

An Investigation of the Perception of Teachers towards Inclusion of Children with Visual Impairment in the Regular UBE Classrooms: Evidence from South-South Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Globally, inclusive education has been identified as the most effective means of providing education for children with special needs including those with visual impairment. Unfortunately, in most countries such as Nigeria, inclusive education has been negatively affected by the attitude of teachers towards children with disabilities and their education. The objective of this study was to find out the relationship between the independent variables (knowledge and attitude) and the dependent variable (inclusion of children with visual impairment). The study covered the south-south geopolitical zone of Nigeria including; Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta, Edo and Rivers. By using stratified sampling technique, four local government areas were selected from each state, and five schools from each local government area. The sample for the study comprised one thousand and forty-five (1,045) male and female teachers in regular primary schools across the states. Inferential statistics of Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to determine the significant relationship in the stated research questions. The result revealed that there was significant relationship between the independent variables (Teachers' knowledge, perception and attitude) and inclusion of students with visual impairment. Inclusive education has strong correlation with Knowledge ($r = 0.685, P < 0.05$), with Perception ($r = 0.812, P < 0.05$) and Attitude ($r = 0.255, P < 0.05$), at 0.05 level of significance. The findings from this study will help the stakeholders in inclusive education to improve the educational system of the children with disabilities by promoting the rapport between teachers and their students.

KEYWORDS: Teachers' knowledge and attitudes, inclusion education, visual impairment, UBE, south-south Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education refers to the concept of educating students with disabilities in a general education setting side by side with their counterparts without disabilities. The concept of inclusion, which has its origin in the field of special education and disability, is far from new. The founding fathers of special education during the 19th century favoured segregation which they believed was essential because children with disabilities were then considered to be incapable of benefiting from ordinary methods of instruction. However, the system of parallel provision began to be questioned with the rise of the world-wide civil rights movement. Following political pressure from disability and parental advocacy groups, the issues of equality of access and education opportunity gained impetus and integration became centre stage. Similarly, this concept is not new in Nigerian education system. The terms "open education" and "integration" have been used in Nigeria at different times to express the idea of physical placement of students with disabilities in the same school or classroom as students without disabilities [1, 2, 3]. However, inclusive education suggests that mere placement is not enough. Inclusion, by extension, has been inferred to include educational service provision in the least restrictive environment, contingent upon student strengths and needs encompassing a substantial continuum of possible supports.

How to cite this paper: Francesca Uche-Ezekiel Uko "An Investigation of the Perception of Teachers towards Inclusion of Children with Visual Impairment in the Regular UBE Classrooms: Evidence from South-South Nigeria" Published in International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (ijtsrd), ISSN: 2456-6470, Volume-4 | Issue-1, December 2019, pp.805-807, URL: www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd29718.pdf



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Hardman, Drew and Egan [4] defined inclusion as an approach in which students with disabilities receive the services and supports appropriate to their individual needs within the general education setting. This paradigm has been described as "push-in services" [5]. Whereas the traditional model of special education has been "pulling the student out" of the general education class to receive support, inclusive education focuses on "pushing services and support into" the general education setting for both students and teachers. According to Kilanowski-Press, Foote & Rinaldo [6] it is this bringing services and support to the student in the general education classroom, as opposed to removing students from learning experiences with same age peers, that is largely viewed as the hallmark of inclusion. According to UNESCO [7], inclusion is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children [7,8]. Similarly, Obani [9] sees inclusion as a higher level of integration which requires that schools prepare, plan for, and adapt their systems and practices to meet the learning

needs of every school child (with or without disabilities) in the same neighbourhood schools.

Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive survey research design where the vital data about people and their beliefs, opinions, attitudes, motivations and behaviour in relation to inclusive education were collected. The population for the study consisted of all the teachers in primary schools in south-south of Nigeria including Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta, Edo and Rivers. The sample for the study comprised one thousand and forty-five (1045) male and female teachers in regular primary schools across the five states. Stratified sampling technique was used to select four local government areas from each state, and five schools from each local government area. Simple random sampling was used to select at the least ten teachers from each of the selected schools.

