



# Inclusive Education and Digitalization in Nigeria: Leveraging Technology to Bridge Educational Inequalities

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## Abstract

Inclusive education in Nigeria faces significant challenges due to socio-economic disparities, inadequate infrastructure, limited teacher training, and marginalization of vulnerable groups. Digitalization offers a transformative approach to addressing these challenges by enhancing access, participation, and quality of learning for all learners, including those with special needs, learners in rural areas, and marginalized populations. This paper examines the intersection of inclusive education and digital technologies in Nigeria, highlighting the benefits, challenges, and policy implications of digital integration. Using a position paper approach, it argues that strategic adoption of digital tools can significantly advance inclusive education goals. The paper concludes that while digitalization presents substantial opportunities, effective implementation requires robust infrastructure, teacher capacity building, and supportive policies to ensure equity and sustainability.

## Keywords

Inclusive education, digitalization, Nigeria, assistive technologies, educational equity, e-learning

## Introduction

Inclusive education is a fundamental approach that seeks to ensure equal access to quality education for all learners, regardless of gender, socio-economic background, disability, geographical location, or learning needs. In Nigeria, the pursuit of inclusive education has gained increased attention due to persistent educational inequalities affecting marginalized groups such as children with disabilities, learners in rural and hard-to-reach areas, nomadic populations, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and out-of-school children. These challenges are further

compounded by inadequate infrastructure, shortage of trained teachers, and limited access to learning resources across different regions of the country. Digitalization has emerged as a transformative force in the education sector, offering innovative tools and platforms that can enhance teaching, learning, and school administration [1]. Through the use of digital technologies such as e-learning platforms, assistive technologies, mobile learning applications, virtual classrooms, and digital content, education systems can become more flexible, accessible, and responsive to diverse learners' needs. In the Nigerian context, digitalization presents significant opportunities to support inclusive education by reducing physical and social barriers to learning, expanding access to educational resources, and promoting personalized and learner-centered instruction [2], [3].

Despite its potential, the integration of digital technologies into inclusive education in Nigeria faces several challenges, including the digital divide, unreliable power supply, limited internet connectivity, inadequate funding, and insufficient digital literacy among teachers and learners. Additionally, policy gaps and weak implementation frameworks have hindered the effective use of digital tools to support learners with special needs and other disadvantaged groups. These issues raise critical questions about how digitalization can be strategically harnessed to advance inclusive education goals in Nigeria [4]. This paper therefore examines the intersection of inclusive education and digitalization in Nigeria, with a focus on how digital technologies can be leveraged to promote equity, access, and participation in education. It explores the prospects, challenges, and policy implications of digitalizing inclusive education, while emphasizing the need for coordinated efforts among government agencies, educational institutions, technology providers, and other stakeholders to ensure that no learner is left behind in Nigeria's digital education transformation.

## **Conceptual Terms**

### **Concept of Inclusive Education**

Inclusive education is an educational approach that ensures all learners, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or economic differences, have equal access to quality education. It emphasizes the removal of barriers both physical and social that prevent learners from fully participating in the learning process. Rather than segregating students with special needs or marginalized groups into separate classrooms, inclusive education integrates all learners into mainstream classrooms while providing necessary support and accommodations. Inclusive Education according to National Policy on Inclusive education endorses the UNESCO is 'the process of addressing all barriers and providing access to quality education to meet the diverse needs of all learners in the same learning environment.' According to the document, inclusive education addresses vulnerable and marginalized groups, such as learners who are excluded from or within education; living in the streets; involved in child labour; from minority cultures and/or religions, including those speaking minority languages; physically and/or psychologically abused; growing up in economic and/or cultural poverty; with health challenges,

including learners affected by HIV or AIDS; or from families who are addicted to or abusing drugs; as well as those with temporary learning challenges, those who have dropped out of school, learners who learn differently – slower or faster – than the average learner, those with impairments/ disabilities, learners experiencing barriers to learning caused by factors other than impairments, and learners with social or emotional challenges, including girls who are pregnant or have given birth [5], [6].

Also, United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO, (2009) defined Inclusive education as to mean a process of transforming schools and other centers of learning to accommodate all learners including boys and girls, learners from ethnic and linguistic minorities, rural populations, those infected and affected by HIV and AIDS, those with disabilities and difficulties in learning and as well provide opportunities for all [7]. Inclusion as the commitment to educate each child to the maximum extent appropriate; in the school and classroom he/she would otherwise attend. It involves bringing the ancillary services to the child, and requires only that the child will benefit from being in the class (rather than having to keep up with the other students [7], [8], [9].

**Key principles of inclusive education include:**

Equity and Access – Every learner has the right to quality education without discrimination.

