

Knowledge and Attitude of Teachers towards the Inclusion of Students with Learning Disabilities in Junior Secondary Schools in Nigeria

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Received: January 16, 2024|**Accepted:** May 22, 2024|**Published:** June 30, 2024

Abstract: *The study determined the knowledge and attitude of teachers towards the inclusion of students with learning disabilities in junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt local government area of Rivers State. The study adopted a survey research design. A sample of 250 teachers drawn from 10 junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Local Government Area, Rivers State were used for the study. A reviewed Likert 4-point scale questionnaire titled “Knowledge and Attitude Towards Inclusion of Students with Learning Disability Questionnaire (KAISLDQ)” was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by experts in special education and measurement and evaluation with a reliability estimate of .82. Thus, data collected were analysed using means, standard deviation and independent t-test for research questions and hypothesis respectively. It was concluded from the findings that junior secondary school teachers in Port Harcourt Local Government Area, Rivers State have adequate knowledge of learning disabilities and also show positive attitude towards the inclusion of students with learning into the regular classroom. It was recommended government should provide necessary facilities and equipment to encourage the inclusion of students with special needs into public schools.*

Keywords: Attitude, Inclusion, Knowledge, Learning Disabilities, Teachers

Introduction

There is a global trend of educating special needs children in a general education context that is based on the equality principle, which recognizes each child as a member of the group. The theory of inclusive education requires that children with special educational needs spend the bulk of their time in the classroom with the typical children and regular teachers as key players. However, for this to be possible, it is essential that teachers' attitudes towards inclusion are positive, as it can influence the way in which we learn in an inclusive environment. Coelho, Blàzquez, And Cubo (2017) also note that positive attitudes promote success and are the foundation of inclusion.

Teacher's attitudes do not only determine the behaviour of a child but also the academic success of the child in learning and in the school performance at large. A teacher's character towards a child may mal or make the child depending on the impact of the treatment on the child. Students with learning disorders need warm and friendly atmosphere to learn, socialize and develop appropriately. To succeed, students with learning disabilities require both disability friendly human and physical environment because of their disabilities. One major psychological environment that school should critically watch out for in relative to positive development of students with learning disabilities is teacher's attitude (Oparaoriaku, 2020; Ubani, 2022).

Learning disabilities is an umbrella term for a wider variety of learning problems (Kemp, Smith & Segal, 2016 in Oparaoriaku, 2020). Supporting this, Ubani and Sanikpege (2020) opines learning disability as learning problems that manifest in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write or do mathematical calculations as a result of disorder in the psychological process involved in understanding or in using language. Most often, it refers to those learning difficulties experienced by students in schools which are so severe that the students require some type of special education services. It could be caused by environmental, neurological and biological factors. Children with learning disabilities usually display some behavioural characteristics such as hyperactivity, withdrawal, emotional instability, short attention, awkwardness and low frustration tolerance and this can greatly affect the individual's ability to learn. Consequently, the learning disorders ranges from dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, auditory and visual processing disorders (Ugbo 2017; Ubani, 2022).

In Nigeria, learning disabilities is one of the most important areas in special needs education that require adequate attention, most especially in this decade. Teachers use punishment as the yardstick for correcting students who are not performing well in the classroom but the truth is, some of these students are suffering from learning disabilities and no form of punishment can correct this problem except a great work on educating the teachers to the term learning disabilities (Ubani, 2022). Teachers can only give their best to what they have knowledge about. The quality of knowledge and awareness of learning disabilities is important in the identification, diagnosis and management of students with learning disabilities. It is therefore expedient for teachers to acquire the needed skill and knowledge to support the inclusion of students with learning disabilities.

Despite, the strong advocacy for educational system to consider the inclusion of students with special learning needs into the regular classroom, there is need to consider the knowledge and attitude of the regular classroom teachers as the success of inclusive education depends largely on it. Many schools lack the necessary resources, infrastructure and trained personnel to successful practice inclusion of students with learning disabilities (Obi & Ashi, 2018). Dupudong (2014) in Baguisa and Ang-Manaig (2019) states that regular teacher's attitude towards students with special educational needs and their knowledge on how to properly educate them determine to a large extent the success of inclusive education. Knowledge and attitudes of teachers are the most important factors in the inclusion of students with learning disabilities into the educational system.

