Assessment of Innovations in Teaching and Learning for Effective Implementation of Inclusive Education Policy in Public Secondary Schools in Anambra State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Innovations in teaching and learning have become central to global education reforms aimed at fostering inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all. In developing nations such as Nigeria, the integration of these innovations is crucial for the effective implementation of inclusive education policies, particularly in public secondary schools where learner diversity is pronounced. This study examined the assessment of innovations in teaching and learning and their effectiveness in the implementation of inclusive education policy in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Guided by two research questions, the study employed a descriptive survey design, targeting a population of teachers and administrators across selected schools in the state. A sample size of 450 respondents (School Administrators and Teachers) was drawn through a multi-stage sampling technique, and the main instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled 'Innovations and Inclusive Education Assessment Questionnaire (IIEAQ)'. Content and face validation of the instrument was done through the inputs of three experts in the fields of Educational Measurement and Evaluation, Special Needs Education, and Curriculum Studies from recognized Nigerian universities. Cronbach's Alpha reliability test was conducted to arrive a suitable reliability coefficient of 0.83. The researcher, together with five research assistants collected relevant data for the study. The basic statistical tools employed to summarize the analysis were frequency tables and Mean rating. Findings revealed that innovations in teaching and learning are being moderately implemented in public secondary schools in Anambra State to support inclusive education. The study also found that the application of innovations in teaching-learning process is moderately enhancing the implementation of inclusive education policies in public secondary schools in Anambra State. It was concluded that the effective implementation of inclusive education policies is contingent upon the consistent application of innovative teaching and learning strategies supported by appropriate resources and teacher capacity-building. The study recommends increased government investment in teacher professional development and inclusive learning infrastructure to bridge the implementation gap and promote equity in education.

Keywords: _Inclusive Education, Innovative Teaching, Learning Strategies, Policy Implementation_

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental human right and a key driver of personal, social, and national development. Globally, inclusive education has been championed through various conventions and declarations. In line with this assertion, Ofoegbu (2021) pointed out that the Salamanca Statement of UNESCO in 1994 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UNCRPD in 2006 underscores the right of every child to be included in mainstream education. These documents are known to advocate for the restructuring of policies, curricula, and pedagogy that create more inclusive environments that support all kinds of people in a manner that could leverage on diversities to make the world a better place. Similarly, Ajuwon (2018) posited that the global commitment to equitable and quality education for all, as emphasized in the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), has brought

239

increased attention to inclusive education and the innovative strategies needed for its effective implementation. This is understandably one of the reasons that, in recent years, the global shift towards inclusive education keep gaining momentum and affirmations, as a means of providing equitable learning opportunities for all students, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or learning needs. This shows that inclusive education has emerged as a global educational priority aimed at ensuring equitable access to quality education for all learners, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or needs. In Nigeria, the implementation of inclusive education policies has equally gained momentum, especially within the public secondary school system. Corroborating this, Ezeokoli and Ofoegbu (2020) observed that in Anambra State, the pursuit of inclusive education is embedded in national and international policies, such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act, the National Policy on Education, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Notwithstanding the fact that innovations in teaching and learning are increasingly recognized as essential mechanisms for addressing the diverse needs of learners and realizing the goals of inclusive education, translating these policies into effective classroom practices remains a complex challenge. Understandably, the extent to which innovations in teaching and learning support this policy implementation seems to be underexplored.

Innovations in teaching could be described as novel instructional methods, techniques, and tools employed to enhance the delivery of educational content and engage students more effectively (Ghavifekr & Rosdy, 2015). They are contemporary introductions into teaching-learning process that are understood to improve the education enterprise. These include the use of technology-assisted instruction, flipped classrooms, collaborative learning, differentiated instruction, and problem-based learning strategies. Unlike traditional teacher-centered pedagogies, innovative teaching emphasizes active learner engagement, creativity, and inclusivity. In inclusive classrooms, these innovations are critical, enabling teachers to adapt content delivery to accommodate learners with disabilities, language barriers, or learning difficulties. In this scenario, Ezeokoli and Ofoegbu (2020) noted that teachers act as facilitators rather than sole knowledge providers, and instruction is adapted to meet the varied needs of learners. This shows that the success or failure of adoption of these innovations is dependent on capacity building of the actors in the teaching-learning ecosystem, access to resources, supportive school leadership, innovative learning platforms, et cetera.

