

INTEGRATION OF EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN AS PERCEIVED BY ENUGU STATE PRIMARY SCHOOLS' TEACHERS

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Abstract

This study adopted survey design to investigate integration of exceptional children as perceived by Enugu State Primary School teachers. The purpose of the study was to determine the perceptions of teacher on integration of exceptional children in conventional classrooms. The population for the study consisted of 500 teachers from the sampled primary schools in Enugu State. One research question and one hypothesis were posed to guide the investigation. The instrument for data collection was a 13 item questionnaire with four weighted response options. Validation of the instrument was established by three lecturers from University of Jos. Sequel to their approval, it was pilot tested. Its reliability coefficient yielded 0.89 using Cronbach Alpha. Data analysis was done using mean (\bar{x}) with standard deviation (S^2) and t -test for the only hypothesis. The finding revealed that many teachers have not heard of integration of exceptional children and they were not comfortable with that kind of arrangement. The results also revealed that their classrooms are not modified to accommodate exceptional children. Based on the findings recommendations were made to the government to ensure that conventional teachers attend workshops on special education.

Introduction

To integrate exceptional children in educational context would refer to the system of combining exceptional children and their non-exceptional counterparts in the same environment for the purpose of instruction. This means that regular education classes are combined with special education classes. Studies by Adeoli & Omoregbe (2012) conceptualized integration as practice of educating pupils with special needs in regular classes during specific time period based on their skills. It means that the regular education classes are combined with special education classes. Schools that practice integration believe that exceptional children who cannot function in a regular classroom to a certain extent “belong to the special education environment”. To put differently, Olowokere (2013) explained that integration is an educational arrangement whereby special needs children are taken out of the classroom to a resource room or centre from time to time for special instruction or services.

Many laymen might find it difficult to interpret the concept of integration of exceptional children. Adeoti (2002) explained what integration is NOT. According to him, integration does not involve putting an exceptional child full time in a special school. He further stressed that integration does not mean placing a child full time in a regular classroom. According to him, an exceptional child who spends the entire day in a regular classroom with non-exceptional peers is considered fully included. Omoregbe (2012) reiterated that exceptional children with mild levels of disabilities such as dyslexia or attention deficit disorder or with non-cognitive disabilities such as diabetes are fully included. Put in another way, integration does NOT involve teaching the child outside of school. An exceptional child who is taught in an institution or at home is excluded (Okeke, 2001). Such a child may receive one-on-one instruction or may attend small group instruction. Button (2014) asserts that the alternatives to integration for special needs students are inclusion and exclude the students from school. Normally, the student individual needs are the driving force behind selecting integration or another style of education. Other concepts related to integration are normalization, mainstream and less restrictive environment.

Mansa (2012) attempted to explain the similarities in these concepts, yet revealing the thin line distinction in them. According to Mansa, even though they have common denomination of reviving education in the most normal circumstances possible, the distinction exist in the concept of mainstreaming, and it is described as a means of providing high quality education to exceptional children. In the past, it was not so, as the early trend has been to segregate exceptional children by placing them into special schools, making it difficult for any of their difficulties to be addressed appropriately. In the 1980s Okeke (2001) revealed that the integration model began to be used more often as a result of the requirement to place exceptional children in the least restrictive environment. It is unfortunate that most general teachers are not trained on helping exceptional children in their classrooms especially by helping them discover their potentials to function as adults in the society. In a similar study Mansa (2012) maintains that many parents are not comfortable with the integration arrangement because they believe that most general teachers will not be able to help their children, and because there are absence of many facilities exceptional children should have used for instruction in the school.

In Nigeria, integration is accepted by the Federal government of Nigeria. The Federal Government National Policy on Education (1981) revised in 2013 accepts integration as the

realistic form of special education. UNESCO document (1974) revised in 2001 explain that integration aims at normalizing which could be seen as preparing a child to function as a member of society. In this case, the educational environment will be modified to accommodate flexibility in the curriculum of the school, equipped and learning environment. Adeoti (2014) maintains that proper integration should ensure those educational goals, educational methods, materials and the physical environment are modified. She added that effective integration therefore requires a combination of regular and supplementary services such services include resource room services, consultative services, itinerant and special class services respectively.

Studies by Olowokere and Hadiza (2015) confirm that for integration to be regarded as successful, the pupil must possess some essential characteristics ranging from intelligence, confidence, independence, sociability and ability to come to terms with handicapping conditions. Adeoti (2014) also agree that successful integration means more than just combining exceptional children and their non-exceptional counterparts. Many scholars Izigba (2012), Adeoti (2014) and Olowokere (2015) have maintained and agreed with American public law 94-142 and 93-80 that to the maximum extent appropriate exceptional children including children in public and private schools are to be educated with children who are not handicapped. In a similar development, Olowokere (2015) agrees that it is the right thing to do. That is, they explained that educating children with disabilities alongside their non-disabled peers foster understanding and tolerance, better preparing exceptional children of all abilities to function in the world beyond school.

