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# Gender Equality and Management of Inclusive Education in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State

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## *Abstract*

This study examined gender equality and the management of inclusive education in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Inclusive education emphasizes equal access to quality education for all learners regardless of gender, disability, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or learning differences. Gender equality remains a critical component of inclusive education because it ensures that boys and girls enjoy equal educational opportunities, participation, and achievement. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The target population consisted of school administrators, teachers, and educational stakeholders in public secondary schools within Karu Local Government Area. Data were collected through questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Findings revealed that gender equality significantly influences the effective management of inclusive education by promoting equal participation, reducing discrimination, enhancing access to educational resources, and improving academic outcomes among learners. The study also identified challenges including inadequate funding, insufficient teacher training, cultural stereotypes, gender bias, and inadequate instructional facilities. The study concluded that gender equality serves as a foundation for successful inclusive education management. It recommended increased government funding, regular professional development for teachers, implementation of gender-sensitive policies, community awareness programs, and improved monitoring mechanisms to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all learners. These measures would strengthen inclusive education and contribute to sustainable educational development in Karu Local Government Area and Nigeria at large.

**Keywords:** Gender Equality**,** Inclusive Education**,** Educational Management Gender-Sensitive Policies and Equal Access.

## *Introduction*

Education is universally recognized as a fundamental human right and a powerful instrument for national development, social transformation, and economic growth. Contemporary educational systems are increasingly embracing the principle of inclusive education, which advocates equal access, participation, and achievement for all learners irrespective of gender, disability, social background, ethnicity, religion, or learning ability. Inclusive education aims to eliminate barriers to learning and create educational environments where every learner feels valued, respected, and supported (UNESCO, 2024).

Gender equality is a fundamental principle of inclusive education. It refers to the provision of equal rights, opportunities, responsibilities, and access to resources for both males and females. Gender equality in education ensures that boys and girls have equal opportunities to enroll in school, participate actively in learning, access educational resources, and achieve their academic potential without discrimination (UNICEF, 2024).

Globally, educational policies and international frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4 on Quality Education and Goal 5 on Gender Equality, emphasize the importance of providing equitable and inclusive educational opportunities for all learners. These goals advocate eliminating gender disparities and ensuring equal access to quality education at all levels (World Bank, 2024).

In Nigeria, inclusive education has gained increasing attention as a strategy for achieving educational equity and social justice. The National Policy on Inclusive Education recognizes the need to accommodate diverse learners, including children with disabilities, girls, marginalized groups, and other vulnerable populations (Federal Ministry of Education, 2024). The management of inclusive education involves planning, organizing, coordinating, supervising, and evaluating educational activities to ensure that all learners receive appropriate support and opportunities for success (Nwisagbo & Osuji, 2024; Uwaleke et al., 2021).

Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State occupies a strategic position due to its proximity to the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The area has experienced rapid population growth, urbanization, and increased demand for educational services. Schools within the local government area serve learners from diverse socioeconomic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. Consequently, educational administrators face the challenge of ensuring that all students receive equitable educational opportunities while addressing issues related to gender disparities, resource limitations, and learner diversity (Nasarawa State Ministry of Education, 2025; Ahmad et al., 2023).

Inclusive education management requires the adoption of strategies that promote equal participation and eliminate discriminatory practices. These strategies include gender-sensitive curriculum implementation, teacher training programs, provision of accessible learning facilities, community engagement initiatives, and effective monitoring and evaluation systems (Omede, 2016; Bakwaph, et al., 2025).

Research has shown that educational institutions that prioritize gender equality and inclusiveness experience improved student engagement, reduced dropout rates, enhanced academic performance, and stronger school-community relationships (Iyala, 2006; Ibe & Ezeala, 2025).

**Statement of the Problem**

Despite government efforts to promote inclusive education and gender equality in Nigeria, many schools continue to experience challenges related to discrimination, unequal participation, inadequate resources, and poor implementation of inclusive education policies. In Karu Local

Government Area of Nasarawa State, increasing student enrollment and learner diversity have created additional management challenges for school administrators.

Gender disparities in educational participation, retention, and achievement remain evident in some schools. Cultural beliefs, socioeconomic factors, and inadequate awareness of gender-sensitive practices often hinder equal educational opportunities for both male and female learners. According to the Federal Ministry of Education (2024), while primary school enrollment has improved, transition rates to secondary education remain lower for girls than boys in many parts of Nigeria, including Nasarawa State.

