

## A Comparative Study of Teachers' Perception of Inclusive Education in Calabar Metropolis of Cross River State, Nigeria.

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### **Abstract**

*Inclusive education provides opportunity to all students to be placed in regular schools and classes as their counterparts, regardless of any challenges or disabilities they may have, in order to receive high quality interventions and support that will enable them benefit from the core curriculum. The trend is not encouraging regarding inclusion in Nigeria; this motivated this investigation on a comparative study of teachers' perception of inclusive education. The study focused on teachers' perception of inclusive education, perception of inclusive classrooms, and perception of their ability to manage integrated classrooms. The expo-facto research design was adopted for the study. The sample consisted of 72 teachers randomly drawn from 2 Special Education and 2 Regular Schools in Calabar Metropolis. The instrument used for data collection was the "Teachers' Opinion Questionnaire on Perception of Inclusive Education (TOQPIE). Data collected from 72 teachers were analysed using independent t-test. The results of the analyses revealed that perception of inclusive education with regard to perception of inclusive classrooms, perception of ability to manage integrated classrooms is statistically significant. The result further revealed that special teachers in Calabar Metropolis are better than regular teachers in their perception of inclusive classrooms.*

**Key words:** Inclusive, Education, Special, needs, Perception, Inclusive, classrooms.

### **Introduction:**

Inclusive education seems to be gaining steam in Nigeria today because research has shown that students with special needs may have recorded higher achievement and improved behavioural skills through inclusive education. Inclusive education can only be successful if there is acceptance, understanding, identification/acceptance of individual differences with regard to cognitive, academic, physical, emotional, social and personality diversities.

The clamour on inclusive education made waves for its incorporation into certain organizations like the European Commission (2010), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2005) the council of the European Union (2010), and UNESCO (UNESCO, 2015).

In Nigeria, there has been an outcry on accepting, accommodating, and celebrating students with diverse educational needs, but this can only be achieved, if teachers adjust the assessment method, teaching styles, and physical environment to meet the needs of all students. The necessity for inclusive education and a comparative study of teachers' perception cannot be overemphasized, since teachers constitute the major driving force for a

successful implementation of the program. Teachers' perception could lead to the success or failure of the process because inclusion depends on teacher's view of individual differences in classrooms and their willingness to respond positively and effectively to those differences (EADSNE, 2003).

Negative perception by most regular school teachers regarding inclusion may stand as a major bottle neck to a successful implementation, especially if a sub-set of teachers do not want children with specific disabilities in their classrooms for personal reasons, a situation as this could jeopardise the teaching learning process. Negative perception results in stigmatisation and discrimination which if not addressed on time could lead to a collapse of the implementation process of inclusive education. John, Shari, Elsa, & Susan (2002) stated that negative perception of inclusion may influence teachers' acceptance of students with disabilities into regular classes. Teachers are at the front burner of educational policy implementation, being the major driving force in determining the success or failure of any educational policy. It is therefore very important to assess how they feel about inclusive education before making strategic ground breaking reforms in the school curriculum. However, if teachers are receptive towards inclusion, it will positively affect students' achievement, acquisition of skills, social interaction, and access to quality instructions that can help develop all round skills.

Based on the aforementioned, a comparative study of teachers' perception of inclusive education became eminent. It is hoped that the findings of this study would greatly assist teachers both in regular and special schools, education policy makers to be on the right path regarding the implementation of inclusive education. Inclusive education is a process of promoting the capacity of education system in any given country in order to meet the diverse needs of learners. It is basically aimed at allowing the special needs students have equal rights to education by having a full school experience with the required support and adjustment (Ajuwan, 2012). It provides an active and equitable education to all children, regardless of their gender, cultural or religious background or learning needs (Mitchell, 2004). Inclusive education as defined by Salamanca statement UNESCO (1994) is schooling in which all children including children with diverse disabilities, have access to regular classrooms and all round support that makes them fit into the society. In most countries, inclusive education is primarily centred on disability, as a result, schools needed to adjust in this light, so as to accommodate children with diverse disabilities.

