

AN EMPIRICAL OVERVIEW OF THE PRACTICABILITY OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN KANO STATE

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Abstract

This paper therefore looks at the practicability of inclusive education in Kano state. In doing so, the authors designed the Inclusion Possibility Questionnaire for the parents, teachers and head teachers. 86 randomly selected pupils from 27 schools within the metropolis were given questionnaires for the parents, with 56 teachers and 27 head teachers from selected schools were used as subjects for the study. Four research questions were raised to guide the study and these questions were answered using simple percentage. The inference deduced showed that inclusive education is highly favoured among both parents and teachers/head teachers in Kano state; however, there remains a lot to be done by the government.

Background

Educating children with special needs in the regular classroom has become the norm in the western world, and the rationale for this shift from the former practice of seclusion to the contemporary practice of inclusion in the education of children with special needs emanates from the results of various studies over the years that showed that segregated classes for children with special needs were ineffective or less effective compared with inclusion (i.e., educating them in the same classroom with their non-disabled peers). But, inclusion is more than a mere shift in the educational provision of children with special needs alongside their non disabled peers in the same classroom; it involves a complete overhaul of the entire educational system. Inclusive education is about equal opportunities for all learners, whatever their age, gender, ethnicity, religious belief, care status, impairment, sexuality, attainment or social or economic background. It pays particular attention to the provision made for, and the achievement of, different groups of learners. However, it also goes much further, and is about tackling the underachievement and exclusion of groups who have been marginalized in the past through taking positive action and through the targeting of resources to ensure that they have their rights upheld (Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden, 2000; Miles, 2000).

A brief review of a number of studies on various inclusive strategies have shown how imperative, in other words, how unavoidably beneficial inclusive education can be to both the children with special needs and their non-disabled peers. There are consistent reports that children get little or no benefit when they are placed in special education settings. For instance, in fifty studies comparing academic performance of mainstream (inclusion) and segregated children with special needs, the mean academic performance of the integrated group was in the 80th percentile (Miles, 2000). According to Ozoji (2003) only a small proportion (1.2%) of the children in developing countries receives an education. Out of this small proportion, those who receive education must attend segregated school, and the situation is even worse in non-urban areas (Harvey, 1998). In Kano State for instance, there are 4,768 public primary schools and only 36 segregated schools (State Universal Basic Education Board, Kano, 2011). There is no known provision made for the children with special needs who may as a result of mobility and proximity challenges have to make do with the public (regular) schools within their vicinity. This study reviewed the concept of inclusive education and the context for the development of inclusive education in Kano using the inclusion possibility questionnaire I and II designed by the researchers to sample the opinions of parents, teachers, and head teachers on the practicability of inclusive education in Kano State.

Statement of the Problem

In education, few issues have generated more debate than the concept of inclusion. Inclusion has remained an issue that has outspoken advocates on all sides, whether staunchly for, avowedly against, or somewhere in between. For many, the concept of inclusion remains somewhat vague. What does inclusion actually mean and what does it look like has remained a question on the lips of many especially policy makers.

Inclusion is a term which expresses commitment to educate each child, to the maximum extent appropriate, in the classroom he or she would otherwise attend. It involves bringing the support services to the child (rather than moving the child to the services) and requires only that the child will benefit from being in the class (rather than having to keep up with other pupils). Proponents of inclusion generally favour newer forms of education services delivery (Adebisi& Iroham, 2011; Miles, 2000). Inclusive education requires bringing all the services that are essential resources for the education of the children with special needs to them rather than placing them in an isolated school where such services are located.

Studies show that children with special needs who are included into the regular classroom settings have higher academic achievement, higher self-esteem, a greater probability of attending college, and better physical health. They are more likely to graduate and find employment. The graduating rates of these students increased by 14% from 1984 to 1997 – because they are not labeled, students who are included into the regular classroom settings do not feel hopelessness that hinders potentials (Miles, 2000).

Inclusion promotes diversity and acceptance and it allows opportunity for all students to advance. For the children with learning disabilities, they are motivated through competition to improve and the regular education students have the ability to rise up to leadership roles that could also be emulated by the students with special needs. However, inclusive education is not yet practiced in Kano State. This by implication means that those children with special needs who may as a result of reasons beyond their control find themselves in a regular school will not have any special education services provided to enhance their learning. This has therefore made it imperative to sample the opinions of some of the major stakeholders in the education sector (i.e. parents, teachers, and head teachers) on the practicability of inclusive education in Kano State.

