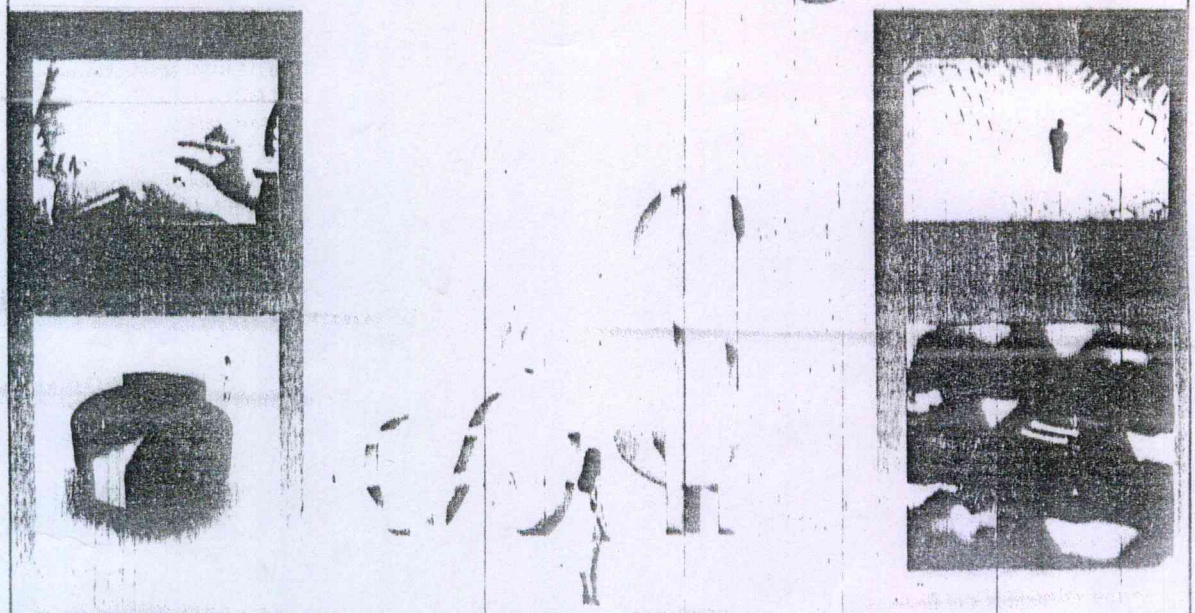
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Pre-Service Regular Teachers Perception on Components of Special Education Courses in Oyo State, Nigeria

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Abstract: This study investigated the perception of pre-service regular teachers on the components of special education in their curriculum with a view to ascertain, whether the courses are comprehensive enough to prepare them for inclusive classroom. The participants were 400 final year students randomly selected from two higher institutions training regular teachers in Oyo State of Nigeria. The research instrument was a self-constructed questionnaire, which was validated by experts while a test retest method was establishing a reliability was used. The instrument had a reliability coefficient of 0.73. The analysis of general questions was done through the uses of frequency count, percentages, mean and standard deviation. T-test was used to test the hypotheses. The result revealed that preservice teachers have positive perception on their level of preparedness with respect to special education courses they were exposed to. A significant difference was observed between the preservice teachers in the university and those in the college of education in their level of preparedness. Based on this findings it was recommended that institutions training teachers should incorporate the concept of inclusion the concept of inclusion as part of their curriculum and also the regular preservice teachers should be given structured opportunities to experience inclusive education in practice during their teaching practise exercise.

Key words: Pre-service, regular teachers, perception, special education

INTRODUCTION

Pre-service regular teachers perception on components of special education courses: The 1970 to 1980 decade could be rightly described as the golden period for persons with special needs in Nigeria, because it was in the latter half of that decade that the Federal Military Government (FMG) of Nigeria announced the National Policy on Education (1977) in which Section 8 states explicitly the government's commitment to the education of all citizens including persons with different special needs. This was aimed at giving concrete meaning to the idea of equalising educational opportunities for all children, their physical, mental and emotional conditions notwithstanding. It specifically emphasised the provision of adequate education for all special needs children and adults.

