

Attitude of Public Primary School Pupils to Inclusive Education Practice in Umuahia Town

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Abstract

The importance of the primary school as the place for laying the foundation for essential skills acquisition for national growth and development is not in doubt. However, making this opportunity available to all children from rich or poor homes, able or disable is still a point in contention in most less developed nations such as Nigeria. As can be found in literature, most developed nations have taken steps to accommodate practically all children in school; but most of developing nations, particularly African nations are yet to take decisive steps in this regard. In Nigeria, the implementation of inclusive education is still at the proposal stage. There is therefore the need to find out the attitudes of school children to inclusive education practice. This study therefore investigated the attitudes of primary school children to inclusive education practice in Nigerian primary schools. The study involved 240 primaries three and four school boys and girls in equal proportion, who were drawn through stratified sampling technique from four equivalent mixed gender primary schools in a Nigerian state capital in South –Eastern Nigeria. Data collection employed a researcher constructed and validated attitude scale for primary school pupils. Twenty items were used in the test, with coefficient alpha .78. Data obtained was analyzed using analysis of variance technique. The results reveal that the class of pupils significantly influenced the attitudes of children to inclusive education practice: [$F_{(1, 240)} = 6.269$; $p < .05$]. Both school and gender did not significantly influence pupils' attitude to inclusive education. School by gender interactions were however significant: [$F_{(3, 240)} = 4.060$]; $p < .05$]. It was recommended that school children should be enlightened on the needs and benefits of inclusive education before the implementation of the policy.

Keywords: Attitude; primary school; Inclusive education; pupils; children

1. Introduction

The primary school is the starting point for regular school education. It is recognized as the foundation institution for preparing adequate background for the development of essential structures upon which requisite knowledge will be developed, nurtured and grown (NPE, 2012). At the primary school level of education, usually harbouring six to twelve year old pupils, it is believed that such young children do not have fixed or rigid dispositions, attitudes, skills and ideas (Inhelder and Piaget 1958). Children alter their attitudes, views and conceptions through learning, natural experiences, reading and observation (Arua and Onukaogu, 1997). Porter (1995) study found that reading among other stimuli promoted good attitude change. After reviewing relevant literature, Iroegbu and Okpala (1998) concluded that attitude is learned through experience, at home, school and other situations.

The school as part of the educational system is designed to offer to each individual child and even to the group of benefitting children, limitless opportunity to learn, acquire and or develop certain skills and attitudes that are judged to be useful and desirable in the society. Aluede and Omoregie (2008) expressed the view that education serves the society in four main ways such as to prepare the individual to be internally consistent and thereby developing the right type of personality. Secondly they opined that education equips the individual with knowledge, skills and virtues essential for harmonious interpersonal relationships in society. They further observed that education confers on the learner, good attitudes and dispositions that are desirable for harmony within and between individuals. They finally concluded that education equips the learners with methods and strategies for solving societal problems, thus promoting societal progressive development. These research findings lead to the conclusion that school education is a very worthy institution of civilized societies.

Morrison (2006) had emphasized the immense benefits of guiding children's behaviour. The author believes that guiding children's behaviour is a process by which all children learn to control and direct their behaviour and become self-reliant. It is believed that such character of self-regulation will be highly helpful in ensuring tolerance, cooperation and integration of regular and special needs children in inclusive classrooms. School education that involves the use of well trained teachers that possess the skills of guiding children's behaviour is believed to be important and needful. Most teachers currently teaching in primary schools in Abia State of Nigeria are trained, with most of them possessing higher qualifications than the minimum certificate of National Diploma in Education (NCE). Such teachers are believed to have the requisite skills for guiding children's behaviour. Studies such as this are required to validate this assumption through learner's attitudes studies. None of the available research literature had undertaken this task in Abia state.

The fore-going discuss has highlighted the importance of school education in guiding children's behaviour. It is probable that the general move by different nations to improve on the state of their education may relate to

the need to make all learners to acquire the skill of self-regulation to promote tolerance, cooperation and integration and therefore attain improved learning and other educational outcomes more profitably (Iroegbu 2016). According to the author, the move to guide school children's behaviour has the general objective of providing education that will benefit every citizen with ability, boy or girl from rich or poor home, and from majority or minority community (U.S. Department of Education 2001). Morrison (2006) opined that the educational reform has brought to the fore the importance of an educational approach that is regarded today as inclusive education. The system of education has been embraced mainly in the developed world, by countries such as United States of America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Wah 2010).

