

Inclusive Education for A Sustainable Future and Employability of Middle Level Manpower Graduates in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper investigates the role of inclusive education in promoting a sustainable future and enhancing employability in Nigeria. Primary data were sourced to assess the main objectives of the study using self-designed questionnaire with a reliability index of 0.75 Cronbach alpha and administered to 120 undergraduate students from all the three public tertiary institutions in Oyo township. Descriptive statistics, (including simple frequency, percentages and weighted values) was used to analyse respondents' personal data and to address the research questions for the study. Pearson' correlation analysis was utilised to test the relationship between the variable of the study. The research finds a strong positive perception of respondents on inclusive education, and in terms of the relationships between inclusive education and sustainable future and inclusive education and employability with mean scores exceeding 2.50. Specifically, the study found a strong positive correlation between inclusive education and sustainable future, with a correlation coefficient of 0.85; between inclusive education and employability, with a correlation coefficient of 0.60; and between sustainable future and employability, with a correlation coefficient of 0.55. This suggests that an increase in inclusive education tends to positively improve both students sustainable future and their employability. As a result, the study recommends that the government should formulate and implement comprehensive policies to support enhanced inclusive education in teaching and learning and also institute educational interventions.

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Introduction

Nigeria, a nation with a rapidly growing population and diverse socio-economic landscape, faces significant challenges in its education system. Inclusive education, which seeks to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students regardless of their background or abilities, is increasingly recognized as a key factor in achieving sustainable development and enhancing employability. Inclusive education aims to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students, including those from marginalized or disadvantaged backgrounds. In Nigeria, inclusive education is pivotal for addressing socio-economic disparities and preparing students for a sustainable and employable future. This study explores how inclusive education contributes to achieving sustainability and enhancing job prospects, using empirical data collected from various educational institutions and stakeholders in Nigeria.

Boyi (2013) argues that to achieve sustainable national development of state or society as it may be, there must be a high level of education. However, Fafunwa,(2004) argues that the knowledge given to the younger generation which enables them to develop positive attitudes and good attributes is one of the pieces of evidence of quality education in the society. In like manner, Amaele (2011) sees education as the complete development of a child by using adequate techniques and methods in accordance to his or her ability and area of interest so that he or she will not be left behind and also the child will be able to survive and add to the development of the society.

Development is crucial to the progress of any society. This is because development remains a key instrument in measuring the growth of the society. However, the ideology of development varies. According to Kolawole, Adeigbe, Zaggi & Owonibi (2014), the development of each society have different stages through which it has to undergo.

The attainment of these stages is contingent upon the level of communication or interaction with the externally or internally world,

the prevailing culture, quality of leadership, managerial ability and the set individual goals as well as the collective goals of citizens. Therefore, the ideology behind the development of a society hinges on the society's readiness for change as a process of what is to occur in a higher state. Hence, development theory simply tries to explain how the society changes and the factors or instruments used to implement change, as well as understanding the process of change (Amsden, 2005).

Statement of the Problem

In an increasingly globalized and interconnected world, education systems play a critical role in shaping future generations to meet societal challenges. Unfortunately, current educational frameworks often fall short in effectively integrating the principles of inclusive education, promoting a sustainable future, and enhancing employability. This gap presents significant barriers to achieving equitable, resilient, and prosperous societies. Inclusive education seeks to provide equal learning opportunities for all students, regardless of their socio-economic background, gender, ability, or ethnicity. However, many educational institutions struggle to implement inclusive practices, leading to the marginalization of certain groups. This exclusion not only affects the academic success and social integration of these students but also undermines the broader societal goal of equality and social cohesion. Simultaneously, the concept of a sustainable future is increasingly recognized as essential for the well-being of both current and future generations. Despite this, educational curricula often lack a strong emphasis on sustainability, leaving students unprepared to tackle environmental challenges, resource depletion, and the broader implications of unsustainable practices. Without adequate education on sustainability, students may lack the awareness and skills necessary to contribute meaningfully to a sustainable future. Finally, the transition from education to the world of work, or employability, is a critical concern for students, educators, and policymakers alike. Therefore, this research aims to examine the role of inclusive education in promoting sustainable future and employability in

Nigeria with particular reference to the middle –level manpower educational sector in Nigeria.

