

English Language Teachers' Awareness Level and Views on Inclusive Education in Basic Education Levels in Northern Central Zone of Nigeria

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Abstract. The fundamental fact underlining inclusive education generally is to entrench equality of educational opportunity to all categories of learners irrespective of their shortcomings. This will have a direct influence upon the quality of education experienced by individuals, their full participation and acceptance in the mainstream and the opportunities to contribute their quota to the development of their society through the quality education given. However, the readiness for acceptance of inclusion varies across nations and continents of the world. Many nations in Africa, especially Nigeria are still not in total conformity with this practice. Therefore, this paper attempts to highlight and examine the concept and history of inclusion, inclusive education in Nigeria, teacher's awareness and views on inclusion in relation to the four major components of gender, disabilities, ethnic difference, and religious difference in English studies classroom in the North-Central zone of Nigeria. The paper at the end revealed the low level of teachers' awareness about inclusive education but they had positive views supporting its practice on the account of the four categories of learners into the mainstream of education in the North-Central zone of Nigeria. It was therefore recommended that the public should be more enlightened about inclusive education, its benefits and practice especially on the account of its component of physical disability.

Keywords: inclusive Education, teacher's awareness, physical disabilities, gender, ethnicity and religion.

1. Introduction

Nigeria like most Africa countries is striving hard to align herself with the whole world to pursue the objectives of education for all by the year 2020. Inclusive education if well implemented and adequately practiced would help in no small way to facilitate the realisation of these laudable objectives. For this purpose, inclusive education as a concept has attracted the attention of the general public particularly stakeholders in the education sector. It is receiving worldwide attention as new concept in the process of providing educational services to all categories of learners irrespective of their shortcomings, As schools are increasingly challenged to serve a diverse student population of various needs, the concern now in Nigeria as in other Africa countries is how to sensitize all the stakeholders in education especially the teachers on how to implement inclusive education in ways that are both feasible and effective in ensuring success for all the children.

Salamaica Declaration of 1994 provided the needed international theoretical framework for inclusive education. It asserts that the task of the

future is to identify ways in which the schools as part of the social environment can create better learning opportunities for all children and by this means address the challenges that are the most pervasive sources of learning difficulties in the school system.

Inclusive education is understood differently by practitioners, government, parents, disabled people's organizations (DPOs) and other key stakeholders. This is evident at all levels, and affects the acceptance, design, implementation and quality of the entire process. It is best described as provision of equal educational opportunities for all categories of learners despite their shortcomings. Fararel (2000) defined it as the extent to which a school or community welcomes all people as the full members of the group and values them as for the contributions which they make. Nwazuo (2001) on the other hand referred to inclusion as normalisation of learning condition for learners with disabilities so that they can learn and develop alongside their able-bodied counterparts in schools and communities. McCarthy (2005), in support of the above, defined it as bringing support services to the child rather than moving the child to a segregated setting to receive special education.

Ademokoya (2003) simply defined it as an effort to equalise educational opportunities for all children regardless of their physical or mental conditions, gender, colour, creed or language. The above definition and that of Fararel (2000) seem to capture the focus of this paper more appropriately as others mostly focus on children with disabilities. Other components such as gender, culture, age, religion, social class and ethnicity seem to be relegated to the background when inclusive education is being discussed. For instance in Nigeria, the insurgence of the terrorist group called "Boko Haram" evolved from the platform of religion; it is the resultant effect of a long time neglect of certain set of religious youths who wanted recognition by all means.

It is no gainsaying that certain ethnic groups in Nigeria are educationally backward and are calling for attention in the inclusive education

programme. Girl-child education is a taboo in some areas until recently when the government and some non-governmental organisations are campaigning against this practice. Girls are quickly married off to prospective husbands as soon as they reach puberty. Therefore, girls found in the schools in these areas are often neglected and later on frustrated out of the school system. How much awareness and enlightenment on inclusive education do teachers and other stakeholders in education in these affected areas have to be able to cater for these categories of disadvantaged students is an important question that needed to be urgently answered.

