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A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF TEACHERS' INSIGHTS INTO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PRACTICES IN OWERRI EDUCATION ZONE 1 OF IMO STATE

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ABSTRACT

*The study explored public secondary school teachers' views on the implementation of inclusive education practices in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State**.** The study employed a survey research design. The population of the study comprised public secondary school teachers in the Zone totaling 2, 644. The sample size for the study was 661 (201 male and 460 female) teachers representing 25% of the population. The sample was obtained using convenience sampling method, evenly distributed across the Zone. The study was guided by three research questions and three hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance. The instrument for data collection was the researchers' structured questionnaire with a reliability coefficient of 0.86 (Cronbach Alpha). The findings indicated that both male and female secondary school teachers independently had positive views on the implementation of inclusive education practices in the zone. Their perceptions on the barriers to the implementing of inclusive education include among other things include: lack of funding and supportive policies that are critical for effective implementation of inclusive education and inadequate enhanced curricula that will cater the diverse learning needs of all students. On the solutions, the teachers perceived among others, that the use of enhanced curricula that will cater the diverse learning needs of all students and an effective monitoring system for the successful implementation of inclusive education. Recommendations for improving inclusive education were also made in this study, which include among others: Government needs to make achievable policies capable of guiding the practice of*

inclusive education, make adequate resources available and always pay attention to training and retraining of teachers.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Educational Equity, Accessibility, Social Justice.

Introduction

Education is a key part of the being of any society and has become a duty to pay attention to, and should include every child irrespective of their socioeconomic background, gender, geographic location, religion, ethnicity and ability. Globally, inclusive classroom is the order of the day in most of the educational systems. According to Baluyot, Kilag and Nogueras (2024), inclusive education has increasingly become a focal point in contemporary educational discourse, championing the principle that every student, regardless of ability or disability, deserves equitable access to quality education within mainstream schools. As a result, Marinay and Delos Reyes (2024) maintained that inclusive education is about recognizing and valuing the diversity of all students while providing the necessary support and accommodations to ensure their success. Inclusive education is a procedure for attending to and meeting the variety of demands of all students by raising learning involvement and lowering exclusion from and within education. The United Nations strives to achieve inclusive, equitable, high-quality education learning for everyone in a global context (United Nations in Cruz & Sisno 2024). According to Abilash (2024), inclusive education was considered in 1994 at the Salamanca Conference of UNESCO in the UN assembly and became a significant international document in the field of special needs. Inclusive education stands as a cornerstone in the global pursuit of educational equity and social justice, aiming to ensure that all students, regardless of their diverse needs and backgrounds, receive quality education within mainstream educational settings (Llanos, Baluyot & Besin, 2024). Inclusive education is seen as a solution to achieving "Education for All", including children with special needs (Sari & Setyowati, 2024). It is not merely a strategy for societal equal opportunity, but a fundamental right, ensuring that every child has access to an optimal learning environment (Sadiki, 2024). As a result of the above, Van Mieghem *et al.* (2020) submitted that inclusive education goes beyond simply integrating students with special needs into regular classrooms; it encompasses a comprehensive and holistic approach to education that addresses the individual learning needs of all students.

The efficacious inclusive education programmes have been adopted in different countries in the world. In Indonesia, according to Syukri *et al.* (2024), inclusive education policies have been regulated in certain government regulations and laws, such as Law No. 20/2003 on the National Education System and Permendikbud No. 70/2009 on inclusive education. These two regulations according to Jungjohann and