Teacher's attitude is very sensitive to the responses a child displays in academic performance. So, the attitude of regular classroom teachers towards students with learning disabilities is of concern because most regular teachers are not aware of the nature and perhaps appropriate ways of handling students with learning disability (Dada, Oluokun & Archibong, 2013 in Oparaoriaku, 2020). Teaching students with learning disability in the regular classroom can be very challenging for the regular teacher because of the frustration that presents itself with the disabilities. Therefore, a regular teacher's attitude demands more than just the mastery of subject content or the conventional techniques of handling the general classroom. The regular teacher must as a matter of fact add to his professional virtues positive attitude to be able to cope with the challenges of students with learning disabilities.

The students with learning disabilities in inclusive classrooms are expected to be participant in classroom instruction and be challenged academically at the same level with their classmates without disabilities. The role of the teacher is to meet the instructional needs of these students by providing equal access to an integrated curriculum and quality education. However, the ability of the teacher to develop teaching strategies, modification of lesson plans and the

capacity to individualized learners needs depend largely on their knowledge and attitude towards students with learning disabilities. This is because the perception of regular classroom teachers may differ based on their knowledge of the disability and this may also have strong influence on their attitude towards the student with learning disabilities, which can also have implication for learning outcome and achievement level of the student.

Statement of the Problem

The inclusion of students with learning disabilities in regular schools is a critical issue in Nigeria as it poses significant challenges for both students and teachers. Despite the advocacy for inclusive education globally, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding and implementation of inclusive practices in Nigerian secondary schools. To worsen the situation, the attitude of the society and particularly the teachers towards the inclusion of students with learning disabilities serve as a significant barrier to their effective inclusion into regular classroom. Teachers' knowledge and attitude towards inclusion of students with learning difficulties into the regular classroom could be said to be important factor in the implementation of inclusive education in schools. However, if teachers lack the necessary knowledge regarding the diverse nature of learning disabilities and the appropriate instructional strategies to accommodate these students' learning needs, it will affect their attitude towards the inclusion of such students. Teachers' lack of knowledge can also contributes to the students' class performance and further hinders the realization of inclusive education goals.

In Nigeria, the increasing population of students with learning disabilities has presented considerable challenges to the educational system. It is worrisome that these students often face difficulties in acquiring and processing information, which can hinder their academic progress and overall achievement. However, Osi & Osi (2022), noted that one of the critical issues of inclusion of students with learning disabilities is that of teachers' level of understanding and attitude towards accommodating them in the general classroom. This could result in teachers struggling to effectively cater to the needs of students with learning disabilities, eventual creating a less inclusive learning environment. Hence, the need to investigate the knowledge and attitude of teachers towards inclusion of students with learning disabilities in junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Local Government Area in Rivers State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate teachers' knowledge and attitude towards inclusion of students with learning disabilities into junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Local Government Area, Rivers State. Specifically, objectives of the study are to;

1. Find out the knowledge of learning disabilities amongst junior secondary school teachers in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State.
2. Find out teachers' attitude towards inclusion of students with learning disabilities in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Research Questions

1. Do junior secondary school teachers in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State have knowledge of what learning disabilities is?
2. What is the attitude of junior secondary school teachers towards inclusion of students with learning disabilities in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference between the mean response of male and female junior secondary school teachers in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State on their knowledge of what learning disabilities is.
2. There is no significant difference between the mean response of male and female junior secondary school teachers on their attitude towards inclusion of students with learning disabilities in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Research Methods

A survey research design was adopted for this study. This design is appropriate as it provided technique that help the researcher to investigate teachers' knowledge and attitude towards students with learning disabilities. Asuru and Asuru (2023) explained that survey is a research wherein the researcher studies a group of people (population) or item by collecting and analysing data from a sample of the entire group. The sample size is made up of 10 selected junior secondary teachers in Port Harcourt Local Government Area making a sample population of 250 teachers thereby 65% of the population made up the sample of the study, where 25 teachers were randomly selected from each of the school while the population of the study consisted of all the teachers in the selected secondary schools in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers States is numbered 416. Data was collected from participants with permission from the school administrations and the teachers themselves. The instrument for the study is titled Knowledge and Attitude Towards Inclusion of Students with Learning Disability Questionnaire (KAISLDQ). The questionnaire was a self-developed instrument with two sections: Section A elicited information on the demographics of the respondents while section B contained 15 items from two sub-constructs of the measuring the knowledge of learning disabilities. KAISLDQ was responded to on a four point modified Likert scale format of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1, having positive statement. The validity of the instrument was done by two experts from special education and educational measurement. The KAISLDQ was administered to 20 staff in two schools that was not part of the main study. The administration is for a trial testing of the instrument in measuring what it is meant to measure. The reliability coefficients of .82 was obtained through Cronbach Alpha estimate. The descriptive statistic of mean and standard deviation was used to analyse the research questions while the Independent t-test statistics was used to test the hypotheses.

