

## Teachers Roles in Creating Learning Environment for Learners with Special Needs in Inclusive Primary Schools

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**Abstract.** This study evaluated the influence of teachers' role in creating friendly learning environment for learners with special needs in inclusive primary schools: A pilot study report on "Evaluation of inclusive education practices for learners with special needs in primary schools in Enugu state of Nigeria". The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey research design. Three (3) research questions and one (1) hypothesis guide the study. The population of the study was 351 teachers. Data were collected through a questionnaire and observation indices. The questionnaire was named influence of teachers' role in creating a friendly learning environment (ITRCFLE). Cronbach's Alpha method, yielded a reliability index of 0.78. Analysis of data was done through simple percentages, mean and standard deviation. Hypotheses were tested with t-test analysis at 0.05 level of significance. The result shows existence of a low friendly learning environment. The researchers recommended along with other suggestions, that a lot needs to be done on inclusive education awareness creation.

**Keywords:** Evaluation, friendly learning environments, inclusive primary schools, learners with special needs, teachers.

### 1. Introduction

Evaluation implies assessing whether or not one is doing the right things in order to achieve a stated goal. Evaluation is a systematic collection and analysis of data in order to assess the strength and weakness of programs, policies, and organizations to improve their effectiveness (Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NADC, 2011). In this study, it

will focus on evaluation of influence of teachers' role in creating friendly learning environment for learners with special needs in primary schools in Enugu state where inclusion is in practice using formative and summative evaluation. Formative evaluation is used to monitor learner's learning to provide ongoing feedback that can be used by instructors or teachers to improve their teaching and by learners to improve their learning. Summative evaluation, however, is used to evaluate learner's learning at the end of an instructional unit by comparing it against some standard or benchmark.

The history of learners with special needs is not a subject for celebration in view of the inherent violation of human rights as are known today. The Dakar Framework of Action adopted a World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) in 2000, which established the goal to provide every child with primary school education by 2015. It clearly identified Inclusive Education (IE) as a key strategy for the development of EFA. Inclusive education is a new model in education which advocates that all learners irrespective of any disadvantage should be educated in the same classroom. All necessary aid to enhance learning are to be provided in the classroom. Nigeria government has formulated policies aimed at giving learners with disabilities adequate education. These policies are expressed in the 2004 National Policy on Education (NPE).

More so, NPE (2004), states that Nigeria government is obliged to provide all the necessary facilities to ensure easy access to education for learners with disabilities. To this end, government must provide inclusive

education or ensure the integration of special classes and units into ordinary/public schools; provide regular census and monitoring of people with special needs to ensure adequate educational planning and welfare programs, provide special education equipment and materials; special education training; special training and re-training of personnel to develop capacity building and to keep abreast of the latest teaching techniques for the various categories of disabilities. The goal of an inclusive education system is to provide all learners with the most appropriate learning environments and opportunities for them to best achieve their potential. In Enugu state, Inclusive schools emerged as a result of intervention of State Advocacy and Voice Initiative (SAVI) a program of the Department for International Development (DFID) Nigeria (SAVI, 2012). Their efforts in collaboration with an organization designated Inclusive Education Advocacy Partnership culminated into the state government signing a policy on inclusive education in 2014.

There are components involved in inclusive education practices to ensure that learners with special needs develop skills in many different areas, as well as obtain the same educational rights as their peers. These include: modification and Accommodation; instructional strategies; assistive technology; infrastructural facilities; collaboration among professionals and para-educators; administrative support; academic qualification; professional qualification in special education; role of peers without special needs, and parents or family support. There are numerous kinds of modifications, including accommodations and adaptations that might be supportive for learners with special needs to access general education curriculum in an inclusive setting. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) indicates that any learner with special needs, no matter how severe the need, must be provided with as much assistance as possible to help them access the general curriculum (Lee, Soukup, Little & Wehmeyer, 2008). Furthermore, some studies provide evidence that learners with special need benefit academically from the general curriculum when they receive adequate and appropriate modifications that meet their unique needs. Teaching learners with diverse abilities is a big challenge, especially in terms of creating a friendly environment. Learners with special needs have diverse needs and inaccessible environment within or outside the school may contribute in excluding them from learning institutions.

