

TEACHERS' INTEGRATION STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES ON INCLUSION IN SELECTED PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN LAGOS, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Inclusion aligns with the goals of Education for All (EFA). Therefore, the study identified teachers' integration strategies and challenges on inclusion in selected public primary schools in Mushin Local Government Area (LGA) of Lagos, Nigeria. Descriptive Survey Research Design was used for the study. 240 teachers in Basic 1-6 formed the sample size who were randomly selected across 24 public primary schools in the LGA. Ten teachers were randomly selected from each school. Three research questions in a 21-item structured questionnaire titled 'Teachers' Integration Strategies and Challenges on Inclusion' (TISACI) was used to elicit information from respondents. The instrument was modified and validated by experts in Early Childhood and Measurement and Evaluation. The reliability instrument coefficient was at 0.798. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency count, percentages and mean. The study found out that that strategies teachers adopt to integrate pupils include differentiation, use of positive technology tools, giving individualized support and collaborative efforts among others. Also, the study outlined challenges teachers face in inclusion such as having to deal with diverse learners with diverse learning needs, lack of resources and support, poor knowledge in special education among others. The study also found that inclusion has positive impact on pupils' academic performance as it fosters positive classroom climate, provides individualized support and encourages peer tutoring among others. It was therefore recommended that teachers' professional training should focus more on tenets of special education, use of differentiation, and

diversification of assessment strategies for optimal learning outcome in order to accommodate special needs pupils among others.

Keywords: Challenges, Inclusion, Integration Strategies, Pupils, Teachers.

Introduction

Education encompasses a broad range of theories and practices for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes. Education shapes and prepares an individual to effectively adapt and succeed in the society he finds himself.

Inclusive education is an educational system that embraces and supports the learning of all pupils, irrespective of their learning abilities and disabilities or requirements. It involves provision and utilization of effective teaching methods, curriculum, school facilities, classrooms, and play areas that suits every child at every level. World Health Organization (WHO) (2021) defines inclusive education as an education given to individuals with learning disabilities alongside those in regular classes and providing them with the same educational, social, vocational and political opportunities under the same conducive learning environment without prejudice. Full inclusion is the integration of all pupils, even those that need educational behavioral support and services to succeed in regular classes without segregation (Olufunke&Oluremi, 2014).

Inclusive education according to United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2018) is significant because of the following: there is an enhanced learning for both children with and without disabilities; it improves children understanding and guarantees reduction in prejudice and encourages integration; and equips children with disabilities better so as to contribute economically and socially to their communities. Currently, emphasis has been laid on inclusive education to enable children with disabilities to have equal learning opportunities as children without disabilities (UNESCO, 2018). Despite the emphasis, from observation, there remains a challenge of full inclusion of physically challenged pupils into public primary schools in Lagos state. This is because teachers must be equipped with diversified teaching and learning approaches required in an inclusive classroom (Loreman, 2014).

Integration strategies are ways teachers involve and absorb children with special needs in a regular classroom to enable them learn with children without disabilities. Such strategies include

public support, use of problem-solving skills and varied instructional techniques and approaches and being able to manage emotions associated with managing children with special needs (Masten & Narayan, 2012). Being able to integrate learners effectively enables teachers overcome the challenges of inclusiveness effectively (Archer & Hughes, 2011).

Moreover, pupils with special needs have unique learning requirements or exceptionalities that may require additional support or accommodations to facilitate their education and promote their overall development. Such areas include physical, sensory, cognitive, emotional, or behavioral aspects. Pupils with special needs may have conditions such as autism spectrum disorder, specific learning disabilities, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, sensory impairments, or physical disabilities (American Psychiatric Association, (APA) 2013).

Inclusive education aims to ensure that pupils with special needs receive equal opportunities and access to quality education, along with their non-disabled peers, in a regular classroom setting. Ajuwon (2008) described inclusion as the philosophy and practice for educating children with special needs in general education settings. Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) (2013) as a nation supports the operation of inclusive education in her National Policy on Education where it states that persons with special needs be in schools with normal persons in age-appropriate education and be supervised by teachers. Inclusive education aims at equity, justice and equality in education for all children who have been excluded from education for the reason of disabilities. (Christopher & Elizabeth, 2012). In another development FRN (2013) maintained that, every Nigerian child is entitled to quality education irrespective of disabilities, color or minority group. In corroboration, Obi (2008) stated that as part of human right, persons with disabilities should not discriminated against based on religion, race, ethnicity, tribe or disability.

