

## **Attitude of Physical Education Teachers towards Inclusion of Special-need Students in Regular Health and Physical Education Class in Secondary Schools in Nsukka LGA**

**Ogugua, John E.<sup>1</sup>, Okop, Ekaette O.<sup>2</sup>, Obayi, Benedeth A.<sup>1</sup>, Bosah, Chukwuebuka N.<sup>1</sup>  
Elufidipe-Olumide, Happiness A.<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education; <sup>2</sup>Department of Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

*Corresponding Author: happiness.olumide@unn.edu.ng*

### **Abstract**

The study focused on the attitude of physical education teachers (PET) towards inclusion of special-need students in regular health & physical education (HPE) class in secondary schools in Nsukka local government Area (LGA) of Enugu state, Nigeria. Specifically, it determined the belief-related and opinion-related attitudes of male and female of PET towards inclusion of special-needs students in regular HPE classes. It used survey research design. Population consisted of 172 HPE teachers in secondary schools in Nsukka LGA. Questionnaire was used for data collection. Means, standard deviation and t-test at 0.05 significant level were used for data analysis. Results revealed 10 belief-related attitudes of male and female PET towards special-needs students' inclusion in regular HPE classes. These include among others, that inclusion is beneficial for all students ( $\bar{X}$ = 4.62). Other findings are 10 positive additional opinion-related attitudes of the male and female PET. These include, among other, that inclusion requires additional training for PET teachers ( $\bar{X}$ = 4.37). There is no significance difference on the mean rating of male and female teachers on the belief-related regarding the inclusion of special-needs students in regular PE class as all the items had p value >0.05 except for one item. There is also no significance difference on mean ratings of the teachers on the opinion-related attitudes. Based on the findings, the study recommended that ministry of education and other related agencies, should make enhanced provision for adequate facilities and equipment suitable for special need students and more motivation of PET.

**Keywords:** Special, Need, Students, Physical, Education, Teachers, Inclusion, Belief-related Attitude, Opinion-related Attitude.

### **Introduction**

Inclusive education not only offers the least restrictive environment for disabled learners facilitating their ability to express their opinion and engage in activities with their peers, while also fostering a sense of belonging. The special-need students are children enrolled into formal education settings who are from the two extremities, they can either be gifted or handicapped.

International legislation in many countries promotes inclusive education for students with special-needs (SN) by educating them with their peers in regular schools. Felder (2018) noted that diverse understanding of inclusion has varying implications and imports for action. This inclusion is transformational in nature as it has a way of meeting the various needs and expectations of the mainstream and

special needs student (Al-Hroub & Jouni, 2023).

The term inclusive education is challenging to explore based on multiple perspectives underlying it (Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2021). Inclusive education is justice-based because it focuses on social justice and democracy stipulates that every child has the right to be educated in the schools within their local areas, where their strengths and needs for support are identified by using responsive approaches (Lalvani, 2024; Hernández-Torrano, *et al.*, 2020). Inclusive education is a global principle with the purpose of ensuring the promotion of equality and equity by eliminating the barriers to learning and social participation of all (Honkasilta, & Koutsoklenis, 2024). Strogilos (2018) opined that despite inclusion, the special-needs should have differentiated instructions in order to meet their diverse needs resulting in exclusion in inclusion. However, it seems that inclusion attempts have not been very successful for many special needs students. This is because most regular teachers do not support inclusion education (Lindner, *et al.*, 2023). In addition to the inadequate provision of material resources, training and upgrading of teachers for the special-needs education.

Successful inclusive education may provide the opportunity for all children, especially special-need students to develop to their best potential. Jessica (2017) averred that children with special-need are the children who have the disorder/deviations from the conditions of the average children which is generally normal in terms of physical, mental or social behavior characteristics. Children with special-need will certainly face many problems dealing with their difference

during their growth, including in education. Special-needs are those who cannot benefit fully from regular classroom teaching and learning due to emotional, mental, physical or other impairments that may or may not be readily apparent (Fuandai, 2010). Handicapped condition is a special-need, because to socialize with the environment including education and teaching requires special treatment. Special-needs education involves addressing individual differences and needs of students with special-needs through individual planning and systematic monitoring of teaching procedures, adaptation of educational materials to achieve success in school and the society at large, which can only be possible in a classroom education (Akinade & Sulaiman (2010) and Anggono, *et al.*, (2020) noted that there is no correlation between attitude and gender.

