

Teachers' Self-Perception, Knowledge of Inclusive Education and Classroom Practices among Primary School Teachers in Ogoja Education Zone, Cross River State

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Abstract

This paper investigated the influence of teachers' self-perception and knowledge of inclusive education on classroom practices among primary school teachers. To achieve this, two research questions and two hypotheses were used to guide the study. 147 teachers (47 males and 100 females) constituted the sample of the study drawn from the population of primary school teachers in Ogoja Education zone using random sampling technique. Ex-post facto design was adopted for the study. A questionnaire with three sub-scales titled Teachers' Self-perception, Knowledge of Inclusive Education and Classroom Practices Questionnaire (TSPKIECPQ) was validated and tested for reliability using the Cronbach Alpha reliability test. This yielded the following estimates: 0.72 for self-perception; 0.81 for knowledge of inclusive education and 0.76 for teachers' classroom practices. Data generated from the questionnaire administered to the subjects were coded and analyzed using One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Results of data analysis revealed significant influences of teachers' self-perception and knowledge of inclusive education on classroom practices adopted by teachers. The implications of this results suggests that teachers self-perception and their knowledge of inclusive education are important for their success in teaching effectively using appropriate and effective classroom practices. This in effect will result to their achievement of goals of inclusion. It was recommended among other things that teachers particularly regular classroom teachers used in inclusive setting be given training through workshops and seminars.

Keywords: Teachers self-perception, knowledge, inclusive education, and classroom Practices.

Introduction

The success of every school programme relies much on the nature of classroom practices. Classroom practices can be described as the different techniques and resources that are incorporated into the teaching-learning process by the teachers. Effective classroom practices are critical to the attainment of goals of education in general and inclusive education in particular. However, such goals are not usually tenable in the Nigerian public school system, especially at the primary school level due to a variety of confounding factors. Teachers' expectation which fail to take into cognizance the differences that exists among learners (Njama, 2015); overcrowded classrooms, poor teachers and learners attributes, poor school environment (Asu, 2018; Effiong, 2014), are some of the factors militating against the use of effective classroom practices by teachers. These confounding factors fail to enhance the capability of all learners; promote collaboration among peers; induce critical thinking; increase class participation by learners; make room for flexibility in teaching styles to accommodate all categories of learners and achieve the goals of learning.

Currently, with the introduction of inclusive education and effort being made to implement it by many nations of the world including Nigeria, the problem of effective classroom practices becomes even more heightened. Inclusive education, the brain child of UNESCO (the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization) is part of UNESCO's Education for All (EFA) initiative which set out to overcome the global challenges of marginalization, discrimination and exclusion (Uchem, Ngwa&Asoguna, 2014). It is conceived as a system whereby students with limitations/disabilities are placed in age appropriate general learning classes in schools in their locality to receive high quality instructions, interventions and supports that would enable them succeed in the core-curriculum (Bui, Quirk, Almazan&Valenti, 2010; Alquraini&Dianne Gut, 2012) doing so however at their own pace (Isah, 2014).

In an inclusive setting, the school and classroom operate on the premise that students with disability are fundamentally competent as those without disability (McManis, 2017). The potentials in them therefore have to be nurtured in these classrooms. Teachers have the main responsibility of ensuring this. According to De Boer, Phy and Minnaert (2011), teachers are the key persons to implement inclusive education. Teachers therefore have to be skilled to carry out this task, making use of classroom practices that will be beneficial to the diverse group of students in their classroom.

Meanwhile, teachers differ in their characteristics and are as a result not able to manage students and the teaching-learning process in the same way.

These differences in teachers' capability arise from a variety of factors including their cultural background (Farook & Bukhary N.D), level of preparedness, attitude and interaction levels with inclusive education (Gokdere, 2012). Ideally, inclusive classrooms should have a special education teacher and a general education specialist in each classroom to ensure that the students' needs are met. However, the experience in Nigeria is that due to lack of special education specialists to go round, general education teachers are left to handle this mixed group of learners alone. These teachers with little or no skill in special education and poor attitudinal tendencies may not do much in achieving desirable teaching/learning outcomes that will benefit all categories of students in inclusive classrooms.

