

Scaling Special Education: Challenges and Opportunities for Edupreneurs

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Abstract

The landscape of special education is undergoing significant transformation, driven by the urgent need to provide equitable learning opportunities for students with diverse needs. This paper explores the challenges and opportunities that edupreneurs face in scaling special education initiatives. Through a qualitative thematic analysis of the insight of 9 crucial stakeholders i.e. special education centre administrators, edupreneurs (entrepreneurs whose business venture is centred on education) and technology in education experts, the study identified key obstacles such as funding limitations, regulatory hurdles, and the need for specialized expertise as the major challenges. Despite these challenges, the paper highlights numerous opportunities for innovation and impact, including developing adaptive learning technologies, personalized educational programmes and collaborative partnerships with public and private sectors. The findings suggest that edupreneurs, by leveraging their agility and innovative approaches, can play a pivotal role in expanding access to quality special education. The study concludes with recommendations for edupreneurs on navigating the complexities of scaling their ventures, emphasising the importance of sustainable business models, stakeholder engagement, and continuous improvement in educational practices. This research underscores the potential of edupreneurship to address critical gaps in special education, ultimately contributing to more inclusive and effective learning environments for all students.

Keywords: Edupreneurship, Special Education, Students with Disability, Education entrepreneurship,

Introduction

Nigeria, with a population exceeding 200 million, has a significant number of individuals with disabilities. According to estimates by the World Health Organization (WHO) corroborated by other studies, about 15% of Nigeria's population lives with some form of disability (Abdulraheem et al., 2011; Etieyibo & Omiegbe, 2016; Iguh & Ugwu, 2023). This translates to approximately 30 million people, many of whom are children requiring special education services. Despite these substantial numbers, the availability and accessibility of special education schools or programs remain limited.

The demographic distribution of disabilities in Nigeria shows significant regional disparities. Eleweke and Ebenso (2016) stated that urban areas, particularly major cities like Lagos and Abuja, tend to have more resources and facilities for individuals with disabilities. According to Amucheazi and Nwankwo (2020), these urban centres may offer specialised schools, inclusive education programs, and access to medical and therapeutic services. In contrast, rural areas are particularly underserved. Ajuwon (2017) stated that the lack of infrastructure, trained professionals, and funding in these regions means that children with disabilities often have little to no access to the education and support they need. This regional imbalance exacerbates educational inequalities, leaving many children, in need of special education, in rural areas without adequate opportunities for growth and development (Antai, 2011). Thus, the adoption of a more inclusive special education model.

Special Education Models Practiced in Nigeria

Special education, a vital component of the educational system, is designed to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities (Obiakor & Offor, 2011). These programs provide tailored instruction, support services, and specialised resources to ensure that all students have equitable access to quality education (Ajuwon, 2012). The field encompasses a broad spectrum of disabilities, including learning disabilities, physical impairments, emotional disturbances, and developmental disorders. As society becomes more inclusive, the demand for effective special education programs continues to grow, necessitating innovative approaches to scaling these services (Chukwuemeka & Samaila, 2020).

