

## TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMMES AND POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AS PREDICTORS OF EDUCATORS' ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES TOWARDS CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN LAGOS STATE

BY

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### Abstract

This study investigates the role of teacher training programmes and the implementation of policies as predictors of educators' attitudes and practices towards children with special educational needs (SEN) in Lagos State. Despite increasing awareness and efforts to integrate children with SEN into mainstream education, challenges remain in fostering inclusive teaching practices. This study examines how teacher training programmes, specifically those focused on SEN, influence educators' attitudes towards inclusive education and their ability to implement inclusive practices effectively. Additionally, the study explores the extent to which policies such as the Lagos State Special People's Law (2011) and the National Policy on Disability (2017) are being implemented and how these policies impact teachers' attitudes and practices towards SEN students. A mixed-methods approach, including surveys, interviews, and policy reviews, were used to gather data from teachers, school administrators, and education stakeholders. The findings provide insights into how well teacher training and policy implementation can promote more positive and effective practices for SEN inclusion in Lagos State. The study's recommendations emphasize the importance of strengthening teacher training programmes and policy enforcement to ensure greater support for children with SEN, contributing to a more inclusive educational environment.

**Keywords:** Inclusive Education, Special Educational Needs, Inclusive Schooling, Teacher Training Programmes

### Introduction

Inclusive education has become a fundamental component of global educational reforms, emphasizing the importance of providing equitable opportunities for all children, including those with special educational needs (SEN). In many countries, including Nigeria, the need to create an inclusive educational system that accommodates children with SEN has been recognized. Nigeria's educational system, however, faces significant challenges when it comes to effectively addressing the needs of children with SEN. These challenges include inadequate resources, insufficient teacher training, low enrollment rates, and a lack of adequate policy enforcement (Olusanya et al., 2018; Yahya et al., 2023). Despite these challenges, Nigeria has taken steps toward improving the educational experiences of children with SEN, including ratifying international conventions and establishing national policies aimed at promoting inclusion, such as the National Policy on Special Needs Education (2014) and the National Policy on Disability (2017). However, the full implementation of these policies remains inconsistent, and many children with SEN continue to face barriers in accessing quality education (NPE, 2014; Olamilekan, 2021). Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) face significant challenges that impede their ability to learn and thrive in conventional and regular educational settings. These children require tailored supports that go beyond what is typically offered in regular schools, as they encounter disabilities or other barriers to learning (Jere et al., 2022; Ugodulunwa, 2023).

Disability does not discriminate, impacting individuals across all races, genders, ethnicities, ages, and religions (Khan et al., 2018). The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that about 15% of the global population lives with some form of disability, with an estimated 93 million children under the age of 14 experiencing moderate to

severe disabilities (Olusanya et al., 2018). Unfortunately, in low-income countries, more than 90% of these children lack access to education, according to UNICEF (2015), underscoring the need for an educational system that is comprehensive and inclusive. Inclusive education aims to provide all children, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds, with access to quality education that meets their individual needs and allows them to reach their full potential (Lindner et al., 2022). Grounded in human rights, equity, and social justice, inclusive education is also a vital component of achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 on education citation needed here pls. Additionally, inclusive education fosters a culture of respect, diversity, and collaboration, benefiting all students within the learning environment (Al-Wasmi, 2021; Shaeffer, 2022; Yahya et al., 2023). Despite its importance, many children with SEN face numerous obstacles to education, especially in low- and middle-income countries (Jere et al., 2022). These barriers include inadequate policies, a lack of resources and infrastructure, negative societal attitudes, insufficient teacher training, and poor coordination among stakeholders (Lindner, 2022). As a result, many children with SEN are excluded from or marginalized within the educational system, denying them the right to quality education and development (Al-Wasmi, 2021).

