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An Assessment of English Language Teachers' Knowledge, Attitude to, and Practice of Inclusive Education in Secondary Schools in Calabar, Nigeria

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Abstract
The paper examined the prospects of Education for All through the prism of English language teachers' knowledge about inclusive education, attitude to inclusive education as well as the practice of inclusive education in secondary schools in Calabar, Cross River State. Twenty eight teachers responded to a questionnaire on their knowledge about, attitude to and practice of inclusive education. Using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, findings showed that majority of the teachers had limited knowledge about inclusive education; majority had negative attitudes and little or no experience in inclusive education. Recommendations were made.
Keywords: education for all, inclusive education, attitude, Knowledge, disability

1. Introduction

According to the United Nations (2011) document, over 10% or 650 million people in the world live with disabilities, while 150 million of this number are children (United Nations, 2011). UNESCO further observed that more than 80% of these children are in developing countries where they are usually excluded from education, employment and other socio-economic opportunities. It can be deduced, therefore, that Nigeria being a developing country has a sizable percentage of the excluded. Perhaps this is one of the reasons the country has embraced conventions that promote equal opportunities for all children.

Nigeria is a signatory to the 1990 Jomtien declaration of the World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA). Article 1 stated that EVERY (our emphasis) person, child, youth and adult shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic needs. Another declaration to which Nigeria is a signatory is the Salamanca Framework for Action, Article 3 (1994) which indicates that, "…schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, emotional, social, linguistic or other conditions." (UNESCO, 2007). The Education for All (EFA) programme was reaffirmed in the Dakar Framework for Action (2000): "In order to attract and retain children from marginalised and excluded groups, education systems should respond flexibly …education system must be inclusive, … and responding flexibly to the circumstances and needs of all learners…" (UNESCO 2007b).

The keywords in the statement are "marginalized" and "excluded". Many groups are excluded and marginalized in Nigeria. They include those excluded on account of poverty, gender, religion, race, pigmentation, ability, or disability. For the purpose of this study, our focus is on those marginalized for having other abilities, or those commonly called disabled. Our inquiry is into how the Education for All (EFA) policy finds expression in the English Language class.

Regarding EFA, UNESCO (2010) argues that:

The goal of education for all will only be achievable when all nations recognize that the universal right to education extends to all and when all nations act to establish or reform public education systems that are accessible to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities (p 2).

In other words, education for all will only be an ever receding horizon unless the mainstream educational system becomes fluid enough to accommodate children of varying abilities, especially the physically challenged. The implication is that every classroom should be accessible to children irrespective of their physical, sensory, or psychological challenges. One of such classrooms should be the English language classroom.

English language is an official language in Nigeria and one of the core subjects in the secondary school curriculum. Facility in English does not only confer communicative advantage, but it provides access to information, and further education. For EFA to be a reality, the English language class above all should not exclude any children on account of their ability or disability.

2. Literature review

What is inclusive education? The European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2012) citing Meijer (2003) provides an operational definition of inclusive settings as: "… those educational settings where pupils with special needs follow the largest part of the curriculum in the mainstream class alongside peers

without special educational needs." (p.9) Inclusive education according to Ajuwon (2012) is a process of enhancing the capacity of the education system to accommodate diverse learners, adding that special needs children have a right to benefits from "a full school experience, with needed modifications and supports, alongside their peers without disabilities who receive general education."

The newly-revised National Policy on Education has given attention to inclusive education of children and youth with special needs in mainstream schools (National Policy on Education, 2008). According to Ajuwon (2008), the National Education Policy document, among other things, requires that special needs children, with their varying abilities be given access to education in environments that are conducive and less restrictive. However, Eskay and Angie (2013) have criticised the Nigeria government and educational administrators for failing to provide resources to facilitate the provision of inclusive education in schools.

