

## Factors Influencing the Implementation of Inclusive Education Policy in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigated the factors influencing the implementation of Inclusive Education policy in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The population of this study was 3629 teachers from public secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State. Data was collected using a questionnaire titled Teachers' Attitude Toward the Implementation of Inclusive Education. A sample of size of 400 teachers was drawn from the population using the Taro Yamane formula. Respondents were then selected from public senior secondary schools in Rivers State using the simple random sampling technique. The instrument was subjected to face and content validity while test-retest was used to measure its reliability. The result of the tests was correlated using Pearson Product Moment, Correlation Co-efficient. The reliability co-efficient of 0.76 was established. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics of Mean and Standard Deviation. From the results, it was observed that none of the schools has ramps on doorways, wheel chairs, adapted toilets, adapted desk and hearing aids, which implies that provisions have not been made for physically challenged students in Rivers State. The results indicated that the implementation of inclusive education was hampered by various issues such as teacher attitudes, lack of teacher training, inadequate infrastructural and material resources, inappropriate policy development, as well as curriculum issues. It was recommended among others, that, government should provide infrastructural facilities and funds for effective implementation of inclusive education at the Basic level of education.*

**Keywords:** Inclusive education, Policy implementation, Public secondary schools.

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### INTRODUCTION

Education is the process through which society passes on skills, knowledge and beliefs from generation to generation. It may also be characterized as acquiring desirable information and abilities as well as developing favourable attitudes about life. It is essential in both an individual's life and the life of society. Inclusive education is a concept that guarantees education is open to all citizens, regardless of their socioeconomic background (Nel, *et al.*, 2011). According to UNESCO, inclusion is "a dynamic strategy to constructively reacting to students' variety and recognising individual differences not as problems but as possibilities for enhancing learning." It also entails embracing a comprehensive vision of education for all by addressing the diverse needs of learners, especially those at risk of marginalisation and exclusion (UNESCO. 2005). Inclusive education represents the belief that all learners can learn and should have equal access to education. This belief is echoed in the 1993 United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Chances for People with Disabilities and the 1994 Salamanca Framework for Action and Statement on Special Needs Education, which reaffirms all Nations

commitment to Education for All. Most developed and developing nations' efforts to establish inclusive education have resulted in both achievements and failures in various circumstances.

To avoid discrimination in education under human rights legislation, inclusive education has been pushed globally (Gallagher, 2013). According to the United States Department of Education (2005), approximately 93% of students with disabilities are mainstreamed in schools, with a large proportion of them participating in inclusive classes rather than isolated institutions or programmes. Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 was a public law that campaigned for children's participation in the educational system. According to Block and Obrusnikora (2017), the law also emphasised results responsibility, enhanced parental participation, and the utilisation of desired learning techniques and resources. The legislation was once known as the Act on Education for All Handicapped Children when it was passed in 1975. In 1990, a new version, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), pioneered an inclusive movement that said that no kid should be placed in a special classroom or be separated. The World Health Organization (WHO) believes that 10% of each population is impaired and in need of assistance. Furthermore, roughly 85% of the world's children with disabilities under the age of 15 reside in poor nations. Every kid has distinct qualities, interests, talents, and learning requirements, and those with special needs must have access to mainstream schools that can satisfy those needs through a child-centred pedagogy. The idea behind inclusive education is that all children and young people, regardless of their cultural, socioeconomic, or educational backgrounds, should have equal learning opportunities in all types of institutions (UNESCO, 2009; Eunice, Nyangia & Orodho, 2015). UNESCO highlights the importance of education systems, schools, and teachers focusing on creating inclusive environments that promote the ideals of respect and understanding of cultural, social, and individual variety. In essence, inclusive education is a method of investigating ways to adapt education institutions and other learning settings to react to the variety of learners.

At the heart of inclusive education systems is the removal of obstacles to participation in learning for all learners (Eunice, Nyangia & Orodho, 2015). Focusing on inclusive education may help guide policy and strategy creation that addresses the causes and effects of prejudice, inequality, and exclusion. The Nigerian constitution provides for appropriate education for all children. Since the number of children with special needs is around 0.42%, while that of their ordinary counterparts is about 67.05%, inclusion has not been achieved. Inclusion of all students in mainstream schools is part of a global agenda that advocates for complete inclusion of all students with learning difficulties in all sectors of society (Eunice, Nyangia & Orodho, 2015).

