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Assessment of Inclusive Education at Junior Secondary Schools in Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC), Abuja Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines the integration of inclusive education in the Junior Secondary School Curriculum in Nigeria, focusing on its impact on academic and social outcomes for students, especially those with disabilities. Inclusive education accommodates all students, fostering equity, participation, and community. Despite Nigeria's commitment to international frameworks like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), barriers such as limited resources, inadequate teacher training, and societal attitudes challenge effective implementation, particularly in under-resourced areas. Using a descriptive survey design, this study sampled 300 teachers and 50 Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) staff, collecting data through questionnaires and interviews on perceptions of inclusive education's benefits and obstacles. Findings show strong support for inclusive education's positive impact, particularly through differentiated instruction, universal design for learning (UDL), and peer engagement in promoting academic and social development. However, practical challenges hinder implementation. The study concludes that aligning policy with practice requires significant investment in teacher training, infrastructure, and community awareness. Recommendations include increased funding, consistent professional development, and strengthened policy enforcement to build an equitable and inclusive education system for all Nigerian students. **Keywords:** Inclusive Education, Curriculum, Disabilities, Junior Secondary School

Introduction

The goal of inclusive education is to accommodate all students in the general education system, irrespective of their unique requirements, backgrounds, or skill levels. It encourages an atmosphere in which students engage in educational activities with their classmates, promoting fairness, involvement, and a sense of community. This method challenges the conventional segregation models that frequently separate children with disabilities and is based on the idea that every child has a right to a high-quality education. According to research, inclusive behaviours help kids become more understanding, cooperative, and empathetic (Loreman et al., 2021). To accommodate the varied needs of their students, teachers in inclusive environments modify their teaching strategies and resources, frequently leveraging frameworks such as differentiated instruction and universal learning design, which benefit all students. All around the world, inclusive education is acknowledged as a basic human right. Integration of people with disabilities into mainstream schooling is required by the 2006 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). All people have equal access to education thanks to Article 24, which mandates that signatory nations including Nigeria, offer accommodations and support services to advance inclusive education (UN, 2006). The necessity for inclusive, fair, high-quality education for all is emphasized by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Goal 4 (United Nations, 2015). Countries must remove obstacles that marginalized groups encounter, such as poor infrastructure, sociocultural perceptions, and a lack of teacher preparation, to accomplish this. Research indicates that inclusive schools promote a culture of tolerance and inclusion (Ainscow, 2020) and that children with disabilities do better academically and socially than those in segregated settings (Hehir et al., 2016).

In addition to policy commitments, substantial adjustments in school administration, teacher preparation, and resource distribution are necessary for the successful implementation of inclusive education. Professional development is crucial because teachers must have the abilities and know-how to manage a diverse student body (Florian & Spratt, 2013). Sadly, a lot of teachers lack the necessary skills to use inclusive methods, especially when assisting kids with complex needs (Forlin & Chambers, 2017). Therefore, creating inclusive classrooms requires constant training and resources. Through laws that support equal educational opportunities for all children, including those with disabilities, the Nigerian government has acknowledged the significance of inclusive education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). But obstacles including low infrastructure, insufficient money, and little teacher preparation still stand in the way of advancement (Abang, 2022). Instead of keeping children with disabilities apart, inclusive education in Nigeria emphasizes integrating them into regular classrooms. In line with international frameworks like as the UNCRPD and SDG 4, the National Policy on Education promotes equal educational

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opportunities for all pupils (Obi & Okoh, 2023). Significant obstacles still exist despite these policies, especially in rural areas where schools lack the infrastructure and resources needed to accommodate students with disabilities (Omede, 2022). Parents are reluctant to enroll their children in mainstream schools out of fear of discrimination, which is frequently caused by societal stigma and misconceptions regarding disability (Ojo & Akinyemi, 2023). This highlights the discrepancy in Nigeria's educational system between policy and practice.