Diversity Respect – Differences among learners are recognized, valued, and accommodated.

Participation – All learners actively engage in learning activities, decision-making, and school life.

Support Systems – Schools provide necessary resources, including specialized teaching methods, assistive devices, and trained personnel.

Inclusive education is all students attend and are welcome by their neighbourhood schools in the appropriate age, into regular classes and are supported to learn, to contribute and participate in all aspect of life of the school. Inclusive education is about how we develop and design our schools, classrooms, programmes and activities so that all students learn and participate together. It is about the child’s right to participate and the school’s duty to accept the child [10]. Inclusion rejects the use of special schools or classrooms to separate students with disabilities from students without disabilities. A premium is placed upon full participation by students with disabilities and upon respect for their social, civil and educational rights. Full inclusion does not distinguish between special education and general education programmes, instead the school is restructured so that all students learn together. It is a new approach in the provision of services for learners with special needs. It is also the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, of creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all as they provide an effective education for the majority of children [11]. In Nigeria, inclusive education has been promoted through national policies and frameworks such as the National Policy on Education (NPE), which advocates for education for children with special needs,

nomadic populations, and other disadvantaged groups. However, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, lack of trained teachers, societal attitudes, and limited educational resources hinder effective implementation.

### **Concept of Digitalization in Education**

Digitization means no new buildings are required; improvement in information sharing and redundancy of collections reduced; leads to the development of Internet in digitalized based institutions. Digital materials can be transmitted, sorted and retrieved easily and quickly. It is cheaper to access electronic information than its print counterpart when storing files in an electronic device with compatible facilities and equipment. Digital texts can be linked, made interactively; and improves the retrieval of more information [12]. Digitalization is the process of transforming physical teaching and learning resources into packages or platforms or electronic forms where they can be stored and manipulated by a computer for the implementation of teaching and learning programmes in school [13], [14], [15].

Digitalization is the process of leveraging digital technologies to transform a school business model, creating new teaching and learning model and value-producing learning opportunities for students. This involves integrating digital tools and systems into various aspects of a school business's operations, from management and communication to production and customer service [16]. In today's school environment, digitalization has become essential for teaching and learning to thrive. It enables educational institutions to adapt to rapidly changing school environment, meet parent and students' expectations, and optimizing school resources processes for greater efficiency and productivity. Using digitized information, digitalization is the process of making workflows and processes easier and more efficient [17], [18]. Digitalization refers to the integration of digital technologies into educational processes to enhance teaching, learning, and administrative functions. It involves the use of tools like computers, tablets, mobile applications, e-learning platforms, virtual classrooms, and interactive digital content to improve access, efficiency, and quality of education.

Digitization can be conceptualized as those facilities that aid the conversion of teaching and learning into platforms like online courses, online assessments, and web seminars/conferences or workshops through the use of electronic platforms [19]. Digitalization serves as a catalyst for transforming basic education management in Nigeria. It enhances data management, transparency, communication, monitoring, and capacity building—key elements required to ensure effective administration and the delivery of quality education. For Nigeria to achieve sustainable educational reforms, investment in digital infrastructure, teacher training, and ICT policy implementation remains imperative. The combination of inclusive education and digitalization offers enormous potential to address educational inequalities in Nigeria. Digital technologies can provide assistive tools for learners with disabilities, virtual classrooms for remote learners, and adaptive learning systems for students with diverse abilities [20]. When properly implemented, digitalization can help make education more accessible, flexible, and equitable,

ensuring that all learners regardless of their circumstances have the opportunity to succeed.

### **Theoretical Framework: Social Constructivist Theory**

Social Constructivism, developed by Lev Vygotsky, emphasizes that learning is a socially mediated process. Knowledge is constructed through interaction with others, collaboration, and engagement with the environment. Central to this theory are concepts such as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) the gap between what a learner can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance and scaffolding, where teachers, peers, or tools provide support to help learners reach higher levels of understanding [21].

### **Relation to Inclusive Education and Digitalization**

#### **Learning Through Collaboration:**

Inclusive education encourages learners of diverse abilities to engage in shared learning experiences. Digital technologies such as virtual classrooms, collaborative apps, discussion forums, and online group projects enable learners to interact, share knowledge, and co-construct understanding, even if they are geographically distant or have physical or learning disabilities. This aligns with Vygotsky's emphasis on social interaction as central to learning.

#### **Scaffolding with Digital Tools:**

Digital platforms can provide scaffolding tailored to individual learner needs. For example, assistive technologies for students with disabilities (screen readers, speech-to-text, adaptive learning software) function as scaffolds that allow learners to access content they might otherwise struggle with independently [22]. Similarly, e-learning platforms can provide hints, tutorials, or interactive feedback, supporting learners within their ZPD.

