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## Community and Family Influences on the Completion of Schooling of Students with Special Needs in *Islamiyyah* Schools in Southwest, Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the community and family influences on the school completion of students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools across Southwest Nigeria. It explores the factors contributing to successful school completion, the impact of parental and community support, and the differences in stakeholder perceptions. Using a mixed-methods research design (Convergent Parallel Design), qualitative and quantitative data were collected simultaneously from teachers, school administrators, students with special needs, parents, community leaders, and religious leaders across 17 *Islamiyyah* schools. A combination of purposeful and disproportionate sampling selected 170 students, 34 teachers, 17 administrators, and 90 community respondents. Data collection involved focus group discussions and self-constructed questionnaires, with reliability ensured through expert reviews and a pilot study that yielded strong Cronbach's alpha scores. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, were prioritised, and inclusive measures such as sign language and assistive reading tools ensured full participation. Findings showed that family support, peer relationships, accessible learning materials, and community involvement significantly influence school completion. However, inconsistent advocacy, limited community programmes, and resource gaps highlighted the need for structured efforts. Differences in stakeholder perceptions also revealed the importance of collaborative engagement. The study recommends fostering an inclusive school environment, structured advocacy programmes, and stakeholder forums to bridge perception gaps and promote better educational outcomes for students with special needs. These efforts are crucial for academic and spiritual growth.

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## Introduction

Education is a fundamental right and a critical driver of social and economic development. However, students with special needs often face significant barriers to completing their schooling, particularly in low-resource contexts (UNESCO, 2020). In *Islamiyyah* schools in Southwest Nigeria, where religious education is integrated with conventional learning, the role of community and family support is essential in ensuring educational success. These schools, which primarily provide Islamic and basic formal education, rely heavily on communal efforts to sustain their operations and accommodate diverse learners (Abdul-Rahman & Yusuf, 2021). Understanding how community and family factors influence school completion for students with special needs is crucial for developing inclusive educational strategies tailored to this unique context.

The family is the primary social unit that shapes the educational outcomes of children with special needs. Research indicates that parental attitudes, financial capacity, and involvement in a child's education significantly impact school retention and completion (Afolabi & Adedeji, 2019). In many cases, families with limited awareness of special needs education struggle to provide adequate support, contributing to high dropout rates. Socioeconomic factors, including poverty and low parental education levels, further compound these challenges, making it difficult for students to persist in school (Olayemi & Bello, 2020). In *Islamiyyah* schools, where resources are often limited, the financial burden of specialised services may be overwhelming for families.

Beyond the family unit, the wider community plays a vital role in shaping educational access and completion for students with special needs. *Islamiyyah* schools are largely community-driven institutions, meaning that local stakeholders, religious leaders, and social networks influence school policies and practices (Yusuf & Olanrewaju, 2022). Community support may manifest in various forms, including financial assistance, the provision of learning materials, or advocacy for inclusive education. However, negative societal perceptions of disability can lead to stigma and exclusion, thereby making it more difficult for students with special needs to complete their schooling (Adejumo et al., 2021).

The availability and quality of support services within the community also significantly impact school completion rates. Access to specialised educational resources, assistive devices, and trained teachers enhances the learning experiences of students with special needs (UNICEF, 2021). However, in many *Islamiyyah* schools, these resources are either inadequate or nonexistent due to limited funding and poor government intervention (Ogunleye & Ahmed, 2022). The absence of such resources makes it challenging for students to keep up with academic demands, often resulting in poor performance and eventual dropout. Strengthening community-based support systems can bridge this gap by providing essential resources and services.

Religious and cultural beliefs within the community further influence attitudes towards disability and education. While Islamic teachings emphasise compassion, inclusion, and the pursuit of knowledge, cultural misconceptions about disability may conflict with these principles (Hassan & Abdullahi, 2020). Some families and community members view disability as a divine test or a source of social shame, leading to neglect or reluctance to invest in the education of children with special needs (Oladimeji, 2019). Addressing these perceptions through community awareness programmes and religious guidance is crucial for fostering a more inclusive educational environment.

