

BEYOND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AND GENDER: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PARENTAL ATTITUDES FOR MANAGING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN ILORIN, KWARA STATE

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Abstract

Parental attitudes play a critical role in the successful implementation and management of inclusive education for children with disabilities. However, dominant explanations often emphasize socio-economic status and gender, with limited attention to other influential factors in Nigerian contexts. This study moves beyond these traditional variables by examining parental attitudes toward the education of children with physical disabilities in Ilorin South and Ilorin West Local Government Areas of Kwara State, Nigeria, while identifying additional determinants. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, involving 150 parents of physically challenged secondary school students selected through multistage sampling. Data were collected using a researcher-designed questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) and inferential statistics (ANOVA) at a 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that parents generally exhibited positive attitudes toward the education of children with physical disabilities (grand mean = 2.24), although their active involvement remained relatively low (mean = 2.10, SD = 0.91). Results further showed that neither gender ($p = 0.825$) nor socio-economic status ($p = 0.525$) significantly influenced parental attitudes. However, parental level of education emerged as a significant determinant ($p = 0.018$), with more educated parents demonstrating more positive attitudes. The study therefore highlights the need for education managers and policymakers to prioritize parent-focused sensitization programmes, community-based awareness initiatives, and adult education interventions as strategic tools for strengthening the management and implementation of inclusive education in Kwara State.

Keywords: Parental attitudes, Management, Physical Disability, Inclusive Education, Parental Education Level, Rural Nigeria, Special Education

INTRODUCTION

Quality within the realm of educational efficiency can be determined by multiple indicators, including equitable access, active participation, and successful learning outcomes for all learners, regardless of their physical abilities. In Nigeria, as in many developing nations, the education of children with physical

disabilities remains a pressing concern, with parental attitudes serving as a critical determinant of their educational participation and success (Elekanachi et al., 2023). Parents are the primary gatekeepers of their children's educational opportunities, and their beliefs, expectations, and level of involvement significantly shape whether children with physical disabilities enroll in school, remain in school, and achieve meaningful outcomes (Ginting et al., 2025). These dynamics have direct implications for the effective planning, administration, and management of inclusive education systems.

The Federal Government of Nigeria, through the National Policy on Education (FGN, 2013), has institutionalized special and inclusive education to ensure equal opportunities for all children irrespective of physical, mental, or emotional challenges. Despite these policy provisions, implementation continues to face significant barriers, including persistent negative societal attitudes, inadequate infrastructure, insufficient trained personnel, and limited parental support. The United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2015) reports that a large proportion of children with disabilities in developing countries experience exclusion, stigmatization, and educational inequality. In Nigeria, where millions of persons live with disabilities (WHO, 2019), many remain excluded from meaningful educational participation, thereby posing challenges for education managers and policymakers striving to implement inclusive practices effectively.

Parental attitudes toward educating children with physical disabilities are shaped by a complex interplay of socio-cultural beliefs, economic realities, and individual experiences. In many Nigerian communities, traditional beliefs have historically linked disability to supernatural causes such as divine punishment, witchcraft, or evil spirits, resulting in stigmatization, concealment of affected children, and denial of educational opportunities (Anokwuru, 2023; Ayeleso & Ayeleso, 2023). Although modernization and increased awareness have contributed to some positive shifts, significant variations in attitudes persist across communities, particularly between urban and semi-urban or rural areas.

Existing literature has also documented the emotional and psychological challenges associated with raising children with disabilities, including financial strain, limited access to specialized services, and inadequate social support systems (Matambanadzo & Rhoda, 2024; Moosa-Tayob & Risenga, 2022). Parents often experience complex emotional responses such as denial, guilt, frustration, and despair (Ahmad et al., 2026), as well as "chronic sorrow," characterized by recurring feelings of sadness and stress (Drew et al., 2014). These experiences can significantly influence parental attitudes, which in turn affect their willingness to support inclusive education initiatives and collaborate with school management.

However, while previous studies have frequently emphasized socio-economic status and gender as primary determinants of parental attitudes, empirical findings remain inconclusive, particularly in specific Nigerian contexts. Moreover, limited attention has been given to identifying other critical factors that may shape these attitudes and how such factors influence the management and implementation of inclusive education at the local level.

