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ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS' PERCEPTION AS PREDICTORS OF SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education is seen as feasible philosophy for expanding educational opportunities for students with learning disabilities. Successful inclusive school provide a unified educational system in which general and special educators work collaboratively to provide comprehensive and integrated service and programming for all students. This study was an attempt to examine the extent to which administrators and teachers perception serve as predictors of successful implementation of inclusive education programme for students with learning disabilities in Cross River State, Nigeria. Three research questions were raised. The descriptive survey research was adopted for the study, while the sample was selected using the simple random sampling technique. The research instrument was a questionnaire containing a twenty (20) item Likert type-4-point scale predictors of successful implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities. Also reported was a gender difference between the teachers' perception towards predictors of successful implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities. Based on this it was recommend that there should be a periodic interactions between special educators and regular education teachers for successful implementation of inclusive education.

KEYWORDS: Perception, Administrators, Teachers, Inclusive Education and Learning Disabilities

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is seen as a feasible philosophy for expanding educational opportunity for students with disabilities. This philosophy is of solid foundation in that, inclusive education goes beyond mere integration and mainstreaming into full and effective integration of students with disabilities in the regular school with all necessary educational or learning facilities for such disabilities being provided for. According to United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO,

2005), inclusive education is a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, culture and communities and reducing exclusive within and from education. Rogers (1993) describes inclusive education as the commitment to educate each child, to the maximum extent appropriate in the school and classroom he or she would otherwise attend (if not placed in special education). He further opined that "inclusive education brings the support services to the child rather than moving the child to

the services. Full inclusion thus refers to the belief that instructional practices and technological supports are presently available to accommodate all students in the school and classroom they would otherwise attend if not disabled.

Successful inclusive schools provide a unified educational system in which general and special educators work collaboratively to provide comprehensive, integrated service and programming for all students. Research suggested that regular teachers feel unprepared to serve students with disabilities, and that they have little time available to collaborate and make few accommodations for students with special needs.

The successful inclusion of students with disabilities requires fundamental change in the organizational structure of schools and in the roles and responsibilities of teachers (Burstein, Sears, Willeoxen, Cabolio & Spaga, 2004). Burstein et al (2004) identified strategies that promote inclusion as follows: building a strong commitment for change, planning for change, preparing personnel change and providing supports that promote and maintain changes. Kavale (2002) asserts that inclusion should be implemented with proper attitude, accommodation and adaptations in place. According to Burstein et al (2004), the most effective forms of inclusion are school-based programmes that encourage the participation of teachers in the planning and decision-making process.

Statement of the problem

Considerable evidence has indicated that both general and special educators as well as administrators have wrong perceptions as to how to serve students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Many regular education teachers have different perceptions towards diversified instructional methods. Therefore, to facilitate confidence and competence, such teachers need systematic and intensive class active participation that include best practices in an inclusive school. This study was premised on the erroneous belief that students with disabilities among members of Nigerian society, particularly in Cross River State, where children or students with disabilities cannot be educated in the same stream with regular students, and also that some teachers who desire to provide such support systems are not encouraged nor provided with the basic skills for effective service delivery and implementation of inclusive education for the students with learning disabilities.

Statement of hypotheses

The following research hypotheses guided the study:

1. Administrators' and teachers' perceptions do not significantly relate as predictors of successful implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities?
2. Teachers' gender does not significantly relate to any predictors towards the successful implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities?
3. Administrators' perceptions do not significantly relate to gender in terms of predictors towards successful implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities?

Theoretical framework

Bandura (1965) cognitively oriented theory examines the mental process of reasoning, belief system, perception, concepts and constructs which affect the areas of cognitive in human functioning. In the traditional African setting, the belief acquired through the mental process of learning takes a long time to re-modify or change. For persons with special needs, it is difficult for them to understand why those without a disability do not think the same way they do. This theory deals expressly with cognition and the need for cognitive re-structuring through the process of re-education. Gestalt insight learning Performance oriented theory, examines the behaviour changes through learning. Learning therefore is seen as a process of behaviour modification through direct or indirect experiences. In human function, most of the things people think, or feel are basically dependent on how they learn or perform each activity for life. This theory therefore examines how human beings exhibit the content of the mental process and emotions. For the person with a disability the theory is crucial because it deals with the issues of impairment, disability and handicap. It defines the limitations of persons with disabilities in terms of functioning capacity and shows how the disability could be minimized through behaviour adjustment.

