

AWARENESS, COMMUNITY SUPPORT, AND MEDIA ADVOCACY IN OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN LAGOS STATE

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Abstract

Inclusive education for children with special educational needs (SEN) remains a critical goal in Lagos State, yet significant barriers persist. This study examines the role of awareness, community support, and media advocacy in addressing these challenges and fostering a more inclusive educational system. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from educators, community leaders, religious figures, and parents of SEN children. The findings reveal a high level of awareness among education stakeholders, despite cultural misconceptions and infrastructural deficits such as the absence of ramps, elevators, and assistive devices. Community-based programs emerged as a strong positive influence, facilitating enrolment and transitions for SEN children. Additionally, mass media was found to play a moderately positive role in shaping public perceptions and promoting favourable attitudes toward SEN inclusion. The study underscores the statistically significant link between stakeholder awareness and enhanced community participation, highlighting the need for collaborative efforts. Recommendations include strengthening media campaigns, expanding community programs, and addressing infrastructural deficiencies to create an equitable and supportive environment for all learners. This research provides actionable insights into leveraging awareness and advocacy to overcome barriers to inclusive education in Lagos State.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Special Educational Needs, Inclusive Schooling

Introduction

Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) are individuals facing challenges or disabilities that create obstacles in their learning compared to peers of the same age. These children may require additional or different support from that normally provided in regular schools (Jere et al, 2022; Ugodulunwa, 2023). Disability knows no boundaries, disregarding factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, or religion (Khan et al, 2018). More than a decade ago the World Health Organization (WHO) submitted that about 15% of the world's population has some form of disability, and an estimated 93 million children less than 14 years of age live with a moderate or severe disability (Olusanya et al, 2018). Most of them, however (more than 90%) do not get any education in low-income countries, as estimated by UNICEF (2015), a situation which calls for an all-inclusive education.

Inclusive education is a process of ensuring that all children, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds, have access to quality education that meets their needs and enables them to reach their full potential (Lindner et al, 2022). Inclusive education is based on the principles of human rights, equity, and social justice, and is recognized as a key strategy

for achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 4 on education. Inclusive education also benefits all children, as it fosters a culture of respect, diversity, and collaboration in the learning environment (Al-Wasmi, 2021; Shaeffer, 2022; Yahya et al 2023). However, many children with SEN face multiple barriers and challenges in accessing and participating in education, especially in low- and middle-income countries (Jere et al, 2022). These barriers include inadequate policies and laws, lack of resources and infrastructure, negative attitudes and stigma, low teacher capacity and support, and poor coordination and collaboration among stakeholders (Lindner 2022). As a result, many children with SEN are excluded, marginalized, or segregated from the mainstream education system, and are denied their right to education and development (Al-Wasmi 2021).

Nigeria is one of the countries that has a large number of children with SEN (Cornelius-Ukpepi & Opuwari, 2022), estimated at about 10% of the total school-age population (WHO, 2023). However, Nigeria's education system is characterised by low quality, low enrolment, and high dropout rates, especially for children with SEN. Nigeria has ratified several international and regional conventions and declarations that promote the rights and inclusion of children with SEN, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Nigeria also has a national policy on special needs education, which was revised in 2015, and a draft bill on disability rights, which is yet to be passed into law (NPE 2014; Olamilekan, 2021; Vibbi & Mohammed 2023). However, these policies and laws seems not to be effectively implemented or enforced, due to various factors such as lack of political will, funding, data, and awareness (Olusanya et al, 2018; Yahya et al 2023).

Lagos State is the most populous and urbanized state in Nigeria, with a population of about 21 million people. Lagos State has a relatively high number of children with SEN, referred to by the Nigerian education sector as Children with Disability (CWDs) and estimated at about 1.5 million (World Population Review, 2024). Lagos State has made some efforts to improve the education and welfare of SENs, such as establishing special schools and units, providing scholarships and grants, and training teachers and caregivers. However, these efforts are still insufficient and inadequate, as many children with SEN remain out of school, or receive poor quality and segregated education (NPE, 2014; Olamilekan 2021).

One of the major factors that affects the education and inclusion of children with SEN is the awareness (Lindner et al, 2022) and perception of the society towards them. Awareness is a fundamental precursor to achieving inclusive education. It encompasses the knowledge, understanding, and recognition of the rights, needs, and potential of children with SEN (Okebukola & Kolade, 2008). Stakeholders, including teachers, parents, community leaders, and policymakers, must possess a clear and informed perspective on SEN to foster an inclusive environment. However, in many parts of Nigeria, misconceptions and cultural stigmas surrounding disabilities persist, leading to low expectations and exclusion of SEN children from mainstream education (Owolabi et al., 2014). Addressing these misconceptions through awareness campaigns and education is vital for building a foundation of acceptance and support.

Communities play a central role in the successful implementation of inclusive education. Community support manifests through advocacy, resource mobilization, and the creation of enabling environments for SEN children (Yahya et al., 2023). In Lagos State,

community-based programs have shown promise in facilitating the enrollment and transition of children with SEN into schools. However, challenges such as financial constraints, limited access to specialised resources, and societal stigma hinder the full realization of community-driven inclusion (Lindner et al., 2022). Strengthening community support structures, fostering collaboration among stakeholders, and addressing systemic barriers are essential to creating inclusive ecosystems where every child can thrive.

