

EXPLORING THE PERCEPTION OF PARENTS TOWARD INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN LOKOJA METROPOLIS, KOGI STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the perception of parents of children with a birth impairment and those of children without special needs toward inclusive education in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria. This study adopted a descriptive survey design. All parents of students in both basic and secondary schools in Kogi State constituted the study population. Purposive random sampling technique was used to sample 400 parents. The PPTIEQ was used to collect data. Experts in the fields of Educational Psychology, Special Education, and Measurement and Evaluation validated the instrument. The reliability coefficient determined through pilot testing was 0.78. The first research question was answered using descriptive statistics, and four null hypotheses were tested using inferential statistics. The findings of this study indicated that parents had very high positive perceptions regarding inclusive education. It was equally revealed that there is no statistically significant difference between the perceptions of parents of children with and without special needs toward inclusive education. No statistically significant difference was found between parents' perceptions of inclusive education on the basis of gender, education qualification, and income. Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, it was recommended that the government should provide all necessary physical and human facilities in all inclusive schools to further increase positive perceptions of parents toward inclusive education for students with learning disabilities.

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Introduction

Inequality and discrimination exist all over the world. To address this challenge, there has been discussion on programs that can be developed to enable all individuals to have equal access to basic services in society. Inclusive education has been recognized as a key policy to promote the education of all children in society. Specifically, all children, regardless of gender, race, and ethnic background, will be given equal opportunity to enjoy their right to education. In achieving this goal, inclusive education has been widely acknowledged as a useful policy for promoting the education of ethnic minority \$2 in society. Inclusive education as a major reform in education has been incorporated into the policy documents of various international organizations. These notable documents include the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Educational Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993), and the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994), which assert the need for equal access to education for all children. These policies affirm the right of all children to equal educational opportunities without discrimination within the mainstream education system. Article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child asserts the right of every child to education and requires that this education be provided on the basis of equality of opportunity. In other words, the Convention calls for non-discrimination in relation to access to education on the grounds of disability. Articles 28 and 29 together with Articles 2, 3, and 23 seem to suggest that all children have a right to inclusive education, regardless of their disability or background. In many developing countries, disability is perceived as a personal tragedy, and as such, individuals living with disability are perceived as a burden and a liability to society (Majoko, 2019; Mantey, 2017; Singal, 2016). In view of this, inclusive education has been envisioned as an ideal policy to reorient society to embrace individuals with disabilities and encourage their education in regular classrooms. People with special needs are individuals with special conditions who have different needs from their peers in terms of their mental, physical, social, and emotional characteristics.

Inclusive education is a modern educational concept that has become an integral part of both developed and developing countries' educational systems. The United Nations Declaration of 1975 recognizes the rights of disabled persons and affirms that disabled people are capable of learning enhanced skills and can grow and integrate into the normal life of society. The declaration emphasizes the principles of social justice, equality of opportunity among all members of society, and equal distribution of the prime rights enjoyed by normal people of all ages among normal and special children, regardless of disability or severity, and these agreements have been indicated in universally important documents.

Over several decades, the concept of inclusion has contributed significantly to the teaching and learning practice and the theoretical and practical experience of schools. Inclusive education is an educational innovation that provides educational services for all students without discrimination. According to UNESCO (2005), inclusive education is an innovation in education that provides fundamental changes that can accommodate the diversity of good students that are implemented in a learning environment that is conducive to all children. Inclusive education provides an opportunity for all students to participate in joint learning in inclusive classes to develop social, emotional, physical, and psychomotor development in a comfortable and conducive classroom environment. According to Abbas, Zafar, and Naz (2016), inclusive education aims to provide opportunities for every child with all the challenges and characteristics and different learning styles to be able to learn together in a conducive learning environment to improve academic and non-academic abilities. In addition, inclusive education can provide an opportunity for every child to be able to appreciate differences to be positive so that they are accustomed to facing real conditions in the future (Ruppar, Bal, Gonzalez, Love, & McCabe, 2018).

In Nigeria, inclusive education is one of the educational services that are still in the developmental stages. A number of inclusive schools have not been able to accommodate all children with a birth impairment. Although there are special schools for students with special needs in many states, they are mostly located in the cities, so many children with special needs cannot have access or be educated according to their needs and obstacles.

