

HPROMOTING INCLUSIVE SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATION IN A PERIOD OF SOCIO-POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND MEASURES FOR IMPROVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the promotion of inclusive secondary education in a period of socio-political uncertainty in Anambra State. Two research questions and two hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised 264 principals of public secondary schools in Anambra State. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the researchers. The instrument was validated by experts in the department of Educational Management and Policy. The reliability test on the instrument yielded coefficient values of .76 for cluster 1 and .80 for cluster 2. The overall reliability coefficient for the entire questionnaire was found to be .78. Mean, standard deviations and t-test was used to analyze data. The findings of the study revealed that inadequate funding of secondary schools, lack of political will to implement government policies on inclusive education, inadequate instructional resources, high rate of corruption among educational administrators and lack of accurate data on special needs students among others are the challenges of promoting inclusive secondary education in a period of socio-political uncertainty in Anambra State. The finding of the study also revealed that providing support for teachers in the form of mentoring and professional development, introducing conflict resolution and peace education programmes in schools, restructuring school infrastructure to be inclusive, allocating sufficient resources to support inclusive education like funding for infrastructure and extensively carrying out policy reforms for inclusive education are the measures of promoting inclusive secondary education in a period of socio-political uncertainty in Anambra State. The researchers recommended that government at all levels should allocate more financial resources to secondary schools, especially during times of socio-political uncertainty among others.

Keywords: Promoting, Inclusive Education, Socio-Political Uncertainty, Challenges, Measures

Introduction

Nigeria is located on Africa's West Coast, on the Gulf of Guinea, between Benin and Cameroon. It is a diverse civilization with over 250 ethnic and linguistic groupings. The Igbos, Hausas and Yorubas are her most numerous and politically powerful ethnic and linguistic groupings. Nigeria gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1960. After nearly 16 years of military dictatorship, a new constitution was ratified in 1999, completing the peaceful transition to civilian authority. Nigeria's transition to democracy in 1999 was a watershed moment in the country's history. The shift from military to democratic power represented an important step towards greater political freedom and more participatory administration. Democracy was expected to create a foundation for excellent government, economic prosperity, and equal resource allocation (Oyedeji, 2022). Regrettably, Nigeria is plagued with chronic corruption during its democratic transition. Corruption pervades many areas, including government, business, and society at large. It has stifled economic growth, increased income disparity, and damaged public faith in government institutions (Arowolo & Olaniyan, 2018).

As previously stated, Nigeria was placed 154th out of 180 nations in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index in 2022. This means that Nigeria is seen as a rather poor country. This suggests that Nigeria is viewed as having a somewhat high level of corruption. A low rating on this index emphasises the importance of significant anti-corruption initiatives and institutional changes. Corruption has far-reaching implications in Nigeria (Babatunde et al. 2021). This has resulted in the misuse of public expenditures, infrastructural degradation, and uneven access to resources. Corruption impairs public service efficacy, perpetuates poverty, and leads to social and political instability.

Nigeria's political institutions have failed to tackle corruption effectively. Corruption has thrived due to weak regulatory authorities, uneven law enforcement, and a lack of accountability measures. Inequitable income and resource distribution has encouraged corruption as people and groups attempt to protect their interests. Corruption can be exacerbated by a lack of equal economic policy. Furthermore, the ethnic gap has long been a problem in Nigeria, and it became very visible during the 2023 elections. Political campaigns frequently use ethnic differences to win support, resulting in heightened tensions between various ethnic groups. This has impacted the nation's social fabric and produced divisions that have spread into educational institutions, affecting the interaction and integration of students from diverse backgrounds (Onwubolu, 2017). These issues have all impacted on the provision of inclusive education in secondary schools in Nigeria. According to UNICEF, there are an estimated 93 million disabled children globally. Nearly, half of such children are not enrolled in school, particularly in poor countries such as Nigeria (Onyeji, 2020). Dare (2020) reported that the World Bank and Global Partnership for Education report on inclusive education published in 2017 stated that while literacy among children with learning disabilities has increased globally, children in Nigeria are still severely excluded from educational policies and lag far behind their peers. Nigeria has the world's highest rate of school dropout and these children include those with impairments.

