

Teachers' Perceptions of Mainstreaming Inclusion in Teacher Development Programme for Equity in Calabar Education Zone, Nigeria: Counselling Implications

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Abstract

The study investigated teachers' perceptions on mainstreaming of inclusion in teacher development programme for equity in Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State, Nigeria. Five research questions were posed to guide this study. The descriptive survey design was adopted. Through a simple random sampling technique, a sample of 400 secondary school teachers was selected from a population of 2,220 secondary school teachers in the Zone. The instrument for data collection was the Teachers' Perception on Mainstreaming Inclusiveness Questionnaire (TPMIQ) adapted from Denwigwe (2014). A Cronbach's alpha value of 0.75 established for the instrument was deemed reliable at .05 level of significance. Findings, among others, revealed that the teachers' perception of mainstreaming inclusion in teacher development programmes is high, and that any teacher development programme devoid of inclusiveness training is not efficacious. Based on the findings, it was concluded that continuous development of teachers with emphasis on inclusiveness is a necessity. Counselling implications were highlighted; it was recommended, among others, that teacher development programmes should be restructured and improved upon to embrace inclusiveness.

Keywords: Inclusion, Mainstreaming, Teacher, development, Equity

Introduction

Equity in education, which has been a central theme in most educational discourse, is as important to human development as quality education is. It is very difficult for any human being to develop to his fullest potentials without access to quality education; this is because quality education positively impacts the individual and his society. Therefore, serious efforts are on to ensure education for all and part of these efforts in Nigeria includes the outcry for inclusive education. The clamour for inclusive education as a veritable transformation process in education has taken a serious dimension in recent years, since the issue of non-equitable access to qualitative education has been of great concern in Nigeria in particular, and the world in general. In an inclusive setting,

everybody has equal rights to learn and the environment is supportive of all, irrespective of gender, status, age and physical disability. It is unfortunate that in spite of the obvious importance of education, access to education is often not in favour of the special needs people; part of the reason being that mainstream teachers have not been sufficiently trained on inclusiveness skills, and the exorbitant cost of special equipment for special needs people.

Inclusive education involves children with special needs learning together in the general education setting or in the same classroom with those who have no physical challenges. Inclusive education is the bringing together of persons with disabilities and those with no disability to study in the same classroom with adaptable facilities and equipment (Obi & Ashi, 2016). Haider (2008) believed that inclusive education is an arrangement that enables special needs students to be taught by the mainstream teachers in the mainstream classrooms.

The basic idea of inclusive education is that every child whether gifted, physically challenged or disadvantaged in any form receives lessons in the same setting with his peers (Denwigwe, 2014). It is necessary therefore, that inclusion be mainstreamed in teacher development programmes so that the teacher will receive enabling skills for proper upbringing of the learners under his care.

The mainstream teacher who has not received any formal training on inclusiveness will lack the needed pedagogical skills and competences that guide inclusive education. Training teachers on inclusiveness will then result in successful implementation of inclusive education. It makes a lot of sense to train pre-service teachers for inclusiveness and then engage in-service teachers in continuous professional development programmes through training and retraining, workshops and seminars. Equity and quality education without well-trained and professionally qualified teachers will be impossible because teachers are very relevant in driving inclusive education. Hammond and Ingalls (2003) opined that the increased need for more specialized training and professional support is critical to the success of inclusive education. What the teacher has is what he can impart to his learners and this demands his acquiring the technical know-how for successful implementation of inclusive education. Many experts have suggested that the success of inclusion depends on the knowledge, instructional skills, attitudes and beliefs of general education teachers towards the inclusion of students with disabilities (Cook, 2001; Friend & Bursuck, 2006). In spite of the good reasons advanced on the need for inclusiveness training for teachers, mainstream teachers in Nigeria still lack what it takes to do an effective implementation of inclusive education. It is therefore the problem of this research to investigate teachers' perception of mainstreaming inclusion in teacher development and how to equip in-service teachers for inclusive education through continuous capacity building.