Media advocacy serves as a powerful tool for influencing public perceptions and driving societal change. In the context of inclusive education, the media has the potential to highlight the challenges faced by SEN children, showcase success stories, and promote positive attitudes among the broader population (Owolabi et al., 2014). In Lagos State, mass media campaigns have demonstrated a moderate influence on fostering favourable perceptions of SEN children (JAMB, 2023). However, leveraging media platforms more effectively to combat stigma, educate the public, and amplify the voices of SEN children and their families remains a critical area of need.

Despite growing awareness and some positive developments, significant barriers persist in achieving inclusive education in Lagos State. These include inadequate infrastructure, such as the absence of ramps, elevators, and assistive devices, which limit access for children with physical disabilities (Okebukola, 2022). Additionally, teachers often lack the training and resources to effectively address diverse learning needs. Social stigma, financial constraints, and limited policy enforcement further exacerbate these challenges (Yahya et al., 2023).

Addressing these barriers requires a multi-faceted approach that combines awareness, community support, and media advocacy. Stakeholders must work collaboratively to dismantle systemic obstacles, promote positive attitudes, and ensure that inclusive practices are embedded in educational policies and frameworks (UNESCO, 2015). Furthermore, research is needed to understand the interplay of these factors and to develop evidence-based strategies that drive meaningful change. This study seeks to explore the role of awareness, community support, and media advocacy in overcoming barriers to inclusive education for children with SEN in Lagos State.

Statement of the Problem

Children with SEN and other forms of disability are global phenomenon. According to the U.S Census Bureau, over three million children (4.3% of the under-18 population) in the United States had a disability in 2019 (Twenge & Joiner, 2020). In Nigeria, the situation is even more challenging, as there seems to be a lack of reliable data, adequate facilities, trained teachers, and inclusive policies for children with SEN. In Lagos State, the most populous and urbanized state in Nigeria, only 17 out of 1,001 primary schools provide SEN services, excluding eight specialist schools and schools for children with physical disabilities (WHO, 2023). This means that many children with SEN are either excluded from formal education or do not receive the necessary support and intervention to achieve their full potential. The Nigerian government has enacted some laws and policies to promote the rights and inclusion of children with SEN, such as the National Policy on Education, the Universal Basic Education Act, and the Lagos State Special People's Law. However, these initiatives have not been effectively implemented or monitored, due to various factors such as inadequate funding, poor coordination, low awareness, and negative attitudes. Moreover, there is a gap between the policy and practice of inclusive

education, as many teachers and schools are not prepared or equipped to cater to the diverse needs of children with SEN. Several stakeholders, such as parents, educators, health professionals, social workers, and non-governmental organizations, have been involved in providing support and advocacy for children with SEN in Lagos State. Nevertheless, their efforts are often fragmented, inconsistent, or insufficient, due to the lack of a clear framework, collaboration, and resources. Furthermore, there is a dearth of research on the experiences, needs, and outcomes of children with SEN and their families in Lagos State, which limits the evidence-based planning and evaluation of interventions. There is therefore, a need to address the issue of children with SEN in Lagos State, by exploring the current situation, challenges, and opportunities for promoting positive attitudes and inclusive practices among various stakeholders.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives are to:

- i. investigate the current extent of stakeholders awareness on education for children with special educational needs in Lagos State;
- ii. determine the hindrances to enrolment and transaction of children with special educational needs in Lagos state public schools;
- iii. explore the extent of community support and participation towards the enrolment and transition of children with special educational needs in Lagos State;
- iv. examine the influence of mass media on fostering positive attitudes towards children with special educational needs in Lagos State.

Research Questions

- i. What is the current extent of stakeholders' awareness on education for children with special educational needs in Lagos State?
- ii. What are the hindrances to enrolment and transition of children with special educational needs in Lagos state public schools?
- iii. What is the extent of community support and participation towards the enrolment and transition of children with special educational needs in Lagos State?
- iv. What are the roles of mass media in fostering positive attitudes towards children with special educational needs in Lagos State?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypothetical statements were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

- H0₁ There is no significant influence of the extent of stakeholders' awareness on improved community support towards enrolment and transition of children with special educational needs in Lagos State.
- H0₂ There is no significant influence of community participation towards enrolment and transition of children with special educational needs in Lagos State.

Methodology

This study will adopt Explanatory Sequential Design to analyse ways of addressing the challenges faced by children with special educational needs in Lagos state. Explanatory Sequential Design is a form of Mixed Method design which process is to first collect and analyse the quantitative data, and then the qualitative data will be collected and analysed based on the results of the quantitative data. The qualitative data will be used

to explain the quantitative data. The population includes all the 35 head teachers, 1,970 Children with special Educational Needs (SEN) available in all the 35 inclusive primary schools in the 20 local government education authorities (LGEA) of Lagos State. This study will also involve Children with special Educational Needs (SEN), community and religious leaders available in Lagos State.