2. Statement of the Problem

Education is on the concurrent list of the nation and of utmost concern to the United Nations. The world is very keen on how all segments of society are granted access to basic education. Inclusive education is based on the right of all learners to a quality education that meets basic learning needs and enriches lives. Focusing particularly on vulnerable and marginalised groups, it seeks to develop the full potentials of every individual (Soodak & Erwin, 2012). The ultimate goal of inclusive quality education is to end all forms of discrimination and enhance social cohesion. However, in spite of the huge resources Nigeria expended on basic education, remarkable access by all citizenry (inclusion) has not been attained in the nation's education programme. This is partly due to the awareness level of the education practitioners (teachers) on inclusive education.

There is therefore need to investigate the awareness level of the teachers, so as to sensitise them and also assess the preparedness of North central zone educational institutions, in terms of government will to provide all the necessary resources and materials. Also, a lot of attention has been given to inclusive education in relation to physical disabilities which have been given major focus to the detriment of other vulnerable and marginalised groups. The vulnerable and marginalised groups are loose terms encompassing many different individuals and groups deprived of their right to education. The

main reasons for their exclusion are poverty, gender, inequity, child labour, speaking a minority language, living a nomadic or rural lifestyle, religious affiliation and so on. The area of interest in this paper is exclusion on the basis of gender, religion, disability (physically challenged) and ethnicity. There is therefore the need to investigate the level of teachers' awareness and their views about inclusive education on the four components.

3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to find out English language teachers' awareness level and views about inclusive education. Specifically, the study would find out:

- whether English language teachers in North-central Nigeria are aware of the concept of inclusive education
- views of the English language teachers in North-central Nigeria about inclusive education
- whether views of teachers defer on inclusive education on the account of its major component of gender.
- whether views of teachers defer on inclusive education on the account of its major component of religion.
- whether views of teachers defer on inclusive education on the account of its major component of ethnic difference.
- whether views of teachers defer on inclusive education on the account of its major component of physical disability.

4. Research Questions

- What is the awareness level of the English language teachers in North-central Nigeria about inclusive education?
- What are the views of the English language teachers in North-central Nigeria about inclusive education?
- Is there any difference in the views of English language teachers in North-central Nigeria about inclusive education on the account of its major component of gender?

- Is there any difference in the views of English language teachers in North-central Nigeria about inclusive education on the account of its major component of religion?
- Is there any difference in the views of English language teachers in North-central Nigeria about inclusive education on the account of its major component of ethnicity?
- Is there any difference in the views of English language teachers in North-central Nigeria about inclusive education on the account of its major component of physical disability?

5. Scope of the Study

The study will cover all English language teachers in Basic schools (pre - primary to junior secondary schools) in North Central zone of Nigeria (Kwara, Kogi, Benue, Nassarawa, Niger and Plateau states). Awareness and views of English language teachers on the four major components of inclusion (gender, religion, ethnic difference and physical disability) would be investigated. A sample of four hundred and eighty teachers were selected for this study using random sampling technique, having used stratified sampling technique to select the respondents on the variable of gender. A percentage was used to answer all the research questions raised in this study.

6. Literature Review

6.1 The Concept and history of Inclusive Education

In recent years, the concept of inclusive education has been broadened to encompass not only students with disabilities, but also all students who may be disadvantaged. Earlier, Skrtic et al. (1996) had argued that inclusive education goes far beyond physical placement of students with disabilities in general classrooms, but should involve schools meeting the needs of all their students within common, but fluid, environments and activities. A succinct definition of inclusive education is provided by Lipsky & Gartner (1996, 1998), who described it

as students with disabilities having full membership in age-appropriate classes in their neighbourhood schools, with appropriate supplementary aids and support services.

Advocacy for inclusive education revolves around three main arguments. Firstly, several writers claim that inclusive education is a basic human right. For example, Christensen (1996) argued that exclusion or segregation of students with special needs is a violation of their human rights and represents an unfair distribution of educational resources. Similarly, Lipsky & Gartner (1996, 1999) asserted that inclusive education is a fundamental right, derived from the principle of equity, which, if recognised, would contribute significantly to a democratic society. To Antia et al. (2002), inclusion denotes a student with a disability unconditionally belonging to and having full membership of a regular classroom in a regular school and its community.

