

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF BARRIERS TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN OYO EAST LOCAL GOVERNMENT, OYO STATE

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Abstract

This study undertook a bold examination of the challenges educators encounter in adopting inclusive education practices within the Oyo East Local Government Area of Oyo State. Employing a descriptive research design, the research involved a varied sample of 200 teachers from nursery and primary schools throughout the region. The investigation utilised a specially developed tool, titled "Teachers' Perceived Barriers to Inclusive Education in Early Childhood Education," focusing on a key research question and formulating three hypotheses, all evaluated at a significance level of 0.05. Through this comprehensive approach, the research sheds light on the critical challenges that hinder the advancement of inclusive educational practices. The collected data were analysed through various statistical methods, including mean and standard deviation calculations, t-tests, and ANOVA. The results highlighted several key obstacles hindering the advancement of inclusive education: managing large class sizes, limited professional development opportunities available and teachers' ability to communicate effectively with children who have diverse learning needs. The research reveals noteworthy variations in how teachers perceive the obstacles to inclusive education, particularly influenced by gender. Additionally, it highlights a significant correlation between these perceived challenges and the number of years of teaching experience. However, it is interesting to note that no substantial link exists between teachers' qualifications and the barriers. The paper recommends fostering collaboration among teachers, parents, special educators, and other stakeholders to collectively address barriers to inclusive education. It emphasises the need for regular workshops and seminars to manage diverse learning needs effectively.

Keywords: Barriers, Inclusive education, teachers' perceptions, collaboration

Introduction

The experiences a child faces during their formative years are vital in influencing their overall growth and the direction of their future. These influences can be both beneficial and detrimental. It is the period where children receive things needed for physical, emotional, intellectual, and social development. In this crucial stage of development, children start to take initiative, mimic behaviours, and cultivate essential habits that will serve them well throughout their educational journey. This foundational period lays the groundwork for all subsequent levels of learning.

Pre-primary education serves as the crucial stepping stone for children before they embark on their primary school journey (NPE, 2013). This early stage is vital in a child's development and is often described as the bedrock for future educational endeavours. It compels us to pay close attention to the quality of learning that occurs during these formative years. As highlighted by Bush (2001), the experiences and education received from birth to age five lay the groundwork for a successful life. Recognising this importance, countries around the globe are diligently striving to ensure that every child has access to high-quality and equitable early childhood education and care. Despite the importance of this period, it is disheartening to see that some children are still being denied the opportunity to be welcomed into regular classrooms to learn and participate in classroom activities, regardless of their abilities or disabilities.

In the words of Adetoun (2003), inclusion is not just a concept; it embodies an enriching journey of embracing new challenges, engaging in additional work, staying updated with the latest information, and

collaborating seamlessly with fellow professionals. Omede (2016) emphasises that inclusion transcends outdated ideas of integration and mainstreaming, which were primarily focused on disability and special educational needs. These former notions often suggested that learners needed to adapt or prove themselves worthy of acceptance within mainstream settings. In stark contrast, inclusion champions a child's inherent right to participate and underscores the school's obligation to welcome every child without exception. Inclusion firmly rejects the separation of children with disabilities into special schools or classrooms. Instead, it prioritises the full participation of all students, honouring their social, civil, and educational rights. Omede (2016) further argues that inclusive education equips learners with disabilities with essential skills applicable both inside and outside the classroom. Rare though they may be, fully inclusive schools dissolve the barriers between “general education” and “special education.” They transform their structures to ensure that all children learn harmoniously together.

At its core, inclusive education is rooted in the belief that every student deserves access to a top-notch education tailored to their individual needs, ultimately enhancing their lives. By focusing on the requirements of vulnerable and marginalised groups, this approach seeks to unlock the full potential of each child. The primary aim of inclusive quality education is to eradicate all forms of discrimination and promote social cohesion, as highlighted by UNESCO in 2012.

Inclusive education embodies the commitment to integrating learners with disabilities into mainstream classrooms. However, its scope extends beyond just these learners; it delves into the diverse ways in which all children differ from one another (UNESCO, 2008). Each child arrives at school with a rich tapestry of traits that shape their educational journeys and achievements. As Ouane (2008) notes, a truly inclusive school acknowledges and embraces the various differences each child brings, which include factors such as ethnicity, race, language, disability, ability, religion, and socioeconomic background. It is essential for educators to be attuned to the unique needs and interests of every learner.