According to UNESCO in Ogunode and Yunusa (2022), inclusive education is a process of transforming schools and other places of learning to accommodate all learners, including boys and girls, ethnic and linguistic minorities, rural populations, and those infected and affected by HIV and AIDS, as well as those with disabilities and learning difficulties, and to provide opportunities for all. According to UNESCO (2021), inclusive education is the process of addressing all barriers and providing access to quality education to meet the diverse needs of all learners in the same learning environment. In order for effective integration and equal participation, all of these children, regardless of their impairments, should be educated alongside other normal children in the same regular schools. This will allow each students to grow and develop, as well as have equitable access to education and contribute to national growth (Ekwueme & Aje, 2022). According to Abdulumumuni (2016), inclusive education is the "process of addressing all barriers and providing access to quality education in order to meet the diverse needs of all learners in the same learning environment." As a result, inclusive education aims to provide equal opportunity, fairness, and excellent education to all learners. Effective inclusive education is achievable with skilled teachers, an inclusive curriculum and availability of facilities that facilitate and promote learning. Thus, inclusive education strives to give high-quality education to all students, regardless of their backgrounds or abilities.

Nigeria's sociopolitical difficulties have made it difficult to build an inclusive educational environment. A significant financial commitment is required for inclusive education. Schools must give resources and assistance to children with and without special needs. Specialised facilities, qualified workers, adaptable materials, and assistive technology are all part of this. One of the most serious difficulties is insufficient financing for special education programmes. The distribution of resources for these programmes is insufficient, particularly in Anambra State, to properly support and execute inclusive education. Inadequate finance is a widespread issue across the Nigerian educational system. The Nigerian federal and state governments have failed to meet the UNESCO requirement of devoting 26% of the budget on education (Ogunode et al., 2021). The management of special needs education programmes is hampered by the underfunding of education, making it difficult to offer sufficient resources and assistance. Furthermore, underfunding education has far-reaching implications. It leads to inadequate infrastructure, a teacher shortage, a lack of instructional resources, a reduction in educational quality, restricted capacity development, poor supervision, and teacher strikes (Oweh, 2019). Significant investment, political commitment, and extensive policy reforms are necessary to solve these difficulties and build a more equitable educational system. These procedures are critical for offering a quality education to all students, regardless of ability or circumstance.

More financial resources should be allocated to special needs education programmes by the government at all levels. Adequate financing is required to provide special needs children with the resources, support, and services they require, as well as to enable the effective implementation of inclusive education (Ogunode & Paul, 2021). The federal and state governments should invest in enhancing and expanding basic school infrastructure across the country, with a specific emphasis on special needs facilities. These facilities should be developed to meet the unique requirements of all students while also providing them with a pleasant learning atmosphere (Ogunode & Yunusa, 2022). However, these strategies have not been empirically proven as measures for promoting inclusive secondary education in a period of socio-political uncertainty as no study has been conducted to address the issues under

discuss. Furthermore, the researchers will explore the influence of the respondents' gender on their opinions. The study therefore empirically ascertained the challenges and opportunities of promoting inclusive secondary education in a period of socio-political uncertainty in Nigeria. Specifically, the study"

8. Determined the challenges encountered by principals in promoting inclusive secondary education in a period of socio-political uncertainty in Nigeria.
9. Investigated the measures adopted by principals in promoting inclusive secondary education in a period of socio-political uncertainty in Nigeria

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

4. What are the challenges encountered by principals in promoting inclusive secondary education in a period of socio-political uncertainty in Nigeria?
5. What are the measures encountered by principals in promoting inclusive secondary education in a period of socio-political uncertainty in Nigeria?

Method

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The study was carried out in Anambra State. The population of the study was 264 secondary school principals in Anambra State. The entire population of the study was used for the study without sampling because it was manageable. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher. The instrument used in this study was titled "Promoting Inclusive Secondary School Education in a Period of Socio-Political Uncertainty: Challenges and Measures for Improvement (PISSESPUCMI)." This questionnaire consisted of two sections: Part A and Part B. Part A collected information about the principals' gender, while Part B contained 20 items aligned with the two research questions. Cluster 1 contains 8 items on challenge of promoting inclusive secondary education in a period of socio-political uncertainty. Cluster 2 contains 12 items on the measures adopted in promoting inclusive secondary education in a period of socio-political uncertainty. Respondents were asked to rate these items using a 4-point scale, including response options such as "Strongly Agree (SA)," "Agree (A)," "Disagree (D)," and "Strongly Disagree (SD)" with a weighted mean of 4,3,2 and 1 respectively. This rating scale allowed the respondents to express the extent of their agreement with specific statements or items. To establish the validity of the instrument, input was sought from three experts in the faculty of education at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

The reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, a measure of internal consistency. A pilot test involving 20 principals in Enugu metropolis, Enugu State, was conducted, and the data collected were subjected to Cronbach Alpha analysis. The results indicated coefficient values of .76 for cluster 1 and .80 for cluster 2. The overall reliability coefficient for the entire questionnaire was found to be .78, signifying a high level of internal consistency among the questionnaire items. The researcher administered the questionnaire by personally visiting the respondents in their offices. Respondents were given ample time to complete the instrument, and the researcher retrieved it on the spot. In cases where immediate retrieval was not possible, arrangements were made for collecting the questionnaires at a later time. Out of the 264 questionnaires distributed, 238 were returned in good condition and were

used for data analysis. The data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Specifically, mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the research questions. Items with a mean rating of 2.50 or higher were considered to have received agreement from the respondents, while those with mean ratings below 2.50 were considered as not receiving agreement. For testing the hypotheses, t-test was employed at a significance level of 0.05. A p-value equal to or greater than the alpha value of 0.05 indicated no significant difference, leading to the acceptance of the hypothesis. Conversely, a p-value less than 0.05 indicated a significant difference, resulting in the rejection of the hypothesis.

Results

Research Question One

What are the challenges encountered by principals in promoting inclusive secondary education in a period of socio-political uncertainty in Anambra State?

Table 1: Respondents Mean Ratings on the Challenges Encountered by Principals in Promoting Inclusive Secondary Education in a Period of Socio-Political Uncertainty in Anambra State

S/N	Challenges of Promoting Inclusive Secondary Education	N	Mean	SD	Decision
1.	Inadequate funding of secondary schools	238	3.70	.75	Agree
2.	Lack of adequate infrastructures in secondary schools	238	3.28	.78	Agree
3	Lack of political will to implement government policies on inclusive education	238	3.52	.84	Agree
4	Lack of qualified professional teachers in secondary schools to implement inclusive education	238	2.67	.81	Agree
5	Inadequate instructional resources for an inclusive classroom.	238	3.33	.90	Agree
6	High rate of corruption among educational administrators	238	3.30	.76	Agree
7	Lack of accurate data on special needs students	238	3.12	.72	Agree
8	High rate of insecurity in different parts of Anambra State	238	2.65	.83	Agree
Cluster Mean			3.19		Agree

Data in Table 1 revealed the challenges encountered by principals in promoting inclusive secondary education in a period of socio-political uncertainty in Anambra State. Data in Table 1 revealed items 1-8 are the challenges of promoting inclusive secondary education in a period of socio-political uncertainty in Anambra State with mean ratings ranging between 2.65 and 3.70. The standard deviation scores ranging between .72 and .90 indicated that the respondents' opinions were related. The cluster mean of 3.19 indicates that inadequate funding of secondary schools, lack of political will to implement government policies on inclusive education, inadequate instructional resources for an inclusive classroom, high rate of corruption among educational administrators and lack of accurate data on special needs students among others are the challenges encountered by principals in promoting inclusive secondary education in a period of socio-political uncertainty in Anambra State.

Research Question Two

What are the measures adopted by principals in promoting inclusive secondary education in a period of socio-political uncertainty in Anambra State?

Table 2: Respondents Mean Ratings on the Measures Adopted by Principals in Promoting Inclusive Secondary Education in a Period of Socio-Political Uncertainty in Anambra State

S/N	Item Description	N	Mean	SD	Decision
9.	Implement specialized training programmes for teachers in inclusive education	238	3.16	.86	Agree
10.	Extensively carrying out policy reforms for inclusive education	238	3.05	.97	Agree
11.	Allocate sufficient resources to support inclusive education like funding for infrastructure	238	3.11	.88	Agree
12.	Appropriate oversight by relevant organisations and ministries to guarantee quality education in all secondary schools	238	3.28	.92	Agree
13.	Restructure school infrastructure to be inclusive.	238	3.20	1.01	Agree
14.	Develop inclusive curricula that consider the diverse learning needs of all students.	238	2.85	.96	Agree
15.	Provide accessible and adaptable teaching materials that accommodate different abilities and learning styles.	238	3.12	.91	Agree
16.	Foster partnerships between schools, families and local organizations to create a supportive and inclusive learning environment.	238	3.25	.95	Agree
17.	Promote a culture of acceptance and respect within schools.	238	3.08	.97	Agree
18.	Provide ongoing support for teachers in the form of mentoring and professional development.	238	3.44	.89	Agree
19.	Introduce conflict resolution and peace education programmes in schools to help mitigate the impact of socio-political uncertainty	238	2.80	.99	Agree
20.	Introduce conflict resolution and peace education programmes in schools to help mitigate the impact of socio-political uncertainty	238	3.42	1.01	Agree
Cluster Mean			3.15		Agree