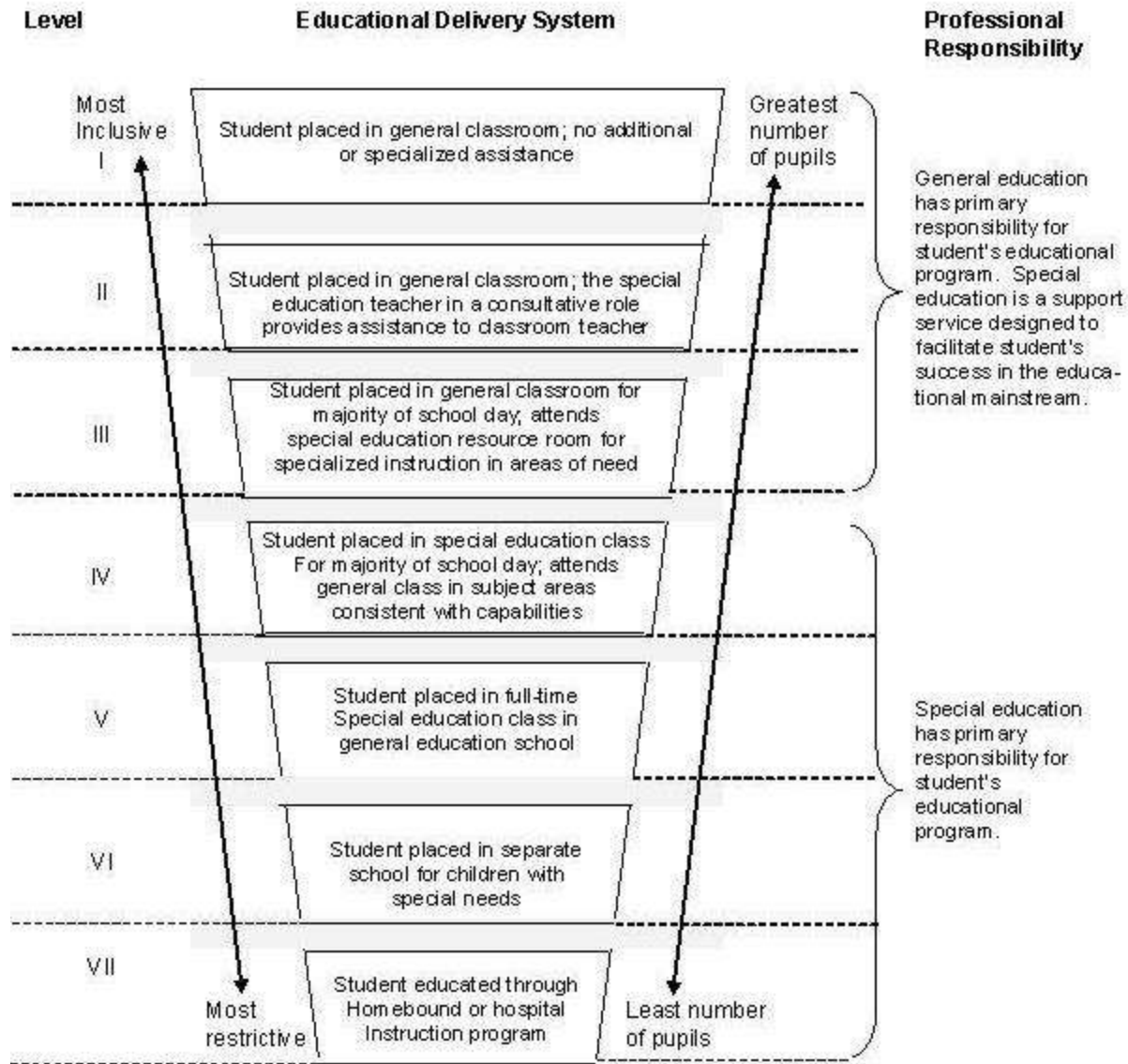


Figure 1: Edison Township Public Schools Educational Services option for Students with Disability (Source: Edison Township Public Schools Official Website)

Special education in Nigeria is delivered through a combination of inclusive education models, special schools, and units within regular schools similar to the framework at Edison Township Public Schools (Figure 1). Inclusive education aims to integrate students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms, providing necessary accommodations and support services to ensure they receive a comparable education to their peers. This approach is grounded in the belief that inclusion benefits both students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers by promoting understanding,

diversity, and empathy (Ajuwon, 2012). However, the implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria faces several significant challenges. Insufficient teacher training means that many educators lack the skills and knowledge to effectively support students with disabilities. Furthermore, the lack of resources, including specialized teaching materials and assistive technologies, hampers the ability of schools to provide adequate support. Inadequate infrastructure, such as inaccessible buildings and classrooms, also poses a major barrier to inclusion.

Special schools, which cater exclusively to students with specific disabilities, offer a more tailored educational experience but are limited in number and often concentrated in urban areas (Adigun, 2018). This urban concentration makes them inaccessible to many students in rural regions, where the need for specialized education services is also significant (Lawal, 2022). Additionally, these schools frequently suffer from chronic underfunding, leading to a shortage of qualified staff, inadequate learning materials, and poor facility maintenance. These financial constraints significantly impact the quality of education that these institutions can provide.