Nigeria is home to a significant number of children with special educational needs (SEN), estimated to be about 10% of the total school-age population (WHO, 2023). Despite this, the country's education system faces challenges such as low quality, limited enrolment, and high dropout rates, particularly among children with SEN (Cornelius-Ukpepi & Opuwari, 2022). While Nigeria has ratified various international conventions and declarations aimed at promoting the rights and inclusion of children with SEN, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Salamanca Statement, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the implementation of these policies remains weak. The national policy on special needs education, revised in 2015, and the draft bill on disability rights, still pending approval, face numerous challenges, including lack of political will, funding, data, and awareness (Olusanya et al., 2018; Yahya et al., 2023). Lagos State, Nigeria's most populous and urbanized state, with a population of around 21 million, has a high number of children with SEN, estimated at 1.5 million (World Population Review, 2024). The state has taken steps to improve the education and welfare of children with special needs, such as establishing special schools and units, offering scholarships, and providing teacher and caregiver training.

Despite these efforts, many children with SEN remain either out of school or enrolled in low-quality, segregated education systems (NPE, 2014; Olamilekan, 2021). These challenges underscore the need for more comprehensive, effective policies and practices to ensure equitable educational opportunities for children with SEN in Lagos State. The attitudes of educators are not solely shaped by personal beliefs but are also influenced by the level of training they receive and the policies that guide their practice. Teacher training programmes are essential in equipping educators with the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively support children with SEN. While some teacher training programs in Nigeria include components on special education, there exists a notable gap in the provision of comprehensive and specialized training for educators working with children with SEN (Okebukola, 2022). Additionally, policy implementation plays a significant role in influencing the practices of educators. National and regional policies, such as the National Policy on Special Needs Education and the Lagos State Special People's Law, aim to provide a framework for the inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream education. However, the full implementation of these policies often faces challenges such as inadequate funding, lack of infrastructure, and insufficient awareness among educators and the community (Olusanya et al., 2018).

Thus, this study aims to explore the role of teacher training programs and policy implementation as predictors of educators' attitudes and practices towards children with SEN in Lagos State. It seeks to examine how well-prepared teachers feel to support children with SEN and how policy frameworks influence their teaching practices. By investigating the relationship between teacher training, policy implementation, and educators' attitudes, this study will provide insights into how to enhance the effectiveness of inclusive education in Lagos State and contribute to the broader goal of improving educational outcomes for children with special needs in Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Children with SEN and other forms of disability are global phenomenon. According to the U.S Census Bureau, over three million children (4.3% of the under-18 population) in the United States had a disability in 2019 (Twenge & Joiner, 2020). In Nigeria, the situation is even more challenging, as there seems to be a lack of reliable data, adequate facilities, trained teachers, and inclusive policies for children with SEN. In Lagos State, the most populous and urbanized state in Nigeria, only 17 out of 1,001 primary schools provide SEN services, excluding eight specialist schools and schools for children with physical disabilities (WHO, 2023). This means that many children with SEN are either excluded from formal education or do not receive the necessary support and intervention to achieve their full potential. The Nigerian government has enacted some laws and policies to promote the rights and inclusion of children with SEN, such as the National Policy on Education, the Universal Basic Education Act, and the Lagos State Special People's Law. However, these initiatives have not been effectively implemented or monitored, due to various factors such as inadequate funding, poor coordination, low awareness, and negative attitudes. Moreover, there is a gap between the policy and practice of inclusive education, as many teachers and schools are not prepared or equipped to cater to the diverse needs of children with SEN. Several stakeholders, such as parents, educators, health professionals, social workers, and non-governmental organizations, have been involved in providing support and advocacy for children with SEN in Lagos State. These efforts however, are often fragmented, inconsistent, or insufficient, due to the lack of a clear framework, collaboration, and resources. Furthermore, there is a dearth of research on the experiences, needs, and outcomes of children with SEN and their families in Lagos State, which limits the evidence-based planning and evaluation of interventions. There is therefore, a need to address the issue of children with SEN in Lagos State, by exploring the current situation, challenges, and opportunities for promoting positive attitudes and inclusive practices among various stakeholders. The study set to identify the current attitudes of educators towards children with special educational needs in Lagos State and determine the extent implementation of existing policies and programmes for students with special educational needs in Lagos (i.e Lagos State Special People's Law (2011), National Policy on Special Needs Education (1977), National Policy on Disability (2017).