In recent time, learning has become very innovative, just as other aspects of human endeavours have drifted towards technology and ease of usage. In the light of this, Salmi (2018) asserted that innovations in learning has to do with the evolving ways students engage with educational content and acquire knowledge, influenced by technological advancements and learner-centered pedagogies, including e-learning platforms, adaptive learning software, gamified content, and mobile learning applications. These tools empower learners to personalize their learning experiences, pace, and styles, which is particularly important in inclusive settings where learners' abilities differ significantly. In inclusive education, innovations in learning facilitate individualized learning paths and support mechanisms that cater to the unique needs of students with disabilities. For example, text-to-speech tools, speech recognition software, and multimedia applications enhance accessibility for students with visual or auditory impairments (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Nonetheless, the equitable implementation of these innovations across public schools, especially in resource-limited settings like some areas of Anambra State, remains a major challenge.

It is important to recall that the usefulness of any invention is determined by how well it is translated from theory to usage. Hence, effective implementation has to do with the extent to which educational policies, strategies, and innovations are operationalized to achieve intended outcomes. In the context of inclusive education, it involves the translation of inclusive policies into practical classroom activities and school-wide practices. This includes teacher preparedness, curriculum adaptation, provision of instructional resources, infrastructure development, and regular monitoring and evaluation. Salmi (2018) warned that implementation effectiveness is hindered by gaps between policy design and ground-level execution, especially in developing contexts, and that without adequate training, resources, and administrative support, the well-intentioned policies often fail to make a significant impact. Thus, assessing the implementation process is critical in understanding why inclusive education may succeed or fail in a secondary school context.

Public secondary schools in Anambra State serve as government-owned institutions providing education to a diverse student population. These schools are expected to play a pivotal role in inclusive

education implementation due to their reach and accessibility. Anambra State is widely regarded as one of Nigeria's educationally progressive states, with relatively high student enrollment and performance rates (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). However, many public secondary schools still struggle with overcrowding, inadequate funding, insufficient specialized staff, and lack of inclusive infrastructure. As such, the potential for innovations in teaching and learning to bridge the gap in inclusive education implementation within these schools remains underexplored and underutilized. It is important to investigate whether such innovations are being employed and, if so, how effectively they are supporting inclusive practices.

Despite the potential of teaching and learning innovations, several challenges hinder their widespread and effective use in inclusive education. Ajuwon (2018) observed that while many teachers lack the training to implement inclusive strategies or use technology effectively, there is inadequate infrastructure to support technological innovations, particularly in public schools with limited funding. Mugambi (2019) decried the attitudinal issue of resistance to change among teachers who are accustomed to traditional instructional methods, coupled with social and cultural factors which have continued to undermined inclusive education, with some stakeholders viewing disability as a burden or taboo. This contributes to poor policy buy-in and low motivation to adopt inclusive innovations, and highlight the need for a systemic approach that addresses teacher preparation, stakeholder sensitization, policy monitoring, and infrastructure development.

Several other studies that have examined inclusive education in Nigeria, such as Nwaogu and Okafor (2019), who explored the influence of teacher training on inclusive practices in South-Eastern Nigeria, and Okoye and Chukwuma (2021) who assessed the integration of ICT in secondary school teaching treated inclusive education and teaching innovations as separate issues. It is only very few studies that have empirically examined how innovations in teaching and learning influence the implementation of inclusive education policy specifically in Anambra State's public secondary schools. This study, therefore, addresses this gap by assessing the extent to which innovations in teaching and learning contribute to or hinder the effective implementation of inclusive education policy. It focuses on public secondary schools in Anambra State, offering context-specific insights that can inform policy and practice.

Statement of the Problem

Inclusive education has emerged as a global imperative aimed at ensuring equal access to quality education for all learners, regardless of their abilities, socio-economic status, or background. Despite Nigeria's commitment to inclusive education, as articulated in several national and international policies, the practical implementation of inclusive education in public secondary schools remains grossly inadequate. Anambra State, like many other states in Nigeria, faces significant challenges in translating policy provisions into classroom realities. Although innovations in teaching and learning, such as differentiated instruction, use of assistive technologies, inclusive pedagogical strategies, and learner-centered methods are widely recognized as essential tools for fostering inclusion, their deployment in public schools has been limited, inconsistent, and often poorly assessed. Teachers often lack the training and resources necessary to implement inclusive pedagogies, and schools are generally ill-equipped with adaptive infrastructure and learning aids required for diverse learners. Furthermore, there is limited empirical evidence evaluating the extent to which these innovations have contributed to the successful implementation of inclusive education policies. Most assessments focus narrowly on access to education or the attitudes of teachers, without considering how innovative practices in teaching and learning shape inclusive outcomes. This disconnect between policy intent and classroom practice calls for a comprehensive investigation.