This study, therefore, moves beyond the traditional focus on socio-economic status and gender by comparatively examining parental attitudes toward the education of children with physical disabilities in Ilorin South and Ilorin West Local Government Areas of Kwara State, Nigeria. It further explores additional determinants of these attitudes and their implications for the effective management of inclusive education, with a view to informing policy decisions, administrative strategies, and community-based interventions. This study, therefore, sought to answer the following research questions:

- i) What is parental attitude toward the education of physically challenged students in Ilorin South and West LGAs?

- ii) Does gender influence parental attitude toward the education of physically challenged students in Ilorin South and Ilorin Local Government area of Kwara State?
- iii) Does parents' socio-economic status influence parental attitude toward the education of physically challenged students in Ilorin South and Ilorin Local Government area of Kwara State?
- iv) Does parents' level of education influence parental attitude toward the education of physically challenged students in Ilorin South and Ilorin Local Government area of Kwara State?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework: Attitude Formation and Parental Dispositions

Attitude formation has been extensively theorized in social psychology, with implications for understanding parental responses to childhood disability. Attitude is a combination of affective, behavioural, and cognitive reactions to an object (Fishman et al., 2021). The tri-component approach suggests that attitudes consist of emotional responses (affective), behavioural tendencies (behavioural), and evaluative beliefs (cognitive) (Bakanauskas et al., 2020). Schewarts et al. (2015) simplified this as a positive or negative evaluation of an object, when people express like, dislike, love, or hate, they are describing their attitudes.

Two major theories explain how attitudes are formed. First, the Mere Exposure Effect posits that repeated exposure to an object or behaviour increases the tendency to develop positive feelings. For physically challenged children, limited exposure within educational settings may perpetuate negative attitudes. Second, Classical Conditioning suggests that previously neutral attitude objects can evoke emotional responses through association with other stimuli. Parents who associate disability with shame, punishment, or burden may develop negative attitudes toward their children's education through this conditioned response.

Bandura (2019) emphasized that attitude learning is integral to socialization, occurring through direct experience, interactions with others, and cognitive processes. For parents of physically challenged children, their attitudes are shaped by personal experiences with disability, cultural narratives, interactions with healthcare and educational professionals, and their own educational backgrounds.

Parental Attitudes Toward Education of Physically Challenged Children

Over the past decades, international declarations from the United Nations have emphasized equal educational opportunities for all children irrespective of disabilities. In response, Nigeria's National Policy on Education (FGN, 2013) instituted special education provisions. However, research indicates that parental attitudes remain a significant barrier. Scavarda (2024) asserts that parents often exhibit negative attitudes toward their children with disabilities, plagued by pessimism, hostility, shame, denial, projection of blame, guilt, grief, withdrawal, rejection, and, eventually, acceptance.

UNESCO (2016) expressed concern that parents of learners with disabilities tend to feel ashamed, leading to children being hidden away from society. This lack of concern often begins with parents themselves, as stigma makes them reluctant to send their children outside the home, thereby denying them education and

vocational training. Similarly, in Kenya, children with disabilities are hidden from society, with documented cases of girls kept from the world for 13 years (Bukhala, 2022).

However, positive changes are emerging. Some parents no longer confine children with disabilities but have accepted them as they are (Hochman et al., 2022). Some view children with disabilities as blessings rather than curses, and certain parents demonstrate enthusiasm toward their children's education (Odame, 2022). This study contributes to understanding what differentiates these positive attitudes from negative ones in the Nigerian context.

Gender and Parental Attitudes

Research on gender differences in attitudes toward persons with disabilities has produced mixed findings. Stovall and Sedlacek (2019) reported that females were more positive about the physically challenged, regardless of disability nature. In a Nigerian study, Olaleye et al., (2012) found that 86.7% of respondents would not be bothered if a child with disability sat next to them in class, with female students demonstrating higher positive attitude scores than males. Rutter et al. (2024) similarly found females held more positive attitudes and compassion toward physically challenged persons.

However, these studies focused primarily on student attitudes, not parental attitudes. Among parents, gender role expectations in African traditional culture may influence attitudes differently. Men are expected to play economic roles, while women play domestic roles. Consequently, when formal schooling was introduced, emphasis was placed on educating boys as potential heads of families and breadwinners, while girls were prepared for feminine roles and marriage (Yuliasari et al., 2024). How these gendered expectations translate into attitudes toward educating physically challenged children, especially girls with disabilities remains under-examined. Therefore, we hypothesised that:

H₀₁: Gender does not significantly influence parental attitude toward the education of physically challenged students in Ilorin South and West Local Government Areas of Kwara State.