In 2001, UNESCO underscored the vital importance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, introduced in 1948, which enshrines education as an essential right for every child. This right serves as a crucial gateway to achieving and maintaining meaningful learning experiences. It is imperative that educational programs are carefully crafted and implemented, taking into account the unique interests, talents, characteristics, and learning needs of each child. Additionally, the global community has increasingly recognised the importance of education for individuals with disabilities, fueled by United Nations initiatives and declarations aimed at realising Education for All (EFA) by 2015 (Smith, 2002). The EFA policy is committed to creating an inclusive educational landscape for learners with disabilities, ensuring they receive equitable access to high-quality, relevant education. Member states of the UN have reaffirmed their dedication to upholding human rights, advancing educational equity, and fostering community development for individuals with disabilities (Pottas, 2000). By embracing inclusion and integrating children with developmental disabilities into mainstream educational settings, we honour a fundamental right of every child: the right to equality.

While the concept of inclusion has made strides, it still falls short of fulfilling all the necessary criteria for success across various segments. There is a pressing need for greater support for children with developmental disabilities and their families. A parent's approach to their child's challenges significantly influences the relationships they cultivate within the inclusive educational framework. Inclusion extends beyond just the child facing developmental hurdles; it encompasses their parents and all individuals connected to the child, including parents of typically developing children and their educators. Involving all stakeholders in the inclusive process is vital for cultivating strong relationships, promoting effective collaboration, and establishing a supportive environment for the growth and education of children with developmental disabilities. The foundation of successful inclusive education lies in the experiences that children encounter during their early years. It's also important to recognise the unique needs of every child engaged in this process. Inclusive education aims to support not only those with developmental disabilities but also any child who requires additional help and guidance as they develop. (Mujkanovic, 2018)

Each day, teachers and parents of children with developmental disabilities face a host of challenges. Educators often cite their biggest hurdles as the difficulty in customising educational materials and the lack of professional support available for these students. Additionally, the limited access to teaching resources and tools, combined with inadequate training for staff to effectively assist learners with diverse needs, further complicates their efforts.

In the realm of early childhood education, researchers have diligently examined the obstacles to inclusivity, gaining insights into how various educational stakeholders perceive these challenges. A pivotal study by Paul (2012) shed light on the landscape of inclusive education in Nigeria, revealing the unique perspectives of special educators. The results were striking: female educators reported a notably higher level of confidence in their ability to teach children with special needs when compared to their male colleagues. In a similar vein, Kranjee *et al.* (2016) explored the thoughts and experiences of teachers as they confronted the hurdles of creating inclusive environments for children with developmental disabilities. This body of research underscores the critical importance of understanding different viewpoints within the educational community, ultimately paving the way for more effective strategies in fostering inclusivity. The research findings indicate that teachers generally support the inclusion process and hold a favourable perspective towards it. However, Amr *et al.* (2016) highlighted that several challenges hinder effective implementation. These include insufficient resources and infrastructure, inadequate government funding, and a lack of teacher feedback about their experiences with inclusion in the classroom.

In their 2023 study, Adedayo and Olaniyi explored the obstacles teachers face in implementing inclusive education. They identified key barriers, such as teachers' attitudes, insufficient facilities, and a lack of acceptance among peers. Interestingly, their findings indicated that teachers' perceptions of these barriers did not significantly differ based on gender. Meanwhile, research by Mujkanovic in 2019 shed light on the perspectives of parents regarding their children's educational settings. Parents of children with developmental disabilities attending mainstream schools overwhelmingly believe that inclusive education is the best path forward, even if the necessary preparations are lacking. Conversely, parents of children in specialised institutions tend to hold negative views about the possibility of their child being educated in a regular school environment, advocating strongly against it.

In her study, Karande (2016) highlights several significant challenges to achieving inclusive education as noted by teachers. These obstacles include a lack of preparedness and training among educators, insufficient classroom support, and various physical barriers. For instance, many schools feature inaccessible pathways for students with mobility issues, with narrow doorways, steep staircases that hinder wheelchair access, and poorly maintained playgrounds that fail to accommodate children with physical disabilities. In their research, Dev and Kumar (2015) discovered that factors such as a teacher's gender, age, and level of education significantly influenced their views on the inclusion of children with learning disabilities (CWLDs) in mainstream classrooms. Interestingly, neither teaching experience nor the specific subject area taught showed any notable impact on these perceptions.