Gebhardt (2023) required that educational institutions must provide equal opportunities for all students, including those with special needs, to participate in the learning process. In Norwegian education, the principle of inclusive education is strongly anchored, and it was formulated as the overarching aim of the current core curriculum for compulsory education, confirming that 'Each pupil has their own history, and they have hopes and ambitions for the future (Somby, 2024). According to Deng *et al*. (2024), Chinese government has published a series of crucial policy documents such as the "Special Education Promotion Plan (2014–2016)", "Special Education Promotion Plan (2017–2020)", and "Fourteenth Five-Year Plan for Improvement Action of Special Education Development", to set up the goal and provide support for developing a "high-quality inclusive education system." Education Policy of the Maldives (Ministry of Education, 2020) in South Asia asserts every child's right to education, emphasizing appropriate accommodations and modifications tailored to individual needs within the education system (Naseer & Hameed, 2024). However, the use of this mode of teaching and learning has not been fully realised in Nigerian secondary schools, especially in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State. When embraced by schools and educational institutions, inclusive education can create a supportive and welcoming environment that benefits all students, regardless of their individual circumstances (Rahmi *et al*., 2024). The aim of this study was to provide valuable insights into the concerns, barriers, and the way forward for the implementation of inclusive education practices in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State.

While the principles of inclusive education have been widely endorsed, the implementation of inclusive practices in different contexts remains a complex and multifaceted endeavour (Llanos, Baluyot & Besin, 2024). As a result, many challenges in implementing inclusive education include social and cultural barriers, lack of teacher training, and inadequate resources (Dewi, 2024; Ngui, 2019). According to Hidayat and Nuruzzaman (2024), individuals coming from economically disadvantaged backgrounds often face barriers in obtaining quality education as financial constraints impact their access to adequate educational resources. Waqar *et al*. (2024) observed that limited resources and large class sizes in the classroom, may discourage the teacher from handling students with learning disabilities. They went further to assert that some teachers may be prejudiced or not culturally competent, in this way, they can contribute to discriminating or excluding other people in class. In inclusive classrooms, the students come into the classrooms with varying abilities, interests, prior-knowledge, and learning styles (Tomlinson in Onyishi, 2024). As a result of the above, attending to individual needs of the students becomes so challenging to the teacher, who often chooses to "teach to the middle" (Tomlinson in Onyishi 2024). Teaching to the middle complicates learning problems of a greater percentage of the class members since most of the students are either under challenged or over-challenged (Finegan, 2017). Adewumi and Mosito (2019) saw unclear

curriculum guidelines, little support for teachers, as well as a lack of funding as the driving forces preventing the implementation of inclusive education. Chairunnisa and Rismita (2022) observed that lack of assistive technologies, and adapted resources essential for accommodating diverse needs, are obstacles to inclusive education.

Regarding the stigmatization and discrimination against students with special needs, Amka *et al.* (2024) observed that there are still negative perceptions or stereotyped views of their abilities, which can affect their participation in inclusive education. They went further to declare that many teachers and educators do not have sufficient knowledge, skills, and understanding of inclusive teaching strategies and how to manage special educational needs in the classroom which can affect the effectiveness of learning and engagement of learners with special needs. Syukri *et al.* (2024) stressed that one of the main challenges of inclusive education is communication. They went further to state that students with special needs sometimes struggle to communicate and need support to participate optimally in class. Communication limitations can hinder their learning process. On the part of Naseer and Hameed (2024), they observed that educators encounter difficulties in evaluating students with writing disabilities.

To successfully deal with the constraints of inclusive education, teachers at the secondary school level who are the ones managing classrooms, stand a better chance to recommend viable ways that can be used to solve the constraints. Inclusive education is crucial educational reform, aimed at eradicating discrimination and ensuring equal opportunities for all children, including those with special needs (Nisak, 2018). Solving the problems facing inclusive education can only involve approaches aimed at policy changes, resource distribution, cultural competence, and specific preparation of teachers (Waqar *et al*., 2024). Mpofu and Sefotho (2024) opined that teacher training programmes in Africa now place a stronger emphasis on inclusive teaching practices. Bilingual education systems that promote the use of the children's mother tongue and the language of learning can enhance academic achievements and inclusion.