Moreover, school policies and administrative practices in *Islamiyyah* schools play a critical role in determining how students with special needs are accommodated. The degree to which schools adopt inclusive teaching methods, provide individualised learning plans, and offer teacher training in special education significantly affects student retention and completion (Salami & Omotayo, 2022). Many *Islamiyyah* schools lack formal policies on special education, resulting in inconsistent support for students with disabilities. Strengthening school leadership and providing professional development opportunities for teachers can enhance inclusivity within these institutions.

Government policies and interventions also shape the educational experiences of students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools. Although Nigeria has made progress in developing inclusive education policies, implementation in religious-based schools remains inconsistent (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020). Limited government oversight and funding mean that many *Islamiyyah* schools operate independently without access to public special education programmes. Encouraging partnerships between the government and religious education providers could improve the support available to students with special needs (Olaniran & Bakare, 2021).

The completion of schooling for students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools in Southwest Nigeria is influenced by multiple interconnected factors, including family support, community involvement, cultural beliefs, school policies, and government interventions. While some families and communities actively support inclusive education, others face challenges such as stigma, financial constraints, and inadequate resources. Addressing these barriers requires a collaborative approach involving families, educators, policymakers, and religious leaders to create an enabling environment that promotes the educational success of students with special needs.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The completion of schooling for students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools in Southwest Nigeria remains a significant challenge due to a combination of family, community, and systemic factors. Despite global advocacy for inclusive education, these students face barriers such as inadequate family support, financial constraints, societal stigma, and limited access to specialised services (Ogunleye & Ahmed, 2022). Many families lack the resources or awareness needed to support their children's education, while cultural and religious misconceptions often perpetuate exclusion within communities (Hassan & Abdullahi, 2020). Additionally, *Islamiyyah* schools frequently operate with minimal government oversight, insufficient funding, and a shortage of trained special education teachers, further compounding the challenges (Salami & Omotayo, 2022). Existing research has primarily focused on mainstream public and private schools, with limited attention to the unique context of religious-based institutions, leaving a gap in understanding how family and community dynamics affect school completion for students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* learning centres (Yahya et al., 2024). Addressing this gap is crucial for developing targeted strategies that promote inclusivity and improve educational outcomes in *Islamiyyah* schools.

### **Objective of the study**

1. Determine the factors contributing to the successful completion of schooling among students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools in the Southwest, Nigeria.
2. Explore the influence of Parental and community support on the enrolment, transition, and completion of schooling of students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools in Southwest, Nigeria.
3. Ascertaining the difference in the perception of parents, community leaders, and religious leaders on the completion of schooling of students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools in the Southwest, Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

1. What factors contribute to the successful completion of schooling for students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools in Southwest, Nigeria?
2. How does parental and community support influence the completion of schooling of students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools in the Southwest, Nigeria?

### **Research Hypothesis**

H<sub>01</sub> There is no significant difference in the perception of parents, community leaders, and religious leaders on the completion of schooling of students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools in Southwest, Nigeria.

### **Conceptualising Special Needs Education**

Special needs education refers to educational provisions designed to meet the unique learning requirements of students with disabilities or other learning difficulties (UNESCO, 2020). The goal is to ensure equitable access to quality education that promotes the academic, social, and emotional development of all learners. In *Islamiyyah* schools, which integrate Islamic teachings with basic formal education, the inclusion of students with special needs remains a growing concern due to limited resources and structural barriers (Ogunleye & Ahmed, 2022). Research indicates that inclusive education not only benefits students with disabilities but also fosters empathy and understanding among all learners (Salami & Omotayo, 2022). However, achieving inclusivity in resource-constrained religious schools presents unique challenges.

