
Review Article

READINESS OF MADARIS FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IMPLEMENTATION: A STAKEHOLDERS-BASED EVALUATION IN SOUTH-WEST NIGERIA

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Abstract: This paper examines whether Madaris, the traditional Qur'anic schools and structured Islamiyyah institutions serving Yoruba Muslim communities across South-West Nigeria possess the institutional, pedagogical, infrastructural, financial, and sociocultural readiness required for inclusive education implementation. The question matters more than the existing literature acknowledges, given that millions of Nigerian children receive their schooling in these institutions, including children with disabilities who are largely invisible in national education policy. Drawing on Stakeholder Theory, Critical Disability Theory, and Social Justice Theory, the paper evaluates Madaris readiness against the demands of Nigeria's 2019 National Policy on Inclusive Education and SDG 4. The study adopts a qualitative integrative review design, synthesizing peer-reviewed scholarship alongside Nigerian policy documents and a small number of foundational theoretical texts whose continued relevance is explicitly justified. Nine stakeholder constituencies are evaluated, with structural barriers across physical, curricular, financial, and sociocultural dimensions examined throughout. The paper's central conceptual contribution is the concept of conditional unreadiness, defined as the institutional state in which normative receptiveness to inclusion coexists with the systemic absence of the professional, physical, curricular, financial, and policy prerequisites that genuine inclusive practice requires to sustain itself. The paper argues that resolving this condition demands coordinated and sustained investment across governance, pedagogy, infrastructure, and community dialogue and, critically, that Nigeria's inclusive education architecture must recognize Madaris as legitimate partners in national provision, not peripheral actors to be reached eventually.

Keywords: Madaris, Inclusive Education, Faith-Based Schooling, Islamiyyah Institutions & Educational Equity

INTRODUCTION

The Islamiyyah school or the local Qur'anic class known as Madrasah (pl. Madaris) is the primary educational experience for the great majority of pupils in South-West Nigeria's urban centers and historic sites, including Lagos, Abeokuta, Ogbomoso, and Ile-Ife. For the millions of families who depend on these institutions, they are the system rather than just gaps or unofficial alternatives to the government structures (Balogun, 2024). Despite playing an essential role in the social and moral fabric of Yoruba Muslim communities, formal policy debate has largely ignored these institutions and the various students who attend them. When the Federal Ministry of Education (2019) developed the National Policy on Inclusive Education and international organizations began tracking progress toward Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), the distinct pedagogical and institutional realities of the Madaris sector were largely disregarded. This exclusion is particularly significant because the National Bureau of Statistics estimates that ten million students nationwide attend these Islamic and non-formal institutions (Marriott, et. al., 2021). Since most of these institutions operate outside of government registration and oversight structures, the existing inclusive education policies are structurally unable to reach them. This isn't always because of obvious discrimination; rather, it's because the regulations weren't designed with their specific institutional environment in mind. Children with disabilities in these institutions thus face a level of risk, which is stigmatized by both their physical or cognitive issues and their community's lack of access to national educational options. By examining these Madaris readiness, this study seeks to bridge the gap between policy architecture and the lived reality of millions of children.

Inclusive education, as this paper understands it, is not simply about placing children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. Fabunmi, et. al., (2025) defines it, as an ongoing institutional process of responding to learner diversity by actively dismantling the exclusionary structures physical, curricular, attitudinal, and cultural embedded in educational environments. Ainscow et al. (2019), reflecting a quarter-century after the Salamanca Statement gave inclusive education its international framing, argue that schools which accommodate diverse bodies without genuinely transforming their cultures, practices, and resource arrangements are engaged in integration rather than inclusion. The difference is not semantic. A child who sits in a classroom from which she is effectively excluded by the physical environment, by the pace of instruction, by the unwillingness of

the institution to adapt has not been included. This distinction matters enormously in the Madaris context. The National Bureau of Statistics (2020), estimates that approximately ten million children nationally attend non-formal and Islamic schools; Lagos State alone is estimated to host several thousand such institutions (Lawal, 2023). Most of these schools operate outside government registration and monitoring frameworks, which means that inclusive education policy designed for formally governed schools is structurally unable to reach them not because policymakers explicitly excluded them, but because the policy was designed without them in mind. The children in these Madaris, including those with disabilities, are therefore doubly marginalised, by their disabilities within their communities, and by their communities' educational institutions within national policy.