Continuous monitoring and evaluation of inclusive education policies are essential to identify and address the existing shortcomings (Fadilah *et al*., 2022). This holistic approach will ensure that inclusive education policies are effectively translated into practice, benefiting all students, particularly those with special needs (Todapa, 2024). Teachers must be adequately prepared to handle diverse classrooms and address the unique needs of students with special needs (Oktarini, 2022). Bryant *et al.* (2019) saw collaboration as the key ingredient of the effort of inclusive schools to meet the needs of the students in different settings and activities. This ensures that all students, including those with special needs, receive the support and resources necessary to achieve their full potential (Marinay & Delos Reyes, 2024). Ahmet (2021) emphasized the importance of continuous information about the learner's

progress through daily, weekly and annual meetings. Hence, Marinay and Delos Reyes (2024) were of the opinion that monitoring helps to ensure that students with disabilities or special needs receive the appropriate support and accommodations to participate fully in the learning process. Kaur (2024) was of the view that teachers should be observing their classroom behaviours carefully, determining the strengths and weaknesses of learners and collaborating with parents by involving them in the educational process of the child. According to Aftab, Amjad and Chaudhry (2024), one of the solutions is the implementation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) which involves creating flexible learning environment that meets the diverse needs of all students especially students with disabilities. They went further to assert that the utilization of assistive technologies is a crucial component for achieving successful inclusion. Strati (2024) opined that teamwork - the collaboration in a single physical space, promotes inclusion in mainstream schools. They went further to submit that family involvement in inclusive classrooms is positively correlated with good behavior, social skills and active student participation in the educational process.

Enhanced resource allocation and infrastructure development are essential to ensure that schools have the necessary supports and accommodations in place to facilitate inclusive classroom practices (Sarigumba, *et al*., 2023). This may involve investing in assistive technologies, providing training for support staff, and creating accessible learning environments that promote the participation and engagement of all students (Llanos, Baluyot & Besin, 2024). Partnerships with parents and community stakeholders are essential for fostering an inclusive school environment (Symeonidou & Phtiaka, 2009).

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study was to ascertain teachers' insights into the implementation of inclusive education practices in public secondary schools in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study intended to:

i. know the teachers' level of awareness on the implementation of inclusive education practices in public secondary schools in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State
ii. examine the barriers faced by teachers in implementing inclusive education practices in public secondary schools in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State
iii. provide directions for future development of inclusive education practices in public secondary schools in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions.

i. What is the level of the teachers' awareness on the implementation of inclusive education practices in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State?

ii. What obstacles do teachers face in the implementation of inclusive education practices in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State?
iii. What are the directions for the future development of the practice of inclusive education in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at a 0.05 level of significance to guide the study.

i. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of public secondary school male and female teachers on their awareness on the implementation of inclusive education practices in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State
ii. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of public secondary school male and female teachers on obstacles to the implementation of inclusive education practices in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State
iii. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of public secondary school male and female teachers on the directions for the future development of the practice of inclusive education in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State

Research Method

Research Design: Survey research design was adopted for the study. The appropriateness of the design stemmed from the postulation of Nworgu (2015), that survey research design is one in which a group of people or items is studied by collecting and analyzing data from only a few people or items considered to be a representative of the entire group. This design was considered appropriate because only a part of the population was studied and findings were used to generalize for the entire population.

Participants: The area of this study was Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State, with 79 public secondary schools. The population of the study consisted of 2, 644 (501 male and 2, 143 female) secondary school teachers in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State (SEMB, 2024). The sample size for the study was 661 teachers representing 25% of the population. The sample was obtained using convenience sampling method, evenly distributed across the five Local Government Areas of the Zone.

Instrument: The instrument for data collection was the researchers' developed structured questionnaire of the 4 – point scale Likert format of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4 points, Agree (A) = 3 points, Disagree (D) = 2 points and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 point, titled: Teachers' Insights on the inclusive Education Practices, (TIIEP).

TIIEP had four sections. Section A was designed to sought information on demographic variables from the teachers. Section B contained 10 items constructed to generate information on the teachers' awareness on the implementation of inclusive education practices, Section C contained 10 items constructed to generate information on the challenges faced by the

teachers in the implementation of inclusive education practices, while Section D designed to generate information on the directions for the future development of the practice of inclusive education had 10 items.

The initial draft of the instrument, objectives, research questions and hypotheses were validated by two Lecturers in Measurement and Evaluation and one Lecturer from Educational Administration, all from Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri. Their suggestions and corrections were effected in the final copy of the instrument.

