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**MANAGEMENT OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY IN UPPER BASIC
EDUCATION IN ABUJA MUNICIPAL AREA COUNCIL, FEDERAL
CAPITAL TERRITORY, NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This paper aimed at identifying types of diversity in schools, analyzing stakeholders' understanding of diversity and inclusivity, and examine their roles and actions towards the realization of these concepts in upper basic education within Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC), Nigeria. It compared the practices against the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 and Nigeria's National Policy on Inclusive Education. The study was guided by a descriptive research design. Four schools (two private and two public) were studied. Sixteen (16) teachers (four from each school) completed a questionnaire developed by the researcher, while semi-structured interviews were held with the principal (leader) of each school. Mean and percentage were used to answer the research question, while the binomial test was used to test the hypothesis at the 0.05 level of significance. Teacher respondents reported strong conceptual awareness of diversity and inclusivity; 80% affirmed that their training equipped them for differentiated instruction, while 94% reported that challenges such as large classroom size and paucity of resources make inclusion impossible. Overall, the paper found that school leaders and teachers in AMAC understand and manage diversity and inclusivity in areas of gender, socio-economic status, and religion, but are handicapped in supporting students with special needs challenges. This practice contrasts with the UN 4 Developmental Goals and Nigeria's Inclusive Policy. The paper recommended professional development for inclusive pedagogy and governmental funding and support.

Keywords: Diversity, inclusivity, competence, and school leader roles.

Introduction

Diversity in education systems takes various forms, such as socio-economic factors, which entail cultural, linguistic, ability, gender, and religion, while inclusivity is the opportunity for all, regardless of any limitations such as physical or learning disabilities, to access quality education in a general education setting without discrimination /segregation.

Globally, there is emphasis on managing diversity and promoting inclusivity in schools as it seeks to align with the United Nations' sustainable development goals. Thus, proclamations such as UNESCO (2020) - Inclusion and Education: All means All., a report that emphasized how inclusive education is a powerful tool in achieving equity in learning opportunities and addressing all forms of exclusion. Managing diversity in schools is not limited to the enrollment of marginalized learners but should involve adjustments in school cultures that are devoid of anti-discriminatory and racist practices and culturally sustaining pedagogies, with educators who are prepared to engage in practices that support equality, inclusion and social justice, as well as the availability of resources (Gaitas et. al., 2022). This is essential as students who experience prejudice, social exclusion and discrimination are subject to compromised well-being and low academic achievement.

Presently, migration around the world has significantly increased, and the consequences include people of different cultural backgrounds, belief systems, abilities, genders, etc. being accommodated in the same educational settings. Having diverse students in the same educational settings has its merits, such as the eradication of stereotypes, biases and discrimination; promoting critical thinking, creativity, problem solving skills; fostering empathy, understanding, and respect for other beliefs, languages, culture and, through interaction, a wider perspective on worldviews (Assefa & Zenebe 2024). Considering the benefits of diversity and inclusivity, the concept should no longer be regarded as mere policy

mandate but a moral and social responsibility that ensures access and quality learning for every student. Hence, there is a burden on all stakeholders (policy makers, school leaders and teachers) to show commitment that ensures implementation in managing diversity and inclusivity in a learning environment that respects and values every learner. Thus, Eze & Okafor (2019), in their study, argued that leaders with inclusive characteristics such as cultural competence, empathy and fairness had successfully created a learning environment that led to deeper student engagement, improved academic achievement and reduced cases of discrimination and stigmatization. Also, principals/school heads who were diligent and passionate, through seminars, taught respect, ethics, morals, and values for others' language, beliefs, and abilities, promoted effective communication and thus succeeded in breaking barriers of people's attitudes to disability and physical barriers in schools (Eden et al., 2024; Kilag et al. al, 2024).

Additionally, teacher training is seen as critical to the successful management of diversity and inclusivity is teacher training. Du Plessis (2019) argued that teacher training is basic in equipping them with the ability to understand the varying components of diversity, have the pedagogical efficiency to meet each learner's learning style, and understand ethnicity, cultural beliefs and values.

In a study conducted by Maia & Freire (2022), they posited that teacher training practicum prepares them on multiple fronts: competence in using differentiated instruction to support social, emotional, and academic success for all students in the context of heterogeneous classrooms; breaking barriers that prevent the implementation of models that allow students to gain an in-depth understanding of their own diversity; and helping teachers challenge their own personality traits, biases and social anxiety and its influence on students' acceptance and implication on academic outcomes.