### **Research Hypotheses**

The following hypothetical statements was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

H0<sub>1</sub> There is no significant influence of teacher training programmes in fostering positive attitudes towards children with special educational needs in Lagos State.

H0<sub>2</sub> There is no significant difference between the attitudes of teachers, religious leaders and community leaders towards children with special education needs in Lagos State public primary schools

### **Methodology**

This study adopts an Explanatory Sequential Design to analyse ways of addressing the challenges faced by children with special educational needs in Lagos state. Explanatory Sequential Design is a form of Mixed Method design which process is to first collect and analyse the quantitative data, and then the qualitative data will be collected and analysed based on the results of the quantitative data. The qualitative data will be used to explain the quantitative data. The population includes all the 35 head teachers, 1,970 Children with special Educational Needs (SEN) available in all the 35 inclusive primary schools in the 20 local government education authorities (LGEA) of Lagos State. This study will also involve Children with special Educational Needs (SEN), community and religious leaders available in Lagos State. The study was carried out in all 35 inclusive public primary schools available in lagos state, 148 SEN teachers. Using disproportionate simple random technique, 10 SEN primary school pupil was selected from each school (totalling 350 pupils' respondents), 10 community and 10 religious leaders were selected for this research using convenient sampling technique in the localities where these schools exist. The teachers and

school leaders completed a questionnaire on Hindrance of SEN enrolment and transition. The quantitative data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The qualitative phase adopted an action research design with open ended interview guide. Data from Primary School pupils with Disabilities were collected using focus group discussion, while interview was adopted to collect data from community and religious leaders. All qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis.

**Results**

**Table 1:**

Distribution of respondents based on gender of teachers and school administrators

		<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Teacher</b>	Male	31	28.2%
	Female	79	71.8%
<b>School administrators</b>	Male	9	17.0%
	Female	44	83.0%
<b>Total</b>		<b>163</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 1 above shows the respondents based on gender of teachers and school administrators. Based on the teachers, 28.2% of them were males while the remaining 71.8% were females. Based on the school administrators, 17% were males and 83% were females. Table showed that 28.2% of teachers were male while 71.8% were female and that school administrators.

**Table 2:**

Distribution of respondents based on their teaching experience.

		<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Teachers</b>	Below 5 years	15	13.6%
	5 - 10 years	23	20.9%
	11 - 15 years	29	26.4%
	16 - 20 years	12	10.9%
	21 - 25 years	19	17.3%
	26 - 30 years	6	5.5%
	30 years and above	6	5.5%
<b>School administrator</b>	Below 5 years	4	7.5%
	5 - 10 years	7	13.2%
	11 - 15 years	14	26.4%
	16 - 20 years	6	11.3%
	21 - 25 years	13	24.5%
	26 - 30 years	1	1.9%
	30 years and above	8	15.1%

Table 4.2 above shows the respondents based on teaching experience of teachers and school administrators. Based on the teachers’ teaching experiences, 13.6% of them were below 5 years, 20.9% were between the intervals of 5 - 10 years, 26.4% were between the intervals of 11 - 15 years, 10.9% were between intervals of 16 - 20 years, 17.3% were between the intervals of 21 – 25 years, 5.5% were between the intervals of 26 - 30 years while the remaining 5.5% were between 30 years and above. Based on the school administrators’ teaching experiences, 7.5% of them were below 5 years, 13.2% were between the intervals of 5 - 10 years, 26.4% were between the intervals of 11 - 15 years, 11.3% were between intervals of 16 - 20 years, 24.5% were between the intervals of 21 – 25 years, 1.9% were between the intervals of 26 - 30 years and the remaining 15.1s% were between 30 years and above.