Units within regular schools represent a hybrid model similar to the two most inclusive categories at Edison Township Public Schools framework (Figure 1), where specialized support is provided within the context of a mainstream school. These units aim to offer the best of both worlds by combining the inclusive environment of regular schools with the specialized support found in special schools. However, these units are not widespread and face similar resource constraints as other special education models (Obi & Ashi, 2016). The limited availability of these units means that many students who could benefit from this approach are left without adequate support. Overall, while Nigeria employs a variety of models to deliver special education, significant challenges related to teacher training, resource allocation, and infrastructure must be addressed to improve the effectiveness and accessibility of these programs.

Key Stakeholders and Their Roles

The landscape of special education in Nigeria involves multiple stakeholders, each playing a critical role in the development and implementation of special education services. The Federal Ministry of Education is primarily responsible for policy formulation and the overall regulatory framework governing special education. This involves setting national standards, developing

curriculum guidelines, and ensuring that educational institutions comply with the relevant laws and policies. However, the enforcement and implementation of these policies at the state and local levels are often inconsistent (Adeniyi et al., 2010). Variations in resource allocation, administrative commitment, and local governance structures contribute to significant disparities in the quality and availability of special education services across different regions. Obi and Ashi (2016) noted that this inconsistency undermines the efforts to provide equitable education for all students with disabilities.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international agencies also play a significant role in advocating for and providing special education services in Nigeria. These organizations often step in to fill gaps left by the government, offering training programs, funding, and resources that are essential for the effective delivery of special education (Oyelude & Bamigbola, 2013). NGOs and international agencies bring in expertise, innovative approaches, and much-needed financial support, which help to improve the quality and reach of special education programs. They also engage in advocacy work, raising awareness about the needs and rights of individuals with disabilities, and pushing for policy changes at both national and local levels (Orowale, 2023). Their contributions are indispensable in bridging the gap between policy and practice.

Parents and families of children with disabilities are crucial stakeholders in the special education landscape. Smith et al., (2010) stated that they advocate for their children's rights, support their educational journey, and often play a central role in decision-making processes related to their education and care. However, many parents lack the necessary knowledge and resources to navigate the special education system effectively. This can lead to challenges in accessing appropriate services and support for their children. Efforts to empower parents through education, support networks, and advocacy training are essential to ensure they can effectively advocate for their children and secure the best possible educational outcomes (Kumar, 2015).

Teachers and educators are at the forefront of delivering special education services. They are directly responsible for implementing educational programs, providing individualized instruction, and supporting the diverse needs of students with disabilities (Sobel & Taylor, 2015). Yet, they often face significant challenges due to inadequate training, limited resources, and obsolete equipment. Many teachers lack specialized training in special education, which affects their ability to effectively support students with disabilities. Additionally, the scarcity of teaching materials,

assistive technologies, and appropriate classroom infrastructure further hampers their efforts (Allday et al., 2013). This is where the role of edupreneurs, or educational entrepreneurs, as part of the stakeholders in the 21st century, becomes crucial.

Edupreneurs and/or Educational Entrepreneurs

Edupreneurs, or educational entrepreneurs, play a crucial role in the scaling of special education. Nieswandt (2017) stated that these individuals bring innovation, flexibility, and business acumen to the field, enabling the development and implementation of scalable solutions. Edupreneurs can identify gaps in the current education system, develop new technologies and methodologies, and create sustainable business models to support the widespread adoption of these innovations (Silin, 2022). By leveraging their entrepreneurial skills, edupreneurs can drive the expansion of special education services, making them more accessible and effective for students with disabilities (van Eck, 2015). Their involvement is essential in transforming the special education landscape, ensuring that it evolves to meet the changing needs of students and society.

