

Integration of Learners with Physical Disabilities: Panacea for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated the integration of learners with physical disabilities as panacea for sustainable development in Nigeria. Using a descriptive survey research design, data were collected using questionnaires from 185 purposively selected teachers involved in teaching students with physical disabilities in fifty secondary schools in South East Nigeria. Three research questions were answered and data was analysed using descriptive statistics. The result of the study revealed that when students with physical disabilities are integrated with non-physically challenged learners, they adjust favourably to overcome their challenges, are well focused and determined to excel academically and in other extra curricula activities. Therefore, integration policy should be practiced with more vigour.

Keywords: Development, Integration, Learners, Nigeria, Panacea, Physical Disabilities.

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Introduction

Inclusive education is transformational in nature and its quality serves as pivot for sustainable national development and this is a critical issue of concern for any nation desiring to have an edge in the context of global competitiveness. Inclusive education is an educational term used to projects the need for every individual with or without disabilities to learn freely and be exposed to the same learning experiences in the same classroom environment without discrimination. This is of importance because inclusiveness gives learners with disabilities utmost sense of belongingness, positive self perception and enthusiastic zeal to excel in and out of school environment. These points of views are consistent with the assertion of Bamiteko, Mustapha and Ibrahim (2017) that the context of inclusive education is geared towards providing an enabling learning environment that would support the qualitative intellectual growth of learners with and without disabilities in the same learning environment with adaptable facilities and equipment. The principles of inclusive education is aimed at making learning environment meet the needs of learners of diverse nature in a regular school environment regardless of their physical, intellectual, sensory, emotional or other special needs (Forlin, 2007) and this implies that every child should be a valued member of the school community and none should be marginalized, alienated, humiliated, teased, rejected or excluded (Bamiteko, et. al., 2017).

According to the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission (2011), physical disability is any degree of disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement of a physical nature caused by bodily injury, illness or birth defect that causes limitation in the physical functioning, dexterity or mobility of an individual. Physical disability varies according to the type and intensity of loss of mobility. People with a physical disability have a loss that reduces the body's motor skills. Motor skills are based on a complex body structure, which includes the nervous system, spinal cord, muscles, nerves, and joints. The disability affects one or more of these elements e.g., muscular, neurological, or skeletal systems rather than a certain part of the body. This refers to disabling condition impairing in nature that requires adaptation. There are varying types of physical disabilities that impair mobility and require affected individuals to use assistive devices to aid mobility (Disabled World, 2013). This gives credence to the assertion of Ajuwon (2008) that there is need for researchers to critically look into the needs and challenges of children with disabilities and come up with a practical framework of how to integrate them into regular classroom environment to make them more functional to self and society in a cost effective manner. This makes this study to investigate the integration of learners with physical disabilities as panacea for sustainable development in Nigeria a necessity. However, this study would focus on students with physical disabilities in inclusive schools that use assertive devices or mobility aids such as crutches, canes, wheelchairs and artificial limbs to obtain mobility.

Integration of learners with physical disabilities in regular school learning classroom environment is an effort to improve the quality of education they need, to add value to their developmental life span and support societal and national development (Racino, 1999). This projection is supported by Beli's (2009) legal view of the UN

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to acquire qualitative education that would make them functional and productive in the society. This implies that a premium is placed upon full participation by students with disabilities and upon respect for their social, civil, and educational rights. Feeling included is not limited to physical and cognitive disabilities, but also includes the full range of human diversity with respect to ability, language, culture, gender, age and of other forms of human differences ([Inclusive Design Research Centre, 2015](#)).

Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) reported that students with physical disabilities' performance and behaviour in educational and extracurricular tasks can be profoundly affected by the way they feel, their perception of how they are seen and judged by others. Thus, when they feel the society view them as inferior, their abilities seem to diminish. Likewise, the report of a national study conducted by National Centre for Educational Restructuring and Inclusion, in 1995 on inclusion, suggested that placement in inclusion programmes led to academic gains for students with disabilities, including improved performance on standardized tests, mastery of Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals, grades, on-task behaviour, and motivation to learn (National Center for Educational Restructuring and Inclusion, 1995).