Results

Table 1: Summary of Frequency Distribution of Respondents based on Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	105	42.0	42.0	42.0
	Female	145	58.0	58.0	100.0
Total		250	100.0	100.0	

Data in Table 1 above shows that majority of the participants [F=105(42.0%)] were male, while the remaining participants [F=145(58.0%)] were female.

Research Question One: Do junior secondary school teachers in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State have knowledge of what learning disabilities is?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on the knowledge of learning disabilities by junior secondary school teachers in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State

S/N	Items	Mean	St.D	Decision
1.	I understand learning disabilities enough, hence can teach students with this identification.	2.26	0.55	Disagree
2.	I possess the knowledge and skills to adequately teach a student with learning disability.	2.31	0.66	Disagree
3.	Students with learning disability can be expressed as a significant disability in reading, writing, communication, coordination and mathematics.	2.80	0.77	Agree
4.	I am knowledgeable regarding curriculum adaptation that can help in teaching students with learning disorder.	2.27	0.57	Disagree
5.	Differentiated instruction is an effective classroom strategy to use in teaching students with learning disabilities.	2.85	0.79	Agree
6.	Teachers need to support students with learning disabilities to enable them maximize their potentials in the classroom.	2.80	0.75	Agree
7.	Teaching students with learning disabilities require specialized training.	2.76	0.76	Agree
8.	Teaching students with learning disabilities require extra preparation.	2.76	0.78	Agree
9.	It is necessary to adopt appropriate techniques while teaching students with learning disabilities.	2.85	0.72	Agree
N=250	Grand Mean & St.D	2.63	0.71	Agree

Table 2 provided the result of the analysis of nine items on the knowledge of junior secondary school teachers in Port Harcourt Local Government of Rivers State. The table shows that 6 items out of the 9 items are accepted because their individual mean is greater than the cumulative mean average of 2.50. In summary, the grand mean stood at 2.63(SD=0.71) indicating that the teachers from the ten selected schools under study agreed that to a high extent, junior secondary school teachers in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State have knowledge of what learning disabilities is.

Research Question Two: What is the attitude of junior secondary school teachers towards inclusion of students with learning disabilities in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation on the attitude of junior secondary school teachers towards inclusion of students with learning disabilities in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State

S/N	Items	Mean	St.D	Decision
1	As a regular teacher, I believe that inclusion is the most appropriate placement for students with learning disabilities.	2.78	0.81	Agree
2	Students with learning disabilities have the right to be educated alongside their counterpart within the regular school.	2.81	0.70	Agree
3	Inclusion of students with learning disability with the regular classroom will positively impact the academic achievement of the student.	2.38	0.77	Disagree
4	It will be difficult to maintain classroom activities when students with learning disability are included in my classroom.	2.80	0.72	Agree
5	It is so burdensome to teach students with learning disabilities in regular classroom.	2.83	0.70	Agree
6	Curriculum implementation is difficult in a class with typical and atypical students.	2.86	0.72	Agree
N=250 Grand Mean & St.D		2.74	0.74	Agree

Table 3 provided the result of the analysis of six items on the attitude of junior secondary school teachers towards inclusion of students with learning disabilities in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State. The table shows that 5 items out of the 6 items are accepted because their individual mean is greater than the cumulative mean average of 2.50. In summary, the grand mean stood at 2.74(SD=0.74) indicating that the junior secondary school teachers in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State have good attitude towards the inclusion of students with learning disabilities.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference between the mean response of male and female junior secondary school teachers in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State on their knowledge of what learning disabilities is.

