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Policies and Programs Driving Inclusive Education for Children with Learning Disabilities: Stakeholder Roles and Implementation Strategies” in Bo District Southern Sierra Leone

Hawa Marah¹, Matthew Tommy Hanson², Tony Patrick George^{3*}, Peter Brima Myers⁴

¹ Department of sociology and social work school of social sciences and Law Njala university

² Department of sociology and social work school of social sciences and Law Njala university

^{3,4} Department of Teacher Education, School of Basic Education Njala University

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***Corresponding author: Tony Patrick George**

Department of Teacher Education, School of Basic Education Njala University

Abstract

This study explores the policies and programs enacted by educational stakeholders to promote inclusive education for children with learning disabilities in Bo District, Southern Sierra Leone. Despite national and international commitments to inclusive education, the effective implementation of inclusive practices for learners with disabilities remains a significant challenge in resource-constrained settings. Drawing on both qualitative and quantitative data, the study Examine the level of awareness among stakeholders regarding policies on inclusive education for children with learning disabilities. Analyze the national policies guiding inclusive education for children with learning disabilities and their implications for implementation in schools, Assess the inclusive education programs implemented in schools for children with learning disabilities and their effectiveness, examine the methods used to customize inclusive education programs to meet the specific needs of children with learning disabilities in schools.”

The research identifies existing inclusive education policies under the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) and assesses how these are translated into school-level strategies. Interviews and surveys were conducted with teachers, district education officials, and community leaders to understand their perceptions, roles, and challenges in supporting inclusive practices. The findings reveal that while policies exist, there is limited awareness, inadequate teacher training, insufficient infrastructure, and minimal stakeholder coordination, all of which hinder effective implementation.

The study concludes that a collaborative, well-resourced, and context-sensitive approach is essential to achieving meaningful inclusion. It recommends strengthening stakeholder engagement, increasing investment in special needs education, and building the capacity of educators through sustained professional development. The findings contribute to the broader discourse on inclusive education in sub-Saharan Africa and offer policy recommendations for improving access and equity for learners with disabilities in Sierra Leone.

Keywords: Inclusive education, learning disabilities, teacher training, educational policy, stakeholder engagement, Sierra Leone, Bo District, implementation strategies, special needs education, education equity

1. INTRODUCTION

In Sierra Leone, various stakeholders have implemented policies and programs to promote inclusive education for children with learning disabilities. These initiatives aim to ensure that every child, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, has access to quality education. One significant policy in Sierra Leone is the Education Act of 2004, which emphasizes the right to education for all children, including those with disabilities Adeola, (2015). This policy sets the foundation for inclusive education by recognizing the importance of providing equal opportunities for children with learning disabilities. According to Florian, et al (2016). inclusive education is not simply about placing learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms but about transforming teaching methods to be responsive to all.

To support the implementation of inclusive education, the Ministry of Basic and Secondary in Sierra Leone has developed the National Policy on Radical Inclusion in schools Education, S. (2021). This policy outlines strategies to ensure that children with learning disabilities are included in mainstream schools and receive appropriate support. It emphasizes the importance of providing specialized training for teachers and promoting inclusive teaching practices. To address the specific needs of children with learning disabilities, Sierra Leone has implemented the Inclusive Education Support Program (IESP) Vescovi, et al (2021). This program aims to provide additional support to children with disabilities in mainstream schools. It includes interventions such as individualized education plans, assistive technologies, and specialized teaching methods. Zubeda, (2020). which argues that the IEP focuses on training teachers to effectively support children with learning disabilities in regular classrooms.

In addition, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a crucial role in promoting inclusive education in Sierra Leone. One such organization is the Sierra Leone Association of the Deaf (SLAD), which advocates for the rights of deaf children and provides support services. SLAD works closely with schools and communities to raise awareness about the needs of deaf children and promote their inclusion in mainstream education. Another notable program is the Inclusive Education Teacher Training Program (IETTP) implemented by the NGO, Plan International. This program aims to enhance the capacity of teachers to effectively support children with learning disabilities in mainstream classrooms. It provides training on inclusive teaching strategies, assessment methods, and the use of assistive technologies Grönlund, (2010).