The benefits of educating students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms (McMaster, 2014; Liggins, 2016) and the role of teachers as key operators of the education process as well as in the assessment of students (De Boer, Phil & Minnaent, 2011) have been emphasized in literature. Teachers' characteristics such as negative attitude, poor self-concept, cultural background and lack of knowledge of subject matter and so on impact negatively on what a teacher can achieve (Ajuwon, 2012). The lack of well trained and skilled special education teachers for inclusive classroom and the use of less knowledgeable regular classroom general teachers to fill the gap in teaching, intervening and providing necessary support for learners in these classrooms pose enormous challenges to these ill-equipped teachers. This study therefore sets out to examine the influence of teachers' self-perception and knowledge of inclusive education on classroom practices in the primary schools with a view to draw its implications for inclusive education.

The importance of effective classroom practices in inclusive classrooms and the factors that can enhance or limit the effectiveness of these practices have been highlighted in literature. In one review, it was noted that the way teachers view their role in the classroom which is associated with their self-perception and self-identity aligns and interacts with their classroom practices (McREL, 2019) and by extension their goal attainment (Njama, 2015). In another review, Yeung, Craven and Kaur (2014) found a significant influence of one's self concept and value perceptions on one's behaviour and beliefs. They pointed out that teachers' self-belief about teaching and value of learning may influence the way they teach and perceive their students learning abilities. They concluded that such teachers' perceptions of themselves can affect their actual classroom teaching methodology.

In an empirical literature, Meiyer (2011) assessed classroom practice and teachers factors and found that such teacher related factors as sensitivity and skills enhance significant social relations among pupils of all categories (special needs and non-special needs). The enhancement of social relations this way may strengthen collaboration among peers. Also, the teachers factors mentioned above

are critical to teachers putting up their best attitude and understanding the learners they teach and the teaching-learning process. It equally engenders better relationships between them and the learners.

Savage and Erten (2015) studied growth rate variation in reading attainment and social-emotional development as functions of classroom practices and teachers' perception of inclusion. To achieve this, data was obtained at two levels grade 3 and 5. 180 students in 15 grade 3 and 5 inclusive classrooms constituted the sample. Using standardized students self-reports and assessments with direct classroom observation and teachers self-report data were generated. Data analysis using Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) revealed significant association between students outcomes (growth in reading attainment and social emotional development) and teachers effective teaching practices as well as teachers perceptions of inclusion. Teachers' perception of inclusion of course arises from their self-perception to a large extent. According to Grace College (ND) an individual's self-perception helps them find their hidden strengths or to improve the weaknesses they did not know they had which helps them get along better in life. Such improvements go a long way to benefit the teaching-learning process in terms of improved outcomes. Furthermore, an individual's self-perception puts him or her in a specific frame of mind to do other things either positively or negatively.

Literature equally reveals the importance of teachers' knowledge of inclusion to the success of inclusive education programme. According to Mngo and Mngo (2018), appropriate knowledge of inclusive education and willingness on the part of teachers (special education teachers and general teachers) to embrace inclusion promotes effective classroom practices for inclusion. The amount of information, facts and skills teachers (special and non-special education) acquire on the concept of inclusion is of advantage for the success of the programme. Invariably, to succeed as a teacher in an inclusive system requires that you have understanding and expertise of the subject-matter. A teacher's knowledge of subject-matter increase his or her self-efficacy (Urtor, Wilbert & Henneman, 2014), as well as reduce his anxiety (McCray & McHutton, 2011) and subsequent fear of failure.