Socio-Economic Status and Parental Attitudes

Children with disabilities impose significant costs on families. Regardless of age, they often require permanent attention, care, and treatment, all carrying innate socio-economic costs. In Russia, examinations of families with disabled children showed most parents employed in less demanding jobs, with 40% of mothers breaking labor force participation when children are born or become invalids (Elena, 2015). Mothers of severely mentally disabled children spent an average of over seven hours daily on care, supervision, and training (Coren et al., 2018).

In Nigeria, poverty and limited financial resources negatively affect educational decisions for children with disabilities. Parents may decide to lock children at home, denying them education, due to the perceived costs of schooling—uniforms, transportation, assistive devices, and specialized instruction. Eze's (2017) study in Enugu State revealed that parents with higher socio-economic status were more likely to prioritize and invest in the education of their physically challenged children. However, whether this pattern holds in rural Kwara State requires empirical investigation. Therefore, we hypothesised that:

H₀₂: Parents' socioeconomic status does not significantly influence parental attitude toward the education of physically challenged students in Ilorin South and West Local Government Areas of Kwara State.

Parental Education Level and Attitudes

The relationship between parental education and attitudes toward disability has received less attention than gender or SES. However, theoretical grounds suggest that education increases access to information, challenges superstitions, promotes critical thinking, and exposes individuals to diverse perspectives. Johnson (2018) found that higher education levels are associated with increased awareness of developmental needs and stronger belief in long-term educational benefits. Sayson et al. (2024) similarly noted that increased awareness of disability rights correlates with greater parental support for inclusive education.

Educated parents may better understand that disability does not diminish a child's capacity to learn and contribute to society. They may be more likely to seek information about educational options, advocate for their children's rights, and collaborate with teachers and school administrators. This study hypothesizes that parental education level significantly influences attitudes toward educating physically challenged children. Therefore, we hypothesised that:

H₀₃: Parents' level of education does not significantly influence parental attitude toward the education of physically challenged students in Ilorin South and West Local Government Areas of Kwara State.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. This design was appropriate as it enabled information to be obtained from a representative sample of the population and described the situation as it existed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018)

Population, Sample and Sampling Technique

The study was conducted in Ilorin South and West Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Kwara State, Nigeria. These LGAs were selected to provide comparative perspectives on parental attitudes across different rural-urban gradients within the same state. The target population comprised all parents of physically challenged students enrolled in secondary schools within the two LGAs. A multistage sampling technique was employed. First, secondary schools with identified physically challenged students were purposively selected. Second, from each LGA, 75 parents of physically challenged students were randomly selected, yielding a total sample of 150 respondents. This sample size was deemed adequate for descriptive and inferential statistical analyses.

Instrumentation

The instrument was a structured questionnaire titled "Comparative Assessment of Parental Attitude Towards the Education of Physically Challenged Students Questionnaire (CAPATEPCSQ)." Section A captured demographic data (gender, highest level of education, socio-economic status). Section B contained 15 items measuring parental attitudes across domains including beliefs about academic potential, involvement in education, satisfaction with school provisions, support for inclusive education,

and advocacy willingness. A 3-point Likert scale (Agreed, Undecided, Disagreed) was adopted considering the socio-economic situation of respondents.

Face and content validity were established through expert review by the research supervisor. Reliability was determined using test-retest method with 5 parents in Offa LGA (outside the study sample). The two scores were correlated using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.78.

Data Collection Procedure and Data Analysis

Following ethical approval and permission from school principals, the researcher administered questionnaires directly to parents during school visits. The purpose of the research was explained, and questionnaires were collected immediately after completion to maximize response rates. Demographic data were analyzed using frequency counts and percentages. Research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation. Hypotheses were tested using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) at a 0.05 significance level. A mean score of 2.0 (on a 3-point scale) was adopted as the benchmark for "agreement" with positive attitude statements.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1: Sociodemographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 150)

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	55	36.67
Female	95	63.33
Highest Level of Education		
No Formal Education	15	10.00
Primary School	45	30.00
Secondary School	55	36.67
Tertiary Education	35	23.33
Socio-Economic Status		
Low	50	33.33
Middle Class	55	36.67
High	45	30.00

Table 1 presents the sociodemographic characteristics of the 150 respondents. The sample was predominantly female (63.33%), reflecting the reality that mothers often serve as primary caregivers for children with disabilities. Regarding educational attainment, the largest proportion had secondary school education (36.67%), followed by primary school (30.00%), tertiary education (23.33%), and no formal

education (10.00%). Socio-economic status was fairly evenly distributed: middle class (36.67%), low (33.33%), and high (30.00%).