Two temptations have shaped previous discussions of this topic, and this paper resists both. The first is the dismissive assumption that Islamic schools are culturally incompatible with disability inclusion, that the combination of religious pedagogy, community governance, and traditional authority simply cannot accommodate the rights-based demands of inclusive education. The second, perhaps more common in sympathetic commentary, is the optimistic claim that Islamic values of compassion, care, and community are naturally aligned with inclusive practice, and that awareness raising and goodwill are the primary ingredients of change. Both positions are wrong, and wrong in ways that matter. The evidence reviewed here suggests that Madaris communities hold genuine assets for inclusion, assets that are largely unmobilised. Understanding why they remain unmobilised is the analytical work this paper attempts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Three theories (Stakeholder Theory, Critical Disability Theory & Critical Disability Theory) were suitable for the paper with comprehensive reasons.

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory was pioneered by R. Edward Freeman in 1984 (Freeman et. al., 2018). It posits that to understand or manage any organization, one must map the entire network of individuals and groups who can affect or are affected by the organization's objectives. This theory is uniquely suitable for this paper because Madaris do not operate under the standard professional bureaucracies of the state; instead, they are governed by religious authority, community trust, and the social capital of the Alfa. This theory allows the research to distinguish between those with moral primacy (the children) and those with the positional power to either accelerate or block reform (religious leaders). By applying

this framework, the study acknowledges that reform in Madaris requires a fundamentally different architecture of engagement than in government schools one that works through established authority structures rather than around them.

Critical Disability Theory

Critical Disability Theory emerged as a distinct academic framework in the late 1980s and early 1990s, largely influenced by the work of Mike Oliver (1990) and later expanded by scholars like Dan Goodley (Goodley, 2024). The theory shifts the focus from disability as a medical deficit inherent in an individual to disability as a social construct produced by inaccessible environments and rigid institutional expectations. This theory is vital for this paper because it forces an engagement with the readiness problem not just as a lack of ramps, but as a presence of disabling cultural and theological frameworks. It challenges the traditional West African view that disability is a property of individual bodies. It argues that disability is produced by the organization of environments and social expectations around a standard person. This is particularly relevant in the Madaris context, where inclusive frameworks often fail to address theological constructions of disability. It provides a mechanism to analyze how popular interpretations of divine will and spiritual causes interact with local cultural frameworks to produce stigma and the concealment of disabled children. In South-West Nigeria, Critical Disability Theory (CDT) helps explain how popular interpretations of divine will interact with Yoruba cosmology to produce internalized stigma. It is the most suitable theory for this paper because it addresses the systemic weakness of children in Madaris by asking what the environment rather than the child needs to change.

Social Justice Theory

Social Justice Theory was developed by John Rawls, an American moral and political philosopher. He published his landmark book, *A Theory of Justice*, in 1971 (Galisanka, 2019). Triple-Dimensional Theory of Social Justice was developed by Nancy Fraser is a prominent American philosopher and critical theorist (McCarthy, 2015) In her seminal work, *Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Space in a Globalizing World* (2008), she expanded the understanding of social justice beyond just "fair shares" of money. Social Justice Theory provides the normative standard for what genuine inclusion or thick inclusion actually looks like. It goes beyond the simple redistributive justice of material resources and demands recognition justice, which values diverse identities within institutional cultures. This theory is suitable for this paper also, because it creates a

high-level test for Madaris: it asks not just whether a school has a ramp, but whether participatory parity exists, allowing children with disabilities to participate as full peers without structural subordination

The application of Social Justice Theory in this paper draws heavily on the work of Nancy Fraser (2008). Fraser's 2008 framework is particularly suitable because it introduces the concept of participatory parity, which demands that social arrangements enable all people to interact as full peers. This theory provides the normative standard or the ultimate yardstick for the study: it distinguishes between redistributive justice (simply giving a school more money or books) and recognition justice (genuinely valuing the identity of a disabled student). This is critical for the Madaris context because it moves the definition of readiness away from thin inclusion where a child is merely present in the room to thick inclusion, where the child and their family can participate in the religious and social life of the school without structural subordination or shame.