Research Questions

To guide the study, the following research questions were raised:

1. To what extent do parents of children in the regular school understand the concept of inclusion?
2. To what extent are parents of children in the regular school permissible of inclusion?
3. To what extent do the teachers and head teachers in the regular school understand the concept of inclusion?
4. To what extent are teachers and head teachers in the regular school permissible of inclusion?

Method and Procedure

The study used the survey research design to sample teachers' and parents' perception about the practicability of inclusive education in Kano State. Surveys and questionnaires are used extensively in research as relatively efficient ways to gather large amount of information (Gravetter & Forzano, 2009). The researchers developed an instrument captioned the Inclusion Possibility Questionnaire with a 3-point scale that was administered to parents, teachers and head teachers of regular schools within the metropolis. 27 schools were randomly selected for the study, and 86 randomly selected pupils in the selected schools were given the questionnaires for their parents and the same questionnaires were administered to 56 teachers with 27 head teachers.

The researchers were assisted by some teachers in the selected schools to administer and collect the questionnaires. The returned rate for duly completed questionnaire was higher for head teachers with all the head teachers returning theirs duly completed (i.e. 100% return rate), teachers had a good return rate of 87% percentage (i.e. 49 completely answered questionnaires) as those who were not duly completed were removed from the analysis. But for the parents, a fairly good return rate of duly completed questionnaires was recorded as out of the 86 administered questionnaires only 34 (i.e. 40%) were duly completed and returned. The returned questionnaires for teachers

and head teachers were analysed together so as to maximise space. The simple percentage was used in answering the research questions raised to guide the study.

Result

Table 1: Parents Understanding of the Concept of Inclusion

S/No	Questions	Agreed (%)	Undecided (%)	Disagreed (%)	Total (%)
1	Do you know that the children with disabilities can be taught in the same classroom with those who are not disabled?	6 18%	15 44%	13 38%	34 100%
2	Children without disabilities learning together in the same classroom alongside those with disabilities is a fundamental human right issue	6 18%	18 53%	10 29%	34 100%
3	Children with disabilities will learn better if allowed to go to a regular school within their neighbourhood	8 24%	12 35%	14 41%	34 100%
4	The training acquired by the regular teacher is adequate for the proper handling of the education of children with disabilities in the regular classroom setting	12 35%	17 50%	5 15%	34 100%
5	Educating children with and without disabilities in the same classroom will be cheaper than the current practice of educating them separately	11 32%	8 24%	15 44%	34 100%
Total		43	70	57	170
% Total		25%	41%	34%	100%

Table 1 shows that out of the total of 170 options in the 34 questionnaires administered to the parents' of children in the regular school, only 25% of the ticked options are in line with the understanding of the concept of inclusion. 35% of the preferred options ticked can be classified as those without an understanding of the concept of inclusion with 41% undecided. The table highlights the fact that most of the interaction on inclusion has been within the circle of professionals in the field of special education.

Table 2: Parents of Children in the Regular School Permissibility of Inclusion

S/No	Questions	Agreed (%)	Undecided (%)	Disagreed (%)	Total (%)
1	Children can be educated together in the regular classroom irrespective of the presence or absence of disability	18 53%	6 18%	10 29%	34 100%
2	All the children with or without disability will benefit from the regular education with adequate provisions made for all	23 68%	2 6%	9 26%	34 100%
3	The children with disabilities will have an improved sense of well-being if they learn together with their non-disabled peers in the same classroom	25 73%	2 6%	7 21%	34 100%
4	The non-disabled child will be more obliged to assist the child with disability whenever he/she needs assistance if they are allowed to learn together	25 73%	4 12%	5 15%	34 100%
5	Parents should be included in the planning and implementation of inclusion irrespective of the disability status of their children	17 50%	7 21%	10 29%	34 100%
Total		108	21	41	170
% Total		64%	12%	24%	100%

From table 2 above, it could be seen that 68% of the entire options show preference for inclusion, 12% were neutral and 24% were not in support. This indicates that inclusion will have the backing of most parents if and when fully introduced.

