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Thank you.

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INCLUSIVE LITERARY PEDAGOGY IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION: ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF DIVERSE STUDENT POPULATIONS

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Abstract: This study examines inclusive literary pedagogy in Nigerian Colleges of Education ducation, focusing on how literature teaching addresses the needs of diverse student populations. As classrooms grow more heterogeneous in language, culture, ability, and socioeconomic background, literature educators face the challenge of ensuring equitable access and engagement. Using a mixed-method approach with surveys and interviews, the research finds that while awareness of inclusive practices exists, implementation is hindered by rigid curricula, large classes, and limited training. It advocates for differentiated instruction, culturally responsive texts, and student-centered methods, arguing that inclusive pedagogy fosters academic success, empathy, and social cohesion. Recommendations include curriculum reform, policy support, and professional development to prepare future teachers for inclusive cassrooms.
Keywords: inclusive pedagogy, literature education, learner diversity

Introduction

Colleges of Education, as training grounds for future teachers, reflect Nigeria's rich cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic diversity. Literature teaching in these contexts carries unique responsibilities: beyond transmitting knowledge, it must engage identities, histories and social realities. Inclusive pedagogy, defined as teaching that accommodates varied learner needs and promotes full participation (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011), requires selecting diverse texts, adopting varied strategies and fostering environments where all students engage critically with literature.

However, research reveals a gap between inclusive ideals and classroom realities (Kudrnáčová, 2021; Okpala & Okoro, 2019). Teacher-centered methods, Eurocentric canons and disregard for linguistic diversity often alienate students, undermining the transformative potential of literature. Barriers identified include curriculum rigidity (Achebe & Onwuegbuzie, 2017), inadequate training (Mills & Ballantyne, 2017) and linguistic hierarchies privileging standard English (Igwebuike & Okwudishu, 2020). Therefore, this study investigates current practices, challenges and strategies to strengthen inclusivity in literature pedagogy.

Statement of the Problem

Despite policy commitments to inclusion, literature teaching in many colleges of education remains exclusionary. Uniform methods, Eurocentric texts and inaccessible language marginalize students from non-dominant backgrounds (Achebe & Onwuegbuzie, 2017). Limited teacher preparation, scarce resources and low awareness of inclusive strategies enhances the gap between policy and practice (Kudrnáčová, 2021; Mills & Ballantyne, 2017). Without deliberate reform, literature classrooms risk perpetuating inequities they should challenge (Gay, 2018).

Research Objectives

The following are the objectives of the research study**:**

1. examine current pedagogical approaches in literature teaching and their responsiveness to diversity.
2. identify challenges to implementing inclusive pedagogy.
3. explore strategies and resources for enhancing inclusivity.

Research Questions

1. What methods are used in teaching literature and how inclusive are they?
2. What challenges hinder inclusive practice?
3. What strategies and resources can promote inclusion?

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on inclusive education theory, which emphasizes full participation for all learners (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011); multicultural education theory, which integrates diverse cultural perspectives (Banks & Banks, 2019) and critical pedagogy, which uses education to question inequality (Giroux, 2020). Together, these frameworks inform analysis of teaching strategies, curriculum content and student engagement.

Conceptualizing Inclusive Literary Pedagogy

Inclusive literary pedagogy ensures that all students see themselves in texts and engage meaningfully in discussion (Booth, 2020). It extends beyond diversifying reading lists to rethinking instruction through culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2018), integrating marginalized voices and adopting participatory strategies such as group discussions, project-based learning and reflective writing (Grobman & Rosenberg, 2015). Digital tools also expand access to diverse texts (Modern Language Association, 2021). In Nigeria's multilingual context, inclusion may mean incorporating oral traditions, indigenous-language texts and contemporary African authors alongside global perspectives (Okonkwo & Ibrahim, 2021). Such approaches bridge cultural gaps, validate identities and foster critical thinking.

Diversity in the Nigerian College Classroom

With over 250 ethnic groups and multiple languages (Okebukola, 2015), Nigerian Colleges of Education bring together students with distinct ways of interpreting texts. However, reliance on Western canons can alienate those whose experiences are not in tandem with the curriculum. Therefore, integrating indigenous literature, folktales and multilingual resources transforms diversity from a barrier into a learning asset (Iwuchukwu & Olanrewaju, 2020).

