

ATTAINING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL IN NIGERIA THROUGH REINFORCING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR THE MARGINALIZED GROUPS AND ADULTS

¹GBENRO Abiodun Idowu and ²OLUGBODE Mujidat Lola

^{1&2}Emmanuel Alayande University of Education, Oyo

Phone No: 08062913006 Email: gbenbiodun@yahoo.com

Phone No: 08033637425 EMAIL: lolaolugbode@yahoo.com

Abstract

The fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4) aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all still remains quite a critical challenge in Nigeria, most importantly in respect of the educational needs of marginalized groups including children with disabilities, girls, children from families with a poor economic background and those from rural areas as well as those affected by conflict or displacement and adults seeking formal education. The marginalization of the categories of persons herein listed not only displays a crucial injustice but also hinders the overall development of Nigeria. The paper explores the concept of the fourth Sustainable Development Goals as well as the concepts of inclusive education and marginalized groups, the types of marginalized groups in Nigeria, the current state of education and the challenges faced by marginalized groups in Nigeria. Hence, it proposes specific inclusive education strategies that can be implemented to create a more equitable learning environment for these categories of people.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goal, Inclusive Education, Marginalized Groups

Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is universal, holistic and indivisible with an imperative to leave no one behind, so refocused efforts are needed to improve learning outcomes for the full life cycle, especially for women, girls, adults and marginalized people in vulnerable settings. The "Sustainable Development Goals" (SDGs) refers to a set of 17 global goals adopted by member states of the United Nations in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. These goals on their adoption were designed to

address a variety of interconnected global challenges including poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, peace and justice (UNESCO Institute for Statistics & Global Education Report, 2022). The SDGs have been built upon the success of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the aim is for them to be achieved before or by the year 2030 (Southern Voice, 2023). The fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4) is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (UNESCO, 2022). In Nigeria's

situation, achieving SDG 4 is crucial for addressing educational disparities, enhancing human capital development, and fostering sustainable socio-economic growth (EDUGIST, 2023). However, Nigeria faces a hurdle when it comes to achieving the fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4) and this has created a challenge that affects most severely marginalized groups like children with disabilities, girls, those from poor or rural areas, and victims of conflict or displacement in particular.

Furthermore, formal education has been tailored to specifically prioritize younger students thereby creating a perception that it is not meant for adults which in itself offends the concept of inclusivity. In fact, many African countries focus so much on primary education that adult education programs are completely neglected. There's a growing recognition of the importance of lifelong learning and the need for more inclusive adult education programs and understanding its challenges and promoting inclusive practices will empower adults to pursue education and contribute meaningfully to the society (Ogbaka & Chieke, 2023). To achieve SDG 4, Nigeria needs to strengthen its inclusive education strategies and tailor them to the specific needs of these marginalized groups. Hence, this paper is out to examine how SDG 4 can be achieved in Nigeria through inclusive education for the marginalized groups. The paper will explore the concept of Sustainable Development Goals with particular focus on the fourth one as well as the concepts of inclusive education and marginalized groups, the types of marginalized groups in Nigeria, the current state of education and the challenges faced by marginalized groups in Nigeria. Finally, the paper proposes specific inclusive education strategies that can be implemented to

create a more equitable learning environment for these categories of people.

Concept of SDGs

The SDGs represent a transformative agenda aimed at promoting sustainable development globally, including Nigeria. Osuntogun & Aina (2017) said SDGs is built upon the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and it aims to go beyond poverty alleviation to tackle broader sustainability issues. The goals provide a comprehensive framework for addressing complex challenges such as poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, and promoting inclusive development. Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. This goal is critical for fostering human development, reducing poverty, promoting gender equality, and empowering individuals to contribute effectively to sustainable development. In the Nigerian context, achieving SDG 4 is essential for addressing educational disparities and enhancing educational quality. Federal Ministry of Education Nigeria. (2013) affirms that the SDG 4 consists of seven targets that outline specific objectives for improving education globally

- Ensure all girls and boys complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education.
- Ensure equal access to quality technical, vocational, and tertiary education, including university.
- Increase the number of youth and adults with relevant skills for employment, decent work, and entrepreneurship.

- Eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education.
- Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
- Expand scholarships for developing countries, especially least developed countries, small island developing states, and African countries.
- Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability, and gender-sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive, and effective learning environments for all education practice.

Types and Challenges of Marginalized Groups in Nigeria

Marginalized groups refers to populations or communities that experience systematic discrimination, exclusion, or disadvantage in society based on various factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, disability, socioeconomic status, religion, or other characteristics. Marginalization often leads to limited access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making processes, resulting in social, economic, and political inequalities.