Inclusive education gives a wide range of academic and social benefits for pupils with disabilities, such as high achievement in language and mathematics, high school attendance and graduation, and enhanced positive relationship with non-disabled individuals (Isuwa & Lengnen, 2014). A number of studies have highlighted the challenges that teachers face when trying to accommodate pupils with special needs in the classroom. These challenges include among others; the lack of appropriate resources, the need for additional support, and the negative attitudes of other pupils towards pupils with disabilities (Singh, 2016; Li & Oi, 2014). Also, Mantey (2014) maintained that, challenges associated with inclusive education are; poor parental awareness and involvement

and community participation, dilapidated buildings, large class size and high pupil-teacher ratio.

Panto (2015) pointed out that, the challenges of teaching children with hearing impairment in an inclusive education are; inadequate infrastructure facilities, lack of/ reduced number of specialists, irregular staff training and inadequate instructional materials. In view of the above assertion, Eskay and Angie (2013) identified the following as the challenges facing inclusive education in Nigeria: lack of specialists and adequate plan for the identification of children with learning disabilities in Nigeria; specialists schools in rural areas are often neglected and attention paid to those in urban areas; lack of awareness and guidance by parents on where the special schools are located in Nigeria; poor economic state of parents; poor identification strategy by Government on where and how to identify such special needs children not in school; poor database on number of out of school special needs children and those enrolled, and poor funding and ignorance of the community at large on the need to enroll the special needs children at school. Aja-Okorie (2010) identified some government policies intervention targets at inclusive education in Nigeria to include; the enactment of three crucial activities which were

- I. The signing of the National Education Strategy for Nigeria by UNESCO (2006-2015),
- II. Having a transparent agenda and being accountable, and
- III. Education sector plan and analysis.

Moreover, research has shown that teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education are crucial in determining the success of the inclusion process. Teachers who have positive attitudes towards inclusive education are more likely to support inclusion of pupils with special needs and adopt integrating strategies (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Also, research has shown that inclusion of pupils with special needs improves their social skills, self-esteem, and academic performance, while the non-disabled peers also benefit from the practice (Salend, 2011). This corroborates with the findings of Kreimeyer (2015) who stated that inclusion increases the understanding of children with learning disabilities, and enhances the empathy and compassion other children have towards them. In credence, Peterson and Hittie (2003) opined that inclusion allows learning of age-appropriate social skills as they imitate their peers without learning disabilities. Also, Kim and Olive (2006) asserted that inclusion encourages participation by parents as they feel happier that their children learn along with their peers irrespective of their learning disabilities under the same environment.

Implementation strategies of inclusive education in Nigeria, according to Maria and Bwoi (2015) include; knowing the right and needs of children; parents' and families' involvement, community, state and federal government involvement and provision of school access to children with learning disabilities. The above strategies were not effectively carried out due to impeding factors. Effective implementation of inclusive education requires that parents, families and communities be involved and in partnership while providing a welcoming and conducive environment to enable teachers provide for the needs of learners. School practices should consider the language and culture of the immediate environment and specialist should be made available to screen pupils and identify their needs and disabilities.

Seven steps for implementing effective inclusive practice in Nigeria according to Kilgore (2011) are: the current inclusion practice must be defined; a leadership team launched; having an action plan for positive change; defining implementation strategies; partnering and meeting with parents and families; identifying implementation measures, and making available a professional learning opportunity and support.

