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# TEACHERS' AWARENESS AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PRACTICE AT THE BASIC EDUCATION LEVEL IN KWARA AND ONDO STATES, NIGERIA

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## Abstract

Advocates of inclusive education believe in equal educational opportunity for all categories of learners regardless of their physical challenges. Regular classroom teachers who are the key agents in inclusive practice must be willing to accept and welcome diversity in their classroom for inclusion to succeed. However, many nations of the world, including Nigeria, are yet to conform totally with inclusive practice due to factors that border on psycho-social phenomenon and other constraints. This paper therefore investigates teachers' awareness and attitude towards inclusive education practice at the basic education level in Kwara and Ondo states, Nigeria. The population for the study was all the public basic school teachers in the two states while the sample size consisted of 400 basic school teachers randomly selected from the two states. The instrument used to gather the data was validated by Special Education instructors in University of Ilorin, Ilorin and Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko. The data gathered were analysed with both descriptive and inferential statistics. Among other findings, it was revealed that majority of the respondents lack awareness of what inclusive education means. Those who claimed they had knowledge of the concept have more positive attitudes towards its practice. Furthermore, it was revealed that teachers' professional training influenced their formation of positive attitudes towards inclusion. Therefore, teachers require special training on inclusive education.

**Keywords:** Inclusive education, teachers' awareness and attitudes, basic school

## Introduction

The goal of every nation of the world is universal primary education—every child is mandated to complete primary education. This critical goal lies in the heart of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Education For All (EFA) and other globally agreed development goals agreed upon by every nation in 2000. Great strides have been made in that direction as it is on record that about a billion children are in school globally (UNESCO GMR Report, 2011). Disability has also been included and officially acknowledged in the MDGs. Hence, the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) which came into law in 2008 and the UNESCO Salamanca Statement (1994) recognise the rights of children with disabilities to a high-quality education (in an inclusive setting and without discrimination) alongside their peers.

Advocacy for inclusive education is anchored on the belief that education is a basic human right. Therefore, when the disabled are excluded from school, their human rights are violated. Not only that, they miss out on the lifelong benefits of education such as a better job, more social and economic security, and more opportunities for full participation in society (Cheshire, 2014). Yet, it is on record that on a global level, approximately 106 million children are disabled (UNESCO, 1994). While about a billion children are in school globally, 61 million children are out of school, and a third of this estimate has one form of disabilities or the other which excludes them from schooling. With reference to Nigeria, the UNESCO estimated that 10.5 million children are not regularly attending school and that 5 to 7 million of them are children with disabilities. The projection is that persons with disabilities constitute about 15% of





populations in developing countries and that between 80 to 90% of them stand the risk of never gaining access to basic education in their lifetime.

Inclusive education in the parlance of special educators refers to schools where all children learn together, receive quality education and support through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, use of resources and partnership with their communities (UNESCO, 1994). Also, inclusion takes into consideration the teaching and learning needs of all marginalized and vulnerable children and young people, including street children, girls, children from ethnic minorities, children from economically disadvantaged families, children from nomadic/refugee/displaced families, children with HIV/AIDS as well as the children with disabilities (Corps, Ceralli, and Boisseau, 2012). Essentially, the overall ultimate aim of inclusion is to prepare people for productive lives as full members of society (National Centre on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion, 1995).

The Federal Government of Nigeria, on her part, has designed special education programme to cater for individuals with special needs and this is contained in the National Policy on Education. It is on record that between the 1980s—1990s, a great stride was made in the provision of education for children with special needs. Many schools tagged “special education” schools and some rehabilitation centres were established in different parts of the country and personnel were sponsored to receive professional training in special education so as to attend persons with special needs (Federal Ministry of Education (FME), 1986). In addition, some Non-Government Organizations have been given the license to establish institutions for the cause of children and adults with special needs.

Despite the various initiatives put in place and the different laws to promote and increase the inclusion of children with special needs in mainstream classrooms, many children with special needs are still being discriminated against and are excluded from education in regular classroom setting. Some of the perceived strong reasons are lack of resources, funding from the government, parents' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with services provided, and many other variables that are specific to the particular country implementing inclusion. This study assumes that the variables associated with teachers' awareness and knowledge of the concept and their attitude towards it

in relation to their years of teaching experience in inclusive practice, professional qualification, and class size could converge to constitute major constraints to successful implementation of inclusion.

