

ASPIRATION FOR ACADEMIC INCLUSIVITY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A STUDY OF ANAMBRA EAST LOCAL GOVERNMENT: AN APPRAISAL

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Abstract

Education is a key driver of national development, with academic inclusivity playing a crucial role in fostering economic productivity and social cohesion. Despite various policies promoting universal education, disparities persist, particularly in marginalized regions like Anambra East Local Government. This study examines the challenges hindering academic inclusivity, evaluates the effectiveness of existing policies and community-driven initiatives, and explores their impact on national development. Employing a mixed-method approach, the research finds that financial constraints, inadequate infrastructure, and socio-cultural barriers remain significant obstacles. While NGO-led initiatives have proven more effective than government policies in enhancing educational access, sustained governmental support is essential. The study underscores the strong correlation between academic inclusivity and national development, emphasizing the need for increased funding, policy enforcement, and stakeholder collaboration to bridge existing educational gaps.

Keywords: *Academic Inclusivity, National Development, Education Policy, Anambra East, Socio-economic Barriers.*

Introduction

Education is widely recognized as a fundamental driver of national development, with academic inclusivity serving as a catalyst for social and economic progress (UNESCO, 2021). Academic inclusivity ensures that individuals, regardless of their socio-economic, cultural, or physical backgrounds, have equitable access to quality education, thereby

fostering economic productivity and social cohesion (Booth & Ainscow, 2020).

Despite various governmental and non-governmental policies aimed at universal education, disparities persist, particularly in rural and marginalized areas (Schuelka & Johnstone, 2021). Anambra East Local Government is one of such regions where limited access to educational opportunities has hindered the realization of inclusive education and national development objectives (UN, 2021).

Several studies have explored academic inclusivity in Nigeria and Sub-Saharan Africa, identifying financial constraints, inadequate educational infrastructure, and socio-cultural barriers as major challenges (Florian & Spratt, 2021). However, most of these studies have not sufficiently examined the effectiveness of existing policies and community-driven initiatives in bridging educational gaps at the local level. Furthermore, little research has been conducted on the interplay between academic inclusivity and national development in the context of Anambra East Local Government. Existing literature on academic inclusivity in Nigeria has largely focused on broad national policies and macroeconomic factors affecting education. However, these studies often overlook localized socio-economic conditions that shape access to education at the grassroots level (Ainscow, 2020). Specifically, there is limited research on how governmental and non-governmental interventions address inclusivity challenges in rural communities like Anambra East L.G.A. Moreover, while prior research has highlighted financial, infrastructural, and cultural barriers to education, few studies have examined the long-term sustainability of existing educational policies and community initiatives (OECD, 2021). Additionally, the extent to which academic inclusivity influences national development particularly in fostering economic growth, social mobility, and civic engagement remains underexplored. This study seeks to address these gaps by investigating the specific challenges, existing interventions,

and their impact on national development. To fill these research gaps, this study aims to answer the following questions: What are the primary barriers to academic inclusivity in Anambra East Local Government? How effective are existing governmental and non-governmental policies in promoting academic accessibility in the region? What role do local communities and stakeholders play in fostering inclusive education? In what ways does academic inclusivity in Anambra East contribute to national development? These are the major prompt of this study.

Conceptual Discourse

Concept of Academic Inclusivity

Academic inclusivity refers to policies and practices that ensure equal access to education for all individuals, irrespective of their background. It encompasses strategies that remove barriers to education, foster an inclusive learning environment, and provide equitable opportunities for diverse learners, including those from marginalized communities (Ainscow, 2020). Inclusivity in education is fundamental for fostering innovation, economic stability, and social cohesion (UNESCO, 2021). Studies suggest that academic inclusivity is a multidimensional concept, involving factors such as accessibility, affordability, quality, and equity (Booth & Ainscow, 2020). Accessibility ensures that all individuals, regardless of socio-economic status, disability, or geographic location, can obtain education. Affordability addresses financial

constraints, while Quality guarantees effective learning outcomes. Equity, on the other hand, focuses on fairness in education by addressing historical disadvantages and providing adequate support to underserved groups (Schuelka & Johnstone, 2021).

Academic inclusivity is closely linked to the principles of social justice and human rights, as outlined in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all (UNESCO, 2021). Research has shown that inclusive education promotes social mobility, reduces economic disparities, and strengthens national development (OECD, 2021). Given its significance, academic inclusivity requires a collaborative effort from policy makers, educators, and communities to implement policies that dismantle barriers and create a more equitable educational landscape (Florian & Spratt, 2021). This study builds on these perspectives to examine how inclusivity is pursued in Anambra East Local Government and the challenges faced in achieving it.