Evaluation therefore involves a prominent process of assessing, testing and measuring. Its main objective is qualitative improvement. It implies a critical assessment of educative process and its outcome in the light of the objectives. Evaluation is a process that critically examines a program. It involves collecting and analyzing information about a program's activities, characteristics, and outcomes. Its purpose is to make judgments about a program, to improve its effectiveness, and/or to inform programming decisions (Patton, 1987). This study used Stufflebeam (2003) evaluation model: Concept, Input, Process and Product evaluation model (CIPP), these are considered within the framework of formative and summative evaluation. Evaluation is relevant to this study, because, it helps in critical evaluation of the influence of teachers' role in creating friendly learning environment. The friendly learning environment on the other hand is one which is warm, welcoming and in which learners have the right to learn to their fullest potential within a safe environment. It is an environment which supports small group work and team work with well-established routines and rules. UNESCO (2001), states that a child friendly school ensures quality education and positive learning for the child. A friendly learning environment is designed to help in overcoming failures and difficulties that learners face in an educational institution as well as reduce the risk of falling behind or being excluded from learning and extracurricular activities (Okoroikpa, 2019). According to Mastropieri & Scruggs, (2010), teachers play a pivotal role in inclusive education. The literature on inclusive education is undisputed about no matter how excellent the educational infrastructure might be, how well articulated educational policy might be, how well resourced a program might be, effective inclusion does not take place until regular classroom teachers deliver relevant and meaningful instruction to learners with disabilities (Mastropieri & Scruggs). Creating friendly learning environments in this study involved teachers effectiveness in employing the components of inclusive education discussed below:

### **Modification and accommodation:**

Modification is defined in some literature as the adapting or interpreting of a school's formal curriculum by teachers into learning objectives and units of learning activities judged most reasonable for an individual learner or particular group of learners. The term *accommodation* is used in the literature to describe ways to help learners with disabilities accomplish something

they would usually be unable to accomplish because of their disability. There are numerous kinds of modifications, including accommodations and adaptations that might be supportive for learners with special needs to access general education curriculum in an inclusive setting. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) indicates that any learner with special needs, no matter how severe the need, must be provided with as much assistance as possible to help them access the general curriculum (Lee, Soukup, Little & Wehmeyer, 2008). More recent research has shown that learners with special needs who are able to access the general curriculum benefit because it promotes communication, motor, and social skills, and helps learners with special needs build friendships (Copeland, Hughes, Carter, Guth, Presley, Williams & Fowler, 2004, Ryndak & Billingsley, 2004). Furthermore, some studies provide evidence that learners with special need benefit academically from the general curriculum when they receive adequate and appropriate modifications that meet their unique needs. Despite the potential benefits, there are many obstacles in the way for granting curriculum access to learners with special needs (Spooner, Dymond, Smith & Kennedy (2006). As inclusive education has changed over time and legislation has sometimes failed to keep up with it, the regulations of the legislation have not been implemented in the schools. Teaching learners with diverse abilities is a big challenge, Instructional strategies: Instructional strategies are techniques teachers use to maximize learning for learners to become independent strategic learners. Current literature provides a great deal of discussion regarding instructional strategies that encourage learners with special needs to acquire functional skills. Copeland and Cosbey (2009) suggest a new approach to instructional strategies in order to support learners with special needs in accessing the general curriculum in a general education setting by combining effective typical instructional strategies with effective special education strategies. According to this approach, several instructional strategies that support learners with disabilities in inclusive setting include cooperative learning (CL), inquiry learning and the environment which supports it (IL, environment), and universal design for learning (UDL). Apart from inclusive learning strategies, there is another, equally important factor that needs consideration, which is provided alongside the work done in the classroom – collaboration among professionals/para educators.

**Collaboration among professionals / paraeducators:** Collaboration can be defined as a process by which people with different areas of expertise team up to identify problems and needs of particular learners, then find ways to solve the problem and meet the needs. Many other professionals provide different services and play different roles in inclusive settings other than teachers, these include, special education teachers, general education teachers, related services providers (example, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and speech/language pathologists), among others. Therefore, collaboration among professionals is essential for successful inclusion (Carter, Parter, Jackson & Marchant, 2009). In other words, the major purpose for collaboration among professionals in these settings is to increase the quality and effectiveness of education programs.

## 2. Statement of the problem

An inclusive curriculum recognizes the need for teachers, to plan, with the individual differences of learners in mind and adopt flexibility to enable all learners to achieve their goals. Enugu state policy on inclusive education identified among others, poor method of lesson delivery, weak relationship between academic programs and child aspiration, unfriendly learning environment, changing social value, inability to procure materials and violence in schools as barriers causing dropout and preventing enrollment of learners. These findings called attention to the need for improved educational provision to —all learners whose educational provisions were grossly inadequate in Enugu State. To the best of the researcher knowledge, since the inception of inclusive education in 2014 in Enugu state, no study has been undertaken to evaluate inclusive education practices in the state, nor for that matter, teachers role in creating friendly learning environment, based on these, and the state's laudable policy on inclusive education with its attendant assurance to key into global progress in the expansion of access to education, the researcher sets out to evaluate inclusive education practices for learners with special needs in the state's primary schools so far, especially as it concerns the influence of teachers' role in creating friendly learning environment.