They contrasted this with ‘integration’, or ‘mainstreaming’, both of which imply that the student with a disability has the status of a visitor, with only conditional access to a regular classroom, but primary membership of a special class or resource room. Writing from a British perspective, and as a person with a disability, Oliver (1996) argued that the education system has failed disabled students by not equipping them to exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens, while the special education system has functioned to exclude them from both the education process and wider social life. He thus saw inclusion as a political as well as an educational process. This is also emphasised in the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO’s) *Salamanca Statement* (1994) and by Slee (2001), the latter considering that inclusive education is about the cultural politics of protecting the rights of citizenship for all students. The resulting agreement, known as the *Salamanca Statement*, demonstrated an international commitment to inclusive education. It included these agreements:

- those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools

which should accommodate them within a child-centred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs, and

- regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving an education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system.

The *Statement* called upon all governments to ‘adopt as a matter of law or policy the principle of inclusive education, enrolling all children in regular schools, unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise’. An argument asserts that since there is no clear demarcation between the characteristics of students with and without disabilities, and there is no support for the contention that specific categories of students learn differently, separate provisions for such students cannot be justified (Lipsky & Gartner, 1996, 1998). Among the 16 propositions to emerge from this overview, seven are particularly pertinent to the present review:

- Inclusive education extends beyond special needs arising from disabilities and includes consideration of other sources of disadvantage and marginalisation, such as gender, poverty, language, ethnicity, and geographic isolation. The complex inter-relationships that exist among these factors and their interactions with disability must also be a focus of attention.
- Inclusion goes beyond education and should involve consideration of employment, recreation, health and living conditions. It should therefore involve transformations across all government and other agencies at all levels of society.
- While many countries seem committed to inclusive education in their rhetoric,

and even in their legislation and policies, practices often fall short. Reasons for the policy-practice gap in inclusive education are manifold and include barriers arising from societal values and beliefs; economic factors; a lack of measures to ensure compliance with policies; the dispersion of responsibility for education; conservative traditions among teachers, teacher educators and educational researchers; parental resistance; lack of skills among teachers; rigid curricula and examination systems; fragile democratic institutions; inadequate educational infrastructures, particularly in rural and remote areas; large class sizes; resistance from the special education sector (especially special schools); and a top-down introduction of inclusive education without adequate preparation of schools and communities.

- Inclusive education exists in historical contexts in which vestiges of older beliefs co-exist with newer beliefs.
- Inclusive education is embedded in a series of contexts, extending from the broad society, through the local community, the family, the school and to the classroom.
- Because cultural values and beliefs, levels of economic wealth, and histories mediate the concept of inclusive education, it takes on different meanings in different countries, and even within countries. The form taken by inclusive education in any particular country is influenced by the nature of the settlements reached at any one time between (a) traditional values such as social cohesion and group identity, collectivism, images of wholeness, fatalism, hierarchical ordering of society, and (b) modernisation values such as universal welfare, equity and equality, democracy, human rights, social justice, individualism, and parent choice.
- Economic considerations play a significant role in determining approaches to inclusive education.

These include (a) a recognition that it would not be financially realistic to provide special schools throughout a country, (b) the adoption of a human capital policy of developing all individuals primarily as a means of enhancing the economy, and (c) an attitude that persons with disabilities are economic liabilities and are therefore of low priority.

7. Inclusive Education in Nigeria – A Perspective

Inclusive education is understood differently by practitioners, government, parents, disabled people's organisations (DPOs) and other key stakeholders. This is evident at all levels, and affects the acceptance, design, implementation and quality of the entire process. From the outset, it must be said that inclusive education is a complex, if not a problematic concept. Despite the internationalisation of the philosophy of inclusive education (UNESCO, 1994, 2008), for a range of historical, cultural, social and financial reasons, its implementation has been uneven across the world. It has been a particularly problematic concept in developing countries, where resources are limited and fewer than 2% of children with disabilities receive any form of education. In a recent book outlining international perspectives on inclusive education, Mitchell (2005) and his authors explored the notion that the characterisation, purpose and form of inclusive education reflect the relationships among the social, political, economic, cultural and historical contexts that are present at any time in a particular country and/or local authority.