Research reports further revealed that placement in an inclusion programme resulted in fewer incomplete assignments, more positive interactions with peers, and improved attitudes toward school and learning. For example, the findings of Kennedy, Shukla, and Fryxell (1997) in a study on impact of inclusion on the social relationship of students with physical disabilities in regular classroom environment revealed that students who were educated in inclusion classrooms had a greater number of interactions and social contacts with students without disabilities, were the recipients of and provided greater levels of social support behaviours, had larger friendship networks that mostly included classmates without disabilities, and had more lasting social relationships with students without disabilities.

Yemi's (2017) report revealed that at the 2016 Paralympics Games which was held from September 7th to 18th in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Nigeria's 23-man team to the Rio 2016 Paralympics Games, which competed in Powerlifting, Athletics and Table Tennis, finished 17th overall on the medals table, the best position by an African nation at the Games. It was also the country's best GOLD medal performance at the Paralympics. Nigeria's Paralympics team has never returned empty-handed since making their debut at the Barcelona Games in 1992 with six athletes, and returning with three GOLD medals. The country has amassed a total of 70 medals: 36 GOLD, 18 Silver and 16 Bronze, from seven outings at the Paralympics, almost tripling the number of medals their able-bodied counterparts have won at the Olympics, a total of 25 medals from their participation in 16 Games. The success of Nigerians paralympians who are physically disabled using crutches, canes, wheelchairs and artificial limbs at successive Olympics has contributed substantially to Nigerian national development and recognition as a giant in sport.

In terms of functioning ability, special needs students with self-care and functional cognitive and social skills are rated to obtain higher academic scores (Stiggins, 2007). Although students with disabilities who are included in the general education classroom are required to be assessed in the core subject areas just as those peers without disabilities, their self-care, functional cognitive and social skills must be taken into considerations when accurately measuring their academic performances. When individual characteristics, disability, and demographics are considered, it is noted in Bishop, (1995), Leatherman, (2007), and Smith, Polloway, Patton and Dowdy (2008) that students with disabilities perform better and have potential academic futures when serviced in the inclusion setting. Inclusion has the advantage of increasing the academic abilities of those students with disabilities (Smith et al., 2008). The National Council on Disability (2004) believed inclusion for students with disabilities promotes competence and confidence within students with disabilities.

Students with disabilities are reported to contribute and participate more within the general education setting as a result of competence and confidence gained from the exposure the general education setting provides (National Council on Disability, 2004). Students with disabilities may reassure their competence and develop tremendously from the positive impact that the inclusive instructional setting may offer (Leatherman, 2007). This study is anchored on the theoretical principles of social learning theory propounded by Albert Bandura. Social learning theory emphasizes the importance of observing and modeling the behaviours, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others. Thus it focuses on learning by observation and modeling. The implication to this study implies that inclusive learning environment enables students with disabilities to observe the behaviours of their non-disabled peers, relate with them and overcome possible feelings of inferiority complex. Social learning theory talks about how both environmental and cognitive factors interact to influence human learning and behaviour. It focuses on the learning that occurs within a social context. It considers that people learn from one another, including such concepts as observational learning, imitation, and modeling (Bandura 2007) and this forms the focus of inclusive learning concept.

