

INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL IDEOLOGY AND NATIONAL ECONOMY ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Sustainable development in special education is a crucial component for fostering inclusivity and equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities in Nigeria. This paper examines how political ideology and the national economy influence the sustainable development of special education in Nigeria. Political ideologies shape educational policies, while the state of the national economy determines the allocation of resources necessary for the implementation of these policies. This paper analyzes how political ideologies and the national economy interact to influence the development and sustainability of special education in Nigeria. The paper discusses political ideology and special needs education in Nigeria, its explains the role of the national economy in special education. The paper further explores the challenges facing sustainable development in special education and highlights potential opportunities for growth, based on international agreements and partnerships.

Keywords: Political Ideology, National Economy, Special Education, Sustainable Development, Nigeria.

Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right and a key driver of national development. For special education in Nigeria, which caters to the needs of individuals with special needs, sustainable development is essential to ensure inclusivity and equal opportunities. However, the realization of sustainable special education is deeply influenced by the political and economic landscape of the country. Political ideologies affect the direction of education policies, while economic conditions determine the extent to which these policies can be implemented.

In recent times, it is generally accepted that the success or failure of any educational system depends on the political system of the area concerned. Education cannot be separated from politics because it is an aspect of political needs of the society. Education is a vital instrument for national unity and integration in Nigeria. That is one of the reasons why the federal government is involved in education at primary, secondary and university levels in Nigeria (Nandes & Lumi, 2016). People with special needs, according to the National Policy on Education (2014), are to be provided with inclusive education services in schools, which normal persons attend, in age-appropriate general education classes, directly supervised by general teachers. For special need education persons who cannot benefit from inclusive education, special classes and units shall remain in special schools, to receive the same quality of education in the other setting. (Paulley & Adeyinka, 2023) Therefore, the introduction of inclusive learning in the classroom is a welcome development in the policies governing the operations of education in Nigeria and a means of fostering peaceful co-existence amongst the citizenry. (Orlunga & Alikor, 2023). Adetoro (2014) highlighted that the adoption of inclusion in Nigeria's National Policy on Education maintains that the nation has accepted the

principle and implementation of inclusiveness in her educational system to take care of the diverse persons who come to learn. Obi (2018), asserted that the practice of inclusiveness represents a situation where the school responds directly to students, with the view of equality to every educational opportunity made available by the government.

Political Ideology

Political ideology is a system of definite views, ideas, conceptions, and notions adhered to by the political class or political party. It is always a reflection of the system predominant at any given time and they shape the way societies envision governance and societal organization (Harrison & Boyd, 2018). It can also be seen as diverse belief systems that shape how individuals and societies perceive governance, societal organization, and values. In essence, political ideologies serve as guiding principles that inform the creation, modification, and implementation of policies across various domains, significantly impacting the direction and character of a government's decisions (Bello, Dan'asabe, Abubakar & Abdullahi, 2023).

Special Needs Education

Special needs education is based on the universal declaration of human rights as enunciated by the united nations in 1946, and later strengthened by the Nigerian National Policy on Education (2014), that 'every Nigerian child shall have a right to equal educational opportunities, irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities' (equality of educational opportunity). The policy went further to state that the Nigeria's philosophy of education is based on the development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen, the full integration of the individual into the community, the provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the country at all levels both inside and outside the formal school system. (Paulley & Adeyinka, 2023)

Olawuyi (2008) defined special needs education as an ideal general education in which individual differences, which are manifested in their abilities, aptitudes, learning styles and motivation to learn, are considered and provided for. Eteng-Uket (2022), described it as classroom or private instructions involving unconventional techniques, materials, exercises, facilities and subject matter designed for learners who have one form of disability or the other such as, behavioral disorders or learning disabilities, the gifted and talented. It is a practice of educating learners with special needs aimed at individual's full participation in school education.