These previous studies have justified the fact that researchers have worked on barriers to inclusive education in early childhood education. However, such research efforts seem to be very scarce, especially regarding the perception of teachers in the Oyo East Local Government Area of Oyo State. Therefore, this study seeks to bridge this gap in research by examining the barriers to inclusive education in early childhood as observed by teachers in the Oyo East Local Government Area of Oyo State.

This study holds significant importance as early childhood education serves as the cornerstone for lifelong learning and social integration. Implementing effective inclusive education during this critical period fosters positive attitudes towards diversity and equality among young learners. Furthermore, by exploring the barriers that preschool teachers perceive, we can uncover the challenges they face in fostering inclusive education. This understanding will equip educators with the skills and knowledge needed to adopt effective inclusive practices, ultimately alleviating anxiety and hesitation while nurturing a more welcoming learning environment. Additionally, the insights gained from this research can guide policymakers in assessing the current landscape of inclusive education in preschools, paving the way for the development of more impactful policies and training initiatives for preschool educators.

Statement of the Problem

A significant proportion of children with disabilities in Nigeria continue to experience unequal treatment and limited social inclusion in educational settings. Social stigma and discriminatory attitudes from peers, educators, and the broader community often result in the isolation and bullying of children with disabilities, reducing their participation and engagement in school activities. The challenges faced by children with disabilities can seriously undermine their self-esteem, hinder their motivation to learn, stifle their social

development, and diminish their overall academic success, ultimately restricting their ability to realise their full potential. To foster an inclusive educational environment for these children, it is essential to have the intentional and effective engagement of teachers. They are pivotal in ensuring that every learner, regardless of their abilities, can fully participate in both learning and social activities.

A wealth of research has explored the insights of teachers regarding the hurdles of implementing inclusive education in Early Childhood Education within Oyo East Local Government, Oyo State. Some studies have specifically examined educators' attitudes toward inclusion and their preparedness to support children with special needs. Other investigations have aimed to identify effective strategies for rolling out inclusive education in Nigeria by gathering the viewpoints of special education teachers. Additionally, these findings have provided valuable perspectives from parents of children with developmental disabilities, alongside those of parents of typically developing children.

While previous research has provided important insights, it has missed a crucial element: the perspectives of teachers on the challenges they face in implementing inclusive education in Early Childhood Education within Oyo East Local Government, Oyo State. This study seeks to bridge that gap by delving into teachers' opinions on the barriers to inclusive education in this area. The results will deliver essential insights that can inform policy development, improve teacher training, and enhance classroom practices. Ultimately, this research aims to identify and address the obstacles that impede the effectiveness of inclusive education.

Purpose of the Study

This research delves into the perspectives of teachers regarding the obstacles they encounter while striving to implement inclusive education in early childhood education within the Oyo East Local Government Area of Oyo State. The study is guided by specific objectives that are outlined as follows:

1. To investigate the perceived barriers to inclusive education among teachers in early childhood education settings in Oyo East Local Government, Oyo State.
2. To establish the difference between teachers' perceptions of barriers to inclusive education based on their gender, years of experience, and educational qualifications.

Research Question

What are the perceived barriers to inclusive education among teachers in early childhood education settings in Oyo East Local Government, Oyo State?

Research Hypotheses

H01: There is no significant difference in teachers' perceptions of barriers to inclusive education based on gender.

H02: There is no significant difference in teachers' perceptions of barriers to inclusive education based on years of experience.

H03: There is no significant difference in teachers' perception of barriers to inclusive education based on their educational qualifications.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This will help gain an in-depth understanding directly from teachers about their knowledge of the barriers to inclusive education and present this information. Out of 394 teachers working in Oyo East Local Government in Oyo State, 200 nursery and primary school teachers working in Oyo East Local Government Area were selected using criterion sampling, which is a type of purposive sampling. For the purpose of this research, a researcher-designed instrument was used to gather information. The Teachers' Perception of Barriers to Inclusive Education Questionnaire (TPBIEQ). The TPBIEQ contains two sections: A and B. Section A consists of the participants' demographic data, which includes gender, years of experience, and educational qualification. This section enables the researcher to identify participants' gender (male and female), their years of experience (categorised into 1-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, and 16 years and above), and educational qualifications (categorised into NCE, HND, B. Ed., and