Although many teachers lack training in managing diverse classes, they are essential to the achievement of inclusive education (Adeniran et al., 2023). Professional development that emphasizes inclusive teaching methods and special education requirements is desperately needed. To establish a setting where all kids can succeed, cooperation between teachers, parents, and other stakeholders in education is crucial (Ogunbanjo & Abiodun, 2022). Since it creates the foundation for fair and encouraging learning settings, integrating inclusive education within the Junior Secondary School Curriculum is essential. The intellectual and social development of students is greatly influenced by this foundational educational phase, which includes junior secondary schools. All students have an equal chance to succeed when inclusive practices are implemented, and when they study with their peers, they develop empathy and a sense of belonging (Loreman et al., 2021). According to research, all kids do better academically when they get inclusive instruction at the basic school level (Hehir et al., 2016). Integrating inclusion into the curriculum enables schools to dismantle the discriminatory and exclusionary barriers faced by marginalized children.

In Nigeria, inclusive education has a great deal of promise to enhance social and academic outcomes for all students, especially those with disabilities. Issues like societal stigma, inadequate infrastructure, and inadequate teacher preparation hamper its effective implementation. Misconceptions in society deter parents from enrolling children with disabilities in normal schools, teachers lack the necessary training to manage a variety of requirements, and many schools lack basic supplies. Nigeria still has a big disconnect between policy and practice, even with its dedication to global frameworks like the UNCRPD and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). Potential advantages like promoting empathy, a sense of belonging, and enhanced academic achievement are largely unrealized because of these obstacles, which restrict the incorporation of inclusive education within junior secondary school. The implementation of inclusive education in junior secondary school at AMAC is examined in this study, with particular attention paid to the difficulties teachers encounter, stakeholder perspectives, and the effects of inclusive practices on students' growth. For all kids to study in a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere, these gaps must be closed.

Objectives of the study

1. To investigate how inclusive education enhances equity, participation, and belonging among students in Nigerian schools.
2. To evaluate the role of teachers in fostering inclusive classrooms through modified teaching strategies, including differentiated instruction and universal learning design (UDL).
3. To examine the barriers to implementing inclusive education, such as infrastructure, societal attitudes, teacher preparedness, and resource availability.
4. To analyze the correlation between inclusive educational practices and students' academic and social performance, especially students with disabilities.

Research Questions

1. In Nigeria, how does inclusive education impact the social and academic achievement of children with disabilities in comparison to those in segregated classrooms?
2. To what extent does Nigerian teacher preparation affect the efficacy of inclusive teaching methods in regular classrooms?
3. How do parents and educators in Nigeria feel about including students with disabilities in regular classrooms?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the academic performance of students with disabilities in Nigerian schools that implement inclusive education policies compared to those in segregated educational settings.
2. There is no significant relationship between teachers' challenges (e.g., inadequate resources and lack of training) and the effective implementation of inclusive education practices in Nigerian schools
3. There is no significant impact of inclusive education practices on the social development of students with and without disabilities in Nigerian schools.

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Methodology

The research design used in this study was a descriptive survey. 1,252 public secondary school teachers from the Abuja Municipal Area Council in Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory and 58 employees of the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) made up the population. The Taro Yamane sampling formula, which reads \(n = N / (1 + N(e)^2) \), was used to randomly choose 300 public secondary school instructors and 50 NERDC employees. The "Inclusive Education and its Integration Assessment Questionnaire (IEIIAQ)," which used a modified 4-point Likert scale with Strongly Agree (4 points) to Strongly Disagree (1 point), was used to gather data. Cronbach's Alpha was used to examine the instrument's reliability and establish its face and content validity; the reliability coefficient came out to be 0.91. The study issues were addressed using mean and standard deviation, and the null hypotheses were tested using a z-test.

Presentation of Results

The results of the study are presented below.