The affective oriented theory thus attempts to examine how human beings feel about themselves and their environment. Carl Rogers' person-centred approach (1957) is based on the assumption that human beings have the tendency to develop in a positive and constructive manner if a climate of respect and trust is established. Rogers (1957) itemized three attributes necessary for a growth-promoting climate in which individuals can move forward and become what they are capable of becoming. These are genuineness or realness, acceptance or caring and deep understanding. Rogers (1959) argued that man in being self-actualized has the capacity to tolerate and even welcome uncertainty in his life, accept one self and others. The need for privacy and solitude and autonomy, is necessary for change in the individual as against the Freudian fatalism. According to him, the core of the person-centred approach is based on the individual's responsibility and capacity to discover oneself and encounter reality as it is. Individual who knew themselves best and are the ones who discover more appropriate behaviour for themselves based on a growing self-awareness. It is the belief that through congruence, empathy and unconditional positive regard towards oneself and from others implementation of inclusive education is possible.

Conceptualization of inclusive education for children with learning disability

Inclusive education refers to the commitment to educate each child to the maximum extent appropriate in the school and classroom he or she would otherwise attend if not placed in special education setting (Rogers, 1993). UNESCO (2005) sees inclusive education from the angle of government's role in developing policies that are necessary and irreplaceable, which must contain certain advocacy, coherent and sustainable policy design, the attainment of financial sustainability, capacity development at multiple levels in the education system, to facilitate an effective learning opportunity for

every child in inclusive setting as well as recognizing and respecting diversity. The term inclusive education implies the careful consideration of the specificity and uniqueness of each child so as to provide his/her real educational opportunity during his/her life time. UNESCO (2005) further stress that there are some key elements which serves as a guidelines in actualizing the processes and outcomes of inclusive education viz:

- i. It is a process of ordering for the best or most appropriate ways of responding to diversity and learning how to learn from the differences.
- ii. It is linked to stimulating through multiple strategies, the creating and the problem-solving capacity of students.
- iii. It comprises the right of the child to attend school to express his/her opinion to have quality learning experience and to attain valuable learning outcomes without regard to their natural social and ethnic characteristics.
- iv. It implies the moral responsibility of prioritizing those students who are at risk of being marginalized and excluded from the school and of obtaining low learning outcomes. This means that inclusive education for all students irrespective of disabilities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Administrators must be more aware and supportive of the needs of general and special education teachers working with students identified as having special needs. One proactive procedure by which this can be accomplished is for administrators to take a more active role in involving continuing in-service training for general education teachers.

Additionally, by encouraging active collaboration between special and regular education teachers' administrators can make implementation of school change more successful (Pugach & Johnson, 1995), the only way administrators can foster collaboration is by scheduling shared or common planning time between these educators. More useful overcomes of inclusive are likely to result when the staff of a school work together to determine how it can meet the needs of specific children (Rogers, 1993). Brustein (2004) in a research has identified strategies that promote inclusive and include building a strong commitment for change, planning for change, preparing personnel for change and providing supports that promote and maintain change. Inclusive shall be implemented with proper attitudes, with accommodation and adaptation in place (Kavale, 2002).

Barry (1994) is also of the view that together general and special education teachers can offer a wide range of services rather than a continuum of placements. By using the strategies of cooperative teaching teachers develop the potential for transforming how concept or skills may ordinarily be taught, what materials, are used to support content, and how to apply methods and strategies. An aspect in collaborative teaching that is mostly neglected is co-

planning (Sailor and Rogers, 2005; and Villa and Thousand, 2003). Co-planning enables more than just an opportunity to hammer out the nut and bolts of instruction; it is a collaborative process, where teachers develop a shared vision.

These shared visions actively involve educators in all steps of the change process including adaptation or initiation and implementation of strategies for effective instruction.

Roberts and Mather (1995) opined that the success of inclusive education programme for the learning disabled student, to a large extent depends on the level of seriousness attached to the programme. Special teachers view inclusion as dichotomous teaching special needs students and general education students in the same classroom but at different times, in different spaces and with different lesson.

Elbaum (2000) reported that most teachers teach reading much like they were instructing a whole class of students with the same abilities. These teachers provided little instruction that addressed word recognition or specific reading comprehension strategies for the students who are less able, including students with specific disabilities.

METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for the study is the survey research design. The population of the study is 750 teachers and administrators drawn from all the 25 schools in the state. The study area is Cross River State, Nigeria, comprising of three senatorial districts (southern, central and northern).