2.1. The role of teachers

Inclusion of students with special needs will require teachers who are knowledgeable about the concept, if not the practice, of inclusive education and mainstreaming. Khan (2012) investigated teachers' knowledge of inclusive education and reported that most teachers agreed that they lacked basic and practical knowledge about inclusive education. In this regard, Ntombela, (2009) has argued that effective implementation of mainstreaming hinges on teachers' knowledge.

Another factor germane to the success of inclusive education, according to Kern (2006), is the educator's attitude and preparedness to accommodate students who have disabilities. Haskell (2011) is of the opinion that inclusive education requires teachers that are prepared to deal with full array of learning requirements, have acquired knowledge and skills, have an appropriate grasp of curriculum and assessment practices and are responsive to the needs of all children.

Some studies have shown the relationship between educators' qualification and their attitude towards inclusive education. Ayuwon (2012) investigated the attitudes toward inclusive education held by 141 special educators in Nigeria and found a greater tolerance for negative behaviours sometimes associated with students with disabilities with increasing formal education. Multiple comparison tests showed significant differences in means between Master's versus NCE ($p<0.001$) or Bachelor's ($p=0.006$), and between Doctorate versus NCE ($p<0.001$) or Bachelor's ($p<0.001$). Therefore, level of academic qualification was seen to influence attitude to inclusion. This confirms Chemera's (2005) earlier submission that research indicates that regular school teachers in developing countries express positive attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities.

Furthermore, Fakolade, Adeniyi & Tella (2009) found that female teachers had more positive attitude towards the inclusion of special needs students than their male counterparts. Furthermore, their results revealed that significant differences existed between married and single teachers in their attitude towards special need students, and professionally qualified teachers tended to have a more favourable attitude towards the inclusion of special need students than their non-professionally qualified teachers.

However, Charema (2005) expresses fear that despite enthusiasm about inclusion education in developing countries, wholesale inclusion could turn regular schools into dumping grounds for the disabled if great care is not taken to ensure that the disable are benefiting from the mainstreaming. Despite Chemera's misgivings about developing countries' preparedness to implement inclusive education, the author declares:

Developing countries can no longer afford to keep on theorizing while millions of children with disabilities continue to be marginalized, segregated, viewed as objects of pity and disadvantaged both in school and in society. Time has come for professionals, parents and heads of governments of developing countries to pull their resources together and create equal opportunities, conducive learning environments and social justice for children with disabilities. Developing countries are lagging behind in keeping abreast with the changes in special education (.para 4.)

3. Methodology

The study used both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to investigate the attitude of English Language teachers towards inclusion of students with sensory and physical needs in the regular classroom education. The inquiry also included the extent of teachers' knowledge about inclusive education, and practice of inclusive education.

Our choice of English language is because English language is a core subject in the curriculum and English language teachers have no choice about who should or should not offer English. Besides, since a credit in English language is a prerequisite for admission into tertiary education, the English class needs to be "open" to students of diverse sensory and physical challenges and give them equal opportunity to be launched into the next level of education. Moreover, since three of this paper authors had taught English language at the secondary school level for over a decade, they are familiar with the structure and pedagogy of the regular English Language class and appreciate the need and the challenges of making the English class inclusive.

3.1. Research questions

For the quantitative data analysis the following research questions were posed:

1. To what extent are English teachers knowledgeable about inclusive education?
2. What is teachers' attitude towards inclusive education?
3. To what extent is inclusive education currently practiced by English language teachers in secondary schools?

3.1.1 Quantitative data collection procedure

For quantitative data, a questionnaire titled Inclusive Knowledge Attitude Survey (IKAS), which was partly constructed by the researchers and partly adapted from Wilczenski's (1992) Questionnaire of Teachers' Attitudes toward Inclusive Education (QTATIE), was administered to 37 English language teachers in Calabar. The teachers were drawn from government-owned and privately-owned secondary schools in Calabar Municipality and Calabar South. There are 22 public secondary schools and 18 private secondary schools (Post Primary School Management Board, 2012). The schools were purposively selected: a University secondary school, a federal government college, one private secondary school and three state government schools. The selection of teachers followed accidental sampling. Since there were on the average 2 English Language teachers per school, only available teachers and those who gave verbal consents were used for the study. Twenty eight English language teachers participated in the study.