Therefore, based on the content of the literature reviewed, it is observed that though the plight of learners with physical disabilities have been reported by diverse authorities but their contextual psychological adjustment problems that could hinder their contribution to societal development have not really been given much attention as most research work on learners with physical disabilities in Nigeria focused on the nature, causes, and

prevalence. Thus, making the society to understand the fact that integration of learners with physical disabilities could serve as panacea for sustainable development in Nigeria is a necessary gap in literature to fill. It is against this backdrop that this study becomes relevant in filling such missing gaps in our knowledge. In view of this context therefore, this study investigated integration of learners with physical disabilities as panacea for sustainable development in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Children with physical disabilities when kept in a special environment to learn secluded from the regular school learning environment that accommodates non-disabled children, they often feel rejected by the larger society, dejected, inferior and stigmatized. This developmental experience of children with physical disabilities in Nigeria is worrisome and of great concern to the society. This is because children with physical disabilities if not integrated in an inclusive school learning environment could be at greater risk of lower intellectual and academic achievement, mental health complications, social behaviour problems and problems of self-control than their non-disabled peers. This developmental experience could have a lifelong psychological challenge in the life of children with physical disabilities and also a negative implication on national development. This is premised considering the fact that most children with physical disabilities when confined to a special school learning environment could feel deprived and disadvantage. Thus, their developmental experience(s) could reduce their chances of developing their own independent self and unique identity. On this projection therefore, this study investigated integration of learners with physical disabilities as panacea for sustainable development in Nigeria

Purpose of the Study

Given the aforementioned concerns associated with previous research on the developmental life experience of learners with physical disabilities, the purpose of the present study is to (a) examine the association and relationship between the ability of learners with physical disabilities to adjust and overcome their challenges when integrated in an inclusive learning environment with their non-disabled (b) examine their determined desire to excel in academics and (c) extra curricula activities in an inclusive learning environment.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will be significant in many respects as thus:

The findings of the study will make the society to be better informed about the plight of learners with physical disabilities and come up with measures to support them positively in all ramifications.

The findings of the study would bring to the awareness of the government the need of establishing counselling services in schools to assist in supporting positive development of learners with physical disabilities in school.

The findings of the study will also, help parents to be aware of the developmental challenges and needs of their children as regards how well to relate with them, accommodate them, guide them effectively and ensure a conducive home environment for them.

Also, the findings of this study will be useful to researchers, people in the helping professions, special needs educators/teachers, medical practitioners, government, school administrators, parents and others in various fields to better understand the challenges of learners with physical disabilities and come up with policies that would support their adjustment and functionality.

Scope of the Study

This study is focussed on investigating integration of learners with physical disabilities as panacea for sustainable development in Nigeria. However, it will be centred in the South-East Geo-political zone of Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. To what extent does the inclusive education policy impact positively on the adjustment of students with physical disabilities to learning in school?
2. To what extent has the inclusive practise impacted positively on the academic attainment of students with physical disabilities in school?
3. Has the inclusive practise impacted positively on the ability of students with physical disabilities to excel in extra curricula activities in school?

Methods

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey research method of quantitative nature for objectivity using standardised questionnaires to collect information for data analysis.

Population: The population for this study consisted of teachers teaching students with physical disabilities in inclusive schools that use assertive devices or mobility aids such as crutches, canes, wheelchairs and artificial

limbs to obtain mobility in South-East Nigeria.

Participants

The participants for this study consisted of one hundred and eighty-five teachers teaching students with physical disabilities in inclusive schools that use assertive devices or mobility aids such as crutches, canes, wheelchairs and artificial limbs to obtain mobility in South-East Nigeria of both Gender (male and female).

The demographic information of the participants is presented in Tables 1, 2, and figures 1, 2, below

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	76	41.1
Female	109	58.9
Total	185	100.0

