INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A PANACEA TOWARDS THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOLS AS PERCEIVED BY TEACHERS IN AGUATA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, ANAMBRA STATE

Oliver-Michael Dunaluo Ezeuzo
Department of Early Childhood Care and Education,
Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe
oliverezeuzo@gmail.com

Abstract

The study investigated the "**Inclusive education: A panacea towards the education of children with disabilities in pre-primary schools as perceived by teachers in Aguata Local Government Area, Anambra State."** Four research questions guided the study. The study was a descriptive research design. The population was 1330 teachers in the 78 public pre-primary/primary schools in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State. A random sampling technique was used to select 200 pre-primary schoolteachers who participated in the study. A structured questionnaire, which had the test-retest reliability of 0.91 after correlating the two sets of scores from pilot studies, with Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, was used as an instrument for the collection of data. The questionnaire used in this study was given to three (3) experts. The researcher and the research assistants collected necessary data from the teachers in each school. The data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation. The findings showed that inclusive education has significant impacts on children with disabilities in pre-primary schools. Parents' socioeconomic status has an impact on their children with disabilities in pre-primary schools. Problems facing the education of children with disabilities in pre-primary schools include the inadequacy of educational funding and educational materials. Government efforts towards promoting the education of children with disabilities in pre-primary schools include establishing of various schools to take care of the needs of the disabled children, among others. Recommendations were made based on the findings that the Government should establish more schools to care for the needs of children with disabilities. The researcher suggested that further studies should be carried out on the effect of early childhood education on children with disabilities.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Children with disabilities and Pre-primary schools.

Introduction

Nigerian education has been seen as a failure towards considering the individual differences among learner (Ministry of Education, 2017). The differences could be in terms of in emotional, maturity and intellectual development among children. Hence, we have the hearing impaired children, the gifted and talented, the mentally retarded who are generally categorized as disabled children. World Health Organization (2016) defined disability as any restriction or lack of ability to perform in a manner or within a range considered normal for a human being. Children with disability consists of those whose activities are limited by physical disabilities like individuals with visual or hearing disabilities, chronic illness, mental health and communication disorders, intellectual disabilities, genetic disorders, disfigurement, and those with problems associated with aging or delay in achieving development/cognitive capabilities (Combrinck, 2018). United Nations convention on the rights of persons with disabilities states that children with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. Children with disabilities can also school alongside with their counterparts in the general classroom. This idea is called inclusive education.

Inclusive education is the most effective way to give all children a fair chance to go to school, learn and develop the skills they need to thrive (UNICEF, 2018). Inclusive education means all children in the same classrooms, in the same schools. It means real learning opportunities for groups who have traditionally been excluded – not only children with disabilities, but speakers of minority languages too. Inclusive systems value the unique contributions children of all backgrounds bring to the classroom and allow diverse groups to grow side by side, to the benefit of all. These children with variations in their total development are those for with special education is meant to take care of. Moreover, Inclusive education is a process of solving and responding to the different needs of all students. Loreman and Deppeler (2012) posited that inclusive education is a right of all children with disabilities in order to obtain the same educational services provided to non-disabled children in the same classrooms with celebration and acceptance of difference and diversity. Ainscow, Booth and Dyson (2016) defined inclusive education as the reduction of barriers to learning, the full participation of all children, and an increase in the school's ability to accommodate all children regardless of their differences. This is an effort to treat them in ways that reflect that they are of equal value and status. Children with disabilities need to be given a proper attention at the pre-primary schools to get them ready for a smooth transition into pre-primary school. When inclusive education is successful, both typically developing children and those with disabilities experience positive results, like a strong sense of belonging, and connected relationships. Inclusion education is essential for creating a safe and welcoming environment for all children with disabilities. By promoting inclusivity, early childhood educators can help children learn empathy, acceptance, and respect for others. Every child should have access to high-quality education, regardless of their background or abilities. Inclusion education provides our students with the skills and knowledge necessary to create an environment where every child can thrive.

Furthermore, pre-primary school is also called early childhood education. It is a type of education given to children from birth to five years. Childhood is a period in which, rapid neural connections, brain development and growth take place. Hence this period is considered as a critical window of opportunity for optimizing children's development through the combined impact of education, care, health, nutrition, protection and stimulation (UNESCO, 2012). Early

childhood education programme provides appropriate education and care service for young children as it has a long-lasting positive consequences in the later development (Ministry of Education, 2017). This programme helps to shape children at early age to make them socially responsible citizen and promotes economic growth by reducing mortality rate, childhood illness, school repetition and dropout rate. Early childhood education in particular helps children to acquire basic skills (pre-reading, pre- writing, counting and arithmetic) in preparation for the child's formal schooling (MoE, MoH &MoWA, 2010).