The questionnaire had three sections. Section A elicited biographical data such as sex, years of teaching experience, highest educational qualification, and having a close relative with any form of disability. Section B elicited information on knowledge about and practice of inclusive education. Eight items to which participants were to respond either Yes or No measured knowledge about inclusive education. Correct responses were scored 2 while incorrect responses were scored 1. Two items measured practice of inclusive education. Section C was a ten – item, four-point scale with responses such as: Strongly disagree (1) Disagree (2), Agree (3) and Strongly Agree (4). The section elicited data on teachers' attitude towards inclusive education. Simple percentages were used in analysing the data.

3.2. Qualitative data collection procedure

For qualitative data, six teachers - five female and one male - accepted to be interviewed after they were assured that the interview was for research purposes and that their real names would not be used unless they authorised. Names used for the interviewees are, therefore, pseudonyms.

The questions to which they responded were:

1. Why would you or would not send your physically challenged child to a regular school?
2. What would be your reaction if a disabled child is transferred to your class?

The reason for interviewing them was to probe deeper, beyond the data got from the structured questionnaire, into teachers' perspectives towards inclusive education and to unravel the reasons behind teachers' attitudes. Of those interviewed, only two had close relatives that had any physical or sensory needs. All had known someone who had close relatives with disability. The responses were recorded in one of the researchers' notebook. The interviewees had their responses read back to them for affirmation or modification. Their responses were later typed and saved in a computer hard drive and in a flash drive as well as online in the e-mail document folder of one of the researchers. Then the responses were colour-coded using Microsoft word. Keywords, phrases and themes were isolated and related keywords and phrases or themes were highlighted using similar colours. Verbatim quotes from the respondents were presented as data.

4. Results

In this section, the results of the quantitative and qualitative data analyses are presented. This is done according to the research questions.

4.1.. To what extent are English teachers knowledgeable about inclusive education?

The mean score of teachers on the items measuring knowledge about inclusive education was 12.5. The maximum score was 16 and the minimum was 8. Those who scored between 8 and 12 were categorised as having inadequate knowledge, while those who scored 13 to 16 were categorised as having adequate knowledge. The analyses using simple percentage showed that 57 per cent of the participants had inadequate knowledge of inclusive education, while 43 percent had adequate knowledge. The result is presented in Figure 1.

