Implementation of Inclusive Education Policy for the Attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: *This study investigated "Implementation of Inclusive Education Policy for the Attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State, Nigeria." Three research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted descriptive research design. The population comprised all the 258 principals in the 258 junior secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria. Out of these schools, 220 are located in the rural areas while 38 are located in the urban areas. A sample of 161 principals (89 males and 72 females), which represents 62% of the population was drawn using the simple random sampling technique. A checklist and a self-structured questionnaire were instruments used to collect data for the study. The checklist was designed to ascertain the adequacy of educational resources in junior secondary schools in Rivers State. The questionnaire, which was entitled: "Implementation of Inclusive Education Policy Questionnaire (IIEPQ),"was used to elicit information on the variables, and was structured after the four-point modified Likert rating scale. The instruments were duly validated by three experts. The reliability of the instrument was tested using the Cronbach's Alpha method to establish the internal consistency of the questionnaire items, and coefficients of 0.79 and 0.83 were obtained for the two clusters respectively. Frequency counts, percentages, mean scores and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while z-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed, among others, that the dearth and inadequacy of educational resources that can facilitate inclusive practices show that Rivers State is not yet on track to attaining the SDG 4, which centres on education for all (EFA). Based on the findings, it was recommended, among others, that Rivers State Government should double efforts in ensuring that true inclusion is practised in the junior secondary education system by ensuring that there is adequate human, material and financial resources that will enable the principals to effectively implement inclusive education.*
KEYWORDS*:* implementation, inclusive education, policy, attainment, inclusion, practices and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

INTRODUCTION

Education has been widely acknowledged as the only key that can unlock national development. In fact, education not only acts as catalyst for national development it also prepares an ideal individual for the society. Having recognized how invaluable education is to both man and society, the United Nations General Assembly, in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights promulgated an Act which stipulated that everyone has the right to education, on 10th December, 1948 in Paris, and enjoined world leaders to implement it in their various countries. This vision was specified and expanded in 1990 at the World Conference in Jomtien, Thailand, where it was emphasized that "education is a fundamental right for all people – children, women and men of all ages, throughout our world" (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1990, p. 2). After a decade, this Act was reviewed by the World Education Forum in Dakar, in the year 2000, and it was observed with dismay that completion of universal primary education for all had not still been met. Thus, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were set and adopted to be attained by developing countries within the time frame of 2000 to 2015. The Millennium Declaration Summit proposed that by 2015, children of school age would have had free, compulsory and accessible education. At the end of 2015, it was observed again that the education-specific Goals (2 and 3) were far from attaining the vision of "Education for All" (UNESCO, 2015). Thus, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were introduced by the General Assembly of the United Nations at Incheon in South Korea to continue with the global commitment of ensuring that every child has access to equal educational opportunities.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are seventeen global Goals with 69 Targets and 232 Indicators that were formulated to be achieved on or before the end of the year, 2030. These Goals were set in order to solve the problems that the MDGs failed to proffer solutions to. Hence, they are broader, more encompassing and involved both developing and developed nations in global partnerships. According to Ford (2015), the 2030 Agenda, emphasize a holistic approach to achieving improved sustainable future for all by building on the principle of "Leaving no one behind." The SDGs critically acknowledged that the Education for All Agenda had hardly considered learners with special and diversified needs (Mundy, 2016). Thus, the Sustainable Development Goal 4 presented a new vision for equitable quality education, which is: "Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunity for All." The Goal 4 has 10 Targets which are measured by 11 Indicators to ascertain the progress made. The SDG 4 targets that by 2030, all school-age children including those with disabilities must have access to qualitative, functional and effective basic education (UNESCO, 2015). Thus, the United Nations firmly believes that inclusion, access and equity are the cornerstones of a transformative education agenda. It is pertinent to note that the MDG 2, which is: "Achieve Universal Primary Education", was reformulated and expanded in the SDG 4 to accommodate learners with special and diversified needs so as to ensure that Education for All is attained.

Inclusive education entails when all children, irrespective of their diversities, abilities, disabilities or any challenges they may have, are placed in the same general education classroom to learn together with their peers. UNESCO (2015) emphasized that inclusion is aimed at ensuring that all learners have access to quality education that meets their basic learning needs in a manner that there is no discrimination or exclusion within or outside the school system. Ajuwon (2012) defined inclusive education as a process of enhancing the capacity of the education system to reach out to diverse learners. Hence, the diverse learners have the right to be taught in the same classroom in a mainstream school; instead of excluding some to learn in a special school except in severe cases. Shyman (2015) also defined inclusive education in the perspective of social justice by asserting that all individuals, regardless of exceptionality, are entitled to the opportunity to be included in regular classroom environments. Mundy (2016) noted that special schools have been found to be socially dysfunctional and irrelevant to the total well-being of persons with disabilities as they help reinforce negative social practices such as discrimination, segregation, low self-esteem and denial of the fundamental rights of children with disabilities. However, the term: "Inclusive Education" came into limelight after the World Conference on Special Needs Education that took place in Salamanca, Spain in 1994. The Salamanca Statement asserts that: "Every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs, and those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child-centred pedagogy capable of meeting their needs" (UNESCO, 1994, p.8). After the Salamanca Declaration, most countries including Nigeria, have acknowledged that inclusive education is an important premise to redress all forms of exclusion, marginalization, disparities, inequalities and access to educational opportunities.