Furthermore, insufficient teacher preparation, inadequate facilities, and limited funding may affect the successful implementation of inclusive education programs. Many teachers lack training in inclusive pedagogy and gender-sensitive teaching practices. This deficiency is particularly concerning in Karu LGA, where population growth has led to larger class sizes and increased demands on teachers.

The persistence of these challenges raises concerns about the effectiveness of inclusive education management and the extent to which gender equality is being promoted within schools. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the relationship between gender equality and the management of inclusive education in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State.

**Research Objectives**

The main objective of this study is to examine gender equality and the management of inclusive education in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State. Specifically, the study seeks to:

i. Determine the extent to which gender equality promotes equal access to educational opportunities in inclusive education management in Karu LGA.
ii. Assess the influence of gender-sensitive school policies on student participation in inclusive education in Karu LGA.
iii. Examine the effect of equal treatment of learners on academic achievement within inclusive settings in Karu LGA.
iv. Identify the challenges affecting the effective management of inclusive education in Karu LGA.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

i. To what extent does gender equality promote equal access to educational opportunities in inclusive education management in Karu LGA?
ii. How do gender-sensitive school policies influence student participation in inclusive education in Karu LGA?
iii. What is the effect of equal treatment of learners on academic achievement in inclusive settings in Karu LGA?
iv. What are the challenges affecting the effective management of inclusive education in Karu LGA?

**The Concept of Inclusive Education**

Inclusive education is a philosophy and practice that seeks to provide quality education for all learners, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions. According to UNESCO (2024), inclusive education is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system

to reach out to all learners. It involves transforming schools and other learning centers to address the diverse needs of all students.

The core principles of inclusive education include:

- Equal Access: Every learner has the right to enroll and participate in educational programs without discrimination.
- Participation: Learners must be actively engaged in the learning process and school life.
- Achievement: All learners should achieve their full academic potential with appropriate support.
- Non-Discrimination: No learner should be excluded based on personal characteristics such as gender, disability, ethnicity, or religion.

In the Nigerian context, the Federal Ministry of Education (2024) defines inclusive education as a strategy for achieving universal basic education and ensuring that all children, including those with disabilities and special needs, have access to quality education. The National Policy on Inclusive Education (2024) provides a framework for implementing inclusive practices across all levels of education.

**The Concept of Gender Equality**

Gender equality refers to the state of equal ease of access to resources and opportunities regardless of gender, including economic participation, decision-making, and the state of valuing different behaviors, aspirations, and needs equally. In education, gender equality ensures that boys and girls have equal opportunities to enroll, participate, and succeed in educational institutions (UNICEF, 2024).

In Nigeria, the National Policy on Gender Education (2023) emphasizes that gender equality in education requires:

- Equal enrollment and retention rates for boys and girls
- Elimination of gender stereotypes in curricula and teaching practices
- Equal access to educational resources and support services
- Equal representation in leadership and decision-making positions
- Safe and supportive learning environments free from gender-based violence

Factors contributing to gender disparities in education include cultural beliefs, socioeconomic constraints, security concerns, inadequate facilities, gender-based violence, and teacher attitudes (Ojo, 2021; Bakwaph et al., 2026).

**The Concept of Educational Management**

Educational management involves the application of management principles to educational institutions to achieve educational goals. According to Nwisagbo and Osuji (2024), educational management encompasses planning, organizing, directing, coordinating, controlling, and evaluating educational activities.

In the context of inclusive education, educational management requires administrators to:

- Develop and implement inclusive policies
- Allocate resources equitably to meet diverse learner needs
- Train and support teachers in inclusive practices
- Create safe and supportive learning environments

- Engage communities in supporting inclusive education
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of inclusive programs

**Gender Equality and Inclusive Education Management**

The intersection of gender equality and inclusive education management is critical for creating equitable educational environments. Gender-responsive management practices ensure that:

- School policies address gender-based barriers to participation
- Learning environments are safe and supportive for both boys and girls
- Teaching practices are free from gender bias
- Resources are distributed fairly to meet the needs of all learners
- Gender perspectives are integrated into curriculum and instruction

Gender equality and inclusive education are mutually reinforcing. Inclusive education cannot be achieved without addressing gender disparities, and gender equality cannot be achieved without inclusive educational practices that address the needs of all learners (UNESCO, 2024).

**Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on three complementary theories:

**Rawls' Theory of Social Justice (1971)**

John Rawls posits that social and economic inequalities should be arranged so that they benefit the least advantaged members of society. In education, this implies that schools must prioritize the needs of marginalized groups, including girls, children with disabilities, and learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, to ensure fairness. This theory justifies the need for gender-responsive resource allocation and affirmative action policies in education.

**UNESCO's Inclusive Education Framework (2017)**

UNESCO's framework emphasizes three interrelated dimensions of inclusive education:

- Access (Presence): Ensuring all learners can enroll and attend school regularly.
- Participation (Quality of Experience): Ensuring learners are actively engaged in learning and school life.
- Achievement (Learning Outcomes): Ensuring all learners achieve their full potential.

This framework provides the lens through which this study evaluates the management of inclusive education in Karu LGA.

**Gender and Development (GAD) Theory**

The Gender and Development (GAD) theory emphasizes the importance of understanding gender relations as fundamental to social and economic development (Ojo, 2021). Key principles include:

- Gender as a social construction
- Gender relations as power relations
- Intersectionality
- Agency and empowerment
- Institutional change

GAD theory provides a framework for understanding the social and cultural factors that shape gender disparities in education.

**Conceptual Framework**

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Showing the Relationship Between Gender Equality and Inclusive Education Management

Independent Variables (Gender Equality) Dependent Variable Moderating Variables (Challenges)

Equal Access to Educational Opportunities Effective Inclusive Education Management Inadequate Funding

Gender-Sensitive School Policies - Improved Participation Shortage of Trained Teachers

Equal Treatment of Learners - Enhanced Academic Achievement Cultural and Religious Stereotypes

- Social Cohesion Gender Discrimination
- Reduced Discrimination Insufficient Learning Facilities
- Equitable Resource Access Weak Monitoring and Evaluation

**Studies on Gender Equality and Educational Access**

Ojo (2021) found that cultural beliefs and socioeconomic factors significantly limit female access to education in Nigeria. The study recommended community awareness programs to challenge gender stereotypes and increased investment in girls' education.

UNESCO (2024) reported that despite progress, gender disparities in education persist in many countries, including Nigeria. In Sub-Saharan Africa, girls are more likely to be out of school than boys, with poverty, early marriage, and cultural norms identified as key barriers.

UNICEF (2024) found that Nigeria has one of the highest rates of out-of-school girls in the world. Key barriers identified include poverty, cultural norms, early marriage, and insecurity.

**Studies on Gender-Sensitive Policies and Student Participation**

Nwisagbo and Osuji (2024) found that gender-sensitive school policies significantly enhance student participation in classroom activities, leadership roles, and extracurricular programs. Schools with clear gender policies had higher participation rates for both boys and girls.

Omede (2016) found that while policies exist, implementation is weak, particularly regarding gender-sensitive practices. The study identified gaps between policy formulation and on-ground implementation.

Olaiya, Adeniyi, and Kuku (2023) found that students feel more engaged in schools where policies address gender-based discrimination and harassment.

**Studies on Equal Treatment and Academic Achievement**

Ibe and Ezeala (2025) found that equal treatment of learners, including access to resources and support, significantly improves academic achievement. When teachers avoid gender bias and provide equitable support, students perform better academically.

World Bank (2024) found that equal treatment of learners is associated with better academic outcomes. Gender bias in education limits learning opportunities for both boys and girls.

**Studies on Challenges of Inclusive Education Management**

Nwisagbo and Osuji (2024) identified challenges including inadequate funding, insufficient teacher training, inadequate facilities, and weak monitoring and evaluation.

Omede (2016) identified policy implementation gaps as a key challenge, with weak implementation due to inadequate resources, limited awareness, and insufficient monitoring.
Olaiya, Adeniyi, and Kuku (2023) identified cultural and religious stereotypes as challenges that reinforce gender stereotypes and stigmatize disability.
Ojo (2021) identified gender discrimination as a key challenge, with cultural beliefs, socioeconomic factors, and inadequate awareness of gender-sensitive practices limiting educational opportunities for girls.

**Research Design**

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. This design is appropriate for gathering data from a sample of the population to describe their perceptions regarding gender equality and inclusive education management (Nwisagbo & Osuji, 2024).

