

# Teachers' Attitude towards Special Need Students in Secondary Schools in North Senatorial District of Edo State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

The study investigated attitude towards special need students (SNS) among teachers in public secondary schools in Edo Central Senatorial District. The study was undertaken to determine the teachers' attitude and the influence of gender, educational specialisation and experience on their attitude towards SNS. A total of 369 (50%) of the 739 teachers were drawn in the district by proportionate to size sampling. However, 351 questionnaires were recovered and used for analysis. The instrument used was a researcher developed questionnaire titled "Teachers' Attitude towards Special Needs Students Questionnaire-TATSNSQ" with a test-retest reliability alpha of 0.79 was used to collect data from teachers. Mean ( $\bar{X}$ ) and standard deviations (S.D) were used to analyze the research question while Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis test was used to test the hypotheses. Findings showed that attitude towards SNS among secondary school teachers in the study area were negatively skewed. The test of hypotheses showed that their attitude does not differ by sex ( $U_{cal.} 15000.50$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ) but differ significantly by their educational specialisation ( $U_{cal.} 7633.50$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) and years of experience (H-value 24.270;  $p < 0.05$ ). It was recommended that the Edo State government needs to establish special education schools for special need students in the state.

**Keywords:** Attitude, Special Need Students, Inclusive Education, Educational Management

## 1. Introduction

Special education like its name suggests, is an educational programme that is different from general education. It is one education with a 'unique curriculum and syllabus' that is uniquely designed and taught by 'unique teachers' to meet the needs of 'unique people'. The Federal Republic of Education (FRN, 2013) described it as a customized educational programme designed to meet the unique need of persons with special needs that general education cannot cater for. It is an educational programme that is supported by the federal government in the provision of equal opportunity and access to education for all Nigerian children of school-going age. Unfortunately, one group of learners that are yet to receive the much needed attention in Nigeria, are special needs students. Buttressing this, Funadai (2010) argued that one area that has not been given the pride of place in Nigeria's educational system is catering for special needs students in the general education programme.

The FRN (2013) under the National Policy on Education succinctly categorized special needs children into three main categories namely: the disabled; the disadvantaged, the gifted and talented. The category of 'the disabled' comprises of people with impairment (physical, sensory) who cannot cope with regular school/class organization and methods without formal special education training. They include those who are visually impaired, hearing impaired, physically or health impaired, mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed, learning disabled and those with one form of handicap or the other. The disadvantaged encompasses children of nomadic pastoralists, migrant fishermen, migrant farmers, hunters, etc. They are those who, due to their lifestyles and means of livelihood, are unable to have access to the conventional educational provision and therefore require special education to cater for their particular/peculiar needs and circumstances while the gifted and talented are people (children and adults) who possess very high intelligent quotient and are naturally endowed with special traits and therefore, find themselves insufficiently challenged by the regular school programmes (FRN, 2013).

Special need students (SNS) and special education are like Siamese twins that are apparently inseparable. The former (special needs students) refers to a wide category of students who by reason of their physical or psychological (dis)advantaged, are unable to benefit fully from general education while the latter (special education) refers to that aspect of education that caters for the former. Kanu (2008) identified twelve categories of special needs to include: (i) mental retardation, (ii) learning disabilities, (iii) emotional and behaviour disorder, (iv); communication disorders, (v) hearing loss, (vi) blindness and low vision, (vii) physical disabilities, (viii) autism, (ix) severe disabilities, (x) multiple disabilities, (xi) deaf/blindness, and (xii) gifted and talented. Scholars have argued that acceptance to include these category of students in a general class depends on teachers' attitude towards special need students (Fakolade, Adeniyi and Tella, 2009; Florian, 2012; Dukmak, 2013).