To buttress the need for mainstreaming inclusion, researchers have carried out some studies on inclusive education. Haider (2008) in a study on Pakistani teachers' attitudes towards inclusion of students with special educational needs, used 50 mainstream classroom teachers and 50 special education teachers from four schools as sample. He ascertained the teachers' views on inclusion using three specially designed questionnaires on exploring attitudes and knowledge towards inclusive education. Using descriptive statistics for data analysis, findings revealed that perceptions of teachers towards inclusive education were positive. An empirical study on teachers' perceptions towards inclusive education in Malaysia by Ali, Mustapha and Jelas (2006), using 23 mainstream and special education teachers in the public primary and secondary schools as study participants, and a questionnaire on the perceptions of teachers towards inclusive education for data collection, revealed that teachers have positive attitude towards inclusive education and that inclusive education enhances social interaction and inclusion among the students and therefore, minimizes negative stereotypes on special needs students. Denwigwe (2014) in a study on teachers' perception of mainstreaming inclusion in teacher education programme in Nigeria for equity, worked with 200 secondary school teachers in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, using the Teachers' Perception on Mainstreaming Inclusiveness Questionnaire (TPOMIQ), as the instrument for data collection, and descriptive statistics for data analysis. Findings showed that secondary school teachers' perceptions on mainstreaming inclusion were high and favourably disposed towards inclusion. In a study by Mai (2008) on the attitude of secondary school teachers towards inclusion of learners with disability, apposite attitude of teachers was revealed. Zimmerman (2011) revealed the need to recognize that legislation, funding, curriculum, assessment and accountability should be considered holistically to support a move towards more inclusive practice in which teacher education plays a key role. Findings by Power (2002) showed increased training to be associated with more positive attitudes to inclusion in mainstream classrooms. Thousand and Villa (2005) revealed from the viewpoint of change theorists, that handy knowledge and skills help to release personnel involved in change process from anxiety and make them self-confident in what they do. Bradshaw and Mundia (2006) believed that the above assertion suggests the need for a holistic approach to inclusive education in general and teacher education for inclusion in particular where universities also join forces to bring about real change in the education system.

Research Questions

1. What are teachers' perceptions of mainstreaming inclusiveness in teacher education?
2. What are the teachers' perceptions about the factors that can hinder inclusive education?
3. What are the teachers' perceptions about the restructuring of teacher education curriculum for mainstreaming inclusive education?
4. What do teachers perceive to be the necessary teaching approaches for mainstreaming inclusiveness?
5. What are teachers' perceptions of the efficacy of regular teacher education that is devoid of inclusiveness?

Methodology

The design of this study was survey. Through a simple random sampling technique, 400 secondary school teachers were selected from a population of 2,220 secondary school teachers in Calabar Education Zone. A four point Likert type questionnaire, “Teachers' Perception on Mainstreaming Inclusiveness Questionnaire” (TPMIQ), adapted from Denwigwe (2014) was the instrument for data collection. The instrument had already been validated by Denwigwe (2014), and a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.75 for the instrument as established by Denwigwe (2014) was deemed high and therefore, reliable at .05 level of significance. The instrument consists of two sections, A and B. Section A elicited respondents' demographic data while B with 32 items measured teachers' perceptions on mainstreaming inclusiveness. Each item needed the respondent to state the weight of his or her perceptions based on a four-point scale of strongly agree (4 points), agree (3 points), disagree (2 points), and strongly disagree (1 point). Data analysis was done using mean ratings to answer the five research questions, with decisions taken on whether the factors should be accepted or not. The decision was to accept a mean of 2.5 and above, while a mean level below 2.5 was rejected.

Presentation of results

Research Question 1: What are teachers' perceptions of mainstreaming inclusiveness in teacher education?

Table 1: Mean Scores of Teachers' Perceptions of Mainstreaming Inclusive Education

S/ N	Mainstreaming inclusiveness in teacher development:	SA	A	D	SD	Score	Mean	Decision
1	Enhances teachers' confidence in their ability to cope with special and non -special needs children in the same classroom	160	120	80	40	1200	3.0	Accept
2	Exposes teachers to a more integrated learning experience which will directly benefit the students	160	140	60	40	1220	3.05	Accept
3	Helps teachers appreciate the fact that every child has the right to the universal learning environment	150	140	90	20	1220	3.05	Accept
4	May not equip teachers with the skills of helping all learners to adjust to learning and be active members of the class	40	60	130	170	870	2.17	Reject
5	Enables them to modify the learning environment to suit the children's needs	130	110	100	60	1110	2.77	Accept

6	Gives them the skills to provide individualized learning objectives to meet the learning needs of the children especially special needs children	200	120	50	30	1290	3.22	Accept
7	Equips them with the skills to harness the potentials of students with high academic abilities for necessary mentoring	220	80	60	40	1280	3.20	Accept
8	Does not give them sufficient ability to provide the emotional needs of children with special needs	30	40	152	178	722	1.80	Reject

From the analysis of mean scores on table 1, it was deduced that generally, the teachers' perceptions of mainstreaming inclusiveness in teacher education are high. The high mean scores of the positively structured items (1, 2, 3, 5 and 7) as well as the low mean scores of the negatively structured items (4 and 8) have illustrated this. In other words, the teachers perceive the mainstreaming of inclusive education into the teacher education programme as a necessity.