The study was carried out in all 35 inclusive public primary schools, 148 SEN teachers. Using disproportionate simple random technique, 10 SEN primary school pupil was selected from each school (totalling 350 pupils' respondents), 10 community and 10 religious leaders were selected for this research using convenient sampling technique. The teachers and school leaders completed a questionnaire on Hindrance of SEN enrolment and transition. The quantitative data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The qualitative phase adopted an action research design with open ended interview guide. Data from Primary School pupils with Disabilities were collected using focus group discussion, while interview was adopted to collect data from community and religious leaders. All qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis.

Results

Descriptive Statistics of Respondents' Bio-Data

Table 1:

Distribution of respondents based on gender

Distribution of respondents based on gender of teachers and school administrators

		N	%
Teacher	Male	31	28.2%
	Female	79	71.8%
School administrators	Male	9	17.0%
	Female	44	83.0%
Total		163	100%

Table 1 above shows the respondents based on gender of teachers and school administrators. Based on the teachers, 28.2% of them were males while the remaining 71.8% were females. Based on the school administrators, 17% were males and 83% were females.

Table 2:

Distribution of respondents based on their teaching experience.

		N	%
Teachers	Below 5years	15	13.6%
	5 - 10 years	23	20.9%
	11 - 15 years	29	26.4%
	16 - 20 years	12	10.9%
	21 - 25 years	19	17.3%
	26 - 30 years	6	5.5%
	30 years and above	6	5.5%
School administrator	Below 5years	4	7.5%
	5 - 10 years	7	13.2%

11 - 15 years	14	26.4%
16 - 20 years	6	11.3%
21 - 25 years	13	24.5%
26 - 30 years	1	1.9%
30 years and above	8	15.1%

Table 4.2 above shows the respondents based on teaching experience of teachers and school administrators. Based on the teachers' teaching experiences, 13.6% of them were below 5 years, 20.9% were between the intervals of 5 - 10 years, 26.4% were between the intervals of 11 - 15 years, 10.9% were between intervals of 16 - 20 years, 17.3% were between the intervals of 21 - 25 years, 5.5% were between the intervals of 26 - 30 years while the remaining 5.5% were between 30 years and above. Based on the school administrators' teaching experiences, 7.5% of them were below 5 years, 13.2% were between the intervals of 5 - 10 years, 26.4% were between the intervals of 11 - 15 years, 11.3% were between intervals of 16 - 20 years, 24.5% were between the intervals of 21 - 25 years, 1.9% were between the intervals of 26 - 30 years and the remaining 15.1% were between 30 years and above.

Table 3:
Distribution of respondents based on their educational qualification

		N	%
Teachers	NCE/OND	38	34.5%
	HND/BSC/B.ED/BA/LLB	69	62.7%
	PHD	3	2.7%
School administrators	NCE/OND	13	24.5%
	PGDE	1	1.9%
	HND/BSC/B.ED/BA/LLB	33	62.3%
	MSC/M.ED/MA/LLM	3	5.7%
	PHD	3	5.7%

Table 3 above shows the respondents based on educational qualification of teachers and school administrators. Based on the teachers' educational qualification, 34.5% of them have NCE/OND educational qualification, 62.7% have HND/BSC/B.ED/BA/LLB, while the remaining 2.7% have PHD educational qualification. Based on the school administrators' teaching experiences, 24.5% of them have NCE/OND educational qualification, 1.9% have PGDE, 62.3% have HND/BSC/B.ED/BA/LLB, 5.7% have MSC/M.ED/MA/LLM and the remaining 5.7% have PHD educational qualification.

Table 4:
Distribution of respondents based on their special educational training

		N	%
Teachers	Yes	110	100.0%
School administration	Yes	53	100.0%

Table 4 above shows the respondents based on teachers and school administrators' special educational training. Based on the teachers, 100% of them were trained on special education and 100% of the school administrators, were trained.

Table 5:

Distribution of respondents based on their area of specialization

		N	%
Teachers	Shi/social studies	12	10.9%
	Special education in hearing impaired	50	45.5%
	Visually impaired/Business Education	14	12.7%
	Special education for the hearing handicap/ Intellectual disabilities	6	5.5%
	Children with physically challenged and impairment	3	2.7%
	Intellectual Disability	16	14.5%
	Rehabilitation science	3	2.7%
	Computer Science/SHI	3	2.7%
	ENG/SHI	3	2.7%
School administrators	Special education in hearing impaired	8	15.1%
	Visually impaired	3	5.7%
	UBEC	1	1.9%
	Special Rehabilitation science	1	1.9%
	Hearing Impairment	7	13.2%
	Intellectual Disability	6	11.3%
	Educational Administration/ Hearing Impairment	7	13.2%
	Education for the gifted and talented	6	11.3%
	Computer Science/SHI	1	1.9%
	ENG/SHI	1	1.9%
	Special education/mathematics	3	5.7%
	Biology/SPH	2	3.8%
	Learning Disability	1	1.9%
	Special Education/political science	1	1.9%
	Intellectual Disability/Agricultural Science	1	1.9%
	Guidance and Counselling/ Special Education	1	1.9%
	SMR	2	3.8%
	Educational therapist	1	1.9%

Table 5 presents a breakdown of areas specialisations of teachers and school administrators in various fields related to special education. Among teachers, the largest group (45.5%) specializes in special education for hearing impairments, followed by those in intellectual disability (14.5%) and visually impaired/business education (12.7%). Smaller proportions of teachers are involved in areas like social studies, rehabilitation science, and computer science for special education. For school administrators, a notable portion (15.1%) has expertise in special education for the hearing impaired, with significant representation in hearing impairment (13.2%) and intellectual disability

(11.3%). Other specializations among administrators include educational administration, gifted education, and various cross-disciplinary areas like special education/mathematics and political science. The diverse range of specializations reflects varying expertise in supporting children with special educational needs, but the higher concentration in hearing impairments and intellectual disabilities suggests these areas may be more prioritized in training and service provision.

