



<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18409040>

Rehabilitation Science and Skill Development as Predictors of Social Inclusion for Persons with Disabilities in Public Senior Secondary School Students in Rivers State

Nbame Letam Nna-Kue (Ph.D) & Clara Gold Dibia

Department of Special Needs Education and Rehabilitation Science,
Faculty of Education, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt
Email: letam.nna-kue@gmail.com 08134246822
Email: dibiaclara@gmail.com Phone No: 08034767293

ABSTRACT

This study investigated rehabilitation science and skill development as predictors of social inclusion for persons with disabilities in public secondary schools in Rivers State. Four research questions and four hypotheses guided this study. Correlational research design was adopted for this study. The population comprised 80 students with disabilities in public secondary schools. The sample size was 80 senior secondary school students with disability in Rivers State. Since the number was manageable, a census sampling technique was employed. Data were collected using a self-structured instrument titled "Influence of Rehabilitation Science and Skill Development on Social Inclusion for Persons with Disabilities (IRSSDSIPD)". The instrument was validated an expert in Educational Measurement and Evaluation. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha which yielded a coefficient of 0.86. Data were analyzed using simple linear regression at a 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that accessible rehabilitation services, assistive technologies, peer support, and collaborative learning significantly predict social inclusion among students with disabilities. The study recommended among others that the ministry of education should ensure adequate provision of rehabilitation services and affordable assistive technologies so as to promote inclusive pedagogy. Schools should also foster structured peer support to strengthen social inclusion and reduce stigma among disabilities students.

Keywords: *Rehabilitation Science, Skill Development, Social Inclusion, Persons with Disabilities, Inclusive Education.*

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has been globally recognized as a pathway to ensuring equity, social justice, and sustainable development, especially for persons with disabilities. In Nigeria, the National Policy on Inclusive Education (Federal Ministry of Education, 2017) and the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act of 2018 emphasized the right of every child to access quality education irrespective of disability status. However, despite these policy frameworks, the reality in many public senior secondary schools is that students with disabilities continue to face barriers that hinder their academic engagement and social inclusion (Okeke, 2022). The extent to which rehabilitation science and skill development strategies are effectively deployed may serve as significant predictors of whether these students experience genuine social inclusion within the school environment.

Social inclusion of persons with disabilities is the process of ensuring individuals with disabilities has equal opportunities to participate fully in all aspects of society, including education, employment, healthcare, cultural activities, and community life. It refers to efforts and practices that promote the participation of all people in society, especially those who are marginalized or disadvantaged. It emphasizes the removal of barriers physical, attitudinal, institutional, and systemic that limit participation, while promoting respect for diversity, equality of opportunity, and active citizenship. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2018) emphasized that social inclusion is a key pillar of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, supporting dignity, autonomy, and active

participation of persons with disabilities in all spheres of life. Banks, Kuper and Polack (2021) asserted that inclusive policies, accessible environments, and supportive networks are essential to achieving meaningful inclusion, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.

In Nigeria of which Rivers State is not exempted, persistent challenges such as stigmatization, inadequate educational support and limited employment access continue to hinder inclusion. However, ongoing efforts in inclusive education and disability rights advocacy are gradually reshaping societal attitudes (Obiakor & Offor, 2020). Thus, social inclusion stands as both a developmental priority that supports dignity, autonomy, and participation in decision-making processes affecting individuals with disabilities and a human rights-based approach, increasingly recognized as vital to sustainable development and as an essential mandate of education systems worldwide (WHO, 2020). Social inclusion in the context of rehabilitation science emphasizes on enabling all individuals, regardless of their background, status, or abilities, have equal opportunities to participate fully in social, economic, educational, and community life.

Rehabilitation science is an interdisciplinary field concerned with restoring, improving or maintaining the functional abilities, independence, and quality of life of individuals with disabilities by addressing medical, educational, psychological, and social needs, while also promoting inclusion in education, employment, and community life (Bright & Kuper, 2018). In educational settings, it provides frameworks and practices such as specialized instruction, adaptive equipment, and inclusive pedagogies that help students with disabilities overcome learning and social barriers (Mactaggart, Banks, Bright & Kuper, 2022). People living with disability can be assisted or empowered through skill development.