Research Question 2: What are the teachers' perceptions of the factors that can hinder inclusive education?

Table 2: Factors that can hinder inclusive education

S/N	These factors hinder inclusive education:	SA	A	D	SD	Scores	Mean	Decision
1	Inadequate preparation of teachers on inclusive education strategies	300	50	20	30	1440	3.6	Accept
2	Lack of on-going professional development opportunities on inclusive education	280	70	40	10	1420	3.5	Accept
3	Absence of elements of inclusive education in teacher education curricula	300	30	40	30	1400	3.5	Accept
4	Inadequate instructional materials	240	40	60	60	1200	3.0	Accept
5	Poor funding	270	70	40	20	1390	3.4	Accept
6	Inadequate Infrastructure to cater for all groups of learners	200	100	60	40	1260	3.1	Accept

The result of the data analysis above showed a mean score of above 2.5 for all the items. This means that the teachers perceive all the factors shown on table 2 as those that hinder inclusive education. Among these factors, inadequate preparation of teachers on inclusive education strategies ranked highest with a mean score of 3.6, followed by lack of on-going professional development and absence of elements of inclusive education in teacher education curricula.

Research question 3: What are the teachers' perceptions about the restructuring of teacher education curriculum for mainstreaming inclusive education?

Table 3: How teacher education can be restructured to mainstream inclusiveness

S/ N	The following are ways of restructuring teacher education for inclusiveness:	SA	A	D	SD	Scores	Mean	Decision
1	Add concept of inclusiveness to teacher education curriculum	260	100	20	20	1400	3.5	Accept
2	Introduce a compulsory stand-alone course on Inclusive Education.	200	150	30	20	1330	3.3	Accept
3	Infuse inclusive education into every course without a compulsory stand-alone course on inclusion	40	50	30	280	980	2.4	Reject
4	Infuse the concept of inclusive education into every course plus a compulsory stand-alone course on inclusion.	300	50	20	30	1420	3.5	Accept
5	Introduce a mandatory continuous training and retraining of in-service teachers	280	80	20	20	1420	3.5	Accept
6	Non-mandatory training and retraining of in-service teachers.	20	50	80	250	620	1.5	Reject
7	Special focus on the use of special needs instructional resources.	220	90	70	20	1310	3.2	Accept
8	Provision of adequate instructional materials for all categories of learners	300	50	20	30	1420	3.5	Accept

From table 3, based on the mean scores, the following factors in descending orders of acceptance are what should be done to restructure the curriculum to mainstream inclusiveness: review the entire teacher training curriculum to include the concept of inclusiveness, infuse the concept of inclusive education into every course plus a compulsory stand-alone course on inclusive education, mandatory continuous training and retraining of in-service teachers, provision of adequate instructional materials for all categories of learners, a compulsory stand-alone course on Inclusive Education for all trainee teachers, special focus on the use of special needs instructional resources in teacher education curriculum.

Research Question 4: What do teachers perceive to be the necessary teaching approaches for mainstreaming inclusiveness?

Table 4: The Teaching approaches for mainstreaming inclusiveness

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Score	Mean	Decision
1	Clinical experience in inclusive classrooms for teaching practice and individualized educational practices.	150	130	100	20	1210	3.0	Accept
2	Lessons on characteristics of special needs students and inclusion of positive behaviour supports	230	110	30	30	1340	3.4	Accept
3	Mastery Learning	210	90	60	40	1270	3.2	Accept
4	Collaborative Team Teaching	270	80	35	15	1405	3.5	Accept

From table 4, the teaching approaches for mainstreaming inclusiveness in decreasing order of acceptance are: collaborative team teaching, lessons on characteristics of special needs students and inclusion of positive behaviour supports, mastery learning, and clinical experience in inclusive classrooms for teaching practice and individualized educational practices.

Research Question 5: What are teachers' perceptions of the efficacy of regular teacher education that is devoid of training on inclusiveness?

Table 5: Teachers' perceptions of the efficacy of regular teacher education that is devoid of inclusiveness training

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Score	Mean	Decision
	Regular teacher education devoid of inclusiveness is inadequate for an inclusive setting	320	40	30	10	1470	3.6	Accept
2	It only provides skills to teach those that have no special needs	340	30	25	05	1505	3.7	Accept
3	It does not make for equity	300	80	10	10	1470	3.6	Accept
4	It will help to cater for special needs children when the need arises	60	50	90	200	770	1.9	Reject
5	It does not limit the teachers in anyway	20	10	70	300	550	1.3	Reject
6	It promotes feelings of isolation and rejection among academically talented students	250	80	50	20	1360	3.4	Accept

Result in table 5 shows that teachers perceive that the teacher education that is devoid of inclusiveness training is not efficacious. Out of the six items listed, four were perceived as negative impact of teacher education without inclusiveness training. These were items 1, 2, 3 and 6 which had high mean ratings. The low mean ratings of items 4 and 5 add credence to the fact that training of teachers devoid of inclusiveness is limiting.