Physical education, as an academic subject that develops motor skills and provides students with the confidence to be physically active for a lifetime (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2014). A physical education teacher refers to a person whose job is to instruct ways to maintain the body through physical exercises. According to Osokoya, (2010) a teacher is a person that has acquired training in a college or university who is able to impart knowledge, skills, values and other abilities to learners. Physical education teachers have been described as trained professionals to impact learning to people. While teaching is the act of imparting knowledge, skills, values and other abilities to learners in such a way that learning can take place through the use of various teaching methods such as discussion method, lecture method, role-playing, field-trip, project method among

others. In this study, a physical education teacher is a trained individual with licensed certificate to instruct students in physical activities. Since teachers play an important role in school systems and furthermore in societal function, proper inclusion of the special needs students can be affected by the attitudes of the physical education teacher. Again, inclusion of special needs student to the regular classes seems to pose more stress on physical health education teachers, hence the need for the study on the attitude of Physical Education teachers, towards inclusion education.

Attitude may be defined as a tendency to react positively or negatively in regard to an object. Attitude is defined as the tendency to react favorable or unfavorable to an event, object or people (Kumar, 2023). Attitudes can be belief-related or opinion-related. Shapariya (2021) averred that belief-related attitude is an acceptance of the existence of a thing without a proof, entirely based on values while opinion-related attitude is a feeling or view formed over a thing without any basis on facts or knowledge but on experience and assumptions. Teachers trained for special education hold positive views about inclusion than regular education teachers. The trained special education teachers are effective in reflection of beliefs as well as facilitating belief change in inclusive classroom (Dignath, *et al.* 2022). The belief-related and opinion-related attitudes displayed positively or negatively by most teachers towards special needs inclusion in regular classes are influenced by lack of incentives, low salaries, few special education trained teachers, lack of development and reinforcement (Farrukh, & Shakoor, 2018). Teachers hold the opinion-related attitude that there should

be a change in the approach to the training of special-needs teachers by the content upgrading (Bibigul, *et al.*, 2022). In this study, attitude refers to beliefs and opinions favorable or unfavorable to the physical education teachers in government secondary schools in Nsukka local government area regarding the inclusion of special-needs students in health and physical education classes. Physical Education teachers' attitude towards successful inclusion of students with disabilities may have been influenced by number variables, however this study is interested in the influence of gender.

Gender has been identified as a demographic variable that can influence the attitudes of physical education teachers towards inclusion. Gender is the range of characteristics pertaining to, and differentiating between, masculinity and femininity. Gender refers to the characteristics of men and women that are socially constructed including norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a man or a woman, as well as relationships with each other. It is important to note that these socially constructed roles vary from culture to culture and can change over time. Gender-based discrimination connects with other factors of discrimination, including socioeconomic status and disability (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2024). Gender influences people's perception about themselves and each other, their action and interaction, and their resources and power distribution in the society Canadian Institutes of Health Research [CIHR], (2023). de Boer, *et al.* (2011) noted that affects teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education: gender. Ahmmed *et al.* (2012) stated that gender is a significant predictor of teachers'

attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities, with males holding a more positive attitude than females. Female teachers expressed more positive attitudes about special-needs students in regular classrooms than their male counterparts (Navarro-Mateu, *et al.*, 2020; Saloviita, 2020). However, in the study of Monsen *et al.* (2014), gender had no association with the attitudes teachers towards inclusion. There is no significant difference between male and female teachers attitude towards inclusive education (Ediyanto, & Kawai, 2023; Singh, *et al.*, 2020). Teachers with relatives that are special-needs shows positive towards inclusive education which is basically opinion-related (Schwab, 2021; Parey, 2019).