Another notable problem associated with the implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria is the lack of adequate government attention in assisting regular schools to become inclusive schools. In addition, the gross inadequate facilities and infrastructure in regular schools to become inclusive schools indicate that regular schools are not yet ready to replace regular schools with inclusive schools. In addition to problems with facilities and infrastructure is the issue of teachers' competence, without a clear understanding of inclusive education. This is because they do not come from a special education background, so they do not understand the characteristics of students with special needs (Vaz et al., 2015; Mekacher, 2019).

Inclusive education is an educational model that envisions providing education to all, where children with and without disabilities will study together in the same classroom without discrimination. The success of any educational design depends upon its successful implementation. The successful implementation of inclusion of children with disabilities in normal schools depends on the positive attitude of all stakeholders (teachers, students, and parents).

Equally important is the mindset of parents about inclusive education. Most parents believe that students with special needs must attend a special school. The concerns of parents are accompanied by fears that people who have not been able to accept the existence of students with special needs in the school environment and the general public environment will not accept the existence of students with special needs (Denman, 2015; Shetty, 2018).

The success of inclusive education is not only the government's duty and obligation in its implementation (Simaeva & Khitryuk, 2014). Since school is a part of society, the role of parents cannot be overemphasized. The role of parents of students with special needs in inclusive classes is germane. Parents must understand the meaning and purpose of inclusive education that their children will undergo (Simayeva, 2013). Inclusive education provides many advantages, especially for children with special needs, although its implementation is yet to be maximized in classroom learning services. (MohdArifudin & MohdMokhtar, 2020). The parents of children with a birth impairment often support the implementation of an inclusive approach (Tryfon, Anastasia, & Eleni, 2019).

The majority of parents believe that the implementation of inclusive education would help their children strengthen their social skills and contribute to their general personal development. Parents should also contribute to supporting and promoting inclusive education. The role of parents as the guardians of their children becomes important in inclusive education when they require help and to provide learning information at school (Tryfone et al., 2019). Parents hope that children who experience difficulties at inclusive schools will have the opportunity to return to school (Ummah, Tahar, & Hanafi, 2020). Furthermore, they have been supporters of the movement to include children with special needs in mainstream education (De Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2010).

The perception of parents toward inclusive education has recently become a topical issue. As noted by de Boer, Pijl, and Minnaert (2009), knowledge about attitudes has increased over the last decade due to the increasing interest of researchers in aspects relating to successful inclusive education. According to Palmer, Fuller, Arora, and Nelson (2001), parental support and involvement are important in facilitating inclusive education. It should be noted that when both groups of parents—children with special needs and those without—are positive toward

inclusive education, teachers and support staff will be more inclined to realize inclusion (de Boer, Pijl & Minnaert, 2009).

Research on parental attitudes toward inclusive education has shown that parents tend to hold predominantly positive attitudes toward inclusive education (Miller & Philips, 1992). Parents of typically developing children report that inclusive education helps their offspring to learn about and accept individual differences (Gallagher et al., 2000; Miller & Phillips, 1992). As noted by Innes and Diamond (1999), researches has found that the attitude of parents, including those who have experience of having a child with a disability in their child's classroom, hold more positive attitudes than parents without this experience. In addition, the type of disability seems be related to parents' attitudes in that parents are most positive toward the inclusion of children with mild disabilities (Innes & Diamond, 1999). Therefore, it is necessary to acquire knowledge about parents' attitudes toward inclusive education and variables relating to their attitudes since they could be useful in developing positive interventions (de Boer, Pijl & Minnaert, 2009).

Gender plays a role in shaping parental attitudes toward inclusive education. Alshemari et al. (2023) found that female parents are generally more supportive of inclusive practices than male parents. This difference may stem from varying levels of engagement and emotional investment in their children's educational experiences, suggesting that targeted outreach efforts may be necessary to more effectively engage male parents.

The attitudes of parents of children with and without disabilities by perception about various aspects of inclusive design. However, their attitudes and perceptions are not uniform. Socioeconomic status as a composite variable includes income and educational status. The research literature supports that the educational qualification of parents of children with disabilities has a significant effect on their attitude and perception toward inclusive education. It states that highly educated parents have a more positive attitude toward inclusive education, whereas less educated parents have a negative attitude. It has been found that parents from the high-income group have a more positive attitude toward inclusive education (Leyser & Kirk, 2014), whereas those from the low-economic status group have a less positive attitude toward inclusive educational design (Most & Ingber, 2016).