Political Ideology and Special Education in Nigeria

Different administrations in Nigeria have varied approaches to special education. The military regimes of the past were often characterized by limited attention to special education. Conversely, democratic governments have been more inclined toward inclusivity, particularly with the adoption of international agreements like the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which Nigeria ratified in 2010. However, frequent changes in government and inconsistent political commitments continue to hinder the full implementation of inclusive education policies. Political ideology significantly influences the development and implementation of special education policies in Nigeria. Political leaders' views on social welfare, inclusivity, and the role of government shape the extent and quality of services provided to individuals with special needs.

In Nigeria, shifts in political ideologies over time have resulted in varied approaches to special education, ranging from periods of increased attention to special education to times of neglect due to economic constraints or competing political priorities.

1. Social Welfare Ideologies and Inclusive Education: Political parties and leaders that prioritize social welfare often push for more inclusive policies in education, which include the provision of

special education services. FME (2015) explain that, Nigeria's National Policy on Education outlines goals for inclusive education, which are rooted in the belief that education is a right for all children, regardless of ability. However, this inclusive vision has been inconsistently implemented due to changes in political regimes and a lack of sustained political commitment. Ojo and Afolayan (2018) added that, political leaders with a focus on welfare tend to allocate more resources to education, including special education. This is seen in periods where there has been increased funding for teacher training, special needs resources, and infrastructure development.

2. Economic Conservatism and Budget Cuts to Special Education: On the other hand, political ideologies that favor economic conservatism often lead to budget cuts and reduced funding for special education programs. Conservative political regimes tend to prioritize fiscal austerity and may view social programs, including special education, as less urgent compared to other economic priorities. The 2016-2017 recession in Nigeria saw substantial cuts in public spending, including education, under a conservative political leadership. This directly impacted the provision of special education services, with many schools unable to afford necessary resources. Obi and Ibrahim (2019) note that during periods of economic conservatism, special education is often one of the first sectors to experience budgetary reductions, affecting the quality of services provided to students with disabilities.

3. Federalism and Policy Fragmentation: Nigeria's federal system also contributes to variations in how special education is implemented across the country. Political ideologies at both federal and state levels influence how resources are distributed and how inclusive policies are enacted. In more progressive states, special education programs tend to be better funded and more effectively implemented. However, in more conservative or resource-constrained states, special education is often underfunded or ignored. Adeyemi and Yusuf (2020) explain, the decentralized nature of Nigeria's political system leads to policy fragmentation, where some states are far more advanced in providing special education services, while others lag behind due to differing political ideologies.

4. International Influence and Human Rights Ideologies: International pressure, particularly from organizations like the United Nations and the World Bank, has also played a role in shaping political ideologies concerning special education in Nigeria. The adoption of global human rights frameworks, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), has influenced Nigerian political leaders to align with more inclusive education practices. However, the effectiveness of this influence depends on the political will of the ruling government. Bello and Musa (2018) added that, while Nigeria has signed several international conventions related to disability rights and education, the political commitment to implementing these agreements has been inconsistent, largely depending on the ideologies of the ruling party at any given time.

5. Corruption and Political Nepotism in Special Education: Corruption and political nepotism further complicate the development of special education in Nigeria. Despite political ideologies that may support inclusive education, the implementation of policies is often undermined by corruption. Funds intended for special education may be diverted, and political appointments may prioritize loyalty over expertise, leading to inefficiencies in managing special education programs. Akinwale and Durojaiye (2017) highlight that political corruption has slowed progress in special education by reducing the effectiveness of resource allocation and policy implementation. They argue that until corruption is addressed, political ideologies favoring special education will not translate into meaningful improvements in the sector.

The Role of the National Economy in Special Education

Nigeria's economy has fluctuated over the years, primarily due to its dependence on oil exports, which directly affects government spending in various sectors, including education. Special education, which requires consistent and specialized funding, is particularly vulnerable to economic changes.