Inclusive Strategies in Literature Instruction

Some effective approaches to inclusive include differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 2017), dialogic pedagogy that values student voice (Asagwara & Omolayo, 2020; Freire, 2018) and culturally responsive curriculum design (Akinmade & Babalola, 2021). Also, selecting texts by Nigerian and postcolonial authors such as Achebe, Soyinka, Adichie and Cole, alongside global voices, promotes belonging and engagement.

Challenges to Inclusive Pedagogy

Implementation of inclusive literature pedagogy is hampered by large class sizes, inadequate materials and lack of teacher training (Edewor & Oghenekaro, 2019). Curricular prescriptions and exam requirements still favour Eurocentric texts. Also included in these challenges are institutional inertia and teacher bias which further limit inclusivity (Okonkwo & Ibrahim, 2021).

Research Gaps and the Need for Contextual Inquiry

Although there is substantial global scholarship on inclusive pedagogy, few empirical studies focus specifically on inclusive literary instruction within Nigerian Colleges of Education. Much of the literature tends to generalize pedagogical challenges or focus on inclusive practices in primary and secondary schools (Uzo and Obi 77). Moreover, there is a dearth of qualitative data reflecting teachers' and student-teachers' lived experiences with diverse learners in literature classrooms.

This study, therefore, addresses this gap by exploring the pedagogical realities, strategies and constraints literature teachers face when engaging diverse learners. It builds on the theoretical and empirical foundations outlined above to generate data-informed recommendations that align with the specific socio-cultural realities of Nigerian teacher education.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative elements to examine inclusive literary pedagogy in colleges of education in Kwara State. The qualitative aspect provides insight into pedagogical practices, challenges and perceptions, while the quantitative element allows for generalizations based on survey data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Population and Sample

The target population includes literature lecturers and student-teachers. Ten lecturers (five male, five female) were selected purposively based on experience and 100 student-teachers from NCE II and III were selected through stratified random sampling to ensure cultural, linguistic and socio-economic diversity.

Instruments and Data Collection

Data were collected through (1) semi-structured interviews with lecturers, (2) classroom observations using an adapted inclusive pedagogy rubric (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011) and (3) questionnaires for pre-service teachers containing open- and closed-ended items. Instruments were pre-tested for reliability.

Results

Qualitative data from interviews and observations underwent thematic analysis, while questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive statistics via SPSS. Triangulation ensured credibility. Ethical approval was obtained, informed consent was secured and confidentiality was maintained.

Demographics

Participants included 20 teachers (12 male, 8 female) with teaching experience ranging from under five years to over sixteen and 40 student-teachers (18 male, 22 female). All were drawn from colleges of education in Kwara State.

Quantitative Findings: Teachers

Sixty-five percent reported consciously applying inclusive strategies, most frequently group discussions (80%), use of local texts and oral forms (50%), visual/auditory aids (35%) and code-switching (30%). Challenges included overcrowded classrooms (75%), lack of training (70%), limited literary resources (65%) and curriculum rigidity (50%).

Quantitative Findings: Student-Teachers

Sixty-five percent felt included in literature classes. Effective methods included storytelling and dramatization (75%), group work (70%), multilingual examples (45%) and ICT-supported learning (35%). Challenges cited were language difficulty (50%), unrelatable content (42.5%) and fear of participation (35%).

Qualitative Themes

1. Growing but Inconsistent Awareness of Inclusive Practices – Teachers often relied on intuitive rather than structured approaches: "I try to relate the texts to their lives, but I do not know if I am doing it inclusively or not."

2. Curriculum Constraints and Resource Shortages – Limited flexibility and scarcity of local or multilingual materials hinder inclusivity: "The curriculum limits us to certain texts that students struggle to relate with."

3. Learners' Perspectives on Inclusion – Students valued contextualization: "When the teacher uses Yoruba proverbs to explain, it helps a lot."