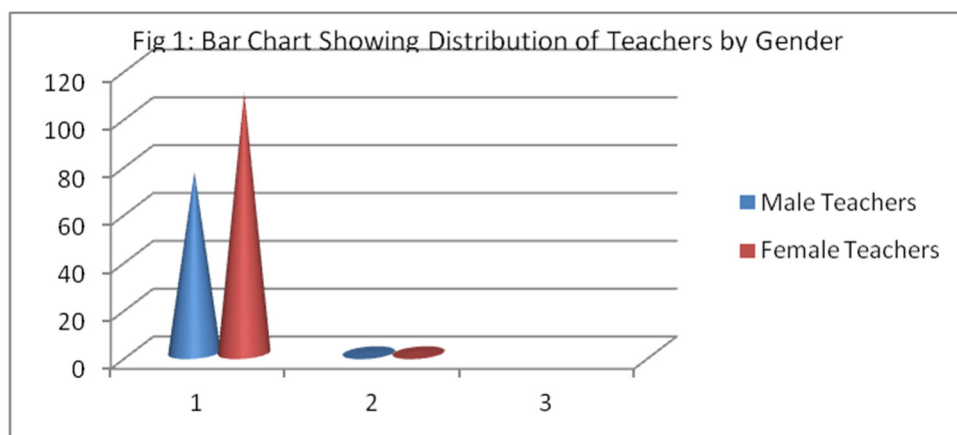
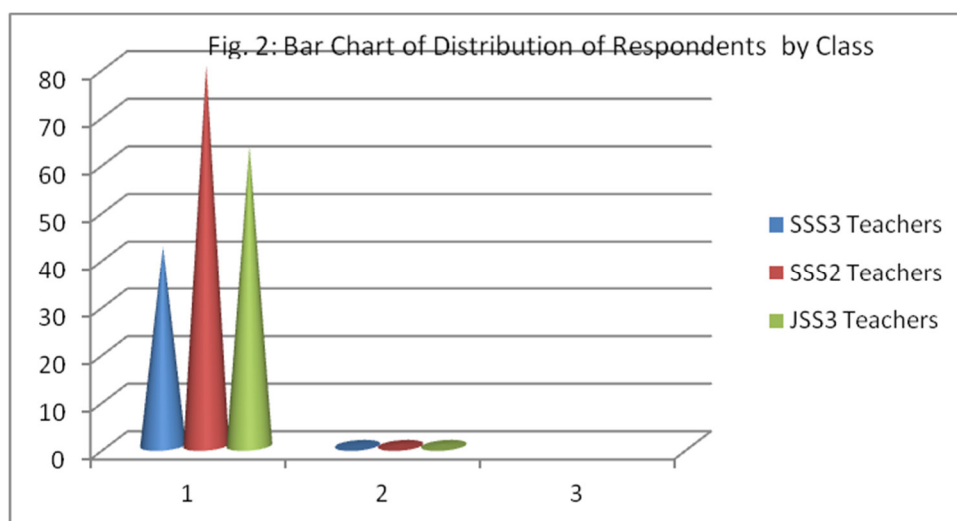


Table.1 and fig: 1 above shows that 76(41.1%) of the respondents were male teachers teaching students with physical disabilities in inclusive schools while their female counterparts were 109(58.9%).

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by Class Taught

Position	Frequency	Percentage
Senior Secondary School (SSS3) Teachers	42	22.7
Senior Secondary School (SSS1) Teachers	80	43.2
Junior Secondary School (JSS3) Teachers	63	34.1
Total	185	100.0



In table 2 and fig 2: above, it is shown that 42 (22.7%) of the respondents teach SSS3 students with physical disabilities, 80 (43.2%) teach SSS2 while 63 (34.1%) teach JSS3 students with physical disabilities. This shows that both male and female teachers teaching students with physical disabilities in inclusive schools were evenly represented.

Sample and Sampling Technique: The samples for this study were one hundred and eighty-five teachers teaching

students with physical disabilities in inclusive schools that use assertive devices or mobility aids such as crutches, canes, wheelchairs and artificial limbs to obtain mobility in South-East Nigeria of both Gender (male and female). Purposive sampling technique was used to select teachers who served as participants from thirty secondary schools in South-East Nigeria for this study.

Instrumentation:

The researchers developed a twelve item research questionnaire on integration of learners with physical disabilities as panacea for sustainable development in Nigeria. The items were structured to centre on adjustment to overcome challenges of physical disability, academic and extra curricula activities in an integrated learning school environment. The items were subjected to objective scrutiny of experts in Measurement and Evaluation, Special Education, Guidance and Counselling, who made relevant input used to make the items standard. Also the instrument was validated and its reliability attained using a pilot study through a test retest method and a reliability coefficient of 0.86 Alpha was attained.