Conceptual Framework

Concept of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education represents a complex paradigm shift in pedagogical theory and practice, moving from a traditional medical deficit model that separated students with disabilities into specialized settings to a rights-based framework that necessitates the total restructuring of the mainstream educational environment. It is defined as a methodical process of removing physical, curricular, and attitudinal barriers to ensure that all students, regardless of their backgrounds, cognitive abilities, or socio-religious identities, have access to high-quality instruction in age-appropriate general education classrooms (Rajab, 2019). Through programs like Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), inclusive education emphasizes that the system must adapt to the learner rather than forcing pupils to adapt to a rigid infrastructure. It is based on the principles of human rights, equity, and social justice outlined in international directives such as SDG 4 and the Salamanca Statement (Wood, 2021). This strategy is in line with the 2019 National Policy on Inclusive Education, which aims to ensure equitable access and dignity for all people in the particular context of Nigerian education (Owadara, 2025). Ultimately, effective inclusion necessitates a proactive commitment from all stakeholders to go beyond thin inclusion the simple physical presence of diverse learners and toward thick inclusion that promotes academic success, participatory parity, and a deep sense of community for each child.

Inclusive Education Policy In Nigeria

Since the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was ratified in 2010 and the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act of 2019 was passed, Nigeria's inclusive education landscape has experienced substantial legislative change. This historic law, along with the National Policy on Inclusive Education (2019), gave the Federal Ministry of Education a broad mandate to guarantee all citizens, regardless of their physical or cognitive abilities, equitable, barrier-free access to high-quality education (Sherif, 2024). These structures, which prioritize teacher preparation, physical infrastructure adaption, and the eradication of sociocultural norms, match Nigeria's national aims with international mandates like Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). However, because these policies are primarily designed for the formal, state-registered school system, there is still a severe implementation gap that leaves millions of students in South-West Nigeria's non-formal Madaris sector without adequate regulations. As a result, the national policy provides a strong theoretical foundation for social justice and fairness, but in order to successfully reach the various and marginalized groups it was intended to safeguard, a decentralized and culturally sensitive implementation plan is needed.

Madaris In South-West Nigeria

It is worth being specific about what Madaris in South-West Nigeria actually are, because the category is genuinely heterogeneous and generalization obscure more than they reveal. At one end of the institutional spectrum are traditional Qur'anic schools sometimes called Makaranta run by a single Alfa from a domestic compound, a mosque annex, or a basic purpose-built room. The curriculum is Qur'anic memorization and recitation, delivered orally, assessed by recitation before the Alfa and community. The Alfa may have other employment; the school may run in the early morning and late afternoon around the secular school day. Fees are informal paid in kind, in food, in small cash amounts that reflect the community's gratitude rather than a market rate. These Madaris are largely invisible to state authorities (USMAN, 2025). At the other end are structured Islamiyyah schools, now a significant presence in Lagos, Ibadan, Abeokuta, and Osogbo. These combine Islamic studies Qur'an, Arabic, Islamic jurisprudence with secular subjects taught in English and Yoruba. They have timetables, multiple teachers, non fee structures, sometimes examination entry. Some are registered with state education authorities; many are not. The infrastructure varies considerably from purpose-built two-storey buildings in