Discussion of findings

In answer to research question 1, the teachers' perception towards mainstreaming inclusion in teacher education is high, and is in line with Mai's (2008) findings on the attitude of teachers towards inclusive education of students with disabilities. It agrees with studies by Ali, Mustapha and Jelas (2006) and Denwigwe (2014) which showed a general positive attitude of teachers towards inclusion.

Research question 2 on teachers' perception of factors that hinder inclusive education revealed that inadequate preparation of teachers on inclusive education strategies and lack of on-going professional development, absence of elements of inclusive education in teacher education curricula, poor funding and inadequate instructional materials as well as inadequate infrastructure to cater for all groups of learners are factors that hinder inclusive education as perceived by secondary school teachers. This is buttressed by the view of Ali et al (2006) that there is a need to train regular teachers in handling and teaching students with special needs and also a need to provide adequate resources to inclusive classes. Zimmerman's (2011) assertion to recognize that legislation, funding, curriculum, assessment and accountability should be considered holistically to support

a move towards more inclusive practice in which teacher education plays a key role is in line with this. Also this finding agrees with Powers (2002) discovery that increased training has been associated with more positive attitudes to inclusion in mainstream classrooms.

Findings on research question 3 revealed that the teachers' perceptions about the restructuring of teacher education curriculum for mainstreaming inclusive education include among others that there should be infusion of the concept of inclusive education into every course in addition to a compulsory stand-alone course on inclusive education. This is supported by the statement of Thousand and Villa (2005) that from the viewpoint of change theorists, handy knowledge and skills help to release personnel involved in change process from anxiety and make them self-confident in what they do. This, according to Bradshaw and Mundia (2006), suggests the need for a holistic approach to inclusive education in general and teacher education for inclusion in particular where universities also join forces to bring about real change in the education system. Secondary school teachers, however, frowned at infusing concept of inclusive education into every course without necessarily introducing a compulsory stand-alone course on inclusive education. They did not also support non-mandatory training and retraining of in-service teachers.

In answer to research question 4, the teachers' perception of the teaching approaches for mainstreaming inclusiveness in decreasing order of acceptance are collaborative team teaching, lessons on characteristics of special needs students and inclusion of positive behaviour supports, mastery learning, and clinical experience in inclusive classrooms for teaching practice and individualized educational practices. This agrees with the submission by Zimmerman (2011) citing Singh (2006) that the various methods of effectively preparing pre-service teachers for inclusive settings will include trainings on characteristics of students with disabilities and their life-span needs, importance of collaboration, universal design of learning, clinical experience and so on.

The finding from research question 5 is that teacher education devoid of inclusiveness training is not efficacious. Mai (2008) revealed that it could be said that training which could assist teachers in their daily practices was likely associated with their positive attitudes. Unfortunately, while interacting with the respondents in the course of this research, it was discovered that none of them had received pre-service training in inclusive education. A few however had attended in-service workshops on inclusive education.

Counselling Implications

Findings from this study imply that teacher development influences teachers' performance in the inclusive classroom; hence there is a need to mainstream inclusion in teacher development so as to equip all teachers with the skills needed for inclusive

education. Counsellors should advocate for the need to include teachers' interests in the plan for implementation of inclusive education by adding inclusive concepts in teacher training curriculum. Counsellors should advocate for well-packaged pre-service and in-service training programmes for teachers and should stress that inclusion is not only about the benefits of students with disabilities but promotes quality education for all students.

Conclusion

This study investigated the perceptions of mainstream teachers toward inclusive education in Nigeria. Teachers support mainstreaming inclusiveness into teacher education and are optimistic of its benefits. Inclusiveness is a worthwhile venture if the needed equipment, infrastructure and effective instructional pedagogies for enhancing it are provided by planners of the educational curriculum, for the purpose of effective teacher education (both pre-service and in-service). Therefore, educational planners and policymakers should see the provision of training and retraining of teachers on inclusiveness as a matter of priority.

Recommendations

This paper therefore recommends as follows:

- i) Restructuring and improving of teacher development programmes to embrace inclusiveness.
- ii) Regular monitoring and evaluation of teacher training institutions for high quality of programmes in inclusiveness.
- iii) Exposing in-service teachers to regular training and retraining on inclusive education.

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