Procedure of administration: The researchers got the necessary permission from the authorities of schools used for the study. The essence of the study was explained to the management and staff. After getting them informed and attaining their consent, the researchers administered the necessary questionnaire two hundred questionnaires to them but only one hundred and eighty-five responded and returned their questionnaire back to the researchers after their response.

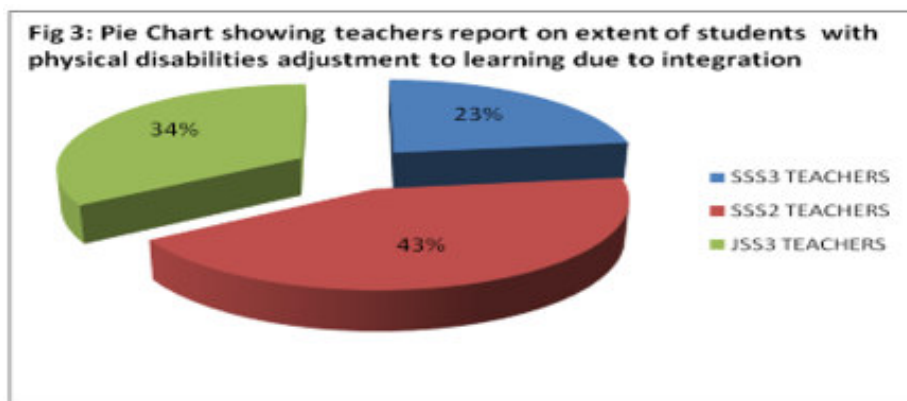
Data analysis: Data was analysed using mean, standard deviation, pie chart, bar chart, line graph. These were used to answer the research questions.

Results

Research question 1: To what extent does the inclusive education policy impact positively on the adjustment of students with physical disabilities to learning in school?

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics result showing teachers response on the impact of inclusive education policy on the adjustment of students with physical disabilities to learning in school

	Statement	Response pattern	SSS3 Teacher	SSS2 Teachers	JSS3 Teachers
1	As a teacher in inclusive school I observed that: The integration of students with physical disabilities in inclusive learning environment has made them develop social competence	Don't know	1(16.7%)	-	5(83.3%)
		Strongly agree	33(24.3%)	65(47.8%)	38(27.9%)
		Agree	5(23.8%)	10(47.6%)	6(28.6%)
		Disagree	3(30.0%)	3(30.0%)	4(40.0%)
		Strongly disagree	-	2(16.7%)	10(83.3%)
		Mean, S.D		1.24, .62	1.27, .66
2	The integration of students with physical disabilities in inclusive learning environment has made them more assertive	Am not sure	8(25.8%)	13(41.9%)	10(32.3%)
		No	6(14.6%)	18(43.9%)	17(41.5%)
		Yes	28(24.8%)	49(43.4%)	36(31.9%)
		Mean, S.D		1.48, .80	1.45, .76
3	Students with physical disabilities are able to develop high self-esteem due to integration in inclusive learning environment	Don't know	4(13.8%)	12(41.4%)	13(44.8%)
		No	8(22.2%)	17(47.2%)	11(30.6%)
		Yes	30(25.0%)	51(42.5%)	39(32.5%)
		Mean, S.D		1.62, .66	1.49, .75