In Nigeria, advanced formal education was associated with a greater tolerance for negative forms of behaviour (that are sometimes connected with special needs students) and with a more positive attitude toward special supports for students with sensory disabilities. Special educators employed in Northern states were more likely than their Southern counterparts to believe that students with behavioural issues should attend their neighborhood schools. Citizens expressed in open-ended comments

their concerns that schools lack trained special education personnel, specialised materials, and architecturally-friendly buildings. Inclusive education is a process of enhancing the capacity of the education system in any country to reach out to diverse learners.

Today in Nigeria, special educators, parents of students with disabilities, policy-makers and other stakeholders continue to debate the benefits and challenges of this education paradigm (Ajuwon, 2008). The basis of inclusion is that special needs pupils have a right to the benefits of a full school experience, with needed modifications and supports, alongside their peers without disabilities who receive general education. Inclusionists contend that special classes, separate schooling, or other forms of removing children with disabilities from the regular environment should occur only when the nature or severity of the disability of the child is such that education in regular classes (with the use of supplementary services) cannot be accomplished.

8. Teacher's Awareness and Practice of Inclusion

Inclusive education, as a concept coined decades ago, still remains new to many teachers. This is not only because they are not aware, or lag behind in the modern concepts or practices in education but also because of the low level of the implementation of the inclusive education in Nigeria, its improper practice, and poor understanding of the concept. Many scholars (Garuba, 2003; Ajuwon, 2008, etc.) found that many teachers consider it as special education for the disabled/disadvantaged.

Garuba (2003) stated that the socio-economic and resource problems and unscientific method of explaining human conditions in Nigeria where 41 percent of people are still illiterate can make the adoption of inclusion end up not in the best interest of the concerned individuals (children with disability). He added that the most challenging and critical aspects of Inclusive Education (IE) development in Nigeria are categorised in terms of *inputs, process, outcomes and contextual factors*.

He explained *inputs* as challenging factor which include: (1) student access, retention and drop-out rates; (2) finding, identifying, and encouraging children to go to school; (3) poverty and associated characteristics of student background; (4) attitudes towards SEN and students with disabilities; (5) conditions of teachers' work; (6) flexible, adaptive and functional life-skills curriculum relevant to students' lives. In terms of *process*, school climate, collaboration, support, and integrated services/teacher training prove challenging as process domains.

According to Garuba (2003), *outcomes* of Inclusive Education are often illusive and difficult to measure. He explained that "student achievement tests of content knowledge provide only one indicator of impact, and are not strongly linked to success in adult life, nor do they provide a measure of creative and analytical problem-solving skills needed for survival". The challenge is to measure success in terms of broad indicators of outcomes and impact. Research suggests that Inclusive Education (IE) programs should look for improvements in terms of *contextual factors*: individual, family, community, organization, and government. Specific indicators include: presence, participation, choice, respect, knowledge and skills (Garuba, 2003).

Identifying these problems and poor awareness of people about inclusion, Garuba (2003, 197-198) recommended the following as a way of facilitating inclusive education in Nigeria.

- (i) Adequate planning which must be proactive and realistic and take into consideration the peculiar and undeveloped nature of special education in Nigeria.
- (ii) Campaigns to enlighten all the stakeholders in the education of children with special needs. This should be done in addition to aggressive awareness campaigns to reach out to parents of normal children who need to be receptive of special needs children.
- (iii) More exposure of regular teachers to the nature and demands of special

- needs. Although the education policy provides for a compulsory component of Elements of Special Education for all teacher education students, there are still some teacher education institutions (especially in the universities) which are yet to implement this important policy provision. In addition to getting these institutions to implement the projects, more course units on special education should be made compulsory for all teachers-to-be, especially those going to teach at primary and secondary school levels.
- (iv) Adults with disabilities living on the streets, need to be rehabilitated and gainfully engaged.
 - (v) The Government needs to mobilise people to form more NGOs, to pursue the cause of people with special needs.
 - (vi) Professionals and other stakeholders should work towards getting the National Assembly to legislate the creation of a special fund for the education of children with special needs.
 - (vii) Though the education policy makes provision for a special education commission, this is still to be implemented. The Government should step up action towards this end.
 - (viii) Lastly, there is the need to get the machinery going towards the process of monitoring, in order to ensure effective implementation of inclusive schooling for children with special needs.