Table 3: Teachers and Head Teachers Understanding of the Concept of Inclusion

S/No	Questions	Agreed (%)	Undecided (%)	Disagreed (%)	Total (%)
1	Do you know that the children with disabilities can be taught in the same classroom with those who are not disabled?	48 63%	10 13%	18 24%	76 100%
2	Children without disabilities learning together in the same classroom alongside those with	44 58%	18 24%	14 18%	76 100%

	disabilities is a fundamental human right issue				
3	Children with disabilities will learn better if allowed to go to a regular school within their neighbourhood	43 57%	20 26%	13 17%	76 100%
4	The training acquired by the regular teacher is adequate for the proper handling of the education of children with disabilities in the regular classroom setting	69 91%	3 4%	4 5%	76 100%
5	Educating children with and without disabilities in the same classroom will be cheaper than the current practice of educating them separately	56 74%	8 10%	12 16%	76 100%
Total		260	59	61	380
% Total		68%	16%	16%	100%

Table 3 shows that 68% of the entire options in the 76 questionnaires administered to teachers and head teachers hints on an understanding of the concept of inclusion. 16% were undecided and another 16% seem not to understand the concept of inclusion. This indicates that despite the inclusion of a compulsory course on introduction to special education educational training of teachers, some of them still do not fully understand what it entails to educate children with special needs.

Table 4: Teachers and Head Teachers Children in the Regular School Permissibility of Inclusion

S/No	Questions	Agreed (%)	Undecided (%)	Disagreed (%)	Total (%)
1	Children can be educated together in the regular classroom irrespective of the presence or absence of disability	44 58%	18 24%	14 18%	76 100%
2	All the children with or without disability will benefit from the regular education with adequate provisions made for all	63 83%	5 7%	8 10%	76 100%
3	The children with disabilities will have an improved sense of well-being if they learn together with their non-disabled peers in the same classroom	48 63%	10 13%	18 24%	76 100%

4	The non-disabled child will be more obliged to assist the child with disability whenever he/she needs assistance if they are allowed to learn together	56 74%	8 10%	12 16%	76 100%
5	Parents should be included in the planning and implementation of inclusion irrespective of the disability status of their children	59 78%	6 8%	11 14%	76 100%
Total		270	47	63	380
% Total		71%	12%	17%	100%

Table 4 shows that as much as 71% of the entire options in the 76 administered questionnaires were in favour of inclusion, with 12% and 17% undecided and disagreed with the permissibility of inclusion respectively. This indicates that inclusion has a wide acceptance among the major stakeholders in education sector.

Discussion

From the analysis of the data collected, it could be seen that inclusion is the most preferred type of education in Kano state. Inclusion offers a cheaper option to the current segregated educational practice that is operational in the state. The critical factor for schools to achieve a high degree of success with all children learning together in the same classroom is that the day to day expectations of the teachers have to be reasonable. The regular teacher needs the professional assistance of the special education teacher in the form of partnership and collaboration. There should also be a creation of a general climate where a parent-teacher partnership is in play as this will make the transition towards inclusion smoother.

The findings on the cost of inclusion are consistent with the study of Stevens, Everington, and Kozar-Kocsis(2002)that postulate that many contend that the current system of segregation is dysfunctional, ineffective, excessively costly, and often segregates and stigmatizes students who could effectively be served in traditional educational settings.

Conclusion/Recommendation

There still exist a number of areas for constructive actions to be taken in order to promote the development of inclusive education in Kano state. Some of these actions primarily require policy development and leadership and can be initiated without significant financial commitments; others will require more systematic actions and will require considerable investment in both human and material resources. The fact that positive effects can be made to general education, and improvements can be directed to

regular schools through investment in inclusive education adds to the argument that such actions be taken.

Some of the actions that should be considered by all the stakeholders in the education sector include the following:

- 1) There should be a pilot projects to support individual schools or cluster of schools that commit to serve all the children in their natural area, and to implement inclusive practices and strategies to assure a high level of success for every child.
- 2) Support the changes needed in teacher education programmes, so that classroom teachers are prepared to accommodate diverse children in the regular classroom. They will need knowledge about children with special needs, but they will also need significant practical training in pedagogical practices and innovative instructional strategies.
- 3) Funding of research this area is urgently needed in the state. Successful models need to be analysed, described, and discussed extensively. The practice that leads to success for pupils and teachers need to be gathered in pamphlets, books, manuals, videos, and other formats for ease dissemination of knowledge to teacher, parents and other stakeholders.
- 4) Partnership among agencies dedicated to the right and education of children with special needs should be nurtured and strengthened where such exist, and should be created where lacking.

Finally, Children with or with disability have a role to play in the development of the society during and after school years. An early start in educating them together will be the best way to prepare them for life after school. Children with special needs have an equal right to membership of the society as anybody else. A segregated education will restrict these rights and will limit their opportunities for self-fulfilment. Inclusion will therefore advance the cause of social justice and equity. Since the people of any given community live together irrespective of their disability status, it is only logical that they should also learn together as this will open up personal opportunities for each individual to achieve both knowledge and acceptance that makes a life in the community a reality.

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