Scaling special education is of paramount importance for several reasons. Firstly, it ensures that all students, regardless of their abilities, have access to the educational opportunities they deserve. Education is a fundamental right (Black, 2018), and by expanding the reach of special education programs, society can promote inclusivity and equity within the educational system (Caputo & Langher, 2015). This inclusivity not only benefits students with disabilities but also fosters a more diverse and empathetic learning environment for all students. Black (2018) noted that by expanding the reach of special education programs, learning institutions can address the growing number of students requiring specialized services and reduce the disparities in educational outcomes. As the population of students with special needs continues to grow, the demand for specialized educational services increases. Without scaling these services, many students may be left without the support they need to succeed academically and socially. Thomas and Loxley, (2022) asserted that expanding these programs ensures that all students have the necessary resources and support to thrive, thereby reducing the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their peers.

Furthermore, Mărunțelu (2023) pointed out that scaling allows for the standardization of best practices, ensuring that high-quality education is delivered consistently across various settings.

According to Lăcătuș and Stăiculescu (2016) stated that standardization is crucial in maintaining a high level of educational quality and effectiveness. When best practices are identified and implemented widely, educators can rely on proven methods and strategies that have been shown to work. Lăcătuș and Stăiculescu (2016) stated that this consistency in delivery helps to ensure that students with disabilities receive a comparable level of education, regardless of where they are located. It also provides a framework for continuous improvement and innovation within the field of special education. This can lead to improved academic and social outcomes for students with disabilities, better preparing them for life beyond school. Students who receive a high-quality education tailored to their needs are more likely to achieve their academic goals, develop essential life skills, and gain the confidence needed to pursue further education or employment (Operti et al., 2014). Improved social outcomes are also significant, as inclusive educational environments can enhance social integration, reduce stigmatization, and promote positive peer relationships.

Statement of the Problem

The field of special education faces significant challenges and opportunities in scaling services to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities. Despite the considerable advancements in educational technology (Bernacki et al., 2020) and the development of inclusive pedagogical strategies (Moriña, 2022), a substantial gap persists in the accessibility and quality of special education, particularly across different regions, with rural areas in Nigeria being among the most affected. Students in these areas often lack access to the necessary resources, trained personnel, and specialized programs that are more readily available in urban centres (Adebisi et al., 2014; Ahmadi & Lukman, 2015). This disparity underscores the urgent need for innovative approaches to ensure that all students, regardless of their geographical location, have access to high-quality special education.

Edupreneurs, or edupreneurs ventures, are uniquely positioned to bridge this gap by leveraging innovative solutions and business models. These individuals and organizations are meant to bring a fresh perspective and the potential for agile, scalable interventions that can adapt to diverse contexts. Through the use of technology, such as online learning platforms and assistive devices, edupreneurs can extend the reach of special education services to underserved areas. Furthermore, they can develop cost-effective and sustainable programs tailored to the specific needs of students in different regions. However, despite their potential, edupreneurs encounter a range of obstacles

that hinder their efforts to scale special education effectively. This study therefore explored the challenges and opportunities that edupreneurs face in scaling special education initiatives in Nigeria

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to explore the challenges and opportunities that edupreneurs face in scaling special education initiatives. Specifically, the examined;

- a. The practical ways edupreneurs and edupreneur ventures could scale up special education in Nigeria
- a. The challenges edupreneurs and edupreneneur venture faces in scaling special education in Nigeria
- b. The opportunities for scaling special education in Nigeria

Research Questions

The following questions were generated;

- b. What are the practical ways edupreneurs and edupreneneur venture could scale up special education in Nigeria?
- c. What are the key obstacles edupreneurs and edupreneneur venture in scaling special education in Nigeria?
- d. What are the opportunities for scaling special education in Nigeria?

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the challenges and opportunities faced by edupreneurs in scaling special education initiatives. The participants of the study involve nine (9) essential stakeholders i.e. 5 special education centre administrators, 2 edupreneurs (entrepreneurs whose business ventures are centered around education) and 2 technology education experts. A semi-structured interview was used to collect data. This kind of interview was adopted because it ensure consistency across interviews while allowing for the exploration of unique insights from each participant. However, three main questions were asked: Question 1 *Can you enumerate the practical ways to scale up special education in Nigeria*”? Question 2 *“State*

the main challenges in scaling special education in Nigeria”? And Question 3 *enumerates the opportunities for scaling special education in Nigeria?”* The qualitative data obtained from these interviews are analyzed thematically to draw out key patterns and themes.