The reliability index was obtained using Cronbach Alpha. The instrument was administered once to 15 public secondary school teachers who were not involved in the study. The coefficient of reliability obtained was 0.86.

Tools of Data Analysis: The research questions were answered using descriptive statistics (mean) while the hypotheses were tested using inferential statistics (t-test) at 5% level of significance.

Presentation of Results

The collected data were analyzed and the results were presented in Tables 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 based on the stated research questions and hypotheses.

Research question 1: What is the level of the teachers' awareness on the implementation of inclusive education practices in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State?

Table 1: Public Secondary School Teachers' Awareness on the Implementation of Inclusive Education Practices in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1	Inclusive education positively affects both school and community to appreciate diversity and inclusion on a broader level.	260	220	122	59	3.03	Agreed
2	Inclusive education is guided by principles of social justice, human rights and respect for all individuals	251	231	116	63	3.01	Agreed
3	Inclusive education has potential to improve learning outcomes for students with disabilities	272	242	103	44	3.12	Agreed
4	Inclusive education nurtures positive relationships, and prepare students for a globally interconnected and inclusive society	301	225	94	41	3.18	Agreed
5	Inclusive education is a powerful solution to achieving "Education for All"	288	205	107	61	3.08	Agreed
6	All children have the same right to learn regardless of physical or other conditions	337	250	40	34	3.34	Agreed
7	Inclusive education system makes teachers more creative and flexible in teaching diverse students	218	221	145	77	2.87	Agreed
8	Teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and practices significantly influence the effectiveness of inclusive education	269	219	109	64	3.04	Agreed
9	Inclusive education is crucial educational reform, aimed						

	at eradicating discrimination and ensuring equal opportunities for all children	277	233	102	49	3.11	Agreed
10	Inclusive education is also good for typical students as it teaches them how to respect fellow friends and not discriminate against friends.	253	229	110	69	3.00	Agreed
	Total					**3.07**	

Table 1 shows that all the items had mean score greater than 2.50 which is the mean value of the four-point scale. The implication is that teachers had high awareness on the implementation of inclusive education practices in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State**.** This implies that the teachers opined that these items were true for the implementation of inclusive education in public secondary schools in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State.

Research Question 2: What obstacles do public secondary school teachers face in the implementation of inclusive education practices in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State?

Table 2: Obstacles Faced by Public Secondary School Teachers Towards the Implementation of Inclusive Education Practices in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1	Lack of proper teacher training programmes	239	237	106	79	2.96	Agreed
2	Lack of adequate resources for students with different abilities	253	229	118	61	3.01	Agreed
3	Lack of respect to the cultural backgrounds and identities of all students, including those with special educational needs.	262	222	113	64	3.03	Agreed
4	Teachers do not establish appropriate goals for the exceptional children.	271	215	104	71	3.03	Agreed
5	Inadequate funding and supportive policies that are critical for effective implementation of inclusive education	280	204	115	62	3.06	Agreed
6	Inadequate enhanced curricula that catered to the diverse learning needs of all students	237	200	140	84	2.89	Agreed
7	Absence of peer support and cooperative learning opportunities	228	221	125	87	2.89	Agreed
8	Lack of assistive modern technologies and tools	279	220	108	54	3.09	Agreed
9	Discriminatory admission procedures	267	230	105	59	3.06	Agreed
10	Difficulties in evaluating students with writing disabilities	243	227	112	79	2.95	Agreed
	Total					**2.99**	

Results in Table 2 show that teachers perceived all the items indicated as likely obstacles to the implementation of inclusive education practices in public secondary schools in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State. The mean responses of teachers on each of these items were greater than 2.50. Hence, lack of proper teacher training

programmes, lack of adequate resources for students with different abilities, lack of respect to the cultural backgrounds and identities of all students, including those with special educational needs, teachers do not establish appropriate goals for the exceptional children, inadequate funding and supportive policies that are critical for effective implementation of inclusive education, inadequate enhanced curricula that catered to the diverse learning needs of all students, absence of peer support and cooperative learning opportunities, lack of assistive modern technologies and tools, discriminatory admission procedures and difficulties in evaluating students with writing disabilities were all factors perceived as obstacles faced by public secondary school teachers towards the implementation of inclusive education in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State.