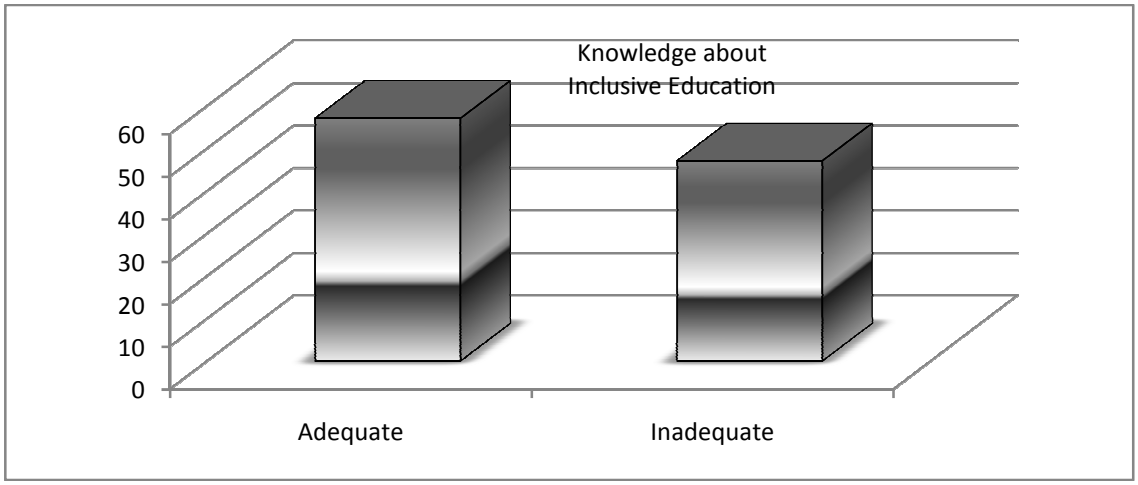
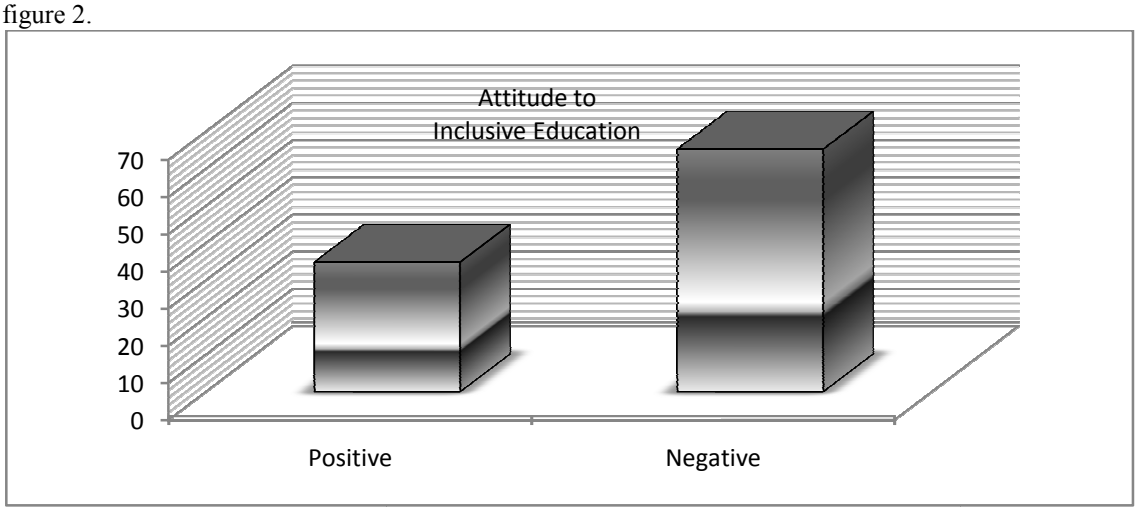


Figure 1 Extent of English teachers' knowledge about inclusiveness education

4. 2 What is teachers' attitude towards inclusive education?

Quantitative data analysis revealed that whereas 65.21 percent of the participant had negative attitudes towards inclusive education, 34.79 percent had positive attitudes towards inclusive education. The result is presented in figure 2.



4.3. *To what extent is inclusive education practiced by English language teachers in secondary schools?*

Based on the responses to the questionnaire, only 4 out of 28 English Language teachers reported having any experience teaching children with disabilities. That means 14.3 percent had some form of experience teaching physically challenged students while 85.7 percent had no such experience. This is presented in figure 3.

