Ethics and Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities in Nigeria: A Philosophical Analytical Study

By

Adenigbagbe Henry Adeloye PhD.
Department of Educational Foundations and Counselling, University of Ilesa, Ilesa.
Henryade2013@gmail.com henry_adenigbagbe@unilesa.edu.ng.

&

Quaye Regina Modupe PhD
Department of Educational Foundations and Counselling, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife
dupsie3000@gmail.com

&

Akinboboye Folayemi Justinah
Department of Primary Education Adeyemi Federal University of Education
folayemi555@gmail.com.

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Abstract
This paper adopts a philosophical and analytical approach informed by ethical ideas such as Rawls's theory of justice and Nussbaum's capabilities approach to examine the moral imperative of inclusive education for children with disabilities in Nigeria. Data was drawn from Nigeria's 2018 DiscriminationAgainst Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, the 2017 National Policy on Inclusive Education, alongside published reports, journal articles, and civil society writings. These documents were analyzed through the lens of justice, human dignity, and moral duty to highlight both the promises of policy and the realities of cultural practice. Findings reveal that while Nigeria has established formal policies promoting inclusion, deep-rooted cultural beliefs continue to hinder their effective implementation. Disability is often stigmatized, associated with misfortune or superstition, which undermines efforts to create inclusive learning spaces. This disconnection between policy ideals and societal attitudes has slowed progress in ensuring equal opportunities for children with disabilities. Nevertheless, the involvement of civil society groups, such as The Irede Foundation, is gradually shifting perceptions and providing practical support for inclusive practices in schools. The paper concludes that there exists a strong moral obligation, grounded in international human rights frameworks, to ensure that Nigerian schools are inclusive, respectful, and empowering environments for all learners. To achieve this, greater investment is needed in teacher training on inclusive pedagogy, the development of accessible learning environments, and stronger collaborations with civil society to dismantle cultural barriers and translate inclusive education policies into meaningful practice.

Keywords: Disability, inclusive education, ethics, justice, Nigeria, philosophy

Introduction

Education is universally recognized as a basic human right and a foundation for social change. Nigeria, through both its national constitution and international commitments, guarantees equal access to education for all children. However, children with disabilities remain systematically excluded. Evidence shows that only about 5 percent of Nigerian children with disabilities attend primary school, with even fewer transitioning to secondary education far below global averages (Glory Ifezue Foundation, 2025; UNESCO, 2024). This stark enrollment gap highlights a persistent problem: despite legal and policy commitments, inclusive education remains largely aspirational.

Inclusive education, which promotes learning side by side in the same classrooms regardless of disability, culture, or socioeconomic status, is a global ideal and a right recognized by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). This framework emphasizes human dignity, autonomy, and non-discrimination. Philosophical perspectives such as Rawls's theory of justice (1971) and Nussbaum's capabilities approach (2011) reinforce this principle, insisting that societies must prioritize the most disadvantaged and guarantee every person the opportunity to develop essential capabilities for a dignified life.

Nigeria has introduced policies such as the 2018 Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities Act, the 2017 National Policy on Inclusive Education, and the creation of the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities in 2020 (Adebisi, 2020; Wikipedia, 2025). Civil society groups like The Irede Foundation and public figures such as Jodie have also raised awareness and advocated for inclusion (Chigbu, 2025; Vulliamy, 2024). Yet, implementation remains weak. Schools frequently lack ramps, Braille materials, and trained teachers, while cultural stigmas continue to associate disability with misfortune, discouraging enrollment (Nwosu, 2024; AI Publications, 2024). Overcrowded classrooms and inadequate teacher preparation further compound these barriers (Glory Ifezue Foundation, 2025).

While existing studies have examined Nigeria's inclusive education from policy, sociological, and administrative perspectives (Ifezue, 2025; Nwosu, 2024), few have engaged with the ethical and philosophical dimensions underpinning inclusion. This research gap is critical because inclusive education is not merely a policy issue but an ethical obligation rooted in justice, fairness, and respect for human dignity.

Accordingly, the present study has a clear objective: to evaluate Nigeria's inclusive education policies and practices through the lens of ethical theories, particularly Rawls's focus on justice for the least advantaged and Nussbaum's capabilities approach, in order to identify the moral imperatives that should guide policymakers, educators, and civil society toward achieving genuine inclusivity.

