

# CHAPTER FIFTEEN

## FUNDING POLICY GAPS IN SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

**Godwin Owoicho Akpa Prof**

*Department of Educational Planning and Administration,  
University of Jos.*

### **Introduction**

Literature and specifically, statistics on Special Needs Education (SNE) in Nigeria is presently slim. More perturbing, is that which relates to funding. What education suffers generally, is more severe with SNE.

This chapter espouses the place of SNE in the development of the individuals living with disability and wholesome societal development at large. Indeed, the more compelling voice, is the yearn for all inclusiveness or leaving no one behind in the Education for All. Understandably, however, education is a costly social service. And SNE as expected, should cost even more. The reasons are not so far-fetched. Simply, the teachers are special, the teaching and learning facilities are special, and the supporting infrastructure is special. Everything about SNE, including the learners are special and therefore costly. Coming with the understanding of huge cost requirements of SNE an expected robust funding policy, clearly enunciated in both the national policy on Education as well as the National Policy on Special Needs Education are imperative. But the gaps are too obvious. Both documents merely list possible sources but without specifying how. It is expected that the policy should also indicate the weight of the burden on each shareholder.

As the proverbial adage goes, the goat to be fed by the community is very likely to starve. It is a result of the non specificity of who pays what and the mechanism for collection and accountability that SNE is grossly underfunded and its delivery sub-optimal.

### **Thesis Statement**

This chapter addresses funding policy gaps in special needs education in Nigeria. It begins by underscoring the place of Special Needs Education in the individual and societal development. This then forms the basis for examining the status of SNE in Nigeria. The review shows the sub-optimal state of affairs; found to be rooted in the cost of SNE, vis-à-vis the subsisting practice as evidence of funding policy gap. Both the national policy on education (2013) and the National Policy on Special Needs Education (2015) contains weak policy statements without actionable guides. The main thesis of the paper is the imperativeness of improved funding policy that can facilitate how to work the talk in SNE in Nigeria.

## **The Place of Special Needs Education (SNE) in Individual and Societal Development**

SNE is auspiciously designed for the mentally, physically, socially and/or emotionally delayed or obstructed; thereby jeopardising their physical, cognitive and scholastic skills development. Because their needs cannot be met within the traditional classroom environment, the lag behind their peers (AfroEden, 2021). This is because they suffer visual impairment, physical and health impairment, intellectual disability, emotional and behavioural disorders, speech and language impairment, learning disabilities as well as the Gifted and the Talented.

The United Nations estimates 25 percent of the country's population to be in the special needs category, which National Population Commission estimates to be 19 million in 2020 (EduCeleb.com, 2020). Of this number, according to Umoh (2021), only 2 percent are educated. This is far from the 10 percent reported by Newswire (2021).

The basic fact is that education modifies behaviour, equips one with skills, acculturates and enculturates, widens one's horizons and raises the income profile of the educated. This may not be easily attainable by persons living with disabilities. Consequently, they are more likely to experience adverse socio-economic outcomes, such as less education, poor health access, lower level of employment and much higher rates of poverty (Ofoegbu, 2021).

In order to reverse this trend and change the narrative, and step up special needs schools, either as full-fledged or inclusive schools, so that all children including those with disabilities have the right to qualitative, functional and effective basic education (UBE Act 2004; FRN, 2013; FME, 2015 and Ofoegbu 2021). Without that, the huge population of about 25 percent of 200 million or 50 million will be the nation's burden.

The only escape that is also through the individual challenged and the societal wellbeing, growth and development is investment in SNE.