Data in Table 2 revealed the measures adopted by principals in promoting inclusive secondary education in a period of socio-political uncertainty in Anambra State. Data in Table 2 revealed items 9-20 are the measures of promoting inclusive secondary education in a period of socio-political uncertainty in Anambra State with mean ratings ranging between 2.80 and 3.42. The standard deviation scores ranging between .86 and 1.01 indicated that the respondents' opinions were related. The cluster mean of 3.15 indicates that providing support for teachers in the form of mentoring and professional development, introducing conflict resolution and peace education programmes in schools, restructuring school infrastructure to be inclusive, allocating sufficient resources to support inclusive education like funding for infrastructure and extensively carrying out policy reforms for inclusive education are the measures adopted by principals in promoting inclusive secondary education in a period of socio-political uncertainty in Anambra State.

Discussion

The finding of the study revealed that inadequate funding of secondary schools, lack of political will to implement government policies on inclusive education, inadequate instructional resources for an inclusive classroom, high rate of corruption among educational administrators and lack of accurate data on special needs students among others are the challenges encountered by principals in promoting inclusive secondary education in a period of socio-political uncertainty in Anambra State. The finding may have resulted because the challenges encountered might become even more apparent during times of socio-political instability, as resources may be moved towards managing urgent emergencies and the emphasis on inclusive education may decrease. This finding is in agreement with Oweh (2019) who reported that the administration of inclusive education in secondary schools is impeded by education's inadequate budget, making it challenging to provide enough resources and support. In addition, underfunding education has broad ramifications. It results in inadequate facilities, a scarcity of teachers, a lack of instructional materials, a decline in the standard of education, constrained capacity growth, subpar supervision, and teacher strikes. In agreement Ogunode and Yunusa (2022) stated that the Anambra State federal and state governments have failed to meet the UNESCO requirement of devoting 26% of the budget on education and this has negatively impacted on the educational spending, Ogunode et al (2021) averred that the seeming lack of political will and institutionalized corruption has impacted on the funding of inclusive education in Anambra State.

The findings of the study revealed that providing support for teachers in the form of mentoring and professional development, as well as introducing conflict resolution and peace education programmes in schools is necessary. Also, there is need for restructuring school infrastructure to promote inclusivity. Hence, allocating sufficient resources to support inclusive education among others are measures adopted by principals in promoting inclusive secondary education in a period of socio-political uncertainty in Anambra State. This finding is in agreement with Ogunode and Paul (2021) who stated that government at all levels, should provide more financial resources to special needs education activities. For students with special needs to receive the resources, assistance, and services they need, adequate funding is necessary (Ogunode & Paul). Similarly, Ogunode and Yunusa (2022) noted that the national basic school infrastructure should be improved and expanded, with a focus on special needs facilities, thanks to investments made by the federal and state governments. These facilities must be created to satisfy the individual needs of every student while also giving them a comfortable learning environment.

Conclusion

The researchers conclude that many challenges are encountered by principals in the promotion of inclusive secondary education in Anambra State during a time of socio-political uncertainty. The identified challenges, including inadequate funding, a lack of political will, insufficient instructional resources, corruption, and data deficiencies, underscore the formidable obstacles faced in achieving inclusive education. These issues collectively hinder the nation's progress towards an equitable and accessible educational system. On the positive side, the study also highlights potential measures that can help surmount these challenges. These measures encompass support for teachers through mentoring and professional development, the introduction of conflict resolution and peace education programs, the

restructuring of school infrastructure to accommodate inclusivity, and the allocation of sufficient resources, especially funding for infrastructure. To ensure the success of inclusive secondary education during these challenging times, it is imperative for stakeholders to prioritize and address the identified challenges, implement the recommended measures, and work collaboratively to create a more inclusive and resilient education system in Anambra State.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study:

8. Government at all levels should allocate more financial resources to secondary schools, especially during times of socio-political uncertainty. Increased funding can help address resource shortages, improve infrastructure and provide necessary support for inclusive education.
9. Government at all levels should build and restructure school structure to accommodate students with special needs.

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