Research Questions

With this brief background, this study is an attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. Does the society value inclusive education being a good strategy for job creation in maintaining a sustainable future for graduates in Nigeria?
2. What are the roles of inclusive education in job creation in Nigeria?
3. What level of relationship exists between inclusive education and employability on one hand and sustainable future of students of tertiary institutions on the other?
4. What should possible policy recommendations be?

Literature Review

The importance of inclusive education in the world of development of any society cannot be underestimated especially in Nigeria considering its multi-developmental challenges. According to UNESCO (2009), inclusive education is a process that ensures the full participation of all students in the education system aimed to reducing barriers and improve educational outcomes for diverse learners. In Nigeria, inclusive education is supported by the National Policy on Education, which advocates for educational access for all children, including those with special needs (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2020). However, the implementation of these policies faces significant challenges due to resource constraints, lack of infrastructure, and socio-economic disparities. Inclusive education refers to educational practices that aim to accommodate the diverse needs of all learners, including those from marginalized or disadvantaged groups. It is grounded in principles of equity and accessibility, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to participate and succeed in the educational system. In the context of Nigeria, inclusive education also involves addressing barriers related to socio-economic status, disability, gender, and geographic location.

Sustainable development is desirable to every society irrespective of size and level of development. This is because sustainable development caters for the interest of the present and future generations (Adefabi, 2016). Inclusive education is closely aligned with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). SDG 4 aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Research shows that inclusive education contributes to achieving these goals by addressing educational disparities and fostering a more inclusive society (United Nations, 2015). Inclusive education promotes social cohesion and reduces inequalities, which are essential for sustainable development. For instance, Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) argue that inclusive education helps in creating educational environments that support diversity and inclusion, which are fundamental for achieving sustainable development outcomes. Inclusive education champion's equal access to quality learning for every student, including those with disabilities, recognizing it as vital for sustainable development. Beyond access, it fosters social inclusion, economic opportunity, and environmental responsibility. By employing hands-on learning, community involvement, and action-based teaching, inclusive education empowers students to drive positive change and champion environmental sustainability (Ambika & Vayola, 2023). Employability refers to the skills, knowledge, and attributes that make individuals more likely to secure and sustain employment. Inclusive education plays a significant role in enhancing employability by equipping students with relevant skills and fostering attributes such as adaptability and resilience. Research by Houghton et al. (2015) indicates that inclusive education settings often provide diverse learning experiences that enhance students' problem-solving abilities and interpersonal skills, which are crucial for the workforce. In Nigeria, the integration of inclusive education with vocational training programs can further enhance employability by providing students with practical skills that align with labour market needs (Ogunyemi, 2019).

Kusimo and Chidozie (2019) observed that inclusive education provides significant benefits, including the integration of individuals with physical disabilities, thereby improving their learning capacity and enabling meaningful community engagement, which ultimately contributes to their advancement. Above all, The World Bank Group (2025) emphasizes education as a fundamental human right and a key driver of development, poverty reduction, and societal progress. Despite increased school enrollment, a "learning crisis" persists. They advocate for strategic investments to combat "Learning Poverty" and equip youth with essential skills for the modern world, including those needed for climate action.

Lawal (2019) & Humphreys (2015) posited that the equitable provision of educational opportunities for all Nigerian children is imperative for the realization of their individual developmental potential. Inclusive education is important to the development of Nigeria.

Kauffman & Hornby (2024) reiterated on the orientation of inclusion in regular schools as an effective means of building a society without discrimination. It was submitted that education policy from the local to national should ensure that physically challenged children are in the same school as their abled peers. While generally supporting inclusive education, the National Policy on Education includes a provision for establishing separate educational systems tailored to the needs of physically challenged and impaired learners. (FGN,NPE 2013). Incidentally, this policy contradicts the international practice of inclusion, where inclusive education is seen as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners.

Despite the potential benefits, the implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria faces several challenges. These include limited financial resources and inadequate infrastructure which hinder the effective implementation of inclusive education programs (Adewale, 2018). Many schools lack the necessary facilities and specialized resources that are required to support students with diverse needs. For example, the shortage of trained educators and insufficient professional development opportunities are significant barriers (Ojo, 2020). Teachers often lack the skills and

knowledge required to effectively support inclusive practices. Also, economic disparities and social inequalities contribute to unequal access to education, particularly for marginalized groups (Eze, 2021). These barriers affect students' ability to participate fully in the education system.