### **The Status of SNE in Nigeria**

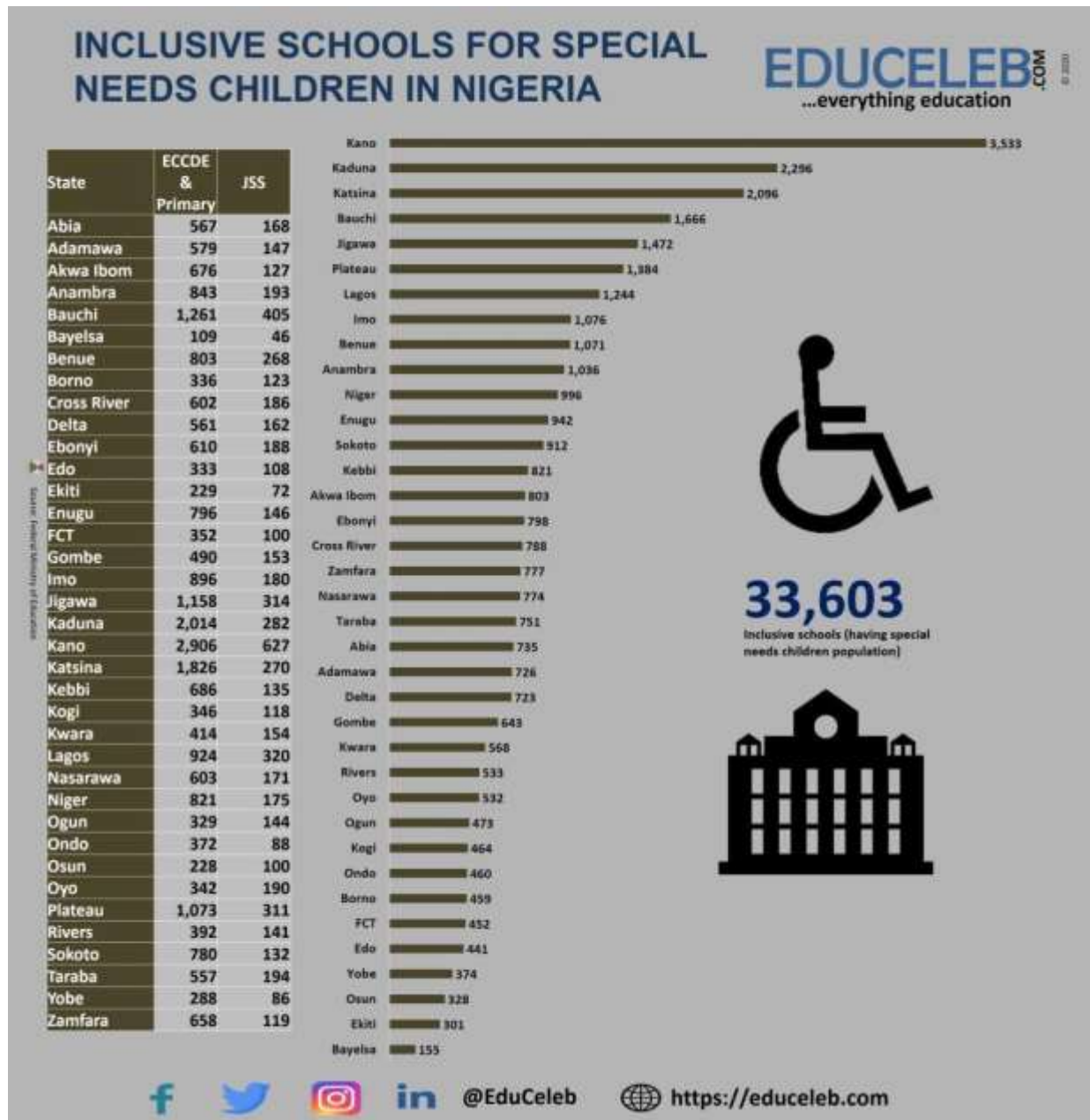
Education for all special needs persons is free in SNS as full fledged or inclusive. The full fledged schools include schools for the blind, schools for the deaf and speech therapy centres. The inclusive schools provide learning opportunities for those with special needs along with normal children in the same environment.

The SNE aligns with Equal Rights Act and Discrimination against persons with disabilities prohibition Act (2019). The law is on track to attaining particularly Goal 4 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Ofoegbu, 2021).