Inclusive education policies and the implementation gap

Over the last twenty years, Nigeria has made significant policy advancements aimed at enhancing inclusive education. The Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act of 2018 is a significant legal change that prohibits discrimination and mandates that schools and public institutions achieve physical accessibility within five years (Adebisi, 2020). This legislation builds on previous initiatives, such as the National Policy on Inclusive Education (Federal Ministry of Education, 2017), which promotes the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular schools and includes provisions for specialized teacher training. However, various studies indicate that these policies often remain unimplemented. For instance, Ifezue (2025) observes that many public schools still lack essential features like ramps, tactile signage, and accessible toilets, hindering physical access for numerous students. Nwosu (2024) highlights that policy documents frequently do not address budget allocations and accountability, jeopardizing the likelihood of effective implementation. UNESCO (2020) reports that the enrollment rate for children with disabilities in Nigeria is below 5 percent, in

contrast to over 80 percent for children without disabilities.The ongoing disparity between policy and implementation highlights a "disconnect between legislative intent and systemic capacity," as noted by Adebisi (2020). This situation arises from insufficient funding, ineffective inter-agency coordination, and a lack of data for monitoring progress. Although Nigeria has embraced inclusive education policies that meet global standards, various systemic and structural obstacles have hindered the actual improvement of conditions for many children with disabilities.

Cultural attitudes and stigma as hidden barriers

Cultural perceptions present significant obstacles to inclusion beyond issues of infrastructure and funding. Research indicates that in certain Nigerian communities, disability is often linked to curses, spiritual punishment, or witchcraft (Nwosu, 2024; AIPublications, 2024). Such views contribute to feelings of shame, leading families to hide disabled children and hesitance in enrolling them in school (Adebisi, 2020). The Glory Ifezue Foundation (2025) notes that children with disabilities frequently encounter bullying, social isolation, and low expectations from teachers, adversely affecting their academic performance and self-esteem. This is consistent with earlier research by Adeniyi & Olawale (2022), which suggests that social stigma can be more harmful than physical barriers, fostering internalized low self-worth among children and hindering their engagement in school activities.

However, there are positive developments. Chigbu (2025), founder of The Irede Foundation, illustrates how awareness campaigns such as #Limitless have shifted perceptions by showcasing the accomplishments of children with prosthetics. Additionally, public figures like Nigerian singer Jodie have leveraged their personal experiences to confront stereotypes (Vulliamy, 2024). Despite these advancements, such initiatives are still limited in scope and often rely on donor funding, highlighting the necessity for broader systemic approaches to change cultural attitudes.

Teacher preparedness and pedagogical challenges

The capacity of teachers is recognized as essential for inclusive education, yet significant gaps exist in Nigeria. The Glory Ifezue Foundation (2025) reports that approximately 74 percent of primary school teachers lack formal training in inclusive education strategies, resulting in many being unprepared to tailor lessons, utilize assistive technologies, or support students with varying needs effectively.

Ezugwu and Chukwuma (2023) note that current teacher education programs often treat inclusive education as an optional module, focusing mainly on theoretical content without incorporating practical experiences such as classroom simulations or internships in inclusive settings. Furthermore, classrooms are often overcrowded, with some having 100–150 pupils per teacher, making personalized instruction nearly impossible even for dedicated educators (Glory Ifezue Foundation, 2025).

Despite these difficulties, some research points to positive outcomes. Olawale and Adeniyi (2022) discovered that inclusive classrooms where trained special educators collaborated with regular teachers and employed peer mentoring strategies showed improved attendance, literacy outcomes, and self-esteem among students with disabilities. Nevertheless, such successful models are primarily found in urban, private, or NGO-supported schools. These results demonstrate that without thorough teacher training, systemic changes, and manageable class sizes, inclusive education policies are unlikely to bring about substantial improvement.

Ethical frameworks: justice and the capabilities approach

Even though there are many known practical challenges, not many studies in Nigeria use philosophical ideas to explain why inclusion is important from an ethical standpoint. John Rawls (1971), in his book A Theory of Justice from, says that a fair society should focus on helping its most vulnerable people first. In education, this means that changes should start by meeting the needs of children with disabilities, not just treating them as an extra part of the system. Martha Nussbaum (2011), talked about the capabilities approach, which says justice isn't just about equal treatment on paper—it's about making sure everyone has real chances to develop important skills and abilities, like reading, thinking, being involved in society, and having self-respect.

