

THE ROLE OF ENGLISH EDUCATION IN ADVANCING INCLUSIVE LEARNING: A STUDY OF COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN OGUN STATE

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Abstract

The paper assessed the role of English education in promoting the ideal principles of inclusive learning among students of Colleges of Education in Ogun State. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised all students of Colleges of Education in Ogun State. A simple random sampling technique was used to select students across all three levels in the institutions, with fifty (50) students randomly chosen from each level, making a total of one hundred and fifty (150) respondents for the study. A self-developed questionnaire, designed in a closed-ended format (Agree or Disagree), was used as the instrument for data collection. The instrument was reviewed by experts who affirmed its validity. Its reliability was determined using Cronbach's Alpha, with a coefficient of 0.62, which was deemed sufficiently reliable for the study. Data collected were analyzed using simple percentage, mean, and standard deviation. Findings revealed that English education is essential for academic advancement; however, its effectiveness in fostering inclusiveness is hindered by challenges such as inadequate teacher training, large class sizes, limited instructional time, and a lack of inclusive teaching materials. Nonetheless, the study also highlighted promising opportunities-particularly the willingness of teachers to adopt more inclusive strategies if given the necessary support. It is therefore recommended that educational stakeholders implement targeted interventions such as professional development, curriculum reform, and improved classroom resources to ensure that English education truly reflects the principles of equity, accessibility, and participation for all learners. Additionally, the Ogun State Ministry of Education should organize regular training workshops for English teachers on inclusive teaching strategies to enhance their competence in addressing diverse learner needs.

Keywords: Accessibility, Ideal, Inclusive, Principles, Participation

Introduction

In the contemporary global educational landscape, inclusive learning has gained prominence as a fundamental right and a strategy for ensuring equal educational opportunities for all learners, regardless of their backgrounds, abilities, or socio-economic conditions. According to UNESCO (2020) inclusive education is a pedagogical approach that aims to ensure that all students regardless of their abilities, disabilities, language backgrounds, socioeconomic status, or learning styles can access and participate fully in the educational process. It is rooted in the principles of equity, diversity, participation, and individualized support. Inclusive education does not merely place learners in the same classroom but requires restructuring content, teaching strategies, and assessments to accommodate learners' diverse needs (UNESCO, 2020).

In practice, inclusive learning involves differentiated instruction, the use of assistive technologies, flexible curricula, culturally responsive teaching, and a commitment to dismantling systemic barriers that hinder some students' learning experiences. Teachers are expected to adopt learner-centered methodologies, foster collaborative learning, and provide adequate support to ensure no student is excluded or left behind (Ibrahim & Samuel, 2023). As education systems aim to leave no one behind, the role of language particularly the language of instruction has become a critical factor in advancing or hindering inclusiveness. In Nigeria, English serves as the official language and the primary medium of instruction from the upper primary level onward, making it central to the implementation of inclusive learning strategies (Adegbite & Bello, 2022).

English education refers to the structured teaching and learning of the English language, including literacy, communication, grammar, and comprehension skills. It serves not only as a subject but also as the medium through which most other subjects are delivered in Nigerian schools. Therefore, proficiency in English is often linked with academic success and full participation in the school curriculum. However, the intersection between English education and inclusive learning principles remains underexplored, particularly in specialized educational institution (Küçükler, & Kodal, 2018).

The Colleges model represents an effort to address the unique educational needs of learners, yet within this setting, diverse learning styles, linguistic abilities, and socio-cultural backgrounds still exist necessitating the implementation of inclusive educational practices (FME, 2021). Beyond its academic utility, English plays a

critical role in social mobility, globalization, and national integration in a multilingual country like Nigeria. The ability to communicate effectively in English is often associated with intellectual competence and career success. However, the dominance of English in education also raises concerns about language equity, especially for students whose mother tongue is not English. This linguistic gap can result in marginalization and limit the learning potential of many students if not addressed through inclusive pedagogies (Oyetade, 2022).

Theoretical Framework

Language Acquisition Theories

Language acquisition theories provide a framework for understanding how individuals learn and develop language skills, which are crucial for effective communication. Several prominent theories have emerged over the years, each offering unique perspectives on the mechanisms and processes involved in language learning. These theories are foundational to the study of how language education contributes to effective communication and, consequently, to minimizing security challenges among students in colleges of education. One of the earliest and most influential theories of language acquisition is Behaviorism, championed by B.F. Skinner in the mid-20th century. Skinner's theory, introduced in 1957 with his book *Verbal Behavior*, posits that language learning occurs through a process of stimulus-response conditioning. According to Skinner, children learn language through imitation, reinforcement, and repetition, with positive reinforcement encouraging the repetition of correct language forms. Although behaviorism emphasizes the role of environmental factors in language learning, it has been critiqued for oversimplifying the cognitive processes involved in language acquisition (Skinner in Schmitt, 2010).