Nigeria reaffirmed her commitment to ensuring Education for All (EFA) in her National Policy on Education, where it is enshrined that inclusive education should be integrated into ordinary/public schools under the Universal Basic Education scheme (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). In Nigerian education system, basic education comprises a 9-year duration (6 years of primary education and 3 years of junior secondary education). The Universal Basic Education Act of 2004 stipulates that basic education shall be free and compulsory for all children of school-age. This corroborates the Salamanca Statement that educational policies at all levels, should stipulate that a child with a disability should attend the neighbourhood school – that is the school that he/she would have attended if he/she did not have a disability (UNESCO, 1994). In the same vein, the United Nation Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) mandated world leaders to ensure that persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free education on an equal basis with their peers in the communities in which they live (United Nations, 2006). Schuelka (2018) opined that inclusive education is a right of every child irrespective of distinct characteristics which tend to set them apart from other children within the same age bracket. Hence, inclusive education entails educating all children with multi-dimensional challenges with the intention of assisting them to realise their desired goals, according to their diversity, needs and abilities.

The Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPN, 2013, as cited in Wenenda and Okeke, 2018), affirmed that inclusive education is a global best educational practice and standard that ensures that no child is out-of-school irrespective of his/her disabilities, gender,

location, ethnicity, social status, among others. The Salamanca Statement captured it succinctly, "regular schools with inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all" (UNESCO, 1994, p. 9). Okongo et al. (2015) emphasized that when inclusion is effectively implemented, true acceptance of diversity ultimately develops within the school environment, which the learners carry into their homes, workplaces and communities. Inclusive system gives children with special needs a full school experience and is instrumental in changing discriminatory attitudes (Ireri et al., 2020). Similarly, Loreman (2014) posited that respect and understanding grow when students of diverse abilities and backgrounds play, socialize, and learn together. Thus, when the disabled, the disadvantaged and the gifted/talented learn together alongside their peers in the same classroom environment, everyone benefits because love and peaceful co-existence are fostered. As Nigeria domesticates inclusive education, it becomes imperative to effectively implement the policy in public schools so as to attain the Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on or before 2030.

Policies are written and unwritten statements which guide and direct present and future actions, initiatives and decisions of managers towards achieving organisational goals. Educational policies therefore are rules and laws that guide educational decisions and operations. Nwideeduh and Adieme (2015) asserted that educational policies and programmes are plans of activities to be systematically implemented in order to achieve educational objectives and national goals. According to UNESCO guidelines on inclusive education, both developed and developing countries are required to give priority on their educational policies, and make budgetary provisions on how to restructure their education system to promote inclusion and cater for learner diversity (UNESCO, 2015). Consequently, the Federal Republic of Nigeria is not left out on the struggle for the attainment of Education for All. The policy framework in the National Policy on Education recommended that inclusive education should be integrated into ordinary/public schools under the Universal Basic Education scheme, where all children will be given access to free, qualitative and compulsory basic education (FRN, 2013). Similarly, the Federal Ministry of Education (2015, pp. 18-20), spelt out the guidelines for inclusive practices in the National Policy on Special Needs Education in Nigeria as follows:

- the classrooms of the 21st century should be entirely technology driven;
- there shall be continuous training and retraining of teachers on-the-job (both special and general teachers;
- teacher-pupil ratio shall be 1:5-10 in inclusive classroom;
- there shall be adaptive curriculum and differentiated curricula that will be tailored to individualized needs;
- existing physical facilities shall be upgraded and new structure put in place.
- there shall be universality of access, removal of all forms of barriers that may interfere with learning;
- adaptation of various equipment, learning materials and facilities;
- promote school infrastructures that meet the needs of all children without discrimination so as to be productive members of the society;

- provision of adequate instructional materials to improve on the quality of teaching and learning in schools;
- schools shall be required to arrange regular sensory, medical and psychological screening assessments to identify any incidence of disability;
- other support services are to be provided to meet the learners' unique needs;
- architectural design shall be disability friendly, that is, provision of toilets, ramps, enlarged entrances, classrooms, administrative offices, embossed rio speech and language laboratories, doorbells, as well as indicators on doors and elevators shall be provided, etc.;
- specialized facilities – as the scheme advances, there shall be need for specialized facilities to be built such as Special Needs laboratories, clinics and resource centres within the various existing centres/schools with provision of virtual learning resources, hyperlinks and computer networks; and
- environments – ensuring that outdoor play areas and roads are barrier and hazard free and generally disability friendly, containing hyperlinks and portals for lessons.

