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An Evaluation of Support Services for Students with Special Needs in Islamiyah School in Southwest Nigeria

Isiaq Oluwatosin Yahya,[1*] Ibrahim Solahudeen Owoyale-Abdulganiy,[2] Azeez Olalekan Raheed,[3] Muhydeen Olaitan Abiola,[4]
[1]Lagos State University, Nigeria, [2,34]Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria
[1]isiaq.yahya@lasu.edu.ng, [2]isabdulganiy@alhikmah.edu.ng,
[3]or.azeez@alhikmah.edu.ng, [4]moabiola@alhikmah.edu.ng
*Corresponding Author

Abstract

This study investigates the availability, effectiveness, and impact of support services for students with special needs in Islamiyah schools in Southwest Nigeria. Despite growing attention to inclusive education, many students with disabilities still face difficulties in transitioning through school and completing their education. Significant challenges include limited access to specialized support services, inadequate teacher training, and weak inclusive education policies. Although resources such as assistive technology, counselling, and specialized educational support exist, their implementation in Islamiyah schools is inconsistent and often dependent on external aid. Using a Convergent Parallel Design, the study collected quantitative and qualitative data from 17 Islamiyah schools through questionnaires and focus group discussions with teachers, school administrators, students with special needs, parents, and community leaders. Quantitative data were analyzed with SPSS, while qualitative insights were obtained through thematic analysis. The study's findings indicate that support services are inadequate and uneven, with urban schools generally better prepared than rural ones. The study highlights crucial factors for the educational success of students with special needs, such as family support, personal motivation, peer relationships, easy access to learning materials, and community involvement. The study emphasizes the need for policy reform, increased investment, and stronger stakeholder collaboration to improve inclusive practices in Islamiyah schools.

Keywords: Educational Transition, Inclusive Education, *Islamiyah* Schools, Special Needs Education, Support Services.

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Introduction

Education is widely recognized as a fundamental human right. Yet, its realization for students with special needs remains filled with challenges, especially in faith-based educational settings such as Islamiyah schools in Southwest Nigeria. These institutions play a crucial role in fostering Islamic knowledge and moral guidance, but they often fall short in supporting learners with disabilities. While inclusive education has gained momentum in

national policy discussions, implementing support services within Islamiyah schools remains inconsistent and inadequate, ultimately impacting students' ability to progress through educational stages and complete their studies successfully (Adetoro, 2014; Agama, 2025; Bano, 2022).

Globally, inclusive education has been recognized as a pathway to equity and quality, as reflected in declarations such as the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006). In Nigeria, the National Policy on Education (2013) affirms the need for inclusive provisions in secular and religious schools. Nevertheless, the reality in Islamiyah schools often does not align with these policy orientations. Challenges to the inclusive process include limited teacher training, insufficient infrastructure, parental ambivalence, and a deficiency of supporting resources (Adebisi et al., 2014; Hollings, 2021; Mohammed et al., 2024; Torgbenu et al., 2021).

These challenges influence each student's transition to and completion of school, particularly posing a vulnerability to students with special needs. They face structural difficulties, such as attitudinal challenges, public stigma, exclusive religious understandings, subordinate expectations, inaccessible buildings, and an undersupply of assistive technology (Yahya et al., 2024). These issues contribute to high dropout rates and insufficient educational outcomes. This reality undermines the very essence of equality that Islamiyah schools strive to uphold. The availability and effectiveness of support services, such as counseling, teacher assistants, and adaptive learning tools, can play a transformative role in overcoming these barriers.

Several studies have examined inclusive education within mainstream public schools in Nigeria, highlighting the positive effects of tailored interventions on academic performance and psychosocial development (Jimoh et al., 2024; Kanneh, 2024; Mohammed, Khadijah, Yahya, et al., 2024; Obizue & Enomah, 2025). However, there is a conspicuous lack of empirical research focusing on Islamiyah schools. Most existing investigations do not adequately explore how Islamic learning environments adapt or fail to adapt to meet the needs of students with disabilities. This gap limits the theoretical understanding and practical implementation of inclusive strategies in religious schools.