Inclusive education is an approach that ensures the presence, participation and achievement of all students in education. This can take place in conventional educational institutions as well as in less conventional learning environments, such as extracurricular groups and humanitarian camps. It often involves working to change the structures, systems, policies, practises, and cultures of schools and other institutions responsible for education, so that they can respond to the diversity of students in their locality. This is

done so that schools and other educational institutions can better serve all of their students (Cornelius-Ukpepi & Opuwari, 2019). Inclusion places an emphasis on providing opportunities for equal participation, while also providing, when necessary, options for specialised help and facilities, as well as room for differentiation within a standard educational structure (Sightsavers, 2011). The idea of inclusive education encompasses all students, however how exactly this should be put into practise can vary greatly depending on the circumstances. For instance, despite the fact that it includes children who are excluded due to language, gender, ethnicity, disability, and other characteristics, it may choose to narrow its attention just on children who have disabilities. Children, on the other hand, may be impacted by more than one problem at the same time. A child with a disability may also speak the language of an ethnic minority group, or she may be a refugee; in addition, if the child is a girl, her family and society may not place a high priority on her receiving an education. According to Udo (2012), making schools more welcoming for boys and girls with special needs improves the educational experience for all students, even those who are at risk of being excluded due to the simultaneous existence of more than one problem.

According to UNESCO (2011), Inclusion is the recognition of the right to education and its provision in non-discriminatory ways, a common vision which covers all people, a belief that schools and other places of learning have a responsibility to educate all children (and adults) in line with human rights principles, continuous process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners regardless of factors such as disability, gender, age, ethnicity, language, HIV status, geographical location and sexuality, and recognizing that all people can learn. The concept of inclusive education refers to the practise of fully integrating students both with and without special needs into the same classrooms and schools, giving these students equal access to the same educational opportunities as their typically developing peers. According to Ahmad (2010), inclusive education is defined as the education of all children and young people with and without disabilities or difficulties in learning together in ordinary pre-primary schools, colleges, and universities with appropriate network support. In other words, inclusive education is the education of all children and young people. According to Okwudire and Okechukwu (2018), inclusive education is characterised by a gradual rise in the engagement of students and a decrease in the degree to which they are excluded from the communities, cultures, and curricula of their respective local schools. The authors went on to add that with inclusive education, all kids in a school, regardless of their strengths or limitations in any area, become a part of the community of the school, regardless of whether or not they get special education services. It is a place where children are recognised as equal members of the classroom and are not excluded from the group in any way. According to Ibok (2015), inclusive education is defined as the practise of ensuring that all students, including those who have significant disabilities, are provided with equal opportunities to receive effective educational services, along with the necessary supplementary aids and support services, in classrooms that are appropriate for their ages. The ultimate goal of inclusive education is to prepare students for lives in which they are contributing members of society. It ensures that students in Nigeria can

access educational opportunities of the same calibre, regardless of their level of schooling. The process of increasing the capacity of the educational system in any nation to reach out to various learners for the sake of national development is what we mean when we talk about inclusive education. The idea that students with special needs have a right to benefit from a full school experience alongside their peers who do not have disabilities and receive general education is the foundation of inclusion. Pupils with special needs have the right to benefit from a full school experience with the necessary modifications and supports.

In 1993, Nigeria issued decree No. 96 to provide inclusive education with clear and comprehensive legal protection and security backing (FRN, 2013). Despite this decree's best efforts, inclusive education was not successfully implemented in Nigeria due to policies implemented by the government and cultural restrictions. This is a significant challenge for the majority of Nigeria's school administrators, both those working in special education and those in other fields. At first, it was believed that there was already a concept of inclusive education in place in the Nigerian educational system. In spite of cultural, socioeconomic, and political barriers, inclusive education has made remarkable strides in the past ten years, which is a cause for celebration (Eskay, 2009). The primary obstacle that educational systems must overcome all across the world is the implementation of inclusive education (Ainscow, 2014). In certain poor nations, such as Nigeria, inclusive education is considered of as a strategy to serve students with disabilities inside general school settings. This is the case in Nigeria. As a direct consequence of this, the National Policy on Education in Nigeria stipulates that Special Education is to be established as a formalised type of exceptional educational training to be provided to people of any age who have special educational requirements, including children and adults (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2013). In spite of this, inclusive education is considered "as a reform that encourages and welcomes diversity amongst all learners" in worldwide practise, and this goes against the grain of that practise (UNESCO, 2011).