Education is a means of enlightening people to become better citizens, develop confidence and have societal relevance. It is a fundamental human right for all including the special-needs. Therefore, inclusion education provides the special need students the opportunity to be treated equally with the regular students of HPE classes. However, special needs students seem to be stigmatized and relegated to the background. Unfortunately, the situation is worrisome as the attitudes of some teachers especially in Nsukka LGA towards inclusion seem to have made the special-needs children to slack in physical education classes. This appears to result in the seclusion of these special-needs students from normal activities and loss of faith in their abilities.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The general purpose of the study was to investigate the attitude of PET towards inclusion of special-need students in regular health HPE classes in secondary schools in Nsukka Local Government

Area. Specifically, determined various forms of;

1. belief-related attitude of PET towards inclusion of special-need students in regular HPE class in secondary schools in Nsukka Local Government Area;
2. opinion-related attitude of PET towards inclusion of special-needs students in regular HPE classes in secondary schools in Nsukka Local Government Area.

### **Hypotheses**

Two null hypotheses were stated and tested at 0.05 level of significance as follows:

There is no significant difference in the mean responses of the male and female PET on:

**HO<sub>1</sub>:** belief-related attitudes towards inclusion of special-need students in regular health and physical education class in secondary schools in Nsukka LGA

**HO<sub>2</sub>:** opinion-related attitudes inclusion of special-need students in regular health and physical education class in secondary schools in Nsukka LGA

### **Methodology**

**Design of the study:** Survey research was used in this study.

**Area of the study:** The area of this study was Nsukka LGA of Enugu State. This is one of the 17 LGAs in Enugu State and is made up of 20 communities. There are 38 public secondary schools in Nsukka LGA. There is inclusion of special-needs students in some of the schools. However, special provisions and equipment are not made for the special-needs within HPE.

**Population for the study:** Population for the study consisted of 172 physical education teachers in secondary schools in

Nsukka local Government Area, Enugu State (Post Primary Schools Management Board (PPSMB), 2022). The PET are comprised of 79 males and 71 females, PET between the ages of 20-29 were 40; 30-39 were 60; 40 and above were 50; 1-5 years of experience were 39; 6-10 years of experience were 55 and 11 years and above were 56. The entire population was used, since it was a manageable size.

**Instrument for data collection:** Questionnaire was the instrument used for the data collection. It was a structured based on the specific research purposes and literature review. The instrument had a five-point scale response options ranging from "Strongly Agree, SA" (5), "Agree, A" (4), "Neutral" (3), "Disagree D" (2) and 'Strongly Disagree SD' (1). Three experts in health education face-validated instrument. Twenty copies of the questionnaire were administered on 20 respondents with similar characteristics with the study area.

Cronbach Alpha reliability was used to determine the internal consistency of the items. A reliability index of 0.78 was obtained. The instrument was therefore deemed reliable for the study.

**Method of Data Collection:** A total of 172 copies of questionnaire were administered to the respondents by hands. Out of the 172 copies, only 150 were properly filled and retrieved. This represents 87 percent return rate,

**Data analysis techniques:** Means and standard deviation were used to analyze data on belief-related and opinion-related attitudes of teachers towards special needs inclusion. The  $\bar{X} \geq 3.00$  was considered as positive attitude. Any  $\bar{X} \leq 3.00$  was considered a negative attitude. t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Values less than 0.05 level of significance was considered significant.

## Results

**Table 1: Mean Responses, Standard Deviation and t-test Results on Belief-related Attitudes of Physical Education Teachers towards Inclusion of Special-need Students in Regular Health and Physical Education (HPE) Class in Secondary Schools in Nsukka LGA (n=150)**

S/N	Items on Belief-related Attitude	$\bar{X}_1$	SD <sub>1</sub>	$\bar{X}_2$	SD <sub>2</sub>	$\bar{X}_g$	t	P
<b>I Believe that Special-needs Students' Inclusion in Regular HPE Class:</b>								
1	is beneficial for all students.	4.72	.452	4.54	1.045	4.62	1.351	.179
2	can improve their physical fitness	4.10	.995	4.29	.923	4.21	-1.210	.228
3	is not proper as special-needs require separate PE class	3.91	1.116	4.15	1.079	4.04	-1.305	.194
4	would enhance their social skills	4.41	.652	4.28	.634	4.34	1.247	.215
5	necessitates that physical education teachers be given additional support for effectiveness	4.44	.557	4.32	.954	4.37	.947	.345
6	would promote equality and fairness.	4.12	1.086	4.41	.993	4.28	-1.747	.083
7	would require too much extra work for the teacher	4.06	1.035	4.22	.875	4.15	-1.030	.305
8	is desirable because benefit from participating in regular HPE classes	4.25	.998	4.29	1.024	4.27	-.257	.798
9	is a legal requirement that must be fulfilled	3.62	1.383	4.20	.949	3.93	-3.022	.033

Table 1 contd.

