Fostering Inclusive Education for Children with Special Needs in Borno State: Study of Enabling Environment in Basic Education Schools

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Abstract

This study determined fostering inclusive education for Children with Special Needs in Borno State: study of enabling environment in Basic Education Schools. Three (3) objectives were formulated to guide the study. Three (3) research questions were answered. The study used survey research design. The population of the study was one thousand and three (1003) consisted of teachers, parents, head teachers, and community leaders. Simple random sampling technique was used to obtain a sample of two hundred and three (203) respondents across the three (3) senatorial districts of the state. The sample size was in consonance with Taro Yamane Sample size formula. A -30 item questionnaire was developed by the researchers for data collection. The instrument had validity index of 0.72 reliability of Cronbach's Alpha value of .886. The data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics and mean and standard deviation. Findings of the study showed that teachers generally have positive attitude towards inclusive education. On curriculum delivery strategies teachers adopt inclusive methods such as individualised instruction and use of flexible assessment. While parental involvement was found to be positive showing strong collaboration between parents and school. The study concludes that teachers and parents show positive attitudes and effort towards inclusive education for children with special needs. The study recommends that there should be regular trainings and workshops to enhance teacher's skills and confidence in supporting children with special needs, continue foster collaboration between parents and teachers, ensuring parents are empowered to support their children's learning.

Keywords: *Children, Education, Environment, Inclusive, Learning and Special needs*

Introduction

The significance of inclusive education for children with special needs is emphasise by the sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the United Nations Convention on the rights of persons with disability (CRPD) while the SDGs seek to provide inclusive, equitable, high quality education for everyone, the CRPD acknowledges the right to education for people with disabilities. In Nigeria the government has introduced policies and initiatives aimed at promoting inclusive education. The National Education policy emphasises the need for inclusive education while the special education act provides a framework for supporting children with special needs. Despite these efforts challenges need persist in ensuring that children with special needs receive quality education (UNICEF, 2024).

Inclusive education involves teaching all students in the same age-appropriate general education classroom, regardless of their abilities or challenges. Its about creating a community where every child feels valued and empowered. Also, design learning environment that serve all students from the start, providing flexibility and choice in learning materials and activities. Differentiated instruction tailor teaching methods to meet diverse learning needs, using various instructional strategies such as visual aids, hands-on activities and adaptive technologies, so as

to develop and implement individual education plans that reflect each child's unique strengths, needs and aspirations. The needs for parental and community involvement is cardinal toward achieving inclusive education, this can be best practice by engaging families and communities in educational process, providing opportunities for feedback and participation.

Odo, Onah, Ujoatuonu and Okafor (2021) reported that conscientious personality and work experience positively predicted school teachers attitudes towards inclusive Education. In another study by zoniou - sideri and Vlachou (2006) found regular education teachers holds a number of restrictive as well as conflicting beliefs towards disability and educational inclusion. These teachers reported that although educational inclusion is necessary as a means of improving the way ordinary school functions and reducing the marginalisation and stigmatisation of students with disabilities. Enai and Benneth (2025) reported that predominance of theoretical, teacher -based teaching method with limited practical engagement is often used by teachers when delivering the content of instructions which affects students assimilation, the finding also identified challenges such as large class size, insufficient instructional materials and lack of specialized training for educators affect the achievement of learning objectives. In Nigeria, the journey towards inclusive education has been marked by various policy initiative aimed at integrating students with special needs into mainstream classroom. However the success of these initiative heavily relies on the predominance of teacher which is influenced by the curriculum delivery methods employed in teacher education institutions (Eke, 2007).