This view is supported in the study by Nishina et al. (2019) and Gomez et al. (2021), that teachers' ability to address their own unconscious biases will address impediments in creating a culturally

acceptable environment for diverse students to learn from each other, while promoting social behaviours that assist students to be ready and able to form friendships with peers from diverse backgrounds, which provides valuable experience and skills for other educational settings and future workplaces in the community.

However, effective management of diversity and inclusivity in schools requires different strategies; educators need to be aware of common school practices, know the composition of ethnic diversity, and understand interpersonal dynamics, as this helps to promote positive ethnic identity for minority students, influence the way students learn and segregate students on a gender basis, which is beneficial for integration (Markey et al. 2021).

Additionally, as noted by Afolabi & Adedokun (2021) and Kercha (2020), other barriers that mitigate against effective inclusive implementations, such as insufficient funding, lack of specialized teacher training, poor remuneration, poor resource allocation and resistance from school personnel due to entrenched biases, need to be addressed.

Statement of Problem

The Nigeria National Policy of Education (2015) reflected the multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual characteristics of Nigeria as a nation. It also stipulated equitable access to education for all learners, especially the vulnerable groups (those with disabilities, marginalized ethnic groups, and poor socio-economic status). However, in practice, this has been challenging and unachievable, as according to studies, there is no commitment to the implementation of policies,

funding and a paucity of trained teachers. This challenge becomes more critical considering statistics of out-of-school children in Nigeria, namely: 10.2 million in lower basic education, 8.1 million in upper basic education, 12.4 million children never attended school, and 5.9 million who left school early. Thus, Nigeria's out-of-school population accounts for 15% of the global total (UNICEF, 2024). Most of these children are of low socio-economic status and disabled, and remain vulnerable to the continuing cycle of poverty.

Nigeria's Upper Basic Education is an important stage in the educational journey where students at that age identity begins to emerge. They are able to exhibit empathy, form relationships that continue through life and the work environment and this makes this stage of education critical to fostering diversity and inclusivity. In AMAC, the student population is characterized by differences in social background (ethnicity, culture, language, religion, etc.), economic status, and learning needs. Despite the national policy on inclusive education, implementation and management of diversity remains challenging. It requires purposeful and intentional strategies, resources and committed leadership.

This study aimed at identifying types of diversity in schools (e.g., cultural, linguistic, gender, ability), analyzing stakeholders' understanding of diversity and inclusivity and their roles and actions towards its realization.

Objectives of Study

1. To assess the level of awareness and understanding of the concept of diversity and inclusivity among school leaders and teachers.
2. Identify the actions and activities currently in place to promote diversity and inclusivity in Upper Basic Education in Abuja Municipal Area Council.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of understanding of diversity and inclusivity among school leaders and teachers?
2. What challenges do they encounter in promoting inclusivity?
3. What measures or strategies have schools adopted to promote diversity and inclusivity?

Hypotheses

HO₁: The concept of diversity and inclusivity is understood and well managed in Junior Secondary Schools in AMAC.

HO₂: The concept of diversity and inclusivity is poorly understood by stakeholders in Junior Secondary Schools in AMAC.

Methodology

The descriptive research method was adopted for this research. The number of participants in the study was 20, comprising 16 teachers and 4 school principals drawn from 4 schools (2 public and 2 private). Questionnaires were administered to the teachers and semi-structured interview held with school principals to understand their perceptions, roles and actions. The research questions were answered using mean and percentage, while the binomial test was used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. All ethical considerations were applied as pseudonyms were used to represent the participants; it was clearly explained to them that information obtained was purely for research purposes.

Sampling Frame

Four upper basic education schools, consisting of 2 private and 2 public schools in Abuja Municipal Area Council, were selected. Twenty (20) participants (4 teachers and 1 school leader/principal in each school). Questionnaires were administered to the teachers and the school leader was interviewed. The respondents' characteristics (gender, qualification, experience and school category) are tabulated below.