From this view, inclusive education is about making sure kids with disabilities can live full, meaningful lives. These ideas help us see inclusion not just as following international rules, but as a moral duty to make sure everyone is treated fairly, with respect, and given the chance to grow. Not many Nigerian studies use these philosophies directly to analyze policies, which shows there's a gap that this paper tries to fill.

Synthesis and Research Gap

In summary, the reviewed literature shows:

• Nigeria has policies that support inclusive education (Adebisi, 2020; Ifezue, 2025), but these policies are not being put into action very well.

• Beliefs about disability in Nigerian culture make it hard for children with disabilities to go to school and take part in learning (Nwosu, 2024).

• Teachers are not well trained for this work, and classrooms are too big to manage properly (Glory Ifezue Foundation, 2025; Ezugwu & Chukwuma, 2023).

• Philosophers like Rawls and Nussbaum say that including everyone is a moral responsibility, not just something we try to achieve through policies (Rawls, 1971; Nussbaum, 2011).

Even though these studies talk about the practical and cultural issues, there is not much research that connects them to ethical ideas to explain why things are still not working well, even with clear rules in place. This paper fills that gap by using ideas about justice and people's abilities to better understand the situation in Nigeria's education system and to give suggestions that are based on strong moral values.

Philosophical Analysis and Discussion

Nigeria's commitment to inclusive education for children with disabilities is often presented as a policy target and a sign of progress. Yet, philosophical inquiry reveals a deeper truth: inclusion is fundamentally an ethical demand rooted in justice, dignity, and the right to flourish. Applying John Rawls's theory of justice and Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach not only helps explain why inclusion matters morally, but also illuminates why policies alone have failed to transform daily realities for most children with disabilities.

Rawlsian Justice: Prioritizing the Most Disadvantaged

At the center of Rawls's (1971) idea of justice is the belief that systems should be set up to help those who are least fortunate. This is known as the difference principle, which says that any unfair differences in wealth or power are only acceptable if they make life better for the most disadvantaged people in society.

In Nigeria, this idea brings up a serious question: if education policies really cared about the most vulnerable, why do only about 5 percent of children with disabilities go to primary school (Glory Ifezue Foundation, 2025; UNESCO, 2020)? The fact that this low number still exists, even with laws like the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities Act (2018) (Adebisi, 2020), shows that these policies were not made or carried out in a way that actually helps those

who need it most. Ifezue (2025) points out that money, teacher training, and changes to school programs have mostly ignored children with disabilities, treating them as an afterthought instead of a priority. From a Rawlsian point of view, this is unfair—true fairness would mean giving more support, better training, and stronger checks to improve chances for disabled students.

Rawls also said that fairness should be handled by public systems, not just by markets or charity. This idea critically questions Nigeria's reliance on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups (Chigbu, 2025), which, although helpful, are often inconsistent and depend on outside money rather than being part of a larger, stable system.

Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach: Beyond Physical Access to Meaningful Inclusion

Martha Nussbaum's (2011) capabilities approach adds more depth by looking at what people can actually do and become, instead of just focusing on the resources they are officially allowed to use. According to her, justice means making sure everyone has the chance to develop important abilities, like thinking clearly, staying healthy, managing emotions, and connecting with others. True inclusion isn't just about letting kids with disabilities sit in regular classrooms—it's about making sure those classrooms are fully accessible, with materials like braille, special teaching plans, and a friendly environment that helps them fit in. Ezugwu and Chukwuma (2023) point out that Nigerian teacher training often doesn't teach teachers how to adjust lessons, and large classes make it hard to give each student the support they need.

Adeniyi and Olawale (2022) found that when schools give kids help through peer mentoring, trained teachers, and special tools, students are able to grow more. They learn to join in with others, feel good about themselves, and reach important learning goals. This matches Nussbaum's belief that real inclusion must deal with both physical and social challenges, so everyone can live with respect and dignity.