Kabango, Matafwali, Matakala and Kabundula (2024) asserted that assessment of the type of pedagogical teaching skills of content showed that there were different types of pedagogical skills of content which are used by teachers and has significant impact on students academic performance such as role play, debate, demonstration and discussion methods. Parental involvement is critical for creating inclusive learning environments. A study by Henry (2021) found that parents were actively involved in their children's education and reported increased satisfaction with their children's education. Similarly, Abdullahi (2022) asserted that children who enjoy parental support tend to have better academic performance than those who lack parental support. Social inclusion is a critical aspect of inclusive learning environment. Another study by Adeniyi (2021) found that peer support programmes can promote social inclusion and reduce stigma towards children with special needs. In the same vein, Isaac (2023) asserted that collaborative learning tends to promote a sense of belonging among children thereby reducing problems of child isolation and stigma.

Inclusive education ensures that all children, regardless of their abilities, have access to quality education that is organised in a supportive and engaging environment. It promotes the full participation of children with special needs alongside their peers, fosters a sense of belonging and reduces discrimination against children faced with learning challenges. The researchers have however observed that a good number of children with special needs do not participate fully in education programs provided for their normal peers in Borno State, Nigeria. In the Basic Schools, for instance, their major challenges seem to stem from inaccessible infrastructure, inappropriate learning materials, inadequate funding as well as inadequate trained staff. The strategies required for creating inclusive learning environments that adequately support all children, no matter their learning challenges in Borno State, Nigeria. Borno State; located in Northeast Nigeria has faced significant challenges in providing quality education to its citizens particularly children with special needs. The state has been affected by the insurgency while this has led to displacement of people, destruction of infrastructure and disruption of social services including education. The study aim to fill this gap by examining

the current state of inclusive education in the state identifying challenges and opportunities, and providing ways for improvement by creating enabling environment for children with special need.

Statement of the Problem

There is public outcry on marginalisation of children with special needs, despite efforts by international organizations, interest groups and formulation of policies that advocate for inclusive education by governments, many children with special needs still face significant barriers to accessing and participating fully in mainstream education programs. These barriers have been observed to include physical inaccessibility to educational facilities or learning environments, inadequate trained staff, inadequate/inappropriate learning resources, and social stigma. In order to achieve equitable education for all school-age children, it is crucial to address these challenges. Thus, the need for initiating this research work.

Despite effort to promote inclusive education, children with special needs in Borno State, Nigeria. Continue to face significant barriers to accessing quality education in basic education schools. The enabling environment in these schools is often inadequate with limited infrastructure, resources and trained teachers to support the diverse needs of children with special needs. This has resulted in low enrolment, high dropout rates and poor academic outcomes for these children.

Objective(s) of the Study

Objectives of the study were to determine:

1. Teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education for children with special needs in Borno State Basic Education schools

2. Curriculum delivery strategies for children with special needs in Borno state Basic Education schools

3. Parental involvement in supporting inclusive education for children with special needs in Borno state Basic Education school

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered

1. What is the attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education for children with special needs in Borno state basic education schools?
2. What are Curriculum delivery strategies for children with special needs in Borno state Basic Education schools?
3. How does Parental involvement support inclusive education for children with special needs in Borno state Basic Education schools?

Theoretical Framework

The study was based on sociocultural theory which was developed by Lev Vygotsky in 1920. Vygotsky's socio cultural theory is a psychological framework that emphasizes the role of social interaction and culture in shaping human development and learning the theory posits that children learn through social interaction with more knowledgeable others, such as parents, teachers and peers. Culture influences the way children learn and develop, shaping their understanding of the world and themselves. Language also is a crucial tool for learning and development as it enables children to communicate with others and construct their own

understanding of the world. The range of knowledge and skills that a child can learn with guidance from a more knowledgeable others, providing temporary support and guidance to help children learn new concept and skills. Learning through guided participation in activities and tasks. Sociocultural theory also underscore the importance of encouraging social interaction and collaboration in learning especially among children which fosters sense of belonging and inclusiveness, recognizing and respecting the cultural backgrounds and experiences of children as well as providing guidance and support to help children learn new concepts and skills. Overall, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the complex interplay between social interaction, culture and learning in human development. The zone of proximal development (ZPD) helps a child to acquire knowledge and skills that a child is capable of mastering with guidance and support from more knowledgeable others such as teachers, peers or parents. The ZPD represents the sweet spot where children learn best as text are challenging yet available with support.