A structured self-designed questionnaire containing Attitude Towards Inclusion of the Blind Scale (ATIBS) was developed to measure attitude of acceptance (or rejection) of inclusion of children with visual impairment. Experts in special education were asked to check whether all the items were clear and captured regular teachers' attitudes towards

inclusion. The experts agreed that the questionnaires were valid hence their suitability for the study. The instrument was thereafter pilot-tested with a group of teachers different from those used for the study and a reliability coefficient of 0.70, using Cronbach Alpha, was obtained. This implies that the instrument is reliable. The researcher trained and made use of five research assistants (one for each state). The purpose of the study was explained to participants before they were invited to fill in the questionnaire. Out of the 1250 questionnaires distributed, 1045 usable responses were returned (83.6% response rate).

Descriptive statistics was used to analyse the demographic data, while inferential statistics of Pearson Product Moment Correlation were used to determine the significant relationship in the stated research questions. Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA) was meant to verify whether the independent variables predicted the dependent variable or not.

Results and Discussion

The study revealed that there was significant relationship between the independent variables (Teachers' knowledge, perception and attitude) and inclusion of students with visual impairment (Table 1).

Table1: Correlation between the independent variable (teachers' knowledge, perception and attitude) and inclusion of children with visual impairment in South-South, Nigeria

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Df	R	P	Remark
Acceptance of Inclusive Education	10.94	2.705	1045	3	-	-	-
Knowledge	10.98	3.42			.685*	.000	Sig.
Perception	9.72	3.32			.812*	.000	Sig.
Attitude	10.30	1.59			.255*	.000	Sig.

*Correlation Significant at 0.05 level

This affirmed that inclusive education has correlation with Knowledge ($r=0.685$, $P < 0.05$), with Perception ($r=0.812$, $P < 0.05$) and Attitude ($r=0.255$, $P < 0.05$), since P -value was lesser than 0.05 level of significance, therefore, there were significant relationship between the independent variables (knowledge, perception, attitude) and acceptance of inclusive education in South-South, Nigeria.

The finding in this study indicated that knowledge, perception and attitude correlate with inclusion of children with visual impairment in the regular classroom. In essence, it implies that the knowledge, perception and attitude of teachers predetermine the inclusion of students with visual impairment in the regular classroom in the South-South Nigeria. This support the findings by Bunch and Valeo [10] that indicated positive influence on the attitude of teachers towards inclusive programmes as it predicts the academic performance of students with visual impairment, who need support in their education. The present result however support the outcome of the study by Ali, Mustapha and Jelas [11] in a study of teacher's perceptions towards inclusive education where it was found that teachers have positive perception about the implementation of inclusive education, hence, it promotes how well children with visual impairment were included in a regular classroom. Furthermore, the present result support the result by Berry, Berst, Jund, Overton, Rondina & Tate [12] who reported that there is a correlation between years of teaching experience and views on inclusion of children with visual impairment. The present study therefore brings to the fore the need for teachers to

change their negative attitude, and perception towards inclusive programmes of students with visual impairment in South-South Nigeria.

The findings in the present study corroborates findings by Tumbo [13], Kanpinga [14], and Barners [15] respectively. They both found out that positive perception towards persons with disabilities in an inclusive setting yield success on the part of the students. That is, the more teachers in an inclusive school see or perceive inclusion of persons with visual impairment, the more a good result is yielded from these students.

Conclusion

This study investigated the relationship between knowledge, perception and attitude of teachers and inclusion of children with visual impairment in the regular UBE classrooms in South-South, Nigeria. Education is made paramount for everyone regardless of abilities and disabilities; hence, children with visual impairment can enjoy the basic education that would make them useful to self and to the nation at large. However, the impact of segregation would be felt in the life of visually impaired children as it most of the time, leads to low self-concept, low self-esteem, and neglect among other; including children with visual impairment in regular classrooms do justice to equal right that must be guaranteed among learners.

However, in finding out the knowledge, perception and attitudes of teachers towards inclusion of children with

visual impairment in the regular UBE classroom, one thousand and forty-five (1045) male and female teachers were used in the study. Attitude Towards Inclusion of the Blind Students (ATIBS) was used to investigate the attitude of teachers towards inclusion of children with visual impairment in the regular UBE classrooms. Hence, the findings in this study revealed that there was favourable attitude on inclusion. The result also showed that no significant relationship between the age and gender on teachers' attitude towards inclusion of children with visual impairment.

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