Answering of Research Questions

Answer to Research Questions One:

What is the extent of stakeholders' awareness on education for children with special educational needs in Lagos State?

Table 6:

The current level of stakeholders' awareness on education for children with special educational needs in Lagos State.

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Teachers' Awareness	I know children with different forms of special education needs.	110	2.00	.000
	I believe that children with special education needs should study with those without special education needs.	110	1.86	.345
	I feel that any form of special education needs in a child is a curse.	110	1.00	.000
	I believe that children with special education needs can lead full lives like children without.	110	1.93	.261
	I believe that given adequate resources, children with disability can excel in their academics.	110	2.00	.000
	To the best of my knowledge, I know the following as some forms/levels of Special Education Needs (Tick as many):	110	2.58	2.447
	Valid N (listwise)	110	11.73	8.56
School administrators' Awareness	I know children with different forms of special education needs.	53	2.00	.000
	I believe that children with special education needs should study with those without special education needs.	53	2.89	.320
	I feel that any form of special education needs in a child is a curse.	53	1.08	.267
	I believe that children with special education needs can lead full lives like children without.	53	3.83	.379
	I believe that given adequate resources, children with disability can excel in their academics.	53	2.00	.000

To the best of my knowledge, I know the following as some forms/levels of Special Education Needs (Tick as many):	53	3.08	3.192
Valid N (listwise)	53	11.88	4.16

Table 6 presents the awareness levels of teachers and school administrators regarding children with special educational needs (SEN). Both groups demonstrate a positive awareness overall, with teachers and administrators scoring relatively high on key items. Teachers showed a mean score of 2.00 on recognizing children with various forms of SEN and believing that children with SEN can excel with adequate resources, while administrators had similar views, with a mean score of 2.00 for recognising SEN and 2.00 for the belief that children with disabilities can succeed academically. Notably, the belief that children with SEN can lead full lives scored higher among administrators (mean = 3.83) than teachers (mean = 1.93), indicating stronger confidence in the potential of SEN children. The item on whether SEN is a "curse" received very low scores (1.00 for teachers, 1.08 for administrators), suggesting a rejection of stigma associated with SEN. Additionally, both teachers and administrators displayed moderate awareness of the various forms of SEN, with higher variability among administrators (mean = 3.08, standard deviation = 3.192). Overall, the findings indicate a generally positive, though slightly varied, attitude towards SEN, with some room for improvement in specific areas like comprehensive knowledge of SEN forms and the integration of SEN children into regular classrooms.

Table 7:
Thematic analysis of special needs pupils, community and religious leaders' respondents on extent of stakeholders' awareness on education for children with special educational needs in Lagos State

Special needs pupils	Most respondents indicated they understand what "special educational needs" means, with a majority answering "Yes" to knowing about SEN. This suggests a basic awareness among special needs pupils regarding their own educational classification. Many pupils reported having seen other children with SEN in their schools or communities, indicating some level of social integration and visibility of children with special needs within their environment. Pupils reported a range of specific needs, including visual impairments, hearing impairments, and learning disabilities such as dyslexia, reflecting the diverse nature of special education needs within the sample.
Community Leaders in Lagos State	Community leaders generally demonstrated awareness of various types of SEN, including autism, dyslexia, and visual or hearing impairments. Most leaders indicated that they knew of children in their communities with SEN and understood that these conditions require specific support. However, a few leaders noted gaps in knowledge within their communities, as some members associate SEN with negative cultural beliefs or spiritual

	causes. This perception sometimes results in stigmatisation or exclusion of children with SEN.
Religious Leaders in Lagos State	Many religious leaders indicated awareness of various special education needs, such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and visual and hearing impairments. This awareness suggests that there is a general understanding of the different forms of special needs, though the depth of understanding varies among leaders.

The findings reveal that although cultural misconceptions and differences in depth of understanding present challenges, supported by statistical evidence, there is a high level of awareness of SEN among education stakeholders in Lagos State.

Answer to research questions two:

What are the hindrances to enrolment and transition of children with special educational needs in Lagos state public schools?

Table 8:

The hindrances to enrolment and transition of children with special educational needs in Lagos state public schools.

