



EXCLUSION OF CHILDREN WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES FROM REGULAR CLASSROOM: NIGERIA PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Study investigated why teachers exclude children with intellectual disability from the regular classrooms in Nigeria. Participants were, 169 regular teachers randomly selected from Oyo and Ogun states. Questionnaire was used to collect data result revealed that 57.4% regular teachers could not cope with children with ID because of their learning difficulties. 84% of the teachers also disagreed that culture was a factor in the exclusion of children with ID. Teachers with higher years teaching experience were found to be more favourable to exclusion. It was recommended that as a matter of policy, regular teachers should be allowed to undergo training so as to enable them handle children with ID in the classroom. The Nigerian Government should also as a matter of policy discourage over population in the regular schools so that children with ID can be accommodated. Lastly, more experienced teachers should be encouraged to handle children at the Primary level of education in Nigeria.

Key words: Exclusion; Children; Intellectual Disabilities; Regular Classroom; Nigeria.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Children with intellectual disability are oftentimes excluded from the regular classroom by the regular teachers in Nigeria (Fakolade and Adeniyi, 2009). In situations where they are not excluded for one reason or the other, they are merely neglected in the classroom while teachers concentrate on regular pupils. According to the report on the implementation of the convention on the Rights of the Child by the United States Department of Justice, Disability Rights section (2005) people with disabilities are the least cared for and discriminated against within the societies and even in their families, and this has contributed to a large extent to why they are excluded from educational system and social activities (Akindenor 2007).

The National Policy on Education (2004) categorically stated that all children should be included in the regular classroom irrespective of the nature of disability. To a large extent, this policy is merely on paper, most of the states are not implementing it, hence in Nigeria, what is mostly practiced is segregation (Olukotun and Oke, 2005). Baker (2013) however remarked that the practice of inclusion or mainstreaming students with disabilities in regular classrooms is required by law. In other words, the nations of the world should strive to practice inclusion. Cardona (2009) remarked that studies by Alemany and Villuendas (2004), Ojea (1999) and Garcia Pastor, Garcia-Jimenez, and Rodriguez-Gomez (1993) conducted in Spain, indicate that teachers are positive towards inclusive education, but at the same time have serious reservations about supporting the wide spread placement of students with special educational needs. In Contrast, Cardona (2000) in a study with pre service and in service teachers, reported neutral perceptions of inclusion. The above studies according to Cardona suggest that teachers who are the prime implementals of the policy of inclusion are often not prepared to meet the needs of students with significant disabilities and that a more aggressive approach is necessary to preparing general education teachers for inclusion.



The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (2007) requires that a continuum of placement options be made available to meet the needs of students with disabilities. The law also requires that to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities are educated with children without disabilities.

Fakolade et.al (2009) remarked that the last three decades have witnessed an International debate particularly in developing countries like Nigeria on why children with disabilities should be included in the regular classroom rather than excluded. While the voices of supporters of inclusive education such as Stainback and Stainback (1991) assert that inclusive education rather than exclusion is the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes and achieving equal educational opportunities for all, most regular teachers and other stakeholders according to Mba (1995) argued that inclusive education will not adequately meet the needs of children with disabilities, that their needs would be better met in a segregated setting, where they have trained teachers to handle them.

Many factors have been thought to have contributed to the argument against inclusion of children with disabilities in the regular classroom. For example, the teachers years of experience in relation to attitudes towards inclusion rather than exclusion, was thought to be a factor, although, Fakolade et.al (2009) in their study found that this has no influence on the acceptability of the teachers towards inclusion. Overpopulation of pupils in the regular classroom is also considered to be a factor that could work against inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in the regular classroom. According to Oyebola, Abiodun and Kolawole (2005), the facilities in the regular classrooms are grossly deficient for the large population of the pupils in the classroom, hence, children with intellectual disabilities would be left out. Obani (1991) remarked that for an effective teaching of children with special needs to take place, there should be maximum of fifteen pupils in the classroom at any given time. The cultural beliefs in Nigeria also have made people to associate disabilities to factors such as “sin to the gods of the land” “reincarnated beings” among others and it is seen as a taboo to associate with such people (Abang,2005). Religion is also assumed to be another factor. People hold on strongly to what they believe, persons with disabilities are probably seen as outcasts (Mba, 1991). In punch newspaper of 10th October, 2014, Akasike remarked that persons living with disabilities in some part of Nigeria protested alleged marginalization. One of the authors of this present study witnessed an unpleasant situation in one of the primary schools in Nigeria, in which a pupil with intellectual disability was excluded within the classroom, while the teachers concentrated on the regular pupils. This pupil was not engaged in any of the activities going on in the classroom.