Research Question 3: What are the directions for the future development of the practice of inclusive education in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State?

Table 3: Directions for the future development of the practice of inclusive education in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1	Use of Enhanced curricula that will cater the diverse learning needs of all students,	231	227	126	77	2.92	Agreed
2	Provision of conducive learning environment for students with special needs.	243	219	117	82	2.94	Agreed
3	Infrastructural improvement	252	221	123	65	2.99	Agreed
4	Community engagement to foster a supportive environment for inclusive education.	261	225	105	70	3.02	Agreed
5	Improving teacher training programmes on inclusive education	270	214	118	59	3.05	Agreed
6	Integration of assistive technologies and tools, such as speech-to-text software, screen readers, or communication devices.	227	210	141	83	2.87	Agreed
7	Monitoring students' learning and progress is a fundamental aspect of effective inclusive education.	238	220	115	88	2.91	Agreed
8	Adequate funding and supportive policies critical for effective implementation of inclusive education	269	230	112	50	3.08	Agreed
9	Use of teaching methods and materials to accommodate diverse learning styles, abilities, and preferences among special needs students.	257	240	106	58	3.05	Agreed
10	Encouraging peer support and cooperative learning opportunities	233	237	122	69	2.95	Agreed
	Total					**2.97**	

Table 3 shows that all the items have means that are above the cut-off mean (2.50). As a result, secondary school teachers in Owerri Education Zone 1of Imo State agreed to the following solutions to the challenges of inclusive education: Enhanced curricula that will cater the diverse learning needs of all students; provision of conducive learning environment for students with special needs; infrastructural improvement, community engagement to foster a supportive environment for inclusive education, improving teacher training programmes on inclusive education; integration of assistive technologies and tools, such as speech-to-text software, screen readers, or communication devices; monitoring students' learning and progress is a fundamental aspect of effective inclusive education; adequate funding and supportive policies critical for effective implementation of inclusive education; use of teaching methods and materials to accommodate diverse learning styles, abilities, and preferences among special needs students; and encouraging peer support and cooperative learning opportunities.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of public secondary school male and female teachers on their awareness on the implementation of inclusive education practices in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State.

Table 4: Analysis of the Awareness of Public Secondary School Teachers on the Implementation of Inclusive Education Practices in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State According to Gender.

Variables	**Males Mean Score (SD)**	**Females Mean Score (SD)**	**Mean Score Difference (95% CI)**	**t-Statistic**	***p*-value**
Gender	3.101 (0.196)	3.0400 (0.0789)	0.0610 (-0.0863, 0.2083)	0.91	0.382

As observed in Table 4, there was no significant difference between male and female teachers' mean responses on their awareness on the implementation of inclusive education practices in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State, since the *p*-value (0.382) is greater than the level of significance (0.05). Thus, the observed differences in the teachers' perceived responses were not significant.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of public secondary school male and female teachers on obstacles to the implementation of inclusive education practices in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State

Table 5: Analysis of The Mean Ratings of Public Secondary School Teachers on the Obstacles to the Implementation of Inclusive Education Practices in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State According to Gender.

Variables	Males Mean Score (SD)	Females Mean Score (SD)	Mean Score Difference (95% CI)	t-Statistic	*p*-value
Gender	3.046 (0.103)	3.061 (0.104)	0.0150 (-0.1126, 0.0826)	0.32	0.750

As observed in Table 5, there was no significant difference between male and female teachers' mean responses on the obstacles to the implementation of inclusive education practices in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State, since the *p*-value (0.750) is greater than the level of significance (0.05). Thus, the observed differences in the teachers' perceived responses were not significant.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of public secondary school male and female teachers on the directions for the future development of the practice of inclusive education in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State

Table 6: Analysis of The Mean Ratings of Public Secondary School Teachers on the Directions for the Future Development of the Practice of Inclusive Education in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State According to Gender.