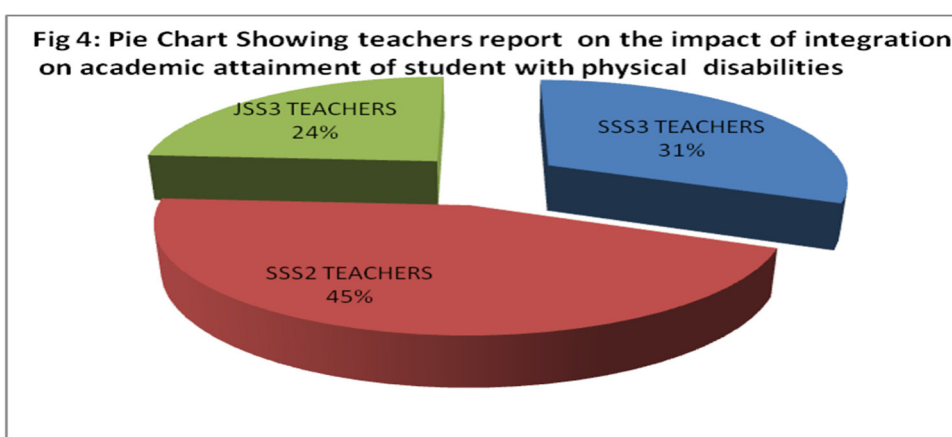


As shown in table 3; the response of teachers teaching students with physical disabilities based on their rating revealed that students with physical disabilities adjusted favourably to teaching and learning experience in an inclusive integrated school environment. Thus the response to item 1 indicates that 33 of SSS3 teachers, 65 of SSS2 teachers and 38 of JSS3 teachers strongly agreed that integration policy has made students with physical disabilities using assertive devices or mobility aids such as crutches, canes, wheelchairs and artificial limbs to obtain mobility to develop the required social competence needed to adjust in an inclusive learning environment. Also, the response of the teachers revealed that 28 SSS3, 49 SSS2 and 36 JSS3 teachers agreed that integration has made students with physical disabilities to be more assertive in their dispositions. Furthermore, the findings to this research question affirmed based on 30 SSS3, 51 SSS2 and 39 JSS3 teachers rating that integration made it possible for students with physical disabilities to develop high self-esteem. The result of the Pie chart in fig 3 revealed that 23% of SSS3, 43% of SSS2 and 34% of JSS3 teacher attested that inclusive education policy impact positively on the adjustment of students with physical disabilities to learning in school. Therefore the research question is answered.

Research question 2: To what extent has the inclusive practise impacted positively on the academic attainment of students with physical disabilities in school?

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics result showing extent to which inclusive practise impact positively on the academic attainment of students with physical disabilities in school

	Statement	Response pattern	SSS3 Teachers	SSS2 Teachers	JSS3 Teachers
	As a teacher in inclusive school I observed that:				
1	To the best of my knowledge, students with physical disabilities are active participants in classroom teaching and learning experience	Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree	3(17.6%) 28(24.3%) 6(18.8%) 5(23.8%)	2(11.8%) 56(48.7%) 15(46.9%) 7(33.3%)	12(70.6%) 31(27.0%) 11(34.4%) 9(42.9%)
		Mean, S.D	1.31, .78	1.34, .67	1.27, .94
2	To the best of my knowledge students with physical disabilities submit their home work assignments on time	Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree	10(18.5%) 12(17.6%) 20(31.7%)	32(59.3%) 32(47.1%) 16(25.4%)	12(22.2%) 24(35.3%) 27(42.9%)
		Mean, S.D	1.24, .82	1.28, .94	1.24, .76
3	To the best of my knowledge, students with physical disabilities perform better than some of their non-disabled peers based on their results	Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree	30(25.0%) 4(13.3%) 8(22.9%)	58(48.3%) 13(43.3%) 9(25.7%)	32(26.7%) 13(43.3%) 18(51.4%)
		Mean, S.D	1.48, .80	1.39, .68	1.78, .87