A proportionate to size sampling and simple sampling methods were used for the selection of the respondents based on a 20% range. By this one hundred and five (105) teachers and forty-five (45) administrators drawn as follows: thirty five (35) teachers and fifteen (15) administrators from the schools in each senatorial district. The researcher used a self-designed questionnaire titled "TQAQ" for data collection. It comprised two section, section A which was a demographic data and section B, a 20-item likert type scale measuring the predictors of successful implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities. Data for the study was collected through the help of research assistants who accompanied the researchers to the three different locations. The validity and reliability of the instrument was established through trial-testing following a rigorous face validity carried out by experts in test and measurement and subjected to a statistical analysis using the Cronbach Alpha coefficient to determine the reliability. The reliability estimate ranged between 0.62 to 0.78.

DATA ANALYSIS

Research hypothesis one

Is there any difference between the administrators' and teachers' perception as predictors towards the successful implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities? This research question was answered using independent t-test, at 0.05 level of significance. The result is presented in table 1.

Table 1

Independent T-test of difference between Administrators and Teachers Perceptions as Predictors towards the Successful Implementation of Inclusive Education for Children with Learning Disabilities

| Variables | N | Means | df | t-value | sig |
|----------------|-----|--------|-----|---------|------|
| Teachers | 105 | 56.695 | 148 | 5.622 | .000 |
| Administrators | 45 | 60.444 | | | |

Significant at 0.05, df= 148

Results from table 1 shows that, the two groups formed a t-value of 5.622, one group (teachers) had a mean value of (x = 56.695) while the group two (administrators) had a mean value of (x = 60.444) at 0.05 level of significance with 148 degree of freedom, this implies that there is significant difference between the two groups.

Therefore the null hypothesis which states that, is there any difference between the administrators and teachers perceptions as predictors towards the successful implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities is by this result rejected. This means that,

there is significant difference between the administrators and teachers perceptions as predictors towards the successful implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities.

Research hypotheses two

Is there any gender difference between the teachers perceptions as predictors towards the successful implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities? This research question was answered using independent t-test, at 0.05 level of significance. The result is presented in table 2.

Table 2

Independent T-test of difference among Teachers perceptions as predictors Towards the Successful Implementation of Inclusive Education for students with Learning Disabilities

| Variables | N | Means | Df | t-value | sig |
|-----------------|----|--------|-----|---------|------|
| Male teachers | 61 | 55.295 | 103 | 4.067 | .000 |
| Female teachers | 44 | 58.636 | | | |

Significant at 0.05, df= 103

Results from table 2 shows that, the two groups formed a t-value of 4.067, one group (male teachers) had a mean value of (x = 55.295) while group two (female teachers) had a mean value of [x = 58.636) at 0.05 level of significance with 103 degree of freedom, this implies that there is significant difference between the two groups.

Therefore the null hypothesis which states that, Is there any gender difference between the teachers perceptions as predictors towards the successful implementation of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities is rejected. This means that, there is significant gender difference

between the teachers’ perceptions as predictors towards the successful implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities.

Research hypotheses three

Is there any gender difference between the administrators perceptions as predictors towards successful implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities? This research question was answered using independent t-test, at 0.05 level of significance. The result is presented in table 3.

Table 3

Independent T-test of Gender Difference of Administrators Perception as Predictors towards the Successful Implementation of Inclusive Education for Students with Learning Disabilities

| Variables | N | Means | Df | t-value | sig |
|-----------------------|----|--------|----|---------|------|
| Male administrators | 28 | 60.714 | 43 | 6.373 | .000 |
| Female administrators | 17 | 60.000 | | | |

Significant at 0.05, df = 43

Results from table 3 shows that, the two groups formed a t-value of 6.373, one group (male administrators) had a mean value of (x - 60.714) while group two (female administrators) had a mean value of (x = 60.000) at 0.05 level of significance with 43 degree of freedom, this implies that there is significant difference between the two groups.

Therefore the null hypothesis which states that, Is there any gender difference between administrators perceptions as predictors towards the

successful implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities is therefore rejected. This means that, there is significant gender difference between the administrators perception as predictors towards the successful implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicated favorable perceptions of teachers and administrators as predictors of successful implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities. Considering the mean cut-off score of 2.50 and above which was used as yardstick for classifying their responses that ranged from 1.44 to 4.00 for administrators and 1.42 to 3.55 for teachers into favourable and unfavourable perception. It can be concluded that over 70% of the respondents responded positively to 14 of the 20 items.