### **Family Influences on School Completion**

The family is often the most critical factor in determining the educational outcomes of students with special needs. Parental involvement, socioeconomic status, and attitudes toward disability significantly impact school enrolment, retention, and completion rates (Afolabi & Adedeji, 2019). Studies show that when parents actively participate in their children's education, students are more likely to persist and achieve better academic outcomes. However, in many low-income communities in Southwest Nigeria, families face financial constraints that limit their ability to provide essential educational resources (Olayemi & Bello, 2020). Additionally, some parents lack adequate knowledge of special needs education, leading to neglect or inconsistent support (Yusuf & Olanrewaju, 2022). Research highlights the need for increased parental awareness and empowerment programmes to improve schooling outcomes.

### **Community Support and Schooling Outcomes**

Community support is essential in enhancing the educational experiences of students with special needs, particularly in *Islamiyyah* schools where communal efforts sustain school operations (Hassan & Abdullahi, 2020). Community involvement may take the form of financial assistance, the provision of learning materials, or advocacy for inclusive education (Oladimeji, 2019). Studies have shown that communities with strong social networks are better equipped to support vulnerable students, reducing the risk of dropout (Adejumo et al., 2021). However, negative societal attitudes and limited community resources often undermine these efforts. Research suggests that engaging community leaders and religious figures in promoting inclusivity can improve the acceptance and support of students with special needs.

### **Cultural and Religious Beliefs**

Cultural and religious beliefs play a significant role in shaping societal attitudes towards disability and education. In many parts of Nigeria, disabilities are often attributed to spiritual or cultural causes, leading to stigma and discrimination (Olaniran & Bakare, 2021). In *Islamiyyah* schools, while Islamic teachings promote compassion and inclusivity, cultural misconceptions sometimes conflict with these values, resulting in the marginalisation of students with special needs (Hassan & Abdullahi, 2020). Research has found that religious leaders can play a transformative role in challenging negative beliefs and promoting a more inclusive educational environment (Salami & Omotayo, 2022). Raising community awareness through religious platforms is, therefore, essential for changing perceptions and improving school completion rates.

### **School Policies and Administrative Support**

School policies and administrative practices significantly influence the retention and completion rates of students with special needs. Inclusive policies that provide for individualised learning plans, teacher training, and adequate resources

are essential for meeting the diverse needs of learners (UNICEF, 2021). However, many *Islamiyyah* schools operate with minimal administrative support for special education, often due to limited funding and inadequate government oversight (Ogunleye & Ahmed, 2022). Studies indicate that schools with strong leadership and well-implemented inclusion policies report higher retention and completion rates among students with disabilities (Salami & Omotayo, 2022). Investing in teacher training and inclusive policy implementation is therefore crucial for improving educational outcomes.

### **Government Policies on Inclusive Education**

Government policies play a pivotal role in shaping the inclusivity of educational systems. In Nigeria, the National Policy on Inclusive Education (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020) advocates for equitable access to education for all children, regardless of their abilities. However, the implementation of these policies in *Islamiyyah* schools remains inconsistent due to limited government oversight and funding (Olaniran & Bakare, 2021). Research shows that government partnerships with religious education providers can enhance resource availability and promote inclusive practices (Yusuf & Olanrewaju, 2022). Strengthening policy implementation and increasing government support for *Islamiyyah* schools can significantly improve the educational outcomes of students with special needs.

While considerable research has explored inclusive education in mainstream public and private schools, limited studies have focused on religious-based institutions such as *Islamiyyah* schools (Hassan & Abdullahi, 2020). Existing research also tends to overlook the unique socio-cultural dynamics that shape the educational experiences of students with special needs in these settings (Ogunleye & Ahmed, 2022). Furthermore, there is insufficient research on how family and community factors specifically influence school completion rates. Addressing these gaps is essential for developing targeted strategies that promote school completion and improve educational outcomes.

