

Effect of Community Based Sensitization Campaign on Inclusive Education Policy for the Visually Impaired in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State

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Abstract

Conventionally, the blind children need braille literacy. This is why there are special education centres across the country to cater for them. However, the 21st century visually impaired persons need more than braille literacy. This is why the Federal Ministry of Education launched Inclusive Education Policy for the visually impaired in 2015. This study investigated the effect of sensitization campaign on both the experimental and control groups prior to and after sensitization campaign. Quasi-experimental research design was adopted for the study. Stratified random sampling method was used to select schools in the categorized areas of Egi, Ndoni, Egbema and Omoku in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State. The sample of the study comprised eight hundred and sixty-six parents and two hundred and forty teachers purposively selected. The Community Sensitization Campaign on Inclusive Education Policy for the Visually Impaired Questionnaire (CSCIEPVIQ) was used to collect data from the 1126 participants. Collected data were analyzed with IBM SPSS. The research question raised was answered using descriptive statistics while the formulated hypothesis was tested at 0.05 alpha level with a multivariate test statistic Analysis of Covariance - ANCOVA. Findings revealed that parents and teachers who were exposed to the sensitization campaign on inclusive education policy for visually impaired gained much knowledge than those who were not exposed. The effect size of the intervention was found to be very high. It was recommended that there should be sensitization campaign for all visually impaired persons in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area. The parents and family members of the visually impaired should be specially acquainted with the prevailing policy too to encourage positive feelings in the family in particular and community at large.

Keywords: Parents, Teachers, sensitization campaign, inclusive education policy, treatment group, control group, visual impairment

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INTRODUCTION

A school is an organized structure carefully designed for the pursuit of academic goals. A school provides learning spaces and learning environments for the teaching of students under the direction of the teacher. In Nigeria, schools are operated at multi-levels viz basic education, (early childhood care, primary and junior secondary school) senior secondary school and tertiary education - physical and virtual or digitalized education (Egielewa et al, 2022). The main purpose of school is to provide for the advancement of each student for living ethically, innovatively, and inventively in a democratic society (Chazan, 2022; Umoke et al, 2020). For the sake of this article, school is a system of formal education sensibly tailored by the government to achieve basic teaching and learning objectives and predetermined sustainable local and international goals. How information flows within the school system and from the regulatory bodies to the school system is a matter of great concern because information is the life wire of any organized system.

Communication could be verbal-oral-face-to-face, verbal-oral-distance, non-verbal, written, visual, formal or informal. In communicating government programmes and policies, it pays to consciously select options that

will help promote effective communication skills within the community of interest. A very simple way is to embark on sensitization campaign which will accord the promoters to do verbal-oral-face-to-face presentation. With sensitization campaign option, presentations are bound to be clear, correct, complete, concrete, concise, considered and courteous. Furthermore, facial expressions, gestures, pointing using hands, writing, drawing, using equipment and eye contact are common features during presentations. Hyland-Wood et al, (2021) argue that an effective communication strategy is a two-way process that involves clear messages, delivered via appropriate platforms, tailored for diverse audiences, and shared by trusted people. Ultimately, the long-term success depends on developing and maintaining public trust. Also, as explained by Hyland-Wood et al, government policymakers and relevant agencies can stimulate widespread public support and participation through increased and ongoing community engagement taking note of the diversity of community groups. The Federal Ministry of Education, FME (2015) made policy to help all children irrespective of special needs to study in common settings and this policy is partly promoted among basic education and senior secondary education system through public sensitization campaign sponsored by Tertiary Education Trust Fund (Tyessi, November, 2021).

Education is very important in human existence such that arms of the world body catering for children and the vulnerable posited that all children, no matter where they live or what their circumstances, have the right to quality education (Smyth, 2000; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, 2022; United Nations International Children s Emergency Fund, UNICEF, 2022). A high point is scored regarding the right of the child to quality education. The blind child needs braille literacy. This is why the federal government of Nigeria initiated and developed special education centres across the country to cater for the visually impaired (Jagun et al, 2019; Ndagije et al, 2019). More innovative efforts birthed Vision 2020 which was articulated with attendant interventions to reduce blindness rates in developing countries. Unfortunately, it failed and became unattainable. While some people are irreversibly blind, some are partially blind. The response of parents and government has been to send them to blind school which has the distinct disadvantage of isolating them from their peers and causing them to lag behind educationally due to teaching methods not corresponding with modern principles. Recently, visually impaired people are encouraged to be schooled alongside their peers in an inclusive manner. For this to be fruitful, they need to be reoriented then endowed with appropriate assistive devices to help secure their coping behaviour (Adio, 2022; Tasali et al., 2022).