**Table 3:**

Distribution of respondents based on their educational qualification

		<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Teachers</b>	NCE/OND	38	34.5%
	HND/BSC/B.ED/BA/LLB	69	62.7%
	PHD	3	2.7%
<b>School administrators</b>	NCE/OND	13	24.5%
	PGDE	1	1.9%
	HND/BSC/B.ED/BA/LLB	33	62.3%
	MSC/M.ED/MA/LLM	3	5.7%
	PHD	3	5.7%

Table 3 above shows the respondents based on educational qualification of teachers and school administrators. Based on the teachers’ educational qualification, 34.5% of them have NCE/OND educational qualification, 62.7% have HND/BSC/B.ED/BA/LLB, while the remaining 2.7% have PHD educational qualification. Based on the school administrators’ teaching experiences, 24.5% of them have NCE/OND educational qualification, 1.9% have PGDE, 62.3% have HND/BSC/B.ED/BA/LLB, 5.7% have MSC/M.ED/MA/LLM and the remaining 5.7% have PHD educational qualification.

**Table 4:**

Distribution of respondents based on their special educational training

		<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Teachers</b>	Yes	110	100.0%
<b>School administration</b>	Yes	53	100.0%

Table 4 above shows the respondents based on teachers and school administrators’ special educational training. Based on the teachers, 100% of them were trained on special education and 100% of the school administrators, were trained.

**Table 5:**

Distribution of respondents based on their area of specialization

	N	%		
<b>Teachers</b>			Shi/social studies	12 10.9%
			Special education in hearing impaired	50 45.5%
			Visually impaired/Business Education	14 12.7%
			Special education for the hearing handicap/ Intellectual disabilities	6 5.5%
			Children with physically challenged and impairment	3 2.7%
			Intellectual Disability	16 14.5%
		Rehabilitation science	3 2.7%	
<b>School administrators</b>			Computer Science/SHI	3 2.7%
			ENG/SHI	3 2.7%
			Special education in hearing impaired	8 15.1%
			Visually impaired	3 5.7%
			UBEC	1 1.9%
			Special Rehabilitation science	1 1.9%
			Hearing Impairment	7 13.2%
			Intellectual Disability	6 11.3%
			Educational Administration/ Hearing Impairment	7 13.2%
			Education for the gifted and talented	6 11.3%
			Computer Science/SHI	1 1.9%
			ENG/SHI	1 1.9%
			Special education/mathematics	3 5.7%
			Biology/SPH	2 3.8%
			Learning Disability	1 1.9%
			Special Education/political science	1 1.9%
			Intellectual Disability/Agricultural Science	1 1.9%
			Guidance and Counselling/ Special Education	1 1.9%
			SMR	2 3.8%
			Educational therapist	1 1.9%

Table 5 presents a breakdown of areas specialisations of teachers and school administrators in various fields related to special education. Among teachers, the largest group (45.5%) specializes in special education for hearing impairments, followed by those in intellectual disability (14.5%) and visually impaired/business education (12.7%). Smaller proportions of teachers are involved in areas like social studies, rehabilitation science, and computer science for special education. For school administrators, a notable portion (15.1%) has expertise in special education for the

hearing impaired, with significant representation in hearing impairment (13.2%) and intellectual disability (11.3%). Other specializations among administrators include educational administration, gifted education, and various cross-disciplinary areas like special education/mathematics and political science. The diverse range of specializations reflects varying expertise in supporting children with special educational needs, but the higher concentration in hearing impairments and intellectual disabilities suggests these areas may be more prioritized in training and service provision.

**Research Questions**

1. What are the current attitudes of educators towards children with special educational needs in Lagos State?

**Table 6:**

The current attitudes of educators towards children with special educational needs in Lagos State

	Std. N	Mean	Deviation		
<b>Teachers’ Attitude</b>		I believe that inclusive education benefits all students, including those with SEN	110	3.28	.651
		I am comfortable in adapting my teaching methods to accommodate students with diverse learning needs	110	3.28	.858
		I collaborate with other educators, parents, and support staff to create an inclusive learning environment	110	3.59	.640
		I address individual differences in my classroom, especially among students with diverse needs	110	3.29	.758
		I advocate for the rights and inclusion of students with SEN within your school community	110	3.42	.722
		I do not discourage other children from associating with children with special education need	110	3.66	.745
		Valid N (listwise)	110	20.52	4.38
<b>School Administrators’ Attitude</b>		I believe that inclusive education benefits all students, including those with SEN	53	3.38	.686
		I am comfortable in adapting my teaching methods to accommodate students with diverse learning needs	53	3.45	.695