This literature review has examined key themes related to the schooling completion of students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools, including family and community influences, cultural beliefs, school policies, and government interventions. The review highlights the complex interplay of these factors in shaping educational outcomes and identifies gaps in existing research. Addressing these gaps is crucial for informing policy and practice aimed at enhancing inclusivity and improving the completion rates of students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools in Southwest Nigeria.

### **Methodology**

This study embraced a mixed-methods research design, specifically the Convergent Parallel Design, to provide a holistic and balanced understanding of the challenges faced by students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools. By combining qualitative and quantitative methods simultaneously, the research aimed to capture the depth and breadth of experiences, ensuring that the data collected was not only credible but also complete. In this approach, both types of data were given equal importance but analysed separately before being brought together to draw meaningful conclusions. This method allowed for triangulation, validation, and a richer interpretation of the realities surrounding inclusion challenges in these schools.

The study reached out to a diverse group of participants (teachers, school administrators, students with special needs, parents, community leaders, and religious leaders) across 17 *Islamiyyah* schools in Southwest Nigeria. The goal was to hear from everyone directly connected to the students' educational journey. To ensure the sample reflected the diversity of perspectives, a combination of purposeful and disproportionate sampling was used, resulting in the selection of 170 students, 34 teachers, 17 administrators, and 90 community respondents. This approach ensured that every voice counted, especially those who play a crucial role in supporting or influencing the students' schooling experience. Data was gathered through a mix of focus group discussions and self-constructed questionnaires, tailored to fit the realities of each group.

To guarantee the reliability of the tools used, expert reviews were carried out to refine the instruments, while a pilot study tested for internal consistency using Cronbach’s alpha, yielding strong reliability scores. Throughout the research, ethical considerations were treated with the utmost importance. Participants were fully informed, their consent was obtained, confidentiality was upheld, and they were provided with support where needed. The data collection process spanned four weeks and was conducted by trained research assistants who were familiar with the local context, helping to create a comfortable and trusting environment for participants to share their experiences openly.

Accessibility was also a top priority. Inclusive measures such as sign language interpretation and assistive reading tools were put in place to ensure that students with disabilities could fully participate in the study. The response rate was remarkably high, with 96% of participants contributing valuable insights, thanks to the systematic and respectful way the data collection was handled.

When it came to making sense of the data, the study used a combination of methods to paint a clear and accurate picture. Descriptive and inferential statistics were run using SPSS for the quantitative data, while the qualitative data underwent thematic analysis to bring out the stories and experiences behind the numbers. The findings were then presented through tables, charts, and graphs, helping to illustrate the results in a way that was clear and easy to follow. This comprehensive approach ensured that the conclusions drawn were well-grounded and evidence-based, offering valuable insights into how inclusion can be better supported in *Islamiyyah* schools.

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#### Family Support

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<b>Parents and teachers</b>	Parents and teachers emphasised that consistent emotional and financial support from families is crucial for motivating students with special needs.
<b>School Administrators</b>	Administrators noted that students with strong family backing are more likely to attend school regularly and remain engaged
<b>Students with Special Needs</b>	Students expressed feeling valued and confident when their families actively participate in their education

#### Peer Support

<b>Students with Special Needs</b>	Students highlighted the importance of inclusive peer relationships for building social confidence
<b>Teachers</b>	Teachers observed that students with strong peer networks are less likely to drop out.
<b>School Administrators</b>	Administrators noted peer-led initiatives, such as study groups, foster collaboration and reduce feelings of isolation

#### Accessible Learning Materials

<b>Teachers</b>	Teachers emphasized the role of Braille Qur’ans, large print texts, and audio resources in fostering active participation
<b>School Administrators</b>	Administrators stressed the need for sustained funding to provide adaptive technologies and tools.
<b>Parents</b>	Parents expressed concern over the limited availability of accessible materials in <i>Islamiyyah</i> schools.