The Moral Weight of Cultural Stigma

Cultural beliefs that see disability as a bad omen or punishment (Nwosu, 2024) show a big ethical problem that is often overlooked. From a Rawlsian point of view, these beliefs hurt a group that is already struggling by influencing how the community makes decisions, how policies are carried out, and even how teachers act.

Nussbaum (2011) explains that cultural stigma limits what people can do by making them feel bad about themselves and stopping them from being part of society—things that are important for people to live well.

The research shows that many parents keep their disabled kids out of school to avoid embarrassment (Nwosu, 2024), and even when kids do go to school, teachers don't expect much from them, and other students sometimes bully them, which hurts their growth (Glory Ifezue Foundation, 2025). Campaigns like The Irede Foundation's Limitless campaign (Chigbu, 2025) and the work of public figures like Jodie (Vulliamy, 2024) have helped change how people talk about disability by showing the abilities and value of children with disabilities. But, as Adebisi (2020) says, these efforts are still not joined together in a full way in teacher training, school lessons, and media. From a philosophical angle, this means that true justice and fairness must go past just laws and focus on changing culture itself, how people think about disability and what they think is possible.

Inclusion as a Shared, Systemic Responsibility

Both Rawls and Nussbaum say that justice isn't just something the government is responsible for—it is something that everyone in society should care about. Making sure everyone is included needs teamwork from schools, communities, leaders, religious groups, and families. For example, the Glory Ifezue Foundation (2025) found that when schools involve parents in education sessions, more disabled kids show up to school. This shows that changing old beliefs can happen through talking and sharing ideas. Similarly, Ezugwu and Chukwuma (2023) explain that when teachers learn by working directly with people who have disabilities, their attitudes start to change for the better.

From a philosophical point of view, inclusion is a way to check if Nigerian society truly believes in equal value for all children, through its laws, organizations, and daily actions.

Reframing Inclusion: From Policy Talk to a Moral Duty

This discussion shows that the difference between Nigeria's inclusive plans and the fact that most disabled children are still left out is not just about how well the government is managing things.

It is about a bigger moral issue: treating inclusion as something we have to do because we're told to, instead of seeing it as something that's deeply important to how we think about fairness, equality, and the value of every child's life. Rawls (1971) would say a just society can't accept that the most vulnerable are always left out. Nussbaum (2011) would say that justice means taking real steps to give people more freedom and opportunities, not just giving them paper rights.

So, looking at things through a philosophical lens changes how we see inclusion. It is not just about following rules. it is about doing the right thing because it's the right thing to do, based on fairness, equality, and the idea that every child is important.

Linking Theory to Practice

Having these ethical principles as a base helps in making real-world decisions. For example:

• When deciding how to use resources, it's important to make sure that training, materials, and facilities are especially helpful for students with disabilities (Rawls, 1971).

• Teachers should be taught about disability issues, cultural awareness, and ways to adjust their teaching methods to meet different needs (Ezugwu & Chukwuma, 2023).

• Public awareness efforts should challenge beliefs that stop people from accepting inclusion, because stigma can limit what people are able to do (Nussbaum, 2011; Chigbu, 2025).

• When collecting data, it is not enough to just count how many students are enrolled; we must also track how much they are actually participating and how their abilities are growing, moving the focus from numbers to the real impact on people's lives (UNESCO, 2020).

In short, the deeper look at this topic shows that including children with disabilities in Nigeria needs to go beyond just saying things in policies.

It must become part of how things are actually done, driven by fairness, respect, and a shared effort from society to make sure that no child is left out, not just in laws, but in everyday life.

Empirical Relationships

Understanding why inclusive education for children with disabilities in Nigeria is still hard to achieve needs looking at how different factors work together every day in schools. These factors include how inclusive policies connect with local beliefs, how ready teachers are to include students with disabilities, and how advocacy and civil society efforts can either help or slow things down. All these elements come together to show a complicated situation where different kinds of factors—like rules in place, cultural attitudes, and personal qualities—either make it harder to include everyone or help create a more inclusive environment.