Research Question 1: Parental Attitudes Toward Education of Physically Challenged Students

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of parental attitudes (N = 150)

Item	Mean	SD	Remark
I believe physically challenged children can achieve academic success	2.50	0.65	Agreed
Quality education for physically challenged children is worthwhile investment	2.35	0.70	Agreed
I am actively involved in supporting my child's education	2.10	0.91	Agreed
I feel well-informed about educational options available	2.45	0.70	Agreed
I am satisfied with quality of education my child receives	2.51	0.65	Agreed
Schools are adequately equipped for physically challenged students	2.95	0.60	Agreed
Teachers are well-trained to educate physically challenged students	2.90	0.65	Agreed
My child will have equal life opportunities after education	2.71	0.75	Agreed
Physically challenged children should be educated alongside non-disabled peers	2.90	0.60	Agreed
Society has responsibility to provide accessible education	2.83	0.75	Agreed
I am comfortable discussing child's challenges with teachers	2.91	0.45	Agreed
I am willing to advocate for rights of physically challenged students	2.78	0.55	Agreed
My child's education is as important as my other children's education	2.87	0.60	Agreed
School provides adequate support for physical needs	2.51	0.65	Agreed
Parents should actively participate in school decision-making	2.52	0.71	Agreed
Grand Mean	2.24		Agreed

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for parental attitudes across 15 items. The grand mean of 2.24 (on a 3-point scale) indicates generally positive attitudes. Parents strongly agreed that schools in their LGA are adequately equipped to meet the needs of physically challenged students (mean = 2.95, SD = 0.60), that teachers are well-trained (mean = 2.90, SD = 0.65), and that physically challenged children should be educated alongside non-disabled peers (mean = 2.90, SD = 0.60). Parents also expressed comfort discussing their child's challenges with teachers (mean = 2.91, SD = 0.45).

However, the lowest-rated item was "I am actively involved in supporting my physically challenged child's education" (mean = 2.10, SD = 0.91), suggesting that while attitudes are positive, actual involvement remains limited. The relatively high standard deviation (0.91) for this item indicates substantial variability among parents, some are highly involved while others are minimally so.

Hypothesis 1: Influence of Gender on Parental Attitudes

Table 3: ANOVA Summary for Gender differences in Parental Attitudes

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Between groups	0.427	1	0.427	0.049	0.825
Within groups	1730.45	148	8.740		
Total	1730.88	149			

p < 0.05 level of significance

Hypothesis 2: Influence of Socio-Economic Status on Parental Attitudes

Table 4: ANOVA Summary for Socio-economic Status differences in Parental Attitudes

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Between groups	0.42	1	1.2	0.19	0.525
Within groups	1230.45	148	4.40		
Total	1530.87	149			

p < 0.05 level of significance

Hypothesis 3: Influence of Parental Education Level on Parental Attitudes

Table 5: ANOVA summary for parental education level differences in attitudes

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Between groups	65.20	2	32.60	4.15	0.018
Within groups	1665.68	147	8.66		
Total	1730.88	149			

p < 0.05 level of significance

Table 5 reveals a statistically significant influence of parental education level on attitudes ($p = 0.018 < 0.05$). The null hypothesis is rejected. The F-statistic of 4.15 indicates that variance between educational groups is substantial, with a between-groups sum of squares of 65.20. Parents with higher educational attainment demonstrate more positive attitudes toward the education of physically challenged children.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated parental attitudes toward the education of physically challenged students in Ilorin South and West LGAs of Kwara State, Nigeria, with particular focus on moving beyond commonly assumed determinants such as gender and socio-economic status to examine other influencing factors and

their implications for the management of inclusive education. The findings provide useful insights for educational planning and administration.

The finding that parents demonstrate generally positive attitudes toward the education of physically challenged children aligns with Sayson et al. (2024), who reported increased awareness of disability rights and the influence of community-based rehabilitation programmes. This suggests that inclusive education policies and advocacy efforts may be gradually influencing perceptions. For education managers, this is encouraging, as positive parental attitudes are necessary for the successful implementation of inclusive education programmes.

However, the observed gap between positive attitudes and low active involvement (mean = 2.10) raises important concerns. While parents may value education for their children, they may lack the knowledge, time, confidence, or support needed to actively participate. This has implications for school management, as administrators cannot assume that positive attitudes will automatically translate into engagement. As noted by Moyo et al. (2020), participation is often limited despite awareness. This suggests that school leaders need to design structures that actively involve parents, rather than relying on goodwill alone.