10	can promote positive relationships between special-needs and the non-disabled students	4.13	.945	4.37	.988	4.26	-1.470	.114
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$\bar{X}_1$  = Mean score of male physical education teachers;  $SD_1$  = Standard deviation of male physical education teachers;  $\bar{X}_2$  = mean score of female physical education teachers;  $SD_2$  = Standard deviation of female physical education teachers;  $\bar{X}_g$  = Grand mean;  $t$  = t-test result;  $D$  = Degree of freedom = 148;  $P$  = 0.05

Table 1 shows that grand mean responses on belief-related attitudes of PET towards inclusion of special need students in regular HPE classes in secondary schools in Nsukka LGA range from 3.37 to 4.37, which that all the means are greater than the mean limit of 3.00 ( $\bar{X} \geq 3.00$ ). This indicates that belief-related attitudes of

PET towards inclusion of special need students in regular HPE classes are positive. Table 1 also reveals t values ranging from -3.022 to 1.351 which show that there no significant difference between the mean responses of both male and female teachers at 0.05 level of significance for nine of the belief-related attitudes.

**Table 2: Mean Responses, Standard Deviation and t-test Result on Opinions-related Attitudes of Physical Education Teachers towards Inclusion of Special-need Students in Regular Health and Physical Education Class in Secondary Schools in Nsukka LGA**

S/N	Items on Opinion-related Attitude	$\bar{X}_1$	$SD_1$	$\bar{X}_2$	$SD_2$	$\bar{X}_g$	t	P
<b>I feel that Including Special-needs Students in Regular Physical Education Classes:</b>								
1	requires additional training for physical education teachers.	4.49	.560	4.23	.851	4.35	2.108	.037
2	can be challenging for physical education teachers.	3.82	1.371	3.93	1.225	4.29	-.487	.627
3	can be challenging due to the diverse needs of the students.	4.44	.557	4.17	1.086	4.29	1.860	.627
4	Will not challenge the teachers because they are able to teach special needs students.	4.04	1.043	4.34	1.102	4.21	-1.685	.094
5	Will not challenge HPET as they can collaborate with special education teachers to develop adapted physical education programs for special needs students.	4.49	.560	4.27	.786	4.37	1.909	.058
6	would involve too much individualized attention by the special needs students	4.47	.585	3.72	1.381	4.35	1.664	.098

Table 2 contd.

7	Is not possible because HPET are not prepared to teach special needs students in regular HPE classes.	3.51	1.476	3.51	1.476	3.61	.886	.377
8	Would compromise the learning experience for other students	3.94	1.091	3.71	1.444	3.81	1.100	.273
9	would require too much extra work for me.	4.04	1.202	4.12	.894	4.09	-.454	.650
10	special needs students would be a distraction to other students in regular Health and Physical Education classes.	3.54	1.057	3.22	1.100	3.37	1.831	.069

$\bar{X}_1$  = Mean score of male physical education teachers;  $SD_1$  = Standard deviation of male physical education teachers;  $\bar{X}_2$  = mean score of female physical education teachers;  $SD_2$  = Standard deviation of female physical education teachers;  $\bar{X}_g$  = Grand mean;  $t$  = t-test result;  $D$  = Degree of freedom = 148;  $P$  = 0.05.

Table 2 shows that the grand mean responses of PET on opinion-related attitudes towards inclusion of special need students in regular HPE classes in secondary schools in Nsukka LGA ranges from 3.37 to 4.37, that is, all means ( $\bar{X}$ ) are greater than the mean limit of 3.00. This indicates that opinion-related attitudes of PET towards inclusion of special need students in regular HPE classes are all positive. Table 2 also reveals  $t$  values ranging from -.454 to 2.108. This shows that there is no significant difference between the responses of the male and female teachers at 0.05 significant level of significance for the 10 opinion-related attitudes items, except to item No. 7.