It is therefore on the afore mentioned premise that the study identified teachers' integration strategies and challenges on inclusion of pupils with special needs in selected public primary schools in Mushin Local Government Area of Lagos State, Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

The inclusion of pupils with special needs into public primary schools remains a challenge for teachers. Despite efforts to promote inclusive education; there are still significant barriers that impede the inclusion process. These barriers amongst others include, the lack of appropriate resources, negative attitudes towards pupils with special needs, lack of appropriate fund allocation for pupils with special needs and social discrimination from peers. In addition, most teachers are not experts in special education. In this vein, most of those teachers without such special training often face a lot of challenges towards accommodating special needs children with other children in the general classrooms because they do not have the requisite skills required to cater for them. In addition, the lack of resources to support the children, lack of funding and support from Government, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), patriotic individuals, and parents' concerns, among others hampers effective inclusion in schools. More so, lack of

competence on teaching strategies that the special needs children require to comfortably compete with other children in the mainstream adds to the challenges teachers have.

Objective of the study

The main objective of the study is to identify teachers' integration strategies and challenges on inclusion in public primary schools in Mushin LGA of Lagos state. Therefore, the specific objectives of this study are:

- i. To discover strategies teachers employ to effectively integrate pupils with special needs into regular classrooms
- ii. To identify the challenges teachers encounter in including pupils with special needs in the mainstream classroom, and
- iii. To determine the extent inclusive education enhances the academic performance of pupils with and without special needs.

Research questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What strategies do teachers employ to effectively integrate pupils with special needs into regular classrooms?
2. What are the challenges teachers encounter in including pupils with special needs in the mainstream classroom?
3. To what extent does inclusive education enhance the academic performance of pupils with and without special needs?

Methodology

The study adopted the Descriptive Survey Research design. Simple random sampling technique was adopted to give all teachers equal chance of being selected. However, 240 teachers formed the sample size for the study. They were randomly selected across 24 public primary schools in Mushin Local Government Area; ten teachers each from each of the randomly selected schools. Teachers from Basic 1-6 were randomly selected. A self-structured researchers' questionnaire titled 'Teachers' Integration Strategies and Challenges on Inclusion' (TISACI) was used for data collection. The Questionnaire contained two sections. Section A has the demographic data of the respondents and the Section B contained the statements from the three research questions. Experts from the Departments of Measurement and Evaluation and Early Childhood Education modified

and validated the instrument. The reliability coefficient was at 0.798. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and simple percentages for the demographic section while the data collected from the section B was analyzed using Frequency Count, Percentages, and Mean.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Section A: Demographic Data of Respondents

Table 1. 1 Distribution of respondents according to Gender

Variables	Frequency	Percentage %
Male	60	25%
Female	180	75%
Total	240	100%

Results: The data from table 1. 1 showed that 25% of the respondents are male while 75% are female. This implies that the number of female teachers is more in Public primary schools than male teachers.

Table 1.2 Teachers years of experience

Years of Teaching Experience	Frequency	Percentage %
2 – 10 years	85	35.4%
11 to 20 years	105	43.8%
21 years and above	50	20.8%
Total	240	100%

Table 1.2 showed that 35.4% of the respondents had 2 – 10 years followed by 43.8% which had 11 to 20 years and 20.8% had 21 years and above. This means that most of the respondents have over ten years teaching experience.

SECTION B: ANALYSIS OF DATA

RESEARCH QUESTION 1:

What strategies do teachers employ to effectively integrate pupils with special needs into regular classrooms?

Table 1. 3 Strategies Teachers employ to effectively integrate Pupils with Special Needs

	ITEM		SA	A	SD	D	Mean	Remarks
			%	%	%	%		
	Teachers utilize differentiated instructional strategies to accommodate the diverse learning needs	240	100	70	30	40	2.9	Accept
			41.7		12.5	16.7		
				29.1				
2.	Teachers incorporate assistive technology tools and resources to support physically challenged pupils in accessing the curriculum and participating fully in classroom activities.		81	100	41	18	3.0	Accept
			33.8	41.7	17.0	7.5		
	Teachers develop individualized support plans or Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) to outline specific goals, accommodations, and modifications for pupils with special needs		100	90	30	20	3.1	Accept
			41.7	37.5	12.5	8.3		
4	Teachers engage in collaborative efforts with other		135	55	43	7	3.3	Accept
			56.2	22.9	17.9	2.9		

	professionals, support staff, and parents to ensure effective inclusion							
5	Teachers ensure healthy –friendly environment for meeting all learners’ needs.	121	98	12	9	3.3	Accept	
		50.4	40.8	5	3.8			
6	Provision of social and emotional support to pupils with special needs is recognized as a key strategy by teachers.	140	61	27	12	3.3	Accept	
		58.3	25.4	11.3	5			
7	Teachers engage in continuous professional development to enhance their knowledge and skills in inclusive education	120	58	36	26		Accept	
		50	24.2	15	10.8	3.1		