In Sierra Leone, the national policy on Radical Inclusion in schools aims to ensure the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities. This policy recognizes the importance of providing equal educational opportunities to all children, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. The policy

emphasizes the involvement of stakeholders, including parents, teachers, school administrators, and the government, to effectively implement inclusive education practices Hollings, (2021). One key aspect of the policy is the involvement of parents and caregivers in the education of children with learning disabilities. The policy encourages parents to actively participate in their children's education by attending parent-teacher meetings, joining parent support groups, and collaborating with teachers to develop individualized education plans for their children Otieno (2024).

Furthermore, the policy emphasizes the need for teacher training and professional development programs to equip educators with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively support children with learning disabilities. Byrd & Alexander (2020). It recognizes that teachers play a crucial role in creating an inclusive learning environment and calls for the provision of ongoing training and support to ensure that teachers are adequately prepared to meet the diverse needs of all students. In addition to involving parents and teachers, the policy also highlights the importance of collaboration between school administrators and relevant government bodies. It calls for the establishment of special education units within schools and the allocation of resources to support the implementation of inclusive education practices. The policy also emphasizes the need for regular monitoring and evaluation to assess the effectiveness of inclusive education programs and make necessary adjustments Otieno (2024).

Adewumi, & Mosito, (2019) argues that inclusion fails not because of poor intent but due to weak support systems and lack of inclusive learning tools. In Sierra Leone, the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities is being supported through the Special Needs Education Support Program (SNEP). This program has been enrolled by various stakeholders who recognize the importance of providing equal educational opportunities for all children, regardless of their learning abilities. One key stakeholder involved in the implementation of inclusive education is the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, (MBSSE). The MBSSE has taken an active role in promoting inclusive education policies and practices in the country. They have developed guidelines and frameworks to ensure that schools are equipped to cater to the diverse needs of all learners, including those with learning disabilities Brussino, (2020).

Another important stakeholder in the SNEP is the Sierra Leone Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (SLANGO). SLANGO is a coalition of non-governmental organizations that work together to promote inclusive education in the country. They provide training and capacity-building programs for teachers and school administrators to enhance their knowledge

and skills in supporting children with learning disabilities (SLANGO, 2019).

According to Kenny, et al (2023). argues that stakeholder awareness must be paired with consistent school-level leadership and peer collaboration to foster sustainable inclusion. Local communities and parents also play a crucial role in the implementation of inclusive education. They are actively involved in advocating for the rights of children with learning disabilities and ensuring that their needs are met within the education system. Community-based organizations, such as the Sierra Leone Society for the Welfare of Persons with Disabilities (SLSWPD), provide support and resources to parents and caregivers of children with learning disabilities (SLSWPD, 2020).

Additionally, international organizations have partnered with Sierra Leone to support the implementation of inclusive education. For example, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF 2018) has collaborated with the government to develop inclusive education programs and initiatives. They provide technical assistance, training, and resources to improve the quality of education for children with learning disabilities Nair, et al (2023). the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities in Sierra Leone is supported by various stakeholders. The Ministry of Education, , non-governmental organizations like SLANGO, local communities, parents, and international organizations such as UNICEF all contribute to ensuring that children with learning disabilities have equal access to quality education in the country. These collaborative efforts are essential in creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment for all children in Sierra Leone. Sesay Jr, (2018).

Plan International has implemented an Inclusive Education Teacher Training Program in Sierra Leone, aimed at promoting inclusive education for children with learning disabilities Kaindaneh, et al (2024). This program is designed to equip teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively support and educate children with diverse learning needs in mainstream classrooms. The program includes comprehensive training modules that cover various aspects of inclusive education, such as understanding different types of learning disabilities, adapting teaching strategies to meet individual needs, and creating inclusive learning environments. Through this training, teachers are empowered to identify and address the specific learning needs of each student, ensuring that no child is left behind. Kaindaneh, et al (2024).

Moreover, the program also emphasizes the importance of collaboration and partnership between teachers, parents, and the community in supporting children with learning disabilities (Plan International, 2020). By involving all stakeholders in the education process, the program aims to create a supportive and inclusive environment that enables children with learning disabilities to thrive. Kaindaneh, et al (2024). The Inclusive Education Teacher Training Program implemented by Plan International in Sierra Leone aligns with the global movement towards inclusive education, which recognizes the rights of all children to receive quality education regardless of their abilities or disabilities. By providing teachers with the necessary training and support, the program contributes to the development of an inclusive education system that promotes equal opportunities for all children. Kaindaneh, et al (2024).