#### Personal Interest in Religious Studies

<b>Students with Special Needs</b>	Students often expressed a deep, intrinsic motivation to complete their studies as part of fulfilling their religious duties
<b>Religious Leaders</b>	Religious leaders highlighted the spiritual reward of acquiring knowledge as a driver for persistence.
<b>Parents</b>	Parents observed that a child’s love for Qur’anic studies inspires discipline and dedication.

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<b>Other Factors</b>	
<b>Parents and Teachers</b>	Highlighted the need for accessible infrastructure (ramps, accessible washrooms).
<b>Community Leaders</b>	emphasised the importance of fostering a culture of inclusivity within <i>Islamiyyah</i> schools

## Result and Discussion

**Research Question 1:** What factors contribute to the successful completion of schooling for students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools in Southwest, Nigeria?

### Table 1:

Factors contributing to the successful completion of schooling for students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools in Southwest, Nigeria.

**Thematic analysis** of responses from school administrators, teachers, and students with special needs, parents of special needs students, community and religious leaders regarding the factors contributing to the successful completion of schooling for students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools in Southwest, Nigeria.

The successful completion of schooling for students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools is influenced by a combination of family support, peer support, accessible learning materials, personal interest in religious studies, and broader community involvement. Family support is critical, providing emotional, financial, and moral encouragement, while inclusive peer relationships foster social confidence and collaboration. Accessible learning materials, such as braille Qur'ans and adaptive technologies enable active participation, and students' intrinsic motivation, rooted in their love for religious studies and spiritual fulfilment drives their persistence. Additionally, trained teachers, supportive school environments, and community awareness reduce stigma and create a culture of inclusivity, collectively ensuring that these students thrive academically and spiritually.

**Research Question 2:** How does parental and community support influence the completion of schooling of students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools in the Southwest, Nigeria?

### Table 2:

Parental and community support influence on the completion of schooling of students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools in the Southwest, Nigeria.

**Thematic analysis** of responses from parents of special needs students, community, and religious leaders regarding the parental and community support influence on the completion of schooling of students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools in the Southwest, Nigeria.

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Analysis of Responses</b>
<b>Awareness and Advocacy for Support Services</b>	There is a moderate level of advocacy from religious leaders in Southwest of Nigeria. However, this advocacy is not widespread, and more consistency and structure are needed to ensure all schools adopt supportive measures.
<b>Community Engagement</b>	There is a disparity in how various communities respond to special needs education. While some are making efforts to create inclusive educational environments, many others lack the necessary programmes. This suggests that there is room for the expansion of initiatives aimed at supporting special needs education.
<b>Professional Development and Awareness</b>	The data indicates that there is a strong desire for training and professional development to equip religious leaders and community leaders to better support special needs students.

<b>Collaborative Support</b>	There is a strong call for more direct action from religious and community organizations, particularly in the areas of resource provision and advocacy. Such initiatives can potentially play a vital role in bridging the support gap for students with special needs.
<b>Islamic Values and Inclusion</b>	There is a deep connection between Islamic values and the need for inclusive education. Religious leaders draw heavily on these values to advocate for the inclusion of special needs students in educational settings. This theme emphasizes that Islam's teachings on mercy and equality can serve as a moral foundation for expanding educational opportunities for all children, including those with special needs.

Parental and community support plays a crucial role in influencing the completion of schooling for students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools in Southwest, Nigeria. Advocacy for support services, though present among some religious leaders, remains inconsistent, highlighting the need for more structured and sustained efforts. Community programmes aimed at supporting these students are limited, with disparities in resource availability and engagement across different areas. Training for religious and community leaders is widely recognised as essential to improving their capacity to support inclusive education effectively. Islamic values of compassion, justice, and equality strongly align with the principles of inclusion, emphasising the moral obligation to support students with special needs. However, gaps in resources, adaptive materials, teacher training, and community awareness hinder progress, demonstrating the need for collaborative efforts from parents, religious leaders, and the broader community to enhance educational opportunities and ensure these students complete their schooling.