In the Nigerian context, marginalized groups face unique challenges that impact their well-being and overall development. Marginalized groups, in the context of education, encompass individuals who face systemic barriers to accessing quality education. These barriers can be social, economic, cultural, or political. In Nigeria, several groups experience marginalization in education. For instance the National Population Commission of Nigeria, in its 2018 report [NPC, 2018 National Population Commission], estimates that at least 23

million Nigerians live with disabilities. Despite the enactment of the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018, children with disabilities often lack access to inclusive education facilities and trained teachers, hindering their learning opportunities (UNICEF Nigeria, <https://www.unicef.org/education/inclusive-education>).

Adedoyin (2016) and Ene & Okoro (2017) also said persons with disabilities in Nigeria face significant barriers to education, employment, healthcare, and social inclusion. They encounter physical and attitudinal barriers that limit their access to public services and opportunities. Stereotypes and social norms have also been established to limit girls' educational opportunities, particularly in northern Nigeria. Early marriage, household chores, and limited access to safe schools all contribute to lower enrollment and completion rates for girls (UNESCO Institute for Statistics [uis.unesco.org]). Women and girls in Nigeria face gender-based discrimination, limited access to education and healthcare, high rates of maternal mortality, gender-based violence, and cultural barriers that restrict their participation in decision-making (Okorie & Oguguo, 2018 and Onyeneho & Orji, 2019). World Bank confirmed that poverty restricts access to educational resources like uniforms, textbooks, and transportation. Furthermore, rural areas may have a limited number of schools, forcing children to travel long distances, which can affect attendance (World Bank, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/234681435.pdf>). The ongoing conflict in the Northeast region and instances of communal violence have displaced millions of Nigerians, disrupting their education and creating a learning environment fraught with trauma

(Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, [internal displacement monitoring centre idmc website ON internal-displacement.org]). All the aforementioned makes Nigeria to grapple with educational disparities.

The Federal Ministry of Budget and National Planning acknowledged this in a report [nationalplanning.gov.ng], where the educational needs of marginalized groups is highlighted. It is important to note that SDG 4 serves as a roadmap for removing barriers and promoting equitable and inclusive educational opportunities for all. According to (Okafor, 2019), marginalized groups face multiple challenges, including limited access to education and healthcare which often result in poor health outcomes. They also experience higher levels of poverty, unemployment, and limited economic opportunities compared to the general population. In addition, social stigma and discrimination negatively impact their social integration and overall well-being.

Marginalization of Adults in Formal Education

Adult education refers to the process of providing learning opportunities and educational experiences to adults beyond traditional schooling age. It encompasses a wide range of formal and informal programs, courses, and activities designed to meet the diverse needs or interests of adult learners. Adult education is based on the recognition that learning is a lifelong process and that adults have unique learning needs and goals. It aims to empower adults to acquire new knowledge, skills, competencies, and to enhance their personal and professional development. (Arslan, Demirbag & Dilmen, 2024) . It also helps them to adapt to changing

societal demands and technological advancements. Adult education benefits individuals, communities, and societies in numerous ways:

1. It enhances personal well-being, fosters social cohesion
2. Promotes economic growth and competitiveness
3. Reduces inequality
4. Contributes to democratic governance and social justice.

Despite its many benefits, adult education faces various challenges that calls for urgent attention if Nigeria must achieve SDG4 by 2030.

Challenges of Adult Education

One key issue is the limited availability and accessibility of formal educational institutions for adult learners, especially by those in rural areas and underserved communities (Ezeocha, 2010 and Ubogu, 2015). These areas often lack adequate infrastructure and resources, making it difficult for adults to access formal educational opportunities. Socio-economic factors such as poverty and high costs of education also contribute to the marginalization of adults from formal learning. Many adults in Nigeria prioritize immediate economic needs over education, making it challenging for them to participate in formal educational programs (Oduaran, Akpochafo, & Akinsolu, 2008; Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2002). Additionally, cultural norms and gender disparities play a significant role in limiting access to education for Nigerian adults, particularly women (Egwu, Ugwu, & Ufot, 2013). Societal expectations and traditional roles often discourage adult women from pursuing formal education, further exacerbating their marginalization from educational opportunities.

Based on the observation of Ewuzie (2013) adult and non-formal education in Nigeria has been

apparently been neglected aspect of educational activities in the country. Chijioke (2010) explains adult education as the practice of teaching and educating adults which often happens in the workplace, through 'extension' or 'continuing education' courses at secondary schools, at a college or university. Other learning places include folk high schools, community colleges, and lifelong learning centers. The practice is also often referred to as 'Training and Development.'

