

ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONISTS' PERCEPTION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION STATEMENT AND PRACTICE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Certain relevant factors remain crucial to effective implementation of inclusive education programme. Of definite mention is the understanding, and the way and manner the programme is implemented in any given developing nation. This study investigated Educationists' perception of inclusive education statement and practice in Nigeria. 50 Education Experts/Specialists were randomly selected and served as sample of study. Four research questions were stated for investigation. The Inclusive Education Statement Practice Measurement Profile (IESPMP) was used as instrument for data collection. The mean score statistics tool was used for data analysis. Results indicate low perception on the four measurement traits being assessed. The findings possess obvious implication for inclusive education programmes and services.

Introduction

The thrust of inclusive education lies in the fact that it is for everybody and is everybody's business. This carries serious implication on pronouncements and implementation of the programme in various countries of the world. The way and manner inclusive education is perceived articulated and interpreted especially in developing countries should be of concerned at this point. Will (1986) observes that inclusive education involves a major focus for change in special education which should be to include learners with identified disabilities in general education. Will argues that a major step toward inclusion is to have building level administrators empowered to assemble appropriate professionals and other resources for delivery effective, coordinated, comprehensive services for all students based on individual education needs rather than eligibility for special education programmes.

Some of the challenging issues in inclusive education include what is understood and carried out under the current educational arrangement. Under the Nigerian system of education, for example, articulation of the new developments in ways of thinking, in policy and in law with regard to inclusive education include: The UN convention on the rights of the child (1989), which sets out children's rights in respect of freedom from discrimination and in the representation of their wishes and views; the UNESCO Salamanca Statement (1994), which calls on all governments to give the highest priority to inclusive education; and the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities

(2006), which calls on all states and parties to ensure an inclusive education system at all levels.

For schools in Nigeria, the national requirement that students be educated in the least restrictive environment that is reasonable encourages the implementation of inclusion for all students. What is obvious here is the awareness of the national policies and pronouncements regarding inclusive education statement and practice in Nigeria, just as it remains imperative to ascertain the opinion of Experts in this regard.

Statement of the Problem

Relevant issues warrant concern on the perception of inclusive education statement and practice in Nigeria: What information is on the opinion of Experts concerning pronouncements, practice and implementation of inclusive education programme in the country: What does expert opinion hold on inclusive education statement and practice as such reflect? Inclusive education, the nation's commitment to the programme, and indicators of the programme in the nation's education system, communities and schools as well as in teaching and learning? To what extent can the findings be interpreted in terms of the status of inclusion and implications for practice and implementation of the programme?

Purpose of Study

The main purpose of this study is to obtain an evaluation of Educationists' perception of inclusive education statement and practices in Nigeria. Specifically the study will determine Educationists' perception status on:

1. Inclusive education in the nation's education system.
2. The nation's commitment to inclusive education.
3. Indicators of inclusive education in the nation's education system, communities and schools.
4. Indicators of inclusive education in teaching and learning.

It is expected that findings of the study on Educationists' perception of inclusive education statement and practice will throw light on the challenges in delivering inclusive education programmes in Nigeria and to a great extent other developing countries including those of West and Central African Sub-Region.

Research Questions

Four research questions were stated for the study.

1. What is the level of Educationists' perception on inclusive education in the nation's education system?
2. Of what level is their perception on the nation's commitment to inclusive education?
3. What is the status of Educationists' perception on indicators of inclusive education in the nation's educational system, communities and schools?

4. Of what status is their perception on indicators of inclusive education in teaching and learning?

Method

Research Design

The research design adopted for this study was descriptive survey. The design typically constitutes a way of obtaining exact facts and figures about Educationists' perception of inclusive education statement and practice as this should provide reasonable insight into the challenges and prospects of the programme.

Population and Sample of Study

The population of the study comprised 250 educationists that constitute members of the National Centre for Exceptional Children (NCEC) in Nigeria. Most of these are Directors and Heads of Education units from both the Federal and State Ministries of Education, Special Education Centres/Clinics including Professionals and Academics from tertiary institutions like Universities, Colleges of Education and Polytechnics. Qualifications of such members range from first degree, master degree and Ph.D and some are Professors of Education and Special Education respectively. A simple random sampling technique was used to select 50 respondents from the population.

Instrument for Data Collection

Inclusive Education Statement Practice Measurement Profile (IESPMP) a Researcher constructed instrument was used for data collection. The instrument was based on statement standard, practice, and commitment to inclusive education programmes and services.

The instrument has four major sections covering the main thrust of which Educationists' perception were determined; such include sections (A) Inclusive education in the nation's education system ; (B) The nation's commitment to inclusive education; (C) Indicators of inclusive education in the nation's education system, communities and schools; (D) Indicators of inclusive education in teaching and learning. The four outlined areas constitute the four measurement traits which inform the characteristics that make up the items of the instrument. The instrument was designed on a five point Likert response type assigned numerical values as: 5 Very good evidence, 4 Good evidence, 3 Little evidence, 2 Very little evidence and 1 No evidence at all. The respondents were required to tick in the response that satisfies their level of Educationists' perception to the items.