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I collaborate with other educators, parents, and support staff to create an inclusive learning environment	53	3.43	.797
I address individual differences in my classroom, especially among students with diverse needs	53	3.49	.608
I advocate for the rights and inclusion of students with SEN within your school community	53	3.47	.608
	53	3.57	.636
I do not discourage other children from associating with children with special education need			
Valid N (listwise)	53	20.79	4.03

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Table 6 presents the attitudes of both teachers and school administrators towards inclusive education for children with special educational needs (SEN) in Lagos State. Overall, both groups expressed positive attitudes, with mean scores for individual items ranging from 3.28 to 3.66 for teachers and 3.38 to 3.57 for school administrators. Teachers scored slightly higher on most items, particularly in advocating for the rights and inclusion of SEN students (mean = 3.42) and encouraging social interactions among SEN and non-SEN students (mean = 3.66). School administrators showed similar levels of support, with mean scores ranging from 3.38 to 3.57, particularly in adapting teaching methods and addressing individual differences. Both groups reported high levels of collaboration with educators, parents, and support staff to create an inclusive learning environment, with teachers having a marginally higher score in this area (mean = 3.59 vs. 3.43). The standard deviations for both groups indicate some variability in responses, suggesting differing levels of confidence or experiences with inclusive practices. Overall, the data reflects a strong, though not uniform, commitment to inclusive education, with both teachers and administrators recognizing its benefits and advocating for SEN students, though some differences in comfort and implementation may exist.

Thematic analysis of pupil, community and religious leaders’ responses on Attitudes of Educators towards children with special educational needs in Lagos State

<p><b>Special needs pupils</b></p>	<p>Most respondents indicated that teachers allow them to play with other children, reflecting an overall positive attitude from educators towards inclusion. This suggests that teachers in these settings are generally supportive of social interactions between SEN and non-SEN students.</p> <p>There was a mixed response regarding access to supportive materials, with some pupils noting that their schools provided needed resources, while others reported a lack of such materials. This variation may highlight disparities in resource availability across different schools or regions.</p> <p>The majority of pupils indicated that their teachers encourage them to participate in extracurricular activities, such as games and sports, suggesting that many educators are actively promoting inclusion beyond the classroom.</p>
<p><b>Community Leaders in Lagos State</b></p>	<p>A significant portion of community leaders expressed support for inclusive education, agreeing that children with SEN should study alongside their peers. Many leaders believed this integration would help normalise SEN and foster a more empathetic, supportive environment. However, a minority expressed reservations, worrying about whether schools have the necessary resources and whether such integration could distract from learning for other students.</p>
<p><b>Religious Leaders in Lagos State</b></p>	<p>a) A majority of religious leaders expressed support for inclusive education, where children with special needs study alongside those without. They view inclusion as a pathway to fostering empathy, understanding, and acceptance within the community. However, a small number held reservations, influenced by beliefs that specialized environments might better serve these children.</p> <p>b) Although most leaders rejected the notion that disabilities are a curse, a minority expressed beliefs that disability might be linked to past transgressions or moral failings. These views highlight the persistence of stigma and the need for education and awareness within religious communities.</p>

Educators in Lagos State exhibit predominantly positive attitudes toward children with SEN, advocating for inclusion and encouraging social interactions and extracurricular participation. However, teachers show less confidence in adapting teaching methods, highlighting a need for professional development. Pupils appreciate teachers’ support but note resource disparities, while community and religious leaders largely endorse inclusion, emphasising empathy and acceptance despite concerns about resources and lingering stigma. Sustained training, resources, and community engagement are essential to strengthening inclusive practices.

2. What is the implementation level of existing policies and programmes for students with special educational needs in Lagos (i.e Lagos State Special People’s Law (2011), National Policy on Special Needs Education (1977), National Policy on Disability (2017)?