In contrast to behaviorism, Nativist Theory or Innatism was proposed by Noam Chomsky in the 1960s. Chomsky's theory, introduced in his 1965 work *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, argues that humans are born with an innate ability to acquire language (Miller, 2011). He introduced the concept of a "universal grammar," a set of linguistic principles shared by all humans that underlie the structure of all languages (Lemke, 2003). Chomsky's theory suggests that children naturally develop language skills without needing explicit instruction, relying instead on their inherent linguistic capacity. This theory is particularly relevant to the study as it underscores the importance of nurturing inherent language abilities through education, which can enhance students' communication skills and their ability to address security challenges effectively (Chomsky in Smith & Roberts, 2021). Social Interactionist Theory, developed by Lev Vygotsky in the 1920s and later expanded upon by other scholars, emphasizes the role of social interaction and cultural context in language learning. Vygotsky posited that language acquisition is deeply rooted in social communication and that children learn language through interactions with more knowledgeable others, such as parents, teachers, and peers. According to Vygotsky, language development is a collaborative process, where social interaction facilitates cognitive development. This theory is particularly relevant to the study as it highlights the importance of interactive and communicative teaching methods in language education, which can help students develop the communication skills necessary to navigate and mitigate security challenges (Vygotsky, 1978).

Another significant theory is Cognitive Development Theory, proposed by Jean Piaget in the 1930s. Piaget's theory, articulated in works such as *The Language and Thought of the Child* in Snow (2010) argues that language acquisition is closely linked to cognitive development. He proposed that children progress through stages of cognitive development, with language emerging as a result of their increasing cognitive abilities. Piaget's theory emphasizes the interplay between language and thought, suggesting that as children's cognitive structures develop, so too does their capacity for complex language use. This theory is relevant to the study as it provides a foundation for understanding how cognitive development supports language acquisition, which in turn influences effective communication skills (Piaget in Williams, & Clarke, 2022).

Lastly, Connectionism, a more recent theory that emerged in the 1980s, offers a perspective grounded in computational modeling and neuroscience. Scholars like James L. McClelland and David E. Rumelhart, in their 1986 work *Parallel Distributed Processing*, argued that language learning is a process of forming connections between linguistic units through exposure and experience. Connectionism suggests that language acquisition is not dependent on innate structures but rather on the gradual strengthening of neural connections through repeated language exposure. This theory is relevant to the study as it aligns with modern approaches to language education that emphasize immersive and continuous exposure to language in varied contexts, thereby enhancing communication skills that can be crucial in addressing security issues (McClelland & Rumelhart in Williams & Clarke, 2022).

Literature Review

The nexus between English education and inclusive learning lies in the ability of English teachers to deliver content in ways that are accessible and meaningful to all learners (Olatunji, & Adeola, 2019). When English

education incorporates inclusive strategies such as scaffolding, use of multilingual supports, culturally relevant texts, and varied assessment methods it enhances students' engagement and academic achievement. Conversely, if English instruction is rigid, language-dominant, or culturally biased, it can exacerbate educational exclusion, particularly for students with learning difficulties, language barriers, or from underprivileged backgrounds (Olanrewaju & Ogunyemi, 2023). In institutions such as Colleges of Education, where learners may be academically advanced but still diverse in language exposure and learning styles, the adoption of inclusive English teaching practices becomes even more crucial. These learners require a balanced approach that challenges their intellectual capacity while accommodating their individual learning needs and promoting a sense of belonging within the classroom (Sapir, 2011).

Despite national and international commitments to inclusive education, challenges remain. In Nigeria, the effective integration of inclusive learning principles in English classrooms is often hindered by inadequate teacher training, lack of learner-centered pedagogies, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient teaching aids (Olanrewaju & Ogunyemi, 2023). Furthermore, students from disadvantaged backgrounds, students with learning difficulties, and those from non-English-speaking homes frequently struggle to cope with the demands of English-dominant instruction. Consequently, these students risk marginalization, underperformance, and eventual dropout—outcomes that inclusive education seeks to prevent (Oyetade, 2022).