Scholars have argued that acceptance to include the disabled category in a general class depends on teachers' attitude towards the disabled special needs (Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden, 2000; Fakolade, Adeniyi and Tella, 2009; and Maheshwari & Shapukar, 2015). Regular classroom teachers are believed to be the most significant of all other stakeholders in inclusive education. For instance, Maheshwari & Shapukar (2015) maintain that for teachers to be truly committed to inclusive practice, they must be aware of the special needs of children with disabilities, the modifications required in the class curriculum, and the awareness about the need for extra input. However, studies have shown that most teachers in the regular classrooms are not aware of the concept and that this has apparently led to their negative attitude towards inclusion and this has impacted on some other variables that make its implementation elusive in most nations of the world.

As the studies of Fakolade, et. al. (2009), Ademefun (2013), and Ademokoya (2014) reveal, government policy on inclusive education in southwest states and Kwara state Nigeria respectively is either partially and haphazardly implemented or hardly implemented at all in any of the public primary and secondary schools. So, none of these schools is inclusive and accessible to children with disabilities. For instance, Ademefun's (2013) major finding is the low public awareness of inclusive education particularly among public officials, policy makers, professionals, and parents. He maintains that this has made it difficult to get them interested and committed to inclusive practice. He reveals that Kwara state has total of over 200,000 disabled children, while there are just seven special public and private schools and learning centres for children with disabilities with the combined enrolment capacity of about 2000 pupils. Virtually all of these special needs schools are sited in distant locations and the basic material and educational infrastructures are lacking in most of these schools.

Similarly, Ademokoya (2014) focus on status of special education in southwest Nigeria. One of her major findings is that there were neither schools nor appropriate and adequate education programmes for deaf-blind children in south western Nigeria, including Ondo state.





Gidlund (2014) rightly observes, inclusion is a human right and a political initiative passed down from the United Nations to national and local governments and then to schools. Hence, Gidlund maintains that teachers were not consulted on its practice and implementation strategies yet as he and the researchers (e.g. Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden, 2000; Fakolade, et. al. 2009) lament, teachers are saddled with the responsibility of its implementation regardless of their personal views and often without resources. Indeed as Avramidis, et. al. (2000) reveal, countries where integration has been effected in an ad hoc manner and without due regard to teachers' instructional expertise and other crucial factors to its successful implementation, general educators (teachers) did not develop empathetic understanding for the disabled and were not ready to accept students with special needs.

Maheshwari and Shapukar (2015) focus on awareness and attitudes of primary and secondary school teachers towards inclusive education. Among other findings it was revealed that most teachers lack knowledge and awareness of what the term inclusive education entails though they welcome the new pedagogical practice of inclusion. It was revealed that teachers' knowledge about meaning of disability, types, causes and intervention was essentially based on what they have seen around them than the scientific knowledge of what the concept entails. On the basis of this and other findings the authors submit that it is impossible to make inclusion work when teachers who should be in the front line of its execution do not know the actual meaning of the concept and its principles.

Attitude, a psycho-social phenomenon, has a great influence on learning outcomes (Tunde-Awe, 2014) and it is factor that is widely believed to be significant to successful inclusion practice. It is believed teachers' attitude about inclusion greatly influence the ability of students to adapt to environment as well as their performance in the classroom (Moberg, 2003; and Maheshwari & Sharpuker, 2015). Teachers' negative attitude alienates the disabled children who deserve special support and integration that make learning worthwhile. Teachers' attitude is influenced by variables like their years of teaching experience with inclusive education, their professional qualification, and class size.

Teachers' previous experience with inclusive practice (or their years of teaching experience) have positive

impact on their attitudes towards inclusion (Avramidis, et. al. 2000; Moberg, 2003; and Fakolade et al. 2009). Avramidis et al. reveal that the more teachers' experience with children with disabilities increased, the more their confidence to teach these children also increased. Thus, there seems to be a positive relationship between teachers' experience and their attitude towards inclusion and prior contact (or acquaintance) with the disabled is related to teachers' positive attitude.

Also, professionally qualified teachers tend to have a more favourable attitude towards the inclusion of special need students than their non-professional qualified teachers (Moberg, 2003; and Fakolade et.al. 2009; and Schmidt and Vrhovnik, 2015). Therefore, it is emphasis is placed on teacher training so as to prepare and give them professional expertise that will help them to develop a more positive attitude towards inclusion.

