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Qualitative Study on Integrating Policies, Practices and Pedagogy on Inclusive Education among Preservice Teacher Training Programs in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper explores the Qualitative study on integrating Policies, Practices and Pedagogy on Inclusive Education among Preservice Teacher Training Programs in Nigeria. As Nigeria seeks to improve equitable access to quality education for all learners, pre-service teacher training programs must equip future educators with the skills, attitudes, and understanding necessary to foster inclusivity in classrooms. Through an analysis of current policy frameworks, educational practices, and pedagogical challenges, this study identifies critical gaps and provides actionable recommendations for developing a robust inclusive education model in Nigerian teacher training institutions. The implications for policy adaptation and curriculum reform were discussed in light of global best practices and Nigeria's unique sociocultural context.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Pre-service Teacher Training, Policy Implementation, Disability, Educational Equity

Introduction

Inclusive education aims to ensure that every learner, irrespective of their physical, cognitive, socio-emotional, or economic differences, has access to quality education in a supportive environment (UNESCO, 2021). In Nigeria, although inclusive education has been emphasized in the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013), the adoption and practical application of these principles in pre-service teacher training programs have been limited (Afolabi & Ojo, 2022). As future educators, pre-service teachers must be equipped to address diverse needs within classrooms, including those of students with disabilities, marginalized communities, and varying learning abilities (Akinyele et al., 2020). Integrating inclusive education policies, practices, and pedagogical approaches in pre-service training is critical to addressing the disparities in Nigeria's educational sector and promoting social equity (Baba & Ahmad, 2021). Nigeria's commitment to inclusive education began with the enactment of policies such as the Universal Basic Education Act, which emphasizes educational access for all (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). Furthermore, the National Policy on Education was revised to incorporate provisions supporting inclusive education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013), with Kaduna State passing into law The Kaduna State Disability Law 2023, as well as Lagos State. However, the implementation has faced numerous challenges, including limited funding, inadequate teacher preparation, and societal stigma toward disabilities (Baba & Ahmad, 2021). Ozoji (2022) notes that without concrete strategies to bridge the gap between policy and practice, inclusive education goals will remain unfulfilled in Nigeria.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory posits that individuals are influenced by multiple layers of their environment, ranging from immediate settings (like family and school) to larger societal influences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to this theory, inclusive education requires supportive structures at each level: from micro-level (classroom practices and teacher attitudes) to macro-level (educational policies and cultural beliefs about disability) (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). This model emphasizes that creating an inclusive school environment depends not only on the classroom but also on the family, school administration, and broader community. For instance, if a school operates within a community that values inclusivity, it is more likely to adopt policies and practices that support students with disabilities (Tudge et al., 2009).

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory emphasizes the social context of learning and the importance of interactions between learners and more knowledgeable others (Vygotsky, 1978). In an inclusive classroom, this theory supports collaborative learning, where peers and teachers work together to support students with diverse abilities. The idea of the "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD) is central here; it suggests that students can achieve higher levels of understanding with appropriate support, such as differentiated instruction or peer tutoring (Daniels, 2005). This theory underpins inclusive practices by advocating for scaffolding and personalized support that respects each student's unique learning process (Gindis, 1999).

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Critical Disability Theory

Critical Disability Theory (CDT) challenges traditional perspectives on disability, viewing it as a social construct rather than an inherent limitation (Goodley, 2013). CDT emphasizes the need to critically examine power dynamics, marginalization, and ableism in educational systems, urging educators to question how curriculum, teaching practices, and policies can exclude certain groups of students (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). This theory calls for an examination of the biases that contribute to inequities in education and advocates for an approach that values diversity and acknowledges the agency of individuals with disabilities. By focusing on social justice, CDT helps to shift the focus of inclusive education from merely accommodating students with disabilities to actively restructuring educational systems for equity (Erevelles, 2000). These theories complement each other in advocating for inclusive education, highlighting how multiple factors—ranging from individual interactions to societal structures—can impact a learner's experience in the classroom. By addressing environmental, social, and systemic barriers, they contribute to a more holistic understanding of inclusive practices. Research on inclusive education in developing countries reveals both promising practices and persistent challenges, particularly related to accessibility, teacher training, policy implementation, and societal attitudes towards disability. Studies from various contexts underscore how social, economic, and cultural factors uniquely shape the inclusivity of educational systems in these regions.

Accessibility and Resources

A significant barrier to inclusive education in developing countries is the lack of resources and infrastructure. For instance, in a study conducted across several low-income regions in Africa, Boissiere (2004) found that the scarcity of resources—such as assistive technologies, accessible school facilities, and educational materials tailored to different learning needs—limits the quality of inclusive education. This shortage often results in overcrowded classrooms, inadequate instructional materials, and limited support services, all of which hinder the effectiveness of inclusive practices (Boissiere, 2004). Similarly, Ahmed (2018) studied inclusive education practices in Bangladesh and found that the availability of resources was crucial for the successful implementation of inclusive policies. In this context, limited funding led to poor school facilities, which were not conducive to the needs of students with disabilities. Ahmed suggested that improving access to resources and making classrooms physically accessible are essential steps toward better inclusivity (Ahmed, 2018).

Teacher Training and Professional Development

Teacher preparedness is another critical factor in developing inclusive education. Research indicates that educators in developing countries often lack specialized training in inclusive practices, making it challenging to meet the diverse needs of learners. In a study conducted in Kenya, Mugo, Oriende, and Sang (2016) highlighted that teachers frequently reported feeling underprepared to address the educational needs of students with disabilities due to a lack of professional development opportunities. They argued that without adequate training in areas like differentiated instruction and Universal Design for Learning, teachers struggle to create supportive learning environments (Mugo, Oriende, & Sang, 2016). Similarly, in Nigeria, Oluremi (2015) found that teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education were largely influenced by their level of training and experience with inclusive practices. The study noted that teachers who had received even limited training in special education were more likely to support inclusive practices and to believe in the capacity of students with disabilities to succeed academically. This highlights the importance of training as a means of positively influencing teacher perceptions and promoting more inclusive classrooms (Oluremi, 2015).