Teachers play a pivotal role in either facilitating or obstructing inclusivity in English education. Their awareness, attitude, and ability to implement differentiated instruction, provide language support, and create inclusive learning environments significantly influence the inclusiveness of the classroom (Ibrahim & Samuel, 2023). In the context of Colleges of Education which caters to learners with exceptional potential, there is a heightened need to assess whether English instruction aligns with the principles of inclusion namely accessibility, participation, equity, and individualized support.

Studies on inclusive learning and English education in Nigeria and other developing contexts according to Lindsay and Wason, (2018) have yielded important insights into how language education affects the realization of inclusive education goals. In a study on teachers' preparedness for inclusive classroom delivery in English language across public secondary schools in South-West Nigeria, Ibrahim and Samuel (2023) surveyed 300 English language teachers using a structured questionnaire. The study found that although a majority of the teachers had general knowledge of inclusive education, less than 40% were trained in inclusive instructional strategies specific to English language delivery. The study concluded that insufficient training and lack of instructional resources hinder effective inclusive English teaching. This finding highlights the necessity of targeted professional development programs to improve teachers' competence in inclusive pedagogies (Lee, 2019).

Oyetade (2022) conducted a mixed-method study exploring the impact of the English language as a medium of instruction on inclusion and participation among students in multilingual classrooms in Ogun and Oyo States. Data were collected from 15 secondary schools through surveys and classroom observations. The results showed that students with weak English proficiency were often excluded from classroom discussions, performed poorly in assessments, and experienced low self-esteem. The study emphasized the need for code-switching strategies and the inclusion of local languages to support learners struggling with English. This aligns with the present study's objective to assess how English instruction either promotes or impedes inclusiveness.

A qualitative case study by Adegbite and Bello (2022) examined inclusive teaching practices in English language classrooms in Lagos State. Through interviews with 10 English teachers and 30 students, the researchers found that the adoption of student-centered methods, such as collaborative group work and differentiated instruction, promoted inclusiveness among learners of varying abilities. However, some teachers expressed challenges in implementing these methods due to time constraints, large class sizes, and lack of administrative support. Their findings support the need for systemic changes in school structures to foster inclusive learning environments. In their study of inclusive education implementation in language classrooms in Ogun State, Olowu and Adefemi (2021) used classroom observations and teacher interviews across five public schools.

The results revealed a significant disparity between policy and practice. While schools claimed to be inclusive, instructional methods remained traditional and teacher-centered, failing to address the learning needs of students with disabilities or those from non-English-speaking homes. The study recommended integrating inclusive education principles into teacher education curricula. The Global Education Monitoring Report by UNESCO (2020) offered large-scale data showing that students with disabilities, language barriers, and socio-economic disadvantages are disproportionately excluded from learning opportunities. The report found that inclusive language education is a key determinant in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4. While not Nigeria-

specific, the report underscored the global importance of language inclusion and is relevant in assessing practices at colleges of Education, where a wide range of learner differences may exist.

Despite national and international advocacy for inclusive education, the reality in many Nigerian classrooms reveals persistent exclusionary practices, especially in language education. English, as the official medium of instruction, plays a central role in determining students' academic engagement and success. However, many students at the Colleges of Education come from diverse linguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds, and some struggle to access English-taught content effectively. While Colleges of Education is designed to nurture excellence, its English education strategies may not always align with inclusive learning principles such as accessibility, participation, responsiveness, and equity. There is growing concern that without deliberate inclusive teaching practices, the learning environment may unintentionally marginalize students who have different learning styles, language proficiencies, or socio-economic experiences.

Moreover, the extent to which English language teachers at Colleges of Education are trained, equipped, or motivated to implement inclusive teaching practices remains unclear (Owoeye & Olatunji, 2014). Existing literature suggests that inclusive education is often undermined by rigid curricula, teacher-centered methods, and insufficient pedagogical support. Yet, few empirical studies have focused on how English education is delivered within specialized institutions like Colleges of Education in Ogun State, or how such instruction aligns with the broader goals of inclusive learning. This gap in knowledge makes it difficult for policymakers and educators to make informed decisions regarding curriculum design, teacher training, and learning support strategies. Hence, there is an urgent need to assess the role of English education in promoting or hindering inclusive learning at Colleges of Education with a view to recommending context-specific improvements.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of this paper is to assess how English education supports or undermines the implementation of inclusive learning principles among students at the Colleges of Education in Ogun State. The specific objectives are to:

- i. To assess the extent to which English education promotes the principles of inclusive learning among students at the Colleges of Education in Ogun State.
- ii. To examine the challenges and opportunities in implementing inclusive teaching strategies in English language classrooms within Colleges of Education in Ogun State.