Regarding class size, Schmidt & Vrhovnik (2015) and Oladele, et. al. (2016) hold a consensus of opinion that the number of the disabled or students with special needs who are to be included with normal children should not be many so as prevent too much work overload for teachers, high level of stress, and ultimately make teachers develop negative attitude to inclusion practice. The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013:49-50) stipulates a teacher-pupil ratio of 1:10 in special schools. The study of Schmidt & Vrhovnik (2015) shows that teachers with the lowest number of special needs students in class displayed more positive attitude to inclusion than those with higher number. Most public schools in Nigeria are overcrowded and the facilities are over-stretched while dearth of personnel is a common phenomenon in our education system. Educating persons with disabilities in an overcrowded classroom with normal children will no doubt put them in a disadvantaged position (Oladele, et. al., 2016).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to find out teachers' awareness and attitudes towards inclusive education at the Basic schools in Kwara and Ondo States, Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

1. Are teachers aware of the concept of inclusive education practice in Kwara and Ondo states, Nigeria?





2. What is the attitude of teachers towards inclusive education practice in the two states?
3. Would there be difference in the teachers' attitude towards inclusive education on the basis of their teaching experience?
4. What is the attitude of teachers towards inclusive education on the basis of their professional training?
5. What is teachers' attitude towards inclusive education on the basis of class size?

### Methodology

The study was a descriptive survey research. The population for the study comprised all the basic schools teachers in Kwara and Ondo States, Nigeria. A total of 20 public primary schools were randomly selected from each of the state, making a total of 40 public schools. From each of the 20 schools in each state, 10 teachers were randomly drawn to complete the questionnaire, thus bringing the participants to 400 (200 each from the two states).

A structured questionnaire was used to gather the data for the study. Section A of the instrument contained the demographic data of the participants while section B was made up of twenty questionnaire items on a four-point Likert scale (ranging from 1- Strongly Disagree to 4- Strongly Agree). Participants were required to respond to the questionnaire items on their awareness and attitude towards inclusive practice in their state.

The instrument was validated and adjudged reliable by experts in special education in the Faculty of Education of the University of Ilorin and Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko. A pilot test carried out using the instrument showed a reliability coefficient of 0.75.

The researchers visited the selected schools for the study and established a rapport with the school authorities who gave directives to the teachers who completed the questionnaire. Administration of the questionnaire was done in one week and the data collected were analysed with descriptive and inferential statistics.

### Results

The findings are as summarized in the following tables:

**Table 1:** Frequency Distribution showing Respondents' Socio Demographic Variables

Variable	Options	Frequency	%
Teaching Experience	5 years and below	17	4.3
	6 - 10 years	82	20.5
	11 - 15 years	82	20.5
	16 - 20 years	113	28.3
	21 - 25 years	106	26.5
	Total	400	100.0
Professional Training Received	Not professionally trained	296	74.0
	Professionally trained	104	26.0
	Total	400	100.0
Class Population	1- 10 students	34	8.5
	11 - 20 students	114	28.5
	21 - 30 students	125	31.3
	31 students and above	127	31.8
	Total	400	100.0

**Research Question 1:** Are teachers aware of the concept of inclusive education practice in Kwara and Ondo States, Nigeria?

**Table 2:** Frequency, Percentage and Chi Square summary on statement regarding awareness of the concept of inclusive education practice

Items	Response				
	F	SA	A	D	SD
I am aware of what inclusive education practice means	8	162	196	34	400
	%	2.0	40.5	49.0	8.5
I am aware that the disabled children have rights to education like other children without disabilities in the same school and environment	8	166	198	28	400
	%	2.0	41.5	49.5	7.0
I am aware that the disabled have rights to employment	36	200	144	20	400
	%	9.0	50.0	36.0	5.0
Inclusive education provides a good opportunity for all children to interact	-	150	192	58	400
	%	-	37.5	48.0	14.5
Inclusive education requires using different curriculum to teach the disabled and regular student learners	38	152	168	42	400
	%	9.5	38.0	42.0	10.5
Averaged Total	18	166	180	36	400
	%	4.5	41.5	45	9.0
Chi Square	X <sup>2</sup>	215.760			
	Df	3			
	P	< .05			





test on statement regarding respondents' awareness of the concept of inclusive education practice in Kwara and Ondo States, Nigeria revealed that most of the respondents are not aware of what inclusive education practice means. This was such that 57.5% did not support the statement, while 42.5% did. Majority of the respondents (56.5%) negated the statement that said they are aware that the disabled children have rights to education like other children without disabilities in the same school and environment, while 43.5% affirmed they are aware.

