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Implementation Strategies of National Policy on Inclusive Education as Perceived by Administrators in Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State

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Abstract

The study investigated implementation strategies of National Policy on Inclusive education as perceived administrators in secondary schools in Port-Harcourt Metropolis in Rivers State. Two specific objectives, research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted descriptive survey design. The population of the study was 759 school administrators comprising of 718 school administrators in government approved private secondary schools and 41 school principals in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The sample size of the study was 328 school administrators comprising 287 private school administrators and 41 public school administrators derived through simple random sampling and census techniques. The instrument for data collection was a self-structured questionnaire titled: "Implementation Strategies of Inclusive Education as Perceived by Administrators in Secondary Schools Questionnaire". The instrument was subjected to face and content validity by experts in Department of Educational Management and Measurement and Evaluation. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha Method which yielded reliability coefficients of 0.70 and 0.81. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while z-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The study found that to high extent accessibility and safety and support for inclusive teaching enhance the implementation of inclusive education as perceived by administrators in Port-Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State. Based on the findings, the study recommended among others that government and school proprietors should make accessibility and safety means available in all schools to accommodate variety of disabilities as this will help create an inclusive learning environment for gifted students, disabled students and others.

Keywords: School Administrators, Strategies, Implementation, National Policy, Inclusive Education

Introduction

The term inclusion in the context of education is often confused to mean special education referring to engagement of persons with physical and mental impairments, such as sensory or mobility limitations, intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, language disorders, behavior disorders and autism spectrum disorders. Beyond this general perspective, Kirschner, (2015) viewed inclusive education as the deliberate and self-conscious structuring of whole-school and classroom environments so that they are accessible and congenial not

only to students with impairments, but also to those who can face exclusion or disempowerment due to their ethnicity, social class, gender, culture, religion, immigration history or other attributes. That is, inclusive education does not only consider learners with physical disabilities but also those whose learning abilities could be affected by their social background, religion, races, or ethnicity.

The afore-mentioned definitions of inclusive education appear to be misleading and not in tandem with the true meaning of inclusive education as stated in the national policy of inclusive education. The National Policy on Inclusive Education, NPIE (FGN, 2017) puts this confusion to rest as it exhaustively defines the term inclusive education and sets out the parameters to be followed in achieving this noble idea in the country. According to the policy, inclusive Education “has been internationally recognized as a means of attaining equity, justice, and quality education for all learners, especially those who have traditionally excluded from mainstream education for reasons of disability, ethnicity, gender, giftedness or other characteristics (National Policy of Inclusive Education, 2017). While others define inclusive education with focus on only disabilities, ethnicity and gender, the policy included also the gifted children. This shows that inclusive education is not only focused on students’ with learning difficulties but also those who have the ability to learn at a faster pace than others in the classroom.

Inclusive education encompasses a range of aspects that promote equity, access, and participation for all students in the educational environment. It involves valuing diversity, providing accessibility, individualizing instruction, fostering collaboration, promoting a positive school climate, supporting social and emotional learning, engaging parents and communities, providing policy and systemic support, conducting ongoing assessment and monitoring, and continuously improving practices to ensure that all students are included and empowered in their educational journey

This position supports the various positions of global agencies as stated earlier and keys in with the position of the, Jomtein conference on Education for All (EFA) which emphasized urgent priority to ensure access to and improve the quality of Education for all children (Lawal & Isah, 2022). Hence, the need for education systems that include all students; welcomes and supports them to learn, whoever they are and whatever their abilities or requirements. This means making sure that teaching, the curriculum, school buildings, classrooms, play areas, transport and toilets are appropriate for all children at all levels. It means all children learn together in the same schools.

The creation of inclusive schools remains a major challenge facing education systems around the world (Mitchell, 2015). Inclusive education remains a multi-level and complex problem, because the development of inclusive practices in schools is not well understood (Anastasiu & Kaufman, 2012; Winzer & Mazurek, 2017). Inclusive education not only affects the principle and nature of education provided to students with disabilities, but also requires a cross-sectional study of the broader goals of education, the purpose of schools, the nature of the curriculum, assessment methods and schools' adaptation to diversity. The way ordinary schools respond to students with disabilities can be an indicator of the quality of education for all students (UNESCO, 2015). Weber and Ruch (2012) affirm that a good school is beneficial for all students and contributes to the success of all students. This requires modifying school strategies and the school environment to adapt to the diversity of students" (Agarwal & Chakravarti, 2014).