Skill development involves acquiring and enhancing cognitive, vocational, social, and adaptive competencies that foster empowerment, independence, and meaningful participation in school and society (Akinyemi & Adeola, 2021). It is a process of improving a person's abilities, knowledge, and competence to perform tasks effectively. It involves learning new skills or enhancing existing ones to increase productivity, employability and personal growth. Skill development helps individuals adapt to changing work demands and contributes to overall social and economic progress. Therefore, rehabilitation science and skill development form a holistic approach to inclusive education, in public senior secondary schools particularly in Rivers State, where the ability of students with disabilities to achieve social inclusion is significantly influenced by the accessibility of rehabilitation services, the use of assistive technologies, the competence of teachers in rehabilitation strategies, as well as peer support and collaborative learning approaches

Rehabilitation services are interventions programmes designed to improve cognitive, physical, sensory, and psychosocial functioning of persons with disabilities, thereby enhancing their participation in school and society. Skill development, particularly in adaptive and social domains, supports the independence and self-reliance of students with disabilities, preparing them for inclusive participation (Igbokwe, 2019). In Rivers State, rehabilitation services are often constrained by poor infrastructure, shortage of professionals, and uneven distribution of facilities. These limitations reduce the ability of students with disabilities to integrate fully into the mainstream school environment (Amadi & Opara, 2021).

Bright and Kuper (2018) noted that improving access to rehabilitation in low- and middle-income countries would significantly enhance health outcomes and community participation, though challenges such as poor infrastructure and inadequate funding remain major obstacles. Nwokorie (2020) emphasized that accessible rehabilitation services within schools enhance both academic achievement and psychosocial adjustment of students with disabilities. Adebisi et al. (2023) revealed that accessibility to educational support services such as special learning resources, trained personnel, and inclusive infrastructure significantly enhances the participation and inclusion of students with disabilities in schools. Similarly, Umeh and Okoye (2022) found that accessibility to inclusive education services, predicts higher levels of social inclusion and academic success among secondary school students with disabilities. Odu and Ede (2024) also revealed that accessible school environments and specialized support services foster positive social interaction among students with disabilities in public schools.

For effective social inclusion, there is need for assistive technology. The use of assistive technologies is the application of specialized tools, devices, and digital resources designed to support persons with disabilities in overcoming barriers to learning, communication, and participation in educational and social settings (Adebisi, Liman & Longpoe., 2023). These technologies ranging from

screen readers, hearing aids, mobility devices, and communication boards to advanced digital learning platforms are expected to predictably enhance the academic performance and social inclusion of students with disabilities by promoting independence and equal participation. Okoye and Okechukwu (2021) revealed that assistive technologies improved students' engagement, reduced exclusion, and greater achievement in both cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes. Integration of assistive technologies within classroom instruction predict teachers' capacity to adapt lessons, thereby fostering inclusive environments that encourage collaboration and equity. Consequently, the systematic use of assistive technologies in schools significantly correlate with higher levels of social inclusion and improved academic experiences for students with disabilities (Al-Azawei, 2021).

Adebisi, Liman and Longpoe (2020) found that the introduction of assistive tools such as screen readers, hearing aids, and adapted keyboards enhanced classroom engagement and learning achievement among children with learning disabilities in Nigerian schools. World Health Organization (2020) emphasized that assistive technologies not only improved educational outcomes but also increased opportunities for social interaction and self-reliance when effectively implemented. Okoye (2024) documented that assistive technologies serve as enablers of inclusion and accessibility for students with disabilities, improving their participation and social interaction in school. Furthermore, Manisha (2023) showed that assistive technology not only improves academic access but also supports psychosocial outcomes, helping students feel more competent and socially connected.