Mba (1976) in Adeoti (2014) revealed in a similar study that there are no equipment and no special classes, even though the policy document recognize that integration should be accomplished with special classes, when it states that special classes and units be provided in ordinary schools. Awa (2012) asserts that educating children with disability alongside their non-disabled peers facilitates access to the general curriculum for children with disabilities. Studies by Adeoti (2014) and Umar (2012) show that with disabilities who are integrated have better social skills. In this case, they tend to exhibit more academically and effective exclusion practices, better understanding of the world around them, and become part of the regular community. They have higher self-esteem by being included in a regular-placed education setting. They also have higher academic achievements. Integration makes exceptional persons as part and parcel of the society. It affords them the opportunity to learn desirable behaviour and to unlearn undesirable behaviour.

But Nwangwu (2007) in a similar study reported that some parents fear that general education teachers do not have the training and skills to accommodate special need children in general classroom setting. However, professional training and supportive services can usually address these concerns. He stressed that teachers who are not aware of integration and later may choose not to adopt integration modifications needed for pupils with special needs are also more resistant to having these pupils in class.

It is noted that this may lead to regression of the pupils with disabilities as well as overall decreased classroom productivities. Adeoti (2014) commented on issues of social activities and cost of integration. According to him, those who are integrated may feel conspicuously and socially rejected by their classmates. They may become targets for bullying, and may feel embarrassed by the additional service they receive in a regular classroom. He also revealed that per-student cost of special education is high.

One of the studies carried out by Jameson and associates in 1996 as reported by Olowokere (2005) reveal that integration was not the panacea for everything. To put it explicitly, Roberts (2012) explains that for one to succeed, one has to be intelligent, sociable and confident to determine, not frightened, not shy. Mba (1976) in Ani (2011) asserts that with integration the absence of enabling environment and supportive services, makes the whole services a joke or even caricature and turns the people worse than they were. She expressed that one of the obstacles of integration in Nigeria is inadequate facilities and equipment, which constitute a barrier to the proper turning and adjustment of exceptional children. This study therefore intended to investigate the perception of teachers on integration in primary schools in Enugu State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine the perceptions of teachers on integration of exceptional children in primary Schools in Enugu State. Specifically, the study sought to: determine the perceptions of teachers in public and private schools in Enugu State.

Research Question

One research question guided the study.

1. What is the level of perception of public and private school teachers on integration of exceptional children in primary schools in Enugu State?

Hypothesis

One null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 significant level formulated to guide the study:

H₀: There is no significant difference between the mean rating of teachers in public and private primary schools regarding their perceptions of integration of exceptional children in primary schools in Enugu State.

Method

A research design used in the conduct of this study was survey method. This is because the method can be used to collect data from a firmly large number of cases at particular times (Best & James, 1995) in Oyebulu (2015). This study aimed at covering Enugu State which consists of 17 local government education authorities. The schools were grouped into 2 strata, that is, public and private primary schools. Hence, the target population for the study comprised all the primary school teachers in the public and private primary schools in Enugu state. There are 12,783 teachers in 1,208 public primary schools and 1,265 teachers in 108 private primary schools duly registered in 2017/2018 (Education Statistics and Planning unit). A purposive systemic multistage sampling was drawn to select 500 teachers (250 public primary school teachers and 250 private primary school teachers for the study. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire designed to elicit responses from primary school teachers of sampled primary schools. It consisted of sixteen (16) items on perceptions of integration of exceptional children by teachers. It had four point response categories of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly disagree (SD). The scale starts from 4-1 for the items. The face and content validities of the instrument were done by senior lecturers in special education and measurement and evaluation, university of Nigeria Nsukka. A pilot study was carried out with reliability coefficient of 0.89 and 0.85 established for the instrument using Cronbach alpha. Copies of the questionnaire were distributed and same collected by the researcher with the aid of 10 research assistants. Copies of the

questionnaire were distributed to the teachers in their various schools and collected on the spot. The 500 copies of the questionnaire were duly completed and returned giving a 100% return rate. The research question were answered using the mean (\bar{x}) and standard deviation (S^2) while Z test was used to test the hypothesis. For the research question the level of acceptance or rejection of each questionnaire item was determined based on the mean ratings of items interpreted, relative to real number limits. For the hypothesis, a null hypothesis was not rejected at 0.05 level of significance when the calculated value of z was equal to or less than the critical Z otherwise the null hypothesis was rejected.

Research Question

What are the level of perception on public and private primary school teachers on integration of exceptional integration of exceptional children in primary schools in Enugu State?