Results: Table 1.3. which outlined strategies teachers adopt to effectively integrate pupils with special needs has the following mean scores affirmation: In item 1, the respondents agreed that teachers utilize differentiated instructional strategies to accommodate the diverse learning needs pupils with special needs with 2.9 mean score. In item 2 the respondents agreed that teachers incorporate assistive technology tools and resources to support physically challenged pupils in accessing the curriculum and participating fully in classroom activities with 3.0 mean score. In 3, the respondents agreed that teachers develop individualized support plans or Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) to outline specific goals, accommodations, and modifications for

pupils with special needs with 3.1. In item 4, the respondents agreed that teachers engage in collaborative efforts with other professionals, support staff, and parents to ensure effective inclusion with 3.3 mean score. In item 5, the respondents agreed that teachers ensure healthy – friendly environment for meeting all learners’ needs with 3.3. In item 6, the respondents agreed that provision of social and emotional support to pupils with special needs is recognized as a key strategy by teachers with 3.3 mean score. In item 7, the respondents agreed that teachers engage in continuous professional development to enhance their knowledge and skills in inclusive education with 3.1 mean score.

Research Question 2: What are the challenges teachers encounter in including pupils with special needs in the mainstream classroom?

Table 1.4 Challenges Teachers encounter in the Inclusion of Pupils with Special Needs in the Mainstream Classroom

ITEM	Number	SA %	A %	D %	SD %	Mean	Remarks
Teachers deal with pupils with a wide range of abilities, learning styles, and needs.	240	73 30.4	100 41.7	21 8.8	46 19.1	2.8	Accept
Insufficient resources and support can pose significant challenges for teachers.		55 22.9	100 41.7	31 12.9	54 22.5	2.6	Accept
Inclusive classrooms often require additional planning, preparation, and collaboration among teachers, specialists, and support staff		100 41.7	51 21.3	40 16.6	49 20.4	2.8	Accept

Pupils with special needs may exhibit challenging behaviors due to their disabilities or difficulties in regulating their emotions and behaviors.	100	69	58	13	3.0	Accept
	41.7	28.8	24.1	5.4		
Teachers often lack opportunities for specialized training and professional development to effectively teach pupils with special needs.	86	81	43	30	2.9	Accept
	35.8	33.8	17.9	12.5		
Providing individualized instruction and assessing the progress of each pupil with special needs can be demanding.	100	72	49	19	3.0	Accept
	41.7	30	20.4	7.9		
Teachers find it difficult to apply classroom management strategies.	109	90	19	22	3.1	Accept
	45.4	37.5	7.9	9.2		

Results: Table 1.4 which identified Challenges Teachers face in the Inclusion of Pupils with Special Needs in the Classroom has high respondents' affirmation as follows: In item 8 the mean score of 2.8 from the respondents showed that teachers deal with pupils with a wide range of abilities, learning styles, and needs. In item 9 the respondents agreed that insufficient resources and support can pose significant challenges for teachers with 2.6 mean score. While item 10 as the respondents agreed that inclusive classrooms often require additional planning, preparation, and collaboration among teachers, specialists, and support staff with a mean score of 2.8. Also, in item 11 the respondents agreed that pupils with special needs may exhibit challenging behaviors due to their disabilities or difficulties in regulating their emotions and behaviors with

3.0 mean score. Item 12 showed that the respondents agreed that teachers often lack opportunities for specialized training and professional development to effectively teach pupils with special needs with a mean score of 2.9. In item 13 the respondents agreed that providing individualized instruction and assessing the progress of each pupil with special needs can be demanding with a mean score of 3.0. Item 14 showed that the respondents agreed that teachers find it difficult to apply classroom management strategies with a mean score of 3.1.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3

To what extent does inclusive education enhance the academic performance of pupils with and without special needs?