The urgency of this research lies in increasing the enrollment of students with special needs in Islamiyah schools and strengthening Muslim families' awareness of the value of inclusive education. However, without adequate support services, from special educators to

active parental involvement, students with special needs remain at significant risk of marginalization (Sümer Dodur & Yüzbaşioğlu, 2025; Ybañez et al., 2024). That signifies that the current landscape demands a critical examination of how Islamiyah schools adapt students with special needs, the barriers they face, and institutional willingness for inclusion.

Relatedly, documented efforts to promote inclusive Islamic education by NGOs and faith-based organizations indicate that many Islamic schools operate without a clear framework to support students with disabilities (Dey, 2025; Dukmak et al., 2024). Limited access to various assistive devices, such as Braille Qurans, sign language interpreters, and other mobility aids, highlights these institutions' financial and infrastructure constraints (Oyedokun, 2025; Yahya et al., 2024). Another issue is the shortage of professional development possibilities for teachers to improve their inclusive pedagogical skills (Darwish et al., 2025; Majoko, 2019).

Furthermore, despite their proven benefits, psychosocial support services, including faith-based counseling, remain underutilized. These services can help students overcome their learning difficulties and boost their self-esteem and motivation, especially when integrated with Islamic principles emphasizing compassion and equality (Khan et al., 2025; Bello & Yusuf, 2020; Ahmed & Yusuf, 2021). Parental and community attitudes also significantly shape the educational journey of students with special needs. In communities where disability is strongly stigmatized, parents may be unwilling to provide formal education to their children due to the lack of necessary support structures (Cologon, 2022; Lalvani, 2015; Mitter et al., 2019; Uba & Nwoga, 2016). Conversely, they are more likely to complete their schooling in a sensitive and actively involved society. Therefore, social mobilization and religious advocacy are crucial to inclusive education in Islamic settings.

This study investigates the role of support services in facilitating school transition and completion for students with disabilities in Islamiyah schools in Southwest Nigeria. Specifically, the study aims to identify the types of support services available, assess their sufficiency and effectiveness, and analyze the institutional and social factors that promote and hinder their performance. In this regard, the study has two primary research questions: what support services are provided to enhance school transition and completion for students with disabilities in Islamic schools? What factors contribute to the successful transition and completion of students with disabilities in Islamic schools?

Although policy frameworks support inclusive education, their practical application in Islamiyah schools remains inadequately understood. Therefore, this study addresses this

crucial research gap by providing empirical insights into the state of support services in these schools. In doing so, it contributes to the discourse on inclusive Islamic education and offers recommendations, creating a more equitable educational landscape for all learners to develop to their full potential.

Methods

This study employed a mixed-method research design, specifically the Convergent Parallel Design, which simultaneously integrates qualitative and quantitative methods to enhance data credibility and completeness (Kumatongo & Muzata, 2021). Under this approach, qualitative and quantitative data were collected with equal emphasis but analyzed separately before concluding on both methods. This design allowed for triangulation, validation, and deeper interpretation of findings related to the inclusion challenges faced by special needs students in *Islamiyah* schools. The study population included teachers, school administrators, special needs students, parents, community leaders, and religious leaders across 17 *Islamiyah* schools in Southwest Nigeria. The sampling strategy combined purposeful and disproportionate sampling to ensure representation, selecting 170 students, 34 teachers, 17 administrators, and 90 community respondents. Various research instruments, including focus group discussions and self-constructed questionnaires, were used to collect data from the diverse participant groups.

Expert reviews were conducted to ensure the validity and reliability of the research instruments, and a pilot study assessed internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded strong reliability scores (Taber, 2018). Ethical considerations were prioritized, including informed consent, confidentiality, and participant support. Data collection spanned four weeks and was facilitated by trained research assistants familiar with the local context. Inclusive measures, such as sign language and assistive reading, ensured accessibility for students with disabilities. A 96% response rate was achieved, with responses retrieved systematically. Data analysis involved descriptive and inferential statistics, using SPSS for quantitative analysis and thematic analysis for qualitative data. Findings were presented through tables to enhance clarity and support evidence-based conclusions.

