

## **Inclusive Education and the Life Skills of Senior Secondary School Students with Special Needs in Northern Cross River State, Nigeria**

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**Abstract:** Inclusion in education is an approach to educating students with special education needs. Inclusion is therefore the meaningful participation of students with special needs in the general educational process. Inclusion should be about the student's right to participate and the school's duty to accept the student or child. Inclusion should reject the use of special schools or classrooms, to separate students with disabilities from students without disabilities. The study aimed at investigating whether inclusive education influences positively or negative the life skills such as academic, vocation, socio-economic and emotion of students with special needs in the research area. Two hundred subjects drawn from the area with the aid of stratified research designed and simple random sampling technique constituted the sample of the study. Independent t-test statistic was employed to analyze the data generated from the administration of an appropriate designed and developed questionnaire. Inclusive Education and Life Skills of Students with Special Needs Questionnaire (IELSSSNQ) by the researchers. This embrace hypothesis tested pointed at significant and positive impact of inclusive education on vocational, academic and socio-economic life skills of students with special needs while the reverse was the case for their emotional life skill in the area. The results were discussed exhaustively and useful conclusion was made which in turn enabled the researchers to make useful recommendations for the beneficiaries of the study.

**Key words:** Inclusion, disabilities, questionnaire, emotional life skill, beneficiaries

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The primary aim of education is to develop all round aspects of human nature so that the person may be able to use his talents to the maximum capacity or potentiality. Most discussions of inclusion concentrate on special students who are a heterogeneous group. Disability is defined as a social question as lack of opportunity to play a part in society. Their school behavior may be frequently inappropriate. Some have sensory or physical disabilities. The purpose of the study was to examine to what extent does inclusive education impact on the life skills of students with special needs in the study area.

Generally, persons with disabilities in developing countries are among the poorest of the poor. Great attention should be paid to them in major development programmes. This is so as the Millennium Development Goals themselves (MDGs) cannot be attained unless they are taken into account. In fact to be frank, students with special needs are seen as being mad, frustrated, sick, emotionally and generally, disabled by members of the

society. Inclusion in general education allows special students to interact with their peers and reduces the effects of labeling. The general education teacher should contribute to the success of student with special needs to achieve vocation, academic, socio-economic and emotional life skills by participating in their assessment, programme planning and placement decisions.

Lynch and McCall (2010) stated that when students with special needs are members of general education classrooms, they remain with their peers and they are not segregated from the normal activities of the classrooms. The research area is vulnerable to the issue of disabilities because of its vegetation and topography as well as its poor socio-economic backgrounds. Only senior secondary school students with special needs are used in the study as they can easily read, understand and explain the items or questions on the questionnaire. This study is carried out to investigate the extent to which inclusive education impacts or influences the life skills of the students with special needs in the Northern Cross River State of Nigeria. Concerted efforts will be made to ensure that justice is made to the purpose of the study.

**Statement of the problem:** Although, most states in Nigeria are in agreement with the concept of Education for All (EFA), inclusion in the fullest context remains far from a practical reality or priority for a number of states like Cross River State which is struggling with more fundamental issues of trying to stretch minimal resources to reach maximum number of children. In light of this, often it is the persons with disabilities who end up without basic education and this is reflective of the fact that 90% of the children or persons with special needs in the so called developing states in Nigeria like Cross River State behaviours. This is so as the assumptions made by them may influence instructional expectations for the students with special needs.

**Inclusive education:** The introduction of inclusive education has led to improvement in educational outcomes for all children or students. However, this can only be achieved through the provision of supporting policy from governments and operational researchers. Students with special needs have the right to appropriate education in all inclusive settings with a focus on achieving outcomes (Allen and Schwartz, 2000).

National Policy on Education (NPE), Federal Republic of Nigeria (FMN, 2004) defined special education as a formal educational training given to people (children and adults) with special needs. This document classified this group of people into three categories (Barkley, 1998):

- Those with physical and sensory impairments
- The disadvantaged persons of nomadic pastorals, migrant fisher folks, migrant farmers, hunters, etc.
- The gifted and talented who are under challenged by general education classrooms facilities (Tuttle, 1996)

Inclusive education is characterized by free education at all levels. It is emphasized in the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme in our dear country-Nigeria. It is stated that all schools should be take into account special needs of the handicapped such as ramps instead of files and medical steps, wide doors for wheel chairs, lower toilets and medical facilities. Area these special needs actually met in the general education classrooms. Metrtens (1990) opined that in the full inclusive setting, the students with special needs are always educated alongside students without special needs.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopted the stratified research design as the research was conducted in a fairly large area, the

Northern Cross River State in Nigeria. It is very important to note that the independent variable-inclusive education had already existed in the study area. This study sample randomly drawn from the study area comprised two hundred subjects with special needs. The study was conducted to find out whether inclusive education can improve the development of adequate life skills of students with special needs in the study area.

The sampling technique adopted for the study was the simple random sampling technique. The main instrument used for data collection was the questionnaire designed by the researchers with the help of research and statistic experts. A compressed hypothesis was formulated to guide the study.

The items on the questionnaire were drawn in accordance with the sub-variables of the hypothesis. Having derived satisfaction from the validity of the instrument, a split half reliability method was used to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. The reliability co-efficient of the instrument was determined using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistics and corrected for full length using the Spearman Brown's Prophecy Formular. A split half reliability coefficient between 0.56 and 0.72 was derived. This range was considered high enough for the instrument to be used for the study. The instrument used was an Impact of Inclusive Education on the Life Skills of Students with Special Needs (IIELSSNQ) Questionnaire.