M.Sc.). The TPBIEQ contains 20 questions addressing teachers' barriers to inclusive education in early childhood education.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the TPBIEQ instruments, copies were distributed to lecturers in the Department of Guidance and Counselling at Emmanuel Alayande University of Education, as well as to experts specialising in Testing, Measurement, and Evaluation from the same institution. These professionals confirmed that the instrument was content-valid, aligning well with the study's variables and demonstrating usability. Their insightful feedback and suggestions were instrumental in refining the final version of the instruments. To assess the reliability of the instrument, essentially its ability to deliver consistent and stable measurements over time, the internal consistency method was employed. The TPBIEQ, which gauges teachers' perceptions of barriers to inclusive education in Early Childhood Education, was administered to a group of 20 teachers from a different location, ensuring no overlap with the study participants. The reliability was quantified using Cronbach's alpha estimate, yielding a robust coefficient of 0.85, thereby affirming its reliability. The data collected were meticulously analysed using various statistical methods, including descriptive statistics, frequency counts, percentages, means, standard deviations, t-tests, and ANOVA.

Answering Research Question

Research Question 1: What are the perceived barriers to inclusive education among teachers in early childhood education settings in Oyo East Local Government, Oyo State?

In answering this research question, the means of responses of the teachers' choice to each items on the questionnaire that addresses their perceived barriers to inclusive education in their schools.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation Analysis Showing Teachers Perceived Barrier to Inclusive Education in Oyo East Local government Early Childhood Education.

S/N			SD
1	Teachers lack adequate training to effectively teach children with special needs in an inclusive classroom setting?	2.73	.901
2	Managing large class sizes hinders the effective implementation of inclusive education?	3.25	.755
3	Many teachers are not aware of the policies and practices of inclusive education?	2.81	.926
4	There are limited professional development opportunities available to enhance teachers' skills in inclusive education?	3.18	.884
5	Teachers face challenges in communicating effectively with children who have diverse learning needs?	3.31	.779
6	Parents oppose inclusive education, believing that children with special needs may disrupt the learning process of others?	3.21	.689
7	Low level of parent's knowledge on inclusive education affects their understanding and acceptance of inclusive education?	3.36	.650
8	Socioeconomic challenges faced by parents negatively impact their support for inclusive education?	3.14	.665
9	Parents prioritize inclusive education for their children	2.57	.684
10	The cultural belief of parents hinder the acceptance of inclusive education in my school	3.04	.850
11	The unavailable of teaching aids and learning materials makes it difficult to implement inclusive education?	3.61	.519

12	The physical setup of classrooms is not designed to accommodate children with special needs?	2.83	.792
13	Assistive devices (e.g., braille machines, hearing aids) are available for pupils who require them?	2.70	.936
14	The school library has resources that address the diverse needs of all learners?	2.74	.786
15	The school provide adequate training for teachers to use assistive technology in the classroom	2.70	.821
16	The content of the curriculum does not accommodate the needs of children with diverse learning abilities?	2.76	.999
17	The pace of the curriculum is too fast for pupils with learning needs	3.06	.806
18	The curriculum lack flexibility to accommodate students with physical or cognitive disabilities	2.80	.757
19	The curriculum fails to integrate alternative learning approaches e.g., visual, auditory) for pupils with different disabilities	3.12	.767
20	The current curriculum does not promote the participation of students with disabilities in mainstream activities	2.76	.842
Grand Mean		2.98	

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Source: Authors field work 2025

Table 1 highlights teachers' views on the obstacles to inclusive education within early childhood settings in Oyo East Local Government, Oyo State. The feedback gathered from various survey items indicates that these factors are perceived as significant barriers, as evidenced by a benchmark weighted mean score of 2.50, with actual responses reaching an impressive 2.98 well above the threshold. This suggests that educators in Oyo East firmly believe these challenges hinder the effective implementation of inclusive education in their region.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference on teachers' perception of barriers to inclusive education based on gender.

Table 2 Summary Table of Independent t-test Analysis Showing the Significant Difference on Teachers perceived Barriers to Inclusive Education Based on Gender.