Education Policy in Anambra State

Anambra State, located in southeastern Nigeria, has implemented various educational policies aimed at enhancing access, quality, and inclusivity in its educational system. The state's Ministry of Education is responsible for formulating and overseeing these policies, focusing on areas such as curriculum development, provision of physical infrastructure, and supervision

of educational boards (OECD, 2021). The policies are:

Universal Basic Education (UBE) Policy: In line with Nigeria's national Universal Basic Education policy, Anambra State has committed to providing free and compulsory education from early childhood care up to junior secondary school. This initiative aims to improve literacy rates and ensure that all children have access to foundational education (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2021). However, challenges such as inadequate instructional materials, insufficient teaching personnel, and hidden fees have been reported, which hinder the effective implementation of this policy (Tilak, 2020).

Free Education Extension to Senior Secondary School: In a significant policy shift, Governor Charles Soludo announced in September 2024 that the state would extend free education to senior secondary school students in public schools. This move eliminates tuition fees and aims to make education more accessible to all students, thereby reducing dropout rates and promoting higher educational attainment (World Bank, 2021).

Enforcement of Free Education Policy: To uphold the free education policy, the Anambra State government has taken strict measures against violations. In December 2024, six head teachers were suspended, and two others were demoted for illegally collecting fees from students' parents and guardians. This action underscores the

government's commitment to ensuring that education remains free and accessible to all (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2020).

- **Challenges in Policy Implementation:** Despite the so initiatives, challenges persist. The high cost of text books and uniforms has been a concern, as it imposes a financial burden on parents and may deter students from attending school (Schuelka & Johnstone, 2021). The Anambra State House of Assembly has expressed concerns over these costs, emphasizing the need to address them to fully realize the benefits of the free education policy.
- **Historical Context and Reforms:** Under the administrations governor Willie Obiano, significant efforts were made to reform the educational sector. Governor Peter Obi's tenure, policies focused on infrastructural development, teacher training, and curriculum improvements were implemented to revitalize the state's education system (UNESCO, 2021).

In conclusion, Anambra State's educational policies reflect a strong commitment to providing accessible and quality education to its residents. While significant progress has been made, ongoing challenges necessitate continuous evaluation and reform to ensure that the objectives of these policies are fully achieved.

Anambra East Local Government Area (LGA) Community-Driven Initiatives

Anambra East Local Government Area (LGA) in Nigeria has witnessed several

community-driven initiatives aimed at promoting educational inclusiveness. Notable among these are:

Summer Reading Programs: These initiatives are designed to integrate literacy skills in children and build a community of young readers. By extending reading activities to rural communities, these programmes enhance social inclusion and bridge the service delivery gap between urban and underserved areas.

Anambra State Library Board Activities: The Anambra State Library Board organizes various events and programs to promote reading and literacy among community members. These include reading promotions through spelling bees, reading competitions, school outreaches, and advocacy. Additionally, they observe International Literacy Day and conduct activities aimed at grassroots engagement and enlightenment for sustainable development goals in the communities.

Pan-African Community Initiative on Education and Health (PACIEH): PACIEH supports education through a school feeding programme aimed at alleviating hunger and promoting school attendance in rural schools. This nutrition programme addresses food insecurity, enabling pupils to focus on their studies and improving both their academic performance and physical well-being.

Community Development Initiatives in Enugwuotu Aguleri: While focusing on Enugwuotu Aguleri, this is because it is a community within Anambra State, these

initiatives have been assessed for their impact and sustainability. The community has actively contributed to overall development through various projects, reflecting a model that can be emulated in other parts of Anambra East LGA. There is scholarship by individuals in the community, students WAEC examination payment was paid from 2020 till this year 2025 and so many others.

- On 24th January, 2025, the Anambra East Local Government Council, through the office of the Chairman in line with the vision of Governor Charles Chukwuma Soludo on free education embarked on a campaign on ‘COMPULSORY BACK TO SCHOOL PROGRAMMES’ for children under the school age, in Anambra state and more especially in Anambra East Local Government Area, titled, give your child the best future by giving him/her EDUCATION.

These initiatives, among others, demonstrate the LGA's (community's) commitment to enhancing educational inclusiveness and ensuring that no child is left behind in Anambra East LGA.

The Nexus between National Development and Education

National development is a multidimensional process encompassing economic growth, social progress, improved governance, and enhanced quality of life (OECD, 2021). Education plays a central role in this process by fostering human capital development, increasing productivity, and reducing inequality (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2020). An inclusive education system equips

individuals with the necessary skills, knowledge, and competencies required to participate actively in national development (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2021).