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Teachers	Infrastructure limitations, such as lack of ramps, elevators, or accessible restrooms) hinders enrolment and transition for children with SEN	110	3.00	.790
	Sufficient learning materials and assistive devices are unavailable in school for children with SEN	110	2.86	.566
	Parents of children with SEN do face challenges during the enrolment process, e.g. administrative hurdles, paperwork, and communication difficulties	110	2.67	.847
	Negative stereotypes or misconceptions about children with SEN discourage enrolment and transition	110	2.92	.623
	Administrative policies and bureaucratic processes create barriers for children with SEN	110	2.59	.625
	Valid N (listwise)	110	14.04	3.46
Criterion Mean = 1.17				
School Administrators	Infrastructure limitations, such as lack of ramps, elevators, or accessible restrooms) hinders enrolment and transition for children with SEN	53	3.25	.705
	Sufficient learning materials and assistive devices are unavailable in school for children with SEN	53	2.83	.612

Parents of children with SEN do face challenges during the enrolment process, e.g. administrative hurdles, paperwork, and communication difficulties	53	2.34	.732
Negative stereotypes or misconceptions about children with SEN discourage enrolment and transition	53	2.70	.668
Administrative policies and bureaucratic processes create barriers for children with SEN	53	2.47	.696
Valid N (listwise)	53	13.59	3.42
Criterion Mean = 3.97			

Table 8 provides information for the answer to research question three. The research findings reveal significant barriers to the enrolment and transition of children with special educational needs (SEN) in Lagos State due to infrastructure limitations, insufficient learning materials, and administrative challenges. Teachers rated infrastructure limitations (mean = 3.00, SD = .790) and negative stereotypes (mean = 2.92, SD = .623) as key challenges, while school administrators identified infrastructure issues as the most significant barrier (mean = 3.25, SD = .705). Both groups highlighted insufficient learning materials and assistive devices as critical gaps, with means of 2.86 (teachers) and 2.83 (administrators). Administrative hurdles and bureaucratic policies were noted as additional challenges, though rated slightly lower by administrators (mean = 2.47, SD = .696) compared to teachers (mean = 2.59, SD = .625).

Table 9:
Thematic analysis of pupil, community and religious Leaders responses on hindrances to Enrolment and Transaction of Children with Special Educational Needs in Lagos State Public Schools

Special needs pupils	a) Pupils identified multiple challenges impacting their school attendance, such as transportation difficulties, physical accessibility, and limited access to assistive devices. These barriers can create daily hardships that affect regular attendance and long-term retention. b) Most respondents felt that children with special needs face additional challenges in passing exams compared to their peers. This perception highlights the need for tailored support and accommodations to help SEN students succeed academically.
Community Leaders in Lagos State	Several community leaders cited societal stigma, lack of resources, and inadequate support services as key barriers to the enrolment and retention of children with SEN in schools. In some cases, families fear the judgment of others or worry about the emotional and financial burden of specialized support, which can lead to lower enrolment rates. Leaders also reported that, even when children with SEN are enrolled, they often face challenges that hinder consistent attendance or lead to higher dropout rates.

- Religious Leaders in Lagos State**
- a) A common theme was the impact of societal stigma on enrolment. Religious leaders observed that negative perceptions toward disabilities often discourage families from enrolling children with special needs in mainstream schools. Families may fear judgment or isolation within the community, which affects their willingness to engage fully in the educational process.
 - b) Many leaders mentioned that the lack of specialised resources, trained teachers, and adapted facilities contributes to higher dropout rates. They identified that without these supports, students with special needs struggle academically and socially, often leading to early withdrawal from school.

The research identified major hindrances to the enrolment and transition of children with special educational needs (SEN) in Lagos State, including inadequate infrastructure, limited resources, and societal stigma. Teachers and administrators highlighted critical issues such as a lack of ramps, elevators, and assistive devices, while pupils reported daily challenges like transportation and insufficient accommodations. Community leaders pointed to stigma and financial burdens, and religious leaders emphasised the absence of specialized facilities and trained staff. The findings indicate the urgent need for systemic improvements in infrastructure and resources to enhance SEN education.

Answer to research questions three:

What is the extent of community support towards the enrolment and transition of children with special educational needs in Lagos State?

Table 10:

The extent of community support and participation towards the enrolment and transition of children with special educational needs in Lagos State.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
There is a high level of Parental involvement in supporting SEN students during enrolment and transitions in my school	53	3.09	.741
Assessing community partnerships has helped identify effective practices for supporting SEN students in my school	53	3.09	.529
Religious leaders contribute to fostering a positive environment by promoting acceptance and understanding of SEN students within and outside the school	53	3.06	.691
Some community-based programmes or initiatives facilitate smooth transitions for SEN students in my school	53	3.11	.640
Parents and community members actively participate in Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings in my school	53	2.75	.757
Valid N (listwise)	53	15.1	3.36

Criterion Mean = 4.49

Table 10 presents data on the level of involvement from parents, community members, and religious leaders in supporting students with special educational needs (SEN) during enrolment and transitions in schools. The mean scores for items related to parental involvement, community partnerships, and religious leaders' contributions are all

relatively high, ranging from 3.06 to 3.11, indicating positive involvement and support. Specifically, the highest mean score was observed for community-based programmes facilitating smooth transitions (3.11), suggesting that such initiatives play a key role in aiding SEN students. However, the lowest mean score was for parents and community members actively participating in Individualised Education Plan (IEP) meetings (2.75), pointing to an area where engagement could be improved.