Attitude is everything in learning. It refers to predisposition or perception, or response of an individual towards an animate or inanimate object, event, subject or person among others. Binder and Niederle (2007) defined attitude as one's positive or negative judgment about a concrete subject. This shows that attitude towards SNS among teachers could be described as learners' positive or negative predisposition or perception about SNS. Studies abound on attitude towards inclusive education and students with special needs among teachers in Nigeria (Fakolade, Adeniyi and Tella, 2009) and other countries (Zoniou-Sideri and Vlachou, 2006; Florian, 2012; Dukmak, 2013). Alghazo (2002) examined Jordanian teachers and administrators' attitude towards persons with disabilities. The study used a demographic survey, the Attitude towards Disabled Persons (ATDP) Scale and Main streaming Attitude Scale (MAS) to assess the attitude of Jordanian educators and administrators towards persons with disabilities. Findings showed that educators' attitude towards persons with disability in general was negative and never liked the idea of including them in the regular education classroom. Many of the educators were more accepting of students with learning disabilities and least accepting of students with mental retardation.

In another study conducted by Zoniou-Sideri and Vlachou (2006) on Greek teachers' beliefs towards educational inclusion, the results revealed that regular education teachers hold a number of restrictive as well as conflicting beliefs towards disability and educational inclusion. These teachers reported that although educational inclusion is necessary as a means of improving the way ordinary school functions and reducing the marginalization and stigmatization of students with disabilities, special segregated education is important as a means of providing a secure and protective shelter to these students and as a way of covering a number of ordinary education's deficiencies. According to Florian (2012), many general classroom teachers in Scotland resist to include children with special needs in their classes believing that inclusion interferes with the effective education of other students.

In Nigeria, Fakolade, Adeniyi and Tella (2009) explored attitudes of teachers about inclusion of special needs children in their secondary schools in general education. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, with 60 teachers as participants from selected secondary schools in Oyo State. Four hypotheses were postulated at the significant level of .05. The instrument, a questionnaire with a general reliability alpha of .83 was used. The t-test method of analysis was the main statistical method used to test the hypotheses. Findings revealed that the attitude of male teachers is 39.4 while that of female teacher is 43.3, thus, the t-test analysis shows that the calculated t-test is 2.107, which is greater than the critical t ( $t=1.960$ ). This implies that female teachers have more positive attitude towards the inclusion of special needs students than their male counterparts. Furthermore, the results reveal that significant difference exists between married and single teachers in their attitude towards special need students and that professionally qualified teacher tends to have a more favourable attitude towards the inclusion of special need students than their non-professional qualified teachers. Studies conducted in the United Arab Emirate (UAE), United Kingdom (UK), and Saudi Arabia found a significant relationship between the two variables for the favor of female teachers respectively (Algazo & Gaad, 2004; Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden, 2000; Qaraqish, 2008).

Dukmak (2013) investigated the attitudes of regular classroom teachers towards including students with disabilities in the regular classroom in United Arab Emirate (UAE). Teachers' attitudes were also studied in relation to their gender, age and years of teaching experience. The influence of teachers' views about the best educational placement for students with various disabilities on their attitudes towards educational inclusion was also investigated. Different statistical analyses such as ANOVA, and correlations were administered to study the relationships between predictors and outcome measures. The findings revealed that, in general, teachers showed positive attitudes towards educational inclusion but male teachers showed more positive attitudes than females did. Teachers' years of experience were found to influence their attitudes towards educational inclusion as when the teachers' years of experience increase their attitudes towards inclusion become less positive.

From the foregoing, none of these studies, has been conducted on attitude of secondary school teachers towards special need students in Edo State has been investigated. Hence, to fill this gap, this study examines attitude of teachers' towards special need students (SNS) in Edo North Central Senatorial District by asking the following research questions:

- 1) What is the attitude of teachers towards SNS in secondary schools in Edo North Central Senatorial District?
- 2) Does the attitude of teachers towards SNS in secondary schools differ by sex in Edo North Central Senatorial District?
- 3) Does area of specialization predict attitude of teachers towards SNS in secondary schools in Edo North Central Senatorial District?
- 4) Does years of experience predict teachers' attitude towards SNS in secondary schools in Edo North Central Senatorial District?