Kantavang, Sujarwanlo, Suwareeper Kjares and Budiyanto (2017) in a comparative study of teachers' opinion relating to inclusive classrooms in Indonesia and Thailand, using a sample of 172 teachers in primary schools in Thailand and 165 from Indonesia revealed that both teachers in regular and special schools express positive opinion about students with special needs. Olson (2003) found that overall special education and general education teachers have positive attitude towards inclusive education. Elhaveris and Alsheikh (2006) reported that teachers had a positive attitude towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general classrooms.

Sharma, Loreman, and Forlin (2012) laments that the implementation of inclusive education practices has been a herculean task that requires total compliance regarding teachers' attitude, beliefs, and adjustment strategies that will suit the classroom situation and bring about tangible improvements. The onus is therefore on the teachers if diversity and inclusivity must be embraced. Schools must key into the transformation of the learning

environment to ensure a smooth and effective implementation of inclusive practices (Savolainen, Engelbrecht, Net, & Malinen, (2012).

Rimm-Kaufman and Sayen 2004) revealed that if teachers who are faced with difficulty managing integrated classrooms, develop a positive mind set and attitude, and belief that they can cope in inclusive settings, then they may likely be more confident and accommodating. Also, teachers who do not believe that they can cope in disruptive /inclusive classrooms may be less consistent and negative in their dealings with students, and may likely feel inadequate. The implementation of inclusive education could only be effective if all stakeholders have their hands on deck to contribute their quota at different levels. Apart from the policy makers, teachers are at the centre of the programme implementation, their ability to manage integrated classes will provide the basis for achievement. Mngo, and Mngo (2018) reported that most teachers showed negative attitude towards integrated classroom management. Teachers preferred to have separate schools or classrooms for students with disabilities or special educational needs as revealed in their perception of the concept of inclusion.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of the study is to compare regular and special education teachers' perception of inclusive education in Calabar metropolis of cross river state. The study focused on determining:

1. The level of perception of inclusive education among secondary school teachers in Calabar Metropolis.
2. If special school teachers differ in their perception of inclusive classrooms from those in regular schools in Calabar Metropolis.
3. If special school teachers differ in the perception of their ability to manage integrated classrooms from those in regular schools in Calabar Metropolis.

### **Null hypotheses**

1. Secondary school teachers' perception of inclusive education in Calabar Metropolis is not significantly high.
2. Teachers in special schools do not significantly differ in their perception of inclusive classrooms from those in regular schools in Calabar Metropolis.
3. Teachers in special schools do not significantly differ in their perception of ability to manage integrated classrooms from those in regular schools in Calabar Metropolis.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted ex-post facto research design. The research area for the study is Calabar Metropolis of Cross River State. The population of the study consists of 119 teachers, 26 from two Special Education and 93 from two regular schools, from Calabar Metropolis of Cross River State. The sampling technique adopted for the study was the stratified random sampling. Schools in the area were stratified into special and regular schools. The sample consisted of 72 teachers, 16 from 2 Special Education and 56 from 2 regular schools in Calabar Metropolis of Cross River State. The instrument used for data collection was designed by the researchers, titled "Teachers' Opinion Questionnaire on Perception of Inclusive Education" (TOQPIE). The instrument consisted of two sections. Section A of the instrument was designed to capture demographic variables such as age, sex and school type, while section B was designed with six (6) items each measuring perception

of inclusive education which is the main variable and the two sub-variables which are perception of inclusive classrooms and perception of ability to manage integrated classrooms. The instrument was validated by two educational psychologists and two measurement and evaluation experts all from the department of Educational Foundations. The researchers visited the selected schools to administer copies of the questionnaire and the data collected were analysed using the independent t- test at .05 level of significance.

### Presentation of results:

**Null Hypothesis 1:** Secondary school teachers' perception of inclusive education in Calabar Metropolis is not significantly high.