The author Wah (2010) was of the view that the use of education for achieving an inclusive society is not a new philosophy of education. However, for Nigeria and many developing nations, inclusive education is a relatively new approach in the education of children in primary schools. Inclusive education has been defined in various ways by many scholars and by international organisations. Eskay and Oboegbulem (2013) defined inclusive education as the full integration of learners with or without special needs into the same classrooms and schools, thereby exposing them to the same learning opportunities as their non special needs counterparts. Aladejana (2017) viewed inclusive education as the right of all children, regardless of abilities, to participate actively in educational facilities provided in their natural settings within their communities. The author further stressed that inclusive education means teaching all children together, regardless of ability level, or disability. The author further opined that inclusion implied unconditionally belonging to and having full membership of a regular classroom.

UNESCO (2009) Policy Guidelines on Inclusive Education sees the practice as a process that involves the transformation of schools and other centres of learning to cater for all children. These include boys and girls, pupils from both ethnic and linguistic minorities, those affected by HIV and AIDS, and those with disabilities and difficulties in learning. The organization emphasized that inclusive education is aimed at exclusion of any segregation due to diversity in race, economic status, social class, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, sexual orientation and abilities. Similarly Aladejana (2017) credited the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development EECD (2017) with the following definition:

Inclusive education is a philosophy that promotes:

- The right of all students to attend school with their peers, and to receive appropriate services quality programming,
- A continuum of supports and services in the most appropriate setting (large group, small group, individualized) respecting the dignity of the child;
- A welcoming school culture where all members of the school community feel they belong, realize their potentials, and contribute to the life of the school,
- An atmosphere which respects and values the participation of all members of the school community,
- A school community which celebrates diversity; and
- A safe and caring school environment (Aladejana 2017, p101-102).

The Salamanca Statement (1994) stresses the importance of inclusive education, calling on governments to give the highest policy and budgetary priority to enable them include all children regardless of individual differences. The statement required governments to "adopt as a matter of law or policy, the principle of inclusive education, enrolling all children in mainstream schools, unless there are compelling reasons doing otherwise". However, as desirable as inclusive education may appear, there are still a number of factors which may likely hinder its full implementation and success especially in developing countries like Nigeria. Some of these challenging factors include shortage of qualified teachers, lack of appropriate teaching materials, lack of facilities including appropriate classroom structures, uncertainty of pupils' and teacher's readiness to accept inclusive system of education, and governments' lack of readiness to adequately invest in education. The greatest obstacle to improved educational attainment in Nigeria lies in government unwillingness to invest sufficiently in education.

Among these factors already mentioned, the readiness of the pupils who are the major beneficiaries of the practice is deemed very important. Scholars and researchers seem to agree that the policy on inclusive education may produce significant effect when the major beneficiaries are receptive to its principles and practice (Iroegbu, 2016; Aladejana, 2017). According to UNESCO (2005), the views of the child should be given due weight when considering whether or not s/he should be educated in a mainstream school. This is in spite of the fact that pupils' readiness and receptiveness have been found to be crucial in the implementation and success of inclusive education especially in the developed countries. However there has not been much of research in developing countries like Nigeria relating to the importance of pupils' readiness and receptiveness with regard to the implementation and success of inclusive education policy.

There are some research literatures on the attitudes of pupils to inclusive education that are worth considering in this study. These include Kimbrough and Mellen (2012) that summarised the results of a national study in which Nowicki and Sandieson (2002) found that children without disabilities were willing to have

children with disabilities included in non-academic classrooms such as art and physical education; but preferred not to have them in their academic classrooms for Mathematics and English language. This was because according to the researcher, the children without disabilities believed that their teacher will spend more time with the disabled to the disadvantage of the non-disabled, thereby slowing down the class.

Also Bunch and Valeo (2004) conducted a study on students' attitude towards peers with disabilities in inclusive and special education. The researchers found that elementary and secondary school students had a good level of social interaction and showed positive attitudes towards peers with disabilities. They also found that interactions among pupils with or without disabilities yielded congenial behaviour and acceptance of special education/or inclusion. The findings showed that the interactions among students in inclusive schools led to the development of friendship and lower degrees of abusive behaviour towards peers with disabilities. These studies were however conducted in developed countries.