Another important factor in this study is the teachers' competence. It is a central factor in advancing inclusive education, particularly for students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. It encompasses the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and professional capacity that educators require to effectively support learners with diverse needs. Competent teachers are able to apply specialized methods, adaptive teaching techniques, and assistive tools that enhance both academic performance and social integration of students with disabilities (Okoye & Ede, 2020). When educators possess adequate skills in rehabilitation strategies, it improves student engagement, greater accessibility to learning opportunities, and enhanced social participation outcomes for students with disabilities (Eze & Iwuoha, 2022). This underscores the role of teachers as pivotal agents in translating rehabilitation science and skill development into practical approaches that promote equity, inclusion, and holistic development within the school system. Teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes determine how well inclusive practices are implemented in the classroom. Ngozi (2019) recorded that structured pre-service and in-service training programmes will boost teachers' confidence and instructional capacity in rehabilitation techniques, thereby generating measurable gains in both student engagement and academic performance. Catteng (2024) revealed that the most durable improvements in social inclusion and academic achievement for students with disabilities occur when teacher competence is reinforced by institutional investments in assistive technologies and robust policy support. Wendelien (2023) reported that teachers who possessed stronger beliefs in dealing with diverse learners including students with disabilities were more able to create inclusive classroom environments that promote social inclusion of such learners. Nur and Rashid (2024) also revealed that teachers' competencies were significantly associated with their capacity to support students with disabilities effectively in school.

Peer support is increasingly recognized as effective approaches for promoting the social inclusion of students with disabilities within mainstream educational settings. Peer support is the process by which students provide academic, emotional, and social assistance to their peers, thereby creating a supportive environment that fosters belongingness and participation (Carter et al., 2019). Peer support interventions improved the emotional and social experiences of students with special educational needs by reducing stigma, increasing peer acceptance, and strengthening self-efficacy, thereby predicting greater levels of inclusion within the classroom. Peer-led support initiatives improved mental health, motivation, and social connectedness, outcomes that serve as predictors of inclusive participation (Pointon-Haas 2023) furthermore, Cooper et al. (2024) emphasized that peer support reduces psychological distress while promoting resilience and belonging, suggesting that structured peer relationships can forecast stronger social integration and academic engagement among students with disabilities. These findings confirm that peer support interventions not only improve immediate academic outcomes but also predict long-term social inclusion by fostering environments of acceptance and empathy. Aluede and Adeleke (2019) found that peer support positively influence the social inclusion of students with disabilities by fostering a sense of belonging, reducing feelings of isolation, and enhancing participation in classroom activities. Similarly,

Eze and Okafor (2020) found that collaborative peer interactions and peer mentoring programmes significantly improved the social integration of students with disabilities in inclusive secondary school settings, highlighting the critical role of peer networks in promoting social inclusion. Again, Musa and Ibrahim (2021) supported that students who received structured peer support exhibited higher levels of engagement, social participation, and acceptance among their peers, confirming that peer support is a significant predictor of social inclusion in schools. Therefore, there is need to assess rehabilitation science and skill development as predictors of social inclusion for persons with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

Statement of the Problem

Education in Nigeria is recognized as a fundamental instrument for national development and social transformation. However, students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools, particularly in Rivers State, still face persistent barriers to inclusive and equitable education. Despite existing policies, many continue to experience marginalization, social exclusion, and limited participation in school life, which often results in poor academic performance, low self-esteem, and restricted social integration. The inadequacy of rehabilitation services, poor access to assistive technologies, and insufficient funding further exacerbate these challenges, making it difficult for learners with disabilities to fully benefit from education.

In addition, teachers often lack the specialized training required to implement effective rehabilitation strategies and inclusive pedagogy, thereby hindering participation and learning. Equally, peer support essential for social acceptance and the reduction of stigmatization are not adequately promoted, leaving students with disabilities isolated within the school environment. The cumulative effect of these limitations undermines the goals of inclusive education and sustainable development. Thus, this study assessed rehabilitation science and skill development as predictors of social inclusion for persons with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to assess rehabilitation science and skill development as predictors of social inclusion for persons with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to:

- 1 Examine the extent to which services accessibility predicts social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.
- 2 Determine the extent to which use of assistive technologies predicts social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.
- 3 Assess the extent to which teacher competence predicts social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.
- 4 Investigate the extent to which peer support predicts social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Research Questions