Variables	Males Mean Score (SD)	Females Mean Score (SD)	Mean Score Difference (95% CI)	t-Statistic	*p*-value
Gender	3.037 (0.152)	3.052 (0.125)	0.0150 (-0.1462, 0.1162)	0.24	0.812

As observed in Table 6, there was no significant difference between male and female teachers' mean responses on the directions for the future development of the practice of inclusive education in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State, since the *p*-value (0.812) is greater than the level of significance (0.05). Thus, the observed differences in the teachers' perceived responses were not significant.

Discussion of Findings

The study investigated teachers' insights into the implementation of inclusive education practices in the public secondary schools in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State. The findings of this study revealed that teachers' level of awareness on the implementation of inclusive education practices was generally high based on items measured (having grand mean of 3.07). These results aligned with the submission of Baluyot, Kilag and Nogueras (2024) which stated that inclusive education has increasingly become a focal point in contemporary educational discourse, championing the principle that every student, regardless of ability or disability, deserves equitable access to quality education within mainstream schools. Also, based on the positive views of the teachers, the outcome of the study also agreed with the assertion of

Sari and Setyowati (2024) that inclusive education is seen as a solution to achieving "Education for All", including children with special needs.

On the obstacles hindering the success of inclusive education, the study also revealed lack of proper teacher training programmes as one of the barriers to the implementation of inclusive education practices, which is in agreement with the declaration of Amka *et al.* (2024) that many teachers and educators do not have sufficient knowledge, skills, and understanding of inclusive teaching strategies and how to manage special educational needs in the classroom which can affect the effectiveness of learning and engagement of learners with special needs. This lack of training can hinder teachers' ability to design and implement effective learning strategies for all students (Marisana in Dewi, 2024). Again, one of the findings showed that teachers perceived lack of adequate resources for students with different abilities as an obstacle. This finding confirmed the submission of Hidayat and Nuruzzaman (2024), that individuals coming from economically disadvantaged backgrounds often face barriers in obtaining quality education as financial constraints impact their access to adequate educational resources. Lack of respect to the cultural backgrounds and identities of all students, including those with special educational needs were found to be obstacles to the implementation of inclusive education practices. The findings above agreed with the assertion of Waqar *et al.* (2024) that some teachers may be prejudiced or not culturally competent, in this way, they can contribute to discriminating or excluding other people in class. Inability of the teachers to establish appropriate goals for the exceptional children. This can jeopardize the successful implementation of inclusive education. Inadequate funding and supportive policies that are critical for effective implementation of inclusive education; inadequate enhanced curricula that will cater for the diverse learning needs of all students were revealed to be part of the problems facing inclusive education. These were in agreement with findings of Adewumi and Mosito (2019) that unclear curriculum guidelines, little support for teachers, as well as a lack of funding were the driving forces preventing implementation of inclusive education. Absence of peer support and cooperative learning opportunities were revealed to be part of the problems facing inclusive education. Lack of assistive modern technologies and tools were found as factors hindering inclusive education. The findings aligned with the opinion of Chairunnisa and Rismita (2022). They observed that lack of assistive technologies, and adapted resources essential for accommodating diverse needs, were obstacles to inclusive education. Discriminatory admission procedures was seen to be part of the problems facing inclusive education. Difficulties in evaluating students with writing disabilities was a factor perceived as an obstacle faced by public secondary school teachers in the implementation of inclusive education practices in the zone. This finding was in agreement with the observation of Naseer and Hameed (2024).

They observed that educators encounter difficulties in evaluating students with writing disabilities.