Some of the factors mentioned above could have contributed to the teachers' behavior. Inclusion rather than exclusion is a global move to combating stigmatization and discriminatory attitudes of children with special needs. The policy of inclusion has come to stay and many developed and developing countries have adopted it in their educational policies (Fakolade et al, 2007). It is imperative that Nigeria regular teachers move with the Global trend by embracing inclusive education rather than excluding children with intellectual disabilities and other disabilities in general from the regular classroom. It is against this background that this study investigated the factors that could be responsible for the exclusion of children with intellectual disabilities by the regular teachers from the regular classroom.

Research Questions

- (1) Would regular Teachers readily include children with intellectual Disability in the regular classroom?



- (2) Is the culture the factor for exclusion of children with intellectual Disability by the regular teachers?
- (3) Do the large population of pupils in regular schools influence the inclusion of children with intellectual disability in the regular classroom?
- (4) Is there any difference in the reaction of teachers in Oyo and Ogun States towards exclusion of Children with intellectual Disability?

Hypotheses:

Two factors were considered of capable of influencing the responses of the teachers about inclusive classroom in Nigeria. These are the years of working experience and the religion practice of the teacher. This influence was checked by setting these hypotheses:

HO₁: There is no significant relationship between teachers' years of experience and their opinions on exclusion of Children with Intellectual Disability from the regular classroom.

HO₂: There is no significant difference between Christian and Muslim teachers in their opinions on exclusion of children with Intellectual Disability from the regular classroom.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted descriptive survey research design.

Sample/Sampling Technique

Multi-stage sampling technique was adopted to select the sample of the study. The first stage is the selection of two states in Nigeria using purposive sampling technique. The two states were selected because they have functioning special schools for children with Intellectual disabilities and it is assumed that regular teachers know about the policy of inclusion in the National policy on education. Nine (9) and Eight (8) schools were randomly selected from which 169 regular teachers (90 teachers from Oyo and 79 teachers from Ogun States) respectively.

Instrument

A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire titled Questionnaire for Exclusion of Children with Intellectual Disability in Regular Classroom ($\alpha = 0.75$) was developed and validated for data collection for the study. This was made up of section A which elicited information on the demographic data such as; age, years of teaching experience, qualification and religion. . Section B comprised of 15 items which elicited information on the possible reasons for exclusion of children with learning disability from regular classroom. . The response option was 5-point Likert scale of strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D), strongly disagree (SD) and neutral (N) respectively and scored 5,4,3,2,1 for positive statements respectively and the reverse scores for the negative statements. The column for neutral was necessary especially as the regular teachers may not be well informed about children with intellectual disability, hence, they may not know whether to agree or disagree to some particular statements.

Procedure

Four postgraduate students from Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta were employed as research assistants in administering the questionnaires in the two states to the regular teachers. The research assistance were given an orientation on the rules and regulations guiding administration of questionnaire and that they should give to those teachers that agreed to complete it and return it immediately so as to ensure good number of returns. . The data collection exercise was carried out for two weeks.

**Method of data analysis**

The data collected were analyzed using computer software known as Statistics Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The data were coded and a variable named 'opinion on exclusion' was computed. For research question 1-3, descriptive statistics of frequency count, percentage, mean and standard deviation and charts were used while t-test was used to analyze research question 4 and to test hypothesis 2. For HO_1 , Pearson product-moment correlation was used.

RESULTS

RQ1: Would regular teachers readily accept children with ID in the regular classroom?

To answer this question, the related items were presented and mean scores and standard deviations of the responses of the teachers were calculated.