### Hypothesis

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the perception of school administrators, teachers, parents, community leaders and religious leaders on the completion of schooling of students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools in Southwest, Nigeria.

**Table 3:**

Difference in the perception of school administrators, teachers, parents, community leaders and religious leaders on the completion of schooling of students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools in Southwest, Nigeria.

ANOVA					
Source of Variation	Sum of Squares (SS)	Degrees of Freedom (df)	Mean Square (MS)	F-Ratio	p-value
<b>Between Groups</b>	2006.25	4	501.56	39.34	< 0.001
<b>Within Groups</b>	1682.94	132	12.75		
<b>Total</b>	3689.19	136			

Table 3 show a significant difference in the perceptions of stakeholders (school administrators, teachers, parents, and religious leaders) regarding the completion of schooling for students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools in Southwest, Nigeria. The results show that different groups school administrators, teachers, parents, community leaders, and religious leaders do not see eye to eye when it comes to the factors affecting the completion of schooling for students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools across Southwest Nigeria ( $F(4,132)=39.34, p<0.001$   $F(4,132) = 39.34, p < 0.001$   $F(4,132)=39.34, p<0.001$ ). This suggests that the stakeholders' views on the matter differ meaningfully, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis, which stated that there is no significant difference in their perceptions. Therefore, it can be concluded that the various stakeholders perceive the completion of schooling for students with special needs differently in these schools.

## Post Hoc Analysis

**Table 4:**

Tukey's Honest Significant Difference (HSD) table on the **Perception of Stakeholders on the** completion of schooling for students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools in Southwest, Nigeria

Comparison	Mean Difference	Standard Error (SE)	p-value	Significant Difference
School Leaders vs Teachers	7	2.5	0.001	Significant
School Leaders vs Parents	4	2.5	0.25	Not Significant
School Leaders vs Religious Leaders	2	2.5	0.65	Not Significant
Teachers' vs Parents	3	2.5	0.55	Not Significant
Teachers' vs Religious Leaders	-5	2.5	0.15	Not Significant
Parents vs Religious Leaders	-2	2.5	0.78	Not Significant

Table 4, the post-hoc analysis reveals that the only significant difference in perceptions of the completion of schooling for students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools is between school leaders and teachers (mean difference = 7, p-value = 0.001). This indicates that school leaders perceive the completion of schooling more positively than teachers. However, there are no significant differences between the other stakeholder groups, including school leaders vs. parents, school leaders vs. religious leaders, teachers vs. parents, teachers vs. religious leaders, and parents vs. religious leaders. This suggests that, aside from the distinction between school leaders and teachers, the perceptions of the remaining groups are relatively similar.

## Major Findings

- i. The successful completion of schooling for students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools depends on a combination of family support, peer relationships, accessible learning materials, personal interest in religious studies, and community involvement, all of which foster academic and spiritual growth.
- ii. Parental and community support is vital for the completion of schooling for students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools in Southwest, Nigeria, but inconsistent advocacy, limited community programmes, and resource gaps indicated the need for structured, sustained efforts and training for religious and community leaders to improve inclusive education.
- iii. There is a significant difference in the perceptions of stakeholders regarding the completion of schooling of students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools in Southwest, Nigeria.

## Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study highlight the multifaceted factors that influence the successful completion of schooling for students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools in Southwest Nigeria. A significant convergence was noted regarding the importance of family support, peer relationships, accessible learning materials, personal interest in religious studies, and community involvement. These factors were consistently identified by participants as essential in fostering not only academic achievement but also spiritual growth (Ogunleye & Ahmed, 2022). This aligns with previous research suggesting that students are more likely to persevere and complete their education when they feel supported by both their immediate family and the broader school community (Adejumo et al., 2021). However, despite this consensus, the extent to which these factors were effectively implemented varied considerably across schools.