According to Al-Thani (2024), emphasizes that inclusive education must be a collaborative effort where multi-stakeholder engagement ensures continuity and responsiveness to learner needs. In Sierra Leone, the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities requires the enrollment of stakeholders in resource allocation and legal protection programs. This is crucial to ensure that these children receive the necessary support and equal opportunities for education. One key stakeholder in the implementation of inclusive education is the government. The government of Sierra Leone has recognized the importance of inclusive education and has allocated resources to support its implementation. For instance, the Ministry of Education has established a Teacher Training Program specifically designed to train teachers in inclusive education strategies (Government of Sierra Leone, 2015). This program aims to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills to effectively cater to the diverse needs of children with learning disabilities in mainstream classrooms.

According to Silver, (2012), the presence of legal backing is essential to enforce anti-discrimination and promote systemic inclusion. Furthermore, legal protection programs have been put in place to safeguard the rights of children with learning disabilities in Sierra Leone. The Disability Act of 2011 is a significant legislation that provides legal protection and promotes the inclusion of persons with disabilities, including children with learning disabilities, in all aspects of society, including education (Government of Sierra Leone, 2011). This act ensures that children with learning disabilities have equal access to education and are protected against discrimination. In addition to the government's initiatives, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also play a vital role in supporting inclusive education for children with learning disabilities in Sierra Leone. For example, the NGO "Education for All" has been actively involved in advocating for the rights of children with disabilities and providing resources for inclusive education. This includes the provision of assistive devices, such as braille materials and hearing aids, to enhance the learning experience of children with learning disabilities.

2. Methodology

The research design for this study was a descriptive survey design, as it aims to evaluate. The factors impacting the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities in Gbitima Layout. The decision to opt for a descriptive survey design stems from the need to ensure accuracy and minimize bias in the data collection process, thereby enhancing the

Reliability of the evidence gathered by Kapur (2018). This research approach primarily focuses on gathering information that describes existing phenomena by eliciting individuals' opinions, attitudes, and values. It proves valuable in illuminating the conditions or relationships between

variables (Cohen et al, 2017). Consequently, considering the objectives of this study, a descriptive survey research method was deemed suitable for comprehensively assessing the factors affecting the successful implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities.

Objective of the Study

1. To examine the level of awareness among stakeholders regarding policies on inclusive education for children with learning disabilities.”

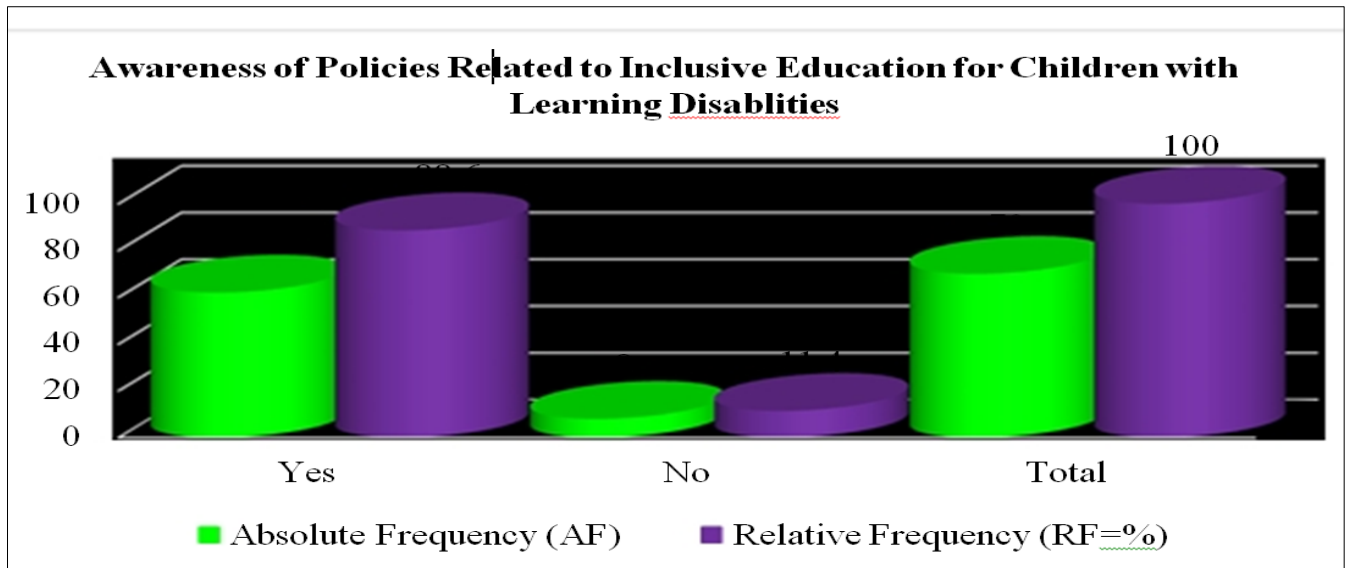
2. To analyze the national policies guiding inclusive education for children with learning disabilities and their implications for implementation in schools.”
3. To assess the inclusive education programs implemented in schools for children with learning disabilities and their effectiveness.”