Results and Discussion

Results

Support Services Types for Students with Special Needs in Islamiyah Schools

This section presents the support services currently available to improve school transition and completion for students with disabilities in Islamic schools in Southwest Nigeria. It involves an overview of stakeholder responses (school administrators, teachers, students with special needs, students' parents, community and religious leaders) to reveal diverse experiences regarding these services' availability, consistency, and effectiveness. While some schools indicate respectable efforts toward inclusion, significant gaps remain for schools in rural areas due to resource constraints.

Table 1. Support Services for Students with Special Needs in Islamiyah Schools

Respondents	Stakeholders' View
School Administrators and Teachers	a) Several school administrators highlighted the consistent availability of specialist teachers and learning aids and emphasized the school's commitment to inclusive education. b) Sign language interpreters were rarely available, leaving deaf students reliant on informal communication methods or peer support. c) Adaptations, such as ramps, were mentioned in some schools, but these were often incomplete or not maintained. d) Some educators provided extra tutoring for special needs students, which was often done voluntarily and outside regular school hours. e) Some expressed confidence in their training, particularly those who had attended formal special education training, workshops, and other professional development. f) Some admitted they felt underprepared, citing limited professional development opportunities or training in inclusive education.
Students with Special Needs	a) A minority of students stated they regularly receive support, particularly in schools with strong partnerships with NGOs or government agencies. b) A significant portion reported receiving no specialized services, citing lack of awareness or inadequate funding. c) Few Students with Visual Impairments mentioned access to Braille materials, reflecting a gap in resource allocation. d) Many felt that teachers were sufficiently trained, particularly in urban areas.
Parents of Students with Special Needs	a) Many parents noted that services, such as specialized teachers or assistive technologies, were only occasionally available due to financial or logistical constraints. b) Noted the absence of services in rural areas or schools with limited capacity c) Extra tutoring was valued but noted to be inconsistent and dependent on individual teacher commitment. d) A small percentage felt teachers were sufficiently trained, particularly in urban areas. e) Criticized the inadequacy of teacher training, with many teachers perceived as unprepared to meet the needs of special needs students.

Respondents	Stakeholders' View
Community and Religious Leaders	Occasional support was linked to seasonal donations or specific events rather than systematic provision.

Table 1 shows a thematic analysis of stakeholder responses regarding the limited, inconsistent, and significant disparities between urban and rural areas in support services provided to students with special needs in Islamiyah schools in Southwest Nigeria. Some schools offer occasional access to specialist teachers, Braille materials, and supplemental tutoring, often facilitated by NGO partnerships or community donations (Brophy, 2020). However, critical resources such as sign language interpreters and physical accessibility adaptations remain insufficient or non-existent in most schools. Teachers also often lack opportunities for training to enhance their competencies in supporting the diverse needs of students with special needs, and the availability of support services relies heavily on external funding and community advocacy, rather than systematic provision. Existing support is inadequate to address students' specific needs effectively.

Supporting Factors for Successful Transition and School Completion for Students with Special Needs in Islamiyah Schools

A thematic analysis of stakeholder responses explored factors influencing educational transition and completion for students with special needs in Islamiyah schools in Southwest Nigeria. Participants included students, parents, religious leaders, teachers, administrators, and community leaders. Their perspectives revealed various aspects influencing educational experiences: motivation, access, resources, and barriers.