1. To what extent does services accessibility predict social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?
2. To what extent does use of assistive technologies predict social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?
3. To what extent does teacher competence predict social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?
4. To what extent does peer support predict social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

- 1 Service accessibility does not significantly predict social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

- 2 Use of assistive technologies does not significantly predict social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State
- 3 Teacher competence does not significantly predict social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State
- 4 Peer support does not significantly predict social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

RESEARCH METHOD

The study adopted a correlational research design. Obilor (2018) noted that correlational research design involves collecting numerical data to determine whether a relationship exists between two or more variables and to use such relationship in making future predictions. It seeks to find out the relationship between two variables and also the magnitude and direction of such relationship. The population of the study comprised 80 public secondary school students in Rivers State. The sample size was 80 students hence census sampling technique was utilized for the study. Self-structured instrument titled: "Influence of Rehabilitation Science and Skill Development on Social Inclusion for Persons with Disabilities" (IRSSDSIPD) was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by expert in Educational Measurement and Evaluation, Department of Educational Foundations, Rivers State University. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha for a measure of internal consistency which yielded reliability co-efficient of 0.86. Simple linear regression analysis was used to answer research questions and test of the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Out of 80 copies of questionnaire distributed, 73 copies were properly filled representing 91% returned rate for data analysis.

Presentation of Results

Research Question One: To what extent does services accessibility predict social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Hypothesis One: Service accessibility does not significantly predict social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

Table 1: Summary of Simple Linear Regression Model of Services Accessibility on Social Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.715 ^a	.511	.514	3.1203		
ANOVA Associated with Simple Regression						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	P-value
Regression		1152.146	1	1152.146	68.494	.000
Residual		1211.125	72	16.8211		
Total		2363.271	73			

a. Dependent Variable: Social Inclusion

b. Predictors: (Constant), Services Accessibility

Table 1 showed the model summary of services accessibility on social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The simple linear regression model gave a coefficient of .715, R^2 of .511 and adjusted R^2 of .514. This shows that services accessibility accounted for 51% variation in social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. This therefore indicates that to a high extent, services accessibility predict social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. Again, the table also revealed the results of ANOVA associated with simple regression which yielded an F-value of 68.494 which was gotten at degree of freedom between 1 and 72 with its corresponding P-value of 0.000 which is less than the chosen level of significance ($p < 0.05$). The null hypothesis is rejected. It therefore, indicates that, services accessibility predict social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

Research Question Two: To what extent does use of assistive technologies predict social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Hypothesis Two: Use of assistive technologies does not significantly predict social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

Table 2: Summary of Simple Linear Regression Model of Use of Assistive Technologies on Social Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.738 ^a	.545	.548	3.1603		
ANOVA Associated with Simple Regression						
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	P-value	
Regression	1645.186	1	1645.186	77.871	.000	
Residual	1521.146	72	21.127			
Total	3166.332	73				

a. Dependent Variable: Social Inclusion

b. Predictors: (Constant), Assistive Technologies

Table 2 showed the model summary of use of assistive technologies on social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

The simple linear regression model gave a coefficient of .738, R² of .545 and adjusted R² of .548. This shows that use of assistive technologies accounted for 55% variation in social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. This therefore indicates that to a high extent, use of assistive technologies predict social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. Again, the table also revealed the results of ANOVA associated with simple regression which yielded an F-value of 77.871 which was gotten at degree of freedom between 1 and 72 with its corresponding P-value of 0.000 which is less than the chosen level of significance ($p < 0.05$). The null hypothesis is rejected. It therefore, indicates that, use of assistive technologies predict social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

Research Question Three: To what extent does teacher competence predict social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Hypothesis Three: Teacher competence does not significantly predict social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

Table 3: Summary of Simple Linear Regression Model of Teacher Competence on Social Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.725 ^a	.526	.529	3.1416		
ANOVA Associated with Simple Regression						
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	P-value	
Regression	1415.521	1	1415.521	68.123	.000	
Residual	1496.146	72	20.779			
Total	2911.667	73				

a. Dependent Variable: Social Inclusion

b. Predictors: (Constant), Teachers Competence

Table 3 showed the model summary of teacher competence on social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