4. To examine the methods used to customize inclusive education programs to meet the specific needs of children with learning disabilities in schools.”

Research Objective 1

To examine the level of awareness among stakeholders regarding policies on inclusive education for children with learning disabilities.”

FIGURE 1



Source: Research Data 2025

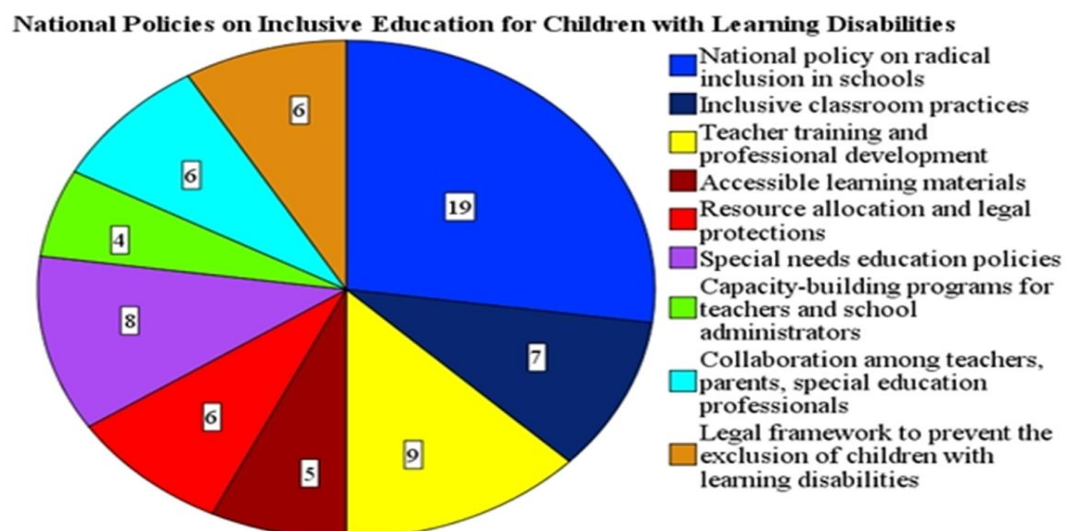
The data presented in Figure 1 clearly demonstrates that a large majority of the respondents, specifically 62 individuals, which accounts for (88.6%) of the total participants, expressed their awareness and understanding of policies related to inclusive education for children with learning disabilities. This indicates that a significant portion of the sample population is well-informed about the guidelines and regulations in place to ensure that children with learning disabilities receive equal opportunities and support in educational settings. On the other hand, a smaller proportion of the participants, consisting of only 8 individuals or (11.4%) of

the total respondents, held a contrasting perspective regarding their familiarity with inclusive education policies for children with learning disabilities. These participants may have indicated that they were not well-acquainted with the specific policies or may have expressed a lack of awareness altogether.

Research Objective 2

To analyze the national policies guiding inclusive education for children with learning disabilities and their implications for implementation in schools.”