Specifically, in Anambra State, while government rhetoric and educational frameworks promote inclusion, the lived experiences of students with special needs and marginalized learners reveal systemic barriers. If innovative teaching and learning practices are not evaluated and strategically implemented, the goals of inclusive education risk remaining aspirational rather than achievable. Therefore, thrust of the study is on the assessment of innovations in teaching and learning for effective implementation of inclusive education policy in public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria, thereby addressing a critical gap in research and practice.

Purpose of the Study

The general aim of the study is to examine the innovations in teaching and learning for effective implementation of inclusive education policy in public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. determine the extent to which innovations in teaching and learning are being implemented in public secondary schools in Anambra State to support inclusive education practices.
2. assess the effectiveness of the innovations in enhancing the implementation of inclusive education policies in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Research Questions

In the study, the following two research questions were provided answers to:

1. To what extent are innovations in teaching and learning being implemented in public secondary schools in Anambra State to support inclusive education?
2. To what extent have innovations in teaching and learning been effective in enhancing the implementation of inclusive education policies in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which is appropriate for collecting and analyzing data on current practices, perceptions, and challenges related to innovations in teaching and learning as they influence the implementation of inclusive education policies. Nworgu (2015) stated that the design allows for the systematic collection of quantifiable data from a large population, making it suitable for assessing trends, relationships, and differences across variables. The descriptive nature of the design enables the researcher to evaluate the existing situation in public secondary schools in Anambra State without manipulating any variables.

The population of this study comprises all teachers and school administrators (principals and vice principals) in public secondary schools in Anambra State. According to the Anambra State Post-Primary Schools Service Commission (PPSSC, 2024), 'there are approximately 263 public secondary schools in the state with an estimated teaching and administrative workforce of 10,500 personnel'. These include subject teachers, special education teachers, and school heads who are directly involved in classroom instruction and policy implementation. A sample size of 450 respondents (School Administrators and Teachers) was drawn through a multi-stage sampling technique. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed for this study. In the first stage, stratified random sampling was used to draw schools across the three senatorial zones in Anambra State (Anambra North, Anambra Central, and Anambra South) to ensure geographical representation. In the second stage, simple random sampling was used to select 30 public secondary schools (10 from each zone). From each selected school, 15 staff members (13 teachers and 2 administrators) were purposively chosen, resulting in a sample size of 450 respondents. Creswell and Creswell (2018) stressed that this sampling approach ensures diversity in teaching experience, specialization (especially in inclusive education), and school type, thereby enhancing the generalizability of the findings.

The main instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled 'Innovations and Inclusive Education Assessment Questionnaire (IIEAQ)'. The questionnaire contains both closed-ended and Likert-scale items, divided into three sections: Section A: Demographic data of respondents; Section B: extent to which innovations in teaching and learning are being implemented in public secondary schools in Anambra State to support inclusive education practices, and Section C: assess the effectiveness of the innovations in enhancing the implementation of inclusive education policies in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Items in the questionnaire were adapted from existing validated instruments on inclusive education and teaching innovations, and modified to suit the Nigerian educational context.

To ensure content and face validity, the draft questionnaire was submitted to three experts in the fields of Educational Measurement and Evaluation, Special Needs Education, and Curriculum Studies from recognized Nigerian universities. Their suggestions regarding item relevance, clarity, and alignment with the study objectives were incorporated before finalizing the instrument. This expert validation

process is understood to be crucial for minimizing measurement errors and increasing the instrument's appropriateness and credibility.

The reliability of the instrument was determined through a pilot study involving 30 teachers from public secondary schools in Enugu State, which shares similar educational characteristics with Anambra. The responses were subjected to Cronbach's Alpha reliability test to determine internal consistency. In line with Nunnally and Bernstein, cited in Ofoegbu (2021) that a reliability coefficient of 0.80 and above should be considered acceptable for any study, the study's reliability coefficient of 0.83 is remarked as being very good and suitable. Upon receiving ethical clearance and permission from the Anambra State Ministry of Education, the researcher, together with five research assistants administered the questionnaires to the sampled respondents. The exercise of data collection took approximately three weeks, and participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and their participation will be voluntary. Completed questionnaires were collected on the spot to ensure a high return rate and data integrity.