The simple linear regression model gave a coefficient of .725, R^2 of .529 and adjusted R^2 of .529. This shows that use of teacher competence accounted for 53% variation in social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. This therefore indicates that to a high extent, use of teacher competence predict social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. Again, the table also revealed the results of ANOVA associated with simple regression which yielded an F-value of 68.123 which was gotten at degree of freedom between 1 and 72 with its corresponding P-value of 0.000 which is less than the chosen level of significance ($p < 0.05$). The null hypothesis is rejected. It therefore, indicates that, teacher competence predict social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

Research Question Four: To what extent does peer support predict social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Hypothesis Four: Peer support does not significantly predict social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

Table 3: Summary of Simple Linear Regression Model of Peer Support on Social Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.709 ^a	.503	.504	3.1202		
ANOVA Associated with Simple Regression						
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	P-value	
Regression	1130.324	1	1415.521	71.999	.000	
Residual	1321.143	72	15.699			
Total	2911.667	73				

a. Dependent Variable: Social Inclusion

b. Predictors: (Constant), Peer Support

Table 3 showed the model summary of peer support on social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The simple linear regression model gave a coefficient of .709, R^2 of .503 and adjusted R^2 of .504. This shows that peer support accounted for 50% variation in social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. This therefore indicates that to a high extent, peer support predict social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. Again, the table also revealed the results of ANOVA associated with simple regression which yielded an F-value of 71.999 which was gotten at degree of freedom between 1 and 72 with its corresponding P-value of 0.000 which is less than the chosen level of significance ($p < 0.05$). The null hypothesis is rejected. It therefore, indicates that, peer support predict social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

Discussion of Findings

Table 1 of research question one showed that, the extent to which services accessibility predicts social inclusion of students with disabilities is high in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State, while the result of the corresponding hypothesis indicated that services accessibility significantly predict social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. This study is in harmony with the findings of Adebisi et al. (2023) who revealed that accessibility to educational support services such as special learning resources, trained personnel, and inclusive infrastructure significantly enhances the participation and inclusion of students with disabilities in Nigerian schools. This result could be probably because when support services are adequately provided and easily accessible, students with disabilities gain confidence and interact more freely within the school system. Similarly, the finding agrees with the work of Umeh and Okoye (2022) who found that accessibility to inclusive education services, predicts higher levels of social inclusion and academic success among secondary school students with disabilities. This result could be probably because access to these services removes learning barriers and encourages students with disabilities to participate fully in both academic and social aspects of schooling,

thereby promoting inclusiveness. Odu and Ede (2024) also corroborated that accessible school environments and specialized support services foster positive social interaction among students with disabilities in public schools. This could be probably because accessibility enhances independence, reduces stigma and promotes collaboration among all learners, thus facilitating the social inclusion of students with disabilities.

Table 2 of research question two showed that, the extent to which use of assistive technologies predicts social inclusion of students with disabilities is high in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State, while the result of the corresponding hypothesis indicated that use of assistive technologies significantly predict social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. This finding is in agreement with the study of Okoye (2024) who found that assistive technologies serve as enablers of inclusion and accessibility for students with disabilities, improving their participation and social interaction in school. This result could be probably because when technology facilitates access to communication, learning and mobility, barriers to social engagement decline and inclusive behaviours in schools are enhanced. Furthermore, the result is supported by Manisha (2023) who showed that assistive technology not only improves academic access but also supports psychosocial outcomes, helping students feel more competent and socially connected.

Table 3 of research question three showed that, the extent to which teacher competence predicts social inclusion of students with disabilities is high in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State, while the result of the corresponding hypothesis indicated that teacher competence significantly predict social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. This finding is in accordance with the study of Wendelien (2023) who found that teachers who possessed stronger beliefs in dealing with diverse learners including students with disabilities were more able to create inclusive classroom environments that promote social inclusion of such learners. It also aligns with the work of Nur and Rashid (2024) who revealed that teachers' competencies were significantly associated with their capacity to support students with disabilities effectively in school.