Research Question 1:

How does inclusive education affect the academic and social performance of students with disabilities compared to those in segregated educational settings in Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation Analysis of the academic and social performance of students with disabilities

S/n	Items	NERDC Staff = 50			Teachers = 300		
			SD	Remark		SD	Remark
Filed work 2023							
1.	Students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms perform academically compared to those in segregated settings	3.44	1.05	Agree	3.52	1.00	Agree
2.	Students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms interact socially with their peers compared to those in segregated settings	3.92	0.72	Agree	3.81	0.85	Agree
3.	Inclusive education provides students with disabilities with equal access to learning opportunities compared to segregated settings	3.71	1.00	Agree	3.68	0.86	Agree
4.	The teaching methods in inclusive classrooms affect the academic success of students with disabilities-compared to segregated settings	3.88	0.88	Agree	3.79	0.75	Agree
5.	Peer support plays in the social integration of students with disabilities in inclusive settings compared to segregated environments	3.53	1.02	Agree	3.50	0.97	Agree
6.	Peers without disabilities in inclusive settings positively impact the engagement of students with disabilities.	3.27	0.82	Agree	3. 18	0.77	Agree
7.	The resources and support available in inclusive settings affect the academic progress of students with disabilities compared to segregated environments.	3.63	1.04	Agree	3.58	1.01	Agree
	Weighted Grand Mean	**3.63**	**0.93**		**3.58**	**0.89**	

Based on input from NERDC personnel and teachers, the findings in Table I examine the main obstacles to introducing inclusive education in Nigerian schools, especially at the basic education level. As seen by the total weighted grand mean of 3.63 and 3.58, respectively, both groups agreed on the difficulties. Teacher preparation, school infrastructure, policies, community involvement, and societal attitudes are some of the challenges that have been identified. With the highest agreement scores (3.92 and 3.81), teacher preparation and professional development were seen as significant obstacles, highlighting the

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necessity of improved training to accommodate different learners. In a similar vein, insufficient school resources and infrastructure were viewed as major challenges since schools might not have the tools and resources necessary to serve all pupils, particularly those with special needs. It was also noted that the current framework for educational policy was inadequate for successfully addressing inclusive education. Although there are policies in place, the results show that they need to be modified to close implementation gaps. Another barrier that was somewhat acknowledged was parental and community involvement, indicating that greater cooperation between families and schools could enhance inclusivity. The outcome also shows that cultural views and societal attitudes toward impairments were identified as significant obstacles. The findings highlight the need for advocacy and awareness initiatives to alter perceptions and promote a more inclusive educational system by demonstrating how unfavorable attitudes may impede inclusion.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the academic performance of students with disabilities in Nigerian schools that implement inclusive education policies compared to those in segregated educational settings.

Table 2: Z-test Comparing the Mean Ratings of NERDC Staff and Teachers on the Academic Performance of Students with Disabilities in Nigerian Schools Implementing Inclusive Education Policies Versus Segregated Educational Settings.

Variables	N		SD	Df	Z-Cal.	Z-Crit.	Remark
NERDC Staff	50	3.63	0.93				Not Significant
Teachers	300	3.58	0.89	330	0.11	1.96	Ho_1 Accepted

Filed work 2023

The mean evaluations of NERDC officials and instructors regarding the academic achievement of children with disabilities in Nigerian schools that follow inclusive education policies vs those in segregated settings are contrasted in Table 2's Z-test results. The mean score for NERDC employees was 3.63 with a standard deviation of 0.93, but the mean score for teachers was somewhat lower at 3.58 with a standard deviation of 0.89. At a 0.05 significance level, the computed Z-value (0.11) is substantially less than the crucial Z-value (1.96), suggesting that there is no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of the two groups. The null hypothesis (HO1) is accepted since the computed Z-value is less than the crucial value. This implies that teachers and NERDC officials have similar opinions about how well students with disabilities perform academically in inclusive schools as opposed to segregated ones. As a result, their opinions about how inclusive education influences kids' academic performance in contrast to segregated settings do not differ significantly.

Research Question 2:

To what extent does teacher training in Nigeria impact the effectiveness of inclusive education practices in mainstream classrooms?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation Analysis on the extent to which teacher training in Nigeria impacts the effectiveness of inclusive education practices in mainstream classrooms.