Other researchers such as Foreman (2005) and McGregor & Volgelsberg (1998), which were also conducted in developed nations, found in their studies that children's response were positively disposed to inclusion. The result was interpreted to indicate that inclusion helps the children to have great network of friends, than children in segregated settings. Also Miller (2008) found in an interview with research participants that students were complaining that they were not given enough opportunity to air their views about inclusive education practice in which they were involved. Furthermore, Ali, Mustapha and Jelas (2006) found that collaboration in the classroom between special needs teachers and regular teachers produced improved attitudes and achievement in inclusive classrooms. Similarly Vaz, Wilson, Falkner, Sim, Scoll, Cordier and Falkner (2015) found that males had more negative attitudes to inclusive education than females. They also documented the finding that older pupils were more negative to inclusive education than younger ones. These research findings tend to show support for inclusive education, although none of them was conducted in a developing nation.

Chua and Mageswary (2015) explored the effects of grade levels and gender on the attitudes of school children towards the learning of sciences. They found that both gender and grade level had significant effects on the attitudes of pupils towards learning chemistry. They specifically documented the existence of significant interaction effects of grade level with the attitudes of pupils towards learning theoretical as well as practical chemistry. These results are similar to those documented by Cheung (2007).

Having observed that most of the empirical studies on attitudes of school children towards inclusive education were conducted in more advanced nations, and in addition inclusive education is yet to be introduced in Nigeria, it was considered necessary to embark on this study. The study therefore hopes to provide some data on inclusive education attitude from a developing nation. Hence, this study investigated the attitudes of primary school pupils to inclusive education practice in a Nigerian town.

1.1 Statement of the problem

There is indication that inclusive education practice has been promoted at the international level for more than two decades (Wah, 2010). This practice is still at the proposal stage in Nigeria as well as most of Africa. This may be due to the government lack of commitment to the policy implementation and lack of adequate facilities, uncertainty of the nature of pupils' attitudes, lack of competent teachers in sufficient numbers, inadequate quantities of appropriate instructional materials and government lack of will to invest heavily in education sector. This study therefore investigated the attitudes of the primary school pupils to the implementation of inclusive education practice in Nigeria.

1.2 Research questions

The following research questions will guide the study.

- I) Does the school of pupils' affect their attitude towards inclusive education practice?
- II) Does class level of primary school pupils affect their attitudes to inclusive education?
- III) Does gender affect the inclusive education practice?
- IV) Is there any significant interaction effect among the variables (school, class and gender)?

2. Method

The study adopted a survey research design. The sample of the study was two hundred and forty (240) primary school pupils drawn by stratified sampling technique from four urban schools in the State capital Umuahia town, of Abia State Nigeria. The distribution of the sample is shown in **Table 1**.

Four urban schools were used for the study, with each school contributing sixty pupils, and classes three and four contributing thirty pupils in equal gender proportions. The sampling technique used was the stratified sampling technique, since the schools were equivalent state primary schools, located at different parts of the town.

The criteria for selection of schools were that the schools had enough boys and girls, located at different sections of the town. In addition primaries three and four classes must have teachers not below National

certificate in Education as qualification. Primary three and four were also chosen because the pupils in these classes were be able to read and understand short questionnaire written in simple English language and they were considered immature to have nurtured the prejudices usually common with adolescent children. Finally, primaries three and four do not belong to pressure classes that might be preoccupied with preparation for common entrance examinations or school leaving examination.

The research instrument was a twenty item attitude questionnaire in the Likert-form which had only two options. The scale was collapsed into two: **Agreed** or **Disagree** for ease of comprehension by the pupils involved in this study. The original instrument was validated by giving it to three specialists in early childhood education to ascertain the face and content validity of the instrument. The recommendation from these specialists led to the recasting of some of the items. The instrument was test-tried on a different sample of primary three and four children in Abia North Senatorial District. The results and observations led the researcher to prune down the instrument to twenty items. The instrument yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of .78. The pupils were given sufficient time to respond to all the items. The instrument was retrieved immediately after completion.

3. Method of data analysis

The data collected was analysed using analysis of variance (ANOVA) techniques.

4. Result

The result of the data analysis is as shown in **Table 2**

4.1: Research question I: This research question sought to find out if the school of pupils' affect their attitude towards inclusive education practice. The data analysis in Table 2 reveals that the school factor has no significant effect on the attitude of primary school pupils to inclusive education practice; [$F_{(3, 240)} = 1.708$; $P > .05$]. This result shows that the school factors have about the same influence on attitude of children to inclusive education practice; and that this influence produces only negligible difference in attitude scores.