Furthermore, the UBE Act (2004), National policy on education (2013) and National Policy on Special Needs Education (2015) require governments

should ensure that education of persons with special needs is free at all levels, furthermore, according to Ofoegbu (2021 P.2),” the Federal, State and Local Governments are also to ensure that all necessary training, facilities and equipment that will ensure easy access and implementation of Special Needs Education programmes and services are provided for”

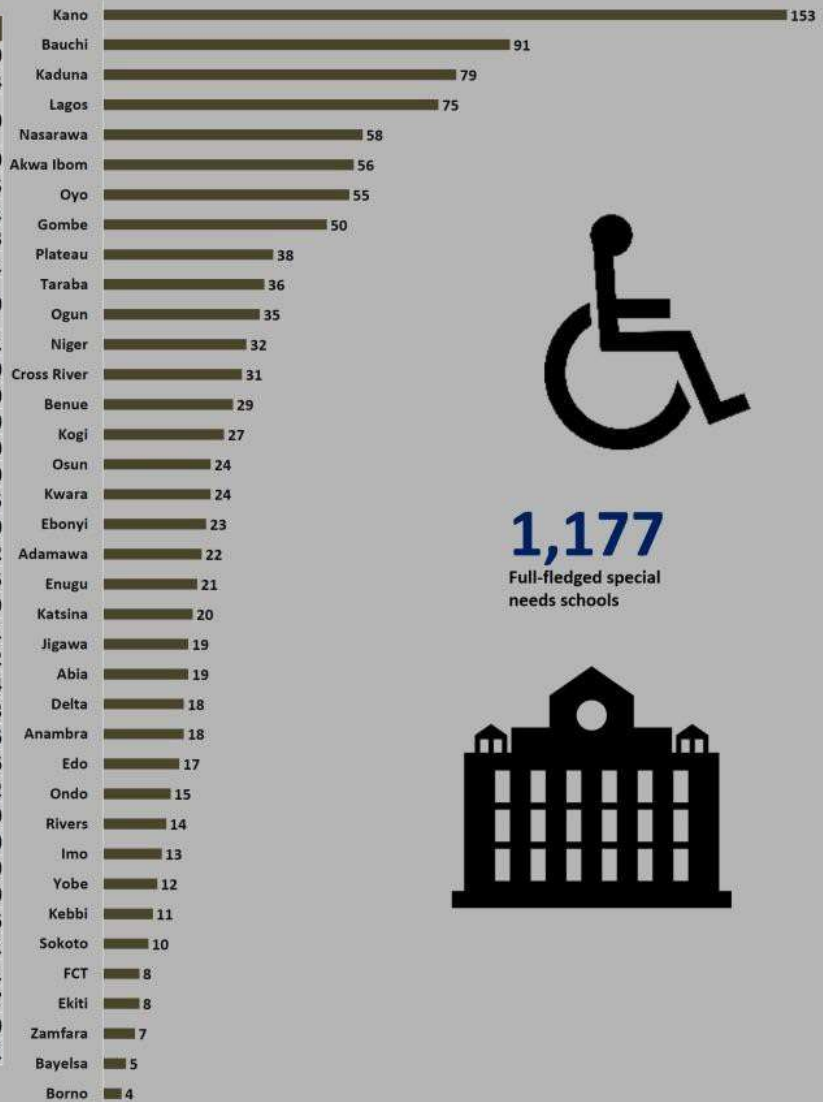
In spite of the delay in implementing the Act, Tables 1, 2 and 3 tell sufficient stories about the status of SNE in Nigeria.