As a result of this, a large number of students with special needs earlier ignored in the past are now being enrolled in the regular classrooms, creating a situation in which the number of children that are in need of special education rising. The regular schools therefore have to cater for more students with different peculiarities. This development led to reforms, which are needed because of the widening of compulsory education to include all children, irrespective of the kind or extent of special needs.

The term "Inclusive Education" is generally replacing "Integration" in principles and semantics. Integration refers to a process of bringing children with special needs into regular schools to undertake teaching and learning activities in the same environment alongside their able-body counterparts. Inclusive education on the other hand, refers to participation by all in a supportive general education environment that entails appropriate educational as well as social support and services. They also need to be included as equals and valued members of the mainstreamed classrooms. Failure to ensure proper equalisation of education opportunities for special needs and regular students seems to be the bane of integration and also the main reason to inform the advent of inclusive education.

The Michigan Department of Education (1992) defines inclusive education as:

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"The provision of educational services for students with disabilities in schools where non handicapped peers attend in age-appropriate general education classes, directly supervised by general education teachers with special education support and assistance as determined appropriate through individualised educational planned committee".

Mainstream or integration denotes introduction of children with special need into a typical learning environment for a given period during the day. It also implies the introduction of some typically development peers into what is essentially a special education programme. Inclusion goes further than these integration principles. It demands that no one is introduced into any specialised programmes. So, all children undergo the same programmes at the same time. Each child is given the support she or he needs to be successful in the inclusive classroom (Udell *et al*., 1998).

Thus, the new and more direct roles of the general education teachers demand a better understanding of various types of special needs, appropriate curricular, instructional modifications and interactions with the students with special needs in the classroom (Sabornie and Debettencourt, 1997).

Providing highly qualitative education for all students in an inclusive setting has been identified one of the most challenging and important discourse in education. Teachers are being called upon to teach students with a wide range of abilities and needs. This, compelling demand on teachers have many scholars identify this as one of the most challenging, controversial and complex issues in education today (Stainbacket *et al*., 1994; Ferguson, 1995; Putnam *et al*., 1999). Apparently, teacher education programmes are in a position to ensure that pre-service teachers acquire the knowledge, disposition and performances required to succeed in educating students with special needs before they get to classroom.

To be ready for an inclusive classroom, teachers who are to teach in this setting to meet the needs of all students must be produced by adequate exposition to appropriate and relevant skills to equip them for effectiveness in their ultimate primary assignment. Obviously, one of the greatest barriers to achieving the goals of inclusion is preparing teachers at pre-service level. Studies have shown that there is need to educate regular education teachers in certain areas of special education and the interface between general and special education are the most important and pressing issues facing educators (Mitler, 2000; Cook, 2002).

The training of competent teachers is considered to be the most urgent and compelling need in inclusive education since no system of education can rise above the quality of its teachers. In other words, the quality of teachers in terms of their training and awareness will determine the quality of instructions and invariably the success of the programme. In spite of the importance in-depth training of regular teachers, few attempts have been made to provide training at pre- service level for inclusive education. Indeed it is doubtful whether regular teachers have been provided adequate preparation with respect to knowledge about appropriate skills in classroom and behavioural management as well as instructional strategies for pupil with special needs EDU 221, Introduction to special education in the NCE programme and SPH 104 introduction to special education at the university level are designed to prepare non-professionals for the task ahead in an inclusive setting (Oyewumi and Adediran, 2001).

These courses deal with the basic rudiments of special education and the courses have been on ground before the advent of inclusive education

If colleges and universities are to prepare teachers to teach in an inclusive setting, they must mirror inclusive practices in their teacher preparation programmes. An in-depth training is this required for pre-service regular teachers to include more course work on special education. The foregoing observations underscore the need to examine the pre-service regular teachers' perception on components of special education for an inclusive classroom preparation. This study therefore is to investigate the perception of pre-service regular teachers on the components of special education in the curriculum with a view to asceitain whether the special education courses are comprehensive enough to prepare them for an inclusive classroom.