Table 4: T-test Analysis of the significant difference between the mean response of male and female junior secondary school teachers in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State on their knowledge of what learning disabilities is

Gender	N	\bar{X}	SD	DF	t	p	Decision
Male	105	2.54	0.36	248	2.001	0.038	Significant (Ho₁ Rejected)
Female	145	2.61	0.71				

From the result presented in Table 4, it is revealed that male teachers had a mean score of 2.54(SD = 0.36), while the female teachers had a mean score of 2.61(SD = 0.71). This result shows that the female teachers have more knowledge of what learning disabilities is over their male counterpart. Further testing using independent samples t-test revealed that there is a significant difference between the mean response of male and female junior secondary school teachers in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State on their knowledge of what

learning disabilities is ($t = 2.001$; $df = 248$; $p = 0.038$). Since $p < .05$, the null hypothesis one was therefore rejected.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference between the mean response of male and female junior secondary school teachers on their attitude towards inclusion of students with learning disabilities in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Table 5: T-test Analysis of the significant difference between the mean response of male and female junior secondary school teachers on their attitude towards inclusion of students with learning disabilities in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State

Gender	N	\bar{X}	SD	DF	t	p	Decision
Male	105	2.62	0.39	248	2.521	0.012	Significant (Ho₂ Rejected)
Female	145	2.83	0.79				

From the result presented in Table 5, it is revealed that male teachers had a mean score of 2.62(SD = 0.39), while the female teachers had a mean score of 2.83(SD = 0.79). This result shows that the female teachers possessed better attitude towards the inclusion of students with learning disabilities into the regular classroom over their male counterpart. Further testing using independent samples t-test revealed that there is a significant difference between the mean score of male and female junior secondary school teachers on their attitude towards inclusion of students with learning disabilities in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State ($t = 2.521$; $df = 248$; $p = 0.012$). Since $p < .05$, the null hypothesis two was therefore rejected.

Discussion of findings

The results of the analysis revealed that teachers have to a high extent knowledge of what learning disabilities is in Port Harcourt Local Government Area in Rivers state. This implies that teachers have relatively high knowledge of what learning disabilities is in Port Harcourt Local Government Area in Rivers state. This finding is in line with that of Adebowale and Moye (2012) in their research topic 'Teachers' Knowledge and Attitude towards Learning Disabilities' carried out in Osun State asserts that majority of teachers possess good knowledge of what learning difficulty is. Likewise, Ademola and Akinbota (2017) carried out a study titled Teachers' attitude and willingness to support students with special needs in Nigeria. According to the study, teachers in Nigeria have a good understanding of the different types of learning disabilities including mild, moderate, and severe disabilities, but it did not in agreement with those of Abang (2021) who observe that most teachers in Nigeria have limited knowledge of the various learning disabilities and the appropriate teaching method to employ in supporting them.

The second result from the analysis of data collected from respondents showed that junior secondary school teachers in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State have good attitude towards the inclusion of students with learning disabilities. This finding is in line with the study of Ekeleme and Obi (2017) titled 'Teachers Attitude Towards Inclusive Education in Nigeria' found that teachers in Nigeria have positive attitude towards inclusion and willing to adapt their teaching materials to meet the needs of students with learning disabilities. In the same vein, Osi and Osi (2022), conducted a study titled 'Attitude of teachers towards inclusion Students with learning disabilities in the regular schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area' asserts that generally teachers had positive attitude towards inclusion of students with learning disabilities. This study's finding is in disagreement with the finding of Dada et al. (2013) that the attitude of regular classroom teachers towards students with learning disabilities

is of concern because most regular teachers are not aware of the nature and perhaps appropriate ways of handling students with learning disability. Teaching students with learning disability in the regular classroom can be very challenging for the regular teacher because of the frustration that presents itself with the disabilities.

Conclusion

The study findings established that teacher's knowledge and attitude towards inclusion of students with learning disabilities was relatively good. Teacher's knowledge of inclusion and their attitude towards students with learning disabilities is crucial in the academic development of students with learning disabilities. The study on teachers' knowledge and attitude towards inclusion of students with learning disabilities revealed that the majority of teachers in junior secondary school were found to have adequate level of knowledge and attitude towards inclusion of students with learning disabilities in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria.

Recommendation

Based on the findings the following recommendations are made

1. Ministry of education should organise workshops, seminars, conferences to enable teachers acquire the require skills on ways to modify instructional materials and impart knowledge on students with special educational needs.
2. Government should provide necessary facilities and equipment to encourage the inclusion of students with special needs into public schools and also reduce the workload of teachers.
3. School administration may provide more training in inclusive education to general classroom teachers who are teaching students with special educational needs.
4. A similar study may be conducted using other variables and to verify the results of this study

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