Figure 2



Source: Research Data 2025

The findings of the study, as depicted in Figure 2, demonstrate various factors that were mentioned by the respondents. Among the participants, 19 individuals (27.1%) referred to the national policy on radical inclusion in schools for children with learning disabilities.

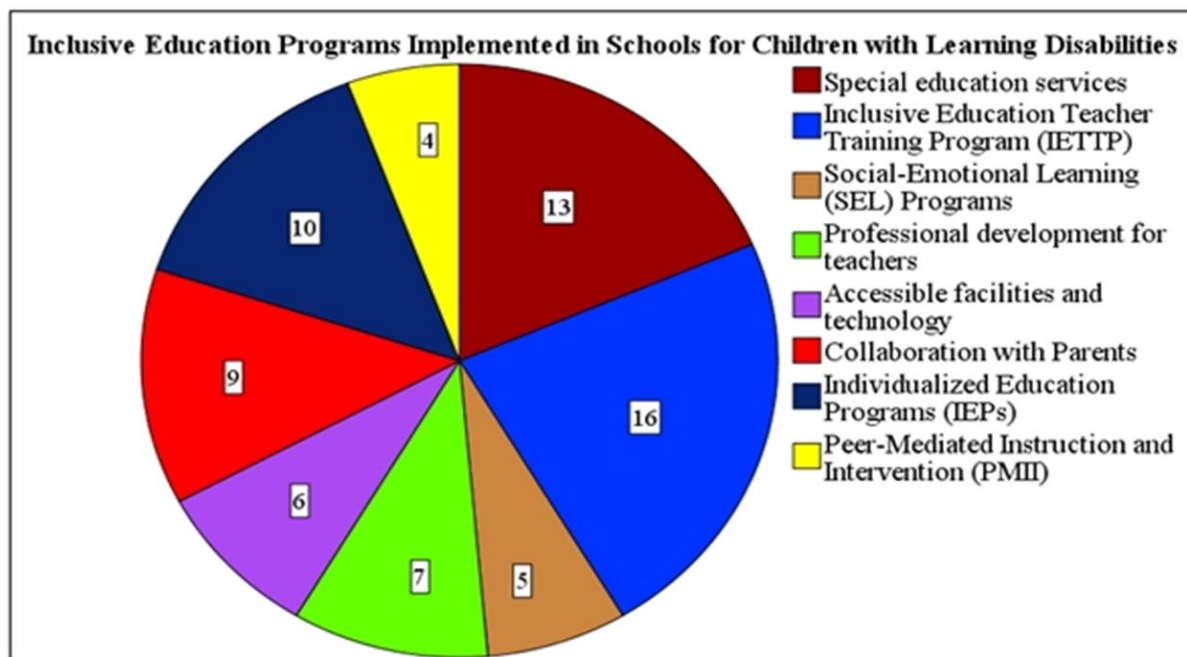
Additionally, 9 participants (12.9%) highlighted the importance of teacher training and professional development. Furthermore, 8 individuals (11.4%) emphasized the significance of special needs education policies. Inclusive classroom practices were mentioned by 7 respondents (10.0%), while 6 participants (8.6%) identified resource allocation and legal protections as crucial factors. Collaboration among teachers, parents, and special education professionals was outlined by another 6 individuals (8.6%).

Similarly, 6 sampled participants (8.6%) expressed the necessity of a legal framework to prevent the exclusion of children with learning disabilities. Moreover, 5 respondents (7.1%) reported the importance of accessible learning materials, and the remaining 4 individuals (5.7%) highlighted the significance of capacity-building programs for teachers and school administrators. The outcome of the study highlights the importance of having a clear and inclusive policy framework in place to ensure that all children with learning disabilities have equal access to education.

Objective 3

To assess the inclusive education programs implemented in schools for children with learning disabilities and their effectiveness.”