Nevertheless, the school based, cultural, and economic are challenges facing children with disabilities in accessing education (Oladejo & Oladejo, 2021). Also, despite the challenges faced by children with disabilities, inclusive education is very effective in educating them. The school systems now face increasing pressure to raise standards, develop social and personal skills, broaden curricula, pay greater attention to equal educational opportunities and prepare young people for rapidly changing world (Osakwe, 2016). Invariably, the modern trend all over the world is shifting towards addressing the educational plights of students with one form of disabilities or the other so as to better their life. The rationale behind this is contingent upon the fact that people with disabilities too have invaluable roles to play in national development, and to be able to do this effectively and meaningfully, their education needs to be given proper attention. It was in line with this view that the present research sought to explore on the inclusive education as a panacea towards the education of children with disabilities in pre-primary schools as perceived by teachers in Aguata Local Government Area, Anambra State.

Statement of the Problem

The Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme gives chance to children to access primary special education at no cost, regardless of their social status and religion. After years of implementation, the universality of UPE to accommodate all categories of children is far from being achieved, especially for children with disabilities. According to the Human Rights Commission (2011), the inclusive special education policy clearly states the government's dedication to providing primary special education to all children regardless of origin, social group or gender. It further calls for inclusion of children with disabilities in all government funded primary schools. However, this policy does not state what inclusion means in regard to the children with disabilities. To this end, no such provisions have been made. The laxity has seen an ever-endless rate of dropouts and hence declining enrolment among children with disabilities.

Human Rights Commission (2011) also reported that approximately 25% of children with disabilities are enrolled in schools under the Universal Primary Education programme. The other population of the children could be on the street begging for money to help their families. Some of them are possibly staying at home with their parents who do not take them as other children. Inadequacy of educational funding and educational materials, poor architectural designs of most of the institutions, stigmatization against the children with disabilities and ineffective implementation of the policies formulated towards their betterment are challenges facing the inclusive education of children with disabilities in the general classroom. These scenarios triggered the researcher to investigate on the inclusive education as a panacea towards the education of children with disabilities in pre-primary schools as perceived by teachers in Aguata Local Government Area, Anambra State.

Purpose of the Study

The major purpose of this study was to assess the inclusive education as a panacea towards the education of children with disabilities in pre-primary schools as perceived by teachers in Aguata Local Government Area, Anambra State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Examine the impacts of inclusive education on children with disabilities education in pre-primary schools in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State.
2. Investigate the place of parents' socioeconomic status on their children with disabilities in pre-primary schools in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State
3. Assess the problems facing the education of children with disabilities in pre-primary schools in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State
4. Examine the government efforts towards promoting the education of children with disabilities in pre-primary schools in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the impacts of inclusive education on children with disabilities education in pre-primary schools in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State?
2. What is the place of parents' socioeconomic status on their children with disabilities in pre-primary schools in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State?
3. What are the problems facing the education of children with disabilities in pre-primary schools in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State?
4. What are the government efforts towards promoting the education of children with disabilities in pre-primary schools in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State.

Method

The study was a descriptive survey design. A descriptive survey design is concerned with collection of data and describing in a systematic manner the characteristics or facts about a given population (Maduokonam, 2014). The design was considered appropriate for the present study because it aims at describing in a systematic manner on the impacts of inclusive education on children with disabilities education in pre-primary schools in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State.The study was carried out in Aguata Local Government Area (LGA) of Anambra State. This is a Local Government Area in Anambra State in Nigeria, with its headquarters in Aguata. The towns that madeup of this local government are: Ekwulobia, Akpo, Achina, Uga, Igbo-Ukwu, Isuofia, Umuchu, Aguluezechukwu, Ezinifite, Ikenga, Amesi, Oraeri, Umuona, and Nkpologwu(Wikipedia, 2022). The researcher chooses this area because education of children with disabilities in pre-primary schools in the area was done mainly in separate classrooms. Also, some schools in this area do not appreciate the significance of inclusive education on children with disabilities education in pre-primary schools.

The target population was one thousand three hundred and thirty (1330) teachers in the seventy-eight (78) government pre-primary schools in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State. The sample comprised two hundred (200) teachers randomly selected from seventy-eight (78) government pre-primary/primary schools in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State. However, simple random sampling was used as the sampling technique to

select ten teachers each from the twenty selected schools, making it 200 teachers in all. This is because each member or element of the population has equal and independent chance of being selected to form the sample group.