Economic Recessions: Olujide (2018), During economic downturns, such as the 2016–2017 recession, Nigeria's government experienced reduced revenue, resulting in significant cuts to education spending. Special education, in particular, suffered from the lack of investment in critical areas such as teacher training, infrastructure, and specialized materials. This created challenges for schools aiming to accommodate students with disabilities, leading to their marginalization and exclusion.

Economic Growth: Ajayi and Chukwuma (2019), were of view that, in contrast, economic growth often results in an increase in government revenue, allowing for more robust investment in various educational programs, including special education. However, Nigeria's economy is highly volatile and dependent on global oil prices, making it difficult to maintain consistent funding for special education.

Diversification and Future Prospects: Adeyemi (2020), postulated that, Economic diversification beyond oil is crucial for long-term sustainability. Expanding into agriculture, technology, and manufacturing will help Nigeria create a more stable revenue base, potentially benefiting special education. Current diversification efforts are underway but have yet to yield significant impacts on special education funding.

Challenges to Sustainable Development in Special Education

Akinpelu (2021), was of the view that, the development of sustainable special education in Nigeria faces several challenges, primarily stemming from the political and economic environment.

Political Instability: Frequent changes in government often lead to policy discontinuity, with each administration introducing new educational reforms without fully implementing existing policies. This instability makes it difficult to maintain long-term strategies for the sustainable development of special education.

Corruption: Corruption is a significant issue in Nigeria, affecting all sectors, including education. Funds allocated to special education are often mismanaged or diverted, leaving schools with inadequate resources to provide quality education to students with disabilities.

Economic Prioritization: Education, in general, has not been prioritized in Nigeria's national budgets. Even when the economy is stable, the government tends to prioritize sectors like infrastructure, health, and security over education. This has resulted in inadequate funding for special education, limiting the development of specialized schools, training of teachers, and provision of necessary learning aids.

Lack of Qualified Personnel: There is a shortage of trained special education professionals in Nigeria. Many teachers in regular schools lack the skills and training to effectively cater to students with disabilities, further exacerbating the challenges faced by special education.

Opportunities for Sustainable Development in Special Education

Despite these challenges, Nwanna (2018), explains that, there are opportunities for sustainable development in Nigeria's special education sector.

International Agreements: Nigeria's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) highlights its commitment to providing inclusive education. These frameworks offer a roadmap for achieving long-

term sustainability in special education, as they require the Nigerian government to prioritize inclusivity in education policies.

Economic Diversification: Diversifying the Nigerian economy beyond oil can provide a more stable financial base to support education. By investing in sectors such as technology, agriculture, and services, the government can generate additional revenue to fund special education programs sustainably.

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs): Collaborations between the government and private sector entities can enhance funding and resource allocation for special education. For example, private companies could contribute to building schools, providing learning materials, or supporting teacher training programs. PPPs offer a viable model for addressing resource gaps in special education.

Foreign Aid and International Partnerships: International organizations and foreign governments, such as UNESCO, the World Bank, and UNICEF, have shown interest in supporting Nigeria's education sector, particularly inclusive education. These partnerships can provide technical and financial support for developing sustainable special education programs.

Conclusion

The sustainable development of special education in Nigeria is highly dependent on the political and economic landscape. The political ideology of Nigerian leadership plays a significant role in shaping the development and sustainability of special education and also shape educational policies, while the state of the national economy determines the resources available to implement these policies. Although Nigeria has made some progress in promoting inclusive education, political instability, corruption, and economic fluctuations continue to pose significant challenges. However, opportunities exist in the form of international agreements, economic diversification, public-private partnerships, and foreign aid. Additionally, Nigeria's federal system and issues of corruption further complicate the landscape of special education policy and implementation. Sustainable development in special education in Nigeria will require strong political will, transparent governance, and commitment to inclusive practices across all political ideologies. For Nigeria to achieve sustainable development in special education, there must be a consistent political commitment and strategic investment in the education sector.

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