Table 1: Respondents' Characteristics – Teachers				
	Gender	Qualification	Years of Experience	School Category
School 1				
1.	Male	PGDE	18	Private
2.	Female	PGDE	22	Private
3.	Female	B.Ed	14	Private
4.	Male	B.Ed	10	Private
School 2				
5.	Male	B.Ed	12	Public
6.	Male	B.Ed	10	Public
7.	Female	M.Ed	23	Public
8.	Female	B.Ed	22	Public
School 3				
9.	Female	B.Ed	25	Private

10	Female	B.Ed	17	Private
11	Female	PGDE	5	Private
12	Male	NCE	0.5	Private
School 4				
13	Male	NCE	14	Public
14	Female	B.Ed	7	Public
15	Female	B.Ed	2	Public
16	Female	NCE	18	Public

The experience level of the 16 teachers (62.5% female and 37.5% male) selected for the study ranged between 0.5 and 25 years, with a mean of 13.7 years. All the teachers possess teaching qualifications; 81% have bachelor/masters (B. Ed. and M. Ed.) degrees and a postgraduate diploma in education (PGDE), while 19% hold a National Certificate in Education (NCE).

Results

Research question 1: 1 What is the level of understanding of diversity and inclusivity among school leaders and teachers?

Table 2: Staff Understanding of Diversity and Inclusivity in the School Context (n = 16)

S/N	Items	Mean	Percentage (%)	Decision
1	I understand what diversity and inclusivity mean in the school context	3.81	95.3%	Perceived
2	My training prepared me to handle diversity in the classroom	3.75	93.8%	Perceived
3	Lack of resources hinders inclusive education in my school	1.69	42.3%	Not Perceived
4	Large class size makes it difficult to meet individual needs	3.56	89.0%	Perceived
5	There is limited support from educational authorities	3.00	75.0%	Perceived
6	I see myself as resistant to change regarding inclusivity	1.13	28.3%	Not Perceived
	Cluster Mean	2.82	70.5%	Perceived

All the respondents indicated that they understand what diversity and inclusivity mean in the school context; 81% strongly agreed. Similarly, 75% strongly agreed and 25% agreed that their training prepared them to handle diversity in the classroom.

On hindrances to inclusive education in schools, approximately 33% disagreed and 56% strongly disagreed that lack of resources hinders inclusion. The respondents who stated there was limited support from educational authorities were 75% (12.5% strongly agreed and 62.5% agreed), while

25% disagreed. Almost all the respondents (about 94%) indicated that they were not resistant to change regarding inclusivity.

Using a descriptive statistics model to summarize the total number of respondents to the questionnaire (teachers)=16. 13 selected Strongly agree: $\frac{13}{16} \times 100 = 81.25\%$, 3 selected Agree: $\frac{3}{16} \times 100 = 18.75\%$. This indicates that 100% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that they understand the concept of managing diversity and inclusivity in the school context.

Testing the hypothesis is tested using a Binomial Test, as more than 70% understand the concept. This binary outcome calculates either strongly agree or not (as each respondent either does or does not understand the concept).

Variables	N	k	p-value	Level of significance	Decision
Understanding of Diversity and Inclusivity (Observed $\geq 70\%$)	16	13	0.0033	0.05	Rejected

Research question 2: What challenges do they encounter in promoting inclusivity?

S/N	Items	Most Frequent Response(s)	% of Respondents	Decision
1	In your opinion, what does inclusivity mean in your school?	Creating an environment where all students can learn (15)	93.8%	Perceived
2	What specific actions or programs have been implemented to promote inclusivity?	Availability of resources for differentiated teaching (9), Training (6)	56.3%, 37.5%	Perceived
3	What challenges do you personally face in managing diversity in your classroom/school?	Large class size (7), Competence issues (7), Lack of resources for SEN (1)	43.8%, 43.8%, 6.3%	Perceived
4	What suggestions would you provide to improve diversity and inclusion in junior secondary schools?	Fostering collaboration among learners (12), Government/School support (8)	75.0%, 50.0%	Perceived
	Cluster Summary	Staff generally perceive diversity and inclusivity issues and offer suggestions	—	Perceived

According to the respondents, their schools have activities and programs to promote inclusivity. Thus, 94% stated environment is created where all students can learn; about 38% indicated that training/workshop are organized to enhance teachers' ability to teach diverse students; and 56% said that resources are provided to implement differentiated teaching.

Large class size and the associated high teacher-to-student ratio, as expressed by about 44% of the respondents, were among the challenges faced by teachers in managing diversity in the classroom/school.

Research question 3: 3. What measures or strategies have schools adopted to promote diversity and inclusivity?

The responses of school leaders/principals to various interview questions are collated below.

Question 1: *In your own words, what does diversity and inclusivity mean in a school setting?*

All respondents stated that it entails a student population of diverse languages and ethnicities, religions, mixed sex (male and female), social and economic backgrounds, and abilities and special needs. One respondent added that it also includes teachers and staff working collaboratively as a team.