Implementation in the educational system is the process of carrying out a plan, a policy, a programme, a task, an initiative, a decision, among others, which are geared towards achieving educational objectives and goals. Educational managers or school administrators are charged with the responsibility of implementing educational policies and programmes. In order to attain the SDG 4, World Education Forum (2015) mandated school managers to adopt, design and implement strategies that support inclusive education in their schools. UNESCO (2017) asserted that measuring the extent of achievement of inclusive education should go beyond merely counting students to evaluate access, but should include measures of educational quality, completion, outcomes, and experiences. In the same vein, Lagos State Ministry of Education (2015) outlined strategies for achieving inclusive education policy in regular/public schools, and they include: ensuring that all children are enrolled, retained and transit to higher schools; creating access and safety in all public schools; improved teaching/learning conditions; making school environments safe; making teaching interesting and recognising the ability and needs of all children; creating awareness on inclusive education and continuous training of teachers. Ireri et al. (2020) emphasized that teachers are key stakeholders in the implementation process. Thus, training and retraining of teachers who will be knowledgeable and have pedagogical skills on inclusive education are very vital in imparting appropriate skills for global competitiveness in the world of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to the Nigerian child as it is stated in the philosophy of inclusive education.Effective implementation of inclusive education in junior secondary schools in Nigeria depends on the ways principals manage their schools and the ways teachers manage their classrooms respectively. Implementing inclusive education is not about increasing the educational budget; but about continuous, systematic and sustained transformation of educational design, cultures, and values (Schuelka, 2018).

Carrington et al. (2017) maintained that inclusive education implementation involves all aspects of school management such as the curriculum, learning facilities, teachers' competency, students' assessment, infrastructures, community/stakeholders' participation and

finance. Osero (2015) noted that inclusive guidelines focus not only on education quality for all learners but also demands that the learning environment be restructured to accommodate diversity. Crawford and Tindal (2006 as cited in Okongo et al., 2015) emphasised that implementing effective inclusive education requires adequate support of the educational resources – human, material and financial. In supporting this assertion, Fajarwati (2017) posited that implementation of inclusive education in public schools requires a comprehensive planning related to the readiness of schools in managing the curriculum, the teaching staff and the infrastructural facilities in realization of educational services that can accommodate the needs of diverse learners. Andai and Mwatela (2017) posited that teachers are key figures in the successful implementation of an inclusive education policy; their competencies in this field are of utmost importance. Obanya (2014) pointed out that every meaningful reform of education should always pay attention to the teacher factor in order to make a lasting impact. Thus, for the SDG 4 to be attained before 2030, Nigeria has to place priority on the teachers' professional development and welfare because they are the key actors in any educational reform.

The challenges to successful implementation of inclusive education, especially in developing countries have been identified by various researchers and scholars. Chataika et al. (2012) discovered that inaccessible school environments, lack of supporting infrastructural facilities, negative attitudes of teachers, discriminatory admission procedures and lack of disability policies hinder the Education for All vision in Africa. Osero (2015) conducted a study on the challenges teachers encountered in teaching inclusive education in public primary schools in Nyamira County, Kenya and found that teachers' lack knowledge of the types of learners; hence, were not meeting the needs of the learners in inclusive classes. Similarly, Abimanyi and Mannan (2014) observed that inclusive education in Uganda experiences major hitches which include: negative cultural attitudes towards disability, shortage of resources, poor funding and inadequate teacher training in inclusive practices. In the same vein, Federal Ministry of Education (2015) attested to the fact that Nigeria is involved in inclusive education, but the present practices are not fully consistent with existing global best practices. More so, the Special Needs classrooms and laboratories in the country are not yet technology driven. Ademefun (n.d) observed that Nigeria faces many challenges in implementing inclusive education which include: very low public awareness on issues of inclusive education; inadequate institutional and human capacities required to implement inclusive education; the confinement of the education of children with disabilities to very few, poorly staffed, poorly equipped and outdated special schools; and inadequate, poor implementation or non-availability of appropriate legal and policy frameworks required for the implementation of inclusive education.

Ensuring that persons with special needs have access to equal educational opportunities with their peers of same age bracket is the main thrust of inclusive education. However, Adetoro (2014) revealed in his study that the content of curriculum and delivery procedures in Nigerian public schools failed to consider the inclusion process, where learners are expected to learn according to their abilities. He also observed that physical facilities for the handicapped are not available or insufficiently adequate, and that the mainstream classrooms are overcrowded to the tune of 1:80 teacher-pupil ratio as against the 1:10 for inclusive classes recommended in

the National Policy on Education. Igbokwe et al. (2014): Amakievi (2013) observed that Nigerian regular schools are not accessible to the physically challenged children; there are many dilapidated structures with no libraries, laboratories and other supporting facilities. Ajuwon (2012) discovered some hitches like: lack of trained special educational personnel; lack of specialized instructional materials; absence of legislation to support inclusion; and public school buildings not user-friendly for students with disabilities in making inclusive education work in Nigeria. Kusimo and Chidozie (2019) discovered inadequate school resources and facilities, insufficient funds to restructure the schools and lack of teacher preparedness on inclusive practices in Nigerian public schools as barriers to effective implementation of inclusive education. Hence, Nigeria encounters myriad of challenges that impede the effective implementation of the inclusive education policy framework.