4.2: Research question II: This research question sought to find out the influence of class level on attitude primary school pupils to inclusive education. The result for this research question is also contained in table 2. The data in table 2 revealed that the class of pupils significantly influenced their attitude to inclusive education: [$F_{(1,240)} = 6.269$; $P < .05$]. This result showed that class level of pupils influence to a considerable degree, the attitudes of pupils to inclusive education practice at the primary education level; and that the extent of influence is beyond what might have occurred by chance.

4.3: Research question III: This research question focused on the effect of gender on the attitudes of primary school pupils to inclusive education practice. The data in table 2 revealed that gender of pupils did not significantly influence their attitudes to inclusive education practice [$F_{(1,240)} = 3.4$; $P > .05$]. This result implies that the gender of pupils does not have much influence on the attitudes of pupils to inclusive education practice; and that any obtained attitude differences could be accounted for, by chance and chance alone.

4.4: Research question IV: This research question was on Interactions and sought to find out if there was any significant interaction effect among the variables (school, class and gender).

Two way interaction

In research question IV on interactions, only school x gender interactions were significant. [$F_{(3,240)} = 4.060$; $P < .05$]. Interactions of school by gender differed considerably for the two gender types (male and female pupils). The result implies that school by gender interactions affected to a high degree the attitudes of primary schools pupils to inclusive education. The other two way interactions (school x class) with value [$F_{(3,240)} = .990$; $P > .05$] and (class x gender) interactions with value [$F_{(1, 240)} = 1.516$; $P > .05$], were not significant.

The three way interaction of school x class x gender, with value; [$F_{(3,240)} = .966$; $P > .05$;] was not significant. This result implies that the interactions of school x class x gender do not produce considerably influence on the attitudes of primary pupils to inclusive education practice.

The two way interactions between schools and gender which were significant were further elucidated with interaction graphs as shown in **figures 1 and 2**.

Fig 1: Graph of interaction of School and gender for males

The disentangled interaction revealed that the attitudes of males in schools A and B were very similar for the two classes although primary four pupils obtained slightly higher mean attitudes score. The situation was reversed for schools C and D, where primary three boys obtained much higher mean attitudes scores than their primary four counterparts. On the whole, the interaction graphs were disordinal in nature.

Figure 2: Interaction graph of school and gender for primaries 3 and 4 girls

The graphs in Fig.2 show the disentangled interaction of school and gender for girls in primaries 3 and 4.

The interaction graphs were disordinate in nature. Figure 2 contain the graphs of marginal means attitude scores of female pupils in schools A, B, C, and D. In all cases, primary three (3) girls exhibited higher positive attitude scores than primary four (4) girls despite the observation that the mean attitude scores were not uniform for different class levels. The interaction graphs were found to be disordinate in nature. From this interaction graphs one can deduce that the attitude of pupils towards inclusive education practice were yet to be systematized. This implies that the attitudes of the pupils can be modulated towards positive attitude development if conducive socio-cultural, educational and environmental school climates for inclusive education practice are brought to bear on the pupils.

5.1: Discussion

The obtained significant interaction of class of pupils and gender in the attitudes of primary school boys and girls is an indicator of the fact that at this level of education, the attitudes of these children can still be manipulated considerably for positive educational effects. The disordinal nature of the graphs, with class three pupils showing higher positive attitudes in most cases suggests that pupils in lower classes could be more accommodating for inclusive education than those in upper classes. This result is similar to those obtained by Chua and Karpudewan (2015). The results appear to suggest that attempts to make pupils accept the situation of inclusive education may be more successful at junior classes, where the attitude of learners are not yet rigid.

The results did not produce any significant gender difference in attitudes. This is contrary to the findings of Cheung (2007) who found that male obtained higher positive attitude scores than females in lower classes while male and females obtained poorer attitude scores in higher classes for both theory and practical work in chemistry. There is therefore a need for future educational researchers to devise strategies that may be employed to moderate the attitudes of young children to accommodate situations of inclusive education in their schools.

5.2 Conclusion

This study has shown that it will be wrong to take the attitudes of primary school children for granted with regards to issues relating to their classroom behaviour. The study has revealed that there were attitude differences among boys and girls as well as among different class levels. The obtained significant interaction between gender and class level in the attitudes is a good indicator that primary school pupils' opinions should be considered when adults take decisions on sensitive issued that involve children such as inclusive education practice as well as other curricula related issues in childhood education. Pupils in primary schools should be educated on the need for inclusive education and the benefits of its practice before introduction of the policy in primary schools.