Inclusive Policies and Cultural Beliefs: Law Meets Social Norms

At the policy level, Nigeria has passed important laws, such as the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities Act (2018) and the National Policy on Inclusive Education (2017). These laws require schools to accept students with disabilities and remove physical obstacles that make it hard for them to attend. However, research shows that strong cultural beliefs can limit how effective these laws are. For example, a study by Nwosu (2024) found that in areas where people believe disability is a result of punishment from ancestors or spiritual issues, parents are less likely to send their disabled children to school. They might worry about being judged or talked about by others, even though schools are legally allowed to take these students. Another study by AI Publications (2024) found that some school leaders, even though they know the law, may not encourage enrollment by saying there aren't enough resources or that disabled students won't do well academically. This shows that laws alone aren't enough to change long-standing cultural attitudes.

Social beliefs play a big role in whether these policies actually lead to more students with disabilities being enrolled and participating in school. On the other hand, there's also evidence that when policies are properly carried out, they can help change cultural beliefs. The Glory Ifezue Foundation (2025) found that in areas where local leaders actively checked on inclusive practices and provided training for teachers, more parents were willing to send their disabled children to school. This suggests that when institutions show support and take action, it can gradually help change people's opinions.

Teacher Preparedness as a Bridge or Barrier

Teacher readiness is a key factor that helps connect policies with what happens in classrooms. A survey by The Glory Ifezue Foundation in 2025 found that about 74% of Nigerian primary school teachers did not get training in inclusive teaching methods. Because of this, teachers had a hard time adapting lessons to different students' needs, managing classrooms with diverse learners, or using special tools to help students with disabilities, even in schools that support inclusion. Ezugwu and Chukwuma (2023) point out that when teachers don’t feel confident or know enough, they tend to expect less from children with disabilities.This lowers the kids’ chances to take part in class and can hurt their self-confidence. On the other hand, Olawale and Adeniyi (2022) show that when teachers get specific training, work with special education experts, and have continuous support, it leads to better classroom involvement, improved reading skills, and more acceptance among classmates. This shows that being prepared as a teacher is more than just knowing what to do—it also involves changing mindsets and developing the skills needed to bring inclusion into everyday teaching.

Cultural Beliefs and Teacher Attitudes: A hidden Layer of Exclusion

Teachers are influenced by the cultural beliefs around them. A 2024 study by AI Publications found that teachers who believe disability is a result of misfortune or a family curse are less likely to change their teaching methods or include students with disabilities in group activities. According to Nwosu (2024), these beliefs can also cause teachers to have lower expectations of disabled students. This can send a message to other teachers and families that including disabled students isn’t really important. This creates a cycle of stigma and low self-esteem for disabled students, even when there are inclusive policies in place.

Research shows that teachers’ attitudes are shaped by cultural beliefs, which in turn affect how they teach and how students experience the classroom.

Because of this, training for teachers should not only focus on teaching skills but also on changing cultural attitudes.

Policy, Teacher Preparedness, and Student Outcomes: A Cascading Effect

Research shows that three things—inclusive school policies, training for teachers, and how people in the community feel about differences—work together to affect how well students do in school. For example, a study from the Glory Ifezue Foundation in 2025 found that even in schools with good inclusive policies, if teachers weren't trained and if the community didn't support students with disabilities, those students still had high dropout rates and poor reading skills. On the other hand, a study by Olawale and Adeniyi in 2022 showed that schools that used special materials, had well-trained teachers, and involved parents saw better results. Students with disabilities did better in school, came to class more often, and felt more confident about themselves. This shows that while good policies are important, it's the teachers' skills and the community's attitude that really make a difference in how much students benefit from education.

The Moderating Role of Advocacy and Civil Society

Advocacy efforts and groups like The Irede Foundation (Chigbu, 2025) and media people like Jodie (Vulliamy, 2024) have shown how important it is to fight stigma and get more kids into school. For example, the #Limitless campaign gave children prosthetics and used stories to change how people see disabilities, which helped more kids get into school and got support from the community in some places. Research from the Glory Ifezue Foundation (2025) also shows that when communities are educated through workshops, parents are more willing to send disabled children to school and other kids are more accepting too.

But these efforts are only happening in certain areas and rely a lot on outside money.

Even though they are making a real difference, they aren't changing things on a bigger, national level. This shows that there's a need for stronger, government-backed plans that can make these changes happen everywhere.