To address these challenges and strengthen inclusive education in Nigeria, several strategies can be employed including proper strengthening policies to ensure better implementation of inclusive education practices and increased funding, direct investment in comprehensive training programs for educators to better address the needs of diverse learners and upgrading school facilities to accommodate all learners and enhance accessibility.

Methodology

Descriptive research design was adopted for this study. It covered Oyo town in Oyo State of Nigeria comprising all the public tertiary institutions in the town. Forty students were randomly selected from each of the 3 public tertiary institutions in the town identified as producing manpower at the middle level in Nigeria: Emmanuel Alayande University of Education, Oyo (EAUAD), Federal College of Education (FCE) Special and Federal School of Surveying. A total number of 120 students were randomly selected for this study. A self- designed instrument was used for data collection. The content, face and construct validity were established by experts in the field of education and vocational studies of Emmanuel Alayande University of Education in Oyo, Nigeria. Cronbach alpha was employed to determine the reliability index 0.75 for the instrument. The instrument was administered and collected for analysis. The data gathered were analysed using descriptive statistics of mean, percentage. Pearson's correlation statistics was also used to examine the relationship between variables of the study. The research highlights the implications of the findings in relation to policy to promote inclusive learning and create an environment for innovative teaching and learning through expansion of systematic and productive employment generation practices in Nigeria's higher institution with a view to guaranteeing a sustainable future and employability for her graduates. The paper also discusses some key

skills necessary to enhance the innovative development and adaptability of graduates to ever - changing challenges facing graduates in Nigeria.

Results

The responses were analysed and the results presented as shown below:

4.1. Respondents Personal Information

Table 4.1: Frequency of Respondents by Gender

Selected tertiary institutions	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percent
EAUED, Oyo	40	33.3	33.3
FCE, (Special), Oyo	40	33.3	66.3
Fed.School of Surveying, Oyo	40	33.4	100.0
Total	120	100.0	
Gender			
Female	68	56.7	56.7
Male	52	43.3	100.0
Total	120	100.0	
Age range			
20-29	38	31.6	31.6
30-39	47	39.2	70.8
41 and above	35	29.2	100.0
Total	120	100.0	

Table 4.1 presents the results of respondents from the randomly selected tertiary institutions in Oyo Township. It was indicated that, 40 representing 33.3% were selected from each tertiary institution. 56.7% of the respondents were females and 43.3% were males. Also, the age bracket reveals that out of the total respondents, 38 representing 31.6% were 20-29 years, followed by 47 are between 30 – 39 years representing 39.2% and 35 number representing 29.2% were of the age bracket 41 years and above.

Research Question 1: Does the society value inclusive education being a good strategy for job creation in maintaining a sustainable future for graduates in Nigeria?

Table 4.2: Societal perception of Inclusive Education

S/N	Statement	Agree	Disagree	Mean (\bar{x})	Decision
1.	Inclusive education promotes equal opportunities for all students regardless of their background.	95	25	6.73	Strongly agree
2.	The curriculum includes materials that are inclusive and sensitive to diverse culture, gender, and ability.	70	50	5.82	Strongly agree
3.	Teachers and staff are well-trained to support students with their respective immediate challenges.	77	43	6.07	Strongly agree
4.	Inclusive education in the institution provides sense of belonging to all students.	87	33	6.44	Strongly agree
5.	The institution provides sufficient opportunity to students to access necessary resources for learning (e.g., learning aids, manpower, technology etc.) to succeed academically.	74	46	5.96	Strongly agree

Table 4.2 reveals that majority of the respondents accept that inclusive promotes equal opportunities for all students regardless of their background with a mean score of 6.73 which was far above the 2.50 decision rule. This statement coincided with previous position of researchers (Ambika & Vayola, 2023). The statement that the curriculum in use is flexible and adaptable was confirmed by the second item in the instrument as agreed with a mean score of 5.82. Hence, the societal perception that the materials that are used in

operating the school's curriculum are adequately not only inclusive but are also sensitive to students' peculiarities, diverse cultural background, gender, and abilities.

Item 3 also confirmed the fitness and suitability of teachers and staff as generally confirmed by the society with a mean score of 6.07.

The World Bank (2025), Ojo (2020) and Angwaomadoko (2023) however, sounded that persistent investment still needed to be carried out by government to address the observed 'learning poverty' in the society. This calls for periodic training and re – training of personnel in order to beef up their capacity building ability to enhance graduate fitness into the future job requirements. In furtherance to the analysis of the data, the statement that “inclusive education in my institution contributes to a sense of belonging for all students” was also generally accepted with mean score of 6.44. This statement also confirms the suitability of the curriculum being adopted for inclusive education policies in schools (Eze, (2021). That the institution should guarantee good access for all category to the necessary resources (e.g., learning aids, technology) in order to produce sound learning outcomes by the society.