With regard to ethical considerations, informed consent was obtained from all interview participants, ensuring that they were aware of the study's purpose and their rights. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing data and securely storing all research materials. The research adheres to institutional guidelines and ethical standards to ensure the integrity and ethical conduct of the study.

Results

Table 1: Participants Profile

Participants	Profession	Experience
Pseudonym 1	special education centre manager	9
Pseudonym 2	special education Specialist	10
Pseudonym 3	special education Lecturer	21
Pseudonym 4	special education centre administrators	6
Pseudonym 5	Small company owner, that sells books to special students	8
Pseudonym 6	Online-based company owner, that offers private tutor services to special children	5
Pseudonym 7	Special Education Specialists that offer diagnostic services	9
Pseudonym 8	Educational Technology Expert	8
Pseudonym 9	Educational technology Expert	11

Participants Responses

Pseudonym 1: Response to Q1-*“One practical way to scale up special education is through increased government funding and support. This can help establish more centres equipped with the necessary facilities. Additionally, training more specialized educators and offering continuous professional development can ensure we have skilled staff to meet the diverse needs of special*

students." **Q2-** "One of the major obstacles is inadequate funding from the government. Without sufficient financial resources, it is challenging to establish more centers, hire qualified staff, and provide necessary learning materials. Additionally, there is a lack of awareness and understanding about special education needs among the general public and policymakers." **Q3-** "There is a tremendous opportunity to tap into international grants and funding aimed at improving special education. By collaborating with global organizations, we can bring in expertise and resources that can significantly boost our capabilities. Additionally, local partnerships with NGOs and private companies can create a robust support network for scaling up services."

Pseudonym 2: Response to Q1- "Implementing inclusive policies that mandate special education in all schools can make a significant difference. Furthermore, partnerships with international organizations for resources and expertise, as well as community awareness programs, can enhance the acceptance and support for special education." **Q2-** "A significant obstacle is the shortage of trained special education professionals. Many educators lack the necessary training to support students with special needs effectively. Another issue is the stigma and cultural misconceptions surrounding disabilities, which can lead to exclusion and lack of support for affected individuals." **Q3-** "The growing awareness and advocacy for special education present a significant opportunity. This can lead to stronger policy support and increased funding. Furthermore, integrating special education into mainstream schools can promote inclusivity and allow for shared resources, benefiting all students."

Pseudonym 3: Response to Q1- "Integrating special education courses into teacher training programs at universities can ensure that all educators have a basic understanding of special education needs. Additionally, creating research grants for special education can encourage the development of innovative teaching methods and tools." **Q2-** "The lack of inclusion in mainstream education policies is a major barrier. Special education is often seen as separate rather than integrated within the general education system. Additionally, there is a lack of research and data on the specific needs of special education students, which hampers effective planning and implementation." **Q3-** "The expansion of teacher training programs to include special education components offers a great opportunity. This ensures that more educators are equipped to handle

diverse classrooms. Additionally, research opportunities in special education can lead to innovative teaching methods and better educational outcomes."

Pseudonym 4: Response to Q1- *"One key approach is to improve data collection and monitoring systems to identify and track students who need special education. This can help in planning and resource allocation. Moreover, fostering partnerships with non-profits and private sectors can bring additional resources and expertise into the system."* **Q2-** *"Administrative challenges, such as bureaucratic delays and inefficient management, can impede progress. Additionally, there is often a lack of collaboration between various stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, and private sector players, which leads to fragmented efforts and reduced impact."* **Q3-** *"There is an opportunity to leverage community-based programs to support special education. By involving local communities, we can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for special needs students. Additionally, government incentives for private sector involvement can attract more investment into special education."*