Synthesis: Interconnected Barriers and Pathways

Empirical evidence shows that inclusive education in Nigeria is influenced by several connected factors that all work together.

- Inclusive policies create the laws and structures needed for inclusion.
- Teachers being well-prepared helps turn these policies into real classroom actions.
- Cultural beliefs can either weaken or support these policies and how they are carried out.
- Advocacy helps reduce stigma and changes how people and teachers think about inclusion.
- Students can only fully take part and learn when all these factors are working well together.

If one part is weak, like having untrained teachers or ongoing stigma, it affects the whole system. But if one area improves, like changing cultural attitudes, it can help improve policies and how teachers teach. In short, research shows why inclusion often doesn't work. It isn't just about institutions—it's about a complex social system shaped by laws, culture, teacher skills, and community efforts. These connections support the idea that inclusion must be approached as a whole, not just through policy. It should also be about ethics, culture, and teaching methods, rooted in fairness and respect for human dignity (Rawls, 1971; Nussbaum, 2011).

Institutional Responsibility

Inclusive education for children with disabilities is more than a policy ambition; it is an ethical demand grounded in justice, fairness, and respect for human dignity. Empirical evidence from Nigeria shows that effective inclusion does not result from isolated policies or individual goodwill but requires coordinated, systemic action from multiple institutions. Drawing on Rawls's theory of justice (1971) and Nussbaum's capabilities approach (2011), this section examines how government, teacher education institutions, schools, communities, and civil society must share responsibility to ensure real inclusion.

Government: Teaching Through Structure, Resources, and Accountability

The Nigerian government is mainly responsible for making sure that all children have access to education. Philosophers like Rawls (1971) say that schools and systems should be built in a way that helps the most disadvantaged people first. Nussbaum (2011) also says that fairness means helping everyone develop important human abilities.In real life, this means the government needs to do more than just talk about inclusive education.

They have to take real steps and keep doing them over time.

Here's how:

(a) Budget allocation: The government should set aside money specifically to build schools that work for all students, including special tools like braille books and technology that helps people with disabilities (Glory Ifezue Foundation, 2025). Without steady funding, these plans stay on paper and don't help real students.

(b) Teacher training and recruitment: The government must make sure that teacher training programs include lessons on how to help all students learn.

They also need to provide ongoing support and development for teachers so they can properly support students with different needs (Ezugwu & Chukwuma, 2023).

(c) Monitoring and accountability: The government should track progress by collecting detailed data on how many students with disabilities are in school, how long they stay, and how well they learn.

This data should be broken down by disability, gender, and where students live. Also, strong systems are needed to make sure schools follow the rules, not just say they will (UNESCO, 2020).

(d) Public leadership: The government should start campaigns to change people's attitudes and work with community and religious leaders to reduce the stigma around disability (Adebisi, 2020).

Without these efforts, as Ifezue (2025) points out, the laws in place may not really help the students who need them most.

They might just be on paper and not change the real lives of disabled learners.

Teacher Education Institutions: Embedding Inclusive Competence

Teachers are very important in making education policies work in real classrooms. Research from the Glory Ifezue Foundation (2025) and Olawale & Adeniyi (2022) shows that when teachers are well-trained and have the right attitudes, inclusive classrooms can be successful. Because of this, teacher training schools have a big responsibility to:

(i) Make sure inclusive teaching is a main part of the training, not just an extra.

This should include things like teaching different ways to reach students, adjusting the classroom environment, and using special tools to help learners.

(ii) Give trainees hands-on experience by placing them in schools that include all students and having them learn from experienced teachers who specialize in supporting students with special needs (Ezugwu & Chukwuma, 2023).

(iii) Help trainees understand and challenge cultural beliefs that might not support people with disabilities.

This involves thinking about fairness, respect, and how to treat everyone equally (AIPublications, 2024). By making sure the training matches the idea of fairness from philosopher John Rawls, teachers will see inclusion as part of their job, not just something extra. This helps them feel it's both professional and moral to include everyone.