The evidence underlying Inclusive education in African countries is weak and fragmentary (Howgego, *et al.*, 2014). Inaccessible environments, the lack of reasonable housing, negative attitudes, discriminatory application and admission procedures, as well as the lack of policies and choices regarding people with disabilities, disadvantage students with disabilities in Africa (Chataika, *et al.*, 2012). Although Nigeria adopted an Inclusive education policy in 2004, it is facing socio-economic obstacles, insufficient funding, a lack of infrastructure and a shortage, the willingness of teachers to practice inclusive practices, aggravated by administrative problems in schools. Many schools have dilapidated buildings without libraries, laboratories and other auxiliary facilities (Ibok, 2015; Igbokwe *et al.*, 2014).

Similarly, inclusive education in Uganda faces serious problems, including negative cultural attitudes towards disability, a lack of resources, insufficient funding and insufficient training of teachers in inclusive practices, as well as a lack of mobile devices, which hinders the allocation of resources to educational institutions (Abimanyi & Mannan, 2014). Nigeria is one of the African countries that has made considerable progress in Inclusive education (Nungu, 2010). The National policy on education (2004) states: "access to education shall be provided and inclusive education or integration of special classes and unit into ordinary/public schools under the UBE scheme" Subsequently several policies have focused on inclusive education in the nation finally culminating in the National policy on inclusive education in 2017. The government has adopted and supported the practice of Inclusive education by incorporating various international agreements into its laws (Njoka *et al.*, 2012).

The policy envisions “a society with an inclusive education system with unhindered access to quality education and active participation of all learners in the same safe school environment.” (National Policy on Inclusive Education FGN, 2017) To achieve this, it proposes to “engage relevant stakeholders, create awareness, build capacity, strengthen service delivery, monitor and ensure implementation for the provision of standardized, qualitative and accessible education system for sustenance of equal opportunities and participation for all learners” (National Policy on Inclusive Education FGN, 2017). Despite the Inclusive education policy, many learners are still excluded from the school system or under provided for – Gifted children, children with special needs, students who by virtue of socio economic, political, gender or other status etc.

Statement of the Problem

Nigerian educational system has suffered greatly due to lack of political will by leaders to overhaul, restructure and reposition the educational system. The underfunding of the sector affects everything from qualified teachers, educational administrators and managers to structures, resources and equipment. Inclusive education has faced many challenges in the country due quite a number of factors related to the governments, parents, pupils/teachers and the community (Lawal & Isah, 2022). The failure to effectively implement inclusive education policy is quite notable in high number of disabled children without educational background, rise in ethnic discrimination in Nigerian schools, students without proper adjustment to school environment thereby leading to low academic performance, segregation of gifted children from others and many more. The question is to what extent would the laid down strategies in the national inclusive education policy enhance the implementation of inclusive education in secondary schools? To provide answers to this question, made the researcher to investigate the strategies school administrators use for the implementation of the National Policy on Inclusive Education in secondary schools in Port-Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the implementation strategies of National Policy on Inclusive Education as perceived by administrators in secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. ascertain the extent to which accessibility and safety enhance the implementation of inclusive education as perceived by administrators in secondary schools in Port-Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State.

2. establish the extent to which support for inclusive teaching enhance the implementation of inclusive education as perceived by administrators in Port-Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- 1 To what extent does accessibility and safety enhance effective implementation of inclusive education as perceived by administrators in secondary schools in Port-Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State?
- 2 To what extent does support for inclusive teaching enhance the implementation of inclusive education as perceived by administrators in Port-Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of private and public school administrators on the extent accessibility and safety enhance effective implementation of inclusive education as perceived by administrators in secondary schools in Port-Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of private and public school administrators on the extent support for inclusive teaching enhance the implementation of inclusive education as perceived by administrators in Port-Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study was 759 school administrators comprising 718 school administrators in government approved private secondary schools and 41 school principals in public senior secondary schools in Port -Harcourt Metropolis. The sample size of the study was 328 school administrators comprising 287 private school administrators and 41 public school administrators derived through purposive and census sampling techniques. The purposive sampling technique was adopted in selecting 287 private secondary school administrators whose schools were duly registered and approved by the State Government. The entire 41 administrators from the public senior secondary schools were studied without sampling. The instrument for data collection was a self-structured questionnaire titled: "Implementation strategies of National Policy on Inclusive Education as