Table 1: Regular Teachers' Acceptability of Children with ID.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	N	Mean	Std.D
1.	Children with ID are not supposed to be in the regular schools because they cannot learn anything	49 (29.0)	48 (28.4)	33 (19.5)	34 (20.1)	5 (3.0)	3.60	1.19
2.	I am not a special educator, hence I do not want any child with ID in my class	40 (23.7)	42 (24.0)	29 (17.2)	53 (31.4)	5 (3.0)	3.35	1.23
3.	I hate relating with children ID because it could be infectious	5 (3.0)	29 (17.2)	77 (45.6)	54 (32.0)	- (0.0)	2.84	.90
4.	Teaching children with ID is too difficult, hence I do not want them in my class	24 (14.2)	46 (27.2)	34 (20.1)	52 (30.8)	13 (7.7)	3.10	1.21
5.	I am often irritated by the outlook of children with ID, the reason why I do not want them in my class	15 (8.9)	36 (21.3)	42 (24.9)	66 (39.1)	10 (5.9)	2.88	1.09
6.	Despite my years of teaching experience, I cannot still cope with having a child with ID in my class	23 (13.6)	45 (26.6)	29 (17.2)	65 (38.5)	4 (2.4)	3.03	1.21
7.	I do not have adequate experience in the teaching of children with ID, hence I cannot afford to have them in my class	37 (21.9)	48 (28.4)	39 (23.1)	45 (26.6)	- (0.0)	3.46	1.11
8.	I do not have the Educational knowledge of handling children with ID if I have them in my class	38 (22.5)	62 (36.7)	41 (24.3)	24 (14.2)	4 (2.4)	3.63	1.06

Table 1 shows that 57.4% of the teachers agreed while 39.6% disagreed that children with ID are not supposed to be in regular schools because they cannot learn anything, the mean score for this item is 3.60. 47.7% of the teachers agreed while 48.6% disagreed that they are not special educators hence, they do not want any child with ID in their class, and the mean score for the item is 3.35. As high as 77.6% disagreed to the statement that says "I hate relating with children with ID because it could be infectious" and the mean score for the item is 2.84. Again, 41.4% of the teachers agreed while 50.9% disagreed to the statement that says "teaching children with ID is too difficult hence, I do not want them in my class" and the mean score is 3.10. 40.0% of the teachers agreed while 55.7% disagreed to the statement that says "despite the years of my teaching experience I cannot still cope with having a child with ID in my class" and the mean score for the item is 3.03.

RQ2: Does the culture of regular teachers affect the acceptance of children with ID in their classroom.

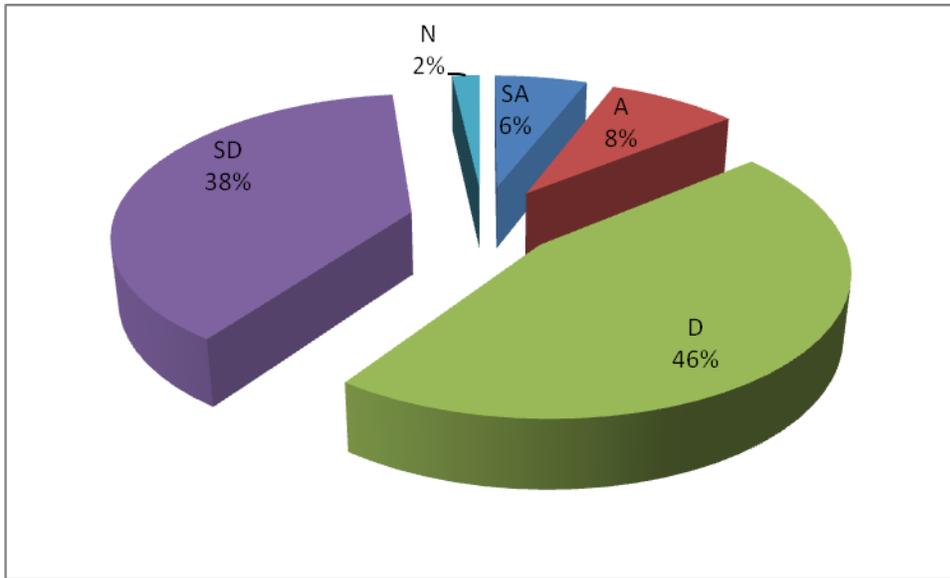


Fig. 1: Regular Teachers’ Culture and the Acceptability of children with ID

Figure 1 shows that 77 (45.6%) and 65(38.5%) of the teachers respectively disagreed and strongly disagreed to the statement that says “my culture frowns at having anything to do with children with ID because they are outcast”. As low as 10(5.9%) strongly agreed to the statement. This implies that the culture of regular teachers does not affect their acceptance of children with ID in their class.

RQ 3: Do the large population of Pupils in regular school influence the inclusion of children with ID in the regular classroom?