Implications of sociocultural theory on inclusive education for children with special needs as it emphasizes the importance of social interaction and culture in shaping learning and development. The theory highlights the importance of social interaction and collaboration in learning. In an inclusive environment thus can be achieve by encouraging peer to –peer support and collaboration using group work and cooperative learning strategies, providing opportunities for children with special needs to interact with their peers. The theory also emphasizes the importance of scaffolding and support in learning in an inclusive learning environment by providing temporary support and guidance to help children with special needs learn new concepts and skills, using assistive technology and adaptive equipment to support learning offering one-to-one support and accommodation as needed. The theory is also relevant to this study in the area of cultural sensitivity and awareness in learning. In an inclusive learning environment by recognising and respecting the cultural backgrounds and experiences of children with special needs, incorporating diverse perspectives and materials into the curriculum.

Some strategies for creating an inclusive learning environment that are informed by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasizes on designing instruction and materials that are accessible and engaging for all learners, provide instruction that is tailored to the needs and abilities of individual learners. Also by using technology to support learning and accessibility for children with special needs so as to deliver a curriculum that is inclusive and relevant to the diverse needs and experiences of children with special needs.

Methodology

This study used survey research design. Survey design enables the researcher to gather information from the sample which is used for generalization. Babbie (2001) Opines that survey design aids the examination of hundreds and even thousands of respondents and permits evaluation of complex prepositions and leads itself to mainly variables that can be qualified and processed electronically. Shittu (2015) stated that survey design allows researchers to systematically collect data on existing condition or attitude of people for purposes of data analysis. Amechi (2018) suggested that when a study involves a population or a sample of respondents from whom information is obtained either verbally or through a questionnaire, the ideal design method to be adopted is the descriptive survey design. The population of the study was One Thousand and three (1,003) consist of Teachers, Parents, Head Teachers and Community leaders. Simple random sampling technique was used to obtain a sample of two

hundred and three (203) respondents across the three (3) senatorial districts of the state. This sample size is in consonance with Taro Yamane sample size formula. A-30 item questionnaire developed by the researchers was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by specialists in the Department of Education, Kashim Ibrahim University Maiduguri. The validity index was 0.72 while Cronbach's Alpha Value of .886 was reported of the instrument. Cronbach's Alpha Value was obtained from a pilot study which was conducted in one other state that was not part of the main study. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation.

Results

Research question one: What is the attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education for children with special needs in Borno state basic education schools?

The summary of descriptive statistics of the attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education is presented in table 4.1

Table 4.1: Descriptive statistics of teachers' attitude toward inclusive education for children with special needs in Borno state basic education schools

S/N	Statement	Mean	SD
1.	Teacher demonstrates empathy and understanding toward children with special needs.	3.92	0.36
2.	Teacher is patient and flexible in adapting their teaching methods to meet the diverse needs of learners.	3.75	0.48
3.	Teacher provides a supportive and encouraging learning environment fostering self-confidence in children with special needs.	3.14	0.42
4.	Willing to learn about different special needs, seeking to enhance knowledge and skills.	3.18	0.52
5.	Feels overwhelmed or uncertain about how to support children with special needs.	3.25	0.60
6.	Holds stereotypes or biases about children with special needs, seeing them as incapable.	3.20	0.62
7.	Lacks knowledge about special needs and feels uncertain about supporting these learners.	3.38	0.63
8.	Attention towards children with special needs can significantly impact learning outcomes.	3.22	0.51
9.	Can create inclusive classrooms that value diversity and promote social learning.	3.09	0.54
10.	Lack of good teacher–pupil relationship can create barriers to learning, limiting opportunities for children with special needs.	3.36	0.69