Perceived Administrators in Secondary Schools Questionnaire (ISNPIEPAQ)". The instrument was designed on a 4-point rating scale of Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE) and Very Low Extent (VLE) with 4, 3, 2 and 1 points respectively. The instrument was subjected to face and content validity by 2 experts in the Department of Educational Management and Measurement and Evaluation. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha statistics which yielded reliability indexes 0.70 and 0.81. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions with a criterion mean of 2.50. Questionnaire items with ratings below 2.50 denoted 'Low Extent' while 2.50 and above signified 'High Extent'. The hypotheses were tested using z-test at 0.05 level of significance. Analyzed data therefore with calculated z-value greater than the z-critical value of ± 1.96 was rejected and below was accepted.

Result

Research Question 1: To what extent does accessibility and safety enhance implementation of inclusive education in secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean Responses of Private and Public School Administrators on the Extent Accessibility and Safety Enhance Implementation of Inclusive Education in Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.

S/No	Item	Private = 99			Public = 38		
		Mean	S.D	Rmk	Mean	S.D	Rmk
1	Strengthening protection guidelines at school and community would aid implementation of Inclusive Education Policy.	3.04	1.03	HE	3.16	0.93	HE
2	Providing easy access to first-aid and other relevant health care facilities in the school would enhance implementation of Inclusive Education Policy.	2.86	0.93	HE	2.97	0.93	HE
3	Involving parents and school management committee in the provision of school security would facilitate implementation of Inclusive Education Policy.	3.04	0.92	HE	3.18	1.05	HE
4	Creating access to library materials on the implementation techniques of inclusive education policies would ensure implementation of Inclusive Education Policy.	2.66	1.09	HE	3.18	1.05	HE
5	Ensuring constant power supply through alternative sources such as solar system would guarantee implementation of Inclusive Education Policy.	3.07	0.98	HE	3.13	1.15	HE
6	Guaranteeing inclusive and accessible recreational and sport facilities would aid implementation of Inclusive Education Policy.	3.15	0.95	HE	2.84	1.11	HE
7	Providing of inclusive and accessible infrastructural facilities in the school such as classrooms, hostels, laboratory, toilets etc would facilitate implementation of Inclusive Education Policy.	3.05	0.99	HE	3.21	0.92	HE
8	Rehabilitating existing classrooms and other school facilities to be accessible by all kinds of learners would ensure implementation of Inclusive Education Policy.	3.36	0.90	HE	2.63	1.09	HE

9	Encouraging all registered schools to accept all school aged children regardless of their peculiarities would help implementation of Inclusive Education Policy.	3.30	0.78	HE	2.87	1.00	HE
10	Enhancing report mechanisms to prevent all sorts of abuse, gender-based violence in the school would guarantee implementation of Inclusive Education Policy.	3.20	0.95	HE	2.68	1.08	HE
Grand Mean					2.99		
Field Survey, 2024 S.D-Standard Deviation; HE- High Extent							

Table 1 shows the mean responses on the extent accessibility and safety enhance implementation of inclusive education in secondary schools in Rivers State. The criterion mean of 2.50 shows that at high extent the following enhance implementation of inclusive education in secondary schools. Strengthening protection guidelines at school and community (3.04 & 3.16), providing easy access to first-aid and other relevant health care facilities in the school (2.86 & 2.97), involving parents and school management committee in the provision of school security (3.04 & 3.18), creating access to library materials on the implementation techniques of inclusive education policies (2.66 & 3.18), ensuring constant power supply through alternative sources such as solar system (3.07 & 3.13), guaranteeing inclusive and accessible recreational and sport facilities (3.15 & 2.84), providing of inclusive and accessible infrastructural facilities in the school such as classrooms, hostels, laboratory, toilets e.t.c. (3.05 & 3.21), rehabilitating existing classrooms and other school facilities to be accessible by all kinds of learners (3.36 & 2.63), encouraging all registered schools to accept all school aged children regardless of their peculiarities (3.30 & 2.87), and enhancing report mechanisms to prevent all sorts of abuse, gender-based violence in the school (3.20 & 2.68). The grand mean scores of 3.07 & 2.99 for private school and public school administrators indicates that stakeholders' engagement and advocacy strategies enhance the implementation of Inclusive Education in secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State to a high extent.

