

Primary School Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusive Education for Learners with Visual Impairment in Jos South, Plateau State, Nigeria

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Abstract. The study examined primary school teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education for learners with visual impairment in Jos South, Plateau state. One research question and one hypothesis were formulated to guide the study. The study adopted a survey research design with data obtained from respondents (n=150) using a researcher constructed Attitude towards Inclusive Education Scale (ATIES). One expert from the Department of Psychology and two experts each from the Departments of Educational Foundations and Special Education and Rehabilitation Sciences of the University of Jos respectively subjected the instrument to content validity. The test re-test method was utilized to determine the reliability of the instrument (reliability index= 0.75) using the Cronbach's alpha reliability statistics. Data collected were examined for accuracy of entry and missing data after which they were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequency count of opinions of teachers regarding inclusive education for learners with visual impairment was obtained using percentage, mean and standard deviation as well as z-scores to determine attitude direction. Based on results of the analysis, the study concluded that primary school teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education for learners with visual impairment were negative. Recommendations were made to alleviate the situation as it was obtained in the area of study.

Keywords: Primary school, Teachers' attitudes, Inclusive education, Learners with Visual impairment, Plateau state

1. Introduction:

The reduced function of the eye constitutes what is generally referred to as visual impairment and is measured by specific visual tests such as those for visual acuity, visual field, colour vision and near vision. According to Sykes and Ozoji (1992), visual impairment results in visual disability seen as the reduced abilities of an individual in tasks such as reading, orientation and mobility as well as the performance of daily living skills. Persons in whom the sense of vision is defective could range from ability to see a little to total blindness. Such persons, according to Ozoji (2003), are visually handicapped when they encounter difficulties that prevent them from total integration and inclusion into the society.

Vision is, no doubt, a person's primary mode of gaining information about the environment in which he or she exists and it is generally believed that over half of the information we receive about our world is obtained through vision. Visual impairment can therefore interfere with, among other skills, the development of learning, mobility, social growth and adjustment. As posited by Sykes and Ozoji (1992) it is for this reason learners with visual impairment are known to present unique

educational needs which cut across other need areas including concept development, improving listening skills and developing study and research skills. Yakwal (2016), posits that apart from needing to be taught alternative ways to read and write, learners with visual impairment require training to use any residual vision to the fullest extent possible. Vision plays a critical role in educational settings and other settings generally and visual impairment which is severe enough to interfere with progress in normal educational programmes is considered a visual handicap. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which is a legally binding instrument that has been signed by practically all the countries of the world, emphatically states that primary education should be compulsory and available free of charge to all. The Jomtien World Declaration on Education for All (1990), on its own part, claimed that educational disparities existed and that many different groups were vulnerable to discrimination and exclusion. For this reason, it emphatically directed that steps be taken to provide equal access to education to every category of persons with disabilities including those living with visual impairment to serve as an integral part of the education system. Inclusive education, as Stubbs (2002) puts it, is not only about the inclusion of people with disabilities but has particular challenges and opportunities for mainstream educational policy and practice.

Learners with disabilities traditionally received their educational programmes in specialized classrooms or special schools designed for them. This was based on the assumption that teachers in general education did not have the skills necessary to meet the needs of all children representing different learning needs. According to Smith, Polloway, Patton and Dowdy (2001), the result was the removal of children with disabilities from the general education environment to an education provided by specialists. In the special education classroom approach, children with disabilities received most of their educational programmes from a special education teacher specifically trained to serve the population of children with various kinds of disabilities.

The concept of inclusion has a values orientation based on the premise that all individuals with disabilities have a right to be included in naturally occurring settings and activities with their neighbourhood peers, siblings and friends (Smith, Polloway, Patton & Dowdy, 2001). Therefore, inclusion can be taken to mean that:

- every child should be included in a regular classroom to the optimum extent appropriate to the needs of that child while preserving the placements and services that special education can provide;
- the education of children with disabilities is viewed by all educators as a shared responsibility and privilege;
- there is a commitment to include all children with disabilities in every facet of school and
- every child must have a place and be welcomed in a regular classroom (Smith, 1995).

Inclusive education is an educational arrangement in which all learners (including those with visual impairments) are expected to have opportunity for learning together in inclusive schools. Rieser (2005) posits that it is based on the philosophical belief that all learners, with or without disabilities, have a right to be educated together in age appropriate class groups in regular classrooms of community schools. This implies that learners with visual impairment should be fully included in all classroom activities in any of the three forms of inclusive education practice – pull in pull out, self-contained class or full inclusion.

In the light of current practice that more programmes are becoming inclusive, teachers need to be facilitators in the classroom to provide the desired active learning environment that is appropriate for each learner. However, some factors that can affect teachers' behavior in their classrooms and subsequently impact on the inclusive environment include teachers' positive attitudes towards inclusion (Mashiya, 2003). There is need to determine the level of preparedness of school teachers in terms of attitudes towards the provision of educational services for learners with visual impairment. It is

in view of this that the study was concerned with primary school teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education for learners with visual impairment in Jos south, Plateau state.

2. Statement of the Problem

Inclusive education, according to the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994), is the most realistic form of educational provisions for children with special needs. Emphasizing those children with disabilities should attend neighborhood schools, it advocated the acceptance of the position that primary school teachers accept to teach learners with visual impairment in their classrooms as the norm (Ozoji, 2008). The implementation of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme by the Federal government was as a result of the Dakar Framework for Action (Education for All, 2000) which states that educational disparities existed and that many different particular groups were vulnerable to discrimination and exclusion. This framework for action actively committed nations to improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence so that learning outcomes are achieved by all learners including those with visual impairment.