Secondary school teachers in the Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State agreed to the following solutions necessary for future development of the practice of inclusive education in the zone: Use of enhanced curricula that will cater the diverse learning needs of all students. This agreed with the submission of Aftab, Amjad and Chaudhry (2024) that the implementation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) will create flexible learning environment that will meet the diverse needs of all students especially students with disabilities. The teachers saw the provision of conducive learning environment for students with special needs and infrastructural improvement as being sacrosanct for successful implementation of inclusive education. The perception agreed with the submission of Sarigumba, *et al*. (2023), that enhanced resource allocation and infrastructural development are essential to ensure that schools have the necessary supports and accommodations in place to facilitate inclusive classroom practices. This may involve investing in assistive technologies, providing training for support staff, and creating accessible learning environments that promote the participation and engagement of all students (Llanos, Baluyot & Besin, 2024). Community engagement to foster a supportive environment for inclusive education was revealed to be a solution. This agreed with the submission of Symeonidou and Phtiaka (2009) that partnerships with parents and community stakeholders are essential for fostering an inclusive school environment. This also went down well with the submission of Strati (2024) that family involvement in inclusive classrooms is positively correlated with good behavior, social skills and active student participation in the educational process. Improving teacher training programmes on inclusive education was seen as a solution. This finding was in tandem with the submission of Oktarini (2022) that teachers must be adequately prepared to handle diverse classrooms and address the unique needs of students with special needs. Integration of assistive technologies and tools, such as speech-to-text software, screen readers, or communication devices were seen by the teachers to be part of the solutions to the problems of inclusive education. This agreed with the submission of Aftab, Amjad and Chaudhry (2024) in which they asserted that the utilization of assistive technologies is a crucial component for achieving successful inclusion. Assistive technology can help bridge the success gap between students with disabilities and their peers by providing them with the necessary assistance for independent learning and active participation. Monitoring students' learning and progress as a fundamental aspect of effective inclusive education was found to be crucial in achieving inclusive education. This happened to be in tandem with view of Marinay and Delos Reyes (2024) who were of the opinion that monitoring helps to ensure that students with disabilities or special needs receive the appropriate support and accommodations to participate fully in the learning process.

Monitoring benefits students, teachers, parents, and the educational system as a whole by fostering individualized instruction, improving outcomes, and ensuring accountability and equity in education. This also agreed with the submission of Fadilah *et al*. (2022) that continuous monitoring and evaluation of inclusive education policies are essential to identify and address the existing shortcomings. This holistic approach will ensure that inclusive education policies are effectively translated into practice, benefiting all students, particularly those with special needs (Todapa, 2024). Adequate funding and supportive policies were found critical for effective implementation of inclusive education. These ensure that all students, including those with special needs, receive the support and resources necessary to achieve their full potential (Marinay & Delos Reyes, 2024). Use of teaching methods and materials to accommodate diverse learning styles, abilities, and preferences among special needs students were found to be able to solve part of the problems faced by the teachers in implementing inclusive education. In giving credence to the solution above, Ohiri (2024) listed some teaching methods that can be used. They include: discussion, game playing, project demonstration, discovery, brainstorming, problem solving and process-based approach. Ohiri (2024) went further to assert that these methods inculcate in the learners, critical thinking skills, creativity, open mindedness and intellectual honesty. Encouraging peer support and cooperative learning opportunities were found to be imperative for the success of inclusive education. As a result of the above, Strati (2024) opined that teamwork - the collaboration in a single physical space, promotes inclusion in mainstream schools.

In all, the test of hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 revealed that there was no significant difference in the perceptions of secondary school teachers on their awareness, obstacles and solutions for future development of the practice of inclusive education based on gender. Thus, the observed differences in the teachers' perceived responses were not significant.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Inclusive education brings significant benefits to all students, including those with special needs and different social-economic backgrounds. This study illuminated the public secondary school teachers' views surrounding inclusive education, revealing both significant importance and critical challenges within its implementation. While teachers generally possess a foundational understanding of inclusive education tenets, particularly in recognising the importance of equitable access and opportunities for all students. Nevertheless, challenges such as lack of teacher understanding and training, inadequate resources and social and cultural impediments need to be conquered to ensure its accomplishment. To curb the problems of inclusive education, the State Government needs to make achievable policies capable of guiding the practice, make adequate resources available and always pay attention to training and retraining of teachers. In the 21st era, technology should be incorporated into teaching and learning. Integration of

assistive technologies and tools, such as speech-to-text software, screen readers, or communication devices for the special students should be encouraged.

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