Research Question 2: To what extent does support for inclusive teaching enhance the implementation of inclusive education secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean Responses of Private and Public School Administrators on the Extent Support for Inclusive Teaching Would Enhance the Implementation of Inclusive Education in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.

S/No	Item	Private = 99			Public = 38		
		Mean	S.D	Rmk	Mean	S.D	Rmk
1	Creating teacher/learner ratio that is result oriented would improve implementation of Inclusive Education Policy.	2.87	1.06	HE	3.19	1.00	HE

2	Engagement of other service providers for special needs learners would aid implementation of Inclusive Education Policy.	3.34	0.95	HE	3.14	0.89	HE
3	Regular promotion of teachers/facilitators and supporting staff members would assist implementation of Inclusive Education Policy.	2.89	0.94	HE	3.12	1.03	HE
4	Recruitment of relevant personnel including: counsellors, care givers, audiologists, sign language teachers and interpreters, social workers, low vision experts, psychologists, physiotherapists would facilitate implementation of Inclusive Education Policy.	3.21	1.00	HE	3.09	0.83	HE
5	Adapting teaching methods and local languages peculiar to the environment to enhance teaching and learning would enhance implementation of Inclusive Education Policy.	2.89	1.02	HE	3.11	1.18	HE
6	Provide appropriate specialized facilities to address identified learning difficulties would support implementation of Inclusive Education Policy.	3.05	1.00	HE	3.00	0.92	HE
7	Allocate flexible extra time and appropriate methods for testing children who have difficulty accessing standard tests would ensure implementation of Inclusive Education Policy.	3.16	0.90	HE	3.00	1.02	HE
8	Provision of appropriate musical and laboratory facilities/materials to support teaching and learning would aid implementation of Inclusive Education Policy.	2.92	1.06	HE	3.19	1.01	HE
9	Provision of basic instructional materials for children with disabilities e.g. Braille materials for learner with visual impairment, hearing aid, magnifiers, large print materials, assistive technology/devices would help implementation of Inclusive Education Policy.	3.03	0.99	HE	2.82	0.91	HE
10	Provision of school/home support especially for learners with severe and multiple disabilities would facilitate implementation of Inclusive Education Policy.	3.26	0.99	HE	3.11	1.06	HE
Grand Mean		3.06			3.08		

Field Survey, 2024 S.D-Standard Deviation; HE-High Extent

Table 2 shows the mean responses on the extent support for inclusive teaching enhance the implementation of inclusive education in secondary schools in Port-Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State. Based on the criterion mean value of 2.50, the analysis showed that at high extent the following would enhance the implementation of inclusive education Creating teacher/learner ratio that is result oriented (2.87 & 3.19), engagement of other service providers for special needs learners (3.34 & 3.14), regular promotion of teachers/facilitators and supporting staff members (2.89 & 3.12), recruitment of relevant personnel including: counsellors, care givers, audiologists, sign language teachers and interpreters, social workers, low vision experts, psychologists, physiotherapists (3.21 & 3.09), adapting teaching methods and local languages peculiar to the environment to enhance teaching and learning (2.89 & 3.11),

provide appropriate specialized facilities to address identified learning difficulties (3.05 & 3.00), allocate flexible extra time and appropriate methods for testing children who have difficulty accessing standard tests (3.16 & 3.00), provision of appropriate musical and laboratory facilities/materials to support teaching and learning (2.92 & 3.19), provision of basic instructional materials for children with disabilities e.g. Braille materials for learner with visual impairment, hearing aid, magnifiers, large print materials, assistive technology/devices (3.03 & 2.82), and provision of school/home support especially for learners with severe and multiple disabilities (3.26 & 3.11). The grand mean scores of 3.06 & 3.08 for private school and public School Administrators indicates that stakeholders' engagement and advocacy strategies would enhance the implementation of Inclusive Education in secondary schools in Port-Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State at high extent.