In Nigeria, despite strides towards inclusivity in education, adults often face significant neglect within the formal education system. These neglect manifest in diverse areas. They have limited opportunities because the Nigerian education system prioritizes enrolling children, leaving fewer resources and dedicated spaces for adults seeking formal education. Traditional formal education often follows a one-size-fits-all approach. This rigidity excludes adults with diverse learning styles, prior knowledge, or work schedules (Okemakinde & Olajide, 2023)

Inclusive Education

Inclusive education according to Okeke, and Nwachukwu (2019) is a pedagogical approach and philosophy that aims to ensure all learners, including those with disabilities or other special needs, are provided with meaningful and equitable educational opportunities within the mainstream of schools and classrooms. It emphasizes removal of barriers to learning and fostering a supportive environment where every learner feels valued and respected. In the Nigerian context, inclusive education is crucial for addressing educational disparities and promoting social inclusion. Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) in the National Policy of Education highlights

the importance of inclusive education and calls for strategies to ensure equitable access to quality education for the marginalized group and adults. It is known that education is one of the most powerful tools by which people are lifted out of poverty and fully participate in their communities. In particular, educating girls has proven to be one of the most impactful ways of breaking the cycle of poverty (Oyekale, 2018). Girls with an education can better access the labour market and get jobs with higher wages. Better educated women can make informed choices about matrimony, maternity, and the nutrition and health of their children. Education also helps women to take on leadership roles in public life, contributing to the decisions that will affect their lives and their communities. The importance of education is not limited to its potential to combat poverty and realise other human rights, it is also a human right in itself. The right to education for all and without discrimination has been recognised worldwide especially in Nigeria.

Delivering Education through Technology for the Marginalized groups and Adults

Education is one of the most important aspects of a child's development. Not only does good education teach kids to read, write, and communicate effectively, it also prepares them for the world and equips them with the tools necessary to grow into productive members of the society. Despite this, millions of children around the world are still unable to attend school for some reasons. Most of these are marginalised learners who are either disabled or hail from low-resource backgrounds. One of the factors impeding the spread of literacy is the prevalence of outdated methods and processes in the education industry. There is need to apply modern

technology to education, which is poised to play a major role in providing quality education for marginalised learners including the disabled, low and middle income children around the world (UNESCO, 2022). Ensuring that all children in these categories receive basic education can lift millions of people out of poverty and boost literacy rates. There are many ways technology can be incorporated into education to prevent marginalization of some groups.

- Technology can provide access to resources and tools that would otherwise be unavailable or unaffordable (AREAi, 2023) It can help close the achievement gap and provide equal opportunities for students.
- With technology, marginalized students would be able to catch up with peers especially their urban counterparts (Ibrahim & Jibia,2024)
- Technology helps the marginalized people by providing access to quality educational materials from afar. Through online courses, lectures, textbooks, and other learning materials, the disadvantaged students can stay up-to-date with what is taught in classrooms. Additionally, technology offers more flexibility regarding scheduling and learning materials since many options are available at all times and can be accessed from anywhere with an internet connection.
- It can assist the marginalized students to connect with others from around the world thereby opening opportunities for them (Ogwo, 2023a)
- Technology can be used to help marginalized students learn more about their own cultures and histories. Technology is needed in

education to help marginalized students keep up with their peers. Technology can also help marginalized students connect with other students and educators worldwide, opening up new opportunities for them (Ngwakwe, Nwosu & Opara, 2023).

- Finally, technology allows marginalized people to connect with others in their field of study. Through online forums, social media groups, and other technology-powered communication methods, these individuals can get advice from experts in their field and learn from peers who have faced similar obstacles. This can be a significant factor in helping them succeed academically (Olanrewaju, Omotosho & Falajiki, 2021)
- Technology is positively impacting education for the marginalized sector and it is vital to continue to invest in technology and its role in the education of marginalized people. Technology can make a difference in their lives and help them reach their educational goals (Ogwo, 2023b)

Strategies for Reinforcing Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is a way of ensuring that all students have equal opportunities for learning irrespective of their background or ability. In addressing the educational gaps in educational achievement of marginalized groups, it is necessary to adopt strategic intervention that guarantees inclusion. The strategies below provide a framework for enhancing inclusive education through supporting equity, empowering the excluded, and establishing supportive learning environments that do not leave anyone behind.