Figure 3



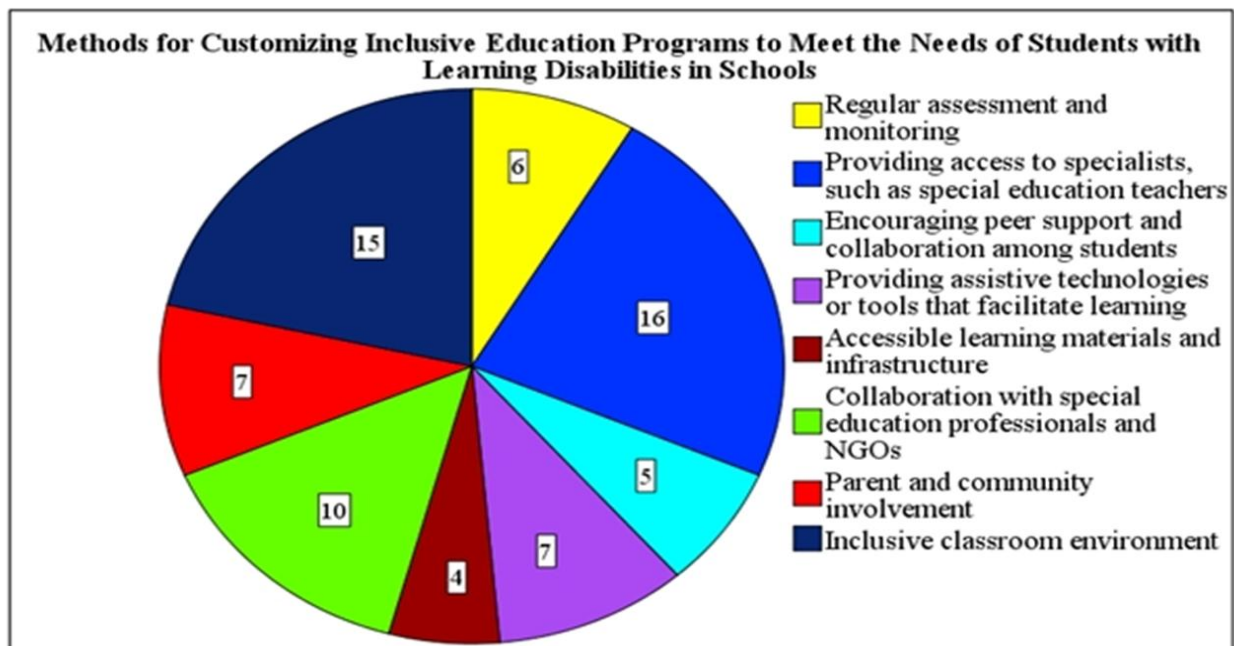
Source: Research Data 2025

The investigation depicted in Figure 12 explored various approaches that have been implemented in schools for children with learning disabilities. The findings of the investigation revealed several key approaches that were reported by the participants. Firstly, the Inclusive Education Teacher Training Program (IETTP) was reported by 16 respondents, accounting for (22.9%) of the participants. This program focuses on training teachers to effectively support and educate students with learning disabilities within inclusive classrooms. Secondly, special education services were mentioned by 13 participants, making up (18.6%) of the respondents. These services provide additional support and accommodations for students with learning disabilities, ensuring that their individual needs are met. Furthermore, the utilization of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) was emphasized by 10 respondents, representing (14.3%) of the participants. IEPs are personalized plans that outline specific goals, accommodations, and support services for students with learning disabilities. The importance of collaboration with parents was highlighted by 9 individuals, accounting for (12.9%) of the respondents. This emphasizes the significance of involving parents in the education and decision-making process, as they play a crucial role in supporting their child's learning and development.

Moreover, 7 study participants acknowledged the significance of professional development for teachers, representing (10.0%) of the targeted population. This highlights the importance of ongoing training and support for teachers to enhance their knowledge and skills in effectively teaching students with learning disabilities. Accessible facilities and technology were expressed by 6 research subjects, making up (8.6%) of the participants. This emphasizes the need for schools to provide physical and technological resources that are accessible and inclusive for students with learning disabilities. Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Programs were asserted by 5 members of the study population, representing (7.1%) of the respondents. These programs focus on developing students' social and emotional skills, which are essential for their overall well-being and academic success. Lastly, Peer-Mediated Instruction and Intervention (PMII) were indicated by 4 individuals, accounting for (5.1%) of the targeted population. This approach involves peers providing support and instruction to students with learning disabilities, promoting social interaction and academic growth.

