - 2.49, —► not aware), (Mean = 2.50 – 4.0 —► aware)**

Table three; depicts mean analysis on level of awareness by SNPs on inclusive PA and Sport in University of Ilorin. Three of the five items with mean of 3.03, 3.09 and 3.97 shows awares as they are above the decision mean of 2.50. This indicates that there is awareness among SNPs towards inclusiveness in PA and Sports in University of Ilorin.

**Table 4: Mean Analysis on Barrier to Inclusive PA and Sports among Special-Needs Persons in University of Ilorin**

S/N	Items	N	Mean	Remarks
1.	Availability of Sports Facilities		2.22	Barrier
2.	Availability of Coaches		2.91	Not barrier
3.	Availability of Financial Resources	32	2.0	Barrier

4.	Availability of Sports Equipment	2.2	Barrier
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**Decision key;** (Mean = 0 - 2.49, —► not a barrier), (Mean = 2.50 – 4.0 —► a barrier)

Table four; depicts mean analysis on barriers to inclusive PA of special needs persons towards their inclusiveness in physical activity and sport in University of Ilorin. It shows that only availability of coaches is not a barrier (mean 2.91). Availability of Sports Facilities (2.22), availability of Financial Resources (2.0) and availability of Sports Equipment (2.3) all stand for barriers. This indicates that there are barriers militating against the inclusion of SNP in PA and sports in University of Ilorin.

**Table 5: Mean Analysis on SNP Awareness of implications of Disability Acts towards Inclusive PA, Sports and Sustainability in University of Ilorin**

S/N	Items	N	Mean	Remarks
1.	Sports for all policy ensures active involvement of special-needs persons in sports.		3.34	Aware
2.	Special-needs persons' involvement in PA and sports is hindered by stigmatization.		3.34	Aware
3.	Rights of special-needs persons include health care and accommodation.	32	3.59	Aware
4.	Discrimination against special-needs persons is prohibited in public transportation.		4.0	Aware
5.	All public organisations are to reserve at least 5 percent of employment opportunities for special-needs persons.		3.69	Aware

**Decision key;** (Mean = 0 - 2.49, —► not aware), (Mean = 2.50 – 4.0 —► aware)

Table five; depicts mean analysis on SNP aware of the implications of Disability Acts towards Inclusive PA, Sports and Sustainability. All 5 items have mean above decision mean (2.50) ranging from 3.34 - 4.0. This indicates that there is high level of awareness among SNPs on the implications of disability acts towards Inclusive PA, Sports and Sustainability in University of Ilorin.

### Discussion

The discussion of findings is based on availability of resources, awareness of and barriers militating against inclusive participation in physical activity and sport among SNPs in University of Ilorin. Special-needs persons do make use of assistive devices as a form of support to carry-out activities of daily living. The study found that the resources needed for inclusive PA and sports by special-needs persons in University of Ilorin are not available. This may hamper the participation of SNPs participation in physical activity and sports. The finding is consistent with Roux e tal (2007) the authors found that availability of resources may be of the environmental factors that influence individual physical activity behaviour. That there are non-availability of resources and the expected influence on participation is not surprising as it is in line with every day observation of the researchers.

This study found out that majority of the special-needs persons in University of Ilorin are not aware of the availability of assistive devices. In few cases they used less sophisticated assistive devices that can only support mobility. As a result of this, getting access to buildings and lecture halls is difficult since there is no mobility assistance rendered by the University of



Ilorin on campus. If care is not taking, all human domains may be affected (such as cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains) through difficulty experienced by special-needs persons in navigating within the environment. Psychomotor domain is a reflection of interactions between experiences gained in the cognitive and affective domains (Mwale & Kafala, 2016). PA and sports could be grouped under psychomotor domain and they are part of curriculum activities that students must undergo in a period of time which may be beneficial to other domains (cognitive and affective domains).