Pseudonym 5: Response to Q1- *"Providing affordable and accessible learning materials tailored to the needs of special students is crucial. Collaborating with schools to supply these materials and getting feedback to continuously improve them can make learning more effective. Additionally, advocating for tax incentives for businesses that support special education can encourage more participation from the private sector."* **Q2-** *"One key obstacle is the limited availability of affordable and high-quality learning materials specifically designed for special needs students. Additionally, logistical issues, such as poor distribution networks, can make it difficult to get these materials to the students who need them most."* **Q3-** *"The market for specialized educational materials is growing, providing a business opportunity to develop and distribute tailored books and resources. Partnerships with schools and special education centers can facilitate direct feedback and continuous improvement of these materials."*

Pseudonym 6: Response to Q1- *"Expanding online tutoring services to reach remote areas can significantly scale up special education. Ensuring these services are affordable and training tutors to handle various special needs can improve accessibility and quality. Partnerships with local schools can also help integrate online and offline learning experiences."* **Q2-** *"The main obstacle is the lack of internet connectivity and technological infrastructure, especially in rural areas. This limits the reach of online tutoring services. Moreover, there is a general lack of awareness and*

trust in online education solutions among parents and educators." Q3- "The increasing penetration of internet and mobile technologies opens up opportunities for online tutoring services to reach more students, even in remote areas. By developing accessible and affordable online platforms, we can provide quality education to special needs students across the country."

Pseudonym 7: Response to Q1-*"Increasing the availability of diagnostic services is fundamental. This includes training more professionals in diagnostic techniques and making these services accessible in rural areas. Early identification of special needs can lead to timely intervention and better outcomes for students." Q2-**"A significant barrier is the limited access to diagnostic services, especially in rural and underserved areas. Without proper diagnosis, many children with special needs do not receive the appropriate interventions. There is also a lack of standardized diagnostic tools and trained professionals to carry out these assessments." Q3-**"There is a significant opportunity to expand diagnostic services through mobile clinics and telehealth solutions. This can make early diagnosis and intervention more accessible, especially in rural areas. Additionally, training more professionals in diagnostic techniques can help meet the growing demand for these services."*

Pseudonym 8: Response to Q1-*"Developing and implementing adaptive learning technologies can provide personalized education experiences for special needs students. Government and private sector investment in educational technology infrastructure, as well as training for teachers on how to use these tools effectively, can facilitate widespread adoption." Q2-**"The primary obstacle is the high cost and limited availability of advanced educational technologies. Additionally, there is often a lack of training for teachers on how to effectively integrate technology into special education. Resistance to change and the digital divide also pose significant challenges." Q3-**"The advancement in educational technologies presents a major opportunity. Developing adaptive learning software and assistive devices can provide personalized learning experiences for special needs students. There is also potential for partnerships with tech companies to innovate and implement these solutions on a larger scale."*

Pseudonym 9: Response to Q1-*"Leveraging artificial intelligence and machine learning to create tailored educational programs can greatly benefit special education. Additionally, establishing tech hubs in schools where teachers and students can access and learn about new educational technologies can promote continuous innovation and improvement." Q2- A: "Key obstacles*

include the lack of infrastructure and technical support in many schools. Many institutions are not equipped with the necessary tools and technologies to implement special education programs effectively. Additionally, there is often insufficient funding to support the purchase and maintenance of educational technologies." Q3-"Investing in educational technology infrastructure offers a huge opportunity. By integrating technologies like AI and machine learning, we can create customised educational programs that cater to individual student needs. Moreover, the potential for developing local tech solutions tailored to the Nigerian context is vast.

Discussions

Research Question 1: *What are the practical ways edupreneurs and edupreneneur venture could scale up special education in Nigeria?*

Theme 1: Scaling Special Education

Scaling special education in Nigeria requires a multifaceted approach that addresses funding, policy reform, educational integration, data-driven planning, private sector involvement, technological adoption, and expanded diagnostic services. The thematic insights from various stakeholders highlight practical strategies to achieve this goal.