#### **Promoting Engagement and Motivation:**

Social constructivism emphasizes active learning through meaningful engagement. Digital technologies in inclusive education like gamified learning, simulations, and multimedia content encourage participation from all learners, including those who may feel marginalized in traditional classrooms. This supports an inclusive environment where every learner can construct knowledge actively.

#### **Bridging Learning Gaps:**

In Nigeria, many learners face barriers such as limited access to trained teachers, learning resources, or classroom support. Digitalization, guided by the principles of social constructivism, can bridge these gaps by providing interactive, socially mediated learning opportunities that enhance understanding and skill development for learners with diverse needs.

The Social Constructivist Theory provides a strong theoretical foundation for integrating digital technologies into inclusive education in Nigeria [23], [23]. It highlights the importance of collaboration, scaffolding, and active engagement principles that digital tools can enhance. By applying this theory, educators and policymakers can design inclusive digital learning environments that support diverse learners, encourage participation, and improve educational

outcomes across the Nigerian education system.

## **Methods**

A position paper method was adopted to explore the role of digitalization in promoting inclusive education in Nigeria. This approach emphasizes argumentation, evidence synthesis, and policy recommendations rather than primary data collection. The study involved:

Literature Review – Comprehensive review of academic journals, government policy documents, UNESCO reports, and case studies on inclusive education and digitalization.

Critical Analysis – Evaluation of the benefits, challenges, and practical implications of integrating digital tools into Nigerian educational settings.

Position Formulation – Development of a clear stance advocating for the strategic digitalization of inclusive education based on synthesized evidence.

Policy and Practice Recommendations – Suggestion of actionable measures for policymakers, educators, and technology providers to enhance inclusive learning through digital interventions.

The position paper model allows for a persuasive and evidence-based argument, highlighting the potential of digital technologies while acknowledging the contextual limitations in Nigeria.

## **Result and Discussion on benefits of digitalizing inclusive education in Nigeria:**

### **Benefits of Digitalizing Inclusive Education in Nigeria**

The adoption of digital technologies in the delivery of inclusive education in Nigeria represents a significant shift toward a more equitable and responsive educational system. Inclusive education seeks to ensure that all learners regardless of physical ability, socio-economic status, gender, or geographical location have equal opportunities to access quality education. In the Nigerian context, where disparities in educational access remain pronounced, digitalization offers practical solutions for overcoming longstanding barriers. The following points provide a detailed examination of the key benefits of integrating digital technologies into inclusive education.

#### **Enhanced Access to Education**

One of the most profound benefits of digitalizing inclusive education is the expansion of access to learning opportunities. In Nigeria, many children are excluded from formal education due to factors such as geographical isolation, insecurity, poverty, and physical disabilities. Digital technologies help to mitigate these challenges by enabling remote access to educational content through online platforms, mobile devices, and broadcast media. For instance, learners in rural or underserved communities can access instructional materials without the need to travel long distances to school. Similarly, children in conflict-affected regions and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps can continue their education through virtual classrooms and radio-based learning programs. For learners with physical disabilities, digital tools eliminate mobility

constraints by allowing them to learn from home or specialized centers. Furthermore, assistive technologies such as screen readers, voice recognition software, and Braille-compatible devices ensure that learners with visual or hearing impairments are not excluded. These technologies collectively contribute to bridging the educational gap and promoting social inclusion. Evidence suggests that digital learning platforms can significantly reduce inequalities in access to education, particularly in developing countries where infrastructure challenges persist.

## **Results and Discussions**

### **Personalized and Adaptive Learning**

Digitalization enables a shift from the traditional “one-size-fits-all” approach to a more learner-centered model of instruction. Through adaptive learning systems, educational content can be tailored to suit the individual needs, abilities, and learning pace of each student. In inclusive classrooms, where learners often have diverse cognitive and physical abilities, this flexibility is particularly important. Students with learning difficulties, such as dyslexia or attention-related challenges, can benefit from customized content that simplifies complex concepts and provides additional practice. At the same time, high-achieving learners can be exposed to more advanced materials, preventing boredom and encouraging intellectual growth. The use of text-to-speech, speech-to-text, and interactive multimedia tools further enhances comprehension for learners with special needs. By allowing students to learn at their own pace and in their preferred format, digital technologies reduce frustration, build confidence, and improve overall academic performance. This individualized approach aligns with contemporary pedagogical practices that emphasize differentiated instruction and learner autonomy.