Table 2. Influencing Factors on Special Needs Students' Enrolment in Islamiyah Schools

Theme	Node Description	Participants	Frequency
Interest in Religious Education	Motivation to gain Islamic knowledge despite special needs.	Students, Parents, Religious Leaders	High
Accessibility for Students with Special Needs	Availability of ramps, braille materials, sign language interpreters, and other accessibility features.	Teachers, School Administrators, Parents	Moderate
Availability of Support Services	Presence of trained teachers, therapists, and counsellors for students with special needs.	Teachers, Administrators, Parents	Moderate
Proximity to Home	The learning center's location relative to the family home.	Parents, Community Leaders	Moderate
Lack of Awareness	Limited knowledge among parents and guardians about the existence and benefits of special *Islamiyah* learning centers.	Parents, Community, and Religious Leaders	High

Theme	Node Description	Participants	Frequency
Other Factors	Factors such as cultural stigma, financial constraints, and parental misconceptions.	All Groups	Low

Table 2 shows the factors influencing students with special needs enrollment in Islamiyah schools in Southwest Nigeria. The primary factors are a combination of interest in religious education, accessibility, availability of support services, proximity to home, and lack of awareness. Stakeholders such as students, parents, and religious leaders highlighted that the desire to receive religious education strongly motivates enrollment. However, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, lack of specialized support services, and lack of awareness about the availability of such centers significantly hinder enrollment. Furthermore, the distance from home to Islamiyah schools/learning centers is another significant barrier, particularly for parents. There is also a widespread lack of awareness among the community, parents, and religious leaders about the existence of Islamiyah schools that cater to students with special needs. These factors indicate that while interest in religious education is high, overcoming infrastructure, information, and logistical barriers is crucial to increasing enrollment in these Islamiyah schools/learning centers.

The main findings of this study highlight two crucial issues in support services for students with special needs in Islamiyah schools in Southwest Nigeria. First, support services for students with special needs remain limited and inconsistent, often depending heavily on external funding. That creates significant disparities between urban and rural areas, resulting in a shortage of essential resources and trained personnel. Second, successful school transition and completion depend on various factors, including family support, peer relationships, and accessible learning materials. Furthermore, personal interest in religious studies and active community involvement play a crucial role in fostering the academic and spiritual growth of students with special needs in this educational system.

Discussion

This study revealed that Islamiyah schools in Southwest Nigeria provide support services for students with special needs. However, these services are limited, inconsistently implemented, and largely dependent on external support such as NGOs and community-based initiatives. Furthermore, several key supporting factors were identified to facilitate the transition and completion of studies for students with special needs. These include active family involvement and support, peer support, access to learning materials, intrinsic

religious motivation, and community involvement. However, problematic systemic challenges hinder inclusive education efforts, such as insufficient teacher competency development training, inadequate infrastructure, and significant disparities between urban and rural schools.

These findings align with and extend Bandura's social learning theory, which posits that individuals learn through interaction, observation, and modelling others' behavior within social contexts (Bandura, 1978). In Islamiyah schools, students with special needs benefit enormously from peer interaction and communal support. These schools' communal and religious orientation offers a value-based environment conducive to observational learning and positive behavior modelling, reinforcing inclusive attitudes and emotional resilience (Amin, 2024; Ngwacho, 2024). However, when such environments lack structure or trained personnel, the benefits of social learning may be diminished or inconsistently realized.

Further insight is provided through Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which underscores the importance of interactions across micro, meso, and exosystems (Akbayrak & Douglas, 2022; El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022; Kern, 2022; Mbelu & Maguvhe, 2024). The study reveals that while microsystems (e.g., families and peers) play supportive roles, failures at the exosystem level (e.g., policy implementation, resource allocation) undermine inclusive practices. That is consistent with findings that argue that inclusive education in Nigeria is often hindered not by cultural resistance but by systemic neglect and policy-practice gaps (Ajuwon & Brown, 2012; Batagarawa & Bagiwa, 2025; Oyinlade & Ajuwon, 2018). Rural Islamiyah schools remain marginalized due to poor governmental oversight and weak infrastructural investment (Ajuwon, 2008; Molosiwa & Boikhutso, 2016; Omede, 2016).