Statement of the problem

The primary stakeholders in the school system majorly parents, teachers and administrators are expected to cultivate a good reading culture and effectively follow up on government policy statements and legislations relevant to the school system through the mass media. Mass media as one of the agents of socialization are known to distribute impersonal information to a wide audience, via television, newspapers, radio, and the internet. Television shows, radio programmes, magazines, web sites and other aspects of the mass media influence primary stakeholders orientation and view about individuals, government and the society at large. For instance, The National Policy on Special Needs Education in Nigeria (Federal Ministry of Education, FME, 2015) focuses on the education of all persons with special needs from pre-school to University (p.2). This includes those people with visual impairment. Based on the stated policy the outright blind and people with partial sight are expected to study in the same classrooms with pupils and students whose seeing ability is sound. It is one thing to put together revitalizing policy to energize the education system. It is another thing to communicate the policy to relevant stakeholders for alertness and possible implementation.

Are parents, teachers and administrators aware of this lofty policy; what is their level of awareness; if they are sensitized, what effect will it have on their knowledge about inclusive education practices in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area and by extension Rivers State? It is a common cultural practice in ogbaland and beyond to have children with visual impairment confined to their parents residents chiefly to avert negative comments from visitors and save the family of the impaired victim from shame (cultural inclination). The researchers carried out a preliminary oral investigation and measured education stakeholders awareness and assimilation of the government policy on inclusive education. It was quite revealing; they were not aware of this policy which stipulates that the visually impaired should study in a common classroom with pupils and students with normal sight. The National Policy on Special Needs Education in Nigeria was launched since 2015. Unfortunately, six years (2015-2022) has past yet the beneficiaries and the implementers of the policy are not acquainted with it. This situation has placed the vision of educational attainment in danger thereby attracting factual comments from international quarters. Even though primary education is officially free and compulsory, about 10.5 million of the country s children aged 5-14 years are not in school. Only 61 percent of 6-11 year-olds regularly attend primary school and only 35.6 percent of children aged 36-59 months receive early childhood education (UNICEF, 2022, para. 1). It is obvious that the quoted figure of children not in school include many sons and daughters of Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State who are overwhelmed by visual impairment.

If urgent steps are not taken to sensitize the primary stakeholders of education in the locality about the extant government policy which is very friendly to children and adult with visual impairment, the sons and daughters of Ogbaland and adjoining communities will continue to be ignorant of the good intentions of government to provide education to the blind in an inclusive learning environment. Blind Children require access to quality rehabilitation services to optimize function and reduce their disabilities. This might be the basis for a strong governmental and non-governmental advocacy to support awareness campaign for inclusive education for the visually impaired.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of sensitization campaign on both the experimental and control groups (made up of parents and teachers in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area) regarding inclusive education policy for the visually impaired. The specific objectives of the study were to:

- i determine the difference between the experimental and control groups in terms of parents and teachers awareness prior and after sensitization campaign on inclusive education for the visually impaired.
- ii ascertain if there is significant treatment effect of the sensitization campaign organized for parents and teachers regarding visual impairment.

Research Question

What is the mean difference between the experimental and control groups in terms of parents and teachers awareness of inclusive education policy prior and after sensitization campaign regarding visual impairment?

Hypothesis

There is no significant difference between the experimental and control groups in terms of parents and teachers awareness of inclusive education policy for the visually impaired prior and after sensitization campaign.

METHODS

Quasi-experimental research design was adopted for the study with both the experimental and control groups assessed at two different time points: Prior (Time 1) sensitization campaign and 1 month after (Time 2). Stratified random sampling method was used to select schools in the categorized areas of Egi, Ndoni, Egbema and Omoku in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State. The sample of the study comprised eight hundred and sixty-six parents and two hundred and forty teachers purposively selected. The Community Sensitization Campaign on Inclusive Education Policy for the Visually Impaired Questionnaire (CSCIEPVIQ) was used to collect data from the 1126 participants. Participants in the experimental groups were given treatment (i.e., exposure to inclusive education policy awareness sensitization on visual impairment). Participants in the control groups were not given any treatment because positive control groups are effective to show the experiment is functioning as planned. The independent variable comprised experimental and control group (fixed factor). The dependent variable comprised posttest scores. The covariate comprised pretest scores. Collected data were analyzed with IBM SPSS. The research question raised was answered using descriptive statistics to show awareness sensitization campaign treatment effect on both experimental and control groups (made up of parents and teachers in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area) regarding inclusive education policy for the visually impaired while the formulated hypothesis to investigate the significance of the treatment effect was tested at 0.05 alpha level with a multivariate test statistic Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA).