However, the introduction of inclusion has necessitated the need for reformation in the education system. Booth and Ainscow (2011); Schuelka (2018) posited that the first step to inclusive education implementation is to help schools understand their own barriers and how to overcome them. Making appropriate education available to children with special needs is one sure way of achieving access and equity as prescribed by UNESCO for inclusive education programmes (Federal Ministry of Education, 2015). Ireri et al. (2020) recommended the recruitment of teachers with special education skills who can assist the general teachers; regular monitoring and evaluation of school resources and facilities to meet the needs of learners with physical disabilities; sensitization of key stakeholders on inclusive education policy and fitting of new school buildings with ramps as a strategy to overcoming physical barriers that hinder the successful implementation of inclusive education. Ajuwon (2012) suggested that teachers must be provided with sufficient instructional resources, and they should be trained to adapt to instructional techniques and assessments, as well as classroom behaviour management styles. In corroboration, Hay et al.(2001,as cited in Thwala, 2015), emphasized that successful implementation of the inclusion programme depends on the high quality of professional preparation of teachers in all levels; to equip them for and update their knowledge in handling mixed-ability groups in the classrooms. Thus, it is pertinent to note that inclusive education makes an additional demand on teachers, especially those in general classes since they are not used to teaching learners with special needs and diversities.

For inclusive education to be implemented effectively in Nigeria, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013); Federal Ministry of Education (2015); Lagos State Ministry of Education (2015) recommended the need to restructure the classroom facilities, provide adequate learning equipment and instructional materials; provide adequate funding that will promote inclusion in the education system. Andai and Mwatela (2017) observed that the most inclusive and high-quality schools are those that have school administrators who lead with vision, creativity, inclusive values, motivation, autonomy, and have trust in their staff. Hence, head teachers and principals have daunting tasks in promoting friendly school climate. Ainscow (2009) noted that it is not practically possible to employ special teachers who will teach alongside the general teachers in all classrooms, but teachers should be empowered with basic skills so that they can become competent inclusive teachers. Winter (2006, as cited in Thwala, 2015), recommended in his study that teachers must be competent in communication skills and multidisciplinary work, some essential knowledge of common disabilities, behaviour management and the

effects of poverty and social deprivation. In a related study, Fajarwati (2017) carried out a study where he also suggested that teachers must have the knowledge and skills to create inclusive classrooms, and understand how to provide services to students according to their individual learning needs. Hence, effective implementation of inclusive education will go a long to ensuring that SDG 4 is achieved. Since the SDGs are interdependent and inter-related, achieving one goal will help to achieve others; thereby making Nigeria on track in achieving the SDGs on or before 2030.

Statement of the Problem

The Nigerian Government has been involved in various international and national programmes that universalise education to her citizenry. Among these are: Universal Primary Education (UPE) of 1976, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989, Education for All (EFA) of 1990, Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act of 2004, which is targeted at universalising education; making it free, compulsory, inclusive and uninterrupted for children within the age brackets of 6-15 years old so as to attain the global objectives on education; Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) between 2000 and 2015, and the on-going Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that are expected to be achieved on or before year 2030. Despite the numerous efforts the government is making to ensure that education is accessible to all children, including those with special needs, there appears to be disproportionate number of disabled children that are still not in school. UNICEF reported that about 95% of children with disabilities in developing countries are out-of-school, and 90% of them may never gain access to basic education in their lifetime. This projection was affirmed by the Nigerian Minister of State for Education, Hon. Chukwuemeka Nwajiuba, who said that Nigeria has more than 10 million out-of-school children in sub-Saharan Africa while delivering a lecture on Thursday, 19th March, 2021 at the Launching of Better Education Service Delivery (BESDA) in Jigawa State. This figure poses a great challenge to Nigeria, the Giant of Africa. Regrettably, quite a number of researchers have also discovered that Nigeria in general and Rivers State in particular are yet to practise true inclusion in the education system.

