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Inclusive Education in Nigeria Amid Global Economic Shocks: Implications of the Middle East Crisis for Access, Equity, and Policy Sustainability

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Abstract: This paper examines the implications of the Middle East crisis, with particular reference to Iran-related geopolitical tensions, on the sustainability of inclusive education in Nigeria. The study adopts a qualitative review approach, drawing evidence from policy documents, newspaper reports, and scholarly literature. It argues that global economic disruptions linked to the crisis have contributed to inflationary pressures, increased poverty levels, and fiscal constraints in Nigeria, all of which indirectly undermine inclusive education objectives. The findings reveal that vulnerable learners, especially children with disabilities and those from low-income households, are disproportionately affected through reduced access to schooling, limited learning support services, and declining educational quality. The paper concludes that while Nigeria's inclusive education policy framework is progressive, its implementation is highly sensitive to external economic shocks. It recommends strengthened education financing, targeted social protection for vulnerable learners, and policy resilience mechanisms that can cushion the education sector against global economic instability.

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1. Introduction

Inclusive education has become a central global education reform agenda aimed at ensuring that all learners, regardless of ability, socio-economic background, gender, or disability status, have equitable access to quality education within mainstream systems. In Nigeria, inclusive education is embedded in national education policy reforms and aligned with international frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goal 4, which promotes equitable and inclusive quality education for all. The implementation of inclusive education does not operate in isolation from broader global economic and political dynamics [1]. The recent escalation of geopolitical tensions in the Middle East, particularly involving Iran, has had far-reaching implications on global oil markets, inflation, and supply chains. As a net importer of refined petroleum products and an import-dependent economy, Nigeria is highly vulnerable to such external shocks.

The transmission of these shocks manifests in rising fuel prices, increased cost of living, currency instability, and reduced fiscal space for social investments. These

conditions directly and indirectly affect the education sector, particularly inclusive education, which requires sustained funding, specialized infrastructure, and targeted support services [2], [3]. Against this background, this paper explores how the Middle East crisis affects the sustainability and effectiveness of inclusive education in Nigeria, with emphasis on equity, access, and policy implementation [4].

2. Materials and Methods

Conceptual Terms

Concept of Middle East Crisis

The Middle East crisis, in its contemporary form, is rooted in long-standing political, religious, and territorial tensions that have shaped the region for decades. However, the most recent escalation can be traced to the renewed cycle of conflict involving Israel, Iran, and allied groups in the region, alongside the intensified Israel–Gaza war that erupted in October 2023. These conflicts are deeply connected to broader geopolitical rivalries, particularly Iran’s influence in the region and its strained relations with Israel and Western powers. Proxy conflicts, sanctions, and military confrontations have expanded the instability beyond local boundaries, making the Middle East one of the most sensitive geopolitical flashpoints in the world. The crisis has had far-reaching consequences on the global economy, largely due to the region’s central role in global oil and gas supply. Any escalation in tensions involving Iran or disruptions in key shipping routes such as the Strait of Hormuz immediately affects global oil prices, leading to inflationary pressures worldwide. Rising energy costs increase transportation, manufacturing, and food prices, thereby slowing economic growth in both developed and developing economies. Financial markets also respond with volatility, as investors react to uncertainty in global supply chains and energy security. These effects are particularly severe for oil-importing countries that are already facing economic challenges [5]. In Nigeria, the impact of the Middle East crisis is felt mainly through imported inflation and rising fuel costs, given the country’s dependence on global oil pricing despite being an oil producer. Increased petrol prices lead to higher transportation costs, food inflation, and a general rise in the cost of living. In the education sector, these pressures translate into higher school fees, increased cost of learning materials, and reduced household ability to fund children’s education. For inclusive education in particular, the situation worsens existing inequalities, as learners with disabilities and those from low-income households face greater barriers to access, retention, and learning support [6], [7], [8].

Concept of Inclusive Education

There are many definitions of inclusive education by different scholars. For instance, According to Florian and Black-Hawkins, inclusive pedagogy requires teachers to assume that differences among learners are normal and to design teaching approaches that benefit all students without stigmatization or separation. Inclusive education is defined as a process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of all learners by increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing exclusion in and from education systems [9]. It emphasizes systemic reform of schools to accommodate diversity rather than segregating learners. This definition is widely advanced by the UNESCO, which stresses that inclusive education is not a fixed state but an ongoing process of educational transformation aimed at equity and quality for all learners.

Inclusive education is an educational right that guarantees all learners equal access to quality education within mainstream systems without discrimination [10], [11]. It ensures that learners with disabilities, marginalized backgrounds, or special needs are not excluded from regular schools. This definition is grounded in the human rights framework of the United Nations, particularly the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD), which affirms that persons with disabilities have the right to inclusive education at all levels. Inclusive education is the use of adaptive teaching strategies,

differentiated instruction, and learner-centered pedagogy to meet the diverse academic and developmental needs of all students within a shared classroom environment. It focuses on instructional flexibility and teacher responsiveness.

Inclusive education is an approach that ensures the full social participation, belonging, and interaction of all learners within school communities, especially learners with disabilities and other vulnerable groups [12], [13], [14]. It promotes social cohesion, peer interaction, and reduction of stigma. Ainscow and Miles argue that inclusive education extends beyond access to schooling and focuses on participation and achievement within socially supportive learning environments that foster belonging for all learners.