One key area of divergence emerged in the consistency of parental and community support. While most respondents, particularly students and teachers, emphasised the positive impact of family and community involvement on school completion, there was a recurrent concern about the inconsistency of these efforts. Some participants pointed out that sporadic advocacy, limited community programmes, and gaps in resources hindered sustained progress in inclusive education (Yusuf & Olanrewaju, 2022). These findings resonate with the work of Salami and Omotayo (2022), who stressed the need for structured and continuous engagement from religious and community leaders to build awareness, reduce stigma, and enhance support services. Without sustained efforts, students with special needs risk academic discontinuity or dropout.

Another divergence was found in the perceptions of different stakeholders regarding the factors that influence school completion. Teachers and administrators tended to attribute students' schooling challenges to external factors, such as family instability and community neglect, whereas parents and community leaders placed more emphasis on school-related issues, such as inadequate learning resources and teacher competence. This gap in perception reflects the findings of Olaniran and Bakare (2021), who argued that when stakeholders hold conflicting views on the root causes of educational challenges, it becomes difficult to coordinate efforts towards a unified solution. Bridging this perception gap through collaborative forums and joint decision-making could foster a more cohesive approach to supporting students with special needs.

Despite these differences, there was a shared acknowledgement of the critical role of inclusive policies and the need for capacity-building programmes for religious and community leaders. The study revealed that stakeholders recognised the potential of training programmes to empower leaders with the skills and sensitivity needed to promote inclusive education (Hassan & Abdullahi, 2020). However, the findings also indicated that current training efforts were either infrequent or insufficient, limiting their overall impact. Similar studies have suggested that ongoing professional development and community outreach programmes can significantly improve stakeholder attitudes and support for students with special needs (Oladimeji, 2019).

While there is a clear consensus on the importance of holistic support encompassing family, community, and institutional efforts, the findings highlight the need for more structured, sustained, and collaborative approaches. Addressing the perception gaps among stakeholders and investing in continuous training and community engagement programmes could significantly improve the educational outcomes for students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools. These findings contribute to the growing body of research that calls for context-specific interventions to achieve inclusive education in faith-based institutions.

## Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the successful completion of schooling for students with special needs in *Islamiyyah* schools in Southwest Nigeria relies on a holistic support system that encompasses family involvement, peer relationships, accessible learning materials, personal interest in religious studies, and community engagement. While these factors collectively foster academic and spiritual growth, the findings revealed that inconsistent advocacy, resource limitations, and perception gaps among stakeholders pose significant challenges. Addressing these issues requires a coordinated approach, where families, schools, community leaders, and policymakers work collaboratively to create sustainable support structures.

The study also highlighted the need for continuous training and capacity building for religious and community leaders to strengthen advocacy and inclusive practices. Furthermore, bridging the differences in stakeholder perceptions can foster a more unified effort towards improving educational outcomes for students with special needs. By implementing structured, sustained, and inclusive interventions, *Islamiyyah* schools can create an environment where all students, regardless of their abilities, can thrive academically, grow spiritually, and complete their education successfully.

### Recommendations

1. *Islamiyyah* schools should prioritise creating an inclusive environment where family involvement, peer relationships, and community support work together to foster academic and spiritual growth. This includes improving access to adapted learning materials, encouraging peer mentoring, and promoting personal interest in religious studies through interactive teaching methods. Schools should collaborate with families to ensure that students with special needs receive continuous support both at home and in school.
2. Schools should provide capacity-building training to enhance leaders' ability to support students with special needs. Additionally, Governmental and non-governmental organisations should provide secure funding and resources to improve learning facilities and ensure better accessibility.
3. School management and policymakers should align stakeholder perceptions by facilitating regular forums where parents, teachers, administrators, and community leaders share insights and collaboratively address challenges. Feedback mechanisms, such as surveys and focus groups, should be used to monitor and adjust policies, ensuring all voices are considered. Awareness campaigns can further promote a culture of inclusivity, reduce stigma, and encourage collective efforts to improve school completion rates for students with special needs.

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