## 2. Hypotheses

The hypotheses formulated in the study are given below:

- 1) The attitude of teachers towards SNS in secondary schools in Edo North Central Senatorial District does not differ significantly by sex
- 2) The attitude of teachers towards SNS in secondary schools in Edo North Central Senatorial District does not differ significantly by their area of specialization
- 3) The attitude of teachers towards SNS in secondary schools in Edo North Central Senatorial District does not differ significantly by their years of experience

## 3. Methods

Descriptive based on survey method was adopted in this study. The study covered the 739 (304 junior and 435 senior) teachers in public secondary schools in the six (6) Local Government Areas - Akoko Edo, Etsako Central, Etsako East, Etsako West, Owan East, and Owan West; in Edo North Senatorial District. This is based on the provisional figure from the Post Primary Education Board (PPEB), Benin City, Edo State (2015 survey). A sample of 50% was drawn by proportionate to size sampling technique from each of the public schools in the study area. This gave a representative sample size of approximately 369 teachers.

The instrument used for the collection of data was a self-developed questionnaire titled: Teachers' Attitude towards Special Need Students Questionnaire -TASNSQ. The questionnaire was divided into Sections A and B only. Section A contains questions relating to personal data of teachers such as their: sex, educational qualification and years of experience while Section B contains 14 items. All the items were rated on a four point likert scale: Strongly Agreed (SA)\_4, Agreed (A)\_3, Disagreed (D)\_2 and Strongly Disagreed (SD)\_1.

The content validity of the instrument was carried out by measurement and evaluation experts in the Faculty of Education (Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma). The reliability of the instrument was carried out using the Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ ) which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.73. Hence, the instrument was adjudged fit for use. Before administering the instrument to students, the researcher sought permission from principals of the schools to notify them of the intended exercise. After due permission was granted, the instrument was administered to teachers with the assistance of trained assistants and retrieved immediately. Data was collected from 342 secondary school teachers. This represents a total of .6% return rate. With the aid of IBM SPSS (Version 20), the research questions was descriptively analyzed using mean ( $\bar{X}$ ) and standard deviation (S.D) while hypothesis 1, 2 and 3 were tested with Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis test respectively. The hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using Statistical Package for Social Science.

## 4. Results

Results on the analyses of the research question and test of hypotheses are presented below:

**Research Question 1:** What is the attitude of teachers towards SNS in secondary schools in Edo North Central Senatorial District?

**Table 1:** Summary analysis of Mean ( $\bar{X}$ ) and Standard deviation (S.D) on teachers towards SNS in secondary schools in Edo North Central Senatorial District?

Item no.	Items	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remarks
1	I believe children with disability need to be given special attention by their teachers	351	2.53	1.15	Agreed
2	I wish I could spend more time teaching children with severe disabilities in my class/school	351	2.62	1.08	Agreed
3	There is nothing wrong with including handicapped children with other children in general class setting	351	2.24	1.21	Disagreed
4	I can teach a partially blind student in a general class	351	2.13	1.17	Disagreed
5*	Including a totally blind students to learn with other students in a class is a thing I don't really like	351	2.62	1.04	Agreed
6*	If I have my way, I will avoid teaching emotionally disturbed children	351	2.59	1.06	Agreed
7	Teaching albinos is an enjoyable thing	351	2.26	1.19	Disagreed
8	I naturally feel excited when I see children of nomadic pastorals that wants to learn with other students	351	2.19	1.00	Disagreed
9*	My major business is my salary at the end of the month and not teaching children of migrants	351	2.53	1.92	Agreed
10	I wish I could help mentally retarded children to learn at school	351	2.18	0.98	Disagreed
11	I try as much as possible to encourage co-teachers to attend to the needs of physically impaired children	351	2.54	1.12	Agreed
12	I believe all children (whether disabled or abled) should enjoy equal right from teachers	351	2.45	1.04	Disagreed
13*	Teaching gifted children with special traits is what I cannot do	351	2.73	0.39	Agreed
14*	Teaching children with high intelligence quotient is too challenging for an average teacher like me	351	2.60	0.37	Agreed
<b>Overall mean (<math>\bar{X}</math>) = 2.44</b>					

\* Items on reverse code Significant mean ( $\bar{X} \geq 2.50$ )

From Table 1 above, the result shows that the overall mean score show that teachers have positive perception on items 1, 2, 5, 6, 9, 11, 13, and 14 at a mean range of 2.53-2.73 and disagreed on items 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, and 12 at a mean of 2.13 to 2.45. However, the overall mean is less than the cut off mean (i.e  $2.44 < 2.50$ ). Hence, it is concluded that majority of the teachers in secondary schools in Edo North Senatorial District have negative attitude towards special need students (SNS).