The instrument used in the study was a questionnaire constructed by the researcher. The instrument was divided into two parts. The questionnaire used was given to an expert from Measurement and Evaluation in Educational Psychology Department and two (2) experts in the fields of Early Childhood Care and Education both in Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe for validation. The validators ensured that the questions in the questionnaire were framed in such a way that they bring out the answers to the research questions. Corrections were made before the instrument was used. The instrument used was trial-tested in a school outside the sampled schools with twenty (20) teachers and their responses collected. The respondents were then given two weeks before the same test was administered again to the same respondents. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was done on the scores from both testing periods using test-retest reliability and a correlation coefficient of 0.91 was ascertained and adopted for the study. The instrument was personally administered to the respondents and collection of responses was made immediately. Consequently, the entire two hundred (200) questionnaires administered were retuned and used for the study. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. The mean less than 2.5 would be disagreed. While the mean of 2.5 and above would be agreed.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the Impacts of Inclusive Education on Children with Disabilities Education in Pre-Primary Schools in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State?

Table 1

Mean and Standard Deviation rating the Impacts of Inclusive Education on Children with Disabilities Education in Pre-Primary Schools.

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	Total	∑FX	$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision
1	Children with disabilities participate fully like any other children in the class with inclusive education	174	20	1	5	200	692	3.46	0.61	Agreed
2	Inclusion is regarded as a process of addressing needs of the children with disabilities using the resources available	105	40	53	2	200	624	3.14	0.67	Agreed
3	Inclusive education gives every child opportunity to learn with others from every backgrounds in a regular school	137	30	32	1	200	656	3.28	0.65	Agreed
4	Inclusive education gives children with disabilities the	140	29	23	8	200	672	3.36	0.63	Agreed

	opportunity to share their experiences with other children									
5	Inclusive education discourages discrimination among children with disabilities in the classroom	134	34	26	6	200	670	3.35	0.61	Agreed

In the table 1, items 1-5 with the responding means and standard deviations of (3.46 & 0.61), (3.14 & 0.67), (3.28 & 0.65), (3.36 & 0.63), and (3.35 & 0.61) respectively were all agreed. This was because, they were up to and above the agreed mean level of 2.5 respectively. Therefore, the results showed that inclusive education has great impacts on children with disabilities education in pre-primary schools because, it gives them opportunities to participate fully like any other children in the class among others.

Research Question 2: What is the Place of Parents' Socioeconomic status on their Children with Disabilities in Pre-Primary Schools in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State?

Table 2

Mean and Standard Deviation ratings the Place of Parents' Socioeconomic status on their Children with Disabilities in Pre-Primary Schools.

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	Total	∑FX	$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision
6	Most children with disabilities are left out of the social services if their parents are in abject poverty	150	18	26	7	200	664	3.32	0.65	Agreed
7	Parents with low socioeconomic status do not even have money to provide special appliances for their children with disabilities	148	20	26	6	200	666	3.33	0.62	Agreed
8	Parents with low socioeconomic status do not feed their children with disabilities nutritiously well	119	42	29	10	200	638	3.19	0.66	Agreed
9	Parents with low socioeconomic status do send their children with disabilities off the street for begging	136	23	33	8	200	652	3.26	0.60	Agreed
10	Parents with low socioeconomic status always sent their children with disabilities to their farms	130	36	27	7	200	650	3.25	0.63	Agreed

In the table 2, items 6-10 with the responding means and standard deviations of (3.32 & 0.65), (3.33 & 0.62), (3.19 & 0.66), (3.26 & 0.60), and (3.25 & 0.63) respectively were all agreed. This was because, they are above the agreed mean level of 2.50. Therefore, the results showed that parents' socioeconomic status have effects on their children with disabilities education in pre-primary schools.

Research Question 3: What are the Problems facing the Education of Children with Disabilities in Pre-Primary Schools in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State?

Table 3

Mean and Standard deviation ratings the Problems facing the Education of Children with Disabilities in Pre-Primary Schools.

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	Total	∑FX	$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision
11	Inadequacy of educational funding	145	10	37	9	200	652	3.26	0.69	Agreed
12	Inadequacy educational materials, facilities and equipments	124	32	39	5	200	644	3.22	0.67	Agreed
13	Poor architectural designs of most of the institutions	133	24	27	16	200	650	3.25	0.60	Agreed
14	Ineffective implementation of the policies formulated towards the betterment of the education of learners with disabilities	145	26	21	8	200	668	3.34	0.62	Agreed
15	Stigmatization against the children with disabilities	110	45	37	8	200	634	3.17	0.65	Agreed

In the table 3, items 11-15 with the responding means and standard deviations of (3.26 & 0.69), (3.22 & 0.67), (3.25 & 0.60), (3.34 & 0.62), and (3.17 & 0.65) respectively were all agreed. This was because, they are above the agreed mean level of 2.50. Therefore, the results showed that these are the problems facing the education of children with disabilities in pre-primary schools.