More worrisome is the fact that inclusive education seems to have become rhetorics. Different policies and legal frameworks have been formulated on inclusive education and its guidelines, but the implementation seems to be a Herculean task. A glance at the education system shows that attaining inclusive education is a far cry in Rivers State Universal Basic Education system. The infrastructures that will accommodate children with special needs and diversities are inadequate let alone being accessible. Most junior secondary schools lack special teachers, and the available teachers are yet to be trained on inclusive education pedagogical skills and behavioural management. The curriculum is yet to be reviewed to accommodate learners with special needs. The classrooms are overcrowded as against the recommended 1:10 ratio. The ramps, paths, and walkways are not structured to promote inclusive education. However, it is pertinent to note that the SDG 4 cannot be achieved unless inclusive education is given a priority. Hence, there is need for a critical internal monitoring of the implementation of this vital global programme in Rivers State so that any deviation from plan could be readily pin-pointed at the point of its occurrence to enable corrective measures to speedily be initiated.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to examine the implementation of inclusive education policy for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in junior secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. ascertain the adequacy of the educational resources for the implementation of inclusive education policy for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in junior secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria;
2. find out the challenges facing the implementation of inclusive education policy for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in junior secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria; and
3. highlight the ways inclusive education policy can be implemented for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in junior secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How adequate are the educational resources for the implementation of inclusive education policy for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in junior secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria?
2. What are the challenges facing the implementation of inclusive education policy for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in junior secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria?
3. In what ways can inclusive education policy be implemented for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in junior secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated at 0.05 alpha level:

Ho_1 There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals on the challenges facing the implementation of inclusive education policy for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in junior secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Ho_2 There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals on ways inclusive education policy can be implemented for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in junior secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the descriptive research design. The population comprised all the 258 principals in the 258 junior secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria. Out of these schools, 220 are located in the rural areas while 38 are located in the urban areas (Rivers State Universal Basic Education Board, 2019/2020 Academic Session). A sample of 161 principals (89 males and 72 females), which represents 62% of the population was drawn using the simple random sampling technique. A checklist and a 20-item self-structured questionnaire were instruments used to collect data from the respondents. The checklist was designed to ascertain the adequacy of educational resources in junior secondary schools in Rivers State. It was used to answer

research question 1. In analysing the checklist, "Adequate" is scored 1 point while "Not adequate" is scored zero. Any percentage, which is above the average acceptable percent of 50% is considered "Adequate" while below 50%, is considered "Not adequate". The questionnaire was entitled: "Implementation of Inclusive Education Policy Questionnaire (IIEPQ)." It had two sections: A and B. Section A elicited information on demographic data of the respondents whereas Section B elicited information on the variables. It was structured after the four-point modified Likert rating scale of Strongly Agree = 4, Agree = 3, Disagree =2 and Strongly Disagree = 1 for research questions 2 and 3. The instruments were duly validated by two experts from Test and Measurement Department, and one expert from Educational Management in Faculty of Education, University of Port Harcourt. The reliability of the instrument was tested using the Cronbach's Alpha method to establish the internal consistency of the questionnaire items, and coefficients of 0.79 and 0.83 were obtained for the two clusters respectively. Frequency counts, percentages, mean scores and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while z-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Research Question One: How adequate are the educational resources for the implementation of inclusive education policy for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in junior secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage of the Adequacy of Educational Resources for Inclusive Education in Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State, Nigeria

S/N	Adequacy of Educational Resources for Inclusive Education	Adequate	Percentage	Not Adequate	Percentage
1.	Teachers with inclusive education skills.	7	4%	154	96%
2.	Special education teachers that can assist the general teachers.	4	2%	157	98%
3.	Teacher-student ratio of 1:5-10.	0	0%	161	100%
4.	Curriculum that addresses learners' diversity needs.	161	100%	0	0%
5.	Provision of adequate instructional materials that can meet diversified needs of the learners.	43	27%	118	73%
6.	School physical structures that are disability-friendly.	112	70%	49	30%
7.	Funds in form of "imprest" given to principals to implement inclusive classrooms.	0	0%	161	100%
8.	Outdoor play areas that are barrier-hazard free.	137	85%	24	15%
9.	Classrooms with enlarged entrances, ramps, uncracked floors, etc,	106	66%	55	34%
10.	Disability-friendly sanitary facilities.	29	18%	132	82%
	Aggregate Percentage		**372%**		**628%**
			37%		**63%**

Table 1 reveals that items: 4, 6, 8 and 9 are adequate since they have their various percentages above the average acceptable percentage of 50% while items 1, 2, 3, 5, 7 and 10 are not adequate because their various percentages are below 50%. Grossly on the aggregate, it is shown that 37% of the educational resources are adequate while 63% are not adequate. See