# FULL-FLEDGED SPECIAL NEEDS SCHOOLS IN NIGERIA

State	ECCDE	Primary	JSS
Abia	9	10	0
Adamawa	5	13	4
Akwa Ibom	28	28	0
Anambra	8	10	0
Bauchi	16	70	5
Bayelsa	2	2	1
Benue	10	16	3
Borno	0	3	1
Cross River	15	16	0
Delta	8	9	1
Ebonyi	7	16	0
Edo	7	10	0
Ekiti	4	4	0
Enugu	10	11	0
FCT	4	4	0
Gombe	17	28	5
Imo	5	8	0
Jigawa	7	10	2
Kaduna	24	50	5
Kano	62	82	9
Katsina	6	13	1
Kebbi	4	5	2
Kogi	7	16	4
Kwara	10	11	3
Lagos	34	35	6
Nasarawa	21	31	6
Niger	10	20	2
Ogun	16	19	0
Ondo	7	8	0
Osun	8	16	0
Oyo	27	28	0
Plateau	13	19	6
Rivers	7	6	1
Sokoto	2	7	1
Taraba	7	22	7
Yobe	1	11	0
Zamfara	1	5	1

Source: Federal Ministry of Education



**1,177**

Full-fledged special needs schools



@EduCeleb



<https://educeleb.com>

## The cost of SNE in Nigeria

Weighed against the huge population of special needs persons the preceding statistics of special needs schools is inadequate. A number of factors may be adduced for this inadequacy.

1. Generally, Governments response to providing SNE is lower than private sector participation. But most of private sector participation are profit- driven: thus making SNE inaccessible to them that are generally poorer.
2. Theactof attracting andretainingqualifiedpersonnelis high. Soalso is the cost of specialised retraining to be abreast with the fast growing technological advancement in SNE pedagogy.
3. Great difficulty in influencing attitudes & mindsets and stereo-types arising from ignorance and overwhelming myths that SNE is a wrong investment. Also,the cultural bias, social stigma and perception of talking about disability as a taboo, combine to escalate the cost of advocacy and delivery of SNE.
4. The special nature of SNE carries with it enormous cost. For example, buildings must have ramps, interpreters and sign language experts as well as high-tech equipment for training in the diverse areas of SNE
5. SNE draws heavily from medical practice, i.e. the need for high level expertise that can manage programmes for the gifted and the talented children. E.g. their early identification and nurture. Special Needs Schools “shall be required to arrange regular sensory, medical and physiological screening assessments to identify any incidence of exceptionality”
6. Funding for SNE possess a perennial challenge as it either seems insufficient, non-existent or not applied for the purpose or all of the above (Obaka, 2017).
7. Inadequate funding against high cost of materials and equipment and dearth of specialists (Oladejo and Oladejo, 2011).
8. Cost-benefit and rate-of-return analysis of SNE investment in time, men, money and materials weighed against opportunity cost and other concrete derivable, e.g. employability and employment opportunities.
9. The policy documents prescribe teacher- pupil ratio of 1:10. This has far reaching implication e.g. more classroom spaces, more teachers, more man hours that combine to escalate the cost of SNE (FRN, 2013; FME, 2015)

Education is a costly social service. SNE is even more capital intensive as highlighted above. This explains why a robust funding policy is imperative.

#### Imperative of Improved Funding Policy

SNE is capital intensive, as said earlier, given its special nature, including procurement of assistive learning technologies, materials and equipment, e.g.

- Perkins braille, braille textbooks, braille talking watch.
- Audiometers, speech trainers, hearing aids, earmould machines
- Callipers, prostheses, crutches, wheelchairs
- Audio-visual engagement
- Internet connectivity
- Educational/ Psychological toys

- Standard library
- Customised/user friendly architectural drawings

There are several other inputs that raise the cost of SNE as highlighted in the preceding section are by no means cheap.

Yet, the National Policy on Special Needs Education, stipulates that SNE shall be provided by

- Federal Government of Nigeria
- State Governments
- Local Governments
- Government agencies/ parastatals
- Private sector
- International development partners
- Non-Governmental Organisations (Local and International)
- Corporate Organisations
- Civil Society Organisations
- Faith-Based Organisations
- Individuals and Philanthropists

Merely listing who and what shall provide is too vague. There is no knowing what each stake holder should contribute and the mode of payment.