9. Methodology

A descriptive survey research design of cross-sectional type was adopted for the study. This is because the study sought for the facts and opinions of the respondents (i.e. teachers). Eight basic schools (four government-owned and four private-owned schools) were selected from each of the six states in the geo-political zone,

making a total number of twenty-four schools in Nigeria used for the study. The population for the study comprised all the basic teachers of English Language in both private and public owned schools out of which eighty teachers were selected from each state in North-central zone, making a total of four hundred and eighty teachers.

The collection of data for this study was through researchers' designed questionnaire and interview format. The questionnaire was divided into six sections. Section "A" deals with background information of the respondents; Section "B" contained question items that revealed the awareness and views of teachers on inclusive education; Section "C" comprised items about views of teachers on the practice of inclusive education on the account of gender, religion, ethnicity and physical disability.

The instrument was subjected to a face validation by two experts from the University of Ilorin. Cronbach Alpha reliability test was used to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. Reliability coefficient of 0.82 was obtained which was high enough to confirm the reliability of the instrument. The research questions for the study were answered using percentage.

10. Analysis of Data and Results

The section presents the responses of teachers from the selected schools on their awareness level and views about inclusive education in Nigeria on the bases of the selected variable of gender and the four components (gender, religion, ethnicity and physical disability) of inclusive educations. The general level of the English language teachers' awareness of inclusive education in North-central, Nigeria is very low. Out of the 480 English Language teachers sampled, 288 (60.0%) were males while 192 (40.0%) were females; 302 (63%) out of 480 (100%) respondents claimed that they were not aware of inclusive education; while 189 (39.3%) of them were males, 113 (23.5%) were females. 178 (37%) of them were aware of the practice with 76 (15.8%) and 102 (21.3%) out of them having a high level and a low level of

awareness respectively. Out of the 178 (37%) respondents who were aware of inclusive education, 98 (20.4%) and 80 (16.7%) were males and females respectively. This result shows that a small percentage of the respondents possess a high level of awareness of inclusive education.

The English language teachers in North-central have different views about inclusive education practices on the account of its four major components of gender, religion, ethnical difference and physical disability. The tables below show their views for and against the practice of inclusive education.

Table 1: Respondents' Support for Inclusive Education Based on Gender

Teacher's Gender	Gender	Components of Inclusive Education			
		Religion	Ethnicity	Physical Disability	
Male	269	176	112	96	
Female	121	182	128	84	
Total		390 (81.3%)	358 (74.6%)	240 (50%)	180 (37.5%)

Table 1 reveals that out of the 480 English language teachers sampled, 390 (81.3%), 358 (74.6%), 240 (50%) and 180 (37.5%) respondents had views supporting the practice of inclusive education on the account of its components of gender, religion, ethnicity and physical disability respectively. In all cases except on ethnicity, males tended to support inclusive education on gender, religion and physical disability more than their female counterparts.

Table 2: Respondents' Support against Inclusive Education Based on Gender

Teacher's Gender	Gender	Components of Inclusive Education			
		Religion	Ethnicity	Physical Disability	
Male	35	63	133	120	
Female	55	59	107	180	
Total		90 (18.8%)	122 (25.4%)	240 (50%)	300 (62.5%)

Table 2 reveals that out of the 480 English language teachers sampled, 90 (18.8%), 122 (25.4%), 240 (50%) and 300 (65.5%) respondents did not seem to support the practice of inclusive education on the account of its components of gender, religion, ethnicity and physical disability respectively. Females seemed not to support it on the components of gender and physical disability more than their male counterparts, as males did not it on the account of religion and ethnicity more than their female counterparts.

