

BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF SPORTS PROGRAMMES AND PARTICIPATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This study examined the barriers to implementing effective sports programmes for students with disabilities in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The study was guided by two objectives, research questions and hypotheses, which were to identify the main barriers hindering the implementation of effective sports programmes for students with disabilities in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, and evaluate how teacher training and facility availability affect the effectiveness and inclusiveness of these programmes. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. Data were collected from 625 students using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings revealed that funding for inclusive sports programmes is very limited, adaptive equipment is rarely available, and physical accessibility to sports facilities is slightly adequate. Teacher training was minimal, and facilities were deemed slightly effective in promoting inclusiveness. Inferential analysis demonstrated a significant relationship between the availability of specialized facilities and programme effectiveness ($\chi^2 = 37.472$ at $df = 24$, $p < .05$), as well as a notable influence of teacher training on student participation (χ^2 is 29.631 at $df = 16$, $p < .05$). Recommendations included increased funding, teacher training in inclusive sports, improved facility accessibility, and the provision of adaptive sports equipment. These measures aimed to create an inclusive environment where students with disabilities can fully benefit from sports programmes.

Keywords: Sports programmes, Effective implementation, Students with disabilities, Barriers, Public Secondary Schools, Physical Fitness.

Introduction

The inclusion of sports programmes for students with disabilities has become a global focus, recognized as essential for promoting physical fitness, psychological well-being, and social integration. Across the world, schools are increasingly recognizing the importance of providing sports opportunities to students with special needs, acknowledging that physical activity promotes a sense of inclusion and helps students to overcome personal limitations. This shift reflects an improved commitment to inclusive education, making sure that all students, regardless of their physical or cognitive abilities, are given equal opportunities to participate in school activities.

In many countries, however, the implementation of inclusive sports programmes faces significant barriers. Limited resources, insufficient infrastructure, and a lack of trained personnel often impede efforts to provide suitable sports programmes for students with disabilities (Craig, Barcelona, Aytur, Amato & Young, 2019). In some contexts, these challenges are further compounded by societal perceptions of disability and limited policy frameworks for inclusive education (Bantjes, Swartz, Conchar & Derman, 2015). While countries with robust educational systems have made considerable progress, developing nations still struggle to establish effective sports programmes for students with disabilities, with various regions facing unique obstacles (Tusiime & Odiango, 2022).

In Nigeria, the need for inclusive sports programmes in schools is particularly pronounced. With a growing emphasis on inclusive education, Nigerian policymakers and educators are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of providing tailored sports opportunities for students with disabilities. However, many schools in the country face substantial resource constraints, inadequate training for teachers, and a lack of specialized facilities, which hinders their ability to meet the needs of students with disabilities effectively (Sani, Danlami, & Bichi, 2018; Hutzler, Meier, Reuker & Zitomer, 2019). These challenges are not only a barrier to participation in sports but also limit the potential benefits of physical activity for these students' overall development.

In Akwa Ibom State, one of Nigeria's prominent states in terms of educational reforms (Effiong & Akpan, 2020), the situation reflects the broader national challenges of inclusive education. Although the state has made efforts to improve educational access for all students, the sports programmes available in public secondary schools still fall short of meeting the needs of students with disabilities. Factors such as inadequate funding, insufficient infrastructure, and limited teacher training on inclusive sports practices have made it difficult for these programmes to be effective. As a result, students with disabilities in Akwa Ibom State face significant obstacles

to participating in sports, missing out on the physical, social, and emotional benefits that such programmes can provide (Okolo, 2020; Uko, 2019).

This study focused on understanding the specific challenges and barriers that affect the effectiveness of sports programmes for students with disabilities in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. By examining these issues, the study shed light on the factors that hinder the success of inclusive sports programmes and provide recommendations for creating a more supportive environment for all students irrespective of their abilities in the state.