Figure 1 for details.
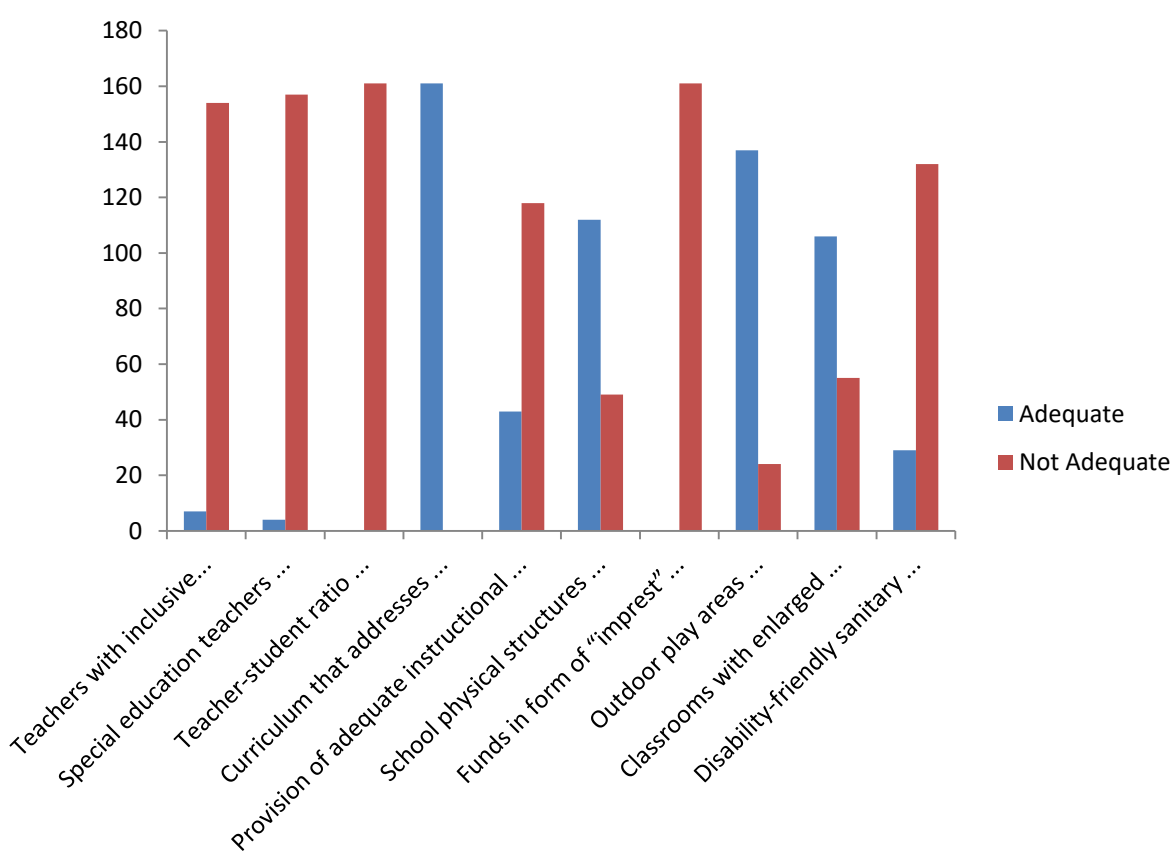

Fig 1: Bar Chart Representing the Adequacy of the Educational Resources for the Effective Implementation of Inclusive Education in Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State

Research Question Two: What are the challenges facing the implementation of inclusive education policy for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in junior secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations on the Opinions of Male and Female Principals on the Challenges Facing the Implementation of Inclusive Education Policy for the Attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State, Nigeria

S/N	Challenges Facing the Implementation of Inclusive Education Policy Include:	Male Principals = 89		Female Principals = 72			Decision
		$\overline{X}_1$	SD$_1$	$\overline{X}_2$	SD$_2$	$\overline{X}_1\overline{X}_2$	
1.	Public school buildings have not been upgraded to be user-friendly for students with disability.	3.18	0.73	3.23	0.80	3.21	Agreed
2.	Insufficient funds to restructure the physical facilities, procure suitable instructional materials, train teachers, etc.	3.25	0.72	3.27	0.80	3.26	Agreed
3.	Lack of teachers' preparedness on inclusive practices.	3.13	0.73	3.09	0.82	3.11	Agreed
4.	Low public awareness on inclusive education.	3.03	0.74	3.01	0.83	3.02	Agreed
5.	Discriminatory admission procedures.	2.19	0.83	2.23	0.92	2.21	Disagreed
6.	Poorly equipped classrooms.	3.13	0.73	3.16	0.81	3.15	Agreed
7.	Nom-availability of policy frameworks required for the implementation of inclusive education.	2.34	0.82	2.31	0.91	2.33	Disagreed
8.	Overcrowded classrooms.	3.07	0.74	3.09	0.82	3.08	Agreed
9.	Lack of extra time to assess students with learning difficulties.	1.99	0.85	2.03	0.95	2.01	Disagreed
10.	Negative attitudes of teachers to practise inclusive classrooms.	2.89	0.76	2.86	0.85	2.88	Agreed
	Aggregate Mean and SD	**2.82**	**0.77**	**2.83**	**0.85**	**2.83**	

Table 2 shows the mean responses of male and female principals on the challenges facing the implementation of inclusive education policy for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in junior secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria. Both male and female principals agreed on items: 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8 and 10 in the Table with mean scores greater than the criterion mean of 2.50. However, they disagreed on items 5, 7 and 9 which are less than the criterion mean of 2.50. Their aggregate mean scores of 2.82 and 2.83 respectively, indicate that they agreed that there are many challenges facing the implementation of inclusive education policy for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in junior secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria. These include: public school buildings not being upgraded to user-friendly level for students with disability; insufficient funds to restructure the physical facilities, procure suitable

instructional materials, train teachers, etc.; lack of teachers' preparedness on inclusive practices; low public awareness on inclusive education; poorly equipped classrooms; overcrowded classrooms and negative attitudes of teachers to practise inclusive classrooms.