Validity and Reliability

The study instrument was adopted as an informal, Researcher constructed measurement profile. The four selected measurement traits that informed the items were considered applicable and relevant for Experts' opinion on inclusive education statement and practice. The reliability level of the instrument was established, a coefficient value of

0.82 was obtained. This confirmed the instrument was highly reliable and acceptable for use in the study.

Method of Data Analysis

Direct delivery and recovery system was adopted in the administration of the study instrument. 50 questionnaires were specifically administered to the respondents of which all were completed and returned, 100%.

Analysis of Data

The four research questions were answered through the use of mean score. The mean rating above 3 was regarded as adequate while the rating below it was taken as low.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the level of Educationalists' perception on inclusive education in the nation's education system?

Table 1: Mean Scores on Responses to Items for Perception on inclusive Education in the Nation's Education System.

S/No	Items	5	4	3	2	1	Mean
<i>Inclusive education in Education Nigeria:</i>							
1	<i>Fosters a learning community that questions disadvantage and challenged social injustice</i>	10	20	45	56	-	2.61
2	<i>Maximizes the educational and social outcomes of all students through the identification and reduction of barriers to learning, especially for those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion.</i>	10	32	30	40	10	2.44
3	<i>Ensures all students understand and value diversity so that they have the knowledge and skills for positive participation in a just equitable and democratize global sociality.</i>	10	24	30	40	12	2.32

Table 1: Shows that no response is up to or above the mean score of 3. All the scores are below the stated mean score indicating low perception on inclusive education in the nation's education system.

Research Question 2: Of what level is their perception on the nation's commitment to inclusive education?

Table 2: Mean Scores on Responses to Items for Perception on the Nation’s Commitment to Inclusive Education.

<i>S/No</i>		<i>5</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>Mean</i>
<i>4</i>	<i>The Nation’s Commitment to Inclusive Education: Responds optimistically and constructively to the needs of educationally disadvantaged/marginalized students.</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>2.4</i>
<i>5</i>	<i>Uses diversity as a rich resource for building a connected and intellectually challenging curriculum in the classroom.</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>2.32</i>
<i>6</i>	<i>Ensures that students, teachers and community members from diverse groups feel safe and free from discrimination, bias and harassment.</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>2.44</i>
<i>7</i>	<i>Respects student’s voice and ensures that all students learn through democratic processes.</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>2.65</i>
<i>8</i>	<i>Promotes locally negotiated responses to students, family and community needs through effective community engagement processes and gross- agency collaboration.</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>2.6</i>
<i>9</i>	<i>Ensures that all National Education Policies and Initiatives recognize the centrality of inclusive education practices to quality education.</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>2.4</i>

Table 2 shows all the score below the mean score of 3. No score is up to or above the stated mean score which indicates low perception on the nation’s commitment to inclusive education.

Research Question 3: What is the Status of Educationists’ Perception on Indicators of Inclusive Education in the Nation’s Educational System, Communities and Schools?

Table 3: Mean Score on Responses to items for perception on indicators of inclusive education in the Nation's Education of system, Communities and Schools.

<i>S/No</i>	<i>Items</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>Mean</i>
<i>Indicators of Inclusive Education System, Communities and School:</i>							
<i>10</i>	<i>Principles of equality and social justice are embedded in policy, practices and decision – making at all levels.</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>80</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>3.6</i>
<i>11</i>	<i>Professional learning opportunities are provided to enhance understanding of the recognition of difference and the factors that contribute to educational disadvantage, especially an appreciation of factors such as: poverty, gender, disability, cultural and linguistics diversity, and families.</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>3.02</i>
<i>12</i>	<i>Community capacity is built through effective partnerships within the school community and with all of the agencies responsible for supporting children, young people and their families.</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>2.4</i>
<i>13</i>	<i>Stories of effective delivery of inclusive education are documented and disseminated.</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>2.32</i>
<i>14</i>	<i>Plans reflect on ethos, organization, culture and values under-pinned by principles of social justices and by democratic processes.</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>2.46</i>
<i>15</i>	<i>Data on access, participation, outcomes and retention of diverse groups are used to evaluate progress, to identify priorities for further action to plan for improvement and to inform professional learning communities.</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>2.44</i>

Table 3: Only items 10 and 11 show scores of 3.6 and 3.02 above the mean score of 3. Other scores are below the mean implying low perception of inclusive education on the nation’s education of system; communities and schools.

Research Question 4: Of what status is their perception on indicators of inclusive education in teaching and learning?

Table 4: Mean Scores of Responses to Items for Perception on Indicators of Inclusive Education in Teaching and Learning.