Analysis of the responses transcribed established the fact that specifically designed sports facilities and equipment and financial resources are barrier to inclusive PA and sports in University setting because they are not available. Sports facilities, provision, utilisation and accessibility significantly influence sports participation and development in higher institutions of learning and their inadequacy or non-availability do not only affect recreational athletes but also elite athletes and able participants showcasing its implication for PWDs (Ogunsemore, 2019; Dauda, Dominic & Adesoye, 2015; Aina, Dominic, Bakinde, Ajadi & Falaye, 2016). Sporting events cannot take place without adequate provision for necessary sports facilities and equipment required. Unless fund is also provided, these needs cannot be met. The lack of these germane resources predispose the SNPs to identified health menace and this necessitate the need to further find out if the situation is the same in other tertiary institutions to holistically address this barrier. Sports facilities are major factors to be considered for participation as they provide standard settings for competitive tournaments, fitness and recreation (Dada & UKpata, 2017). This does not imply that that sports facilities and equipment are the only factors necessary for sports participation. Availability of knowledgeable and competent coaches alongside other resources contribute to excellence in sports participation (Goryakin et al., 2019). Though findings from this study revealed that qualified sports coaches are available in the university to properly handle the inclusiveness of special-needs persons in PA and sports but non-availability of specially designed sports facilities, equipment and other resources tend to limit coaches' operations.

There is awareness of health benefits embedded in PA and sports participation among special-needs persons. PA and sports participation improve physical, mental, social and spiritual health of an individual (Dominic, 2020). PA and sports participation tend to improve impairment or disability conditions of the person involved over time. Generally, well-being of special-needs person is promoted through PA and sports participation as it offers the opportunities for social interactions with their able counterparts. PA and sports participation by extension is beneficial to the health of special-needs persons by serving as a social platform. Also, special-needs person are aware about the disability acts that encourages inclusiveness of special-needs persons through policies formulation that removes stigmatization, prohibiting discrimination and provision of health care, accommodation and employment opportunities to promote their participation in PA.

Awareness among special needs persons in Nigeria regarding the implications of disability acts towards inclusive physical activity (PA) and sports is an important yet underdeveloped area. The Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018 is a key legislation in Nigeria that aims to promote the rights and inclusion of individuals with disabilities (National Assembly of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2018). This study found that there is high level of awareness and understanding among SNPs in Nigeria about the provisions and implications of this act, particularly in the context of physical activity and sports. This negates the findings of Onaolapo and Onaolapo (2017); Adebisi, Ogunsakin and Ayanniyi (2021) that there is lack of awareness among special needs persons in Nigeria about the provisions and implications of this act and this has been hindering their ability to assert their rights and advocate for inclusive opportunities.





Without adequate the knowledge of their legal entitlements, SNPs in Nigeria may face significant barriers in accessing and participating in physical activity and sports programmes (Okafor & Ngwu, 2014). This can lead to reduced physical, social, and emotional well-being, as well as limited opportunities for personal development and social inclusion. Addressing this gap through awareness-raising campaigns, educational programmes, and collaborative efforts between SNPs, service providers, and government agencies is crucial for empowering this population and creating a more inclusive environment for physical activity and sports within the university for high impact PWDs workforce in Nigeria.

### Conclusion

Majority of the resources required for inclusive participation of SNPs in PA and Sport in University of Ilorin are not available. There is awareness among SNPs towards inclusiveness in PA and Sports in University of Ilorin. There is barrier militating the inclusion of SNPs in PA and sports in University of Ilorin. There is awareness among SNPs on the implications of disability acts towards inclusive PA and Sports in University of Ilorin.

### Recommendations

Based on the conclusion, it is therefore recommended that specially designed sports facilities and other resources (such as assistive devices and financial resources) that will commensurate with the available knowledgeable and competent coaches should be provided by the school authority and charity organisations to facilitate PA and sports participation for health promotion and rehabilitation.

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