Table 11:

Thematic analysis of pupil, community and religious leaders' responses on extent of community support and participation towards the enrolment and transition of children with special educational needs in Lagos State

Special needs pupils	a) Few pupils reported receiving special learning materials from outside organizations, indicating a lack of external support for many students. This suggests that while some organizations may offer support, it is not universally accessible. b) Only a small number of respondents reported receiving financial assistance from community or religious organizations, indicating that such support is limited or inconsistently available. c) Most pupils felt that their parents support their inclusion in regular school settings, reflecting a generally positive attitude towards mainstream education among families.
Community Leaders in Lagos State	Community leaders highlighted the importance of community and religious organizations in shaping perceptions and promoting inclusion for children with SEN. Many leaders described efforts to raise awareness through community meetings, workshops, and sermons, aimed at reducing stigma and fostering acceptance. In some cases, community groups have also provided limited financial or logistical support to families with SEN children, although leaders noted that these resources are often insufficient.
Religious Leaders in Lagos State	a. Religious leaders reported mixed beliefs among parents, with some viewing special needs as unfortunate but manageable, while others see it as a family burden. Leaders observed that parents often need reassurance and education to understand that their children can still achieve fulfilling lives with adequate support. b. Many religious leaders stated that their organizations are beginning to hold programs to educate and support parents and the broader community about special needs. Some leaders have initiated awareness sessions, sermons, and support groups to promote inclusion and understanding. Despite these efforts, they acknowledged that there is still considerable work to do in reducing stigma and promoting acceptance.

Community support for the enrolment and transition of children with special educational needs (SEN) in Lagos State is generally positive, with community-based programmes facilitating transitions scoring the highest. However, community involvement in Individualised Education Plan (IEP) meetings is lower, indicating a need for more engagement. While religious and community leaders raise awareness and promote

inclusion, external support such as financial aid and learning materials is limited. Parental attitudes vary, with some viewing SEN children positively and others as a burden, highlighting the need for further education to reduce stigma and improve support.

Answer to Research Questions four

What are the roles of mass media in fostering positive attitudes towards children with special educational needs in Lagos State?

Table 12:

The roles of mass media in fostering positive attitudes towards children with special educational needs in Lagos State.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The portrayal of children with SEN in mass media affects societal attitudes towards them	110	2.62	.488
Mass media contributed to my understanding of the needs and capabilities of children with SEN.	110	2.87	.920
Mass media influences my teaching approaches to children with SEN.	110	3.05	.759
Mass media have positively impacted the inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream education.	110	2.82	.732
Mass media coverage of SEN issues influenced my views on educational policies and advocacy for children with SEN	110	2.99	.736
Valid N (listwise)	110	14.35	3.64

Criterion Mean = 3.94

Table 12 presents data on the impact of mass media on societal attitudes, understanding, teaching approaches, inclusion, and educational policies regarding children with special educational needs (SEN). The mean scores across the five items range from 2.62 to 3.05, indicating that mass media has a moderate to positive influence on educators' perceptions and approaches toward SEN. Specifically, the item with the highest mean score (3.05) suggests that mass media has a notable impact on teaching approaches to SEN children, while the lowest mean score (2.62) reflects a moderate effect of mass media portrayal on societal attitudes. The overall mean score of 14.35, with a standard deviation of 3.64, highlights the general trend of positive influence, though there is some variability in responses.

Table 13:

Thematic analysis on roles of mass media in fostering positive attitudes towards children with special educational needs in Lagos State.

- Special needs pupils**
- a. A significant number of pupils felt that children with SEN are misrepresented in the media, often portrayed in a way that does not reflect their full potential or humanity. This suggests that media narratives may contribute to societal misunderstandings of SEN.
 - b. Most respondents agreed that media representation affects how the public views children with SEN, suggesting that negative or stereotypical portrayals in the media could influence public attitudes and possibly reinforce stigma.

Mass media plays a moderate to positive role in fostering positive attitudes toward children with special educational needs (SEN) in Lagos State. It has a notable impact on educators' teaching approaches, with the highest influence observed in shaping instructional strategies. However, media portrayal of children with SEN often reflects negative or stereotypical images, contributing to societal misunderstandings and reinforcing stigma. While mass media generally supports inclusion and understanding, there is room for improvement in representing SEN children more accurately and positively to enhance public attitudes and reduce stigma.

Test of Hypotheses

H0₂ There is no significant influence of extent of stakeholders' awareness on improves community support and participation towards enrolment and transition of children with special educational needs in Lagos State.

Table 14:

Influence of extent of stakeholders' awareness on improves community support and participation towards enrolment and transition of children with special educational needs in Lagos State.

Model		Coefficients ^a		t	Sig.
		Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients		
1	(Constant)	1.392		2.944	.005
	Stakeholders' Awareness	.508	.438	3.476	.001

a. Dependent Variable: Community Support and Participation towards the Enrolment and Transition of Children with special educational needs

Table 14 presents the results of a regression analysis testing the hypothesis: "There is no significant influence of the level of stakeholders' awareness on improving community support and participation towards the enrolment and transition of children with special educational needs (SEN) in Lagos State." The constant value is 1.392, with a standard error of 0.473. This represents the baseline level of community support and participation when stakeholders' awareness is zero. The unstandardised coefficient for stakeholders' awareness is 0.508, which means that for every one-unit increase in stakeholders' awareness, community support and participation towards the enrolment and transition of children with SEN increases by 0.508 units. The standardized coefficient (Beta) is 0.438, which indicates a moderate positive influence of stakeholders' awareness on community support and participation. The t-value for stakeholders' awareness is 3.476, and the significance value (Sig.) is 0.001, which is less than the typical significance level of 0.05.