Research Question Three: In what ways can inclusive education policy be implemented for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in junior secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of the Opinions of Male and Female Principals on Ways Inclusive Education Policy can be Implemented for the Attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State, Nigeria

S/N	Ways Inclusive Education Policy can be Implemented Include:	Male Principals = 89		Female Principals = 72			Decision
		$\overline{X}_1$	SD$_1$	$\overline{X}_2$	SD$_2$	$\overline{X}_1\overline{X}_2$	
11.	Recruitment of teachers with special education skills who can assist the available general teachers.	3.28	0.71	3.24	0.80	3.26	Agreed
12.	Ensuring that every student is enrolled no matter his/her disability.	3.11	0.73	3.18	0.81	3.15	Agreed
13.	Sensitization of parents on inclusive education.	3.09	0.74	3.01	0.83	3.05	Agreed
14.	Restructuring of school buildings with ramps so as to overcome physical barriers.	3.23	0.72	3.19	0.81	3.21	Agreed
15.	Continuous training of teachers on inclusive education pedagogical skills, assessment of special needs students, handling of mixed-ability groups, etc.	3.32	0.71	3.29	0.80	3.31	Agreed
16.	Provision of adequate funding that will promote inclusion in the education system.	3.35	0.71	3.32	0.79	3.34	Agreed
17.	Promoting adaptive curriculum that considers the inclusive process where learners are expected to learn according to their abilities.	3.13	0.73	3.09	0.82	3.11	Agreed
18.	Earmarking of feasible extra time for assessing students with learning difficulties.	3.01	0.75	3.03	0.83	3.02	Agreed
19.	Provision of adequate learning facilities, equipment, instructional materials, etc.	3.16	0.73	3.10	0.82	3.13	Agreed
20.	Regular monitoring of infrastructural facilities in order to meet the needs of learners with physical disabilities.	3.21	0.72	3.17	0.81	3.19	Agreed
	Aggregate Mean and SD	**3.19**	**0.73**	**3.16**	**0.81**	**3.81**	

Table 3 displays the mean responses of male and female principals on the ways inclusive education policy can be implemented for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in junior secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria. Both male and female principals agreed on all the items with mean scores greater than the criterion mean of 2.50. Their aggregate mean scores of 3.19 and 3.16 respectively, reveal that they agreed on the items as ways inclusive education policy can be implemented for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in junior secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria. These include: recruitment of teachers with special education skills who can assist the available general teachers; ensuring that every student is enrolled no matter his/her disability; sensitization of parents on inclusive education; restructuring of school buildings with ramps so as to overcome physical barriers; continuous training of teachers on inclusive education pedagogical skills, assessment of special needs students, handling of mixed-ability groups, etc; provision of adequate funding that will promote inclusion in the education system; promoting adaptive curriculum that considers the inclusive process; earmarking of feasible extra time for assessing students with learning difficulties; provision of adequate learning facilities, equipment, instructional materials, etc and regular monitoring of infrastructural facilities in order to meet the needs of learners with physical disabilities.

Table 4: z-test on the Difference between the Mean Ratings of Male and Female Principals on the Challenges Facing the Implementation of Inclusive Education Policy for the Attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State, Nigeria

Status	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	Df	z-cal	Critical Value	Remarks	Decision
Male Principals	89	2.82	0.77					
				159	-0.08	±1.96		
							Not Significant	Failed to Reject
Female Principals	72	2.83	0.85					

P< 0.05

Table 4 reveals the z-test analysis on the difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals on the challenges facing the implementation of inclusive education policy for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in junior secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria. The result shows that z-calculated value of -0.08 is less than the critical value of ±1.96; therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted at 0.05 alpha level. Thus, there is no significant difference on the mean ratings of male and female principals on the challenges facing the implementation of inclusive education policy for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in junior secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Table 5: **z-test on the Difference between the Mean Ratings of Male and Female Principals on Ways Inclusive Education Policy can be Implemented for the Attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State, Nigeria**

Status	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	Df	z-cal	Critical Value	Remarks	Decision
Male Principals	89	3.19	0.73					
				159	0.24	±1.96	Not Significant	Failed to Reject
Female Principals	72	3.16	0.81					

P< 0.05

Table 5 reveals the z-test analysis on the difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals on ways inclusive education policy can be implemented for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in junior secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria. The result shows that z-calculated value of 0.24 is less than the critical value of ±1.96; therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted at 0.05 alpha level. Thus, there is no significant difference on the mean ratings of male and female principals on ways inclusive education policy can be implemented for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in junior secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