In another review, lack of, or poor preparation and knowledge of inclusive education have been found to generate high levels of anxiety in teachers particularly in general education teachers in inclusive setting. Literature also reveals that acquiring sufficient knowledge about inclusive education enables teachers to develop positive attitude toward inclusion. The importance of teacher's positive attitude in enhancing the goals of a programme has been stressed (Amr, Al-Nahour, Al-Aldallat & Alkhama, 2016).

Literature reviewed here are generally foreign and fail to address the critical problem of teachers' self-perception and lack of knowledge of inclusion

and their influence on classroom practices in the Nigeria environment. The purpose of this research therefore was to find out the influence of teachers' self-perception and knowledge of inclusive education on classroom practices. To achieve this, two research questions and two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study.

Research questions

1. To what extent does teachers' self-perception influences their classroom practices in inclusive classrooms?
2. What is the influence of teachers' knowledge of inclusive education on classroom practices in inclusive classrooms?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant influence of self-perception on classroom practices among primary school teachers in inclusive settings.
2. Teachers' knowledge of inclusive education does not significantly influence their classroom practices in inclusive settings.

Methodology

The researchers adopted the Ex-post facto research design. This design enabled the researchers to establish the influence of the independent variables retrospectively on the dependent variable. In other word, the influence of teachers' self-perception and knowledge of inclusive education on their classroom practices without having to manipulate the independent variables. Using random sampling technique, a total of 147 teachers (47 males and 100 females) were selected from eight primary schools picked randomly from the 56 primary schools in Ogoja Education Zone. The 147 primary school teachers purposively responded to items on the 30-item Teachers Self-Perception and Knowledge of Inclusive Education Questionnaire as well as the classroom practices questionnaire. Example of items responded to were: inclusion helps all categories of learners develop freely; encourages group work and togetherness; allows all children learn in a nurturing environment at their own pace(for knowledge of inclusive Education). I cannot cope with teaching children with diverse needs; teaching in an inclusive classroom is a burden for the teachers; I do not see the need for inclusive classrooms; I do not think I am competent to handle an inclusive classroom (For teachers' self-perception). And I make instructional materials inclusive; I vary my approach to teaching/instruction in inclusive classes; I provide special assistance to the students as the need arises; I am sensitive to the peculiarities of my students; I ask questions about students' needs and make adjustments where necessary (for classroom practices).

The items on the questionnaire were scored on a four point scale which required the subjects to Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree to the questions raised. The questionnaire was face and content validated and tested for reliability using the Cronbach Alpha reliability test and the test yielded reliability estimates ranging from 0.72 for teachers' self-perception, 0.81 for knowledge of inclusive education and 0.76 for teachers' classroom practices on the sub-scales. Data collected from the instruments were coded and analyzed using One-Way Analysis of Variance to test the two hypotheses of the study.

Results

Hypothesis one

There is no significant influence of self-perception on class room practices among teachers. The independent variable self-perception was categorized into high, moderate and low self-perception while the dependent variable classroom practices was measured continuously. To test this hypothesis, One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used and the result showed that the mean value ($X = 29.717$) for those with high self-perception is greater than those with moderate self-perception ($X = 27.71$) and then those with low self-perception ($X=25.78$). This implies that teachers with high self-perception are better in their classroom practices compared to other teachers with moderate and low self-perception. When these mean differences were further compared using One Way- analysis of variance, the result showed that ($F=6.535$, $p<.05$). Since $p(.001)$ is less than $p(.05)$, this implies that there is a significant influence of self-perception on classroom practices among primary school teachers. With this result, the null hypothesis was rejected. A post hoc analysis was carried out using Fisher Least significant differences (LSD) to establish where the significant differences lies and the result showed that the mean value of those with high self-perception is significantly higher than those with moderate and low knowledge of inclusive education. The result also showed that teachers with moderate self-perception had a significant greater mean when compared to those with low self-perception. The results are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1