Since the significance value is 0.001, which is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis ("There is no significant influence of the level of stakeholders' awareness on improving community support and participation") is rejected. This indicates that there is a statistically significant influence of stakeholders' awareness on improving community support and participation towards the enrolment and transition of children with SEN in Lagos State.

H0₃ There is no significant influence of mass media on fostering positive attitudes of teachers towards children with special educational needs in Lagos State.

Table 15:

Influence of mass media on fostering positive attitudes of teachers towards children with special educational needs in Lagos State.

		Coefficients^a			
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t
1	(Constant)	2.455	.225		10.932
	Mass media	.345	.077	.395	4.471
					Sig.
					<.001
					<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Attitudes of Educators Towards Children with Special Educational Needs

Table 15 presents the results of a regression analysis testing the hypothesis that "There is no significant influence of mass media on fostering positive attitudes of teachers towards children with special educational needs in Lagos State." The unstandardized coefficient for mass media is 0.345, indicating that for every unit increase in mass media influence, the attitude of teachers toward children with special educational needs increases by 0.345 units. The standardized coefficient (Beta) is 0.395, suggesting a moderate positive influence of mass media on teachers' attitudes. The t-value is 4.471, and the p-value (Sig.) is less than 0.001, which is highly significant. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis. This indicates that there is a significant influence of mass media on fostering positive attitudes of teachers toward children with special educational needs in Lagos State. Therefore, the data supports the idea that mass media plays a significant role in shaping educators' perceptions and attitudes toward SEN children.

Summary of Findings

1. The findings indicate that while cultural misconceptions and varying levels of understanding pose challenges, statistical evidence highlights a high level of awareness about special educational needs (SEN) among education stakeholders in Lagos State.
2. Teachers and administrators described the difficulties of working without essential infrastructure like ramps, elevators, or assistive devices, while pupils shared daily struggles with transportation and insufficient support. Community leaders voiced concerns about stigma and financial constraints, and religious leaders emphasized the urgent need for specialized facilities and trained personnel to ensure proper support for every child.

3. Community support for the enrolment and transition of children with SEN in Lagos State is largely positive, with community-based programmes facilitating these transitions receiving the highest evaluations.
4. Mass media plays a moderately positive role in promoting favourable attitudes toward children with SEN in Lagos State, helping to shape public perceptions.
5. The findings demonstrate a statistically significant link between stakeholders' awareness and enhanced community support and participation in the enrolment and transition of SEN children.
6. The data underscores the pivotal role of mass media in influencing educators' perceptions and fostering positive attitudes toward children with SEN.

Discussion of findings

The findings highlight a complex interplay between cultural misconceptions and growing awareness of special educational needs (SEN) among education stakeholders in Lagos State. While societal beliefs, such as associating disabilities with supernatural causes, continue to perpetuate stigma, a high level of awareness among stakeholders offers hope for progress. This awareness suggests a shift towards more informed perspectives, aligning with global trends advocating for inclusive education (UNESCO, 2022). It also reflects the impact of advocacy and sensitization efforts, which have played a key role in increasing public consciousness about SEN (Obadara & Adebisi, 2021). However, the persistence of cultural barriers underscores the need for sustained efforts to dispel misconceptions and promote acceptance (Ainscow, 2020).

Despite the encouraging level of awareness, practical challenges remain. Awareness alone cannot drive change without complementary measures such as teacher training, policy implementation, and resource provision (Florian, 2019). Stakeholders' recognition of the importance of inclusive practices provides a solid foundation for targeted interventions to address cultural and systemic barriers. By building on this awareness and equipping stakeholders with the necessary tools and support, Lagos State has the potential to make significant strides toward inclusive education, ensuring that children with SEN receive equitable opportunities to learn and thrive (UNESCO, 2022; Obadara & Adebisi, 2021).

The findings reveal that teachers and administrators in Lagos State face significant challenges in providing inclusive education due to the lack of essential infrastructure such as ramps, elevators, and assistive devices. These physical barriers create an environment that is not conducive to the full participation of children with special educational needs (SEN). Pupils themselves reported facing daily struggles, particularly in accessing schools due to inadequate transportation and a lack of sufficient accommodations once they arrive at school. This aligns with previous research, which highlights how physical barriers and insufficient resources are key obstacles to the inclusion of SEN children in mainstream education (Adewumi & Oyeboji, 2021). The challenges highlighted by teachers and students underscore the need for immediate infrastructural improvements to create a more accessible and supportive educational environment for all learners.

Furthermore, community leaders in Lagos expressed concerns about the stigma surrounding children with SEN, which often leads to social exclusion and discrimination. Financial constraints were also identified as a significant barrier, with many families unable to afford the necessary support services or specialized educational resources. Religious leaders added their voice, stressing the importance of establishing specialized facilities and employing trained personnel to meet the diverse needs of these children.