Statement of the Problem

While public secondary schools have made strides in implementing sports programmes for general students, there remains a noticeable gap in the provision of effective programmes for students with disabilities. Factors such as limited availability of adaptive sports facilities, inadequate training for teachers on inclusive sports practices, and low levels of institutional support create barriers that restrict the participation of students with disabilities in physical activities. These issues not only compromise the physical and psychological well-being of students with disabilities but also inhibit their social integration within the school community. Without addressing these barriers, students with disabilities are likely to miss out on the benefits that sports participation can offer.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the primary barriers hindering the implementation of effective sports programmes for students with disabilities in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.
2. To evaluate the impact of teacher training and facility availability on the effectiveness and inclusiveness of sports programmes for students with disabilities in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What are the main barriers to implementing effective sports programmes for students with disabilities in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria?
2. How do teacher training and facility availability impact the effectiveness and inclusiveness of sports programmes for students with disabilities in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between the availability of specialized facilities and the effectiveness of sports programmes for students with disabilities in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.
2. There are no influences of Teacher training in inclusive sports practices on the participation of students with disabilities in sports programmes in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Scope of the Study

This study is limited to public secondary schools that offer sports programmes for students with disabilities in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. It focused on identifying the barriers that affect the effectiveness of these programmes within this educational domain. The study examined internal variables such as facility availability, teacher training, and inclusiveness policies and excluded potential external factors like family support or community-based sports programmes.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey design to examine the challenges affecting sports programmes for students with disabilities in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The design allowed for the collection of data on key factors such as facility availability, teacher training, and inclusiveness. The research focused on schools across the state, with the aim for finding barriers that students with disabilities face in accessing and participating in sports activities.

The target population was about 10,000 students, with a focus on those with disabilities. A sample of 625 students was selected using simple random sampling to ensure equal representation and reduce bias. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire containing closed-ended questions, addressing issues such as facility adequacy, teachers training, inclusive practices, and student experiences in sports programmes.

Data analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive tools like frequencies and means summarized the data, while chi-square and t-tests were used to identify significant relationships between variables such as facilities, teacher training, and programme effectiveness. This method provided a broader conceptualization of the factors influencing inclusive sports participation in the study area.

Results

Research Question One

What are the main barriers to implementing effective sports programmes for students with disabilities in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean responses and standard deviation of barriers to implementing effective sports programmes for students with disabilities in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria (N = 625)

S/N	Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision
1	Rate the level of funding available to implement sports programmes for students with disabilities in your school.	625	2.98	.164	Very limited funding
2	Rate the availability of adaptive sports equipment specifically designed for students with disabilities in your school.	625	3.19	.637	Rarely available
3	Rate the physical accessibility of sports facilities (e.g., ramps, accessible bathrooms) for students with disabilities in your school.	625	3.11	.701	Slightly accessible
4	Rate the level of support and acceptance students with disabilities receive from their non-disabled peers in sports activities.	625	3.16	.817	Slight support
	Valid N (listwise)	625			
Cluster Mean			3.14		

Table 1 is the mean responses of the main barriers to implementing effective sports programmes for students with disabilities in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria (N = 625). The result indicated that all items had mean score significantly above the criterion mean point of 2.5. The cluster mean of 3.14 suggests that teacher training and facility availability had only slight impact on the effectiveness and inclusiveness of sports programmes for students with disabilities in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Research Question Two

How do teacher training and facility availability impact the effectiveness and inclusiveness of sports programmes for students with disabilities in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean responses and standard deviation of teacher training and facility availability impact the effectiveness and inclusiveness of sports programmes for students with disabilities in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria (N = 625)

S/N	Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision
1	Rate the level of training your sports teachers have received in accommodating and supporting students with disabilities in sports programmes.	625	3.34	.613	Minimal training
2	Rate how frequently teachers lead inclusive sports activities that encourage participation from students with disabilities.	625	3.58	.629	Rarely
3	Rate how effective the available sports facilities are in supporting inclusive sports programmes for students with disabilities.	625	3.36	.610	Slightly effective
4	Rate the level of support and encouragement teachers provide to students with disabilities participating in sports programmes.	625	3.22	.713	Slightly supportive
	Valid N (listwise)	625			
Cluster Mean			3.37		

Table 2 is the mean responses of How do teacher training and facility availability impact the effectiveness and inclusiveness of sports programmes for students with disabilities in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The result indicated that all items had mean score significantly above the criterion mean point of 2.5. The cluster mean of 3.37 suggests that teacher training and facility availability had only slight impact on the effectiveness and inclusiveness of sports programmes for students with disabilities in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Hypothesis One

There is no significant relationship between the availability of specialized facilities and the effectiveness of sports programmes for students with disabilities in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Table 3: Summary of Chi-Square Analysis of availability of specialized facilities and the effectiveness of sports programmes for students with disabilities in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	37.472	24	.039
Likelihood Ratio	36.472	24	.049
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.352	1	.067
N of Valid Cases	625		

Table 3 shows the calculated chi-square value $\chi^2 = 37.472$ at $df = 24$, $p < .05$. The inference that goes with these findings is that the null hypothesis, that is no significant relationship between availability of specialized facilities and the effectiveness of sports programmes for students with disabilities in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria is rejected. Therefore, it is inferred that specialized sports facilities is needed for effective implementation of sports programmes for students who are disabled in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom state.