4. Need for Training and Institutional Support – Teachers and students called for targeted professional development: "We need more training specific to literature."

Interpretation of Findings

The study reveals partial but growing implementation of inclusive pedagogy. Group discussions, storytelling and code-switching enhance engagement, aligning with student-teachers' reports of increased inclusion. The parallel 65% rates of teacher-reported inclusive practice and student-perceived inclusion suggest a positive relationship between the two. However, persistent barriers; language difficulty, curriculum rigidity and limited resources, mirror earlier findings (Booth, 2011; Iwuchukwu & Olanrewaju, 2020). Addressing these challenges requires targeted training, curricular flexibility and improved access to relevant literary materials.

Discussion of Findings

Inclusive Practices in Literature Classrooms

From the data gathered and analysed, findings show that 65% of teachers report using inclusive strategies, though often applied intuitively rather than systematically. This reflects Florian and Black-Hawkins' (2011) view that teachers may aim for inclusion without a structured approach. The lack of targeted training aligns with Tomlinson's (2017) call for professional development in differentiated instruction. While some teachers use group work, storytelling and indigenous literary elements, their application is sporadic, echoing Ladson-Billings' argument that culturally responsive pedagogy must be fully integrated rather than added superficially.

Barriers to Implementation

Overcrowded classrooms, limited inclusive materials and rigid curricula emerged as the most pressing challenges. These mirror Iwuchukwu and

Olanrewaju's (2020) observation that Nigerian institutions often prioritize content coverage over learner diversity. The focus on canonical Western texts alienates some students, especially those from rural or non-English-speaking backgrounds. Notably, 70% of teachers have received no formal training in inclusive practices, undermining their ability to meet varied literacy levels, language proficiencies and cultural experiences. Booth and Ainscow (2011) stress that inclusion requires not just access but meaningful participation, something difficult to achieve without pedagogical competence.

Learners' Perceptions

Sixty-five percent of student-teachers reported feeling included in literature classes, suggesting partial success of current strategies. Storytelling, dramatization and code-switching were especially effective, supporting Ade-Ojo's finding that connecting instruction to students' lived realities improves engagement. However, 35% still felt excluded due to language barriers and unfamiliar content, underscoring the need to revise curricula to better reflect Nigerian cultural and linguistic diversity (Obi, 2019).

Theoretical Implications

Constructivist theory emphasizes that learners build knowledge through meaningful, contextual experiences yet many classrooms still rely on teacher-centered approaches. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development underscores the value of scaffolding instruction to meet learners' needs; an aim that inclusive pedagogy fulfills when applied deliberately. Florian and Spratt (2013) argue that difference should be viewed as an asset, yet many teachers in this study saw diversity as a challenge, shaping strategies that limit participation and confidence.

Toward a More Inclusive Literary Classroom

Improving inclusivity requires equipping teachers with evidence-based strategies, such as integrating local literature, multimodal texts, multilingual instruction and learner-centered techniques. In line with Obi and Akande's (2020) recommendations, curricula should incorporate courses on inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogy, preparing student-teachers to address diverse learning contexts.

Conclusion

The study reveals that while inclusive strategies exist, they lack consistent and deliberate application. Overcrowding, rigid curricula, limited resources and insufficient training hinder progress. Strategies like group discussion, storytelling and code-switching show promise but are inconsistently implemented. The findings affirm that inclusive pedagogy, rooted in constructivism and a commitment to diversity, is essential for producing culturally aware, socially responsible teachers.

Recommendations

In view of the findings, the following recommendations are given:

1. Integration of inclusive pedagogy into teacher training – Making courses on inclusive, differentiated and culturally responsive teaching compulsory.

2. Provide Ongoing Professional Development – Organize workshops and seminars to strengthen practical application of inclusive strategies.

3. Diversify Literary Texts – Include indigenous, multicultural, and contemporary works to reflect student experiences.

4. Promote Learner-Centered Instruction – Use peer teaching, dramatization, and multilingual materials to enhance engagement.

5. Strengthen Policy and Institutional Support – Regulate class sizes, fund inclusive resources, and evaluate teachers' use of inclusive practices.

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