It appears that in considering the philosophy of inclusive education for children with special needs in Nigeria, primary school teachers prefer inclusion to special school arrangements for learners with visual impairments; that school teachers are readily in favour of equal educational opportunities for learners with visual impairments and that they have recognized and wholeheartedly accepted the growing evidence in favour of inclusive education for such learners. Ozoji, Unachukwu and Kolo (2016) posits that inclusive education has been conceived on the basis of more overarching purposes and relevance. According to them, the purposes and relevance of inclusive education are to, among others, ensure access to education in the most suitable and less discriminatory learning environments as well as ensuring the provisions of appropriate, commensurate and functional education within professionally recognized best practices. There have been speculations that teachers were generally ready to accept children with disabilities into their

classes, take responsibility for such children and help them adjust to the school environment (Ozoji, 1984). This, according to Yakwal (2016), does not seem to be the real picture in Nigeria because different attitudes are exhibited by primary school teachers towards inclusive education for such learners with visual impairment and this range from positive, negative to ambivalent. This scenario prompted the interest in the effort to determine primary school teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education for learners with visual impairment in the area of study.

3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine the direction of primary school teachers attitudes towards inclusive education for learners with visual impairments in Jos south, Plateau state.

4. Research question:

What is the direction of primary school teachers' attitude towards inclusive education for learners with visual impairments in Plateau state?

5. Method and Procedure

The data answering the research question was obtained from the researcher constructed Attitude towards Inclusive Education Scale (ATIES). Attitude towards Inclusive Education Scale (Yakwal's ATIES) is a twenty item attitude measurement scale developed by the researcher, preceded by a section that sought personological information from respondents. It had 4-point modified Likert type scale designed to obtain the attitude direction of respondents (n=150) towards inclusive education for learners with visual impairment. The data collected from the field were examined for accuracy of data entry and missing data after which they were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequency count of opinions of teachers regarding inclusive education for learners with visual impairment was obtained using percentage, mean and standard deviation as well as z-scores computed to determine attitude direction.

6. Results:

Standard Deviation Points: Attitude towards Inclusive Education ATIE (n=150) for both Respondents in Plateau state

ATIE (Mean)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Z	SD Units	No. of Respondents	Attitude Direction
57.64	6.420	-3	40 - 45	3 (2%)	Negative
		-2	46 - 51	25 (17%)	Negative
		-1	52 - 57	52 (35%)	Neutral
		+1	58 - 63	40 (27%)	Neutral
		+2	64 - 69	23 (15%)	Positive
		+3	70 - 75	7 (5%)	Positive
Total				150	

Findings of the study revealed the standard deviation points of ATIES which measured the attitude direction of primary school teachers towards inclusive education for learners with visual impairment. Only 30 representing 20% of the total number of respondents (n=150) showed positive attitude towards Inclusive Education, 28 representing 18.67% showed negative attitude while 92 representing 61.33% showed ambivalent attitude towards inclusive Education. This could be attributed to the number of responses classified as neutral which indicate a lack of commitment to the acceptability of inclusive education as a novel development in the education of all learners irrespective of their special needs and challenges. Based on the analysis, the attitude direction of teachers towards inclusive education for learners with visual impairment in Jos south, Plateau State cannot be said to be conclusively positive. The finding is in line with the results reported by Mushoriwa (2001) who revealed that in Zimbabwe, teachers had a negative attitude towards inclusion of learners with visual impairment. It also agreed with the findings by Barnartt and Kabzems (1992) who found that the levels of acceptance of the integration of learners with special educational needs were low. Similarly, Bothma, Gravett and Swart (2000) reported that teachers felt learners with special educational needs would be best served in separate educational facilities like special schools or special classes rather than taking them into the mainstream. However, this finding, even though corroborating some previous reports (Barnartt & Kabzems, 1992; Bothma, Gravett & Swart, 2000 & Mushoriwa,

2001) on the fact that primary school teachers' attitude towards inclusive education for learners with visual impairment were negative, it contradicted the finding by Avramidis and Burden (2000) who revealed that teachers involved in the implementation of inclusive programmes showed more positive attitudes. It however broadly upholds Ozoji's (2008) argument that such results may be interpreted to mean a minimal positive attitude direction towards persons with visual impairment. The findings can therefore be said to agree with the resultant general trend that may be interpreted to mean a negative attitude direction towards inclusive education in Jos south, Plateau State, Nigeria.

7. Implications

Inclusive education is an educational arrangement in which all learners including those with visual impairment are placed together in same class environments for the purpose of instruction. Are primary school teachers adequately disposed towards accepting learners with visual impairment in their classrooms? The study looked at the attitude direction of primary school teachers towards inclusive education for learners with visual impairment. The implication is that attitudes determine how teachers respond to the presence of learners with visual impairment in their classrooms which in turn affects how well they can teach such learners.

8. Recommendation

Attitudes could be positive, negative or ambivalent views of an “attitude object” (person, behavior or event). Thus people form likes and dislikes towards any situation as a result of information or misinformation about such an “attitude object” obtained from other sources. There is need to investigate into pre-requisite skills that are often lacking in teachers thereby leading to having difficulties and unfavourable attitudes towards inclusive education and learners with disabilities. Because primary school teachers’ attitudes towards inclusive education for learners with visual impairment appear to be negative in Plateau state, Nigeria, there is need for a strategy to be put in place to change this for the betterment of the society.

9. Conclusion

Primary school teachers’ attitudes towards inclusive education for learners with visual impairment in Plateau state can be construed as negative. This is because the number of responses classified as neutral could indeed indicate a lack of commitment to the acceptability of inclusive education as a novel development in the education of learners with visual impairment. Based on the outcome of the study, far reaching suggestions has been made to correct what could be regarded as an anomaly in our effort to provide adequate educational services for learners with visual impairment generally.

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