S/n	Items	NERDC Staff = 50			Teachers = 300		
			SD	Remark		SD	Remark
Filed work 2023							
1.	Teacher training in Nigeria effectively prepares teachers to teach students with diverse learning needs in inclusive classrooms.	3.86	1.04	Agree	3.79	0.89	Agree
2.	My school provides adequate resources and support to implement inclusive education practices effectively after teacher training.	3.70	0.82	Agree	3.73	0.90	Agree
3.	I believe that ongoing professional development is essential to maintaining and improving the effectiveness of inclusive education in Nigerian classrooms.	3.91	0.95	Agree	3.85	0.56	Agree
4.	The content of the teacher training I received adequately covered strategies for managing inclusive classrooms.	3.75	1.00	Agree	3.60	0.86	Agree
5.	Inclusive education training has positively influenced my						

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approach to teaching students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms.	3.80	0.98	Agree	3.68	0.74	Agree
6. Teacher training programs in Nigeria should be revised to better align with the current needs of inclusive education in mainstream classrooms.	3.78	1.10	Agree	3.72	0.83	Agree
8. The collaboration between teacher training programs and schools is effective in enhancing the implementation of inclusive education practices.	3.96	0.60	Agree	3.89	0.55	Agree
Weighted Grand Mean ($\overline{X}$ $\overline{X}$)	**3.82**	**0.93**		**3.75**	**0.76**	

The findings of the Z-test in Table 2 contrast how NERDC employees and educators view the academic achievement of kids with disabilities in inclusive and segregated environments. The man score for NERDC staff was 3.63, while the mean score for instructors was somewhat lower at 3.58. The difference in perceptions was not statistically significant, with a Z-value of 0.11, which was far lower than the crucial value of 1.96. As a result, the null hypothesis (Ho1) was approved, suggesting that both groups agree that inclusive education improves student achievement. Table 3 demonstrates agreement between NERDC officials and teachers concerning Research Question Two, which deals with the impact of teacher training on the efficacy of inclusive education. There is general agreement that teacher training is valuable, as evidenced by the mean rating of 3.86 given by NERDC officials and 3.79 given by teachers. A favorable opinion of teacher training's contribution to inclusive education is shown by the overall weighted grand mean of 3.82 for NERDC employees and 3.75 for educators. The significance of continuous professional development and the necessity of updating teacher preparation curricula to better meet contemporary inclusive education standards were also emphasized by both groups.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between the challenges faced by teachers (e.g., inadequate resources and lack of training) and the effective implementation of inclusive education practices in Nigerian schools.

Table 4: Z-test of Difference between the Mean Ratings of NERDC Staff and Teachers on the Extent to which the challenges teachers face (e.g., inadequate resources and lack of training) affect the implementation of inclusive education practices in Nigerian schools.

Variables	N		SD	Df	Z-Cal.	Z-Crit.	Remark
NERDC Staff	50	3.82	0.93				Not Significant
Teachers	300	3.75	0.76	330	0.50	1.96	Ho_2 Accepted

Filed work 2023

According to Table 4, the computed Z-value is 0.50, and the mean score provided by NERDC personnel was 3.82 with a standard deviation of 0.93. At a significance level of 0.05, this Z-value is significantly less than the essential Z-value of 1.96. The null hypothesis (Ho2) is thus accepted, indicating that the perceived difficulties have no appreciable impact on the adoption of inclusive teaching methods. According to this finding, teachers and NERDC officials may have similar opinions about how difficulties affect inclusive education's efficacy, suggesting that these difficulties may not have as much of an impact as previously thought. A possible discrepancy between teachers' perceived difficulties and their real influence on the adoption of inclusive education in Nigerian schools is further highlighted by the acceptance of the null hypothesis. Although problems like a lack of training and resources are acknowledged, the research indicates that they might not be a major obstacle to good teaching methods. This may suggest that other underlying elements—like teacher resilience, regulatory frameworks, or administrative support—may be more important for the effective execution of inclusive education. Therefore, in order to create more effective strategies for its implementation in Nigeria, policymakers and educational stakeholders may need to take into account both the difficulties raised by teachers and the larger context in which inclusive education functions.