This study was based on the classical liberal theory of equal opportunities propounded by Sherman and Wood, (1982). The major gist of the theoretical underpinning is that there is need to aspire for equal opportunities in education for all eligible learners. This theory contends that each individual is born with a given amount of capacity. According to this theory, educational systems should be designed with a view to removing barriers of any nature for example, barriers based on socio-economic factors, socio-cultural factors, geographical factors, school-based factors which prevent learners who have a learning disability to take advantage of their inborn talents since disability is not inability. The education offered to such groups of learners will accelerate them to social promotion since education is a great equalizer which enhances life chances of the children with special needs (Sherman and wood, 1982).The theory demands that opportunities be made available for individuals to go through all levels of education (primary, secondary and tertiary) to which access will not be determined by the disability of the learners but on the basis of individuals capability. In this way, education would at least provide equality of economic opportunities where all classes, races and gender could

benefit economically from excellent academic performance. The theory further states that social mobility will be promoted by equal opportunity for all citizens to education. Many economists have supported the policy on free primary education (FPE), started by the government in 2003 which advocates for a radical reform of the schools in terms of curriculum, assessment, pedagogy and groupings of pupils. This policy makes education free and compulsory for all in trying to meet the millennium development goals (MDGs) by 2015. Through acquiring quality education by all children of school-going age on an equitable basis and the children's right to education. The local communities, parent groups, associations of disabled persons, churches and community leaders have tirelessly worked for the inclusion of disabled children into local schools in partnership with the government and professionals.

Evidence from research all around the world shows that investing in human capital via formal education is a critical driver of economic growth. Education can help to minimise social and economic inequality since it is a tremendous equaliser if all pupils have equal access to it. Children with learning problems whose parents do not send them to school, leaving them as outcasts in society and living in extreme poverty. The goal of Universal Basic Education (UBE) is to guarantee that all children who are eligible for primary school have the chance to enrol and stay in school in order to study and receive a quality basic education. Inclusion is a process of reforming and reorganising the school as a whole to ensure that all pupils/students have access to the school's full range of educational and social possibilities. This comprises the curriculum presented, as well as the testing, recording, and reporting of students' achievements. The inclusive education agenda must be concerned with addressing barriers to participation in education that students may encounter.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Nigeria has adopted inclusive education as one of the strategies for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2015. The majority of learners with disabilities in Nigeria, particularly in Rivers State, chose special schools for their education rather than ordinary secondary schools. Despite efforts by national and international organisations to guarantee that inclusive education policies are adopted, there are still learners in many sections of the state who are educated in segregated, special schools (FRN, 2014). In line with worldwide trends, the Ministry of Education created and is now implementing the Education Sector Policy on Inclusive Education for Nigeria (FRN, 2014). However, there is no indication that the Ministry of Education's initiatives on inclusive education mentioned in these policy documents were properly implemented. Furthermore, no evidence of any official evaluation of inclusive education practises in Port Harcourt Metropolis has been found. Furthermore, it is unknown whether teachers in this state support inclusive education or not, or whether the administration has addressed the needs of all learners in the state. This lack of information can make it difficult to conduct inclusive education effectively. Because teachers are the primary implementers of inclusive education, the researchers felt it was critical to explore secondary school teachers' perspectives on some of the elements influencing the successful implementation of inclusive education practises in

Rivers State public schools. This study was therefore designed to investigate the variables impacting the implementation of inclusive education policy in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

### **Aim and Objectives**

The purpose of the study is to investigate the factors influencing the implementation of inclusive education policy in public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State. In specific terms the study was intended to find out;

1. Teachers' attitude toward the implementation of inclusive education policy in public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State.
2. Infrastructural facilities available for the implementation of inclusive education policy in public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study;

1. What is the attitude of Teachers toward the implementation of inclusive education policy in public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State?
2. What are the infrastructural facilities available for the implementation of inclusive education policy in public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State?