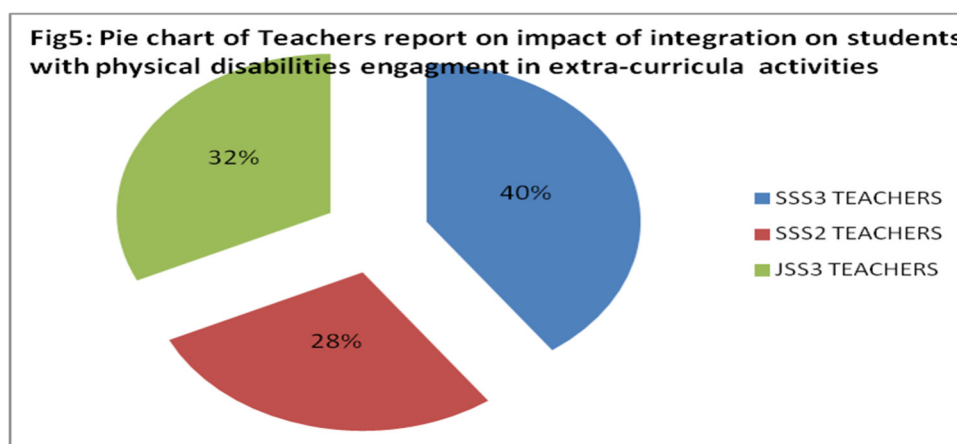


The result on table 4 indicates that inclusive practise impacted positively on the academic attainment of students with physical disabilities in school. 28 of SSS3, 56 of SSS2 and 31 of JSS3 teachers stated that students with physical disabilities are active participants in classroom teaching and learning experience. Also, 30 SSS3, 58 SSS2 and 32 JSS3 teachers attested to the fact that some students with physical disabilities performed better than some of their non-disabled peers based on their results. Likewise, Pie chart on fig 4 revealed that 45% of SSS3, 31% of SSS2 and 24% of JSS3 teachers affirmed that some students with physical disabilities performed better than some of their non-disabled peers. Therefore the research question is answered.

Research question 3: Has the inclusive practise impacted positively on the ability of students with physical disabilities to excel in extra curricula activities in school?

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics showing result of impact of inclusive practise on the ability of students with physical disabilities to excel in extra curricula activities in school

	Statement	Response pattern	SSS3 Teachers	SSS2 Teachers	JSS3 Teachers
1	As a teacher in inclusive school I observed that: Students with physical disabilities participate actively in playing football in school	Don't know	1(20.0%)	-	4(80.0%)
		Strongly agree	30(21.1%)	65(45.8%)	47(33.1%)
		Agree	6(24.0%)	12(48.0%)	7(28.0%)
		Disagree	4(57.1%)	-	3(42.9%)
		Strongly disagree	1(16.7%)	3(50.0%)	2(33.3%)
		Mean, S.D		1.38, .79	1.26, .65
2	Students with physical disabilities participate actively in drama club activities in school	No	13(21.7%)	26(43.3%)	21(35.0%)
		Yes	29(23.2%)	54(43.2%)	42(33.6%)
		Mean, S.D		1.69, .47	1.68, .47
3	Students with physical disabilities participates actively in singing activity in school	No	9(21.4%)	17(40.5%)	16(38.1%)
		Yes	33(23.1%)	63(44.1%)	47(32.8%)
		Mean, S.D		1.79, .46	1.77, .44



The result on table 5 revealed based on the rating of the teachers that inclusive practise impacted positively on the ability of students with physical disabilities to excel in extra curricula activities in school. The responses indicated that 30 SSS3, 65 SSS2 and 47 JSS3 teachers strongly agreed that students with physical disabilities participated actively in playing football. Also, 29 SSS3, 54 SSS2 and 47 JSS3 teachers affirmed that students with physical disabilities engaged actively in school drama club activities. Likewise, 33 SSS3, 63 SSS2 and 47 JSS3 teachers stated that students with physical disabilities engaged actively in singing activities in school. Furthermore, Pie chart on fig 5 affirmed that 40% SSS3, 28% SSS2 and 32% JSS3 teachers agreed that integration policy has positive impact on the ability of students with physical disabilities to engage in extra-curricular activities. Therefore the research question is