## 3. Aims and Objectives of the study

The aim of this study is to evaluate the influence of teachers' role in creating friendly learning environment for learners with special needs in

inclusive primary schools: A pilot study report on "Evaluation of inclusive education practices for learners with special needs in primary schools in Enugu state of Nigeria".

Specifically, the study is designed to achieve the following specific objectives:

- Investigate the extent of curriculum modification in Enugu State inclusive primary schools to suit the learning needs of learners with special needs.
- Examine the instructional strategies employed in inclusive schools to enhance learning of learners with special needs.
- Evaluate collaboration among professionals to increase effectiveness of inclusive practices for learners with special needs in the State's inclusive primary schools.

#### 4. Research Questions

In view of the problem to be investigated in this research the following research questions were raised:

- What is the extent of curriculum modification for the inclusive primary schools?
- What are the instructional strategies that support learners with special needs that are used in inclusive primary schools in the state?
- How do professionals collaborate to increase effectiveness of inclusive practices in inclusive primary schools in the state?

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#### 5. Hypotheses

One hypothesis was stated to guide this study and was tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- There is no significant mean difference in the curriculum modification in inclusive primary school teachers across Enugu State Education zones 1, 2 and 3.

#### 6. Methodology

This research employed descriptive cross-sectional survey design. A descriptive survey design is generally used where the study population is large and getting everyone to be involved in the study will be very difficult to carry out, a representation of the research target audience can be used to represent the entire population. The study was conducted in 3 inclusive schools, one each from LGAs which represented three zones out of 6 education zones of the state. The population of this study was taken from 3 out of the 6 education zones and comprised 351 teachers in 39 inclusive schools in 3 local government areas used for the study. Random, purposive and stratified sampling

technique were employed in this study, the names of the 6 education zones in the state were written, folded and placed in a basket, the researcher picked 3 which were used for the study. The researcher used the same technique to select one LGA each from the education zones and also one school each from the selected LGAs. Only primary 4, 6 classes were involved due to the possibility of learners being able to read and write in English language. 7 Primary 4 to 6 teachers who have learners with special needs in their classes were chosen for the study. The 3 local government areas are Obollo represented as Education zone 1, Agwu as education zone 2 and Agbani as education zone 3. Both regular and special educators were included. The instruments used included questionnaire named influence of teachers' role in creating a friendly learning environment (ITRCFLE) which was developed by the researcher, interviews and observation. The questionnaire consisted of teachers' curriculum adaptation, collaboration, and instructional Strategies in creating friendly learning environment. Interviews and observation were used to confirm the responses elicited from the questionnaire. The instrument was divided in 4 sections. Section A, examined teachers bio information with 7 items comprising four 4 open-ended questions, two multi-choice questions and one dichotomous question. Sub-section B, consisted seven (7) items on school curriculum adaptation, which comprised seven (7) dichotomous questions. Sub-section C, consisted five (5) items on collaboration existing among professionals, which comprised of four point scale. Sub-section D, consisted of eleven (11) items on instructional strategies to help the learners, which comprised three point scale. The instruments were designed to evaluate teachers' role in creating friendly learning environment.

The content validity and instruments relevance were assessed by experts in Research Measurement and Evaluation, Department of Educational Foundations, Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation Sciences and the researcher's supervisor at the University of Jos Nigeria. A trial test was conducted using teachers at Uwani Primary School 1(one) in Enugu South LGA. The reliability of the instruments obtained using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient indexes was 0.78.

The data that were obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed using mean score, ranking scale and percentages. Chi square was used to test the hypotheses at .05 significance level. Find below the results.