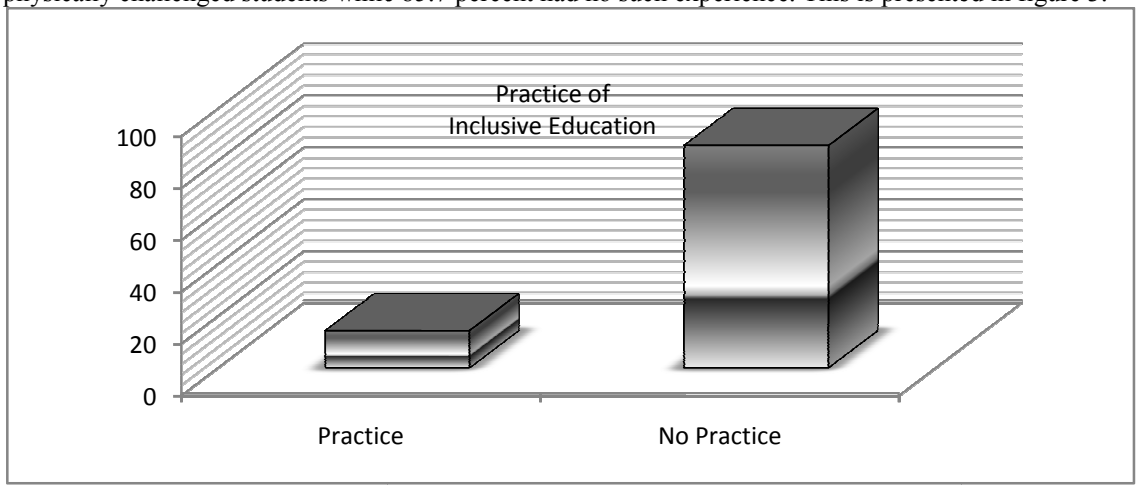


Figure 3. Extent of English Language teachers' practice of inclusive education

4.4. Results of qualitative data analysis.

The result of the qualitative data analysis is presented in this section.

4.4.1. Would teachers send their physically challenged children to a regular school?

The analysis of the qualitative data revealed reasons behind teachers' attitude to inclusive education. Respondents to the interview were asked if they would send their children to regular schools. Two of the respondents would not send their children to regular schools. One of them Ms Magreb said

> " they're supposed to go to special school because in special school provision is made for them. For example, if you're blind you get Braille; if you can't hear you're given hearing aid or taught how to communicate."

Mrs CY has a close relative who is deaf and dumb. Her reaction:

> "What for?" It's not possible. They won't feel comfortable in a regular class. We have schools for the handicapped. One is owned by the government. The other private – (named a school)."

She found the idea of attending a regular school preposterous, when there are schools for the handicapped. She, however, raised the issue of a disabled person not feeling comfortable in a regular class. Other respondents also raised the issue of the disabled child's feelings.

Madam Edak believes that not all disabled children should attend regular schools. She said the physically disabled could cope, but:

> "Some like deaf and dumb will feel embarrassed. Then other students might insult them. But if they are with others who have the same problems. They'll say she is like me. So they can help each other and not feel embarrassed."

On the whole, only two of the interviewees completely rejected the idea of mainstreaming. One accepted that she would send children with some forms of disability such as those with motion problems to regular schools but would not send children with visual, aural or other sensory disabilities.

Three teachers accepted that if they had children who were disabled they would send them to regular schools. One of them, Mr Eye had a niece who is physically challenged, and whose experience informed his decision.

> My niece had a slight speech problem and the mom was afraid of other kids making fun of her. So she sent her to school for the deaf and dumb. After about a year, that girl can't talk again, only signs with hands. His mama said, "what trouble!" and removed her immediately to a normal school. Now she's speaking, though not perfect...

4.4.2 What would be teachers' reaction if a disabled child were transferred to their class?

The teachers were asked what their reactions would be if a disabled child were transferred to their class. When asked what his reaction would be if he had a blind child transferred to his class, Mr Eye showed alarm,

> Are you kidding? Impossible! What am I supposed to do? Give sight? Well, if I talk, the kid will hear. What happens when I write on the board? Well, I can read what I wrote...But if it's an imbecile, old boy, I'll be helpless. Special school is best for some of the kids, except you have special training.

Another respondent was asked what her reaction would be if a disabled child was posted to her class, she showed visible alarm. But said,

> If they're blind, that'll be a problem. What can you do? It's useless. I think they are better off in a special school. But a person who has problem with hand or leg, one can manage. But blind, deaf and dumb, I'll resign.

Only two teachers who themselves have had experience teaching in an inclusive private school said they would try their best. Two expressions which the two teachers used frequently while narrating their experience of teaching disabled children were " it's not easy" or " a real challenge"

5. Discussion of findings

In this study we tried to find out knowledge of, attitude towards, and practice of inclusive education among English language teachers in Calabar. Our results showed that majority of English language teachers in Calabar had inadequate knowledge about inclusive education as well as negative attitude irrespective of their gender or years of experience. The findings cohere with Kern (2006), who in a review of studies of teachers' attitude to specific items of inclusive education, reported that an average of only 40.5% of general education teachers conceptually agreed with inclusion. This seems to dovetail with our findings that only 34 percent of English language teachers had positive attitude towards inclusive education.