Discussion of Findings

The result of research question one revealed that students with physical disabilities adjusted favourably to teaching and learning experience in an inclusive integrated school environment. Pie chart in fig 3 revealed that 23% of SSS3, 43% of SSS2 and 34% of JSS3 teaches attested that inclusive education policy impact positively on the adjustment of students with physical disabilities to learning in school. Therefore the research question is answered. The reason for this development could be align to the fact that inclusive education is transformational in nature because inclusiveness gives learners with disabilities utmost sense of belongingness, positive self perception and enthusiastic zeal to excel in and out of school environment. These points of views are consistent with the assertion of Bamiteko, Mustapha and Ibrahim (2017) that the context of inclusive education is geared towards providing an enabling learning environment that would support the qualitative intellectual growth of learners with and without disabilities in the same learning environment with adaptable facilities and equipment. The principles of inclusive education is aimed at making learning environment meet the needs of learners of diverse nature in a regular school

environment regardless of their physical, intellectual, sensory, emotional or other special needs (Forlin, 2007) and this implies that every child should be a valued member of the school community and none should be marginalized, alienated, humiliated, teased, rejected or excluded (Bamiteko, et. al., 2017).

The result of the second research question indicated that inclusive practise impacted positively on the academic attainment of students with physical disabilities in school. Pie chart on fig 4 revealed that 45% of SSS3, 31% of SSS2 and 24% of JSS3 teachers affirmed that some students with physical disabilities performed better than some of their non-disabled peers. Therefore the research question is answered. This finding is consistent with the assertion of Racino (1999) that integration of learners with physical disabilities in regular school learning classroom environment is an effort to improve the quality of education they need to add value to their developmental life span and support societal and national development. Likewise, the report of a national study conducted by National Centre for Educational Restructuring and Inclusion, in 1995 on inclusion suggested that placement in inclusion programmes led to academic gains for students with disabilities, including improved performance on standardized tests, mastery of Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals, grades, on-task behaviour, and motivation to learn (National Center for Educational Restructuring and Inclusion, 1995). When individual characteristics, disability, and demographics are considered, it is noted in Bishop, (1995), Leatherman, (2007), and Smith, Polloway, Patton and Dowdy (2008) that students with disabilities perform better and have potential academic futures when serviced in the inclusion setting. Inclusion has the advantage of increasing the academic abilities of those students with disabilities (Smith et al., 2008). The National Council on Disability (2004) believed inclusion for students with disabilities promotes competence and confidence within students with disabilities. This implies that a premium is placed upon full participation by students with disabilities and upon respect for their social, civil, and educational rights. Feeling included is not limited to physical and cognitive disabilities, but also includes the full range of human diversity with respect to ability, language, culture, gender, age and of other forms of human differences ([Inclusive Design Research Centre, 2015](#)).

The answer to the third research question revealed that the practise of integration impacted positively on the ability of students with physical disabilities to excel in extra curricula activities in school. Pie chart on fig 5 affirmed that 40% SSS3, 28% SSS2 and 32% JSS3 teachers agreed that integration policy has positive impact on the ability of students with physical disabilities to engage in extra-curricular activities. This gives credence to the Yemi (2017) report of the 2016 Paralympics Games. The success of Nigerians paralympians who are physically disabled using crutches, canes, wheelchairs and artificial limbs at successive Olympics has contributed substantially to Nigerian national development and recognition as a giant in sport.

Recommendation

Teachers should encourage social participation of special needs students with their non-special needs peers in school as a measure to ensure positive adjustment of special needs students in regular school environment.

Special needs students should be given the appropriate support they need to maximise their potentials as to have the capacity to be functional, productive and contribute to national development.

School authorities should make learning environment comfortable for special needs students to excel in all phase of life.

Conclusion

Integration is an educational policy which if well implemented could help reinforce self realisation on the part of special needs students that if they maximise their potentials they can equally be functional and productive member of the society and be supportive of national development.

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