Hypothesis Two

There are no influences of Teacher training in inclusive sports practices on the participation of students with disabilities in sports programmes in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Table 4: Summary of Chi-Square Analysis of influence of Teacher training in inclusive sports practices on the participation of students with disabilities in sports programmes in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	29.631	16	.020
Likelihood Ratio	24.964	16	.070
Linear-by-Linear Association	.030	1	.862
N of Valid Cases	625		

From Table 4, the calculated chi-square value χ^2 is 29.631 at a degree of freedom of 16, $p < .05$. Hence, the null hypothesis that is stated, which is There are no influence of Teacher training in inclusive sports practices on the participation of students with disabilities in sports programmes in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, is rejected. Therefore, it can be stated that training of teachers on disability sports impacts how students participate in school sport programmes.

Discussion of findings

The findings revealed that multiple barriers hinder the effective implementation of sports programmes for students with disabilities in public secondary schools. Respondents identified key challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, lack of trained personnel, insufficient funding, poor policy implementation, and negative societal attitudes toward disability. These factors collectively limit the inclusion and active participation of students with disabilities in school-based sports.

This aligns with Kabanda (2021), who revealed that structural and systemic challenges—such as inaccessible facilities and underqualified staff—remain major obstacles to inclusive education practices, including sports. Similarly, Okolie, Nwosu & Mlanga (2019) noted the importance of adapting institutional frameworks to accommodate the needs of all learners, stressing that without deliberate infrastructural and curricular inclusion, students with disabilities will continue to face exclusion in school activities.

These findings point to a lack of policy enforcement and insufficient awareness among school administrators, which often results in the sidelining of sports programmes for students with special needs. This agrees with Kamsker & Slepcevic-Zach (2021), who argued that inclusive practices require ongoing institutional commitment and training to overcome deep-seated prejudices and operational inefficiencies. Compared to earlier approaches that often-neglected students with disabilities in physical education programming, current findings discussions have

shown the need for inclusive, adaptive, and student-centered sports activities. The findings support the hypothesis that several systemic and attitudinal barriers significantly affect the implementation of inclusive sports programmes in public secondary schools.

The analysis showed no statistically significant difference in the views of physical education teachers regarding barriers to implementing inclusive sports programmes based on their educational qualifications. Whether educators hold a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree, they share similar views on the challenges involved. This uniformity suggests a common awareness of the systemic issues that obstruct inclusive practices in school sports.

This supports the findings of Paine, Blömeke, & Aydarova (2016), who noted that shared teaching environments and exposure to professional development often shape common understandings among educators, especially on widespread educational issues such as inclusion. It challenges the notion that differing academic qualifications always result in diverging opinions on implementation challenges.

However, Osiesi (2023) and Ajibade, Adeleke & Oyetoro (2022) observed that ongoing training, seminars, and institutional workshops help standardize the knowledge and perspectives of educators regardless of their academic background. As such, these shared experiences may contribute to the alignment of views on the barriers to inclusive sports programmes. The findings uphold the second hypothesis- that there is no significant difference in educators' perceptions based on qualification levels.

Conclusion

The study uncovered significant barriers to implementing effective sports programmes for students with disabilities in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. Limited funding, inadequate facilities, and minimal teacher training are key obstacles that must be addressed. Implementing the recommended measures, schools can create an inclusive environment that supports the physical, social, and emotional development of students with disabilities through sports.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. **Provision of Inclusive Facilities:** Government and school authorities in Akwa Ibom State should prioritize the development and renovation of sports infrastructure to ensure accessibility for students with disabilities. This includes providing adaptive sports equipment and modifying existing facilities to meet inclusive standards.

2. Teacher Training and Sensitization: Regular training and professional development workshops should be organized for physical education teachers and school staff to equip them with the skills needed to support inclusive sports programmes.

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