Table 1: Mean scores and standard deviation of respondents on integration of exceptional children as perceived by Enugu State Primary Schools' Teachers

N= 250

Integration of Exceptional Children as Perceived by Enugu State Primary Schools' Teachers

S/N	ITEM DESCRIPTION	Public School teachers, N=250			Private School Teachers N=250		
		X	S ²	Dec	x	S ²	Dec
1.	I have heard of integration.	1.78	0.69	LL	1.80	0.66	L
2.	I am comfortable with the presence of exceptional children.	1.66	0.58	LL	1.66	0.58	L
3.	My classroom is modified to accommodate flexibility.	1.60	0.49	LL	1.65	0.48	L
4.	Integration is interesting.	1.60	0.49	LL	1.65	0.48	L
5.	Integration distorts teaching.	3.60	0.49	HL	3.60	0.49	H
6.	I resist integration of exceptional children.	3.56	0.50	HL	3.50	0.50	H
7.	Per student cost of integration of exceptional children is expensive.	0.56	0.50	HL	3.54	0.58	H
8.	Integration of exceptional children makes headway.	1.83	0.74	LL	1.76	0.76	L
9.	There are facilities and equipments for the training of exceptional children in my school.	1.78	0.83	LL	1.61	0.68	L
10.	General education teachers can help exceptional children discover their potentials.	1.56	0.60	LL	1.55	0.57	L
11.	Exceptional children are intelligent.	1.54	0.57	LL	1.53	0.55	L
12.	With integration exceptional children feel as part of the society.	1.58	0.64	LL	1.57	0.62	L
13.	Implement may debar exceptional children of what they want to be.	1.58	0.64	LL	1.56	0.60	L
14.	Most primary schools have services like resource rooms, consultative services and special class services	1.52	0.50	LL	1.56	0.59	L

GRAND x	2.15	0.55	2.03	0.54
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Results

Table 1 above shows the responses of public and private primary school teachers and indicates high levels on items 5, 6, 7 and 8 with mean scores and standard deviation of $x = 3.60$, $S^2 = 0.49$, $x = 3.50$, $S^2 = 0.50$, $x = 3.56$, $S^2 = 0.50$, $x = 3.5$, $S^2 = 0.50$ respectively. The respondents attract low level for the rest of the items 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 with mean below the cutoff point of 2.50. The table also reveals low mean for the grand mean and standard deviation of 2.15 and 0.55 for public school teachers in primary schools in Enugu State.

Table 2: Z-test statistics verifying the difference in the mean responses of public and private primary schools teachers on integration of exceptional children in primary schools in Enugu State

Variable	N	\bar{x}	S^2	Df	Z cal	Z- table
Public	250	2.15	0.55	0	0.00	1.99
Private	250	2.03	0.54			

The Z test comparison was calculated to determine whether there were any significant difference between the mean responses of private and public school teachers on their perceptions of integration of exceptional children in their classrooms. The result reveal that there is no significant difference in the mean perception responses of public and private school teachers. It is indicative of the data that the calculated Z was less than the Z table at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, public school teachers on the way they perceive integration of exceptional children in their classrooms in primary schools in Enugu State. Consequently the null hypothesis (H_0) was not rejected.

Discussion

The research question revealed that teachers (both public and private) have not heard of integration, and they were not comfortable with the arrangement of integration of exceptional children in their classrooms. They all agree that their classrooms were not modified to accommodate flexibility and integration of exceptional children. To the teachers integration is uninteresting and distorts teaching. As a matter of fact, the sampled teachers resisted integration and revealed that the cost of per student for integration is expensive. They also revealed that the integration of exceptional children is yet to be accepted by the sampled teachers. The findings

agreed that there were no facilities and equipments for training of exceptional children and agree with Adeoti and Olawole (2012) who established that there were no equipments and special classes even though the policy documents recognized that integration should be accomplished with special classes. It is however clear from the study that general teachers do not perceive exceptional children as intelligent as they were not trained to teach exceptional children and so they are unable to help exceptional children discover their potentials.

However, this study contradicted Adeoti (2014) who had earlier established that with integration, exceptional children feel as part of the societies. The study revealed that most schools do not have essential services as resource rooms, consultative services and special classes services. The study revealed that most general teachers, their locations and school strata notwithstanding were unable to interpret the entire concept and even the educational objectives of integration.

Educational Implication of the Study

The objective of integration in the policy document was to prepare a child to function as a member of the society and teachers were meant to carry out this objective. Unfortunately, the availability of teachers to be able to carry out this major objective poses a great challenge to integration of exceptional children. The low mean established in this study is of great consequence to the education of the exceptional children. The question is, if exceptional children cannot receive classes with their non exceptional counterparts, how would they be able to learn desirable behaviours and unlearn undesirable ones? Integration will help to minimize certain unfavourable behaviours in exceptional children. The implication therefore is that they will not be able to function or feel as part of the society which contradicts the major objective of the policy document.

Conclusion

In integration, regular classes are combined with special education classes. Most general education teachers are not conversant with the concept of integration facilities and equipment to use for training exceptional children are not found in most schools. Teachers generally resent exceptional children and this may constitute a big challenge to exceptional children and their education in Enugu State.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were proffered.

- Teachers should be given workshops on special education.

- Special education courses should be adopted by colleges of education and universities.
- Government should ensure that some schools should practice integration.
- Special educators should be posted to primary schools for enlightenment.
- Private schools should modify their classrooms for flexibility.

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