Although, most of the respondents (59%) agreed that they are aware that the disabled have rights to employment, with 41% negating, majority still negated the statement that said inclusive education provides a good opportunity for all children to interact. This was such that 62.5% of the respondents did not support the statement, while 37.5% agreed. Similarly, 52.5% of the respondents negated the statement that inclusive education requires using different curriculum to teach the disabled and regular student learners, while 47.5% supported the statement. In conclusion, the average total revealed that 54% of the respondents negated the statements with the opinion that teachers have adequate awareness of the concept of inclusive education practice, while 46% supported the statement. With a p value less than 0.05, the chi square result confirmed the observed variation, thus teachers are not aware of the concept of inclusive education practice in Kwara and Ondo States, Nigeria ( $X^2=215.760$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

This findings agrees with the studies of Gidlund (2014) and Maheshwari and Shapukar (2015) that most teachers lack knowledge and awareness of what the term inclusive education entails though they supported the new pedagogical practice of inclusion. But teachers' need to be carried along for inclusion to succeed.

**Research Question 2:** What is the attitude of teachers towards inclusive education practice in the two States?

**Table 3:** Frequency, Percentage and Chi Square summary on statement regarding teachers' attitude towards inclusive education practice

		Response				Total
		SA	A	D	SD	
Disabled children should be taught in special schools	F	134	166	76	24	400
	%	33.5	41.5	19.0	6.0	100.0
During teaching, students with learning difficulties will burden the teachers unnecessarily	F	46	240	84	30	400
	%	11.5	60.0	21.0	7.5	100.0
Teachers are bound to react angrily when students with disabilities do not understand what is been taught when other have done.	F	104	160	108	28	400
	%	26.0	40.0	27.0	7.0	100.0
I would not like disabled students to be admitted in my class in a regular school	F	130	102	148	20	400
	%	32.5	25.5	37.0	5.0	100.0
Teachers do separate students with disability in a regular class and even during sport activities	F	142	154	76	28	400
	%	35.5	38.5	19.0	7.0	100.0
Averaged Total	F	111	165	98	26	400
	%	27.8	41.2	24.5	6.5	100.0
Chi Square	$X^2$			98.260		
	df			3		
	P			< .05		

The test on statements regarding general attitude towards inclusive education practice in Kwara and Ondo States revealed that 75% of the respondents supported the statement that the disabled should be taught in special schools, while 25% did not support. Similarly, 71.5% of the respondents affirmed that the disabled will bother the teachers unnecessarily during teaching while 28.5% felt otherwise. Most of the respondents (66%) also affirmed that teachers are bound to react angrily when students with disabilities do not understand what is being taught when other normal children do. But 34% disagreed. This implies that teachers' attitude to inclusion is negative. The result in Table 3 also indicated that 58% of the respondents agreed that they would not like disabled students to be admitted in their class in a regular school, while 42% felt otherwise. Lastly, 74% of the respondents agreed to the statement that the disabled students should be not be kept in regular classroom with normal children and even during sport activities, while 26% felt otherwise.

The summary total revealed that 69% of the respondents in the two states have negative attitude towards inclusive education practice, while only 31% have positive attitude. With a p value that was less than 0.05, the chi square result confirmed the





observed variation. Thus, it could be concluded that most teachers have negative attitude towards the concept of inclusive education practice in Kwara and Ondo States, Nigeria ( $X^2=98.260$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

This finding is in agreement with scholars like Avramidis, et. al (2000), Fakolade, et. al., (2009); and Maheshwari & Shapukar (2015) who maintain that teachers' acceptance to include the disabled category

in a general class depends on their attitude. Disregard for teachers' significance in inclusive practice largely account for their lack of empathy for the disabled and general negative attitude to the practice in most nations of the world.

**Research Question 3:** What is the attitude of teachers towards inclusive education on the basis of their teaching experience?

**Table 4:** Frequency, Percentage and Chi Square summary on statement regarding teachers' attitude towards inclusive education on the basis of their teaching experience

Items	Teaching Experience		Response				Total
			SA	A	D	SD	
There is no benefit in engaging in inclusive learning for students with disabilities in schools	5 years and below	F	16	1	-	-	114
		%	94.1	5.9	-	-	28.5
	6 - 10 years	F	38	39	3	2	50
		%	46.3	47.6	3.7	2.4	12.5
	11 - 15 years	F	27	51	2	2	89
		%	32.9	62.2	2.4	2.4	22.2
	16 - 20 years	F	12	57	33	11	119
		%	10.6	50.4	29.2	9.7	29.8
	21 - 25 years	F	18	17	60	11	28
		%	17	16	56.6	10.4	7.0
	Total	F	111	165	98	26	400
		%	27.8	41.2	24.5	6.5	100.0
Chi Square		$X^2$		177.826			
		Df		12			
		P		< .05			