## 7. Results

### 7.1 Research Questions

**7.1.1 Research Question One:** What was the extent of curriculum modification for the inclusive primary schools?

**Table 1:** Extent of Curriculum Modification for the Inclusive Primary Schools

**Table 1:** Extent of Curriculum Modification for the Inclusive Primary Schools

S/N	Statement	Strongly Agree (SA)	Agree (A)	Disagree (D)	Strongly Disagree (SD)	Total
	I use different types of teaching devices such as pictorial representation to enable all my pupils learn	2(28.57)	2(28.57)	2(28.57)	1(14.29)	7(100)
	I make use of assistive devices to help learners who need them to learn	0	0	2 (28.57)	5(71.42)	7(100)
	More time is given to learners with special need for instruction and to turn up assignments in class	1(14.29)	2(28.57)	2(28.57)	2(28.57)	7 (100)
	Differentiated activities are given to learners within the same curriculum level	2(28.57)	2(28.57)	2(28.57)	1(14.29)	7(100)
	Adapted Instructional Materials are employed to drive home concepts	2(28.57)	2(28.57)	2(28.57)	1(14.29)	7 (100)
	Content of assignment are modified by giving learners with special needs fewer practice task	0	8(42.88)	5(42.88)	1(14.29)	7(100)
	Grouping learners for shared activities with different goals to achieve	1(14.29)	3(42.86)	1(14.29)	2(28.57)	7 (100)
	<b>Total</b>	8(16.32)	14(28.57)	14(28.57)	13(26.53)	49(100)

Source: Field Data, 201

Table 1 revealed the extent of curriculum modification for the inclusive primary schools based on the teachers' responses. Forty-five percent (44.89%) agreed that curriculum was modified to some extent in the inclusive primary schools while, 55.1% of the respondents disagreed to it. This implied that to a low extent curriculum is modified in the inclusive primary schools.

**7.1.2. Research Question Two:** What were the instructional strategies that support learners with special needs that were used in inclusive primary schools in the state?

**Table 2: Instructional Strategies that Support Learners with Special Needs that were used in Inclusive Primary Schools in Enugu State**

	Items	Very Often	Fairly Often	Not at al	Total
<b>Cooperative Learning (CL),</b>	Learners with disabilities and are grouped together for class discussions	0	5(83.33)	1(16.67)	6(100)
	Learners with disabilities are grouped together for class discussions				

		4(66.67)	2(33.33)	0	6(100)
	Learners with disabilities				
	are grouped together for class discussions	0	0	6 (100)	6 (100)
<b>Inquiry Learning (IL)</b>	Projects are created in which learners with diverse ability levels work together to solve problems based on groups learning speed.	0	2(33.33)	4(66.67)	6 (100)
	Projects are created Individually for learners to work on according to individual learning speed		2(33.33)	2(33.33)	2 (33.33)
					6(100)
<b>Universal Design for Learning (UDL)</b>	Flexible but powerful learning materials that can help learners with diverse needs learn regardless of their abilities are provided	0	3(50.00)	3(50.00)	6(100)
<b>Response prompting</b>	Teacher leads learner to answer questions with the use of verbal an non-verbal cues while the learner is struggling to find the correct answer	1(16.67)	4(66.67)	1(16.67)	6(100)
<b>TOTAL</b>		7(16.67)	18(42.86)	17(40.48)	6(100)

Source: field data 2018

Table 2 revealed the instructional strategies that support learners with special needs that were used in inclusive primary schools in the State. Cooperative Learning (CL) was used fairly often, learners without special needs were grouped together with learners with special needs for class discussion. Learners with special needs were not grouped together by themselves for class discussion. Inquiry Learning (IL) were not often used by teachers to create projects in which learners with diverse ability levels work together to solve problems based on groups learning speed and Projects were not created individually for learners to work on according to individual learning speed. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) were not often used (50% of respondent indicated fairly often used and not used at all), Flexible but powerful learning materials that can help learners with diverse needs learn regardless of their abilities were not often used. Response prompting were fairly often used, teacher leads a learner to answer questions with the use of verbal and non-verbal cues while the learner is struggling to find the correct answer.

### 7.1.3. Research Question Three: What collaborative practices existed among professionals in inclusive schools in the State?

**Table 3:** Collaborative Practices Existing among Professionals in Inclusive Primary Schools in Enugu State

S/N	COLLABORATION	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
1	As a teacher, I plan with Special educator(s)	0	2 (28.57)	3 (42.86)	2(28.57)	7(100)
2	In curricular and instruction	0	1 (14.29)	3 (42.86)	3 (42.86)	7(100)
3	In assessment and evaluation	0	2(14.29)	2 (28.57)	3 (42.86)	7(100)
4	In classroom and behavioural management	0	2(28.57)	2(28.57)	3(42.86)	7 (100)
5	There is lack of collaboration Between the regular education teachers and profrssionals	3 (42.86)	2 (28.57)	1(14.29)	1 (14.29)	7 (100)
<b>Overall Total</b>		3(8.57)	9(25.71)	11(31.43)	12(34.29)	35 (100)