**Area of Study**

The study was conducted in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Karu LGA borders the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, and has experienced rapid population growth, urbanization, and increased demand for educational services. The LGA has approximately 15 public secondary schools serving diverse socioeconomic, ethnic, and cultural populations.

**Population of the Study**

The target population comprised all principals, vice-principals, teachers, and education officers in the public secondary schools in Karu Local Government Area. According to the Karu Local Government Education Authority (2025), there are 15 public secondary schools with an estimated staff population of 950 individuals.

**Sample and Sampling Technique**

A sample of 250 respondents was selected using a combination of stratified and simple random sampling techniques:

**Instrument for Data Collection**

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Gender Equality and Inclusive Education Management Questionnaire (GEIEMQ)." The questionnaire was divided into three sections:
Section A: Demographic data (gender, designation, experience)
Section B: Gender Equality variables measuring:

- Equal Access to Educational Opportunities (3 items)
- Gender-Sensitive School Policies (3 items)
- Equal Treatment of Learners (3 items)

Responses were measured on a 4-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1).
Section C: Challenges affecting inclusive education (checklist)

**Validity and Reliability**

The instrument was face-validated by three experts in Educational Management from Veritas University, Abuja. Reliability was established using the Cronbach Alpha method, yielding a coefficient of 0.82, indicating high internal consistency.

**Methods of Data Collection**

Questionnaires were administered directly to respondents with the assistance of four trained research assistants. The questionnaires were distributed during school visits and collected immediately after completion.

**Methods of Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. The decision rule was based on a 4-point Likert scale with a criterion mean of 2.50. Items with mean scores of 2.50 and above were accepted.

**Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

**Table 1**

***Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 250)***

| Variable | Category | Frequency (N) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | Male | 138 | 55.2 |
| | Female | 112 | 44.8 |
| **Designation** | Principals | 25 | 10.0 |
| | Vice-Principals | 35 | 14.0 |
| | Teachers | 170 | 68.0 |
| | Education Officers | 20 | 8.0 |
| **Years of Experience** | 1–5 Years | 45 | 18.0 |
| | 6–10 Years | 78 | 31.2 |
| | 11–15 Years | 67 | 26.8 |
| | 16 Years and Above | 60 | 24.0 |

**Table 2:**

*Analysis of Gender Equality Variables*

| S/N | Variable | N | Mean | Std. Dev. | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | Gender equality promotes equal access to educational opportunities | 250 | 3.42 | 0.71 | Accepted |
| **2** | Gender-sensitive school policies enhance student participation | 250 | 3.36 | 0.68 | Accepted |
| **3** | Equal treatment of learners improves academic achievement | 250 | 3.51 | 0.65 | Accepted |
| | **Grand Mean** | | **3.43** | | |