Table 1.5: The Extent Inclusive Education Enhances the Academic Performance of Pupils with and Without Special Needs

ITEM	Number	SA %	A %	D %	SD %	Mean	Remarks
15 Inclusive education fosters a positive classroom climate that values diversity, inclusion, and respect.	240	140 58.3	58 24.2	23 10	19 7.9	3.3	Accept
16 Inclusive education aims to provide individualized support and accommodations to meet the unique needs of all pupils.		99 41.3	65 27.0	43 17.9	33 13.8	2.9	Accept
17 Inclusive classrooms offer opportunities		73 30.4	100 41.7	21 8.8	46 19.1	2.8	Accept

	for social interaction and peer learning.						
18	Inclusive education can enhance the self-efficacy and confidence of both pupils with and without special needs.	70	121	39	10	3.0	Accept
		29.2	50.4	16.2	4.2		
19	Inclusive education promotes high expectations for all pupils	100	63	26	51	2.8	Accept
		41.7	26.3	10.8	21.2		
20	Inclusive education often encourages peer tutoring and support	76	100	31	33	2.9	Accept
		31.7	41.7	12.9	13.7		
21	Inclusive education often encourages collaboration among teachers, specialists, and support staff	104	70	47	19	3.0	Accept
		43.3	29.2	19.6	7.9		

Results: Table 1.5 which identified the Extent Inclusive Education Enhances the Academic Performance of Pupils with and without Special Needs has the following respondents' affirmation: In item 15, the respondents agreed that inclusive education fosters a positive classroom climate that values diversity, inclusion, and respect with 3.3 mean score. In item 16, the respondents agreed that inclusive education aims to provide individualized support and accommodations to meet the unique needs of all pupils with 2.9 mean score. In item 17, the respondents agreed that inclusive classrooms offer opportunities for social interaction and peer learning with 2.8 mean score. In item 18, the respondents agreed that Inclusive education can enhance the self-efficacy and confidence of both pupils with and without special needs with 3.0.

In item 19, the respondents agreed that inclusive education promotes high expectations for all pupils with 2.8 mean score. In item 20, the respondents agreed that Inclusive education often encourages peer tutoring and support with 2.9 mean score while in item 21, the respondents agreed that Inclusive education often encourages collaboration among teachers, specialists, and support staff with 3.0 mean score.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Research question 1 outlined the strategies teachers adopt to effectively integrate pupils with special needs. The findings corroborated with the findings of Tomlinson and Allan (2020) who posited that to integrate children with learning disabilities, differentiated instructional strategies should be adopted by teachers in order to allow individuals learn based on their abilities and learning needs.

Research question 2 identified the challenges teachers face in the inclusion of pupils with special needs. The findings are in agreement with Forlin (2010) who stated that teachers' lack of training and knowledge in integrating children with learning disabilities hampers inclusion. Inclusive education requires teachers to possess the skills and competencies to utilize varied instructional strategies while giving support to such children.

Research question 3 examined the extent inclusive education enhances the academic performance of pupils. The findings corroborated with the findings of Peterson and Hittie (2003) who maintained that age –appropriate and social skills are learned together as the children with learning disabilities observe and imitate other children without learning disabilities.

Conclusion

Education for All (EFA) encourages that every child has equal access to education. One of the philosophies of basic Education is that education should be qualitative, compulsory and universal. Inclusion supports the spirit of oneness where all learners are given the opportunity to learn in a conducive environment irrespective of physical, emotional or social need of the child. Meeting up with the needs of the special needs children will encourage unity and forbearance among pupils.

Recommendations

Based on this study, below are some practical recommendations that could be adopted:

1. Teachers' professional training should be encouraged in schools where trained teachers in special education should help in fostering the knowledge of teachers to overcoming the challenges they encounter in inclusion.
2. Training on differentiation approach should be keyed into teachers' practices to enable their incorporating such differed strategies in the inclusive classroom.
3. Teachers should also diversify their assessment strategies to enhance the academic performance of all learners and ensure their optimal learning outcome.
4. Parents-Teachers' forum should create avenue to educate both parties on need to include the special needs children into the mainstream and not exclude them.

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