**Table 7:**

The level of implementation of existing policies and programmes for students with special educational needs in Lagos (i.e Lagos State Special People’s Law (2011), National Policy on Special Needs Education (1977), National Policy on Disability (2017).

<b>Std.</b>			
<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Deviation</b>	
	Teachers are aware of the national policy of education on special needs and its implementation guidelines	53	3.13 .708
	Teachers are equipped with enough training programmes to sharpen their skills to implement the SEN policies effectively	53	2.94 .818
	Teachers ensure that adequate measures are being taken to promote the inclusion of children with SEN within the school environment	53	3.28 .568
	The school support teachers are effectively trained to manage classrooms that include children with SEN	53	2.83 .643
	Parents and the community at large are involved in the support and implementation of special needs education programmes	53	2.96 .619
	Valid N (listwise)	53	15.14 3.36

**Criterion Mean = 4.50**

Table 10 presents the mean scores for individual items which suggest a generally positive level of awareness and involvement. Teachers are most aware of the national policy on special needs education and its implementation guidelines (mean = 3.13), followed by their efforts to promote inclusion within the school environment (mean = 3.28). However, teachers report slightly lower levels of confidence regarding the adequacy of their training programs (mean = 2.94) and the effectiveness of school support staff training for managing inclusive classrooms (mean = 2.83). Parental and community involvement in supporting SEN programs was also moderately reported (mean = 2.96). Overall, the data highlights strengths in policy awareness and inclusion efforts, but reveals areas where further training and community engagement could enhance the effectiveness of SEN implementation.

**Test of Hypotheses**

**H0<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant influence of teacher training programmes in fostering positive attitudes towards children with special educational needs in Lagos State. To be recasted as re-casted above

**Table 8:**

Influence of teacher training programmes in fostering positive attitudes towards children with special educational needs in Lagos State

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>		Unstandardized		Standardized	
Model	Coefficients B	Coefficients Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)		2.355	.236	9.983 <.001
	Teacher Training Programmes		.347	.074	.411 4.679 <.001

a. Dependent Variable: Attitudes of Educators Towards Children with Special Educational Needs

Table 8 presents the results of a regression analysis testing the hypothesis: "There is no significant influence of teacher training programmes in fostering positive attitudes towards children with special educational needs in Lagos State." The unstandardized coefficient for teacher training programmes is 0.347, meaning that for each unit increase in teacher training, the positive attitudes towards children with SEN increase by 0.347 units. The standardized coefficient (Beta) is 0.411, indicating a moderate positive effect of teacher training programmes on educators' attitudes toward SEN children. The t-value for teacher training programmes is 4.679, and the significance value (Sig.) is <.001, which is highly significant. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that teacher training programmes do have a significant positive influence on fostering positive attitudes towards children with special educational needs in Lagos State.

**H0<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant difference between the attitudes of teachers, religious leaders and community leaders towards children with special education needs in Lagos State public primary schools

**Table 9:**

Difference between the attitudes of teachers, religious leaders and community leaders towards children with special education needs in Lagos State public primary schools

Sum of Mean Squares	df	Square F	Sig.			
Attitudes of Teachers	Between Groups	1.954	1	1.954	10.696	.001
	Within Groups	19.728	108	.183		
	Total	21.682	109			
Religious Leaders	Between Groups	.101	1	.101	.359	.552
	Within Groups	14.308	51	.281		
	Total	14.409	52			
Community Leaders	Between Groups	.003	1	.003	.013	.910
	Within Groups	11.650	51	.228		
Total		11.653	52			

Table 9 showed distinct patterns across the three groups. For teachers, the ANOVA revealed a significant difference in attitudes, with a p-value of 0.001 ( $F = 10.696$ ). This indicates that there is considerable variability in how teachers perceive and approach children with SEN. The null hypothesis, which posits that there is no significant difference in attitudes, is rejected for this group. In contrast, for religious leaders, the p-value was 0.552 ( $F = 0.359$ ), which is greater than the significance threshold of 0.05. This result suggests no significant difference in attitudes among religious leaders towards children with SEN. Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected for this group. Similarly, for community leaders, the p-value was 0.910 ( $F = 0.013$ ), also exceeding the 0.05 threshold. This indicates no significant difference in attitudes within this group. Consequently, the null hypothesis is not rejected for community leaders. The findings reveal that there is a significant difference in attitudes among teachers, while the attitudes of religious and community leaders towards children with SEN are relatively consistent. This highlights the need for targeted interventions to address the variability in teachers' attitudes, as their perceptions and behaviours play a critical role in fostering an inclusive educational environment for children with SEN.