The following research questions would be examined:

- What is the perception of the pre-service regular teachers on preparedness, with respect to the special education courses they have been exposed to?
- Do pre-service regular teachers consider the special education courses taken relevant to inclusive classroom preparation?

Hypotheses:

- There is no significant difference between the perception on components of special education courses of students in the University of Ibadan and those in Oyo State College of Education.
- There is no significant difference between the perception of male and female pre-service regular teachers.

The objectives are to:

- Affirm how well equipped the pre-service regular teachers are for an inclusive classroom.
- Assess the extent to which curriculum at colleges of education and universities are preparing pre-service teachers enter for all categories of students.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research design: The study adopted a descriptive research design to investigate the perception of pre-service regular teachers on components of special education courses for an inclusive classroom preparation.

Population of the study: The target population of the study are final year students in a College of Eduction and a University in Oyo State. Both are among the institutions preparing regular teachers in the country.

Sample and sampling techniques: Two hundred participants were selected through random sampling technique in Oyo State College of Education, Oyo and University of Ibadan. The pre-service teachers in all teaching courses and departments were sampled, making a total of 400 respondents from the two institution being studied.

In the college of education, there are school of Agriculture, Vocational Studies, Arts, Science, Language, Vocational and Technology.

In the university, there are the following departments: Departments of adult education, guidance and counseling, teacher education and educational management.

Instrumentation: For the purpose of this study, A structured questionnaire was used. The major instrument used for the study was a Likert scale format. The questionnaire was structured to investigate the pre-service regular teachers perception on the components of special education courses for an inclusive classroom preparation.

The questionnaire comprised 2 sections, A and B. Section A contains the demographic information of the respondents while section B focuses on the perception of the pre-services teachers. The instrument was developed to adequately and sufficiently cover every aspect of the research questions and the hypotheses to ensure the realisation of the objectives of the study.

Procedure for administration of instrument: The two institutions selected were visited and the authorities consulted to facilitate in gaining access to students.

Table 1: Distribution of pre-service teachers according to institution and gender

Variable	f	(%)
Institution		
University	200	50.0
College	200	50.0
Total	400	100.0
Gender		
Male	211	52.8
Female	185	46.3
No response	4	1.0
Total	400	100.0

Source: Generated from sample surveyed

Two hundred questionnaires were administered to the respondents in each school after they have been duly informed on what the study is set to achieve. After the respondents completion of responding to the items in the questionnaire, the researcher collated the questionnaire for data analysis.

Method of data analysis: In analysing the data collected from the field, both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed. The descriptive statistics explored frequency, simple percentages, mean and standard deviation, while the inferential statistics, that is, t-test statistics was used to test the hypotheses using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) software.

RESULTS

Demographic data analysis: Table 1 reveals that 400 pre-service teachers participated in this study, out of which 50% were from the university and 50% in the colleges of education. This suggests that the study recognised that Nigerian teachers are trained in both universities and colleges of education. Both institutions are equally represented in the study.

The Table also reveals that 52.8% of the pre-service teachers respondents (participants) are male while 46.3% are female. One percent failed to disclose their gender. Given the fairly balanced representation of both male and female respondents; the findings could not be said to be gender biased.

Answering the research questions

Research question 1: What is the perception of the pre-service regular teachers on preparedness with respect to the special education courses they have been exposed to?