Teaching should be based on the inclusive education model with a mean score of 3.55, indicated that for inclusive education to be successful, there is need for teachers to based their teachings on the inclusive education model. This is corroborated by the National Policy on Education (2004) that says educators should tolerate and manage the behaviors of learning disabilities students.

It has also been established in this study that educators should keep a close watch on students with learning disabilities so that they can identify their problems. This was corroborated with Okorie, and Uche (2007) who pointed out that learning process can only be effective when the teacher pays attention to individual differences and that adequate and equal opportunity should be given to the students with learning disabilities in regard to their conditions. This is supported by Obi and Obi (2006) who opined that students with disabilities in regular programme and activities should be educated along side their counterparts without disabilities.

It has also been established in this study that there is a significant difference between* the teachers and administrators perceptions as predictors of successful implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities ($t = 5.622$, $df = 148$, $p < 0.05$). This shows that teachers have higher perception as predictors of successful implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities. This difference may be due to the fact that teachers have spent more of their years with students with disabilities than teachers who have not risen to the height of an administrator.

The result of the study indicated that there is gender difference between the administrators perceptions as predictors of successful implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities ($t = 6.373$, $df = 43$, $p < 0.05$). This shows that male administrators have more favourable perception on predictor of successful implementation of inclusive education than female administrators.

Finally, the result of this study shows that there is significant difference between the male and female teachers perceptions as predictors of successful implementation of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities ($t = 4.067$, $df = 103$, $p < 0.05$) the result indicated that female teachers have better perception on the successful implementation of inclusive education than their male counterparts. Lewis (1995) found out that teachers and administrators have influence on inclusive education in regular school programme. Lack of teachers and administrative interest for inclusive programme should not be blamed on the instructors but should be attributed to the government and other organizing body.

CONCLUSION

Based on the finding of this study, it has been observed that in the inclusive education programme in Cross River State certain factors must be considered. These factors include availability of required teachers, viable educational content, instrumental activities, attitudes of educators, learning obstacles, age differences and the learners' attitude to the programme. Teacher and other school personnel must work together to make decision about what to teach and how to teach it. This collaborative planning process is the most important activity in which teacher must engage.

The National priority of "leaving no child behind" implies that educational resources must extend to meet the needs of students with special need that are at-risk, from divers background or have a disability. However, both structural and ideological barriers to curriculum access are well established in schools and classrooms. In an era of standard-based reform, where great emphasis is place on schooling outcomes, scientifically validated instructional interventions and teaching approaches must be made available so that practitioners can apply them in their own learning environments.

Techniques used in both general and special education setting frequently complement one another to produce environments and create opportunities conducive to optimal learning. As described at the outset of this researched work, technological tools and digital media will increase curriculum flexibility. Application of the principles of universal design for learning (UDL) will ensure that digital curriculum will be accessible by the wide possible range of students. But new technologies and new digital based media will not replace teachers. Together, university digital leaning will reform curriculum so that the challenges of teaching all students will becomes a more joyful.

The literature findings point to the need for flexibility in planning instructional routines, selection of media and material, and design of learning activities for the special need in order for instruction to be considerate in their learning. These studies support the underlying principles of effective implementation of inclusive education in southern senatorial district, multiple means of representation, multiple means of engagement and multiple means of expression.

It is the sincere desire of the researcher that if the government, non-government agencies who are interested in the programme, educators, and indeed the learner themselves will consider the factors raised in this study, the factors which serve as problem to inclusive education will be eliminated and more stakeholders and parents will be willing to undertake such programmes.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

Based on these findings of this study, there is need for various organs of government, school administrators, curriculum planners, policy makers and teachers to adopt the following recommendations:

1. The government and other agencies should adequately provide suitable facilities or adaptation of existing facilities. To aid proper implementation of inclusion of

- students with learning disabilities into regular education setting.
2. In defining the content of inclusive education activities, priority should be given to specific need of the students; this is because life long education and learning have theoretical boundaries and should meet the particular situations created by specific needs of development.
 3. The implementation of inclusive education should not be based on sex, age, social status, and experience. The programme of inclusive and implementation should be relevant to their felt need.
 4. There should be cordial relationship between the educators and the learners, as this will help to remove the inherent fear in inclusive education to regular school programme thus encouraging them to learn effectively.
 5. Inclusive education should be encouraged in order to effectively integrate students with special needs into the society beyond expectation whether there is any external reward or not.

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