Objective 4

To examine the methods used to customize inclusive education programs to meet the specific needs of children with learning disabilities in schools.”



Source: Research Data 2025

The findings of the study, as depicted in Figure 4, demonstrate a range of approaches used in schools to meet the educational needs of children with learning disabilities. The data collected from the respondents revealed several key components of customized inclusive education programs. Firstly, 16 participants (22.9%) highlighted the provision of access to specialists, such as special education teachers, as a crucial aspect of these programs. This suggests that having professionals with expertise in supporting students with learning disabilities is seen as essential in ensuring their educational success. Additionally, 15 participants (21.4%) emphasized the importance of creating an inclusive classroom environment. This indicates that schools recognize the significance of fostering an atmosphere where all students feel valued and included, regardless of their learning abilities. Collaboration with special education professionals and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) was identified by 10 respondents (14.3%) as another significant factor. This suggests that schools are actively seeking partnerships and support from external organizations to enhance their inclusive education programs.

Furthermore, 7 individuals (10.0%) stressed the necessity of providing assistive technologies or tools that facilitate learning. This highlights the recognition of the role technology can play in supporting students with learning disabilities and ensuring equal access to education. Similarly, 7 sampled respondents (10.0%) reported the importance of parent and community involvement. This indicates that schools acknowledge the value of engaging parents and the wider community in supporting the educational needs of children with learning disabilities. A smaller proportion of the study population, 6 individuals (8.6%), asserted the significance of regular assessment and monitoring. This suggests that schools recognize the importance of continuously evaluating the progress and needs of students with learning disabilities to provide appropriate support.

Moreover, 5 respondents (7.1%) outlined the need for regular assessment and monitoring, indicating the importance of ongoing evaluation in ensuring the effectiveness of inclusive education

programs. Lastly, the remaining 4 research participants (5.1%) of the targeted population emphasized the importance of accessible learning materials and infrastructure. This suggests that schools recognize the need for physical and instructional accommodations to ensure that students with learning disabilities can fully participate in the educational process

3. Result and Discussion

The findings in figure 1 highlight the importance of promoting and disseminating information about inclusive education policies to ensure that all stakeholders, including educators, parents and policymakers, are well-informed and equipped to support children with learning disabilities effectively. It also suggests that there may be a need for targeted interventions or educational initiatives to increase awareness and understanding among the minority of participants who expressed a lack of familiarity with inclusive education policies.

According to Florian, et al . (2016). inclusive education is not simply about placing learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms but about transforming teaching methods to be responsive to all. This transformation requires that teachers not only be aware of policies but also be professionally developed to operationalize them effectively. Similarly, Kenny, et al (2023). argues that stakeholder awareness must be paired with consistent school-level leadership and peer collaboration to foster sustainable inclusion. Policies must be embedded into school culture and teacher education programs.

The results obtained from the study indicate that in Sierra Leone, the national policy on inclusive education for children with learning disabilities is designed to ensure equal educational opportunities for all children, regardless of any disabilities they may have. This policy acknowledges the fundamental right of every child to receive a high-quality education, regardless of their individual learning capabilities (Ministry of Education, 2019). In addition, the findings suggest that a crucial component of this national policy is the provision of appropriate support and accommodations to cater to the diverse needs of children with learning disabilities. This includes the implementation of

Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for students facing specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Furthermore, the policy stresses the importance of training and professional development for teachers in order to effectively assist children with learning disabilities. It underscores the necessity of specialized training programs and workshops to equip teachers with the essential skills and knowledge required to address the unique learning needs of these children (Ministry of Education, 2019).

As noted by Florian et al 2016, inclusive education is only possible when teachers are trained not only in pedagogy but in flexibility and differentiated instruction. Collaboration among Teachers, Parents, and Special Education Professionals (6%) is vital for sustaining inclusive practices beyond individual classrooms. Al-Thani, (2024).emphasizes that inclusive education must be a collaborative effort where multi-stakeholder engagement ensures continuity and responsiveness to learner needs. Accessible Learning Materials (5%) and Resource Allocation and Legal Protections (6%), though present, remain under-addressed. These are critical enablers of inclusion but are often neglected due to funding and infrastructural challenges. Adewumi, & Mosito, (2019) argues that inclusion fails not because of poor intent but due to weak support systems and lack of inclusive learning tools. Legal Frameworks to Prevent Exclusion (6%) point to the growing recognition of disability rights in the educational sector. The presence of legal backing is essential to enforce anti-discrimination and promote systemic inclusion Silver, (2012).