Table 2 reveals that the pre-services teachers have positive perception on their preparedness with respect to the special education courses they have been exposed to (weighted Average = 9.73). Their perception is rated to be 68.31%. This is because of their positive response to

Table 2: Pre-service teachers' perception about preparedness in special education courses

Item no	Statement	1 SD	2 D	3 A	4 SA	Means	Std.D
1	The university/ college classes in special education provided you required background knowledge in how children learn and develop.	45 (11.3)	30 (7.5)	241 (60.3)	84 (21.0)	2.19	0.85
2	The University/ college classes in special education prepared you for :						
A	Setting standards upon which to judge your students' progress.	109 (27.3)	125 (31.3)	71 (17.8)	93 (23.3)	2.36	1.13
B	Developing appropriate learning environment and curriculum implementation for both special needs and regular students.	89 (22.3)	65 (16.3)	111 (27.8)	135 (33.8)	2.73	1.15
C	Adapt materials, equipment, environment, programme and human resources to meet the social, cognitive physical-motor, communication and medical needs of children with diverse learning needs.	19 (4.8)	108 (27.0)	128 (32.0)	144 (36.0)	2.99	0.92
3	The university/ college classes in special education prepared you to:						
A	Realise that every child in the class is your responsibility.	104 (26.0)	99 (24.8)	77 (19.3)	120 (30.0)	2.53	1.17
B	Knowing a variety of instructional strategies and how to use them effectively.	71 (17.8)	76 (19.0)	119 (29.8)	131 (32.8)	2.76	1.11
C	Working as a team with parents and special education teachers to learn what skill a child need and to provide the best teaching approach.	68 (17.0)	115 (28.8)	100 (25.0)	117 (29.3)	2.67	1.07
4	The classes in your institution prepared you for a consultative/collaborative role in communicating with:						
A	Parents	82 (20.5)	70 (17.5)	96 (24.0)	150 (37.5)	2.78	1.17
B	Teachers	42 (10.5)	84 (21.0)	132 (33.0)	142 (35.5)	2.04	0.99
C	Resources/ support personnel	51 (12.8)	84 (21.0)	101 (25.3)	164 (41.0)	2.95	1.06
5	The university/ college classes in special education prepared you for:						
A	The ability to be able to informally access the skills the student needs	114 (28.5)	114 (28.5)	61 (15.3)	111 (27.8)	2.42	1.17
B	The ability to take advantage of children individual interest and use their internal motivation for the developing needed skills	79 (19.8)	110 (27.5)	93 (23.3)	118 (29.5)	2.63	1.11
C	The ability to make appropriate expectation for each student, regardless of the student's capabilities.	66 (16.5)	84 (21.0)	90 (22.5)	160 (40.0)	2.86	1.12
D	The ability to determine how to modify assignment for students, how to design classroom activities with so many levels that all students have a part.	74 (18.5)	86 (21.5)	123 (30.8)	113 (28.3)	2.67	1.10
E	The ability to learn how value all kind of skills that students bring to class, not just academic skills.	72 (18.0)	92 (23.0)	107 (26.8)	129 (32.3)	2.73	1.10
F	The ability to informally assess the strength and weakness of students.	65 (16.3)	69 (17.3)	110 (27.5)	146 (36.5)	2.70	1.17
	Weighted average	2.73 (68.31%)					

Table 3: Pre-service regular teachers perceptions about relevancy of their special education courses

Item No.	Statement	SD	D	A	SA	Mean	Std.D
	The university/ college classes in special education increased:	97 (24.3)	100 (25.0)	104 (26.0)	99 (24.8)	2.51	1.11
a	Awareness regarding inclusive education /practices	93 (23.3)	70 (17.5)	98 (24.5)	132 (33.0)	2.64	1.21
b	Roles of various professionals in the field in the process of providing inclusive education						
	Weighted average	2.58 (64.38%)					

most of the items in the Table 2. For instance, they agreed that their university/college classes in special education provided them the necessary and required background knowledge on how children learn and develop (X = 2.91) (item one). They also agreed that special education courses prepared them to develop appropriate learning environment and curriculum implementation for both special needs and regular students (X = 2.73), (item 2b). Further, they expressed the notion that they are well prepared. They prepared to realize that every child in the class is their responsibility (X = 2.53). In addition, they conceded that they have been adequately prepared for a consultative/collaborative role in communications and the ability to take advantage of children individual interest as well as use their internal motivation to develop needed skill(s).

Research question 2: Do pre-service regular teachers consider the special education courses taken relevant to inclusion classroom preparation?