Statement of the problem

Despite the global popularity of inclusive education, certain ingredients are necessary for its successful implementation. The perception of parents toward inclusive education is notable among these ingredients. As noted by Palmer, Fuller, Arora, and Nelson (2001), parental support and involvement is regarded as being greatly important in facilitating inclusive education. de Boer, Pijil, and Minnaert (2009) assert that it seems reasonable that teachers and support staff will be more inclined to realize inclusion when both groups of parents—those of children with special needs and those of children without—are positive toward inclusive education.

The perspective of parents could facilitate parent-school partnership, which is important for the success of implementing inclusive education at school (Lui, Sin, Yang, Forlin, & Ho, 2015). Parents are one of the most important factors for inclusive education systems because their support will impact the implementation of inclusive education. Parents of children with a birth impairment have become supporters of inclusive education, and they play the main role in education reform toward inclusivity. To enable parents' participation in inclusive education, it is essential to understand their perspective on the education of children with a birth impairment.

Therefore, this study intends to investigate the perceptions of parents of children with special needs and those without special needs education toward inclusive education in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria, thus this study explored parents' perception toward inclusive education in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria. This

study investigated the influence of variables such as sex, education qualifications, and income on parents' perceptions of inclusive education.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the perception of parents toward inclusive education in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives of the study are as follows:

- a. Investigate the level of parents' perception of inclusive education in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria.
- b. Determine the difference in the perceptions of parents of children with and without special needs toward inclusive education.
- c. Determine the difference in the perception of parents toward inclusive education based on sex in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria.
- d. Investigate the difference in parents' perceptions toward inclusive education based on education qualification in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria.
- e. Investigate the difference in parents' perception toward inclusive education based on income in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

Five research questions were raised to guide this study.

- a. What is the level of parents' perception of inclusive education in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria?
- b. Is there a statistically significant difference in the perceptions of parents of children with and without special needs toward inclusive education in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria?
- c. Is there a statistically significant difference in the perception of parents toward inclusive education based on sex in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria?
- d. Is there a statistically significant difference in the perception of parents toward inclusive education based on education qualification in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria?
- e. Is there a statistically significant difference in the perception of parents toward inclusive education based on income in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

The following four (4) null hypotheses were formulated and tested in this study:

- H0¹:** There is no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of parents of children with and without special needs toward inclusive education in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria.
- H0²:** There is no statistically significant difference in the perception of parents toward inclusive education based on sex in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria.
- H0³:** There is no statistically significant difference in the perception of parents toward inclusive education based on education qualification in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria.
- H0⁴:** There is no statistically significant difference in the perception of parents toward inclusive education based on income in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria.

Methods

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. All parents of students in both basic and secondary schools in Kogi State constituted the study population. A total of Four Hundred (400) parents of children with and without special needs who have children in both basic and secondary schools in the study area were purposely selected and participated in the study. A purposive random sampling technique was adopted to select a total sample of 400 respondents from Lokoja Metropolis. The Parents' Perceptions Toward Inclusive Education Questionnaire

(PPTIEQ) was used to collect data to determine parents' perceptions of inclusive education in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria. This instrument was adapted from Rafferty and Griffin's 2005 instrument titled Parents' Attitudes Toward Inclusion/Integration (PATI). The questionnaire contained two sections. Section A consisted of items on the respondents' personal details which include: types of parent, Gender, education level, and income level. Section B contains 16 items on parent' perceptions of inclusive education for students with and without disabilities. The measures used a five (5) Likert scale with response options including Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, and Strongly Agree (Rafferty & Griffin, 2005). The contents of the research instrument were further validated by experts in the field of Educational Psychology and Measurement and Evaluation. Afemike (2016) defined reliability as the consistency, dependability, or stability of measures obtained from an assessment. The reliability of this instrument was further determined through pilot testing with test re-test method. A total of 100 respondents were selected from Five (5) Local Government Areas from the three (3) senatorial districts that are not part of the local government areas selected for the study. They were given questionnaires to respond to and return. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Crobach's alpha statistics, and the reliability coefficient was determined to be 0.73. This estimate indicates that the instrument is reliable and internally consistent. Therefore, the instrument was considered suitable, valid, and reliable for the study. Data collected from the study were subjected to analysis and descriptive statistics. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the first research question, while inferential statistics (t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) statistical techniques were used for testing of four (4) null hypotheses formulated in the study.

Results

The first research question was answered using descriptive statistics. The mean and standard deviation of the four research questions were transformed into corresponding hypotheses and tested at 0.05 alpha level of significance using t-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistical techniques.