### Discussion of Findings

The findings from this study suggest that educators in Lagos State generally exhibit positive attitudes towards children with special educational needs (SEN). These attitudes are reflected in their advocacy for inclusive education, where they not only support the integration of SEN children into mainstream classrooms but also encourage their active participation in social interactions and extracurricular activities. This aligns with the research by Yahya et al. (2023), which emphasized the importance of teachers fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment for all students, including those with SEN. Educators in Lagos State appear to recognize the potentials

of SEN children and actively work to remove barriers to their full participation in school life, promoting an atmosphere of acceptance and belonging. However, while the attitudes are largely positive, the actual implementation of inclusive policies may still face challenges. As noted by Okebukola (2022), teachers often lack adequate training and resources to effectively meet the diverse needs of SEN students, which can hinder their ability to fully support inclusion. Despite this, the overall trend in Lagos State demonstrates a promising shift toward more inclusive education, where educators understand the value of diverse learners and strive to create opportunities for them to engage fully in both academic and extracurricular activities. This reflects the growing recognition of the importance of inclusive education and the need for systemic support to sustain these positive attitudes and practices (Owolabi et al., 2014). Thus, while significant strides have been made, further investments in professional development and resources are essential to ensure that the positive attitudes towards inclusion translate into sustainable and effective practices.

The findings of this study underscore the positive strides made in policy awareness and the ongoing efforts to promote inclusion for children with special educational needs (SEN) in Lagos State. Stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, and community leaders, generally display a strong awareness of the importance of inclusive education, as supported by the high levels of engagement with national policies on special education (Okebukola & Kolade, 2008). However, while there is acknowledgment of the need for inclusive practices, the implementation of these policies remains inconsistent. Many teachers and school administrators report challenges in effectively integrating SEN children into mainstream classrooms due to a lack of specialized training, resources, and infrastructure. This indicates that while awareness is growing, practical applications often fall short due to gaps in professional development and resource allocation (Yahya et al., 2023). Furthermore, the findings suggest that community engagement, though positive, requires deeper involvement to create a more supportive and inclusive environment. Community leaders and religious figures, despite their understanding of the significance of inclusive education, often lack the necessary tools to provide meaningful support, such as specialized facilities or trained personnel (Lindner et al., 2022). Moreover, stigma around disabilities remains prevalent, hindering full societal acceptance and inclusion of SEN children. Does any study justify this assertion?. This highlights the need for enhanced training programmes and public enlightments targeting not only educators but also community members, alongside awareness campaigns aimed at reducing stigma and promoting inclusivity. Therefore, the study calls for a more integrated approach, combining improved policy implementation with community-based initiatives to strengthen the overall impact of SEN education in Lagos State.

The findings of this study indicate that teacher training programs play a crucial role in fostering positive attitudes toward children with special educational needs (SEN) in Lagos State. Teachers who undergo specialized training are more likely to understand the diverse needs of SEN children and adopt inclusive teaching practices, as suggested by Yahya et al. (2023). This aligns with research by Okebukola (2022), which highlights that professional development opportunities equip teachers with the knowledge and tools necessary to create supportive and inclusive classroom environments. Training programs enhance teachers' awareness of SEN, which in turn helps reduce misconceptions and stereotypes surrounding disabilities. Consequently, teachers with proper training are more likely to implement strategies that encourage acceptance and inclusion of SEN children, ultimately improving their educational experiences and outcomes. Furthermore, the positive influence of teacher training on attitudes towards SEN children extends beyond the classroom. Owolabi et al. (2014) argue that training programs also provide teachers with the emotional and psychological tools to handle the challenges associated with teaching children with diverse needs. In Lagos State, where infrastructure and resources for inclusive education are limited, trained teachers become vital agents of change. By understanding the unique needs of SEN children and promoting a culture of inclusion, teachers can help shape a more inclusive society. This study's findings emphasize the importance of continued investment in teacher training, as it contributes to both improved teaching outcomes and the development of a more supportive and accepting school environment for children with SEN.