Research Question 3

What are Nigerian teachers, parents, and educational stakeholders' perceptions and attitudes toward the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools?

Table 5: Mean and Standard Deviation Analysis on the extent to which Nigerian teachers, parents and educational stakeholders' perceptions and attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools

S/n	Items	NERDC Staff = 50	Teachers = 300

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		SD	Remark		**SD**	Remark
1.	Inclusive education benefits all students, including those with disabilities.	3.82	1.02 Agree	3.90	0.87 Agree	
2.	Mainstream schools are equipped to effectively support children with disabilities.	3.91	0.99 Agree	3.84	0.73 Agree	
3.	Parents of children with disabilities are actively involved in their child's education in mainstream schools.	3.88	0.86 Agree	3.85	0.80 Agree	
4.	Inclusion in mainstream school's fosters positive social interactions between children with disabilities and their peers.	3.70	1.03 Agree	3.66	0.98 Agree	
5.	Children with disabilities can achieve academic success in inclusive classroom settings.	3.26	1.12 Agree	3.17	0.86 Agree	
6.	Cultural beliefs and attitudes towards disability influence the inclusion of children with disabilities in schools.	3.74	0.93 Agree	3.75	0.96 Agree	
7.	Existing policies regarding inclusive education in Nigeria needs to be improved					
8.	To better support children with disabilities.	3.64	1.00 Agree	3.65	0.91 Agree	
	Weighted Grand Mean ($\overline{X}$ $\overline{X}$)	**3.710.99**		**3.69**	**0.87**	

There is a generally positive consensus among Nigerian parents and teachers regarding the inclusion of children with disabilities in normal schools. With mean scores ranging from 3.17 to 3.91, NERDC staff and instructors concur on the advantages of inclusive education. For instance, both groups gave the statement "inclusive education benefits all students, including those with disabilities" high ratings—NERDC personnel gave it a score of 3.82, while teachers gave it a score of 3.90—demonstrating a strong belief in the importance of inclusion in improving educational outcomes. Both groups gave positive scores for parental participation (3.88 for NERDC staff and 3.85 for teachers), indicating a common awareness of the significance of teacher-family collaboration. Both groups felt that inclusive education promotes positive peer connections, demonstrating their recognition of the social benefits of inclusion. Concerns were raised, though, especially regarding the academic performance of kids with impairments in inclusive environments, where their mean scores were lower at 3.26 and 3.17. Furthermore, both groups concurred that Nigeria's current inclusive education laws require enhancement, underscoring the necessity of legislative change. The aggregate weighted grand averages of 3.69 for teachers and 3.71 for NERDC officials show that there is broad consensus regarding the importance of inclusive education, but they also highlight the difficulties in putting it into practice.

Table 6: Z-test of Difference between the Mean Ratings of NERDC Staff and Teachers on the extent to which Nigerian teachers, parents, and educational stakeholders' perceptions and attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools

Variables	**N**		**SD**	**Df**	**Z-Cal.**	**Z-Crit.**	**Remark**
NERDC Staff	50	3.71	0.99				Not Significant
Teachers	300	3.69	0.87	330	0.13	1.96	Ho_3 Accepted

Alpha Level = 0.05

The disparity between the mean evaluations of NERDC employees and educators with respect to their attitudes and views on the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classrooms is displayed in Table 6. The computed Z-value is 0.13, and the mean score for NERDC employees is 3.71 with a standard deviation of 0.99. At a significance level of 0.05, this number is significantly below the necessary Z-value of 1.96. The null hypothesis (Ho3) is accepted since the computed Z-value falls below the crucial threshold. This result suggests that instructors and NERDC staff have a consensus about the inclusion of children with impairments, as there is no statistically significant difference between their opinions. The null hypothesis's acceptance suggests that teachers and NERDC staff have comparable opinions about the value and effects of inclusive education. Their shared position on the inclusion of children with impairments in mainstream settings is shown in their agreement on this matter. This conclusion is significant because it implies that educators and policymakers in Nigeria's educational system have similar viewpoints, which may make it easier to work together to adopt inclusive policies. All things

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considered, the findings highlight a shared understanding of the importance of inclusive education, which should bolster support for laws and procedures that improve educational opportunities for Nigerian children with disabilities.