Table 3 reveals that the pre-service regular teachers consider the special education courses taken in course of their training as relevant to inclusive classroom, (Weighted Average = 2.58). This is because of the fact they agreed that their university/college classes in special education increased their awareness regarding

Table 4: Summary of t-test tables showing differences in the perceptions of university and college students on the components of special education courses

Variables	N	Mean	Std.D	t	df	P	Remark
Perception about preparedness							
University students	200	43.42	5.36				
College of education students	200	43.98	9.68	-.716	398	475	Not. sig
Perception about satisfaction							
University students	200	11.73	2.34				
College of education students	200	10.63	3.14	3.967	398	.000	Sig
Perception about mode of instruction							
University students	200	33.97	4.25				
College of education students	200	32.13	7.63	2.988	398	.003	Sig

Source: Data generated

inclusive education/practices (X = 2.51). Similarly, they accepted that it increased their awareness regarding the roles of various professionals in the field in the process of adopting inclusive education approach (X = 2.64). The data generated indicate that 64.38% of the teachers supported this.

Testing the hypotheses

Ho: There is no significant difference in the perception of components of special education courses between students of University of Ibadan and those in Oyo State College of Education.

Table 4 reveals that there is no significant difference between the perception of pre-service regular teachers in the college of education and university being studied on the level of preparedness by special education courses for inclusive setting ($t = -0.716$ degree of freedom = 398, $p>.05$). However, there is a significant difference between them in their perception on satisfaction received from special education courses ($t = 3.967$, $df = 398$, $p<.05$). The mean scores here show that the university students are more satisfied (11.73) than the college of education students (10.63).

There is also a significant difference between them in their perceptions on mode of instruction ($t = 2.988$, $df = 398$, $p<.05$). The mean scores here also reveal that the university students have better perception (33.97) than the college of education students (32.13).

Therefore, the null hypothesis 1 is rejected. That is there is a significant difference between the pre-service teachers in the university and those in the college of education in their level of satisfaction, perception on mode of instruction. While there is no significant difference in their perception about the preparedness on the special education courses given to them during training.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the pre-service regular teachers' perception on components of special education courses for an inclusive classroom preparation in Oyo State. The results of the findings are presented in what follows.

Based on this study, the pre-service teachers have positive perception on their preparedness with respect to the special education. This finding supports Bender *et al.* (1995) which shows that the success of inclusive education depends to a large extent on the willingness and the ability of teachers to make accommodation for individuals with special needs. In addition, teachers who are aware of the inclusion policy can and are more willing to be part of inclusion team. This indicates that the teachers are of the opinion that they are adequately prepared an inclusive classroom and ready to work in.

Further, the results reveal that pre-service teachers considered the special education courses taken during their training as being relevant to inclusive classes. This finding supports Ali *et al.* (2006) viewpoint which states that the exposure of teachers to special education training will help them in implementing better their role in inclusive classroom. In their study, inclusive education programme received a positive response from the pre-service teachers.

The findings indicate that there were significant difference between the university and college of education students in their perception on satisfaction, skills and techniques they received from special education courses. The university students have higher and positive perception. This could be attributed to the fact that majority of the students who are in the university have attended Colleges of Education. This finding supports Pajares (1992) who posited that teachers cognition and belief in part may have their sources in their experiences while they were students and they may also be the product of their teacher training.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings of this study, the following recommendations are conceived:-

- There should be enough advocacy on the benefits of inclusive education for unconditional cooperation among parents, teachers and school authority.
- Adequate and enabling environment should be provided to suit the purposes of inclusive setting and to promote the concept of inclusive education.

- Adequate instructional materials to boost learning experience must be made available; for all learners in an inclusive setting.
- Periodic training and retraining of teachers in order to ensure quality in service delivery and improve teachers competence.
- Pre-service teachers should also be given structured opportunities to experience inclusive education in practice during their teaching practise exercises.
- Institutions training teachers should incorporate the concept of inclusion as part of their curriculum.
- Many important aspects of special education should be stressed throughout the duration of the courses.

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