### **Hypothesis**

The hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant difference in the attitude of male and female teachers toward the implementation of inclusive education policy in public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The population of the study consisted of all 3629 teachers in public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State. A sample of size of 400 teachers was drawn from the population using the Taro Yamane formula. Respondents were then selected from public senior secondary schools in Rivers State using the simple random sampling technique. The instruments used for this study was a questionnaire titled: Teachers Attitude Toward the Implementation of Inclusive Education (TAIIEQ) with the 4-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) and an observational checklist which was done by the researcher. The instrument was subjected to face and content validity while test-retest was used to measure its reliability. The result of the tests was corrected using Pearson Product Moment, Correlation Co-efficient. The reliability co-efficient of 0.76 was established. The instrument was administered directly by the researchers and the data collected were subjected to Mean, Standard Deviation and the null hypothesis was tested using the z-test at 0.05 level of significance. A criterion mean of 2.5 was adopted as decision rule to answer the Research questions. The simple percentage was used to answer the checklist items.

## RESULTS

### Research Question 1

What is the attitude of Teachers toward the implementation of inclusive education policy in public senior secondary schools Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State?

**Table 1**

*Mean Rating of Respondents on Teachers' Attitude Toward the Implementation of Inclusive Education Policy in Public Senior Secondary Schools Port Harcourt Metropolis*

S/N	items	SA	A	D	SD	N	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Large classes and work load on teacher do not allow for inclusive education in schools	42	199	110	49	400	2.59	0.84	Agreed
2	Teachers' negative attitudes toward children with special need are the barrier to the implementation of inclusive education	86	54	34	226	400	2.00	1.25	Disagreed
3	Including learners with disabilities will not affect the performance of other non-disabled learners	81	68	64	187	400	2.11	1.20	Disagree
4	Learners with disabilities should be put in special schools	234	97	43	26	400	3.35	0.91	Agreed
5	Pre-service teacher training adequately equips teachers to deal with diverse educational needs from inclusive education.	94	43	7	256	400	1.94	1.30	Disagree
6	Learners with disabilities take longer time to understand instructions	23	199	163	15	400	2.58	0.66	Agreed
7	Learners with disabilities do not interact freely with learners without disabilities	92	49	9	250	400	1.96	1.29	Disagree
8	Learners with severe disabilities will not cope in a regular school	87	217	86	10	400	2.95	0.73	Agreed
<b>Grand Mean</b>							<b>2.43</b>		<b>Disagreed</b>

From Table 1, respondents generally agreed to items 1, 4, 6 and 8, while they disagreed with items 2, 3, 5 and 7 that teachers' negative attitudes toward children with special need are the barrier to the implementation of inclusive education, including learners with disabilities will not affect the performance of other non-disabled learners, pre-service teacher training adequately equips teachers to deal with diverse educational needs from inclusive education and that Learners with disabilities do not interact freely with learners without disabilities. A Grand mean of 2.43 was obtained, this implies that teachers' has a negative attitude toward the implementation of inclusive education policy in public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.

### Research Question 2

What are the infrastructural facilities available for the implementation of inclusive education policy in public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis?

**Table 2**

*Infrastructural Facilities Available for the Implementation of Inclusive Education Policy in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis*

S/N	Infrastructures for Inclusive Education	No of Sampled Schools in Obio Akpor (N=21)				No of Sampled Schools in Port Harcourt (N=17)			
		AV	%	NAV	%	AV	%	NAV	%
1	Spacious classrooms	21	100.0%	0	0.0%	17	100.0%	0	0.0%
2	Ramps on doorways	0	0.0%	21	100.0%	0	0.0%	14	100.0%
3	Wheel chairs	0	0.0%	21	100.0%	0	0.0%	17	100.0%
4	Adapted Toilets	0	0.0%	21	100.0%	0	0.0%	17	100.0%
5	Adaptive desks	0	0.0%	21	100.0%	0	0.0%	17	100.0%
6	Walkers/Crutches	7	33.3%	14	66.7%	4	23.5%	13	76.5%
7	Hearing aids	0	0.0%	21	100.0%	0	0.0%	17	100.0%
	Average Percentage		<b>19.0%</b>		<b>81.0%</b>		<b>17.6%</b>		<b>82.4%</b>

Key: AV – Available, NAV – Not Available.