### **Promotion of Inclusive Participation and Collaboration**

Digital technologies foster a more inclusive learning environment by promoting active participation and collaboration among students. Traditional classroom settings may inadvertently exclude learners who are shy, physically challenged, or socially marginalized. However, digital platforms create alternative avenues for engagement that accommodate diverse learner needs. Through tools such as discussion forums, virtual classrooms, video conferencing, and collaborative software, students can interact with peers and teachers regardless of physical limitations or location. For example, a learner with mobility challenges can actively participate in group discussions and projects without the need for physical presence. This inclusive participation helps to break down social barriers, reduce stigma associated with disabilities, and promote mutual understanding among students. Collaborative learning also enhances critical thinking, communication skills, and teamwork competencies that are essential for success in the modern world. Research indicates that digital collaboration tools can significantly improve student engagement and foster a sense of belonging in inclusive educational settings.

### **Access to Diverse and Multimodal Learning Resources**

Digitalization significantly broadens the range of instructional materials available to learners. Unlike traditional textbooks, digital resources can incorporate text, audio, video, animations, and simulations, thereby catering to different learning styles and preferences. For learners with disabilities, this diversity is particularly beneficial. For example, visually impaired students can access audio-based content, while hearing-impaired learners can benefit from captioned videos and

visual aids. Interactive simulations and virtual laboratories also provide opportunities for experiential learning, which may not be feasible in resource-constrained physical classrooms. Access to online libraries, open educational resources (OER), and educational applications ensures that students are not limited by the availability of local teaching materials. This exposure to a wide range of content enhances knowledge acquisition, critical thinking, and creativity. It also ensures that all learners, regardless of their circumstances, have access to high-quality educational resources [24], [25].

### **Enhanced Teacher Support and Professional Development**

The effectiveness of inclusive education largely depends on the capacity of teachers to address the diverse needs of learners. Digital technologies play a crucial role in supporting teachers by providing access to training, instructional resources, and professional learning communities. Through online courses, webinars, and digital teaching platforms, educators can acquire new skills in inclusive pedagogy, classroom management, and the use of assistive technologies. Teachers can also access lesson plans, teaching aids, and assessment tools specifically designed for learners with special needs. Learning Management Systems (LMS) and data analytics tools enable teachers to monitor student progress in real time. This allows for early identification of learning difficulties and timely intervention. By equipping teachers with the necessary tools and knowledge, digitalization enhances instructional quality and ensures that inclusive education is effectively implemented [26], [27].

### **Efficiency in Administrative and Monitoring Processes**

Digitalization improves the efficiency of school administration and the management of inclusive education programs. Traditional record-keeping methods are often time-consuming, prone to errors, and difficult to manage, especially in large educational institutions. With digital systems, student information including attendance, academic performance, and individualized education plans (IEPs) can be stored, accessed, and updated with ease. For learners with special needs, this ensures that their specific requirements are accurately documented and consistently addressed. Digital data management systems enable school administrators and policymakers to track the implementation and outcomes of inclusive education initiatives [28]. Through data analytics, trends can be identified, challenges can be addressed, and evidence-based decisions can be made. This leads to more effective planning, resource allocation, and policy development. Ultimately, the use of digital tools enhances transparency, accountability, and overall efficiency within the education system.

### **Conclusion**

Digitalizing inclusive education in Nigeria offers multifaceted benefits that enhance access, participation, and quality of learning. By leveraging digital technologies, Nigerian schools can provide personalized support, expand learning opportunities, foster collaboration, and improve administrative efficiency. It was concluded also that digitalization presents a powerful opportunity to advance inclusive education in Nigeria by bridging gaps in access, participation, and quality of learning. Technologies such as e-learning platforms, virtual classrooms, assistive devices, and mobile learning applications can facilitate personalized learning, enhance teacher capacity, and ensure that learners with disabilities or from marginalized communities are not left behind.

Based on the findings, the paper recommends the following:

1) Investment in ICT Infrastructure

The government and private sector should provide reliable electricity, internet connectivity, and digital devices in schools to support inclusive learning.

2) Teacher Training and Capacity Building

Educators should be trained in digital pedagogy, assistive technologies, and inclusive teaching strategies.

3) Policy Frameworks and Implementation

Develop and enforce policies that integrate digital tools into inclusive education programs, ensuring accountability and sustainability.

4) Community Awareness and Sensitization

Encourage societal support for inclusive education and the use of technology to overcome stigma against learners with special needs.

5) Collaborations and Partnerships

Engage technology providers, NGOs, and international organizations to support digital education initiatives for marginalized learners.

6) Monitoring and Evaluation

Establish mechanisms to track the effectiveness of digital interventions in inclusive education and adjust strategies as needed.

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