These findings reflect broader societal issues related to awareness and resources, as noted in studies by Nwogu and Omoike (2020), which found that stigma and financial limitations often prevent children with SEN from accessing quality education. The need for specialized training and facilities is crucial, as it ensures that children with SEN receive the individualized attention and support they require for academic and social success.

The findings indicate that community support for the enrollment and transition of children with special educational needs (SEN) in Lagos State is predominantly positive, with community-based programs receiving the highest evaluations. This aligns with previous research that highlights the importance of community involvement in the inclusion of children with SEN, where local initiatives and support systems are often critical in easing transitions into mainstream education (Smith & Jones, 2019). Community-based programs have been shown to provide tailored assistance, ensuring that children with SEN are welcomed into school environments and that their families receive the necessary support (Nguyen, 2021). In Lagos State, these programs help bridge the gap between home and school, facilitating smoother transitions and greater integration for children with SEN, as evidenced by the high ratings from stakeholders.

Furthermore, the positive impact of community-based programs can be attributed to their ability to leverage local resources and foster a supportive environment for both children and their families. Studies have emphasized that when communities actively engage with educational institutions, they contribute not only to the child's academic success but also to their social and emotional development (Williams & Patel, 2018). This collaborative effort leads to a more inclusive and accepting atmosphere, which is crucial for the successful inclusion of SEN students in Lagos State schools. The findings also support the notion that strong community involvement can overcome the limitations of formal education systems by providing additional networks of support and advocacy (Fleming, 2020).

The role of mass media in shaping public attitudes toward children with special educational needs (SEN) in Lagos State emerged as a key finding in this study. It was observed that mass media plays a moderately positive role in promoting favorable perceptions of SEN children, which aligns with previous research emphasizing the media's power in shaping social attitudes (McGlynn, 2017). While traditional media outlets such as television and radio, as well as newer digital platforms, contribute to increasing awareness, the influence remains moderate, suggesting that while progress has been made, there is still a significant need for more targeted, consistent, and inclusive media content to challenge stereotypes and raise awareness of the benefits of inclusion for children with SEN (Wang & Shaughnessy, 2018). The media's ability to alter perceptions is crucial, as it can reach a wide audience and foster positive narratives about SEN children, countering harmful stereotypes and stigmatization often seen in the community (Booth & Ainscow, 2011).

Furthermore, the findings underscore a statistically significant link between stakeholders' awareness and improved community support for the enrolment and transition of SEN children. This result supports the notion that heightened awareness among parents, teachers, and local leaders directly correlates with greater participation in the educational journey of SEN children. The evidence indicates that when stakeholders such as educators and parents are better informed about SEN, they are more likely to engage in efforts to ensure successful transitions for these children into inclusive educational

settings (Haug, 2017). This aligns with previous studies that highlight the importance of awareness in fostering supportive environments for children with disabilities (Guralnick, 2015). As stakeholders' understanding improves, they become better equipped to advocate for necessary resources and adjustments, thus enhancing the inclusion process (Jordan, 2014).

Moreover, the study emphasises the critical role of mass media in influencing educators' perceptions. The data indicates that media exposure contributes significantly to shaping how educators view and approach children with SEN. Educators who are exposed to positive media portrayals of SEN children are more likely to develop inclusive attitudes and employ strategies that accommodate diverse learners in their classrooms (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). This finding is consistent with research suggesting that media depictions of people with disabilities can significantly alter attitudes and beliefs, making educators more empathetic and proactive in creating inclusive learning environments (Powers & Gilson, 2008). However, despite this positive influence, there remains room for improvement in providing more comprehensive training and media content that reflects the lived experiences of children with SEN and promotes empathy and understanding.

Conclusion

The study highlights that while cultural misconceptions and varying levels of understanding present challenges, there is a commendable level of awareness about special educational needs (SEN) among education stakeholders in Lagos State. Teachers and administrators emphasized the urgent need for infrastructure improvements such as ramps, elevators, and assistive devices, while pupils expressed their struggles with transportation and inadequate accommodations. Community leaders underscored the dual burdens of stigma and financial constraints, and religious leaders stressed the critical lack of specialized facilities and trained staff. Despite these challenges, community support for the enrollment and transition of SEN children is encouraging, bolstered by effective community-based programs. Additionally, the mass media plays a significant role in fostering positive attitudes and shaping stakeholder perceptions, reflecting its potential as a tool for advocacy and awareness. These findings underscore the pivotal role of stakeholder awareness in improving support and participation for children with SEN in Lagos State.

Recommendations

1. Government and private stakeholders should prioritize providing accessible infrastructure in schools, including ramps, elevators, and assistive devices, to create an inclusive learning environment.
2. Invest in specialized training programs for teachers and staff, equipping them with the skills and resources to effectively support SEN children.
3. Expand and strengthen community-based initiatives that facilitate the enrollment and smooth transition of SEN children into mainstream education.
4. Leverage mass media campaigns to further reduce stigma and promote understanding of SEN, ensuring accurate representation and sustained awareness.
5. Increase funding for SEN programs and enforce policies that mandate inclusive education practices in all schools.
6. Foster partnerships between educators, community leaders, religious institutions, and policymakers to address gaps and build a robust support system for SEN children.

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