The Role of Inclusive Education In Job Creation Drive in Nigeria

Nigeria, characterized by resource scarcity and persistent poverty, necessitates a strategic blend of policies to effectively enhance job creation for its burgeoning youth population. While a marginal decrease in poverty levels has been observed, significant progress remains elusive (Abisuga-Oyekunle, Patra, & Mammo, 2019). A crucial component of addressing this challenge lies in equipping individuals with the essential skills and competencies demanded by the modern workforce. Technical, Vocational Education, and Training (TVET) programs play a pivotal role in this regard, empowering individuals with practical skills conducive to both job creation and sustainable economic development.

Furthermore, inclusive education is instrumental in fostering inclusive growth and development. By ensuring equitable access to quality education and training for all individuals, irrespective of their background or abilities, inclusive education directly contributes to the reduction of poverty and unemployment rates, both of which pose

substantial challenges in Nigeria. The promotion of inclusive education also facilitates strategic planning and policy development aimed at stimulating economic growth and generating employment opportunities. For example, the Nigerian government has formulated a framework for job creation and youth employment, which underscores the critical importance of inclusive education and skill development in achieving these objectives. souce of statement

Hence, Adetoro, (2014) posits that inclusive education is the only means of achieving Nigeria’s dream of a free and democratic society and “a just and egalitarian society”. It is also a way of combating discrimination and achieving education for all. Even though expensive, inclusive education is the only type of education that can serve “our unity in diversity”. Consequently, Nigeria cannot run away from this responsibility and therefore it should be her future development plans.

Research Question 2: Relationship between Inclusive Education and Sustainable Future

Table 4.3: Descriptive statistics results.

S/N	Item	Agree	Disagree	Mean (\bar{x})	Decision
1.	Inclusive education integrates topics related to environmental sustainability into the curriculum.	77	43	5.73	Strongly agree
2.	The awareness of global sustainability challenges, such as climate change and resource depletion is required in education.	87	33	5.62	Strongly agree
3.	Inclusive education can equip students with the knowledge to contribute to a sustainable future.	74	46	5.07	Strongly agree
4.	Inclusive education encourages students to engage in sustainable practices, such as recycling or reducing energy consumption.	87	33	6.64	Strongly agree

5.	In achieving a sustainable future inclusive education should be a priority.	74	46	5.96	Strongly agree
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Table 4.3 displays the relationship between inclusive education and sustainable future. The acceptance of all the statements in the affirmative is a clear confirmation that the curricula in their state are not only adequate but are suitable to address environmental sustainability challenges in Nigeria. Sufficient awareness and advocacy had been done concerning the impact and effect of climate change and energy consumption respectively. The need to exercise caution and checks on all these climate change issues were revealing from the descriptive results as analysed.

Research Question 3: Relationship between Inclusive Education and Employability

Table 4: Descriptive statistics results

S/N	Item	Agree	Disagree	Mean (\bar{x})	Decision
1.	Inclusive education provides students with practical skills that are relevant to the current job market.	87	33	6.43	Strongly agree
2.	Students feel confident that they will be employable after completing their education.	74	46	5.22	Strongly agree
3.	Inclusive education offers sufficient career guidance and support for students seeking employment.	77	43	6.17	Strongly agree
4.	Students have developed transferable skills (e.g., communication, teamwork, problem-solving) that will help in future employment.	95	25	6.04	Strongly agree
5.	Inclusive education prepares students to adapt to the evolving demands of the workplace, including digital skills and innovation.	70	50	5.16	Strongly agree

Table 4 analyses the relationship between Inclusive Education and Employability. Item 1 has a mean score of 6.43; Statement 2 has mean score 5.22. Item 3 has mean score of 6.17 as generally acceptable and believed by respondents. The table also revealed that students are exposed to sufficient soft skills capable of making them relevant and suitable for the challenges of future labour market demands. The possession of certain skills can significantly boost a graduate's employability. Students have to develop transferable skills such as communication, teamwork and collaboration, problem-solving and adaptability, time management, initiative and leadership skill and above all the skill to learn continuously and self - development skills. While, the skills cannot solely guarantee employment, they can certainly increase chances of success in the Nigerian job market. The mean score of 6.04 affirmed the general popularity of the community in the strength of these necessary skill for future employability and a meaningful sustainable future for the graduates in Nigeria. that will help in future employment with mean score of 6.04. Item 5 with a mean score of 5.16 that inclusive education prepares students to adapt to the evolving demands of the workplace, including digital skills and innovation further strengthen this popular assertion and perception.