Table 3 revealed the Collaborative Practices Existing among Professionals in Inclusive Primary Schools in Enugu State. Teacher plans with special educators with 2(28.57%) of the teachers agreed and 5(71.43%) disagreed to it as one of the collaborative practices. Another collaborative practices were in planning curricular and instruction with 1(14.29%) of the teachers agreed and 6(85.72%) disagreed, while planning assessment and evaluation had 2(28.57%) of the teachers in agreement and 5(71.43%) disagreed. Also classroom planning and behavioural management received 2(28.57%) of the teachers' agreement and 5(71.43%) disagreement. Lack of collaboration between the regular education teachers and professionals received 5(71.43%) of the teachers agreement and 2(28.57%) disagreement. The overall result revealed that the inclusive primary schools in Enugu State lack collaborative practices among professionals although in some cases, such as planning curricular and instruction, assessment and evaluation, and behavioural management, there were low collaborative practices.

## 7.2 Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 probability level

**7..2.1 Hypothesis One:** There is no significant difference in the Curriculum modification mean scores of inclusive primary school teachers due to their educational zones

**Table 4:** Summary of One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of F-test difference in the Curriculum Modification of Inclusive Primary Schools across the Education zones in Enugu State

Educational Zones	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	Df	F <sub>cal</sub>	P-value
Education Zone1	2	26.00	0.00	2, 4	18.384	0.010
Education Zone2	3	18.33	1.53			
Education Zone3	2	24.50	2.12			
P<0.05						

Table 4 showed the summary result of one way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) F-test difference of in the Curriculum Modification of Inclusive Primary Schools across the Education zones in Enugu State. The SPSS version 23.0 output of the analysis showed that the Education zone 1 response mean scores of teachers was 26.00, with a standard deviation of 0, Teachers in Education zone 2 had a response mean scores of was 18.35, with a standard deviation of 1.53 and Teachers in Education zone 3 had a response mean scores of 24.50, with a standard deviation of 12.20. In addition, the calculated value of F- test was 18.38 while the p-value is 0.01. Since the p-value was less than 0.05. Therefore, there was a significant difference in the Curriculum Modification of Inclusive Primary Schools across the Education zones in Enugu State in favour of Education zones 1 and 3.

## 8. Discussion

The study reveals that the aim of Enugu state government is to provide access to learners with disabilities to learn alongside their peers without disabilities. The researcher found out that the curriculum was modified in the inclusive primary schools, though to a low extent. This falls in line with IDEA's assertion that any learner with special needs, no matter how severe the

need, must be provided with as much assistance as possible to help them access the general curriculum (Lee, Soukup, Little & Wehmeyer, 2008). Spooner, Dymond, Smith & Kennedy (2006) opine that there are many obstacles in the way for granting curriculum access to learners with special needs, some of these obstacles may have resulted to the low extent curriculum modification of the teachers. The study also found, that there was no significant difference in the Curriculum Modification of Inclusive Primary Schools across the Education zones in Enugu State.

The study found out that teachers moderately use the instructional strategies suggested by Copeland and Cosbey (2009) in the inclusive primary schools in the Enugu State, these include **Cooperative Learning (CL)**, used very often, learners with special needs were grouped together fairly often in class discussion with learners without special needs. Learners with special needs were sometimes grouped together by themselves for class discussion. **Inquiry Learning (IL)** was fairly used by teachers. Teachers fairly used Projects created individually for learners to work on according to individual learning speed. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) was fairly used, flexible but powerful learning materials that helped learners with diverse needs to learn regardless of their abilities



were provided. Response prompting of verbal and non-verbal cues was very often used by teachers to lead learners to answer questions while learners were struggling to find the correct answer. These strategies were used in creating friendly learning environment for learners with disabilities.

The study found out that, in response to the question on collaboration among professionals, that lack of collaboration between the regular education teachers and professionals received 5(71.43%) of the teachers agreement and 2(28.57%) disagreement in effect, collaborative practices, existed only to a low extent among professionals in inclusive primary school in Enugu state, this is in line with Carter, Parter, Jackson & Marchant's (2009) assertion that collaboration among professionals is essential for successful inclusion.

## 9. Conclusion

Friendly learning environment is designed to help in overcoming failures and difficulties that learners face in an educational institution as well as reduce the risk of falling behind or being excluded from learning and extracurricular activities (Okoroikpa, 2019), the study found, that this does not hold for inclusive school across the education zones in Enugu state, since teachers seldom play the roles expected of them in creating inclusive learning environment.

## 10. Recommendations

- Encourage teachers to work more on modification of curriculum to enable creation of friendly learning environment for learners with disabilities.

- Encourage the state government to provide workshops and seminars regularly for teachers to equip them on methods for creating friendly learning environments.
- Encourage more collaboration among teachers and professional.

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