Promoting Equity and Access

To promote equity and access, there is need to develop targeted interventions to support marginalized learners. These support includes but not limited to free school meals, learning aids and school admission policies. These strategies according to Oluwatosin (2024) promotes equity by ensuring that all learners, regardless of background or disability are adequately taken care of and provided with resources they need to thrive academically and socially. This can help bridge education gaps and reduce disparities in learning outcomes.

Enhancing Learning Outcomes

To enhance learning outcome, there is need to introduce inclusive pedagogy. When this is adopted and used appropriately for marginalized learners, they are more likely to achieve better learning outcomes and develop essential skills for life and employment (Arowolo – Ayodeji & Opeifa, 2025).

Empowering Marginalized Groups

To empower marginalized groups, there is need to enforce laws that guarantee the right to education for all thereby empowering and enabling them to fully participate in society. This according to Abdul' azeez & Abdul 'aziz (2023) helps in breaking cycles of poverty and discrimination and promotes full societal participation.

Building Inclusive School Environments

Building inclusive school environments involve designing school policies and practices that discourages discrimination and promote safe, supportive, and welcoming environments for all students while modifying infrastructure to support

accessibility. Nwashili (2023) supported that inclusive environments reduces stigma, promote diversity, and create a safe and supportive space for learning.

Capacity Building and Teacher Training

Investing in teacher training and capacity building is essential to equip educators with the skills and knowledge to support diverse learners effectively. Ibrahim & Ibrahim (2024) explained that teachers in inclusive strategies are better equipped to support learners with diverse needs.

Collaboration and Stakeholder Engagement

Achieving inclusive education requires collaboration and strengthening partnerships between government agencies, schools, communities, civil society organizations, and international partners to develop and implement inclusive policies and programs. This was confirmed by Yusuf & Rakiya (2024) that multi – stakeholder collaboration is vital for the formulation of inclusive education policies and programmes.

Addressing Barriers to Access

Efforts at addressing physical, financial, cultural, and attitudinal barriers that prevents marginalized children from accessing and benefiting from education are vital for inclusivity. This can be done through provision of financial support, modification of cultural attitudes through awareness campaign and building of disability – friendly school infrastructure. This according to (Zubairu & Sarki, 2023) will break the barriers to access and enable marginalized children to access quality education.

Recommendations

To make inclusive education a reality in Nigeria, there must be coordinated activity from government, educational institutions and all stakeholders. These recommendations aim to close existing gaps through infrastructure development policy implementation, awareness creation and flexibility in curriculum to suit the needs of the marginalized groups

- Government and school administrators should improve physical infrastructure and facilities within schools and educational institutions needed to promote inclusivity and accommodate learners with diverse disabilities by providing fund, renovating and building accessible facilities
- Government and adult education agencies should increase investment in non – formal education for inclusivity of adults by allocating more budgetary support, expanding adult literacy programme and training facilitators for non – formal education
- Government and other relevant agencies like Ministry of Education should not only develop inclusivity policies but also ensure that the policies are implemented, enforced and monitored.
- Stakeholders such as NGOs, community leaders, educators and media should create awareness about provisions made for adult learners to enable more participation through campaigns, community sensitization and use of media.
- Teacher training institutions and regulatory bodies should ensure that inclusive education is integrated into pre-service teacher training program and curriculum should be revised and reviewed to

include inclusive education principle and practices.

- Curriculum developers and policymakers should design flexible learner centered curricular to accommodate adult learners with their unique feature and that reflect the realities of time.

Conclusion

Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) in Nigeria through reinforcing inclusive education for marginalized groups is essential for advancing education equity, promoting social inclusion, and driving sustainable development. Inclusive education aims to ensure that all children, regardless of their backgrounds, abilities, or circumstances, have equal access to quality education and meaningful learning opportunities. This is particularly crucial for marginalized groups such as children with disabilities, girls, rural populations, and ethnic minorities who often face barriers to education. It was also realized that technology can be incorporated into education to help marginalized sectors reaching their Educational goals.

Conclusively, achieving SDG 4 is not just a lofty ambition for Nigeria, it's a necessity. By prioritizing inclusive education and ensuring equitable access for all, reinforcing inclusive education for marginalized groups in Nigeria is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic investment in the country's future. By embracing inclusive education practices, Nigeria can unlock the potential of all children even the adults, ensure no one is left behind, and advance towards achieving SDG 4's vision of quality education for all. This requires sustained commitment, resource allocation, and collective action to create an inclusive

and equitable education system that empowers every child to fulfill their potential and contribute positively to society.

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