Table 2 assessed the availability of infrastructural facility for the implementation of inclusive education in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State using the observation Checklist. Judging from the percentage scores in specific items, the result showed that in item no. 1, 38(100%) of the observed schools in Port Harcourt metropolis had Spacious classrooms. Also, responses to items 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7 show that none of the visited schools has Ramps on doorways, Wheel chairs, Adapted Toilets, Adapted desk and hearing aids, this implies that provision are not been made for physically challenge students in Rivers State. This posed a great challenge for the adoption of inclusive education in the public school in the state

**Hypothesis**

There is no significant difference in the attitude of male and female Teachers toward the implementation of inclusive education policy in public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis, River State.

**Table 3**

*z-Test of Difference Between the Attitude of Male and Female Teachers Toward the Implementation of Inclusive Education Policy in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis.*

Respondents	N	X	SD	df	z-cal	z-crit	Level of Significance	Decision
Male	171	2.40	1.24	398	0.34	1.96	0.05	Accepted
Female	229	2.37	1.34					

Result on test of the Hypothesis shows that the z-calculated value of 0.34 is less than the z-critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance and degree of freedom of 398. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, there is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female teachers’ on their attitude toward the implementation of inclusive education policy in public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis, River State.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The findings of this study show that teachers have a negative attitude toward the implementation of inclusive education policy in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. This finding is in line with that of Wanjohi (2010) who reported that there are particular challenges about negative attitudes and behaviour, on the part of both educators and parents, in relation to the skills of disabled children to learn for proper implementation of the inclusive education policy. He concluded that these challenges can be conquered by raising consciousness of human rights in communities and publicizing optimistic examples of the physically challenge children succeeding in inclusive education and in life beyond school as a result. Other possible methods include supporting disabled children to express their aspirations and participate in planning processes, as well as promoting action research and critical pedagogy amongst teachers.

The finding of the study also revealed that public schools in Rivers State have spacious classrooms. It was also observed that none of the visited schools has Ramps on doorways, Wheel chairs, Adapted Toilets, Adapted desk and swing, this implies that provision are not been made for physically challenge students in Rivers State. Thus posed a great challenge for the adaption of inclusive education in the public school in Rivers state. This finding agrees with that of Salihu and Jamil (2015) who stated that provision of infrastructural facilities is one of the significant determinants in the implementation of inclusive education. According to Salihu and Jamil (2015) one of the ways to assess the effectiveness of public school is to look at the availability of infrastructures needed for it implementation. The authors noted that infrastructure such as classroom, books, and other learning materials are insufficient to meet the goals of the programme, and to ensure access by everyone. The implementation of the inclusive education at the basic education level is confronted with lack of infrastructural facilities like Braille, ramps, environment friendly walk ways for the blind and those on wheel chairs.

## **CONCLUSION**

From the results, it was concluded that there is negative attitudes from the teachers and inadequate physical resources to assist in the implementation of inclusive education. This has led to the physically challenge learners being ignored in mainstream classrooms. It is also notable that teachers and school heads could have a negative attitude towards children with special needs, which could inhibit the effective implementation of inclusive education. The learning environment in the public primary and secondary schools was not learner-friendly and could not guarantee quality learning, especially for children with physical impairments.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the foregoing, the following recommendations are made.

1. Adequate infrastructure and facilities should be provided even to the very grassroots by the government to ensure coverage.
2. Teachers at all level should be trained by the ministry of education on inclusive education in order to change their attitude toward children with special need meaningfully educating them for the society.

3. A special directorate of inclusive education should be created in federal and state ministries of education charged with the responsibilities of planning, strategizing, implementing, and monitoring of inclusive education activities in Nigerian schools by the federal government.

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