One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) result on the influence of self-perception on classroom practices

| Variable | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|----------|----|-------|----------------|
| Low | 50 | 25.78 | 4.04 |
| Moderate | 56 | 27.50 | 3.63 |

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|---------------------|----------|-------|--------|---------|------|
| High | 41 | 29.17 | 3.58 | | |
| Total | 147 | 26.82 | 3.81 | | |
| Source of variation | SS | Df | MS | F-ratio | Sig |
| Between groups | 185.016 | 2 | 92.508 | 6.535 | .001 |
| Within groups | 2138.385 | 144 | 14.155 | | |
| Total | 2223.401 | 146 | | | |

*Significant at .05 level; $p < .05$

Table 2

LSD post hoc analysis on the influence of teachers' self-perception of inclusive education on classroom practices

| Variable | Low (n=50) | Moderate (n=50) | High (n=50) |
|------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Low | 25.75 ⁿ | -1.75 ^b | -3.42 |
| Moderate | -4.32 ^{*c} | 27.50 | -1.67 |
| High | 2.17 [*] | 2.87 [*] | 29.17 |
| MS _{within} =14.155 | | | |

a = group means along the principal diagonal

b = group mean differences above the principal diagonal

c = calculated t-values below the principal diagonal

Hypothesis two

Teachers' knowledge of inclusive education does not significantly influence their classroom practices. The independent variable knowledge of inclusive education was categorized into high, moderate and low knowledge of inclusive education, while the dependent variable classroom practices was measured continuously. To test this hypothesis, One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used and the result showed that the mean value ($X=28.15$) for those with high knowledge of inclusive education is greater than those with moderate knowledge of inclusive education ($X=27.29$) and then those with low knowledge of inclusive education ($X = 25.43$). When these mean differences were further compared using One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), the result showed that ($F=7.386$, $p < .05$). Since $p(.001)$ is less than $p(.05)$, this implies that, there is a significant influence of knowledge of inclusive education on classroom practices among primary school teachers. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. A Post Hoc Analysis was carried out using Least Significant

differences (LSD) to find out where the significant least differences lies and the result showed that the mean value of those with high knowledge of inclusive education differed significantly from those with moderate and low knowledge of inclusive education. The result also showed that teachers with moderate knowledge of inclusive education differed significantly in their classroom practices when compared to those with low knowledge of inclusive education. The results are presented in tables 3 and 4.

Table 3
One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) result on the influence of knowledge of inclusive education on classroom practices

| Variable | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | | |
|---------------------|----------|-------|----------------|---------|------|
| Low | 57 | 25.44 | 3.84 | | |
| Moderate | 48 | 27.29 | 3.58 | | |
| High | 44 | 28.16 | 3.51 | | |
| Total | 149 | 26.84 | 3.82 | | |
| Source of variation | SS | Df | MS | F-ratio | Sig |
| Between groups | 198.296 | 2 | 99.148 | 7.386* | .001 |
| Within groups | 1959.838 | 146 | 13.424 | | |
| Total | 2158.134 | 148 | | | |

*Significant at .05 level; $p < .05$

Table 4
LSD post hoc analysis on the influence of knowledge of inclusive education on classroom practices

| Variable | Low (n=57) | Moderate (n=48) | High (n=44) |
|----------|---------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Low | 25.43 | -2.86 | -3.83 |
| Moderate | -3.87* | 27.29 | -1.54 |
| High | 2.65* | 3.21* | 28.83 |

$MS_{\text{within}}=13.424$

a = group means along the principal diagonal

b = group mean differences above the principal diagonal

c = calculated t-values below the principal diagonal

Discussion of result

Analysis of hypothesis one which stated that there is no significant influence of self-perception on classroom practices among teachers showed a significant influence of self-perception on classroom practices among teachers. A perusal of the mean differences for teachers with high, moderate and those with low self-perception on classroom practices showed that teachers with moderate and low self-perception differs respectively in their measure of classroom practices.