The variable involved in this hypothesis was teachers' perception of inclusive education which was categorized into two: Perception of inclusive classrooms, and perception of ability to manage integrated classrooms. For the teachers' perception of inclusive education to be significantly high, the mean score should be significantly greater than the reference mean of 15 (the midpoint between, which is 2.5 multiply by six which is the number of items measuring the variable). This hypothesis was analysed using population t-test analysis tested at .05 level of significance as presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Population t-test analysis for secondary school teachers' perception of inclusive education in Calabar *Metropolis* ( $N=72$ ) Reference mean,  $\mu = 15$

S/N	Variable	$\bar{X}$	SD	Mean difference	t-value	p-level
1.	Perception of inclusive classrooms	13.63	4.77	-1.37	-2.446*	.017
2.	Perception of ability to manage integrated classrooms	13.68	4.56	-1.32	-2.457*	.016

\*Significant at .05,  $p < .05$ ;  $df=105$ . Critical  $t = 1.994$ .

The result of the analysis in Table 1 revealed that the obtained mean score for teachers' perception of inclusive classrooms was 13.63 with a standard deviation of 4.77 is less than the reference mean of 15. This shows that the mean difference is statistically significant since the calculated t-value of 2.44 in absolute sense is less than the critical t-value of 1.99 at .05 level of significance with p-value of .017 and 71 degrees of freedom. The result further revealed that the obtained mean score for teachers' perception of ability to manage integrated classrooms was 13.68 with a standard deviation of 4.56 is also less than the reference mean of 15. This shows that the mean difference is also statistically significant since the calculated t-value of 2.457 in absolute sense is less than the critical t-value of 1.994 at .05 level of significance with p-value of .016 and 71 degrees of freedom.

Therefore, the null hypothesis which stated that secondary school teachers' perception of inclusive education in Calabar Metropolis is not significantly high was rejected for perception of inclusive classrooms, perception of ability to manage integrated classrooms since the mean difference between the obtained mean and reference mean is statistically high.

**Null Hypothesis 2:** Teachers in special schools do not significantly differ in their perception of inclusive classrooms from those in regular school in Calabar Metropolis.

The independent variable was categories of teachers categorized into special teachers and regular teachers while the dependent variable was perception of inclusive classrooms among teachers in Calabar Metropolis. The hypothesis was analyzed using Independent t-test analysis in comparing the perception of inclusive classrooms among special teachers and regular teachers tested at .05 level of significance as presented in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Independent t-test analysis for categories of teachers and perception of inclusive classrooms in Calabar Metropolis (N=72)

Variable	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t-value	p-level
Special teachers	16	18.94	3.30	6.965*	.000
Regular teachers	56	12.11	3.98		

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

The result in Table 2 revealed that the mean score obtained by the 16 special teachers as regards perception of inclusive classrooms was 18.94 with a standard deviation of 3.30 is greater than the mean score of 12.11 with a standard deviation of 3.98 obtained by the 56 regular teachers. The mean difference was statistically significant since the t-value of 6.965 obtained with a p-value of .000 met the criteria for significance at .05 level since the p-value is less than .05. Based on this, the null hypothesis which stated that teachers in special schools do not significantly differ in their perception of inclusive classrooms from those in regular school in Calabar Metropolis was rejected. This implied that special teachers in Calabar Metropolis were significantly better than regular teachers in their perception of inclusive classrooms.

**Null Hypothesis 3:** Teachers in special schools do not significantly differ in their perception of ability to manage integrated classrooms from those in regular school in Calabar Metropolis.

The independent variable was categories of teachers categorized into special teachers and regular teachers while the dependent variable was perception of ability to manage integrated classrooms among teachers in Calabar Metropolis. The hypothesis was analyzed using Independent t-test analysis in comparing the perception of ability to manage integrated classrooms among special teachers and regular teachers tested at .05 level of significance as presented in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Independent t-test analysis for categories of teachers and perception of ability to manage integrated classrooms in Calabar Metropolis (N=72)

Variable	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t-value	p-level
Special teachers	16	20.13	2.39	11.376*	.000
Regular teachers	56	11.84	3.12		

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

The result in Table 3 revealed that the mean score obtained by the 16 special teachers as regard perception of ability to manage integrated classrooms was 20.13 with a standard deviation of 2.39 is greater than the mean score of 11.84 with a standard deviation of 3.12 obtained by the 56 regular teachers. The mean difference was statistically significant since

the t-value of 11.376 obtained with a p-value of .000 met the criteria for significant at .05 level since the p-value is less than .05. Based on this, the null hypothesis which stated that teachers in special schools do not significantly differ in their perception of ability to manage integrated classrooms from those in regular school in Calabar Metropolis was rejected. This implied that special teachers in Calabar Metropolis were significantly better than regular teachers in their perception of ability to manage integrated classrooms.