Increased Government Funding and Support: One critical aspect of scaling special education is the necessity for increased government funding and support. Kisanji (2019) reiterated that establishing more centres equipped with the necessary facilities is foundational for providing a conducive learning environment for special needs students. This funding is also essential for training specialized educators and offering continuous professional development, ensuring a skilled workforce capable of meeting diverse student needs. **Pseudonym 1** emphasizes that without adequate financial resources from the government, it would be challenging to build the infrastructure needed to support special education effectively.

Inclusive Policies and International Partnerships: Policy reform is another crucial component. Implementing inclusive policies that mandate special education in all schools can significantly impact by creating an educational environment where special education is normalized and integrated into the mainstream. **Pseudonym 2** suggests that partnerships with international organizations can bring in much-needed resources, expertise, and innovative practices. This

corroborated the remarks of Oluwafemi et al., (2014) who noted that these collaborations, combined with community awareness programs, can enhance the acceptance and support for special education, creating a supportive ecosystem for scaling up these services.

Teacher Training and Research Grants: Integrating special education courses into teacher training programs at universities ensures that all educators have a basic understanding of special education needs. This educational integration, highlighted by **Pseudonym 3**, allows schools to better accommodate diverse learners. Additionally, **Pseudonym 3** attested that establishing research grants for special education can drive the development of innovative teaching methods and tools, contributing to continuous improvement in special education practices in line with the submission of Chukwuemeka and Samaila (2020). This fosters an educational culture that values and supports special education, promoting both immediate and long-term growth in the field.

Data Collection and Public-Private Partnerships: Effective data collection and monitoring systems are vital for planning and resource allocation in special education. Identifying and tracking students who need special education can lead to more targeted interventions and efficient use of resources. **Pseudonym 4** underscores the importance of fostering partnerships with non-profits and the private sector to bring additional resources and expertise into the system. This was also articulated by Umar and Tubosun (2016) in that such collaborations can significantly enhance the capacity and effectiveness of special education programs.

Affordable Learning Materials and Tax Incentives: Providing affordable and accessible learning materials tailored to the needs of special students is crucial for effective education. Collaborating with schools to supply these materials and obtaining continuous feedback can enhance learning outcomes. **Pseudonym 5** advocates for tax incentives for businesses that support special education, encouraging more private-sector involvement. This approach drives innovation and ensures the availability of necessary resources, highlighting the role of private enterprise in enhancing special education also voiced in Dakung et al., (2017) work.

Online Tutoring and Accessibility: Expanding online tutoring services to reach remote areas leverages technology to improve accessibility. Affordable online tutoring services, combined with trained tutors who can handle various special needs, ensure quality education for special needs students regardless of their location. **Pseudonym 6** suggests that partnerships with local schools

to integrate online and offline learning experiences can create a more cohesive and flexible educational environment, further scaling up special education. This also corroborated the submission of Chukwuemeka et al., (2021)

Diagnostic Services and Early Intervention: Increasing the availability of diagnostic services, especially in rural areas, is fundamental for early identification and intervention of special needs. **Pseudonym 7** emphasises training more professionals in diagnostic techniques and making these services accessible. This agrees with the remark of Mapunda et al., (2017) that early diagnosis can lead to timely intervention, significantly improving educational outcomes for special needs students.

Adaptive Learning Technologies and Innovation: Educational technology has the potential to transform special education significantly. Developing and implementing adaptive learning technologies can provide personalized education experiences tailored to individual student needs. Investment in educational technology infrastructure and teacher training can facilitate the widespread adoption of these technologies. **Pseudonyms 8 and 9** highlight the potential of leveraging artificial intelligence and machine learning to create tailored educational programs. This further situates the recommendations put forward in Oladele et al., (2022) work that establishing tech hubs in schools can promote continuous innovation and improvement, enhancing the quality and scalability of special education.