Answering Research Question One: What is the level of parents' perception of inclusive education in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria?

Table1: Analysis of the level parents' perceptions of inclusive education for students with special needs.

S/N	Indicators	Mean	SD
1	The social skills of students with special needs would be improved by educating them in the general education classroom alongside their peers.	3.2307	.74754
2	Inclusion of students with special needs in the general education classroom would likely enhance their acceptance by the community in general.	4.0627	.68809
3	Educating students with special needs in the general education classroom alongside typical peers would allow them to develop their academic skills.	3.5747	1.24779
4	Including students with special needs in the general education classroom is likely to have a positive impact on how they feel about themselves.	4.0680	.68680
5	The inclusion of students with special needs in the general education classroom would provide more opportunities to participate in various school activities.	3.7840	.82395

6	Students with special needs would have the opportunity to learn more in a classroom that includes both students with and without disabilities than in a classroom that only includes students without special needs.	3.7133	.70698
7	Including students with special needs in the general education classroom would likely help them achieve their desired outcomes.	3.9840	.81743
8	In classrooms that included both students with and without special needs, teachers would not be well-trained or qualified to educate or deal with the needs of students with disabilities.	3.7400	.89323
9	In classrooms that included both students with and without special needs, students with special needs were less likely to receive enough special help and individualized instruction from their teacher.	3.8973	1.00133
10	The inclusion of students with special needs in the general education classroom would likely reduce the amount of specialized support that teachers provide to students without special needs.	3.8947	.10328
11	Students with special needs would be more likely to be rejected by classrooms that included both students with and students without special needs.	4.3040	.76302
12	Including students with special needs in the general education classroom would provide diverse interactions that would lead to greater understanding and acceptance of differences.	4.2360	.94454
13	The inclusion of students with special needs in the general education classroom would likely have a negative effect on their emotional development.	3.5613	1.10418
14	Including students with special needs in the general education classroom would promote their social independence.	3.7867	.57797
15	I would be satisfied with my child being educated in a general education classroom that includes both students with and without special needs.	3.3400	.49705
16	Separating students with special needs from the classroom of general education violates their rights	4.5133	.57797

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for 16 items used to measure parents' perceptions of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities. According to the above results, the mean value analysis indicated that none of the sixteen (16) indicators falls below the average mean score of 2.5. These results indicate that parents of students with special needs in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria, have a very high and positive perception of inclusive education for students with special needs.

Testing the Hypotheses

H0¹: There is no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of parents of children with and without special needs toward inclusive education in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria.

Table 2: t-test analysis of the difference in the perception of the parents of children with and without special needs toward inclusive education.

Variables	No	Mean	SD	Df	t-cal. (2 tailed)	Decision
Parents of children with a birth impairment	184	63.73	3.18	398	.762	Accept
Parents of children without a birth impairment	216	61.59	3.23			
Total	400					

Table 2 shows the results obtained from the testing of hypothesis one. From the table, Df. = 398, calculated t-value (2-tailed) = .762. Since the calculated t-value (2-tailed) of .762. is greater than .05 alpha level of significance, the null hypothesis, which states that there is no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of parents of children with and without special needs toward inclusive education in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria, was accepted. This indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between the perceptions of parents of children with and without special needs toward inclusive education in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria.

H0²: There is no statistically significant difference in the perception of parents toward inclusive education based on sex in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria.

Table 3: t-test analysis of the difference between the perceptions of male and female parents toward inclusive education.

Variables	No	Mean	SD	Df	t-cal. (2 tailed)	Decision
Male	175	65.82	3.47	398	.538	Accept
Female	225	62.43	3.61			
Total	400					

Table 3 shows the results obtained from the testing of hypothesis one. From the table, Df. = 398, calculated t-value (2-tailed) = .538. Since the calculated t-value (2-tailed) of .538. is greater than .05 alpha level of significance, the null hypothesis was accepted, which states that there is no statistically significant difference in the perception of parents toward inclusive education based on sex in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria was accepted. This indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between the perceptions of male and female parents toward inclusive education in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria.

H0³: There is no statistically significant difference in the perception of parents toward inclusive education based on education qualification in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria.

Table 4: Analysis of variance of parents' perceptions of parents toward inclusive education based on the Education qualification.