Global Standards for Inclusive Teacher Education

Globally, inclusive education has gained prominence as a cornerstone of quality education under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 4, which aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all" (UNESCO, 2021). International frameworks, such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Differentiated Instruction, offer adaptable strategies to support diverse learners, providing benchmarks for countries like Nigeria to develop inclusive teacher training programs (Akinyele et al., 2020).

Pedagogical Approaches in Inclusive Education

Effective inclusive education relies on pedagogies that support diverse learning needs, such as differentiated instruction, active learning strategies, and the UDL model (Rose & Meyer, 2002). These approaches allow teachers to cater to the various abilities and learning styles of students, thus ensuring that no student is left behind. In Nigeria, however, pre-service teacher training often focuses on traditional lecture-based methods, with limited exposure to inclusive pedagogical approaches (Afolabi & Ojo, 2022). Adapting teaching methodologies to include hands-on, student-centered learning can better prepare teachers to manage inclusive classrooms (Ozaji, 2022).

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach, drawing on data from policy documents, curriculum reviews, and interviews with teacher educators and pre-service teachers. Through document analysis, this paper examines the extent to which inclusive education principles are embedded within Nigeria's teacher training curricula. Interviews with stakeholders, including educators and education policymakers, provide insights into the challenges and perceptions surrounding inclusive education practices in Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

1. Policy Integration in Pre-Service Teacher Training

A review of Nigeria's National Policy on Education indicates a commitment to inclusive education but lacks explicit guidelines on how to operationalize these principles within teacher training curricula (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). Current teacher education curricula in Nigerian universities and colleges often do not include comprehensive modules on inclusive education, which would cover topics like disability awareness, culturally responsive teaching, and adaptive teaching methods (Akinyele et al., 2020). Baba and Ahmad (2021) argue that the absence of clear, enforceable guidelines results in fragmented adoption of inclusive practices, leaving pre-service teachers inadequately prepared for diverse classrooms.

2. Incorporation of Inclusive Pedagogies

Inclusive pedagogies such as UDL and differentiated instruction remain underutilized in Nigerian teacher training programs. The UDL framework, which emphasizes providing multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression, is especially suitable for meeting the needs of diverse learners in Nigerian classrooms (Rose & Meyer, 2002). However, studies show that most pre-service teachers receive little to no training on UDL or other inclusive methodologies (Ozaji, 2022). Akinyele et al. (2020) suggests that integrating practical, hands-on training in these inclusive pedagogies can improve pre-service teachers' confidence and competence in addressing diverse learning needs.

3. Attitudinal Challenges and Awareness Gaps

Interviews with teacher educators and pre-service teachers reveal a significant challenge: the perception of inclusive education as a secondary priority or an "extra responsibility" rather than a core component of effective teaching (Baba & Ahmad, 2021). This negative perception is often reinforced by limited exposure to inclusive practices and societal stigmas around disability and special needs. Developing positive attitudes toward inclusion requires not only curriculum changes but also targeted awareness programs that highlight the benefits of inclusive education for all students (Afolabi & Ojo, 2022).

4. Structural Barriers and Resource Constraints

Structural challenges such as inadequate funding, lack of specialized resources, and insufficiently trained faculty hinder effective implementation of inclusive teacher training programs. Ozaji (2022) notes that teacher training institutions in Nigeria face substantial resource constraints, limiting their ability to provide practical training in inclusive education. Furthermore, insufficient access to assistive technology and adaptive learning materials prevents pre-service teachers from gaining firsthand experience in inclusive practices (Akinyele et al., 2020).

Conclusion

Integrating policies, practices, and pedagogies of inclusive education within Nigerian pre-service teacher training programs is essential to promoting equitable education for all students. By reforming curricula, supporting faculty, and encouraging positive attitudes toward inclusion, Nigeria can build a foundation for inclusive education that addresses the diverse needs of its student population. Implementing these recommendations will not only improve the quality of teacher education but also contribute to Nigeria's broader goals of achieving educational equity and social inclusion.

Recommendations

1. Enhance Policy Frameworks for Inclusive Education

Policymakers should strengthen Nigeria's inclusive education policies by incorporating specific mandates for pre-service teacher training programs. Clearer guidelines and standardized benchmarks for inclusive education in pre-service curricula can ensure that all teacher candidates receive adequate preparation for diverse classrooms (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013).

2. Redesign Teacher Training Curricula

Teacher training programs should incorporate modules on UDL, differentiated instruction, and other inclusive pedagogies as core components rather than optional additions (Rose & Meyer, 2002). Additionally, integrating culturally responsive



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teaching approaches can help pre-service teachers address the unique needs of Nigeria's multicultural student population (Akinyele et al., 2020).

3. Faculty Development and Resource Allocation

Providing faculty with training on inclusive education and adaptive teaching methodologies can improve the quality of teacher training programs. Collaborative partnerships with international organizations and government agencies can help secure the necessary resources for implementing inclusive education training modules (Ozaji, 2022).

4. Community Engagement and Policy Advocacy

Promoting a culture of inclusivity requires active engagement with communities, policymakers, and educational institutions. Collaborative efforts involving parents, educators, and policymakers can raise awareness and reduce the stigma associated with inclusive education, fostering a supportive environment for inclusive practices in teacher training institutions (Baba & Ahmad, 2021).

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