Discussion of Findings

In Nigeria, inclusive education has enormous potential to enhance social and academic outcomes for all students, particularly those with disabilities. According to the study conducted in junior secondary schools under the Abuja Municipal Area Council, inclusive methods like differentiated instruction and universal learning design (UDL) promote equity, engagement, and a feeling of community. Teachers and NERDC personnel stressed the value of collaborative learning and peer assistance in fostering constructive relationships between students with and without disabilities. Significant obstacles still exist, nevertheless, such as lack of infrastructure, inadequate training for teachers, and social stigma. Schools frequently lack resources like assistive technology and accessible facilities, and teachers are not adequately trained to handle a variety of learning requirements. To bridge these disparities, teacher preparation programs must be in line with inclusive education standards and involve ongoing professional development.

Progress is also hampered by societal attitudes and cultural beliefs since stigma and misunderstandings deter parents from sending their disabled children to regular schools. Establishing supportive environments for these adolescents requires cooperation from parents, teachers, and other stakeholders. To close the gap between policy and practice, the study emphasizes the necessity of better resource allocation and more stringent policy enforcement. In rural and neglected communities, more money is especially needed for technology, teacher preparation, and infrastructure.

Conclusion

Nigeria has made strides toward inclusive education through international agreements and regulations, but there are still obstacles to overcome. Making inclusive education a reality requires addressing infrastructure deficiencies, enhancing teacher preparation, and overcoming social stigmas. For all students, regardless of background or ability, to have access to high-quality education, cooperation between the government, civil society, and educational institutions is required. Globally, frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) support inclusive education as a human right. All kids must receive an education that promotes equity, empathy, teamwork, and respect for diversity. Differentiated instruction and universal design for learning (UDL) are two strategies that teachers use to modify their teaching strategies to accommodate a diverse student body. Nigeria is committed to these ideals, although in practice, they are not always followed, especially in rural areas where there are few resources and skills. For inclusive education to be implemented successfully, educators, parents, administrators, legislators, and advocacy organizations must work together. By working together, we can make sure that schools have the infrastructure and resources they need to serve every student. In the end, inclusive education fosters social cohesion, raises academic achievement, and creates the groundwork for just societies in which all people, regardless of aptitude, can prosper.

Recommendations

1. It is important to offer frequent, thorough training on differentiated instruction, special education requirements, and inclusive pedagogies. Programs for ongoing professional development can give educators the tools they need to successfully lead inclusive classrooms.
2. Ramps, classroom modifications, and assistive technology for students with disabilities are examples of accessible infrastructure that should be installed in schools. To bridge resource allocation gaps, the government should fund the development of inclusive learning environments, particularly in underprivileged and rural areas.
3. It is essential to set aside enough money to promote inclusive education efforts. To guarantee that schools have enough funding to supply specialized teaching materials and assistive technology, the Nigerian government should work with the business sector and non-governmental organizations.
4. Nigeria has policies that support inclusive education, but they are not always implemented consistently. To guarantee that schools adhere to inclusive education requirements, like those outlined in the National Policy on Education, the government should bolster policy enforcement and set up monitoring mechanisms.
5. Public awareness efforts are necessary to combat the stigma associated with disability in society and the false beliefs about students with special needs. More acceptance and support for inclusive education can result from these programs' ability to cultivate a more inclusive mentality among communities, educators, and parents.

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6. To establish a supportive environment for students with disabilities, parents, educators, school administrators, and government representatives must collaborate. To guarantee that each student thrives in an inclusive environment and to customize learning experiences to meet their needs, active parent-teacher engagement is required.
7. Students with disabilities can participate more actively in class when technology, such as assistive devices and adaptive learning tools, are used. Partnerships between public and private entities should be investigated to supply these resources to both public and private schools.

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