## RESULTS

**Data analysis of results:** The data is analyzed to test the compressed hypothesis for the study.

**Hypothesis:** The life skills of students with special needs in the research area are not significantly influenced or impacted on by inclusive education.

To test this hypothesis, the independent t-test statistic was used to establish the extent to which inclusive education influences or impacts the like skills of students with special needs in the study area. The result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Independent t-test analysis of inclusive education on the life skills of students with special needs in the study area (200)

| Variables (life skills) | N   | X     | SD   | t-values |
|-------------------------|-----|-------|------|----------|
| Vocation (X)            | 200 | 14.13 | 2.63 | 3.10     |
| Academic (X)            | 200 | 13.55 | 2.48 | 2.63     |
| Socio-economic (X)      | 200 | 13.95 | 2.66 | 3.26     |
| Emotion (X)             | 200 | 12.41 | 2.32 | 1.61     |
| Inclusive education (Y) | 200 | 14.96 | 2.92 | 3.15     |

Significant at 0.05, critical t-value = 1.960, df = 198

From Table 1, results of the data analyzed revealed that inclusive education impacts positively on the life skills of the students with special needs such as classrooms furniture and facilities, toilets, chairs, benches, desks, doors, windows, chalkboards, tables, steps, wheel chairs and other special furniture and facilities to mention by just a few in the study area in the areas of vocation ( $t = 3.10$ ), academic ( $t = 2.63$ ) and socioeconomic ( $t = 3.26$ ) while it (independent variable-inclusive education impacts or influences negatively on their emotional life skill ( $t = 1.61$ )). This was so as the calculated t-values of 3.10, 2.63 and 3.26 for the first three life skills are greater than the critical t-value of 1.960 while the calculated t-value (1.61) of emotion is less than the critical t-value of 1.960 in Table 1.

### DISCUSSION

From the result of the hypothesis tested, it was evident that inclusive education influences significantly the vocational, academic and socioeconomic life skills of the students with special needs in the study area while for their emotional disposition, the null hypothesis was significantly retained. The result was in support of the findings of Woodring (1992) who found that students with special needs could be academically sound and vocationally inquisitive and does not involve themselves in occupational floundering but that they could tend to be emotionally fragile and inconsistent.

Choudhoy also stated that unless provision of supporting policy is viably articulated by government and other constituted authorities, this category of students could be frustrated in life and lack confidence as they develop very low self concept. They have problem in analyzing their self-worth level in the area of SWOT-Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Treat. This unfortunate situation will certainly affect them vocationally, academically and socio-economically. Bishop (1996) also discovered same concept in his study about students with special needs in general education classrooms.

On the issue of ability to learn quickly and easily, Mackhurs (1995) supported Woodring (1992) who opined that students with special needs could be academically sound in the midst of students without special needs. It is note worthy to know that according to Ann that the school behavior of students with special needs may be frequently inappropriate due to their sensory or physical disabilities, their speed in language or culture. Klunsin (1993) was of the same opinion when he maintained that these students with special needs more than most normal students, require extra teaching efforts by special

educators to succeed in general education classrooms as this category of students may have special learning needs because of their cognitive, physical and affective (sensory) or emotional disability.

### CONCLUSION

This study has done justice to the purpose of the study. All key words and sub-understood the topic vividly. The philosophy in which the educational policy in Nigeria is based on is not suitable for the all round development of a typical Nigerian. Researchers needed an indigenous system of education that would have incorporated the best aspects of the traditional setting without being just imitative. It should have centred on the principle of be your brother's keeper.

From results and discussions so far generated in the study, it could be concluded that with good governance and spirit of oneness in the country in general, the state and research area in particular, all things being equal, there is the likelihood that there is a bright future for special students with special needs in Northern Cross River State in Nigeria.

All the life skills considered in this study except emotional aspect are progressively pursued. The impact of inclusive education on the life skills of students with special needs in the study area is something to write home about if this trend is sustained.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

This study having examined the impact of inclusive education on the life skills of students with special needs in Northern Cross River State, Nigeria a heterogeneous sub-society of Cross River State, Nigeria has the following recommendations to make:

- Educators and even national educational commissions should be greatly concerned about the life skills of students with special needs in the general education classrooms
- Despite the concern stated above, enough research should be conducted to further determine the life skills that are mostly influenced by inclusive education
- Legislation should require states to establish programmes for students with special needs to enhance their potentials such as vocations, academic, socio-economic and emotional aspects
- Students without special needs should open to working with students with special needs and vice versa

- Students with special needs should be ready to work with their families and vice-versa
- Students with special needs should be encouraged or sensitized to work independently on assignments both at home and in schools
- Non special educators should choose to participate in inclusive classrooms
- School administrators should provide adequate resources for inclusive classrooms
- A continuum of service should be maintained. A range of education programmes available should be run simultaneously by the special education teachers to meet the needs of students with special needs
- Special education settings should have resources rooms for students with special needs should always be made available for special education
- Itinerant teachers who travel from school to school, may be specialists in the education of students with special needs
- Persons with disabilities in developing states in Nigeria should not be regarded as the poorest of the poor. Grant attention should be paid to them in major development programmes. This is so as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) themselves can not be attained unless they are taken into account
- Developing countries in general and Cross River State in particular should revise their development policy guidelines to ensure that they include persons, students with special needs in particular in their programmes. These done, sensitive education contemporary issues will be rationally solves

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