### **Discussion of Findings:**

#### **Secondary school teachers' perception of inclusive education in Calabar Metropolis is not significantly high.**

In the hypothesis tested for perception of inclusive education in Calabar Metropolis, an obtained mean score of 13.63 with a standard deviation of 4.77 which is less than the reference mean of 15 was revealed. This shows that the mean difference is statistically significant since the calculated t-value of 2.44 in absolute sense is less than the critical t-value of 1.99 at .05 level of significance with p-value of .017 and 71 degrees of freedom, revealing a high perception of inclusive education among teachers in Calabar Metropolis.

By implication, this means that secondary school teachers in Calabar Metropolis have a high perception of inclusive education. The result corresponds with the findings of Kantavang et'al (2017) who in a comparative study of teachers' opinion relating to inclusive education revealed that both teachers in regular and special schools express positive opinion about students with special needs. The result is in line with the discovery of Olson (2003) and Elhaveris et'al (2006) who found out that special education and general education teachers have positive attitude towards inclusive education.

#### **Teachers in special schools do not significantly differ in their perception of inclusive classrooms from those in regular school in Calabar Metropolis.**

The second hypothesis which states that teachers in special schools do not significantly differ in their perception of inclusive classrooms from those in regular schools in Calabar Metropolis was also rejected. This is because the mean score obtained by the 16 special teachers as regards perception of inclusive classrooms was 18.94 with a standard deviation of 3.30 which is greater than the mean score of 12.11 with a standard deviation of 3.98 obtained by the 56 regular teachers. The mean difference was statistically significant since the t-value of 6.965 obtained with a p-value of .000 met the criteria for significance at .05 level since the p-value is less than .05. Therefore, the null hypothesis which stated that secondary school teachers' perception of inclusive education with regards to perception of inclusive classroom is not statistically significant in Calabar Metropolis was rejected. This implied that special teachers in Calabar Metropolis were significantly better than regular teachers in their perception of inclusive class rooms. John et'al (2002) supports the present findings with their views that negative perception of inclusion may influence teachers' acceptance of students with disabilities into regular classes. Elhaveris et'al (2006) reported in support of this study findings that teachers had a positive attitude towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general classrooms.

### **Teachers in special schools do not significantly differ in their perception of ability to manage integrated classrooms from those in regular school in Calabar Metropolis.**

The result of hypothesis three revealed a mean score of 20.13 obtained by the 16 special teachers as regard perception of ability to manage integrated classrooms, with a standard deviation of 2.39 which is greater than the mean score of 11.84 with a standard deviation of 3.12 obtained by the 56 regular teachers showing a statistically significant difference. Based on this therefore, the null hypothesis which stated that secondary school teachers' perception of inclusive education in Calabar Metropolis is not significantly high was rejected for perception of ability to manage integrated classrooms since the mean difference between the obtained mean and reference mean is statistically high.

Mngo et'al (2018) contradicts the present findings when they reported that most teachers showed negative attitude towards integrated classroom management. Whereas, Rimm-Kaufman et'al (2004) supports these findings when they revealed that if teachers who are faced with difficulty managing integrated classrooms, develop a positive mind set and attitude, and belief that they can cope in inclusive settings, then they may likely be more confident and accommodating. A further analysis which revealed that special teachers in Calabar Metropolis are better than regular teachers in their perception of inclusive classrooms and ability to manage integrated classrooms could be that special teachers may have had previous training that has better equipped them mentally, and psychologically to deal with children with diverse disabilities. Their preparedness to handle children with disabilities could be the reason for a better perception.

### **Conclusion:**

Based on the findings, it was concluded that teachers' perception of inclusive education with regard to perception of inclusive classrooms, perception of ability to manage integrated classrooms is statistically significant. The result further revealed that teachers in Calabar Metropolis were significantly better than regular teachers in their perception of inclusive classrooms. All hands should be on deck to support laudable implementation agenda of inclusive education in our school system to enable people living with disability feel accepted, develop their God given skills, become financially independent and consequently contribute their quota in national development.

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