Table 6: Correlation Analysis

Variables	Inclusive Education	Sustainable Future	Employability
Inclusive Education	1.00	0.85	0.60
Sustainable Future	0.85	1.00	0.55
Employability	0.60	0.55	1.00

Interpretation:

- There is a strong positive correlation between inclusive education and sustainable future with correlation coefficient (**0.85**). As inclusive education increase, sustainable future tend to increase as well.

- There is a moderate positive correlation between inclusive education and employability with correlation coefficient (**0.60**). More inclusive education are associated with a higher employability.
- There is a moderate positive correlation between sustainable future and employability with correlation coefficient (**0.55**). Higher sustainable future are associated with higher employability

Discussion of Findings

The results of this investigation indicate that students' perceptions of inclusive education at the tertiary levels are notably positive, suggesting a normalized and integrated approach to inclusive practices. The finding supports the conceptual framework articulated by Kauffman and Hornby (2024), which emphasizes the non-discriminatory nature of effective inclusive education. Moreover, a statistically significant positive relationship was observed between inclusive education and sustainability, implying that the implementation of inclusive educational strategies can effectively enhance future sustainability prospects. Consistent with the perspectives of Lawal (2019), Humphreys (2015), and Ajuwon (2012), this study reaffirms the pivotal role of inclusive education as a catalyst for sustainable development. This study provides empirical support for the proposition that inclusive education serves as a catalyst for improved employability and sustainable development. The findings corroborate the theoretical frameworks presented by Ambika and Vayola (2023), Ogunyemi (2019), and Houghton (2015), which similarly emphasize this relationship. The research indicates a substantial capacity for inclusive education to foster a sustainable future and enhance employability within Nigeria. However, realizing this potential requires a multifaceted approach, grounded in both robust policy and practical implementation.

The findings highlight the significant potential of inclusive education to contribute to a sustainable future and improve employability in Nigeria. However, for these benefits to be fully realized, several measures needed to be taken: There is a need for more robust policy frameworks that support inclusive education and

align with sustainability goals. Increased investment in educational infrastructure and resources is critical for effective implementation. Professional development programs should focus on inclusive education practices and sustainability to better prepare educators.

Conclusion

Inclusive education is crucial for fostering a sustainable future and enhancing employability in Nigeria. By addressing the diverse needs of learners and integrating sustainability into the educational framework, Nigeria can build a more equitable society and prepare its workforce for the demands of a green economy. Continued efforts to overcome challenges and implement effective strategies will be essential in achieving these goals.

Recommendations

The study recommends as follows:

Government should develop and implement comprehensive policies supporting inclusive education and sustainability. Increase funding and resources for schools to improve sustainable infrastructure and training are also critical.

Targeted training for educators on inclusive practices ability is equally sacrosanct. Training institutions should also hold a great duty of ensuring that all teachers' trainee undergo special courses in special need education before graduation to be qualified to participate in inclusive education especially at the basic education in Nigeria.

Fostering partnerships among schools, communities, and NGOs to support inclusive education initiatives should equally be given priority.

Ensuring relevant data is produced on children with disabilities, and that this is broken down by type of disability, so that specific needs can be addressed in education sector planning, and inclusion monitored is also of paramount consideration. This can be done using standardised, comparable data collection methods that meet international standards, using the Washington Group child-functioning module for example to collect information on disability at the household level, school attendance and other relevant demographic data for planning purposes. training institutions shall

hold a great duty of ensuring that all teachers' trainee undergo special courses in special need education before graduation to be qualified to participate in inclusive education especially at the basic education in Nigeria.

Summarily, in order to make education truly inclusive and sustainable and guarantee employment opportunity for the future it is important governments need to:

- Create strong policies that support both inclusive education and environmental sustainability.
- Provide more money and resources to schools for better buildings and training.
- Train teachers well in inclusive teaching methods.
- Ensure all new teachers learn about special needs education.
- Work with communities and organizations to support inclusive schools.
- Collect good data on children with disabilities to plan better and track progress

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