RESULTS

Table 1

Mean Difference Results Showing Awareness Sensitization Campaign Treatment Effect on Inclusive Education Policy for the Visually Impaired

Group	Pretest		Posttest		Mean Gain
	M	SD	M	SD	
Experimental	1.4699	0.3998	3.2020	0.0248	1.3672
Control	1.4678	0.3955	1.8327	0.1472	
Mean Difference	0.0021		1.3693		

Table 1 shows the mean difference or difference in means treatment effect between the experimental and control groups based on pretest: Experimental (M =1.4699, SD=0.3998), Control (M=1.4678, SD =0.3693) and posttest (M=3.2020, SD=0.0248), Control (M=1.8327, SD=0.1472) with a substantive Mean Gain (1.3672) which is the difference between the pretest mean score (0.0021) and posttest mean score (1.3693)

Table 2
Analysis of Covariance Showing Sensitization Treatment effect on Inclusive Education Policy for the Visually Impaired

Source	SS	df	MS	F	P	PI^2
Corrected Model	491.814 ^a	2	245.907	2.929	.000	.981
Intercept	487.989	1	487.989	5.812	.000	.981
PrVisual	.004	1	.004	.449	.503	.000
Treatment	491.814	1	491.814	5.858	.000	.981
Error	9.429	1123	.008			

a. R Squared = .981 (Adjusted R Squared = .981)

As shown on Table 2, a significant difference was found, $F(1, 1123) = 5.86, P = 0.000$. On this ground, the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the experimental and control groups in terms of parents and teachers awareness of the inclusive education policy for the visually impaired prior and after sensitization campaign is rejected. Importantly, the effect size for treatment is large: partial eta squared (PI^2) = 0.98.

DISCUSSION

The mean difference between the experimental and control groups in terms of parents and teachers' awareness of inclusive education policy prior and after sensitization campaign regarding visual impairment shows a substantive mean gain. This finding simply purports that parents and teachers who were exposed to the awareness sensitization campaign on inclusive education policy regarding visual impairment gained much knowledge than those who were not exposed. This finding is similar to Ndagije et al, (2019) who after the implementation of the community dialogue and sensitization programme, recorded 20% increase in knowledge about adverse drug events in the community compared to before the program began. The mean gain documented in the current study speaks volumes thereby encouraging continuous effort in the sensitization programme.

Furthermore, there is significant difference between the experimental and control groups in terms of parents and teachers awareness of inclusive education policy for the visually impaired prior and after sensitization campaign. Remarkably, the effect size for treatment is large. This finding aligns with Talabi et al., (2022) whose study participants' exposure to radio campaign messages on COVID-19 preventive measures influenced the awareness and adoption of COVID-19 preventive measures during the pandemic. The radio campaign messages were found to be effective in communicating effectively. If the radio campaign messages were not timely, probably worse condition would have prevailed. However, the documented finding for this study is in variance with Tasali et al., (2022) whose finding did not show any significant treatment effect in sleep duration and energy intake which resulted in weight reduction in the sleep extension group versus the control group. It is important to highlight the effect size of the change prior sensitization and after sensitization which is found to be very large. This means that the intervention or experimental manipulation (sensitization campaign) has remarkable impact on the study participants. The outcome of the manipulation has practical significance regarding the knowledge and rate of awareness about the inclusive education policy for the visually impaired.

Conclusion

It is over six years (2015-2022) since the inclusive education policy for the visually impaired was launched and the results of this current study have shown a vast awareness gap among stakeholders in the school community. Therefore, when more parents and teachers in the school community are sensitized about the carefully designed template of the government to make children with visual impairment challenge study in the same classrooms with those with normal vision, then the lofty goals of the government at all levels would be attained. For emphasis, sensitization campaign option of presenting inclusive education policy for the visually impaired was a very effective intervention because of its verbal-oral-face-to-face characteristics. The intervention conveyed clear, correct, complete, concrete, impactful, and concise message that created the observed effect.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Behavioral change communication experts including basic and post-basic education regulatory authorities at all levels should leverage on mass media among the populace to spread inclusive education policy for the visually impaired.
2. There should be sensitization campaign for all visually impaired persons in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area. The parents and family members of the visually impaired should be acquainted with the prevailing policy too to encourage positive feelings in the family in particular and community at large.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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