**Hypothesis 1:** The attitude of teachers towards SNS in secondary schools in Edo North Central Senatorial District does not differ significantly by sex

Table 2: Mann-Whitney U test Summary/Analysis on Teachers' Attitude towards Special Need Students (TATSNS) by gender

Variable	Sex	(n=351)	$\bar{X}$ rank	Sum of ranks	Mann Whitney-U	p-value	Remarks
TATSNS	Male	162	174.10	28203.50	15000.50	0.745	Retain null hypothesis $P > 0.05$
	Female	189	177.63	33572.50			

Result in Table 2 shows that the calculated U-value of 15000.50 is not statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). Thus, the null hypothesis which states that attitude of teachers towards Special Need Students (TATSNS) in secondary schools in Edo North Central Senatorial District does not differ significantly by sex is retained while the alternate is accepted. This implies that sex of teachers has no significant influence on their attitude towards Special Need Students.

**Hypothesis 2:** The attitude of teachers towards SNS in secondary schools in Edo North Central Senatorial District does not differ significantly by their area of specialization

**Table 2:** Mann-Whitney U test Summary/Analysis on Teachers' Attitude towards Special Need Students (TATSNS) by gender

Variable	Teachers' Specialisation	(n=351)	$\bar{X}$ rank	Sum of ranks	Mann Whitney-U	p-value	Remarks
TATSNS	NES	118	124.19	14656.50	7633.500	0.000	Null hypothesis rejected P< 0.05
	NE	233	202.24	47121.50			

**Note:** NES - Non-education specialized NE- Education specialized

Result in Table 2 shows that the calculated U-value of 7633.500 is statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, the null hypothesis which states that attitude of teachers towards Special Need Students (TATSNS) in secondary schools in Edo North Central Senatorial District does not differ significantly by teachers' specialisation is rejected while the alternate is accepted. This implies that educational specialisation of teachers has significant influence on their attitude towards Special Need Students.

**Hypothesis 3:** The attitude of teachers towards SNS in secondary schools in Edo North Central Senatorial District does not differ significantly by their years of experience

**Table 4:** Kruskal-Wallis H test summary/analysis on Teachers' Attitude towards Special Need Students (TATSNS) by their years of experience

Variable	Years of exp.	(n=351)	$\bar{X}$ rank	df	Chi-square	p-value	Remarks
TATSNS	Below 6years	53	137.38	2	24.270	0.000	Null hypothesis rejected P< 0.05
	6-12years	169	162.83				
	Above 12years	129	209.12				

Result in Table 4 shows that the calculated H-value of 24.27 from the Kruskal-Wallis test is statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, the null hypothesis which states the attitude of teachers towards SNS in secondary schools in Edo North Central Senatorial District does not differ significantly by their years of experience that is rejected while the alternate is accepted. This implies that teachers' years of experience has significant influence on their attitude towards Special Need Students.

## 5. Discussions

Result from Table 1 showed that the attitude of teachers towards SNS in secondary schools in Edo North Central Senatorial District is negatively skewed. This corroborates the findings of Alghazo (2002) who examined Jordanian teachers and administrators' attitude towards persons with disabilities and found that educators' attitude towards persons with disability in general was negative. Many of them never liked the idea of including them in the regular education classroom. Similarly, Florian (2012) found that many general classroom teachers in Scotland resist including children with special needs in their classes believing that inclusion interferes with the effective education of other students. In another study conducted by Zoniou-Sideri and Vlachou (2006) on Greek teachers' beliefs towards educational inclusion, the results revealed that regular education teachers hold a number of restrictive as well as conflicting beliefs towards disability and educational inclusion. These teachers reported that although educational inclusion is necessary as a means of improving the way ordinary school functions and reducing the marginalization and stigmatization of students with disabilities, special segregated education is important as a means of providing a secure and protective shelter to these students and as a way of covering a number of ordinary education's deficiencies.