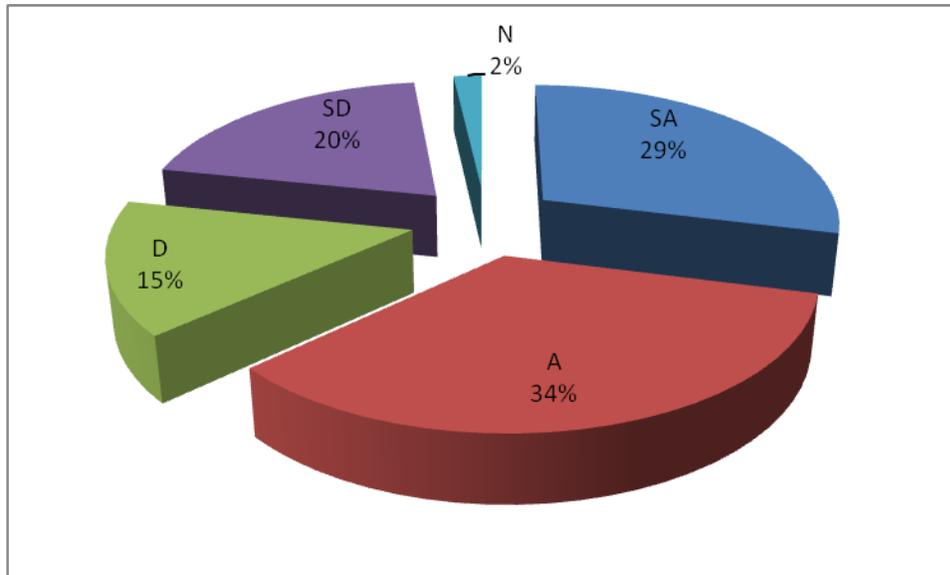


Fig. 2: Population of Regular Pupils and the Acceptability of Children with ID in Classroom

Figure 2 shows that 48(28.4%) and 57(33.7%) respectively strongly agreed and agreed to the statement that says “the population of the regular pupils is large, paying attention on a child with I.D will be difficult in such a class”. 33(19.5%) strongly disagreed to the statement. This implies that the population of the regular students will not allow teachers to accept students with ID in their class

RQ4: Is there any difference in the reaction of teachers in Oyo and Ogun States towards the exclusion of children with ID in the regular classroom?

To answer this questions, t-test statistics was used to analyze the variable computed (opinion on exclusion) which is a continuous data. The score obtainable is 75 (15 items by 5-point)

Table 2: Summary of t-test Analysis Showing Difference Between Oyo and Ogun States in their Teachers’ Exclusion of Children with ID in the Regular Classrooms.

Variable	N	Mean	Std.D	t	df	Sig.	Remark
Exclusion of Children with ID from Regular classroom							
Ogun State	66	47.08	9.09	-2.707	162	.008	Significant
Oyo State	98	50.93	8.83				

Table 2shows that there is a significant difference between the regular teachers in Oyo and Ogun state in their opinion about exclusion of children with ID in the regular classrooms ($t = 2.71$; $df = 162$; $P < 0.05$). The teachers’opinion to accept the children with ID in their classes is high is higher in Oyo State (mean = 50.93) than in Ogun State (mean = 47.08).

Testing the Null Hypotheses

H_{01} : There is no significant relationship between teachers’ years of experience and their opinions on exclusion of children with ID in regular classroom.

**Table 3: Summary of Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Showing Relationship between Years of Teaching Experience and Their Opinions**

Variable	N	Mean	Std.d	r	Sig.	Remark
Years of Teaching Experience	169	2.746	1.736			
Opinion on exclusion of children with ID	169	49.278	9.096	-.188	.014	Significant

Table 3 reveals that there is a significant negative relationship between teachers years of teaching experience and their opinion on exclusion of children with ID from regular classroom ($r = 0.188$; $P < 0.05$). Therefore, H_{O1} is rejected. The negative relationship implies that the higher the years of teaching experience, the less their opinion on exclusion of children with ID from regular classroom. In another words, experienced teachers support inclusive education for children with ID.

H_{O2} : There is no significant difference between Christian and Muslim teachers in their opinions on exclusion of children with ID in regular classroom.

Table 4: Summary of t-test Analysis Showing Difference between Christian and Muslim Teachers in their Opinion.