Schools: Creating Inclusive Cultures

Schools are where inclusion becomes lived experience. Beyond physical access, inclusion depends on day-to-day practices that affirm dignity and participation. Empirical evidence shows:

Schools with inclusive practices like peer mentoring and group work report better attendance and academic outcomes (Olawale & Adeniyi, 2022).
Schools that engage parents and community leaders challenge stigma more effectively (Glory Ifezue Foundation, 2025).
Schools, therefore, hold responsibility to:
Adopt differentiated teaching strategies to meet diverse needs.
Create safe spaces where children with disabilities feel emotionally secure.
Establish anti-bullying measures and promote respect in school culture.
Partner with families to encourage regular attendance and celebrate achievements.
These actions translate Nussbaum's capabilities approach into daily practice, ensuring all children can genuinely develop literacy, critical thinking, and self-respect.
Communities and Families: Changing Cultural Narratives
In many Nigerian contexts, disability is still framed as shame, spiritual punishment, or misfortune (Nwosu, 2024; AIPublications, 2024). These beliefs discourage parents from enrolling disabled children and shape peer attitudes in schools.
Communities and families hold responsibility to:
Participate in awareness campaigns led by NGOs and government (Chigbu, 2025).
Normalize inclusion by encouraging disabled children's participation in social and religious life.
Teach non-disabled peers to see disability as part of human diversity, not as something to fear.
Rawls (1971) reminds us that justice is not only institutional but social: community norms must reflect fairness and dignity for every child.
Civil Society and Advocacy: Bridging Gaps and Sustaining Momentum
Organizations like The Irede Foundation and public figures like Jodie (Vulliamy, 2024) have filled gaps left by slow government action by:
Providing assistive devices (e.g., prosthetics, braille materials).
Running public campaigns (e.g., #Limitless) to challenge stigma (Chigbu, 2025).
Offering scholarships and school support.
Empirical data (Glory Ifezue Foundation, 2025) shows these efforts correlate with increased enrollment and social acceptance. Yet, as Adebisi (2020) warns, these gains remain localized and donor-dependent; sustained change requires institutional ownership.
Civil society's responsibility is thus twofold: direct support and policy advocacy to ensure that inclusive education is institutionalized, not charity-based.
Philosophical Synthesis: Inclusion as a Moral Test
Together, these organizations create a network of responsibility. Rawls's difference principle sees inclusion as a duty to focus on those who are most at a disadvantage, while Nussbaum's approach focuses on helping people truly live well, not just have access to opportunities.
Real results from inclusion happen only when:
• The government sets and pays for clear goals.
• Teachers are trained both in skills and in ethics.
• Schools treat everyone with respect every day and adjust to different needs.
• Communities change the stories they tell about people.
• Civil society keeps the issue visible and pushes for change.
Inclusion is not just about passing laws, it shows how much society cares about fairness, respect, and being together as one.
In short, in Nigeria, making sure education is inclusive is something everyone must share, keep going, and base on justice. It is not about giving charity, it is about everyone's duty to help every child learn and grow.

Conclusion

The paper concludes that providing inclusive education for children with disabilities in Nigeria is not just something the government needs to do because of policies, it is also a moral duty based on fairness and respect, as discussed by Rawls (1971) and Nussbaum (2011). Real examples (Glory Ifezue Foundation, 2025; Nwosu, 2024) show that true inclusion happens when different groups like the government, schools, teacher training programs, and local communities work together to move from just having access to actually being able to take part and learn properly.

Recommendations

Based on the philosophical arguments and empirical findings, this study recommends:

The Nigerian government should establish dedicated budget lines to cover assistive technologies, adapted materials (such as braille and sign language resources), and the recruitment of special educators. This aligns with Rawls's call to prioritize the most disadvantaged and addresses the persistent resource gap identified by Glory Ifezue Foundation.

Teacher training institutions should embed practical, compulsory modules on inclusive education including differentiated instruction, cultural reflection, and field placements in inclusive classrooms. This will prepare teachers not just technically but ethically, helping transform classroom practices and attitudes.

The Ministry of Education, in partnership with traditional and religious leaders and organizations like The Irede Foundation should run national media campaigns and community workshops to reframe disability as part of human diversity. This addresses cultural beliefs that discourage enrollment and undermine daily inclusion.

Government and education agencies should track inclusive education using disaggregated data on enrollment, retention, participation, and learning outcomes for children with disabilities. Regular public reporting would ensure policies do not remain rhetorical and highlight where further intervention is needed.

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