The study reveals a variety of approaches that have been put into practice in schools to address the needs of children with learning disabilities. These approaches aim to create inclusive and supportive environments that cater to the unique requirements of these students. Additionally, the findings confirm that inclusive education programs have been implemented in Sierra Leonean schools to cater to the needs of children with learning disabilities. The objective of these programs is to provide equal educational opportunities for all students, regardless of their abilities. Regarding the Inclusive Education Teacher Training Program (IETTP), the study suggests that one example of an inclusive education program in Sierra Leone is the Inclusive Education Project (IEP), which is carried out by the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE), in collaboration with UNICEF. The study's findings align with a previous research conducted by Zubeda, (2020). which argues that the IEP focuses on training teachers to effectively support children with learning disabilities in regular classrooms. The study also found that teachers who underwent training through the IEP reported an improvement in their knowledge and skills in adapting their teaching methods to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities.

In conclusion, the research has deduced that the investigation's findings shed light on the diverse methods utilized by schools to cater to the educational requirements of children with learning disabilities. These methods encompass a variety of aspects, such as access to specialists, the establishment of an inclusive environment, collaboration with external organizations, the provision of assistive technologies, involvement of parents and the community, regular assessment and monitoring, and the assurance of accessible learning materials and infrastructure.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The impetus of the objective was to analyze the policies and programs implemented by various stakeholders to promote inclusive education for children with learning disabilities. The results of the study indicated that a majority of the survey participants demonstrated a good understanding of the policies pertaining to inclusive education for children with learning disabilities in Sierra Leone.

These insights led to the identification of several national policies developed by stakeholders, including the implementation of radical inclusion in schools, adoption of inclusive classroom practices, provision of teacher training and professional development opportunities, availability of accessible learning materials, allocation of resources, establishment of legal protections, formulation of special needs education policies, implementation of capacity-building programs for teachers and school administrators, as well as the promotion of collaboration among teachers, parents, and special education professionals. Additionally, there was an emphasis on the need for a legal framework to prevent the exclusion of children with learning disabilities.

Within the framework of the objective, the study concludes that stakeholders' policies and programs play a significant role in shaping the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities. Government policies, educational authorities' guidelines, and non-governmental organizations' initiatives influence the direction and scope of inclusive education in schools. When stakeholders prioritize and invest resources in promoting inclusive education, it can greatly contribute to its successful implementation.

Recommendation

School administrators should work with education authorities to develop and implement policies that support inclusive education. These policies should address issues such as curriculum adaptation, assessment accommodations, and the provision of support services for children with learning disabilities.

Governments and NGOs should allocate sufficient funding to support inclusive education for children with learning disabilities. This includes funding for teacher training, specialized resources, and support services.

Governments should develop and implement inclusive education policies that prioritize the rights and needs of children with learning disabilities. These policies should focus on removing barriers to inclusion, promoting access to quality education, and ensuring equal opportunities for all children.

Governments and NGOs should provide comprehensive training programs for teachers to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively support children with learning disabilities in inclusive classrooms. This includes training on individualized instruction, differentiated teaching strategies, and the use of assistive technologies.

Governments, policy makers, and NGOs should collaborate and network with each other to share best practices, resources, and expertise in the field of inclusive education. This can be done through workshops, conferences, and online platforms. Governments, policy makers, and NGOs should invest in research and data collection to better understand the challenges and needs of children with learning disabilities in inclusive education settings.

This data can inform policy development, resource allocation, and program evaluation.

Governments and NGOs should actively involve parents and communities in the decision-making process regarding inclusive education. This includes seeking their input, addressing their concerns, and providing them with information and support to actively participate in their child's education. Governments, policy makers, and NGOs should also raise awareness about the importance of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities. This includes advocating for inclusive education policies, challenging stereotypes and misconceptions, and promoting a culture of acceptance and inclusion in schools and communities.

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