Table 4 of research question four showed that, the extent to which peer support predicts social inclusion of students with disabilities is high in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State, while the result of the corresponding hypothesis indicated that peer support significantly predict social inclusion of students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. This finding is in line with the study of Aluede and Adeleke (2019) who revealed that peer support positively influence the social inclusion of students with disabilities by fostering a sense of belonging, reducing feelings of isolation, and enhancing participation in classroom activities. Similarly, Eze and Okafor (2020) found that collaborative peer interactions and peer mentoring programs significantly improved the social integration of students with disabilities in inclusive secondary school settings, highlighting the critical role of peer networks in promoting social inclusion. In the same way, Musa and Ibrahim (2021) supported that students who received structured peer support exhibited higher levels of engagement, social participation, and acceptance among their peers, confirming that peer support is a significant predictor of social inclusion in schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 The Rivers State government should ensure that rehabilitation services are adequately available and accessible in public senior secondary schools to reduce barriers faced by students with disabilities.
- 2 Schools should be equipped with affordable and appropriate assistive technologies, and both teachers and students should be trained in their effective use to enhance inclusive learning.
- 3 Teachers should undergo continuous professional development in rehabilitation science and inclusive pedagogical practices to improve classroom participation of students with disabilities.
- 4 Schools should promote structured peer support to strengthen social inclusion, reduce stigma, and enhance interaction between students with and without disabilities.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that rehabilitation science and skill development are strong predictors of social inclusion for students with disabilities in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. Accessible rehabilitation services and assistive technologies enable these students to overcome barriers, enhance

learning, and promote independence. Building teacher competence in rehabilitation strategies fosters inclusive pedagogies, while peer support learning foster a culture of cooperation, empathy, and mutual respect among learners, which reduces stigma and encourages social participation. All these factors underscore the importance of inclusive practices in achieving equity, participation, and social justice. Strengthening rehabilitation science and skill development will not only boost academic achievement but also prepare students with disabilities for meaningful inclusion and lifelong empowerment.

REFERENCES

- Adebisi, R. O., Liman, N. A., & Longpoe, P. K. (2020). Using assistive technology in teaching children with learning disabilities in the 21st century. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 21(4), 12–22.
- Adebisi, T. A., Onu, V. C., & Alade, S. O. (2023). Accessibility and inclusive education: Assessing the role of educational support services for learners with disabilities in Nigerian schools. *African Journal of Educational Research and Development*, 18(2), 112–125.
- Akinyemi, O., & Adeola, M. (2021). Rehabilitation, skill acquisition and empowerment of persons with disabilities in Nigeria: Implications for inclusive education. *Journal of Special Needs Education*, 11(2), 77–89.
- Al-Azawei, A. (2021). Assistive technology in higher education: Impact on learners with disabilities. *Education and Information Technologies*, 26(5), 5673–5685.
- Aluede, O., & Adeleke, F. (2019). Peer support and social inclusion of students with disabilities in inclusive secondary schools. *Journal of Inclusive Education*, 19(2), 45–58.
- Amadi, E., & Opara, C. (2021). Accessibility of rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities in Rivers State, Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Research*, 17(2), 44–56
- Atteng, T. D. (2024). Teacher competence in rehabilitation strategies and inclusive education practices in Nigerian secondary schools. *International Journal of Education and Development*, 34(2), 112–124.
- Banks, L. M., Kuper, H., & Polack, S. (2021). Poverty, disability, and social inclusion: Towards inclusive policy frameworks. *Journal of Social Inclusion*, 19(1), 118–128.
- Bright, T., & Kuper, H. (2018). A systematic review of access to rehabilitation for people with disabilities in low- and middle-income countries. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 15(2), 2165–2178
- Carter, E. W., Asmus, J. M., Moss, C. K., & Biggs, E. E. (2019). Peer support interventions for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities in inclusive classrooms: A systematic review. *Remedial and Special Education*, 40(6), 356–368.
- Cooper, R. E. (2024). The effectiveness, implementation, and experiences of peer support: a review. *Journal of BMC Medicine*, 25(1), 56–79
- Eze, J., & Okafor, C. (2020). Peer mentoring and social integration of students with disabilities in Nigerian secondary schools. *International Journal of Special Education*, 35(1), 77–89.
- Eze, T. I., & Iwuoha, V. C. (2022). Teachers' competencies and the implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria: Implications for educational policy and practice. *African Journal of Teacher Education*, 41(2), 102–113.
- Federal Ministry of Education. (2017). *National policy on inclusive education in Nigeria*. Abuja Federal Government of Nigeria.
- Igbokwe, D. (2019). Skill development for learners with disabilities: Implications for inclusive education. *Journal of Educational Foundations*, 28(1), 15–27.
- Mactaggart, I., Banks, L. M., Bright, T., & Kuper, H. (2022). Barriers to rehabilitation for people with disabilities: Insights from low- and middle-income countries. *International Health*, 14(5), 442–455.
- Manisha, A. (2023). The impact of assistive technology on students with disabilities. *Global International Research Journal*, 24(1), 75–88.
- Musa, A., & Ibrahim, H. (2021). Enhancing social participation of students with disabilities through peer support. *African Journal of Educational Research*, 29(3), 112–125.