Research has shown that countries with higher levels of educational inclusivity tend to experience faster economic growth and lower rates of poverty (Tilak, 2020). Education contributes to national development by promoting civic engagement, social cohesion, and political stability (UNESCO, 2021). Moreover, investment in education has been linked to technological advancements and innovation, further propelling national progress (World Bank, 2021). In the context of Anambra East L.G., academic inclusivity can serve as a tool for community-driven development, creating employment opportunities, and reducing socio-economic disparities. By improving access to education for marginalized groups, the region can foster a more inclusive and participatory economy, ultimately contributing to national development objectives (Florian & Spratt, 2021).

Socio-Economic Barriers in Anambra East Local Government

Anambra East Local Government faces several socio-economic barriers that hinder academic inclusivity and overall development, including but not limited to the following:

Financial Constraints: Many families struggle to afford education-related costs, including textbooks, uniforms, and

transportation, despite free education policies. This financial burden limits school attendance and retention rates (Tilak, 2020).

- **Inadequate Infrastructure:** Poorly equipped schools, insufficient classrooms, and lack of basic amenities such as electricity and internet access hinder effective learning, particularly in rural areas (UNESCO, 2021).
- **Cultural and Gender Norms:** Traditional beliefs sometimes discourage female education, while early marriage and domestic responsibilities further reduce school participation among girls (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2021).
- **Limited Government Funding and Policy Implementation:** While policies exist to promote education, weak enforcement, corruption, and bureaucratic inefficiencies prevent their full realization (OECD, 2021).
- **Community and Stakeholder Challenges:** Although local communities and NGOs play a significant role in education, they often lack the necessary resources and governmental support to drive long-term change (Florian & Spratt, 2021).

Addressing these barriers requires increased educational funding, stronger policy enforcement, and collaborative efforts between government agencies, NGOs, and local communities (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by the Capability Approach by Amartya Sen (1970). The approach emphasizes that individuals should have the freedom to achieve educational and personal development based on available opportunities. The Approach offers a theoretical framework for evaluating human well-being and development. It shifts the focus from income or resource-based measures to the actual capabilities of individuals, their freedom to achieve valuable functioning's, such as being educated, participating in society, and contributing to the economy. The approach argues that social and economic structures should provide equitable educational access to enable individuals to reach their full potential. The approach is highly relevant when examining educational aspirations, academic inclusivity, and their contribution to national development, particularly in regions like Anambra East Local Government in southeastern Nigeria.

Relevance of the Capability Approach to the study

In the context of Anambra East Local Government Area (LGA), this approach provides a robust framework for understanding the challenges and opportunities related to academic inclusivity and national development. The region, located in southeastern Nigeria, faces various socio-economic issues that influence educational access, quality, and

aspirations, all of which have profound implications for the broader goals of national development. By addressing these barriers, local authorities can help ensure that students have the freedom to pursue their academic ambitions.

Methodology

A mixed-method approach was employed, incorporating qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques.

Sample size and Population of the study: two hundred (200) respondents, including students, educators, and policymakers, were selected through stratified sampling¹. technique.

Data Collection: Structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were conducted.

Data Analysis: Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS, while qualitative responses were thematically analyzed to identify key trends.

Data Analysis

Data analysis based on the four key research questions regarding academic inclusivity and national development in Anambra East Local Government.

Primary Barriers to Academic Inclusivity in Anambra East (Findings from Thematic Analysis & Descriptive Statistics)

Top Barriers Identified(n=200)

Barrier	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Inadequate funding for education	130	65%
Poor infrastructure (schools, classrooms, libraries, etc.)	110	55%
Limited access to technology	120	60%
Teacher shortages & lack of training	95	47.5%
Gendered is parity in education	80	40%
High cost of education	85	42.5%
Cultural & religious factors affecting education	70	35%

Sources: Fieldwork2025

Discussion

Funding issues 65% and infrastructure challenges 55% are the most cited barriers, suggesting a need for governmental

intervention and increased budget allocations. Technological access 60% is a key concern, particularly for students in rural areas with limited internet and digital

resources. Teacher shortages 47.5% indicate the need for more professional development programs and recruitment strategies. Cultural & gender-related barriers 35-40%

highlight underlying social issues that affect academic inclusivity, particularly for girls in some communities.

2. Effectiveness of Governmental and Non-Governmental Policies in Promoting Academic Accessibility. (Findings from Likert Scale & Policy Evaluation)

Perceived Effectiveness of Policies (1 = Not Effective, 5 = Highly Effective)

Policy Area	Mean Score (1-5)	Standard Deviation
Government-funded scholarship programs	3.5	0.78
Infrastructure improvement initiatives	3.2	0.85
Teacher recruitment & training programs	3.7	0.72
Technology integration policies	3.0	0.80
NGO-led educational initiatives	4.0	0.68

Source: Fieldwork2025

Discussion

NGO-led initiatives $M = 4.0$ are rated more effective than government policies in addressing inclusivity gaps. This suggests that collaborations between the government and NGOs could improve overall accessibility. Government scholarship programs $M = 3.5$ are moderately effective, but funding limitations reduce their reach.