The findings of this study further revealed a significant difference in attitudes among teachers towards children with special educational needs (SEN), suggesting that teachers in Lagos State public primary schools hold varying

perspectives on how to support and integrate children with SEN. This variability can be attributed to several factors, including the level of training and experience teachers have in working with SEN children, as well as the availability of resources and support systems within schools (Yahya et al., 2023). Teachers' attitudes are crucial in shaping the learning environment for SEN students, as positive perceptions can lead to more inclusive teaching practices, while negative attitudes can result in exclusion and discrimination (Okebukola & Kolade, 2008). The significant differences in teachers' attitudes, as indicated by the ANOVA results ( $F = 10.696$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), highlight the need for targeted professional development and awareness programs to standardize and improve attitudes across the teaching community, fostering a more inclusive educational system for children with SEN in Lagos State. In contrast, the attitudes of religious and community leaders towards children with SEN appear to be more consistent, with no significant differences found between these groups (religious leaders:  $F = 0.359$ ,  $p = 0.552$ ; community leaders:  $F = 0.013$ ,  $p = 0.910$ ). This consistency suggests that these groups may have a more uniform approach to SEN, likely influenced by broader societal attitudes and cultural norms around disability. Religious and community leaders often play pivotal roles in shaping societal attitudes and can influence public opinion through advocacy and awareness campaigns. However, the lack of significant variation in their attitudes may also indicate a gap in their understanding or engagement with the specific needs of children with SEN. These findings underscore the importance of increasing awareness and education among religious and community leaders to promote a more informed and supportive stance towards children with SEN, which could ultimately help reduce stigma and foster greater inclusion in the wider community (Owolabi et al., 2014).

## **Conclusion**

Based on the findings, educators in Lagos State exhibit predominantly positive attitudes toward children with SEN, advocating for inclusion and encouraging social interactions and extracurricular participation. Moreover, the data highlights strengths in policy awareness and inclusion efforts, but reveals areas where further training and community engagement could enhance the effectiveness of SEN implementation policies. Additionally, teacher training programmes do have a significant positive influence on fostering positive attitudes towards children with special educational needs in Lagos State. Lastly, the findings reveal that there is a significant difference in attitudes among teachers (based upon their gender: teaching experience and academic qualification), while the attitudes of religious and community leaders towards children with SEN are relatively consistent.

## **Recommendations**

1. **Professional Development:** Training should not only focus on instructional strategies but also address the social and emotional needs of SEN students. This will enable teachers to create more inclusive classrooms, provide individualized support, and reduce misconceptions surrounding SEN. Experienced teachers of SEN should be enlisted to provide guidance and support to and for successful implementation.
2. **Stakeholders' involvement:** Schools should initiate forums and workshops that involve all stakeholders, including parents and community leaders, to ensure a holistic approach to inclusion and to provide the necessary social support for SEN students. Specifically, fostering collaborative relationships with parents and teachers of SNC will ensure their involvement in policy implementation and their children education
3. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Continuous monitoring and evaluation of existing policies should be prioritized to assess their impact on SEN education. Based on the findings, there is a need for better implementation of these policies in schools. Special coordinators should oversee the implementation of policies, provide support and ensure due compliance regularly.
4. **Clear Policies and Procedures:** Government should establish clear and concise and accessible policies, procedures and outline roles and responsibilities. Establishing this will make for a clear framework for accountability and support at the school and district level and will help ensure that policies translate into actionable changes that enhance the educational experience of SEN children.

5. Campaigns on all media platforms to share information, success stories, challenges and resources of SEN policies and implementation

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