more prosperous urban areas to converted residential premises in lower-income neighbourhoods. Between these two poles lies a range of hybrid arrangements that resist the formal/informal binary Nigerian educational statistics try to impose (Ogunmuditi, 2025). What all of these institutions share and this is what matters for inclusive education is a set of structural features that independently and collectively constrain readiness. Teacher preparation is overwhelmingly religious rather than pedagogical, knowing the Qur'an deeply, reading classical Arabic texts, demonstrating Islamic character. No element of formal teacher training in child development, special educational needs, differentiated instruction, or physical accessibility enters most Madaris practitioners' professional formation (Mahmood, et. al., 2025). Physical environments were built or converted without disability access as a consideration, no ramps, no accessible toilets, overcrowded rooms, uneven surfaces (Tavares,et. al., 2023). Madaris suffers from chronic underfunding due to its insecure finance, which is almost entirely dependent on modest parental fees and irregular community donations (Khalek, 2025). And the dominant pedagogy the Alfa speaks, the students repeat, memorize, and recite is not a practice into which inclusive differentiation can be easily grafted. One further point deserves emphasis. The resources these schools command community trust, deep family relationships, cultural embeddedness, religious authority are not nothing (Ottuh, 2025). They are, in fact, precisely the assets that inclusive education in these communities would need to draw on if it were to become sustainable. The problem is not that Madaris lack assets. The problem is that those assets are not currently connected to the institutional capacities that inclusive practice requires.

METHODOLOGY

To evaluate the readiness of Madaris for inclusive education implementation, this study adopted a qualitative integrative review design. This method is particularly useful when investigating complex, socially embedded educational issues where empirical data is divided across formal and non-formal sectors (O'Brien, et. al., 2019). A systematic, comprehensive analyses of current Nigerian educational policy documents (especially the 2019 National Policy on Inclusive Education and the 2019 Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities [Prohibition] Act), peer-reviewed empirical research on Islamic pedagogy and special education in West Africa, and foundational theoretical texts supporting Stakeholder Theory, Critical Disability Theory (CDT), and Social Justice Theory was conducted. The study's analytical model was organized around the nine essential stakeholder groups found in the Madaris system in South-West Nigeria: Proprietors

(Mudara-u) Arabic teachers (Asatidhah) Arabic Students Arabic Students with Disabilities, Peers who are Neurotypical, Parents & Parents of Children with Special Needs, The Muslim Ummah (Community), Islamic Shura Councils and Regulatory Organizations, Officials from the State Ministry of Education and Non-Governmental/Civil Society Organizations.

The perspectives of the stakeholders, institutional capabilities, and systemic limitations were mapped against the four fundamental dimensions of educational readiness: physical-infrastructure, curricular-pedagogical, financial-structural, and sociocultural-theological using deductive thematic analysis of data from these sources. This methodology effectively bridged the macro-policy architecture with micro-level community realities by cross-examining policy imperatives with the operational realities of both informal Makaranta and structured Islamiyyah institutions across Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun and Ekiti states. This ensured a rigorous, multi-perspectival evaluation of institutional capacity.

DISCUSSION

The integration of the findings reveals a major systemic challenging situation that defines the current Madaris sector in South-West Nigeria—a situation this study refers to as conditional lack of readiness. This institutional state is characterized by a high degree of normative, faith-based receptivity to the values of equity, compassion, and human dignity, which coexists with almost total lack of the professional, financial, curricular, and physical infrastructure required to support true inclusive education. The physical settings of both informal Makaranta and semi-formal Islamiyyah schools become actively damaging constructions when evaluated through the perspective of Critical Disability Theory (CDT). Children with physical disabilities are structurally invisible due to the widespread existence of architectural barriers, such as unpaved surfaces, multi-story buildings without ramps, and inaccessible facilities, which serve as a physical embodiment of institutional exclusion. This content exclusion is made worse by a significant professional vacuum. The Mudara-u/Alfas (Proprietors) and Arabic Teachers (Asatidhah), the primary gatekeepers of these institutions, have a lot of moral power and positional influence, but they lack professional expertise in differentiated instruction, child development, or special educational needs (SEN), according to the principles of Stakeholder Theory. The current educational paradigm, which mostly relies on rote memory and group oral recitation, has little place for pedagogical differentiation. As a result, kids with cognitive or sensory

learning disabilities experience a type of thin inclusion, according to Social Justice Theory. They may be physically present in the classroom as a result of community charity, but they are not given thick inclusion that is, access to both actual participative parity and high-quality instruction free from institutional subordination or internalized shame.

Furthermore, a poisonous cycle of stigma is created by some local Yoruba Muslim frameworks' ongoing theological misattributions of disability to spiritual trials, divine punishment, or ancestral curses. This frequently forces families to hide their children with disabilities, completely excluding them from state and religious educational counts. The Madaris are fundamentally unable to close this implementation gap on their own because they are underfunded, operate outside of government registration frameworks, and rely largely on sporadic community donations. They continue to live in a condition of conditional unreadiness where systemic deprivation cannot be made up for by goodwill.