One of the major findings of this study is that the available educational resources for the implementation of inclusive education policy for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in junior secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria are grossly inadequate. It was also observed that most of the school infrastructures have not been upgraded to accommodate students' diversities and needs. The implication of this finding is that Rivers State is yet to practise inclusion in the junior secondary schools. The finding agrees with Adetoro (2014), who observed that physical facilities for the handicapped are not available or insufficiently adequate, and that the mainstream classrooms are overcrowded to the tune of 1:80 teacher-pupil ratio as against the 1:10 for inclusive classes recommended in the National Policy on Education. It is also in line with Igbokwe et al. (2014): Amakievi (2013), who discovered in their various studies that Nigerian public schools are not accessible to the physically challenged children. The finding is also in line with Ajuwon (2012), who found out that Nigerian public secondary schools lack trained special educational personnel and specialized instructional materials. The finding also corroborated with Kusimo and Chidozie (2019), who discovered inadequate school resources and facilities, insufficient funds to restructure the schools and lack of teacher preparedness on inclusive practices in Nigerian public schools as barriers to effective implementation of inclusive education. Thus for inclusive education to be effectively implemented in public junior secondary schools, all aspects of educational resources: human, financial and material must be adequately available.

Another finding of this study revealed that there are many challenges facing the implementation of inclusive education policy for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in junior secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria. These include: public school buildings not being upgraded to user-friendly level for students with disability; insufficient funds to restructure the physical facilities; lack of teachers' preparedness on inclusive practices; low public awareness on inclusive education; poorly equipped classrooms; overcrowded classrooms and negative attitudes of teachers to practise inclusive classrooms. This finding is in agreement with Chataika et al. (2012); Abimanyi and Mannan (2014); Osero (2015), who revealed in their different studies that inaccessible school environments, lack of supporting infrastructural facilities, negative attitudes of teachers, discriminatory admission procedures, teachers' lack knowledge of the types of learners, shortage of resources, poor funding and inadequate teacher training in inclusive practices hinder the effective implementation of inclusive education in Africa. It is also in consonance with Ireri et al. (2020), who observed that the dominant issues hindering teachers in Kenya to teach inclusively is lack of possessing the skills to implement inclusive practices. The finding also agrees with Andai and Mwatela (2017), who conducted a study and found out that there is very low public awareness on issues of inclusive education. Hence, this implies that principals encounter myriads of challenges in the bid to implement inclusive education.

It was also discovered that ways inclusive education policy can be implemented for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in junior secondary schools in Rivers State include: recruitment of teachers with special education skills who can assist the available general teachers; ensuring that every student is enrolled no matter his/her disability; sensitization of parents on inclusive education; restructuring of school buildings with ramps so as to overcome physical barriers; continuous training of teachers on inclusive education pedagogical skills, assessment of special needs students, handling of mixed-ability groups, etc; provision of adequate funding that will promote inclusion in the education system; promoting adaptive curriculum that considers the inclusive process; earmarking of feasible extra time for assessing students with learning difficulties; provision of adequate learning facilities, equipment, instructional materials, etc and regular monitoring of infrastructural facilities in order to meet the needs of learners with physical disabilities. This finding is in consonance with Ireri et al. (2020) who carried out various studies, and recommended the recruitment of teachers with special education skills who can assist the general teachers; regular monitoring and evaluation of school resources and facilities to meet the needs of learners with physical disabilities; sensitization of key stakeholders on inclusive education policy and fitting of new school buildings with ramps as a strategy to overcoming physical barriers that hinder the successful implementation of inclusive education. It also agrees with Ajuwon (2012); Hay et al. (2001, as cited in Thwala, 2015); Fajarwati (2017) , who suggested in their studies that successful implementation of the inclusion programme depends on the high quality of professional preparation of teachers to equip them for and update their knowledge in handling mixed-ability groups in the classrooms. Hence, this implies that implementation of inclusive education in Nigerian public secondary schools requires a systematic planning in managing the curriculum, the teaching staff and the infrastructural facilities in realization of educational service delivery that can accommodate the needs of diverse learners.

CONCLUSION

From the findings of this study, it can be concluded that Rivers State is yet to practise true inclusion in the junior secondary education system. Dearth and inadequacy of educational resources that can facilitate inclusive practices show that Rivers State is not on track to attaining the SDG 4, which centres on education for all (EFA). Hence, this poses a great challenge to attaining Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on or before 2030 since they are interrelated and interdependent.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:
1. Rivers State Government should double efforts in ensuring that true inclusion is practised in the junior secondary education system by ensuring that there are adequate human, material and financial resources that will enable the principals to effectively implement inclusive education.
2. Principals should create awareness on inclusive education among teachers, students, parents and community so as to disabuse them from the myths that physically challenged children must be separated from their peers, and learn in a special school.
3. Ministry of Education should constantly organise training and retraining of teachers on inclusive education pedagogical skills and handling of diversified learners in the same classroom.

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