The data collected were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. The basic statistical tools employed to summarize the analysis were: frequency tables and Mean rating. The interpretative decision rule for the Mean as Orji, et al. (2025) recommended is as follows:

1.0	-	1.49	=	Very Low Extent (VLE)
1.50	- 2.49		=	Low Extent (LE)
2.50	-	3.49	=	Moderate Extent (ME)
3.50	- 4.49		=	High Extent (HE)
4.50	- 5.00		=	Very High Extent (VHE)

Research Questions 1: To what extent are innovations in teaching and learning being implemented in public secondary schools in Anambra State to support inclusive education?

Table 1:

Mean ratings of responses of School Administrators (Principals and Vice Principals) and teachers regarding the extent to which innovations in teaching and learning are being implemented in public secondary schools in Anambra State to support inclusive education.

S/N the	Rating of the extent of application of the following teaching-learning innovation at the schools.	School Administrators (N=60) Mean	Remark	Teachers (N=390) Mean	Remark
1.	Universal design for learning (UDL) for engaging and comprehensive curriculum designing	2.78	ME	2.74	ME
2.	Differentiated instruction for tailoring learning experiences to meet learners' individual readiness levels, learning styles, and interests.	2.60	ME	2.80	ME
3.	Assistive technology technological tools that support students with disabilities in accessing curriculum content.	2.55	ME	2.51	ME
4.	Cooperative learning that provides platform for students to work in small, diverse groups to complete tasks.	2.60	ME	2.69	ME
5.	Blended learning that combines traditional face-to-face instruction with digital tools to give students control over pace, path, and place of learning.	2.63	ME	2.78	ME
6.	Game-based and gamified learning that uses game elements to motivate and engage learners of all abilities.	2.51	ME	2.60	ME
7.	Project-based learning (PBL) that	2.85	ME	2.79	ME

S/N		School Administrators Mean	Remark	Teachers Mean	Remark
	encourages students to learn through investigating and responding to complex questions or real-world challenges.				
8.	Multisensory learning that incorporates visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic activities to enhance understanding and retention.	2.54	ME	2.50	ME
9.	Scaffolding and visual supports, a structured support system that gradually reduces as learners become more competent.	2.52	ME	2.50	ME
10.	Culturally responsive teaching that aligns learning with students' cultural contexts and experiences.	2.79	ME	2.70	ME

On Table 1, it can be observed that the mean of ratings for questionnaire items, 1 to 10 for both the School Administrators category, and Teachers category fall between the remark scale, 2.50 and 3.49, which is referred to as moderate extent. This means that innovations in teaching and learning are being moderately implemented in public secondary schools in Anambra State to support inclusive education. These teaching-learning innovations include: universal design for learning; differentiated instruction; assistive technology technological tools; cooperative learning; blended learning; game-based and gamified learning; project-based learning; multisensory learning; scaffolding and visual, and culturally responsive teaching.

Research Questions 2: To what extent have innovations in teaching and learning been effective in enhancing the implementation of inclusive education policies in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Table 2:
Mean ratings of responses of School Administrators (Principals and Vice Principals) and teachers regarding the extent to which innovations in teaching and learning have been effective in enhancing the implementation of inclusive education policies in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

S/N	Rating of the extent of effectiveness of the following teaching-learning innovations in enhancing implementation of inclusive education in Anambra State.	School Administrators (No=60) Mean	Remark	Teachers (No=390) Mean	Remark
11.	Innovative practices, such as the universal design for learning and differentiated instruction have made it possible for learners with diverse needs (including those with disabilities) to access the same curriculum, thereby reducing exclusion and enhance participation.	2.79	ME	2.76	ME
12.	With the use of ICT tools and self-paced digital platforms, teachers now implement individualized education plans (IEPs) more effectively, tailoring learning experiences to each student's unique needs and pace.	2.69	ME	2.70	ME
13.	Innovative strategies like assistive technologies (screen readers, Braille	2.79	ME	2.90	ME

	displays, audio texts) have allowed learners with visual, auditory, or physical impairments to engage meaningfully in academic activities.				
14.	Collaborative and co-teaching models have allowed for inclusive classroom management, where general and special educators plan and execute lessons together, hence teachers become more responsive to the unique needs of every student.	2.87	ME	2.78	ME
15.	Innovative learning strategies such as project-based learning, peer tutoring, and gamified learning foster greater student involvement, especially among marginalized groups, thereby promoting confidence, collaboration, and responsibility.	2.73	ME	2.68	ME
16.	Formative assessments through digital platforms provide immediate feedback to teachers and students, allowing quick adjustments in teaching to support struggling learners, thereby improving monitoring of inclusivity goals.	2.78	ME	2.76	ME
17.	With culturally responsive teaching and activities that aligns learning with students' cultural contexts and experiences, learners are starting to appreciate their unique history and heritage, and the prospect it holds for tourism and identity.	2.89	ME	2.90	ME