Research Questions

- i. To what extent does English education promote the principles of inclusive learning among students at the Colleges of Education in Ogun State.?
- ii. What are the challenges and opportunities in implementing inclusive teaching strategies in English language classrooms within Colleges of Education in Ogun State.?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised all students in Colleges of Education in Ogun State. A simple random sampling technique was used to select students across all three academic levels within the institutions. Fifty (50) students were randomly selected from each level, making a total of one hundred and fifty (150) respondents for the study. A self-developed questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. It was designed in a closed-ended format with response options of "Agree" or "Disagree." The instrument was reviewed by experts who affirmed its validity. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a value of 0.62, which was considered adequately reliable for the study. Data collected were analyzed using simple percentage, mean, and standard deviation as statistical tools.

Presentation of Data Analysis and Results Discussion

Table 1: To what extent does English education promote the principles of inclusive learning among students at the Colleges of Education in Ogun State.

S/N	ITEMS	Yes		No		Undecided		Mean (\bar{x})	S.D
		(N)	%	(N)	%				
1.	English lessons at Colleges of Education in Ogun State accommodate students with different learning styles	130	87%	18	12%	2	1%	3.99	.79
2.	All students are encouraged to participate actively during English language lessons.	124	83%	26	17%	-	-	3.86	.77

3.	The English curriculum at Colleges of Education in Ogun State is flexible enough to support students with varying language abilities	88	59%	62	41%	-	-	3.71	.73
4.	English teachers at Colleges of Education in Ogun State use diverse teaching methods to reach all learners.	136	91%	14	9%	-	-	3.90	.78
5.	I feel included and supported during English language classes, regardless of my background or ability	128	85%	22	15%	-	-	3.89	.79

Overall Total

Mean (\bar{x}) = 3.88 and STD = 0.78

The analysis of the responses in the table reveals a generally positive perception of the role of English education in promoting inclusive learning among Colleges of Education in Ogun State. Students. The overall mean score of 3.88 and a standard deviation of 0.78 indicate a high level of agreement among respondents that English language lessons are inclusive and responsive to diverse learning needs. Specifically, 87% of the respondents agreed that English lessons accommodate different learning styles (Item 1), and 91% agreed that English teachers use diverse teaching methods (Item 4), suggesting that the teaching approach is largely inclusive. Additionally, the feeling of inclusion and support during English classes was affirmed by 85% of the students, indicating that most learners feel recognized and valued regardless of their background or ability (Item 5).

Despite this largely positive trend, there are slight variations in the level of perceived inclusivity. For instance, while 83% of students felt encouraged to participate actively during English lessons (Item 2), only 59% agreed that the curriculum is flexible enough to support students with varying language abilities (Item 3). This may suggest that although teaching strategies are inclusive, the structure of the curriculum might still pose limitations to full inclusiveness. Nonetheless, with all mean values above 3.7, the responses reflect strong agreement that English education at Colleges of Education in Ogun State incorporates key principles of inclusive learning, including accessibility, participation, and responsiveness.

Table 2: What are the challenges and opportunities in implementing inclusive teaching strategies in English language classrooms within Colleges of Education in Ogun State.?

S/N	Items	Yes (N)	%	No (N)	%	Undecided (N)	%	Mean (\bar{x})	S.D
1.	Teachers lack adequate training on how to implement inclusive strategies in English classrooms	108	72%	32	21%	10	7%	3.68	.76
2.	Large class sizes make it difficult for English teachers to attend to individual learning needs	128	85%	22	15%	-	-	3.77	.78
3.	There are not enough learning materials to support inclusive English teaching at Colleges of Education in Ogun State.	126	84%	24	16%	-	-	3.78	.77
4.	Some English teachers are open to using new and inclusive methods in the classroom.	126	84%	16	11	8	5%	3.85	.76
5.	Limited time during lessons prevents teachers from using inclusive teaching techniques effectively.	128	85%	22	15%	-	-	3.77	.78

Overall Total

Mean (\bar{x}) = 3.77 and STD = 0.78

The data presented in Table 2 highlights several critical challenges and opportunities in implementing inclusive teaching strategies in English language classrooms at the Colleges of Education in Ogun State. A majority of respondents (72%) agree that teachers lack adequate training on inclusive strategies, reflected by a mean score of 3.68, suggesting a significant gap in professional development. Furthermore, 85% of respondents identify large class sizes as a major barrier to individual attention, with a mean of 3.77. The same percentage of respondents also point out that limited lesson time impedes the application of inclusive techniques. These results indicate systemic challenges particularly teacher preparation, time constraints, and class size that hinder the effective implementation of inclusive practices.