Result from hypothesis 2 (Table 2) showed that sex of teachers has no significant influence on their attitude towards Special Need Students in secondary schools in Edo North Central Senatorial District. This is not in agreement with the findings of Fakolade, Adeniyi and Tella (2009) who explored attitudes of teachers about inclusion of special needs children in selected secondary schools in Oyo State and found that the attitude of male teachers is 39.4 while that of female teacher is 43.3; implying that female teachers had more positive attitude towards the inclusion of special needs students than their male counterparts. Dukmak (2013) investigated the attitudes of regular classroom teachers towards including students with disabilities in the regular classroom in United Arab Emirate (UAE) and found that in general, teachers showed positive attitudes towards educational inclusion but male teachers showed more positive attitudes than females did.

Result from hypotheses 3 and 4 (Table 3 and 4) indicates that teachers' area of specialisation and years of experience has significant influence on their attitude towards Special Need Students in secondary schools in Edo North Central Senatorial District. This corroborates findings of Dukmak (2013) who found that as teachers' years of experience increases their attitudes towards inclusion become less positive in United Arab Emirate (UAE). Furthermore, the results revealed that professionally qualified teachers tend to have a more favourable attitude towards the inclusion of special need students than their non-professional qualified teachers. Studies



conducted in the United Arab Emirate (UAE), United Kingdom (UK), and Saudi Arabia found a significant relationship between the two variables for the favor of female teachers respectively (Algazo & Gaad, 2004; Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden, 2000; Qaraqish, 2008).

## 6. Implications for Inclusive Education and Educational Management in Edo State

The FRN (2013) under the national policy on education noted that the aims of special education are to: a) provide access to education for all persons, in an inclusive setting; b) equalize educational opportunities for all persons, irrespective of their generic composition, social, physical, sensory, mental, psychological or emotional disabilities; c) provide special education for all persons with special needs in order that they may fully contribute their own quota to the development of the nation; d) provide opportunities for exceptional gifted and talented persons to develop their talents, natural endowment/traits at their own place in the interest of national development; and e) design a diversified and appropriate curriculum for the different target groups.

It was further noted that the Federal Ministry of Education shall: contribute to the funding of special education programmes across the country; be responsible for policy formulation and modification relating to the special education programmes; coordinate and supervise the provision of special education services and programmes for special with special needs; provide matching grants to states and local governments for the provision of special education programmes; encourage national and international donor agencies/financial institutions to assist in funding and implementing special education programmes; and cooperate with relevant ministries and agency to carry out regular data update of the number of persons that require special education services across the country

The aforementioned assignment of the Federal Ministry of Education and findings from this study has implications on inclusive education and educational management in the following ways. Firstly, special education schools must as a matter of urgency be established in the six local governments in Edo North Senatorial District. This is to avoid physical or emotional exclusion of special need students by teachers in regards to their affective and behavioural attitude towards having them in the general class setting. The established of these schools should not be government based only but through private and international support through their help of the state ministry.

Furthermore, educational managers need to take cognizance of the fact that more teachers need to be trained and recruited in special education schools established in the state. Recruiting teachers with the general education certificate might not be too helpful in that their training at college does not usually cover the 'length and breadth' of special education curriculum. Lastly, the adequate provision of special education materials such as braille machine for the blind, visual and hearing impairment machines, automated wheel chairs and so on, must be made at affordable prices for parents of special need children to buy.

## 7. Recommendations

The following are recommended for the study:

- i. There is need for the Edo State government to establish special education schools to cater for the needs of all category of special need students in the state. This should be established, funded and properly managed by the government to cater for the needs of the disabled; the disadvantaged, the gifted and talented accordingly.
- ii. Special education should be integrated and made compulsory for all education students into Colleges of Education, Faculties of Education, and Institute of Education. This is to formally train them for inclusive education and also acquit them with knowledge on how to manage a general class with special need students.
- iii. All programmes designed to cater for the needs of the special child should constantly be monitored, evaluated and revised in line with standards from the international educational protocols such as United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, (UNESCO) and Educational for All (EFA).

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