Research Question 4: What are the Government efforts towards Promoting the Education of Children with Disabilities in Pre-Primary Schools in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State?

Table 4

Mean and Standard Deviation rating the Government efforts towards Promoting the Education of Children with Disabilities in Pre-Primary Schools.

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	Total	∑FX	$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision
16	Establishment of various schools to take care of the needs of the disabled people	105	83	6	6	200	687	3.41	0.69	Agreed
17	Signing a decreed that	106	80	5	9	200	683	3.38	0.75	Agreed

	educational services for the disabled shall be the joint efforts of all tiers of government									
18	Establishment of a college of education for advanced teacher training for special education	106	85	4	5	200	692	3.43	0.66	Agreed
19	Setting up vocational training centres for the disabled as a matter of priority	111	78	6	5	200	695	3.44	0.67	Agreed
20	Establishment of National council for special education with the aim of looking into the issues of the disabled	111	83	1	5	200	700	3.47	0.64	Agreed

In the table IV, items 16-20 with the responding mean and standard deviation of (3.40 & 0.69), (3.38 & 0.75), (3.43 & 0.66), (3.44 & 0.67), and (3.47 & 0.64) were all agreed. This was because, they were up to and above the agreed mean level of 2.5 respectively. Therefore, the results showed that these are the government efforts towards promoting the education of children with disabilities in pre-primary schools.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings for research question one revealed that inclusive education has significant impacts on children with disabilities in pre-primary schools because, it gives them opportunities to participate fully like any other children in the class with inclusive education, it is regarded as a process of addressing needs of the children with disabilities using the resources available, it gives every child opportunity to learn with others from every backgrounds in a regular school, it gives children with disabilities the opportunity to share their experiences with other children, and also discourages discrimination among children with disabilities in the classroom. The findings of the study were in agreement with Skjørten (2011) who posited that inclusive education was conceived so that everyone should learn, grow and work with others from similar and diverse backgrounds in a regular school.

The findings for research question two revealed that parents' socioeconomic status have effects on their children with disabilities in pre-primary schools because, most children with disabilities are left out of the social services if their parents are in abject poverty. Again, parents with low socioeconomic status do not even have money to provide special appliances for their children with disabilities, they do not feed their children with disabilities nutritiously well and also they always sent their children with disabilities to their farms. These findings were in agreement with the assertions of Muyinda and Burton (2013) whom posited that most of the households in rural areas are poor and those with children with disabilities do not even have money to provide special appliances like knee pads, wheel chairs and crutches.

The findings for research question three revealed that problems facing the education of children with disabilities in pre-primary schools include inadequacy of educational funding, Inadequacy educational materials, facilities and equipments, poor architectural designs of most of the institutions, ineffective implementation of the policies formulated towards the betterment of the education of learners with disabilities and stigmatization against them. The findings were

in agreement with Ladipo (2019) who reported that the architectural designs of most of the schools where the education of learners with disabilities take place did not take into consideration, the disability nature of these people. Children with disabilities are devalued, isolated, avoided, neglected and stigmatized which results into lack of access to essential social services like education and health (Katz, 2011).

The findings for research question four revealed that government establishes of various schools to take care of the needs of the disabled people, signs a decreed that educational services for the disabled shall be the joint efforts of all tiers of government, establishes of a college of education for advanced teacher training for special education, sets up vocational training centres for the disabled as a matter of priority and establishes of National council for special education with the aim of looking into the issues of the disabled. The findings were in agreement with Oyewo (2019) who posited that governmental agencies should establish of various schools to take care of the needs of the disabled people. Also, they should Setup vocational training centres for the disabled as a matter of priority.

Conclusion

It was concluded that inclusive education has significant impacts on children with disabilities in pre-primary schools in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State. Again, parents' socioeconomic status has tremendous effects on their children with disabilities in pre-primary schools in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State. Problems facing the education of children with disabilities in pre-primary schools include inadequacy of educational funding, Inadequacy educational materials, facilities and equipments among others. Government efforts towards promoting the education of children with disabilities in pre-primary schools include establishing of various schools to take care of the needs of the disabled people and also establishing of a college of education for advanced teacher training for special education.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

i. Government should establish more institutions/schools to take care of the needs of children with disabilities.
ii. Education of children with disabilities should be a collective responsibility of all the tiers of government.
iii. More Departments of Special Education should be created in our nation's Universities in order to address the problem of shortage of teachers for children with disabilities.
iv. Again, non-governmental organizations should be encouraged to establish more special schools as well as vocational and rehabilitation centres.

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