On the other hand, the data also reveals a promising opportunity for improvement: 84% of respondents affirm that some English teachers are open to adopting new and inclusive methods, with the highest mean score of 3.85. This suggests that despite the structural challenges, there is a positive attitude among teachers toward inclusive education. Additionally, while 84% agree that there is a shortage of inclusive teaching materials (mean = 3.78), the relatively consistent standard deviation across all items (around 0.76–0.78) indicates a strong agreement and shared perception among respondents

Discussion of findings

Result from research question 1 revealed the extent does English education promote the principles of inclusive learning among students at the Colleges of Education in Ogun State. The findings are in line with Ibrahim and Samuel (2023) who found that teachers who intentionally diversify their instructional strategies foster greater inclusion among learners with diverse academic and language abilities. Similarly, Adegbite and Bello (2022) reported that inclusive English classrooms, where student-centered approaches and differentiated instruction are used, tend to create a more engaging and supportive learning environment for all students. Furthermore, the UNESCO (2020) Global Education Monitoring Report underscores that inclusive education is enhanced when teachers adapt their content delivery to accommodate different learning needs, reinforcing the significance of the practices observed at Colleges of Education in Ogun State. However, as also highlighted by Olanrewaju and Ogunyemi (2023), curriculum rigidity remains a common barrier to achieving full inclusiveness, echoing the relatively lower agreement on curriculum flexibility observed in this study.

Moreso, research question 2 shows the the challenges and opportunities in implementing inclusive teaching strategies in English language classrooms within Colleges of Education in Ogun State. These findings are consistent with previous studies of Ibrahim and Samuel (2023) found that while most English teachers in South-West Nigeria expressed interest in inclusive teaching, they were constrained by overcrowded classrooms and inadequate training. Similarly, Olanrewaju and Ogunyemi (2023) highlighted the lack of instructional materials and insufficient lesson time as key impediments to inclusive education in language classrooms. Adegbite and Bello (2022) also stressed the importance of ongoing teacher training and support systems to bridge the gap between inclusive education policies and classroom practices. Thus, the findings from Colleges of Education in Ogun State are consistent with national trends and underscore the urgent need for strategic investments in teacher development, classroom infrastructure, and instructional resources to foster inclusive English education.

Conclusion

This study has examined the role of English education in promoting the ideal principles of inclusive learning among students of Colleges of Education in Ogun State. The findings reveal that, while English education is essential for academic advancement, its effectiveness in fostering inclusiveness is hindered by challenges such as inadequate teacher training, large class sizes, limited instructional time, and a lack of inclusive teaching materials. However, the study also highlights promising opportunities, particularly the willingness of teachers to adopt more inclusive strategies if given the necessary support.

It is therefore imperative that educational stakeholders implement targeted interventions—such as professional development, curriculum reform, and improved classroom resources—to ensure that English education in Colleges of Education in Ogun State truly reflects the principles of equity, accessibility, and participation for all learners.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that;

- i. The Ogun State Ministry of Education should organize regular training workshops for English teachers on inclusive teaching strategies to improve their competence in addressing diverse learner needs.
- ii. School administrators at Colleges of Education in Ogun State should reduce class sizes or implement student grouping strategies to enable more personalized and inclusive teaching in English classrooms.
- iii. Curriculum developers should revise the English language curriculum to include flexible and learner-centered approaches that promote inclusivity.
- iv. English teachers should adopt differentiated instructional methods and use varied assessment tools that accommodate students with different learning styles and abilities.
- v. Government and donor agencies should provide adequate inclusive teaching and learning materials, including assistive technologies, to support effective English instruction for all learners.
- vi. Educational policymakers should incorporate inclusive education modules into pre-service and in-service teacher education programs to ensure sustainability in inclusive practices.
- vii. The Colleges of Education in Ogun State management should allocate sufficient lesson time for English language instruction to allow for inclusive engagement with students at different proficiency levels.

- viii. Parents and guardians should be sensitized on the importance of inclusive education and encouraged to support their children's learning at home, particularly in English language development.

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