Table 4.1 shows how teachers in Borno state universal basic education schools feel and behave toward children with special needs. The results are based on the average ratings (mean scores) of their responses. The table shows that most teachers have a positive attitude toward inclusive education. The highest mean score (3.92) shows that many teachers demonstrate empathy and understanding toward children with special needs. This means teachers care about the feelings and challenges of these children. Teachers also showed a high level of patience and flexibility in their teaching methods (mean = 3.75), which suggests that they try to adjust lessons to fit the needs of all learners. Responses to statements about feeling overwhelmed (3.25), holding stereotypes (3.20) and lacking knowledge (3.38) suggest that a number of teachers still struggle with confidence and understanding in handling children with special needs. The result for teacher–pupil relationship (3.36) and creating inclusive classrooms (3.09) also shows that some

teachers may might need more guidance and support to apply inclusive strategies effectively. Therefore, the findings indicate that teachers' attitudes are mostly positive, but there are still areas where improvement is needed especially in gaining more knowledge, reducing bias and building stronger teacher–pupil relationships to support inclusion fully.

Research question two: What are Curriculum delivery strategies for children with special needs in Borno state Basic Education schools?

The summary of descriptive statistics of Curriculum delivery strategies for children with special needs is presented in table 4.2

Table 4.2: Descriptive statistics of curriculum delivery strategies for children with special needs in Borno state basic education schools

S/N	Statement	Mean	SD
1.	Teacher tailors instruction to the unique needs and goals of each child with special needs.	3.89	0.44
2.	There is collaboration with parents, teachers, and other professionals to develop and implement individualized education plans (IEP).	3.54	0.50
3.	Providing multiple means of representation (visual, auditory, etc.) can aid learning.	3.15	0.55
4.	Providing multiple means of action and expression such as writing, drawing, or technology-based options can aid learning.	2.99	0.57
5.	Teacher uses grouping strategies such as small-group instruction or peer-to-peer learning.	3.21	0.64
6.	Learning centres provide hands-on, interactive experiences tailored to different learning styles.	3.17	0.57
7.	Teacher uses text-to-speech software to support students with reading difficulties or dyslexia.	3.22	0.52
8.	Teacher modifies assessments to accommodate the needs of learners with special needs (extra time, assistive technology, etc.).	3.24	0.51
9.	Inclusive grouping strategies promote social interaction and learning among all students.	3.21	0.49
10.	Implementing positive behavioural supports promotes positive behaviours and reduces challenging ones.	3.36	0.57

Table 4.2 shows the responses of teachers on curriculum strategies used for children with special needs. Since all the mean scores are above 2.00, it means the respondents agreed with all the statements. The highest mean score (3.89) indicates that teachers tailor their instruction to meet the individual needs and goals of each child with special needs. Teachers also agreed that collaboration with parents and professionals helps in developing individualized education plans (mean = 3.54), and that positive behavioural support promotes good classroom behaviour (mean = 3.36). Other areas such as providing different ways of learning (visual, auditory, or technology-based), using grouping strategies and modifying assessments also recorded mean scores above 3.00, showing general agreement among teachers. This means that teachers in Borno State Universal Basic Education Schools apply a variety of curriculum strategies to support inclusive learning and make the classroom more accommodating for children with special needs.

Research question three: How does parental involvement support inclusive education for children with special needs in Borno state basic education schools?

The summary of descriptive statistics of parental involvement support inclusive education for children with special needs is presented in table 4.3

Table 4.3: Descriptive statistics of parental involvement support in inclusive education for children with special needs in Borno state basic education schools

S/N	Statement	Mean	SD
1.	Parents attend meetings with teachers to discuss their children's progress, strengths, and challenges.	3.86	0.39
2.	Parents participate in IEP meetings to develop and implement personalized education plans.	3.15	0.59
3.	Parents volunteer in classrooms to support teachers and learners with special needs.	3.20	0.56
4.	Parents advocate for inclusive education policies and practices.	3.21	0.54
5.	Parents provide feedback and suggestions to teachers and administrators to improve inclusive education.	3.11	0.59
6.	Parental involvement improves academic outcomes for children with special needs.	3.25	0.50
7.	Parental involvement facilitates better communication between parents and teachers.	3.18	0.52
8.	Parental involvement empowers parents to advocate for their child's needs and rights.	3.17	0.61
9.	Lack of awareness or understanding of inclusive education can be a barrier to parental involvement.	3.15	0.60
10.	Creating a welcoming environment that values diversity and inclusion encourages parental involvement.	3.23	0.57