Question 2: *Are you familiar with any National Policy on Inclusive Education?*

One respondent was aware of the existence and content of the policy; two respondents were aware of its existence but unfamiliar with its content, while one respondent was not aware of its existence.

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Question 3:

Practice/Area	P1	P2	P3	P4	Decision
Prayers in different languages	✓	✓	✓	✓	Supports respect for religion/language – keep.
Cultural days	✓	✓	✓	✓	Encourages cultural awareness – recommended.
Clubs for tolerance	✓	✓	✓	✓	Effective for social values – continue.
Gender-equal group work	✓	✓	✓	✓	Promotes equality – sustain.
Regular performance checks	✓	✓	✓	✓	Helps identify support needs – essential.
Special needs students	X	3	5	20	Inclusion varies – needs improvement.
Specialized teachers	X	X	X	10	Major gap – prioritize hiring/training.

Question 4

S/N	Challenge/Support Area	P1	P2	P3	P4	Decision
1	Financial constraint in organizing workshops for continuous professional development	✓	✓	✓	✓	Significant challenge – impacts teacher readiness
2	Lack of support from government (in provision of specialized learning/teaching materials)	✓	✓	✓	✓	Needs attention – limits inclusive learning tools
3	Biases students develop from home that hinder tolerance of religion and culture; minimal collaboration with parents	✓	✓	✓	✓	Challenge – requires stronger home-school partnership
4	Large class size with high teacher-student ratio makes effective management difficult	✓	✓	✓	✓	Significant challenge – affects instructional quality
5	High/excessive tax burden	✓	✓	✓	✓	Indirect issue – may affect school funding and support
6	Regular workshops and training are organized for teachers (Support Strategy)	✓	✓	✓	✓	Effective support – should be sustained

The major findings include:

1. The concept of diversity and inclusivity is well understood by stakeholders (teachers and principals);
2. There are strategies in place (differentiated learning and moral, social extra-curricular activities) to make sure all students are included; and
3. Limited resources and gaps in teacher training are factors militating against successful implementation of inclusivity.

Discussions

The findings of this study showed that there is a positive perception by teachers towards managing diversity and inclusivity. This result is consistent with the study carried out by Gaitas et al. (2022), that educators have foundational training that equips them with empathy, pedagogical competence, and moral and social justice ethics that prepare them for diverse students. However, the reality is that most teachers are able to handle diverse students as it relates to religion, ethnic differences, gender, and socio-economic status, but not those with special educational needs, as seen from the findings. Teachers felt inadequately prepared, as most Universities and Colleges of Education in Nigeria do not have special needs and culturally responsive pedagogy as part of teacher education (consistent with UNESCO observation that inclusive methods are integrated into pre-teacher training). As observed by Maia and Freire (2022), these gaps in teacher education deny them the opportunity to deal with their own stereotypic perceptions and biases regarding disabilities; for example, 1 teacher responded that students with special needs should be educated in such schools rather than mainstreamed.

The situation is not changing because, while Nigeria's policy on education emphasizes inclusion, it is not implemented. The government has not provided resources for actualization, both in personnel and materials, e.g., overcrowded classrooms of 50 students and above as against UNESCO's recommendation of 30-35 students/classroom, making actual practice uneven. A few principals described ad hoc measures for implementation, while the private school principals expressed willingness to train the teachers and provide resources that will help in enrolling students with special needs, but they are limited by excessive taxation from the government. This implies that, in practice, inclusivity was reactive rather than systemic. Although there are feeble efforts in the private sector to accommodate students with special educational needs, a great number of such students remain excluded and, inclusivity remains weak and almost non-existent.

Conclusion

This study concluded that teachers use diverse strategies in managing diversity and inclusivity in upper basic education as regards to gender, socio-economic status, religion and ethnicity, but not for students with learning disabilities and special educational needs.

Recommendations

Effective management of diversity and inclusivity has numerous benefits for the educational sector. A supportive, inclusive school promotes empathy, understanding and peer mentoring; thus the following is recommended to achieve these:

1. re-evaluation of teacher training practicum to include skills for managing special needs;
2. employ more teachers for effective classroom management;
3. advocacy campaigns (through the National Orientation Agency and media) against cultural stigmatization of disabilities to reduce stigmatization; and
4. government to organize workshops for enlightenment on the content of the National Policy as regards inclusive education, provide materials/resources to achieve it and enforce implementation through monitoring.

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