The result of the hypothesis is in line with the findings of McREL (2019) who found that teacher's self-perception and self-identity relate to their classroom practices. Craven and Kaur (N.D) also lend support to this work as they found significant influence of one's self concept and value perceptions of one's behaviour and beliefs. They further suggested that teachers' self-beliefs about teaching and their value of learning may influence the way they teach and perceive their students learning abilities. If a teacher perceives himself or herself as being incapable of handling special needs learners or on the other hand perceives self as being advantaged or better still superior to the point of developing a negative attitude towards the special needs children, he or she may become unable to function effectively in handling the tasks of teaching these categories of learners particularly in an inclusive classroom. This type of attitude would limit untrained teachers in inclusive setting from finding their hidden strengths as well as in improving weaknesses they may not know they possess (Grace N.D).

A teacher's self-perception affects his/her self-confidence. When self-perception is positive, it will likely result to high self-confidence in the individual's achievement of the goals of teaching any category of learners. Therefore, a teacher with positive self-perception of inclusive education will develop confidence in carrying out the tasks of teaching in an inclusive classroom. More so, such a teacher even when not a specialist will cultivates attitudes that makes him or her open to learning. Hence in an inclusive classroom, the general classroom teachers with high self-perception of inclusion would likely succeed.

The analysis of the second hypothesis which stated that teachers' knowledge of inclusive education does not significantly influence their classroom practices showed a significant influence of teachers' knowledge of inclusive education on their classroom practices. An examination of the mean differences of the 3 levels of knowledge (high, moderate and low) showed that teachers with high knowledge of inclusive education had a higher mean value than those with moderate and low respectively. The result of this analysis aligns with the view of Mngo and Mugo (2018) who pointed out that an appropriate knowledge of

inclusive education and willingness of teachers to embrace inclusion promotes effective classroom practices for inclusion, as well as the works of Urton, Wilbert and Henneman (2014) who opined that a teacher's knowledge of subject-matter increases his or her self-efficacy. An increased self-efficacy in individuals gives rise to improvement in their thought patterns and responses. Teachers' therefore with increased self-efficacy in an inclusive setting, would see the task of teaching in such classrooms as an easy one. This invariably will result in quality planning of their lessons in such a way that learners will benefit and teachers stress will be reduced. High self-efficacy therefore results from knowledge of subject matter. When teachers have good knowledge of subject matter they become more comfortable in themselves and consequently are more able and willing to accept and implement new strategies in their teaching that will be for the general good of their pupils that they teach. Gokdere (2012) pointed out that a correlation exists between teachers' levels of confidence which of course arises from knowing and their willingness to use inclusive practices. When you know a subject-matter you become confident in handling it.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, teachers' self-perception and knowledge of inclusive education significantly influence their classroom practices. When teachers' have positive perception and good knowledge of inclusion, it impacts positively on their classroom practices. The findings of this research have significant implications for the implementation of inclusive education particularly in countries like Nigeria where there are lots of challenges facing the education enterprise. To achieve inclusive education goals therefore teachers who are knowledgeable, well informed about inclusive education, skilled to handle inclusive classrooms as well as have qualities that can take care of the intellectual, social and emotional needs of all categories of learners must be used in the programme. Using these categories of teachers starting from the primary level of education will be advantageous. Ascertaining the influence of teachers' self-perception and knowledge of inclusive education on classroom practices is therefore a step towards ensuring that the quality of inclusive education is guaranteed.

Recommendations

In view of the findings of this study, it is recommended as follows;

1. Stakeholders, government, non-governmental organizations, policy makers and teachers must do everything possible to improve on teachers' self-perception and their knowledge of inclusive education.

2. Refresher courses, remedial courses, workshops and seminars can be adopted by government and other agencies in giving training to teachers to enhance their self-perception and knowledge of inclusive education which will improve their classroom practices for attainment of maximum teaching-learning outcomes.

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