From the interviews, some respondents have reacted with "impossible", "not possible", "it's useless" "I'll be helpless." Such expressions seem to show that the teachers are overwhelmed by the prospect because of their incapacity to handle an inclusive class. Therefore, it is possible that the negative attitudes belie the teachers' handicap rather than unwillingness. Perhaps, teachers merely mirror the attitude of the society. Eskay and Angie

(2013)) have commented on "...the unfavorable attitude of the society towards children with disabilities"(p.316). Furthermore, Hegarty (2001) cited by Khan (2011) has critically examined inclusive education and has concluded that including children with special needs in regular schools is neither desirable nor practicable. Hergarty's concerns agree with the views of one of the respondents. One of the interviewees, Ms Magreb, had responded that children with disabilities are "supposed" to attend special schools. She assumed special schools are the norm for the disabled. Her "supposed" betrayed her assumption. But a vital component of her reason that there are provisions in a special school which may be lacking in a regular school agrees with Lipsky and Gartner's(1999) argument that inclusive education has few positive outcomes for special needs children because they need specialised services that can only be provided outside regular classrooms.

Khan (2012) has conceded that attitudes to inclusive education were complex and varied. Although the European Agency for Special Education Needs (2013) admits that certain attitudes or beliefs demand certain knowledge or level of understanding and skills in order to implement this knowledge in a practical situation, often, mere conceptual knowledge does not translate to change in attitude or practice. Teachers may have knowledge about the meaning of inclusive education but without knowledge of the processes and the operations of inclusive education, which is usually acquired by formal training, attitude might not change.

A very crucial point raised by many of the interviewees had to do with the feelings of the disabled and the reaction of other students. The following expressions were extracted from the data:

...other kids making fun of her....
...other students might insult them....
...will feel embarrassed....
...won't feel comfortable....

That is why the implementation of inclusive education should first sensitise the people about the disabled and the need for them to study in regular schools.

6. Recommendations

Regarding inclusive education, hurried and harried approach to implementation might be counter-productive unless certain background steps are taken. We, therefore, recommend the following:

1. Individuals, organisations and government should conduct public enlightenment and sensitization about the rights of the disabled and the importance of mainstreaming. People need to accept disabled people as legitimate members of their communities. The public need to be aware of the implications and advantages of inclusive education.
2. School structures and resources should be in place to cater for children of diverse needs. Existing structures should be remodelled to give greater access to children with disability. Even public utilities should be remodelled similarly.
3. Teachers, not only special education teachers, should be trained on how to manage an inclusive classroom. Teacher education should integrate inclusive education into teacher training curriculum. In addition, workshops and seminars should be organized by experts in Special Needs Education for serving teachers.
4. Governments should establish pilot inclusive schools so that such schools can serve as experimental grounds and models for the practice of inclusion. In addition, private institutions, practicing inclusion should be encouraged by government through grants or exemption from education tax.

7. Conclusion

The study assessed by mixed methodology the knowledge of English Language teachers about inclusive education, their attitude to inclusive education and practice experience. Findings showed that majority of the teachers had limited knowledge about inclusive education; majority had negative attitudes and little or no experience in inclusive education. This shows that at least for the population of teachers in this study, inclusive education and, by extension, education for all is not yet a reality.

Since education for all is not just a destination but a vehicle for national development and global competitiveness, and in view of Nigeria's huge investment of about 160 billion naira in her pursuit of the Universal Basic Education, the federal and state governments should explore bottom-up approaches to policy implementation. These may include mass mobilisation and enlightenment, teacher training, school plant reconstruction for increased access, and utilisation of public-private partnership in inclusive education.

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