Contrary to expectations and previous findings such as Olamide (2016), this study found no significant gender differences in parental attitudes. This supports the argument of this study that gender may not be a strong determinant in all contexts. In Ilorin South and West, shared socio-cultural realities may shape similar responses among both fathers and mothers. This finding, challenges generalized assumptions and suggests that inclusive education management strategies should not be overly gender-targeted but should instead address broader contextual issues affecting all parents.

Similarly, the absence of a significant socio-economic status effect contradicts earlier studies (e.g., Eze, 2017) and further reinforces the need to move beyond SES as a dominant explanatory factor. It appears that parents across different economic levels may face similar barriers such as stigma, lack of information, and weak institutional support. For policymakers and education managers, this implies that interventions should not be limited to low-income groups alone but should adopt a more inclusive and system-wide approach.

The most important finding of this study is that parental education level emerged as the only significant predictor of positive attitudes. This clearly supports the central argument of this study that factors beyond socio-economic status and gender are more critical in shaping parental attitudes. Educated parents are more likely to understand disability in non-stigmatizing ways, appreciate the value of education, and engage effectively with schools. They are also better positioned to support their children academically and emotionally.

From a management perspective, this finding is very important. It suggests that improving parental attitudes cannot be achieved only through policy declarations but requires deliberate efforts to educate and engage parents. School administrators and education authorities need to invest in parent education programmes, awareness campaigns, and community engagement strategies. Strengthening collaboration between schools and parents will enhance the overall effectiveness of inclusive education and improve outcomes for physically challenged learners.

CONCLUSION

This study examined parental attitudes toward the education of children with physical disabilities in Ilorin South and Ilorin West LGAs of Kwara State, with a focus on moving beyond socio-economic status and gender as dominant determinants. The findings revealed that while parents generally exhibit positive

attitudes toward educating their physically challenged children, their level of active involvement remains low. Importantly, the study established that neither gender nor socio-economic status significantly influences parental attitudes in this context. Instead, parental level of education emerged as the only significant factor shaping attitudes. This indicates that commonly held assumptions about gender and economic background as primary determinants may not adequately explain parental behaviour in relation to inclusive education. The study therefore concludes that improving inclusive education outcomes in Ilorin requires greater attention to parental education and awareness, as positive attitudes alone are insufficient without corresponding engagement and support.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The findings of this study have important implications for the management and implementation of inclusive education in Ilorin. First, school administrators and policymakers cannot rely solely on socio-economic or gender based categorizations when designing interventions, as these factors were not significant in shaping parental attitudes. Management strategies must instead focus on addressing knowledge gaps among parents. Second, the gap between positive attitudes and low parental involvement suggests that school managers need to adopt more proactive engagement strategies. This includes creating structured opportunities for parent participation, improving communication channels, and building trust between schools and families.

Third, parental education level as a key determinant implies that inclusive education management must extend beyond the school system to include community-based learning and awareness programmes. Education managers should collaborate with local authorities and organizations to promote adult education and disability awareness. Finally, effective implementation of inclusive education requires that school leaders and teachers are equipped not only with instructional skills but also with strategies for managing diverse classrooms and engaging parents. Without this, inclusive policies may exist in theory but remain weak in practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Schools and education authorities should conduct regular awareness campaigns and workshops to improve parents' understanding of inclusive education and disability issues.
2. School administrators should establish structured platforms such as regular meetings and support groups to encourage active parental involvement in their children's education.
3. Government and relevant agencies should support adult education programmes to improve parental literacy and awareness, especially among less educated parents.
4. Capacity building programmes should be organized to equip educators with skills for managing inclusive classrooms and effectively engaging parents.
5. Education authorities should strengthen monitoring systems to ensure that inclusive education policies are effectively implemented with active parental participation.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the sample was limited to two LGAs in Kwara State, limiting generalisability to other regions of Nigeria. Second, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences about the relationship between parental education and attitudes. Third, self-report data may be subject to social desirability bias, with parents over reporting positive attitudes. Fourth, the questionnaire used a simplified 3-point scale, which may not capture nuanced attitudinal variations.

Future research should expand to multiple states and LGAs, employ mixed methods (including interviews and focus groups), use longitudinal designs to track attitude changes over time, and develop more refined instruments with 4- or 5-point scales. Intervention studies testing the effectiveness of adult education programs on parental attitudes and child educational outcomes are urgently needed.

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