Variable	N	Mean	Std.d	T	df	Sig.	Remark
Opinion about Exclusion of Children with ID							Not Significant
Muslim Teachers	33	48.67	9.05	-.451	165	.652	
Christian Teachers	134	49.47	9.10				

Table 4 shows that there is no significant difference between Christian and Muslim Teachers in their opinion about exclusion of children with ID in the regular classroom ($t = 0.45$; $df = 165$; $P > 0.05$). Therefore, H_{O2} is not rejected.

DISCUSSION

The discussion is based on the four research questions that were raised and two hypotheses tested. The first research question addressed the regular teacher's acceptability of children with intellectual Disability. The findings as revealed by items 1,2,7 and 8 in table 1 shows that the teachers would not want to accept the children with ID in their classroom because they believe the children cannot learn anything, they also agreed that since they are not special educators they would not want any child with ID in their classroom, they said they do not have adequate experience in the teaching of children with ID and also because they do not have the educational knowledge of handling children with ID in the classroom. The responses of the teachers showed that they have good idea of what it entails to teach children with ID in regular classroom and they probably think that since they do not have the required knowledge and skills, they would not be able to cope with these category of children in their classrooms. In other words, it is assumed that the teachers can accept children with ID in their classrooms peradventure they have the required knowledge and skills. This response from the teachers is quite encouraging when compared with what obtained a few years ago.

This agrees with the findings of Mba (1995) in which most regular teachers argued against including children with intellectual disabilities in the regular classroom that the children would be



better off in the segregated (special) schools where they have trained teachers that could handle them.

In line with this finding, Fakolade and Adeniyi (2009) remarked that the last three decades have witnessed an International debate particularly in developing countries like Nigeria on why children with disabilities should be accepted and included rather than excluded in the regular classroom.

The second research question focused on the regular teachers' culture and their acceptability of children with ID. Almost all the teachers 142(84.1%) responded that their culture is not responsible for the reasons why they would not accept a child with ID in their classrooms. This is encouraging because despite the fact that cultural beliefs are held in high esteem in Nigeria, the teachers still claimed that culture does not have anything to do with their acceptability of children with ID. This however is in contrast with the submission of Brown (1991) that differences in attitudes of teachers towards children with special needs education may be linked to differences in cultural beliefs.

The third research question asked if the large population of the pupils in the regular schools would affect the acceptability of children with ID in the regular classroom. Majority of the teachers 105 (62.3%) agreed that over population of pupils would prevent them from paying attention to children with ID if included. This agrees with the findings of Oyebola, Abiodun and Kolawole (2005) that overpopulation of pupils in the regular classroom is found to be a factor that could work against inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in the regular classroom, this is because the facilities are grossly deficient for large population, and as such children with intellectual disability would be left or abandoned in the process.

Research question four which states "is there any difference in the reaction of teachers in Oyo and Ogun states towards exclusion of children with ID?" Findings revealed as shown in table 4 that there is significant difference in the reaction of the regular teachers in Oyo and Ogun States. The difference in reaction is higher in Oyo state than Ogun state. It could be assumed that Ogun State has a higher awareness level and knowledge about children with intellectual disability than their Oyo State counterparts. The study further revealed that there is a significant negative relationship between teachers' years of experience and their opinion on exclusion of children with ID in regular classroom. ($r=0.188$; $p<0.05$) meaning that teachers who have more years of teaching experience support inclusion rather than excluding children with ID in the classroom. It could be argued that having been in the teaching profession for many years, the teachers could probably have handled various children with diverse challenges in their classrooms. Fakolade et al (2009) while of the opinion that teachers' years of experience and attitude are related to their acceptability of children with ID, found in their study that this has no influence on the acceptability of the teachers towards children with ID.

In this study also, religion was found not to be significant in the teachers' opinion about exclusion of children with ID from the regular classroom.

Conclusion

Majority of the regular teachers responded positively to inclusion rather than exclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in their classrooms. However, their constraints as found out in this study are based on the fact that it is difficult to teach these children, because they lack



the experience in teaching them since they are not Special Educators. Overpopulation in regular schools was also found to be a factor by the teachers for exclusion of children with ID.

Recommendations

- As a matter of policy, regular teachers should be encouraged to undergo constant training in handling children with ID in the classroom.
- The Nigerian Government should as a matter of policy discourage over population in the regular schools so that children with ID can be accommodated.
- The government should also see the necessity of Special Educators in the regular schools so that they can have positive influence on the regular teachers in handling children with ID.

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