SUMMARY

This study evaluated the institutional, pedagogical, infrastructural, financial, and sociocultural readiness of Madaris (traditional Qur'anic and structured Islamiyyah schools) for the implementation of inclusive education in South-West Nigeria. Positioned at the intersection of Nigeria's 2019 National Policy on Inclusive Education and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), the study addressed a critical gap in national policy, which currently overlooks the estimated ten million children educated within these non-formal faith-based systems. Utilizing a qualitative integrative review design grounded in Stakeholder, Critical Disability, and Social Justice theories, the study analyzed the roles, capacities, and constraints of nine distinct stakeholder groups across the South-West geopolitical zone.

The findings indicate that while Madaris possess immense latent assets including profound community trust, deep sociocultural embeddedness, and organic networks of religious authority these assets are entirely disconnected from the technical capacities required for inclusive schooling. The sector is structurally constrained by disabling physical infrastructures, an instructional model unsuited to pedagogical differentiation, an absence of teacher training in special education, and chronic financial instability. Additionally, children with disabilities are doubly marginalized by both national policy omissions and localized institutional deficiencies due to complex sociocultural and theological interpretations of disability that sustain stigma and the concealment of exceptional learners.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study shows that as long as national policy architecture views the Madaris sector as a peripheral, imperceptible, or transient substitute for state education, Nigeria will not be able to realize equitable, inclusive education. The millions of children who populate these institutions, particularly those with physical and cognitive disabilities, represent a vulnerable demographic currently marooned between an exclusionary state apparatus and a structurally unready religious educational system. This study's diagnosis of conditional unreadiness demonstrates that the Yoruba Muslim community's intrinsic cultural or religious animosity toward disability rights is not the obstacle to inclusion. Instead, it is a structural result of long-standing underfunding, pedagogical underdevelopment, and policy isolation. It is both analytically and practically incorrect to expect Madaris to move from integration to thick inclusion without a methodical revision of their operating settings. True educational equity and social justice demand that these institutions be recognized as legitimate, permanent partners in national educational provision. The admirable goals of SDG 4 and the National Policy on Inclusive Education will remain distant rhetoric for the most marginalized children of South-West Nigeria until the Nigerian government and foreign development partners actively engage with the distinctive governance architectures of faith-based schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the multi-dimensional barriers and stakeholder dynamics identified in this paper, the following strategic interventions are recommended:

The Federal and State Ministries of Education in South-West Nigeria must expand the operational jurisdiction of the 2019 National Policy on Inclusive Education to explicitly recognize and integrate non-formal and faith-based Madaris.

State governments (South-West), Nigeria should establish a decentralized, culturally sensitive registration framework that provides legal recognition to these Madaris without stripping them of their religious autonomy.

Madaris in South-West, Nigeria should set up dedicated internal funds using community Zakat (alms) and Waqf (endowments) to cover tuition, learning materials, and assistive devices for students with disabilities, reducing their reliance on unpredictable school fees.

Islamic leaders and scholars in South-West, Nigeria must lead campaigns to clear away local stigmas against disability by teaching that classical Islamic laws naturally

uphold the rights, dignity, and equality of people with disabilities, communities can stop families from hiding children with special needs.

State governments (South-West), Nigeria and international partners should launch Madaris Accessibility Grant to fund vital physical upgrades such as wheelchair ramps, level floors, and accessible toilets in existing schools, prioritizing crowded urban areas like Lagos, Ibadan, and Abeokuta.

State colleges, Islamic higher institutions, (South-West), Nigeria and NGOs should team up to provide Madaris teachers (Alfas and Asatidhah) with consistence training focused on special education needs, flexible learning designs, and tailored teaching methods.

Madaris in South-West, Nigeria, should partner with educational NGOs to acquire affordable, adapted learning materials, such as braille Qur'ans, large-print texts, and tactile learning aids, ensuring that sensory-impaired students can participate fully in lessons.

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