11. Discussion

This study examined the teachers' awareness level and views about inclusive education using the variable of gender and the four components of inclusion which gender, religion, ethnicity and physical disability. From the data collected and analysed, it was discovered that the general level of the English language teachers'

awareness of inclusive education in North-central, Nigeria is very low. This is because 302 (63%) out of 480 (100%) respondents claimed that they were not aware of inclusive education; while 189 (39.3%) of them were males, 113 (23.5%) were females. 178 (37%) of them were aware of the practice with 76 (15.8%) and 102 (21.3%) out of them having a high level and a low level of awareness respectively. Out of the 178 (37%) respondents who were aware of inclusive education, 98 (20.4%) and 80 (16.7%) were males and females respectively. This result shows that a small percentage of the respondents possess a high level of awareness of inclusive education. This could be attributed to the low level of the practice of inclusive education in the country, and some teachers' lack of willingness to learn and apply the new trend in educational or pedagogical system. The result of this study corroborated the findings of Garuba (2003) who identified poor awareness of people about inclusion in addition to the fact that many

teachers considered it as special education for the disabled/disadvantaged.

On the views of the English language teachers in North-central Nigeria about inclusive education, 390 (81.3%), 358 (74.6%), 240 (50%) and 180 (37.5%) respondents had opinions supporting the practice of inclusive education on the account of its components of gender, religion, ethnicity and physical disability respectively. 90 (18.8%), 122 (25.4%), 240 (50%) and 300 (65.5%) respondents did not seem to support the practice of inclusive education on the account of its components of gender, religion, ethnicity and physical disability respectively. Hence, 60.8% of the respondents had views supporting the practice of inclusive education while 39.2 % did not. Generally, the second finding revealed that the English language teachers of basic educational level in North-central had positive views supporting the practices of inclusive education on the account of its four components (of gender, religion, ethnicity and physical disability) though with distinct percentages.

The third, four, fifth and sixth findings revealed that there are differences in the views of English language teachers in North-central Nigeria about inclusive education on the account of its major components of gender, religion, ethnicity and physical disability based on the variable of gender, as showed in Tables 1 and 2 above. Generally, respondents supported inclusive education most on the account of gender and religion with 81.3% and 74.6% respectively; they supported the practice less on the account of ethnicity with 50% and least on that of physical disability with 37.5%.

Though many respondents had positive opinions about the practices, 62.5 % of them did not support having children with physical disability in the same class or teaching-learning setting with those without any physical disability. Also, the support for and against having children of different ethnic groups had the same percentage (50%). Looking at their negative responses about inclusion on the component of physical disability, more enlightenment needs to be made on the practice of inclusive education so that the educational stakeholders (teachers, learners, parents, etc.) and the country at large

could benefit immensely from such an educational practice.

12. Conclusion and Recommendations

The outcome of the analysis showed that English language teachers' awareness of inclusive education in North-central, Nigeria is very low. This is because only 37% of the respondents were aware of inclusive education, with just 15.8% of the sample having a high level of the awareness of inclusion.

The English language teachers of basic educational level in North-central had positive views supporting the practices of inclusive education on the account of its four components though with distinct percentages. Also, there are differences in the views of the respondents about inclusive education on the account of its major components of gender, religion, ethnicity and physical disability based on the variable of gender. However, the majority of the respondents did not support the practice of having children with physical disability in the same class or teaching-learning setting with those without any physical disability.

In view of the findings of this study, it is recommended that more awareness should be made about inclusive education, its socio-cultural, inter-relational, peace-building benefits and its practice so that the public can be better enlightened, and they can advocates of its practice. Teachers should be more trained on the practice of inclusive education at the levels of instruction decisions, management, first aids treatment, guidance and counselling etc. so that they can be useful human resources towards the achievement of the noble cause of inclusion aimed at addressing all kinds of exclusion, discrimination, segregation and vulnerability of people in education. Government at all levels should equip all schools, especially in the immediate communities, with necessary resources to cater for all divergent learners with or without physical disability. With more enlightenment about inclusive education and the provisions of the necessary resources and facilities, people's negative views about it could be influenced, and they could then support its practice at all forms of its components,

especially physical disability. With the practice of inclusive education in all communities, the aim of Education For All (EFA) ensuring that "every child and adult receives basic education of good quality" can be achieved.

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