Variables	Sum of the Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	6.314	2	3.157	0.3299	.725
Within Groups	3807.503	398	9.567		
Total	3813.817	400			

Table 4 shows the results obtained from the testing of hypothesis one. From the table, it is shown that F ratio = 0.3299, and the calculated sig. value = .725. Since the significance value of .725 is greater than the 0.05 alpha level of significance, the null hypothesis, which states that there is no statistically significant difference in the perception of parents toward inclusive education based on education qualification in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria, was accepted. Thus, there is no statistically significant difference in the perception of parents toward inclusive education based on education qualification in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria.

H0⁴: There is no statistically significant difference in the perception of parents toward inclusive education based on income in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria.

Table 5: Analysis of the Variance of Parents' Perceptions of Inclusive Education Based on the Income.

Variables	Sum of the Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	7.513	2	3.756	0.4032	.702
Within Groups	3707.204	398	9.315		
Total	3714.717	400			

Table 5 shows the results obtained from the testing of hypothesis one. From the table, it is shown that F ratio = 0.4032, and the calculated Sig. value = .702. Since the significance value of .702 is greater than the .05 alpha level of significance, the null hypothesis, which states that there is no statistically significant difference in the perception of parents toward inclusive education based on income in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria, was accepted. This indicates that there are no statistically significant differences among parents' perceptions of inclusive education based on income in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria.

Discussion of the Findings

This study examined the relative perceptions of parents toward inclusive education for students with special needs. The first research question was raised to explore the general perceptions of parents toward inclusive education for students with and without special needs in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria. The first finding of the study revealed that parents had very high positive perceptions regarding inclusive education for students with learning disabilities. This finding agreed with the findings of Sosu and Rydzewska (2017) and Bader (2018). Sosu and Rydzewska (2017) found that parents with generally positive perspectives regarding inclusion sometimes demonstrate less support on impact scales measuring perceived benefits for students with disabilities and typical peers, while Bader (2018) found similar patterns of difference between stronger global perspectives on inclusion than within specific measures of impact, including impact on students without disabilities, impact on parents of students with disabilities, and impact on parents of students without disabilities. This perspective aligned with the opinion of de Boer et al. (2010) and Ummah et al. (2021), whose findings revealed that parents support the implementation of inclusive education because it is believed to have many advantages that can be gained by children with intellectual disabilities.

The first research hypothesis investigated the difference between the perceptions of parents of children with and without special needs toward inclusive education in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria. The second finding

of the study revealed no statistically significant difference between the perceptions of the parents of children with and without special needs toward inclusive education in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria.

This finding supports Bader's (2018) findings that, generally, perspectives among parents of students with and without disabilities supported inclusion. The findings further confirmed that although both parents with and without disabilities indicated generally supportive global views toward inclusion, parents of students with disabilities tended to agree more strongly with statements supportive of inclusion than parents of students without disabilities.

The second hypothesis investigated the difference between the perceptions of male and female parents toward inclusive education in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria. The third finding of the study revealed no statistically significant difference between the perceptions of male and female parents toward inclusive education in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria. This finding contradicts the findings of Alshemari et al. (2023), who found that female parents are generally more supportive of inclusive practices than male parents. The findings further stated that this difference may stem from varying levels of engagement and emotional investment in the educational experiences of their children, suggesting that targeted outreach efforts may be necessary to engage male parents more effectively.

The third hypothesis examined the difference among parents' perceptions toward inclusive education based on education qualification in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria. The fourth finding of the study revealed that there is no statistically significant difference among parents' perceptions toward inclusive education based on education qualification in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria.

The fourth hypothesis explored the difference between parents' perceptions toward inclusive education based on income in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria. The fifth finding of the study revealed that there are no statistically significant differences among parents' perceptions of parents toward inclusive education based on income in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State, Nigeria. The findings contradicted those of Leyser and Kirk (2014) and Most and Ingber (2016). Leyser and Kirk (2014) found that parents from the high-income group have a more positive attitude toward inclusive education, and Most and Ingber (2016) found that parents from the low-economic status group have a less positive attitude toward inclusive educational design.

Conclusions

Based on this study's findings, it was concluded that parents have positive perceptions toward inclusive education. It was also concluded that gender, education qualification, and parents' income did not have a statistically significant influence on their perceptions of inclusive education.

Recommendations

In view of the findings and conclusions of this study, it was recommended that the government should provide all necessary equipment and facilities in inclusive schools and employ special education experts as teachers in all inclusive schools to further increase the positive perception of parents and other relevant stakeholders toward inclusive education for students with learning disabilities.

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