Table 4.3 presents the responses on how parents are involved in supporting inclusive education for children with special needs. Since all the mean scores are above 2.00, it means the respondents agreed with all the statements. The highest mean score (3.86) shows that most parents attend meetings with teachers to discuss their children's progress, strengths, and challenges. Parents also participate in classroom activities, advocate for inclusive education, and provide useful feedback to improve school practices, with mean scores ranging from 3.11 to 3.25.The results further show that parents play an important role in promoting communication with teachers, improving learning outcomes, and supporting their children's rights. Although some parents may still face challenges due to limited awareness or understanding of inclusive education, the overall findings indicate that parental involvement in inclusive education in Borno State Universal Basic Education Schools is generally positive and supportive.

Discussion of findings

On what is the teachers' attitude towards inclusive education for children with special needs in Borno state basic education schools (Research question one) revealed that teachers have positive attitude towards inclusive education for children with special needs. This finding is consistent with the sociocultural theory propounded by Lev Vygotsky (1920) which states that learning is a social process where interactions and relationships shape understanding. Teachers scaffold learning providing support to promote child's growth. According to Odo, Onah, Ojiatuonu and Okafor (2021) reported that consciousness personality and core experience positively predicted school teachers' attitude towards inclusive education. This finding is contrast with Zoniou-sideri and Vlachou (2006) who found that regular education teachers holds a number of restrictive as well as conflicting beliefs towards disability and inclusive education. These teachers reported that although inclusion is necessary as a means of

improving the way ordinary schools functions and reducing the marginalization and stigmatization of students with disabilities.

On what are the curriculum delivery strategies for children with special need in Borno State basic education schools (Research question two) revealed that teachers in Borno state basic education schools apply a variety of curriculum delivery strategies to support inclusive learning. This finding was in contrast with Eke and Benneth (2025) who asserted that predominance of theoretical lecture–based teaching methods with limited practical engagement is often used by teachers when delivering the content and instruction which affects students' assimilation. The finding also identified challenges such as large class size, insufficient instructional materials and lack of specialized training for educators' affect the achievement of learning objectives. According to Kabungo, Matafwali Matakala and Kabundula (2024) asserted that there were different types of pedagogical skills & content which are used by teachers and has significant impact on students' academic performance such as role play, debate, demonstration and discussion methods.

On how does parental involvement support inclusive education for children with special needs in Borno state basic education schools (Research question three) revealed that parental involvement in inclusive education in Borno state basic education schools is generally positive and supportive. This finding was in line with Henry (2021) who found that parents who were actively involved in their child's education reported increased satisfaction with their child's education. Similarly, Abdullahi (2022) asserted that children who enjoy parental support tend to have better academic performance than those who lack parental support. Also, Corroborating Adeniyi (2021) found that peer support programme can promote social inclusion and reduced stigma towards children with special needs. In the same vein, Isaac (2023) asserted that collaborative learning tends to promotes sense of belonging among children thereby reducing problem of child isolation and stigma.

Conclusion

From the finding reported in this study, the study concludes that teachers' positive attitudes, better curriculum delivery and parental involvement are crucial in supporting inclusive education for children with special needs in Borno State. These factors create a supportive environment, improve academic outcomes and promote social inclusion ensuring children with special needs reach their full potentials.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendation were made;

1. Provide ongoing training and workshops for teachers to enhance their skills in supporting children with diverse needs.

2. Government and other stakeholders should provide adequate resources, infrastructure and assistive technologies to support inclusive education.

3. Strengthen parent-teacher partnerships through regular communication collaborative goal settings.

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