### Discussion

The findings in table 1 shows that the belief-related attitudes of physical education teachers towards inclusion of special need students in regular health and physical education class in secondary schools in Nsukka LGA is positive. For instance, teachers believe that special needs students' inclusion in regular Health and Physical Education (HPE)

classes is beneficial for all students. This finding is surprising and not expected because of the culturally ingrained negative disposition and discrimination against the special needs. However, the positive attitude could be as a result of increased sensitizations, training of special needs teachers and increased enlightenment about the rights of the special needs in the public domain. This finding agrees with Dignath, *et al.*, (2022) who reported that special needs teachers had a positive belief-related attitude towards inclusion of special need students in regular health and physical education class. However, the finding was inconsistent with (Navarro-Mateu, Franco-Ochoa, Valero-Moreno, & Prado-Gascó, 2020; Saloviita, 2020) who found that female teachers expressed more positive attitudes about special needs students in regular classrooms than their male counterparts. In Table 3, there was no significant difference in the belief-related attitude of male physical education teachers. This implies that physical education teachers do not significantly differ in their belief-related

attitude towards inclusion of special need students in regular health and physical education class. However, there may be subtle differences not captured by the analysis. The finding is consistent with (Singh, Shiba & Singh, 2020) who found that there was no significant difference in the male and female teacher belief-related attitude towards inclusive education. Also, in a related study by (Anokye-Poku & Ampadu, 2020), there was no significant difference in the attitude of both male and female teachers. However, the study is inconsistent with Ahmmed, *et al.* (2012) who found that there was a statistical difference in the male and female belief-related attitudes of Bangladeshi teachers towards inclusive education. This could be as a result of the belief system of the different cultures and the type of inherent values placed on the special needs in the different geographical locations,

Results in Table 2 shows that the opinion-related attitudes of physical education teachers towards inclusion of special need students in regular health and physical education class in secondary schools in Nsukka LGA is positive. This is evidenced by a high mean score of teachers with the opinion of collaborating with special education teachers to develop adapted physical education programs for special needs students among others. This finding is not surprising because opinions are not deeply rooted, but operates at the perception and emotional level. The finding is consistent with (Aboelmaaty, *et al.*, 2023; Wa Munyi, 2018) who found that the opinion-related attitude of teachers was positive. This finding corroborates with Muega, (2019) who found that teachers that expressed opinion-related attitude of a need for changes in the regular schools to meet with the needs of students with special needs by

collaboration and skills that could empower them. The finding is inconsistent with Lindner, Schwab, Emará & Avramidis, (2023) who found that regular teachers do not favour inclusive education. This could be as a result of lack of confidence in their ability to cope with teaching the special needs without appropriate training. The findings in Table 4 showed no significant difference in the opinion-related attitudes of male and female physical education teachers towards inclusion of special need students in regular health and physical education class in secondary schools in Nsukka LGA. The finding is consistent with the finding of (Ediyanto, & Kawai, 2023) who found no significant difference in the opinion-related attitudes of male and female physical education teachers towards inclusion. The finding is inconsistent with (Rakap & Kaczmarek 2010) who found that there is a significant difference in the opinion-related attitude of male and female teachers on special needs inclusion. These inconsistencies could be as a result of range of factors including cultural orientation, individual disposition, material resource availability and trained human resources for the special needs inclusion on regular school classes.

### Conclusions

Based on the findings, it was concluded that belief-based and opinion-based attitudes of physical education teachers were positive towards the inclusion of special needs students in regular health & physical education classes in schools in Nsukka Local Government Area. Both male and female physical education teachers showed positive attitude towards the inclusion of special needs students in regular health & physical education class in schools. There was no significant



difference on the belief-based and opinion-based attitude of male and female physical education teachers towards the inclusion of special needs students in regular health & physical education classes in schools in Nsukka Local Government Area. The findings of this study provide a useful guide for the government and relevant stakeholders to make adequate provision for the training and equipment of school teachers for special needs inclusion in secondary schools in Nsukka LGA.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were proffered:

1. Ministry of Education, in conjunction with relevant agencies, should encourage constant seminars and workshop for teachers on inclusive education.
2. Considering peculiarities of special needs students in the construction of school sports facilities and equipment by school authorities and Education Ministry.
3. The government should pay more attention to inclusive schools so that children with special needs and those who are gifted can channel their talents and abilities well.

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