Male	45	61.1333	3.37504				
				-2.602	.198	.006	Significant
Female	155	59.2323	4.54675				

Source: Author's field work 2025

Table 2 shows the significant difference on teachers' perceived barriers to inclusive education based on gender. The findings revealed that there is significant difference ($t = -2.602$; $df = 198$; $P < 0.05$). The hypothesis is therefore rejected in the light of the result since the significant value is less than 0.05. This implies that there is significant difference in teachers barriers to inclusive education based on gender in Oyo east local government, Oyo state

H₀₂: There is no significant difference on teacher's perception of barriers to inclusive education based on years of experience.

Table 3: ANOVA Showing difference between Teachers' Perception of Barriers to Inclusive Education in Early Childhood Education based on Years of Experience.

Variable	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig .	Decision
Between Group	188.271	2	94.136			
			5.119	.007	Significant	
Within Group	3622.609	197	18.389			

*Significant $P < .05$

Data in Table 3 showed the F-Value calculated of 5.119, while p-value is .007. Since the p-value is less than the significant value of 0.05. Therefore, the hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference between teachers' perception of barriers to inclusive education based on years of experience is rejected which implies that there is significant difference between teachers' perception of barriers to inclusive education based on years of experience.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference on teachers' perception of barriers to inclusive education based on educational qualifications.

Table 4: ANOVA Showing the Difference between Teachers' Perception of Barriers to Inclusive Education in Early Childhood Education Based on Qualification.

Variable	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig .	Decision
Between Group	24.229	2	12.114			
			.630	.534	Not Significant	
Within Group	3786.651	197	19.222			

*Significant $P < .05$

Data in Table 4 showed the F-Value calculated of .630, while p-value is .534. Since the p-value is greater than the significant value of 0.05. Therefore, the hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference between teachers' perception of barriers to inclusive education based on qualification is retained which implies that there is no significant difference between teachers' perception of barriers to inclusive education based on qualification.

Discussion of Findings.

One of the findings revealed that there are barriers to inclusive education in early childhood education in Oyo East Local Government, Oyo State. This was revealed by the overall mean value of 2.98 of the total response from the respondents, which is greater than the cut-off points of 2.50. There are many barriers to inclusive education in early childhood education, including managing large class sizes, limited professional development opportunities available, teachers' ability to communicate effectively with children who have diverse learning needs, parents opposition to inclusive education, level of parents knowledge, socio-economic challenges faced by parents and the unavailability of teaching aids as the major barriers perceived by the teachers.

This insight is echoed by Amr *et. al.* (2016), who highlighted that the absence of essential materials, inadequate infrastructure, insufficient government funding, and the lack of teacher involvement in fostering inclusion are significant barriers to effective implementation. This perspective is further supported by the research conducted

by Adedayo and Olaniyi (2023), which explored teachers' perceived obstacles to inclusive education. Their findings identified key challenges, such as teacher attitudes, limited facilities, and a lack of acceptance among peers, all of which hinder progress toward inclusive practices.

The findings of hypothesis one revealed that there is a significant difference in teachers' perceived barriers to inclusive education based on gender in Oyo East Local government, Oyo state. This was revealed by the significant value of the response .006 which is less than 0.05. This study is in line with Paul's (2012) study on how to make inclusive education work in Nigeria by evaluating special educators' attitudes. The study revealed that female respondents indicated more confidence to teach special needs children than male respondents. Also, Adedayo and Olaniyi (2023) in their work on teachers' perceived barriers to inclusive education found that there is no significant difference in teachers' perceived barriers to inclusive education based on gender.

Another finding revealed that there is a significant difference between teachers' perceptions of barriers to inclusive education based on years of experience. This does not go in line with

Dev and Kumar (2015) study which found out that teaching experience and teaching field made no significant difference in their perception.

Furthermore, hypothesis three findings revealed that there is no significant difference between teachers' perceptions of barriers to inclusive education based on qualification.

Conclusion

The study concludes that multiple factors hinder the effective implementation of inclusive education in early childhood education settings within the Oyo East Local Government Area, Oyo State.

Recommendations

1. Addressing these barriers requires a multi-stakeholder approach emphasising adequate funding, teacher empowerment, and curriculum reform.
2. Strengthening teacher capacity through sustained professional development and fostering an inclusive school culture remain vital to achieving equitable early childhood education in Oyo East Local Government Area, Oyo State.

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