Research Question 2: *What are the key obstacles edupreneurs and edupreneneur venture face in scaling special education in Nigeria?*

Theme 2: Challenges in Scaling Special Education

The participants reveal several key obstacles impeding the scaling of special education in Nigeria, with inadequate funding and the lack of trained professionals standing out prominently. **Pseudonym 1** underscores the critical issue of insufficient government funding, which hinders the establishment of necessary facilities, the hiring of qualified staff, and the provision of essential learning materials. This funding gap, in line with Adebisi et al., (2014), is compounded by a general lack of awareness and understanding about special education among the public and policymakers, which further stymies progress. Additionally, **Pseudonym 2**, corroborating the discovery in Esegbe et al., (2015) research, highlights the severe shortage of trained special

education professionals, exacerbated by stigma and cultural misconceptions surrounding disabilities. These factors collectively lead to exclusion and inadequate support for students with special needs, emphasizing the necessity for both financial investment and cultural change.

Further complicating the issue is the lack of integration of special education into mainstream policies, as noted by **Pseudonym 3**. This segregation results in insufficient research and data on the specific needs of special education students, hampering effective planning and implementation agreeing with the suggestions of Lawal (2022). Administrative inefficiencies and lack of stakeholder collaboration, identified by **Pseudonym 4**, lead to fragmented efforts and diminished impact. The limited availability of affordable learning materials, poor distribution networks, and technological infrastructure issues, especially in rural areas, as pointed out by **Pseudonyms 5 and 6**, further restrict access to quality education. Moreover, the scarcity of diagnostic services and standardized tools, coupled with the high cost and limited availability of advanced educational technologies, highlighted by **Pseudonyms 7, 8, and 9**, indicate significant gaps in both the diagnostic and technological support systems necessary for effective special education.

Research Question 3: *What are the opportunities in scaling special education in Nigeria?*

Theme 3: Opportunities in Scaling

With regards to the opportunities in scaling special education, the participants reveal several promising opportunities for scaling special education in Nigeria, with a strong emphasis on leveraging international and local collaborations, expanding teacher training, and utilising advanced technology. **Pseudonym 1** highlights the potential to tap into international grants and funding, which can bring in much-needed expertise and resources. This can be bolstered by forming local partnerships with NGOs and private companies to create a robust support network. **Pseudonym 2** echoes this sentiment, pointing out that the growing awareness and advocacy for special education can lead to stronger policy support and increased funding. Integrating special education into mainstream schools promotes inclusivity and allows for shared resources, benefiting all students. These collaborations and policy advancements are crucial for building a sustainable and comprehensive special education system also attested in the work of Shikden, (2015).

Furthermore, **Pseudonym 3** identifies the expansion of teacher training programs to include special education components as a significant opportunity. This approach ensures that more educators are prepared to handle diverse classrooms, leading to better innovative ideas. **Pseudonym 4** adds that leveraging community-based programs can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for special needs students. Brydges and Mkandawire (2020) stated that government incentives for private sector involvement could attract more investment into special education, fostering innovation and resource availability. **Pseudonym 5** points out the growing market for specialized educational materials, suggesting that developing and distributing tailored resources can enhance learning experiences. Additionally, the increasing penetration of internet and mobile technologies, as noted by **Pseudonym 6** opens up opportunities for online tutoring services to reach remote areas, providing accessible and affordable quality education. **Pseudonyms 7, 8, and 9** emphasize the potential of diagnostic services and educational technologies, such as mobile clinics, telehealth solutions, adaptive learning software, and AI-driven customized programs, to transform special education. These advancements can facilitate early diagnosis, personalized learning experiences, and continuous innovation, making special education more effective and scalable in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Scaling special education in Nigeria presents both significant challenges and promising opportunities. Key obstacles include inadequate funding, lack of trained professionals, insufficient policy integration, administrative inefficiencies, and limited access to diagnostic services and advanced educational technologies. However, leveraging international grants, forming local partnerships, expanding teacher training, utilizing community-based programs, and harnessing the power of educational technology can effectively address these challenges. To move forward, it is recommended that the Nigerian government increase funding for special education, integrate special education into mainstream policies, enhance teacher-training programs, and foster public-private partnerships. Additionally, investing in technological infrastructure and expanding diagnostic services, particularly in rural areas, will be crucial for providing inclusive and quality education to all special needs students.

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