3. Results and Discussion on Impact of Middle East Crisis on Inclusive Education in Nigeria

Inflationary Pressures and Rising Cost of Education

Inflationary pressures and rising cost of education have had a significant impact on inclusive education in Nigeria following the ongoing geopolitical tensions in the Middle East. These tensions have contributed to fluctuations in global oil prices, which in turn have increased the cost of living in oil-import-dependent economies like Nigeria [15], [16]. As a result, many children in Nigeria, especially those from low-income families, are unable to access quality education. This has further deepened the education gap and hindered the progress of inclusive education in the country. Inflationary pressures have also affected government budget allocations for education, as increased spending is required to stabilize the economy and manage fuel subsidy reforms [17]. This has reduced available resources for educational development, particularly for inclusive education programmes targeting learners with disabilities. The rising cost of education has further discouraged parents from sending their children to school, especially girls, who are more likely to be kept at home for domestic responsibilities. The Middle East geopolitical tensions, particularly involving major oil-producing regions, have contributed to global oil market instability. This has resulted in increased fuel prices, transportation costs, and general inflation in Nigeria, affecting household welfare and educational affordability [18]. Families facing rising inflation increasingly prioritize basic survival needs over education, thereby undermining inclusive education participation and retention.

Deepening Poverty and Educational Exclusion

Closely linked to inflation is the widening poverty gap, which has been exacerbated by global economic shocks linked to geopolitical instability. Reports show that rising inflation and economic hardship have significantly reduced household purchasing power in Nigeria. Inclusive education systems depend on stable socio-economic conditions; however, increasing poverty has led to reduced school attendance and higher dropout rates. UNESCO notes that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to be excluded from education during economic shocks due to inability to afford direct and indirect schooling costs. Consequently, the crisis indirectly reinforces educational exclusion, particularly for learners with special needs who require additional learning support and assistive technologies [19], [20]. Deepening poverty and educational exclusion have become pressing issues in Nigeria due to worsening economic conditions. UNICEF reports that many children from low-income households are unable to access quality education, leading to widening inequality. In addition, many families are forced to withdraw children from school to support household survival needs, reinforcing intergenerational poverty cycles [21]. The World Bank and Ogunode, Ukozor, Ayoko, and Devi, further explains that economic shocks and displacement pressures increase vulnerability among families, reducing investment in education. As a result, many children are forced to drop out of school to contribute to household income, thereby deepening educational inequality and exclusion.

Diversion of Government Priorities and Funding Constraints

Another significant impact is the shift in government attention and fiscal priorities toward managing macroeconomic instability caused by global energy shocks and geopolitical tensions. The Federal Ministry of Finance highlights that Nigeria has prioritized inflation control, exchange rate stabilization, and energy market adjustments [22]. While these interventions are necessary, they have reduced fiscal space for education financing. UNESCO and Ogunode, Ayoko, Ukozor, and Devi emphasizes that in times of economic crisis, education budgets are often constrained, limiting investments in inclusive education infrastructure, teacher training, and learning support systems [23]. The diversion of funds and policy attention delays the implementation of inclusive education frameworks and weakens institutional capacity to support diverse learners. Similarly, UNICEF; International Energy Agency (IEA) and International Monetary Fund (IMF). observes that underfunding of education systems disproportionately affects vulnerable learners, including children with disabilities and those from low-income households [24]. As a result, many students are left behind and are unable to access equitable educational opportunities, particularly in inclusive education systems that require sustained government investment.

Rising Cost of Educational Service Delivery and Infrastructure Challenges

The broader economic disruptions caused by global oil market instability have significantly increased the cost of educational service delivery in Nigeria. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, inflation has driven up the cost of goods and services, including educational materials and infrastructure development [25]. For inclusive education, this translates into higher costs for assistive devices, accessible classroom infrastructure, and inclusive learning technologies. UNESCO notes that inclusive education requires sustained investment in accessibility tools and specialized instructional materials, which become more expensive during inflationary periods. Public schools, especially in rural and low-income areas, are disproportionately affected by funding shortages, leading to inadequate provision for learners with special educational needs. This ultimately compromises the quality and inclusiveness of education delivery across the country [26], [27]. Punch Newspaper also reports that rising inflation and exchange rate volatility in Nigeria have significantly increased the cost of school operations, including construction, transportation, and procurement of learning materials.

4. Conclusion

The analysis reveals that the Middle East crisis, though geographically distant, has significant indirect consequences for inclusive education in Nigeria through its impact on macroeconomic stability. Inflationary pressures and rising living costs reduce household capacity to support education, while government fiscal constraints limit investment in inclusive education infrastructure and support services. As a result, learners with disabilities and other vulnerable groups experience increased barriers to access, participation, and achievement.

The study concludes that inclusive education in Nigeria remains structurally vulnerable to global economic shocks due to weak social protection systems and inconsistent education financing. Based on the findings, the study recommend the following:

- 1) Government should increase and ring-fence funding for inclusive education to ensure that budgetary allocations are protected even during periods of economic instability caused by external shocks.

- 2) Targeted interventions such as conditional cash transfers, school feeding programmes, and subsidies for learners with disabilities should be expanded to reduce the impact of inflation on school attendance and retention.

3) Nigeria should integrate economic shock-response mechanisms into education planning to ensure that inclusive education policies remain sustainable during periods of global crisis.

4) The government and development partners should promote low-cost assistive technologies and digital learning platforms to reduce dependency on expensive imported educational resources.

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