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Appendix 1
 Table1; Distribution of respondents by school, class and gender
Between-Subjects Factors

		Value Label	N
School of respondent	1	School A	60
	2	School B	60
	3	School C	60
	4	School D	60
Class of respondent	1	Primary 3	120
	2	Primary 4	120
Gender of respondent	1	Male	120
	2	Female	120

Appendix 2

Table 2: Factorial analysis of pupils' attitude to inclusive education by school, class and gender

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Attitude score of respondent

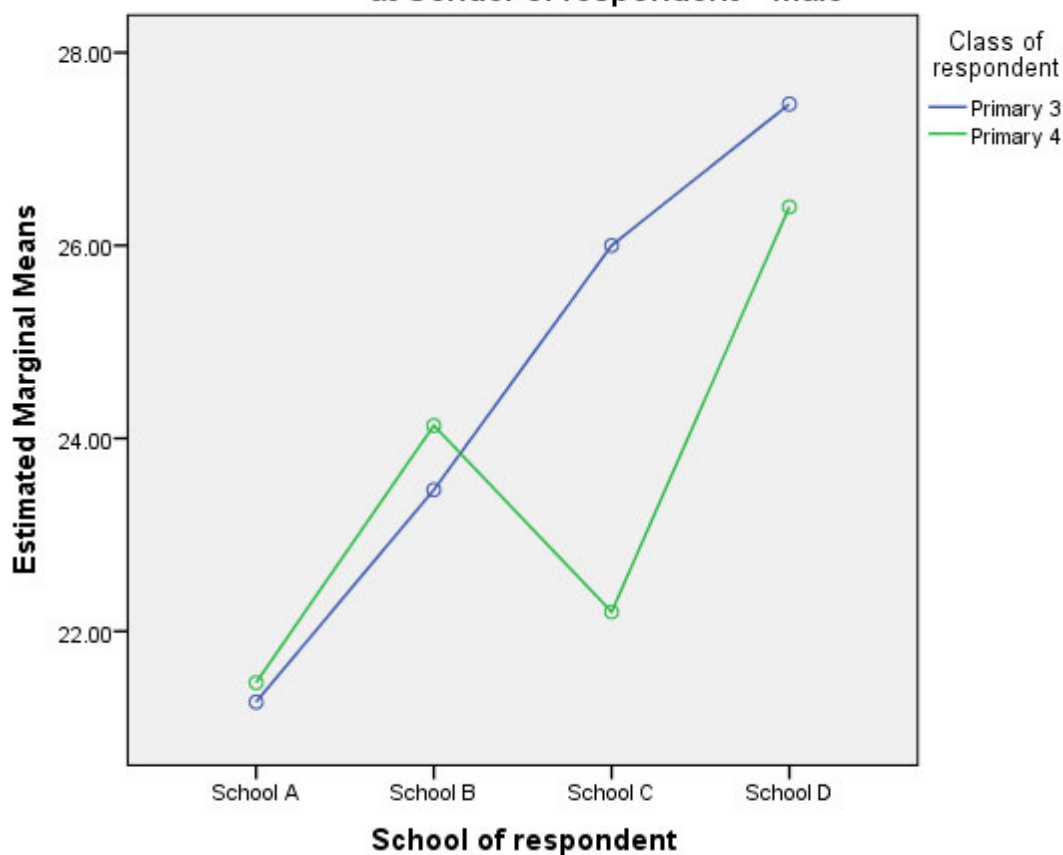
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	1279.863 ^a	15	85.324	2.304	.005
Intercept	130505.938	1	130505.938	3523.871	.000
SCHOOL	189.742	3	63.247	1.708	.166
Class	232.165	1	232.165	6.269	.013
Gender	125.911	1	125.911	3.400	.067
SCHOOL * Class	110.017	3	36.672	.990	.398
SCHOOL * Gender	451.087	3	150.362	4.060	.008
Class * Gender	56.148	1	56.148	1.516	.220
SCHOOL * Class * Gender	107.377	3	35.792	.966	.409
Error	8295.799	224	37.035		
Total	140289.000	240			
Corrected Total	9575.662	239			

a. R Squared = .134 (Adjusted R Squared = .076)

Appendix 3

Estimated Marginal Means of Attitude score of respondent

at Gender of respondent = male



Appendix 4

**Estimated Marginal Means of Attitude score of respondent
at Gender of respondent = Female**