A critical comparison of the current findings with previous studies reveals both convergence and divergence. For example, research findings highlighting that teacher capacity remains a crucial barrier to inclusive education (Batagarawa & Bagiwa, 2025; Darwish et al., 2025) are a concern, also reflected in this study's findings of under-trained staff in Islamiyah schools. Similarly, Lawal and Isah found that over-reliance on externally funded programs led to unsustainable models of inclusion, a trend evident in the urban Islamiyah schools studied, where NGO support was prevalent but fragile (Lawal & Isah, 2022).

In distinction to the findings of Hu et al., who emphasized the detrimental impact of stigma and exclusionary interpretations of religion on children with disabilities in Muslim-majority countries, this study found that when community leaders supported inclusive Islamic values, stigma was significantly decreased (Hu et al., 2024). This nuance underscores the potential of Islamiyah schools to serve as culturally grounded platforms for inclusive practices if adequately supported. Several researchers have also emphasized the significance of peer support in faith-based environments, noting its influence on student engagement and identity formation (Ali et al., 2022; Aseery, 2024; Khalid et al., 2020), a finding reinforced by the positive peer dynamics observed in this study.

The scholarly contribution of this study lies in its focus on Islamiyah schools, a setting often overlooked in inclusive education literature. While previous studies have explored inclusion in general or public schools (Abosi & Koay, 2008), few have examined the unique intersection of faith, culture, and disability within Nigeria's informal religious education systems (Orlunga & Alikor, 2023). This study helps fill that gap by showing how Islamic values, when interpreted inclusively, can promote acceptance, motivation, and social support for learners with disabilities. The implications are significant. For educators, there is a clear need to incorporate inclusive pedagogies such as differentiated instruction and culturally responsive use of assistive technology.

Eleweke and Rodda emphasize that inclusive education can only succeed when instructional methods are adapted to local contexts (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002). For policymakers, the evidence indicates an urgent need to invest in teacher training and decentralized funding models that empower rural schools. Researchers recommend longitudinal assessments of inclusive practices within religious education systems (White & Fletcher, 2025). Finally, community stakeholders, especially religious leaders, should be involved in challenging harmful norms and promoting inclusive interpretations of Islamic teachings, as Alnahdi and Schwab demonstrated in their study on inclusive Islamic education in the Middle East (Alnahdi & Schwab, 2021).

Islamiyah schools promise to promote inclusive practices for students with special needs, but much remains to be done: bridging the urban-rural divide, institutionalizing inclusive policies, and fostering broader community support. These are crucial steps to ensuring equitable and sustainable education for all learners, regardless of ability or circumstance.

Conclusion

This study has highlighted the factors influencing the education of students with special needs in *Islamiyah* schools in Southwest Nigeria. The findings of this study revealed that support services in these schools are inadequate, inconsistent, and heavily reliant on external funding, with significant disparities between urban and rural areas. A shortage of trained personnel, a lack of specialized learning resources, and insufficient infrastructure further hinder the effectiveness of special needs education in these institutions. Despite these challenges, the study also found that family support, peer relationships, accessible learning materials, personal interest in religious studies, and community involvement influence the successful transition and completion of schooling for students with special needs. A holistic approach that integrates these factors can foster academic and spiritual growth for students with special needs in *Islamiyah* schools.

Based on the research findings, it is recommended that the government take significant steps to incorporate Islamiyah schools into the national framework for special needs education, thereby facilitating access to essential funding, specialized training, and inclusive education policies. To sustain this initiative, it is crucial to establish robust financial mechanisms, such as government grants and public-private partnerships, particularly targeting support for special needs education in rural areas. Furthermore, Islamiyah schools should be provided with specialized learning materials, accessible infrastructure, and adequately trained personnel to support students with disabilities effectively. Promoting teacher capacity-building programs, peer mentorship initiatives, and active community involvement is essential to foster an inclusive and supportive learning environment. Through these measures, we can enhance educational opportunities for all students, ensuring that those with special needs receive the support they require to thrive.

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