Infrastructure projects $M = 3.2$ and technology initiatives $M = 3.0$ received lower scores, highlighting implementation challenges and the digital divide in rural areas. Teacher recruitment programs $M = 3.7$ are relatively effective, but more needs to be done to retain skilled educators in underserved communities.

3. Role of Local Communities & Stakeholders in Fostering Inclusive Education (Findings from Qualitative Thematic Analysis & Stakeholder Responses)

Stakeholder	Role in Academic Inclusivity
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Parents & Guardians Traditional & Religious, leaders	Financial support, home-based learning, cultural influence on gender-based education Advocacy for education, addressing cultural barriers (e.g., promoting girls' education)
Community Associations	Fund raising for schools, organizing local literacy programs
NGOs & Educational Foundations	Scholarship provision, teacher training, infrastructure development
Government Agencies	Policy formulation, funding, and regulatory enforcement
School Administrators & Teachers	Implementing inclusive teaching strategies, supporting student engagement

Source: Fieldwork 2025

Discussion

Local communities play a crucial role in education accessibility, particularly through financial contributions, cultural influence, and advocacy. Traditional and religious leaders help challenge harmful cultural norms that prevent full inclusivity. NGOs

are instrumental in supplementing government efforts, particularly in funding and infrastructure development. Stronger collaboration between schools, NGOs, and government bodies is necessary for long-term sustainability.

4. Contribution of Academic Inclusivity to National Development (Findings from Correlation & Regression Analysis)

Correlation Between Academic Inclusivity and Developmental Indicators.

Development Indicator	Correlation Coefficient(r)	p-value
Economic Growth (Employment Rate)	0.71	0.001
Literacy Rate Improvement	0.68	0.002
Reduction in Poverty Levels	0.65	0.003
Social Equity & Gender Balance	0.60	0.005

Fieldwork:2025

Regression Model: Predicting National Development Based on Inclusivity

Variable	Beta Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value
Inclusivity Index	0.72	5.45	0.001**
Education Funding	0.65	4.80	0.002**
Teacher Training	0.58	4.32	0.004**

Field's work:2025

Interpretation: Academic inclusivity has a strong, positive impact on national development, particularly in employment rates $r = 0.71$, literacy $r = 0.68$, and poverty reduction $r = 0.65$. Regression results confirm that improving inclusivity to education significantly boosts economic and

social development, with an Inclusivity Index $\beta = 0.72$ ($p = 0.001$), indicating a highly significant relationship. Education funding and teacher training also contribute significantly to development ($\beta = 0.65$ and $\beta = 0.58$, respectively), showing that investing in education directly enhances national progress.

Findings

- It was found that Funding and infrastructure are the major barriers to inclusivity to education in Anambra East L.G.A.
- The study revealed that NGO-led initiatives outperform government policies in improving accessibility to education in that locality.

It also found that community stakeholders play a vital role in education but need more governmental support both financially and otherwise.

It was further found that academic inclusivity has a strong correlation with national development, particularly in employment, literacy, and poverty reduction.

Recommendations Short-Term Actions

The study therefore recommends the following short actions

- Increase educational funding – Allocate more resources to infrastructure and teacher training.
- Enhance public-private partnerships – Encourage more NGO involvement in education initiatives.

Expand digital learning programs – Improve access to technology for students in rural areas.

There should be continued emergency campaign in the area, encouraging massive participation in education despite the gender,

through the local government mayors, Igwes, President general and youth leaders

Long-Term Strategies

The study also has long term recommendations, they include but not limited to the following:

- The government should legislate and enforce education inclusivity policies, they should also ensure the policies are effectively implemented at all levels especially at the grassroots level.
- Socio-cultural barriers such as beliefs, gender roles social class, should be addressed. Government should work with

traditional and religious leaders to advocate for education.

There should be improvement in monitoring and evaluation on education, Track policy impact and make necessary adjustments to improve effectiveness.

There should be adequate provision of the needed infrastructure and technological access in the local government.

Conclusion

Academic inclusivity is critical for national development, particularly in economic growth, literacy improvement, and poverty reduction. Major barriers include funding limitations, infrastructure deficits, and technological access. Local communities

and NGOs play an essential role, but government intervention remains crucial for long-term success. Policy improvement, funding, and stakeholder engagement are key to achieving full educational inclusivity in Anambra East L.G.A.

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