Table 2 above revealed that the mean rating on the school administrators' and teachers' columns for items, 11 to 17 fall between 2.50 and 3.49. Understandably, these range of rating is considered to be moderate extent. This implies that the application of innovations in teaching-learning process is moderately enhancing the implementation of inclusive education policies in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Discussion of Findings

Extent of Application of Innovations in Teaching and Learning in Secondary Schools

Findings from various studies indicate that while the integration of innovative teaching and learning practices is increasingly recognized in policy documents and educational frameworks across developing nations, the actual extent of application remains limited due to systemic, infrastructural, and pedagogical constraints. In many African countries, including Nigeria, innovative strategies such as differentiated instruction, assistive technologies, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and other digital platforms are being introduced in secondary schools, notwithstanding the challenges, which Ofoegbu (2021); UNESCO (2020) asserted as inadequacy of teacher training, poor access to technology, insufficient funding, heavy reliance on traditional lecture-based instruction, and minimal administrative support for innovation. For instance, Adebayo and Olubusuyi (2022) reported that only about 27% of teachers in selected Nigerian secondary schools used ICT tools regularly, hence the reason behind the moderate implementation of innovations in teaching-learning process. Similarly, Mugambi (2019) found that many

Kenyan teachers lacked the competencies and confidence to implement learner-centered and inclusive pedagogical strategies effectively. The findings of this study align with these earlier studies, showing that although there is moderate awareness of innovative teaching and learning practices among teachers in Anambra State, their consistent and effective application is yet to be fully actualized due to the highlighted challenges.

Effectiveness of Innovative Teaching and Learning Practices in Inclusive Education Settings

The study found that where innovative practices were applied, such as co-teaching, differentiated instruction, formative assessment, and the use of assistive technologies, students of all categories are starting to appreciate their unique history and heritage, and the prospect it holds for tourism and identity, improving monitoring of inclusivity goals, and greater student involvement. These findings are consistent with global research affirming the positive impact of inclusive pedagogies on learner outcomes. For instance, Mitchell (2014) emphasized that evidence-based teaching strategies such as scaffolding, cooperative learning, and the use of multiple representations significantly improve outcomes for diverse learners. Similarly, Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) argued that inclusive pedagogy not only benefits students with disabilities but also enhances the learning experience for all students. In the Nigerian context, Ezeokoli and Ofoegbu (2020) observed that when teachers utilized multimodal instruction and flexible grouping strategies, learners with mild cognitive disabilities were more actively engaged and performed better than in traditional settings. The findings from this study reinforce the conclusion that innovative teaching and learning strategies are not only desirable but essential for the successful implementation of inclusive education policies. However, their effectiveness is contingent upon teacher preparedness, administrative support, and a conducive policy environment.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that although public secondary schools in Anambra State are gradually embracing innovations in teaching and learning, their application remains inconsistent and often limited to a few progressive schools. The effective implementation of inclusive education policies is significantly enhanced by the use of innovative pedagogical strategies with its attendant impact on teaching-learning process, notwithstanding obvious challenges that continue to limit their widespread adoption. hence, for inclusive education to thrive, strategic investments in human and material resources, as well as sustained policy support, are imperative.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with findings of the study, the following recommendations are put forward:
1. Capacity building and professional development should be taken seriously by the government and educational stakeholders by intensifying efforts to train and retrain teachers in inclusive and innovative teaching strategies through workshops, seminars, and collaborative learning communities. Emphasis should be placed on evidence-based practices such as UDL, differentiated instruction, and assistive technologies, especially in underserved schools.
2. Infrastructure and resource enhancement should be prioritized by the Ministry of Education for functional provision of digital tools, assistive devices, and inclusive learning materials in public secondary schools. This should be coupled with policy monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that innovations in teaching and learning are being effectively implemented to support inclusive education goals.

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