S/No		5	4	3	2	1	Mean
	Indicators of Inclusive Education – Teaching and Learning:						
16	<i>There is a “no blame” culture that is underpinned by high expectations for all groups of students.</i>	1 0	2 4	3 0	40	1 2	2.32
17	<i>Curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment are aligned and meet the needs of diverse student groups.</i>	1 0	3 2	3 0	40	2 0	2.44
18	<i>Curriculum is intellectually challenging for all students and connected with student and community imperatives and experiences.</i>	1 0	2 4	4 5	40	5	2.4
19	<i>Curriculum programmes are informed by student outcome data and by current research relevant to diverse student needs.</i>	1 0	2 4	3 0	40	1 2	2.32
20	<i>Teachers build bridges from the knowledge and skills that students bring from their homes and communities to the knowledge and skills they need for success in schooling.</i>	-	2 8	3 0	50	8	2.32
21	<i>All students are provided with the explicit and scaffolded teaching they need for success in schooling and beyond.</i>	1 5	2 8	2 0	50	1 0	2.48
22	<i>Students are recognized as partners in the teaching/learning process and opportunities are provided for student</i>	-	3 2	3 0	44	1 0	2.32

voice, for example through negotiating curriculum and assessment.

23	<i>Evaluation of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment provides evidence that the interests, skills, knowledge and experiences of diverse groups are central features in the design of learning.</i>	5	8	3	20	-	3.6
		0	0	0			

Table 4 shows only item 23 with the mean score of 3.6 which is above the mean score 3. The rest mean scores are below the stated mean indicating low perception on indicators of inclusive education in teaching and learning.

Discussion

The study investigated Educationists' perception of inclusive education statement and practice in Nigeria. Inclusive education is the most recent initiative directed toward meeting the special educational needs of students in the regular school setting. The programme reflects the values, ethos and culture of a public education system committed to excellence by enhancing educational opportunities for all students (The state of Queensland, Department of Education and the Arts, 2004).

All the results and findings of the study indicate low perception of Education Experts on the inclusive education statement and practice in Nigeria. The observed low perception cuts across the major variables of this study which include: The nature of inclusive education in the nation's educational system; the nation's commitment to inclusive education; indicators of inclusive education in the nation's educational system, communities and schools, as well as in teaching and learning.

The findings remain intriguing, as this can be interpreted to mean low status in inclusive education statement and practice with obvious implication relative to challenges confronting the implementation of the programme in line with acceptable standards.

Will (1989) posits that major setback in the implementation of inclusive education programmes and practices is the low perception of Professionals and the absence of having building level administrators empowered to assemble appropriate Professionals and other resources for delivering effective, coordinated, comprehensive services for all students based on individual education needs rather than eligibility for special education programmes.

Of special note here is federal government's acceptance in principles of the philosophy of inclusive education. In planning for this scheme; the government indicates its intention to work in collaboration with agencies, private and public parastatals and state governments, to start a pilot project in all states within the six geo-political zones, the regular schools for inclusive education will operate mixed ability classes, including the intention to train regular teachers for inclusive education programme's. The review so far on the overview of inclusive education in Nigeria indicates a near absence of

innovations and lack of initiatives in addressing the programmes statement and practice in line with acceptable standards (Osuorji 2009).

Osuorji (2010) reported a low outcome upon the evaluation of MDGs and objectives in relation to inclusive education. The findings suggest unfavourable trend toward inclusive education policy practice, as well as low status for pre-service training and in-service professional developmental toward implementation of the programme. Gwanshak (2009) reported that teachers are not adequately prepared for inclusive education programmes. According to him, many graduate teachers are ill prepared, not adequately informed about the inclusive education statement and practice. He suggests that Universities and Colleges of Education should introduce education and professional innovations to empower graduate teachers in this regard. Okoli (2010) observes that lack of professional expertise and active participation of educational planners and administrators as well as lack of interest in teaching profession constitute a great challenge to Special Needs Education and on the long run effective implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The following are recommendations derived from the study findings:

1. Key factors for effective implementation of inclusive education should be investigated. This is as such include Experts' perception and awareness of inclusive education concepts, statement, and practice in developing countries as Nigeria and her sister nations, more especially those in the West and Central African sub-region.
2. There is need to encourage effective training education and professional Development of teachers, educational administrators, etc as these remain central to inclusive education practices. Policies that encourage building bridges along inclusive education statement and practices through such measures above hold the possibility of contributing effectively to successful implementation of the programme.
3. Absence of data and assessment on inclusive education awareness, components and practice evidence point to a critical need to support research on crucial factors that affect inclusive education programmes and practice. Availability of data will help tackle the challenges confronting effective implementation of inclusive education more especially in developing countries.

Conclusion

The thrust of inclusive education should reflect the values, ethos and culture of a public education system committed to excellence by enhancing educational opportunities for all students. A nation's educational system through policies, reviews and initiatives should embrace a school reform with a focus on quality teaching and learning. Inclusive education in any nation should foster a learning community that questions disadvantage

and challenges social injustice. The system should maximize the educational and social outcomes of all students through the identification and reduction of barriers to learning, especially for those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion. It will ensure that all students understand and value diversity so that they have the knowledge and skills for positive participation in a just, equitable and democratic global society.

The nation's educational commitment remains important, just as effectively responding to the nation's commitment to inclusive education requires a reforms on understandings, relationships, policies and practices at all levels of the system. Indicators of inclusive education will reflect valuing and responding to diversity which are critical in judgment about quality at all levels of the system. This possesses obvious implication to the educational system, communities and schools as well as teaching and learning. Assessment of perception on statement and practice remains crucial to the implementation of inclusive education programmes and services.

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