The policy documents talk about their responsibility to provide SNE but in what fashion and to what magnitude? What legal framework should guide such and be made to function as a sustainable revenue yielding strategy as well as a cost- controlling factor.

To mitigate the usual wide public system fiscal leakages, corruption, misappropriation and absence of transparency and accountability SNE funding policy needs a very tight noose in its fiscal management from the following sources.

1. Federal Government-0.5 percent of the consolidated fund.
2. State Government-2.0 percent of its Education budget.
3. Local Government-1.0 percent of its monthly allocation.
4. Corporate bodies-0.5 percent profit tax.
5. Civil Society Organisations-1.0 percent annual turnover.
6. Non-Governmental Organisations-1.0 percent annual turnover.
7. CBOs and FBOs- Donation.
8. Philanthropists-Donation.

The resources accruing from there shall be managed by an exquisite Board of Trustees composed of three (3) people of proven integrity and living with disabilities.

As a special body, managing a special fund, there is zero tolerance for any kind of misdemeanour. Similarly, any infraction will be marked with prosecution as may

be spelt out in the legal framework.

The case of the people living with disabilities and the crucial response of SNE evokes high empathy such that any infraction is summarily dealt with in accordance with subsisting rules and regulations.

How to work the talk

How can we practice what we preach? Enough of theorising. How do we operationalise the proposed SNE funding policy?

1. With all our hearts, with all our minds and with one voice we argue to make it work.
2. Government encourages the operators with the necessary political will. Let's begin by appreciating the special nature of the people involved and why we should all be committed to contributing our level best to satisfy them.
3. Step up advocacy to popularise SNE and bringing to the public courts with shamelessly name and shame any wrong doing in SNE. We should begin to invite individuals and corporate to begin to invest in SNE as an area of critical need.
4. A change of narrative to give SNE a pride of place is possible as we institute categories of SNE Teacher Allowance for outstanding performance, long service, and Good-Better-Best performance as well as categories of individuals and corporate body recognition awards. Student's good performance in affective, cognitive and psychomotor domains must be similarly acknowledged.

## Conclusion

It is heart-warming that with growing awareness, more people are now willing to enter into an open-minded conversation on this mystified and a taboo. To continue on the old track, the languishing souls would have perished in hunger, squalor, disease and abject poverty. Not yet where the chapter juxtaposed the PWDs against the SNS with a clear evidence that a lot is yet to be done while appreciating the role of SNE in the individual and societal growth and development, its high cost implications was underscored. The most plausible way out is to adopt a radical approach in SNE funding policy. Going beyond rhetoric, every stakeholder is enjoined to participate to see the option work. "After all, disability should be everyone's business, because anything can make anyone disabled at any point in time". (Ofeogbu, 2021, P.6).

## References

- AfroEden(2021).Special education in Nigeria.<https://afroeden.com/special-education-in-Nigeria>.
- Educeleb(2020)Statistics on special needs schools in Nigeria.  
<https://mail.google.co.com>

Eskay, M., Eskay, O.E & Uma, E. (2012). Educating the people with special needs in Nigeria: Present and Future Perspectives. *US-China Education review* B-10, 898-906.

Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013). *National Policy on Education*. Abuja: NERDC

Federal Ministry of Education (2015). *National Policy on Special Needs Education in Nigeria*. Abuja: Author

Obaka AI. (2017). *Education of People with special needs*. <https://www.researchgate.net>

Ofeogbu, D.I (2021). *Budgeting for education and persons with disability* <https://dailytrust.com/budgeting-for-education-and-persons-with-disability>

Oladejo, M.A. and Oladejo, S.A (2011). *Educating students with disabilities in Nigeria: some challenges and Policy Implications*. *European Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(1)128-139.

Olaigbe, O. (2021). *How Special needs students are struggling against the Nigerian Education System*. <https://newswirengr.com2021/05/13>