**Figure 1:**

*Bar Chart of Mean Scores for Gender Equality Variables*

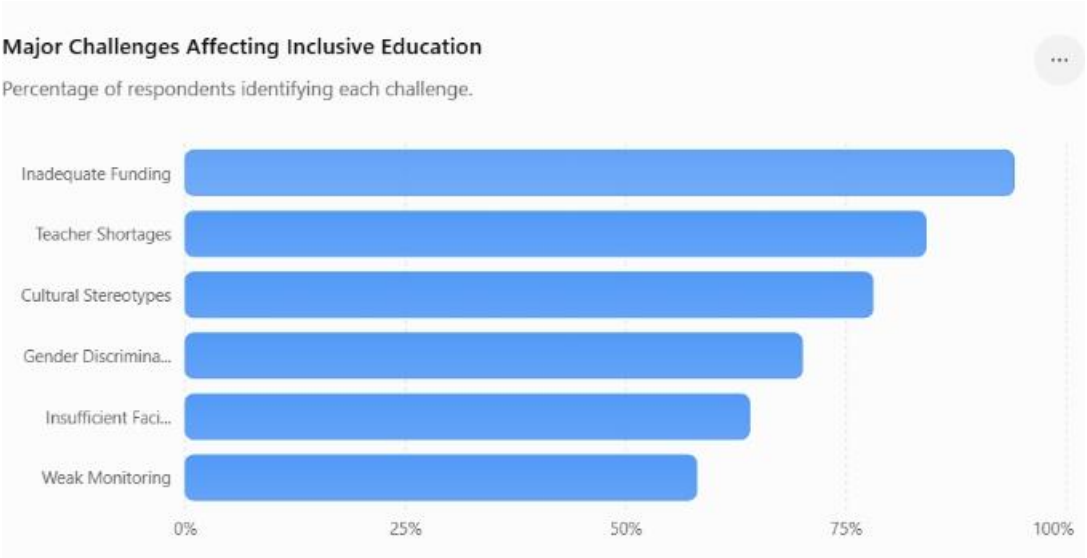



**Table 3:**

*Analysis of Challenges Affecting Inclusive Education*

| S/N | Challenge | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | Inadequate Funding | 235 | 94.0 |
| **2** | Shortage of Trained Inclusive Education Teachers | 210 | 84.0 |
| **3** | Cultural and Religious Stereotypes | 195 | 78.0 |
| **4** | Gender Discrimination | 175 | 70.0 |
| **5** | Insufficient Learning Facilities | 160 | 64.0 |
| **6** | Weak Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms | 145 | 58.0 |

**Figure 2:**




*Pie Chart Showing Key Challenges*

**Discussion of Findings**

**Gender Equality and Equal Access to Educational Opportunities**

The finding that gender equality promotes equal access to educational opportunities (Mean = 3.42) aligns with Omede (2016) and UNESCO (2024). This supports Rawls' Theory of Social Justice, which emphasizes that inequalities should benefit the least advantaged. In Karu LGA, ensuring equal access requires addressing cultural beliefs, socioeconomic constraints, and inadequate facilities.

**Gender-Sensitive School Policies and Student Participation**

The finding that gender-sensitive school policies enhance student participation (Mean = 3.36) corroborates Nwisagbo and Osuji (2024). Gender-sensitive policies create safer and more supportive school environments, increasing student engagement. However, implementation may be inconsistent, aligning with Omede's (2016) observation of a policy-implementation gap.

**Equal Treatment of Learners and Academic Achievement**

The high mean score (3.51) for equal treatment improving academic achievement reinforces Ojo (2021) and Ibe and Ezeala (2025). Equal treatment means providing all learners with the same level of support regardless of gender. Teachers who avoid gender bias create positive learning environments where students perform to their full potential.

**Challenges Affecting Inclusive Education Management**

The identification of inadequate funding (94.0%) as the major challenge agrees with Ibe and Ezeala (2025) and the World Bank (2024). The shortage of trained teachers (84.0%) aligns with Nwisagbo and Osuji (2024). Cultural and religious stereotypes (78.0%) and gender discrimination (70.0%) reflect Ojo's (2021) findings on sociocultural barriers.

**Conclusion**

The study concluded that gender equality is an essential determinant of effective inclusive education management in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State. Equal educational opportunities for males and females enhance participation, academic achievement, social integration, and overall school effectiveness. However, significant challenges persist, including inadequate funding, insufficient teacher training, cultural stereotypes, gender discrimination, inadequate facilities, and weak monitoring mechanisms. Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts among government agencies, school administrators, teachers, parents, and community stakeholders.

**For Government and Policy Makers:**

1. Increase budgetary allocation to education to at least 15% of the annual state budget.
2. Provide subsidized learning materials, including sanitary pads for girls and assistive devices.
3. Strengthen monitoring mechanisms to ensure gender-sensitive policies are implemented effectively.

**For School Administrators:**

4. Establish gender-equity committees to monitor and report discrimination.
5. Adjust school schedules to accommodate cultural and religious observances.
6. Prioritize accessible facilities and separate sanitation for boys and girls.

1. For Teachers:
7. Undergo mandatory re-training to avoid unconscious gender bias.
8. Participate in continuous professional development on inclusive education.
2. For Community Stakeholders:
9. Partner with schools to host town-hall meetings to dispel cultural myths.
10. Encourage parents to enroll all children regardless of gender.

**For Monitoring and Evaluation:**

11. Improve data collection and analysis to track progress.
12. Establish accountability mechanisms for policy implementation.

**Limitations of the Study**

The study was limited to public secondary schools in Karu LGA, so findings may not be generalizable to other areas. The study relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias. The cross-sectional design captures perceptions at a single point in time.

**Suggestions for Further Studies**

1. Comparative studies between public and private schools.
2. Qualitative studies exploring lived experiences of female students with disabilities.
3. Longitudinal studies tracking the impact of gender-responsive policies.
4. Studies examining the effectiveness of government programs like BESDA.

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