Table 55 showed the results of teachers' attitude towards inclusive education on the bases of their teaching experience. It was observed that 28.5% of the total respondents were having below 6 years of experience and most of them (94.1%) strongly agree to the opinion that there is no relevance in engaging in inclusive learning for students with disabilities in schools, while the remaining 5.9% agreed. From the groupings of teachers with teaching experience ranging between 6 and 10, it was observed that majority of them (93.9%) affirmed the view that there is no relevance in engaging in inclusive learning for students with disabilities in schools, while just 6.1% felt otherwise. This implied that they had a negative attitude towards inclusive education. The result also indicated that majority of the respondents within teaching experience ranging between 11 and 15 years (95.1%) were in support of the statement, thus indicating a negative attitude, while 4.9% felt otherwise. The responses from respondents with teaching experience ranging between 16 and 20 years showed that 61% supported the statement, while 39% did not. This implied that 39% of them had positive

attitude towards inclusive experience. Lastly on this, the result showed that majority of the responding teachers (67%) with 21 to 25 years of teaching experience negated the statement, while 33% supported the statement. This implied that majority of the responding teachers with teaching experience ranging between 21 and 25 years were having positive attitude towards inclusive education. These findings revealed that the higher the teaching experiences of teachers in their works, the more positive their attitude towards inclusive education, although, on a general view, majority still portray negative attitude towards it.

The chi square result revealed a calculated value with  $p$  less than 0.05, this implied that there is significant difference among teachers' attitude towards inclusive education based on their teaching experience. This proved that the observed variations that were explained above were significant ( $X^2=177.826$ ,  $df=12$ ,  $p < .05$ ).





this as research (e.g. Avramidis, et. al. 2000; Fakolade et al. 2009; and Boer, Pijl & Minnaert, 2016) revealed, teachers' years of teaching experience have positive impact on their attitudes towards inclusion. The more years teachers have with

children with disabilities, the more their confidence to teach them increased.

**Research Question 4:** What is the attitude of teachers towards inclusive education on the basis of their professional training?

**Table 5:** Frequency, Percentage and Chi Square summary on statements regarding attitude towards inclusive education on the basis of professional training received

Items	Professional Training		Response				Total
			SA	A	D	SD	
There is no benefit in engaging in inclusive learning for students with disabilities in schools	Do not have professional training	F	98	153	39	6	296
		%	33.1	51.7	13.2	2.0	74.0
	Had professional training	F	13	12	59	20	104
		%	12.5	11.5	56.7	19.2	26.0
	Total	F	111	165	98	26	400
		%	27.8	41.2	24.5	6.5	100.0
Chi Square		X <sup>2</sup>		136.488			
		Df		3			
		P		< .05			

The test on attitude of teachers towards inclusive education on the basis of professional training received revealed that from the 296 responding teachers that do not have professional training, 84.8% were in support of the statement that there is no relevance in engaging in inclusive learning for students with disabilities in schools, while 15.2% felt otherwise. This implied that most of them have a negative attitude towards inclusive education. From the 104 respondent teachers that had professional training, only 13% supported the statement, while 87% negated the statement. This implied that majority of the responding teachers that had professional training had positive attitude towards inclusive education.

With a p value that was less than 0.05, the chi square result confirmed the observed variation between the attitude of teachers with professional experience and those without ( $X^2=136.488$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p < .05$ ). It could therefore be concluded that teachers who have professional experience have positive attitude towards the concept of inclusive education practice in Kwara and Ondo States, Nigeria. This finding is in consonance with Moberg (2003) and Fakolade et.al. (2009) that professional expertise is required for successful inclusive practice.

**Research Question 5:** What is the attitude of teachers towards inclusive education on the basis of class size?

**Table 6:** Frequency, Percentage and Chi Square summary on statement regarding attitude towards inclusive education on the basis of class size

Items	Class Size		Response				Total
			SA	A	D	SD	
There is no benefit in engaging in inclusive learning for students with disabilities in schools	1- 10 students	F	2	9	9	14	34
		%	5.9	26.5	26.5	41.2	8.5
	11 - 20 students	F	1	24	83	6	114
		%	0.9	21.1	72.8	5.2	28.5
	21 - 30 students	F	38	82	4	1	125
		%	30.4	65.6	3.2	0.8	31.2
	31 students and above	F	70	50	2	5	127
		%	55.1	39.4	1.6	3.9	31.8
	Total	F	111	165	98	26	400
		%	27.8	41.2	24.5	6.5	100.0
Chi Square		X <sup>2</sup>		330.996			
		Df		9			
		P		< .05			





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