Hypotheses

H0₁: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of private and public school administrators on the extent to which accessibility and safety enhance implementation of inclusive education in secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State.

Table 3: z-test Analysis Between the Mean Responses of Private and Public School Administrators on the Extent Accessibility and Safety Enhance Effective Implementation of Inclusive Education in Secondary Schools in Port-Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State.

Administrators	N	Mean	S.D	A	Df	z-cal	z-crit	Rmk
Private	99	3.07	0.95	0.05	135	0.42	±1.96	Failed to reject
Public	38	2.99	1.03					

Research Data Output, 2024

Table 3 presents the z-test analysis on the extent accessibility and safety enhance effective implementation of inclusive education in secondary schools in Port-Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State. The z-calculated value obtained was 0.42 while the z-crit was ±1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. Since the z-cal is less than the z-critical the hypothesis was therefore upheld. That is, there is no significant difference in the mean responses of private and public school administrators on the extent to which accessibility and safety enhance implementation of inclusive education in secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State.

H0₂: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of private and public school administrators on the extent support for inclusive teaching enhance the implementation of inclusive education in Port-Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State.

Table 4: z-test Analysis Between the Mean Responses of Private and Public School Administrators on the Extent Support for Inclusive Teaching Enhance the Implementation of Inclusive Education in Port-Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State

Administrators	N	Mean	S.D	α	Df	z-cal	z-crit	Rmk
Private	99	3.06	0.99	0.05	135	-0.11	± 1.96	Failed to reject
Public	38	3.08	0.99					

Research Data Output, 2024

Table 4 presents the z-test analysis on the extent support for inclusive teaching enhance the implementation of inclusive education in Port-Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State. The z-calculated value obtained was -0.11 while the z-crit was ± 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance for two-tailed test. Since the z-cal is less than the z-critical the hypothesis was not rejected. That is, there is no significant difference in the mean responses of private and public school administrators on the extent support for inclusive teaching enhance the implementation of inclusive education in Port-Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

The result obtained from research question on Table 1 revealed that accessibility and safety enhance the implementation of Inclusive Education in secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State to a high extent with grand mean scores of 3.07 and 2.99. The corresponding hypothesis 1 on Table 3 shows no significant difference in the mean responses of private and public school administrators on the extent to which accessibility and safety enhance implementation of inclusive education in secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State with z-calculated of 0.42 which was less than z-critical value of ± 1.96 . The finding is related to Agarwal and Chakravarti, (2014) implementation of inclusive education would require modifying school strategies and the school environment to adapt to the diversity of students. It is by this modification that variety of students would be motivated to enroll in an inclusive school. Also, Njoka et al (2012) who stated that ensuring the safety and accessibility of students is essential in an inclusive environment whereby variety of learners would struggle for their survival in a competitive environment.

The findings of the study for research question two on Table 2 revealed that support for inclusive teaching enhance the implementation of Inclusive Education in secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State to a high extent with grand mean scores of 3.06 and

3.08. The corresponding hypothesis 2 on Table 4 shows no significant difference in the mean responses of private and public school administrators on the extent to which support for inclusive teaching enhance implementation of inclusive education in secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State with z-calculated of -0.11 which was less than z-critical value of ± 1.96 . This finding aligns with Okyere, et al. (2019) who stated that inclusion goes beyond teachers, rehabilitation professionals (i.e. occupational therapists) and educational professionals should partner to identify practical solutions to the challenges of creating inclusive environments for children with special education needs.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that to a high extent accessibility and safety and creating support for inclusive teaching, are the strategies to enhance implementation of inclusive education in secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were:

1. Government and school proprietors should make accessibility and safety means available in all schools to accommodate variety of disabilities as this will help create an inclusive learning environment for gifted students, disabled students and others.
2. Government in collaboration with the school administrators and non-governmental organizations should help equip teachers in secondary schools with resources to support inclusive teaching in the classroom as this could make the implementation process of inclusive education easier.

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