- Ngozi, O. F. (2019). Influence of teachers' capacity building on students' academic performance in Rivers State (South-East): Implications for service delivery. *Journal of Educational Theory and Research in Practice* 35(2), 86-99
- Nur, R.E & Rashid, S.M. (2024). Understanding and enhancing special education teachers' competencies for inclusive practice: A comprehensive analysis. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 23(6), 32-45
- Nwokorie, C. I. (2020). Accessibility of rehabilitation services and educational outcomes of students with disabilities in Nigeria. *African Journal of Special and Inclusive Education*, 15(1), 22-34.
- Obiakor, F. E., & Offor, I. F. (2020). Inclusive education and the social inclusion of persons with disabilities in Nigeria: Issues and challenges. *African Journal of Special Educational Needs*, 27(2), 33-45.
- Odu, C. O., & Ede, M. O. (2024). Accessibility and social participation of students with disabilities in inclusive school environments in Southern Nigeria. *Journal of Contemporary Education Studies*, 19(1), 44-57.
- Okafor, H. O., & Anowor, O. F. (2021). Accessibility of rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities in Nigeria: Issues and prospects. *Journal of Disability Studies*, 27(2), 45-53.
- Okeke, E. C. (2022). Assessment of inclusive education in public secondary schools in Rivers State. *Journal of the Nigerian Academy of Education* 28(1), 35-47
- Obilor, F. F. (2018). Rehabilitation of persons with hearing impairment in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria: Implication for special needs counselling. *European Journal of Special Education Research* 32(1), 87-99.
- Okoye, C. C. (2024). Assistive technology and inclusion of children with disabilities in Nigeria. *African Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research*, 47(3), 81-94
- Okoye, K. R. E., & Okechukwu, C. E. (2021). The predictive influence of assistive technology on inclusive education practices in Nigeria. *African Journal of Special and Inclusive Education*, 22(1), 45-57.
- Okoye, N. S., & Ede, M. O. (2020). Teacher competence in rehabilitation and inclusive strategies for learners with special needs in secondary schools. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 11(18), 59-67.
- Pointon-Haas, J. (2023). A systematic review of peer support interventions for student mental health and well-being in higher education. *Frontiers in Public Health*. 18(3), 82-95
- Umeh, J. I., & Okoye, C. A. (2022). Access to inclusive education services as predictors of social inclusion among secondary school students with disabilities in South-South Nigeria. *International Journal of Special Education and Rehabilitation*, 17(3), 88-101.
- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2018). *Realization of the sustainable development goals by, for and with persons with disabilities*. Retrieved from. <https://social.un.org/publications/UN-Flagship-Report-Disability-Final.pdf>
- Wendeelion, B.F, (2023). Education for all in action: Measuring teachers' competences for inclusive education. *Journal of PLoS ONE*, 24(1), 53-46
- World Health Organization. (2020). *World report on disability and rehabilitation*. Geneva: WHO Press.

: