



INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AS TRANSFORMATIVE MECHANISM FOR THE EFFECTIVE TEACHING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN NIGERIA

Ifeoma Eucharia Nwashili

Crowther Graduate Theological Seminary

Igbein, Abeokuta, Ogun State

Email: ifynwashili3579@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examines inclusive education as a transformative approach to improving the effectiveness of English language teaching in the Nigeria. Despite the critical role of English proficiency in Nigeria's educational and socio-economic development, many learners especially those with diverse needs face challenges that hinder their academic success. This research explores how inclusive education frameworks can create equitable learning environments by accommodating all learners regardless of their abilities or backgrounds. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from teachers, students, and other education stakeholders across selected Nigerian schools. The paper argues that inclusive education promotes collaboration, differentiated instruction, and the use of adaptive resources could significantly enhance learners' engagement and proficiency in English. The study concludes that for English language teaching to be truly effective and transformative, inclusive education must be integrated into policy and practice, supported by teacher training, resource provision, and curriculum adaptation. Recommendations are provided to guide policymakers, educators, and researchers in advancing inclusive education to foster improved English language outcomes in Nigeria.

Keywords: Approach, Effective teaching, Inclusive, Transformative, Mechanism,

Introduction

The Nigerian school system has long recognized the importance of English language proficiency as a critical skill for academic success, social integration, and global communication (Adeyemi, 2018). English serves as the official language and the primary medium of instruction in many Nigerian schools, making its effective teaching a priority for educators and policymakers alike (Okeke, 2020). However, despite numerous reforms, the quality of English language teaching and learning outcomes in Nigeria remain inconsistent, often hindered by challenges such as inadequate teaching resources, large class sizes, and diverse student needs (Eze & Chukwu, 2019). These challenges are exacerbated by the presence of learners with different abilities and learning styles, which calls for more inclusive pedagogical approaches.

Inclusive education, which advocates for the participation of all learners regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, or linguistic differences, has emerged as a transformative mechanism to address these challenges (UNESCO, 2020). By fostering an environment where every student is valued and supported, inclusive education promotes equity and access, thereby enhancing learners' engagement and academic performance (Adebayo, 2021). In the context of English language teaching, inclusion encourages the use of diverse instructional strategies that accommodate learners with special educational needs, language barriers, and varying levels of proficiency (Abubakar & Musa, 2017). This approach not only benefits students with disabilities but also enriches the learning experience for all students, making teaching more dynamic and effective.

Despite its recognized benefits, the implementation of inclusive education in Nigerian schools faces numerous obstacles, including inadequate teacher training, lack of policy enforcement, and insufficient educational materials tailored for inclusive classrooms (Ibrahim & Bello, 2019). Many teachers are not adequately prepared to adapt their instructional methods to meet the needs of diverse learners, particularly in the teaching of English language where linguistic complexities and proficiency

differences are pronounced (Ojo, 2021). Furthermore, systemic issues such as overcrowded classrooms and limited support services constrain the practical application of inclusive education principles, thereby limiting its potential as a transformative tool in the Nigerian educational context (Salami, 2018).

Given the pivotal role of English language in educational attainment and national development, exploring inclusive education as a transformative mechanism offers promising prospects for improving teaching effectiveness and learner outcomes in Nigeria (Nwafor & Udo, 2022). By integrating inclusive practices, educators can create more supportive, learner-centered environments that acknowledge and leverage students' diverse abilities and backgrounds. This study therefore seeks to investigate how inclusive education can enhance the teaching and learning of English language in Nigerian schools, aiming to contribute to the discourse on educational reform and inclusive pedagogy within the country's multilingual and multicultural landscape.

Theoretical Framework

Systemic Functional Linguistics

The basic theory adopted for this study is the Systemic Functional Linguistics evolved by (Halliday in Freire, 1970). This theory accounts for how language is used in social context, by maintaining that everything that is said is conditioned by the social situation in which it is said. Halliday in Freire, (1970) states that language has evolved to satisfy human needs; and the way it is organised and is functional with respect to these needs, it is not arbitrary. A functional grammar is essentially a natural grammar, in the sense that everything in it can be explained, ultimately, by reference to how language is used... a theory of language as a means of getting things done(xiii). This means that the choice of words or other linguistic elements during a conversation is determined by the function they are to perform. It is not enough to know the structure of a language and be able to organise the grammatical elements correctly, but more importantly it is required that there should be knowledge of the appropriate use of language

in particular social contexts and environments. When people communicate, they do so in particular situations and for particular goals to be achieved. In that way, the form or pattern of the language that they use is determined by the prevailing circumstances in which they find themselves. Adopting Halliday's in Freire, (1970) approach to language, Bloor and Bloor add that Since a speaker's or writer's choice of words is constrained by the situation of utterance, and since words and groups of words take on special significance in particular contexts, the grammar must be able to account for the way in which the language is used in social situations. This theory of functional linguistics by Halliday in Freire (1970) forms the underlying model upon which this study is set. The use of language in our area of study is analysed based on the various social circumstances surrounding it. It is further based on the principles of sociolinguistics, which is basically the study of language in relation to society.

Chomsky's Universal Grammar

Chomsky's Universal Grammar (UG) is one of the most influential theories in the field of linguistics, proposing that humans are born with an innate capacity for language acquisition. According to Noam Chomsky, this inborn linguistic ability, or "language faculty," enables individuals to acquire and understand any language, regardless of the specific linguistic environment they are born into. Chomsky (2002) argued that the complex structures of language could not be learned solely through exposure to language, especially given the limited input children receive (a phenomenon known as the "poverty of the stimulus"). Instead, humans possess an inherent set of grammatical principles common to all languages, which he termed Universal Grammar.

Chomsky's Universal Grammar (UG) theory is based on the assumption that all human languages share a common underlying structure. The differences between languages, according to this theory, are surface variations, while the deep structural elements are universal. These universal principles include categories such as nouns, verbs, and other syntactic structures, which are

present in all languages (Chomsky, 2002). Chomsky (2006) introduced the concept of a parameter setting, where children, as they are exposed to a particular language, "set" certain parameters according to the linguistic input they receive. These parameters account for the syntactic and grammatical variations across languages. For instance, one parameter might determine whether a language follows a Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) word order (as in English) or a Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) order (as in Japanese).

Chomsky's UG theory challenges behaviourist views of language learning, such as Skinner's (1957) idea that language acquisition is a result of imitation and reinforcement. Instead, Chomsky (2002) proposed that humans possess an internalized system of rules for generating and understanding language. Children do not simply mimic adult speech but rather construct their own grammars using the principles of UG. This explains how children can produce grammatically correct sentences they have never heard before and why they can grasp abstract grammatical rules even with limited linguistic input (Hornstein, 2017). The implications of UG for second language acquisition (SLA) are also significant. UG suggests that all humans have the capacity to learn any language, as the underlying structures are universal. However, second language learners may find it harder to fully acquire a new language after the critical period, even though the principles of UG remain accessible (Schwartz & Sprouse, 2020).

Concept of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is an educational approach that seeks to ensure all learners, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions, have equal access to quality education within mainstream schools (UNESCO, 2020). It involves the removal of barriers that hinder participation and learning, fostering a supportive environment that respects diversity and promotes the right to education for every child. This model contrasts with segregated or special education systems by emphasizing integration and equity, thereby aiming to accommodate learners with disabilities and other

marginalized groups within regular classrooms (Ainscow, 2016).

The concept of inclusive education is grounded in the belief that diversity enriches the learning experience and that education systems must adapt to meet the varied needs of all students (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). It requires flexible curricula, teaching strategies, and assessment methods to ensure effective learning for everyone. Moreover, inclusive education promotes social cohesion and reduces discrimination by fostering interactions among students from diverse backgrounds (Booth & Ainscow, 2016). By recognizing and valuing differences, inclusive education helps develop learners' potential while preparing them to participate actively in society.

In the Nigerian context, inclusive education is particularly significant due to the country's diverse population and the high incidence of learners with special educational needs who have historically been excluded from mainstream schooling (Okeke, 2019). The Federal Government of Nigeria has adopted policies to promote inclusion, yet implementation challenges remain, including insufficient teacher training, inadequate resources, and societal attitudes (Eze, 2021). Thus, inclusive education in Nigeria is an evolving framework aiming to transform traditional teaching and learning practices toward more equitable educational outcomes.

Transformative Mechanism

A transformative mechanism refers to processes or strategies that bring about significant change in systems, attitudes, or practices by fundamentally altering the way things are understood or done (Mezirow, 1997). In education, transformative mechanisms act as catalysts that challenge existing paradigms and promote new ways of thinking, learning, and teaching. These mechanisms often involve critical reflection, dialogue, and active engagement, encouraging learners and educators to reconsider assumptions and embrace innovation (Cranton, 2006).

Transformative mechanisms are essential for fostering meaningful change, particularly in contexts where traditional methods have failed to

meet learners' diverse needs. They enable educational systems to evolve by integrating inclusive values, learner-centered approaches, and adaptive pedagogies that support all students (Freire, 1970). For instance, adopting inclusive education itself can be viewed as a transformative mechanism, as it requires rethinking curriculum design, classroom management, and assessment to accommodate diversity effectively (Ainscow, 2016).

In Nigeria's school system, transformative mechanisms play a crucial role in addressing entrenched educational challenges, such as inequality, inadequate teacher preparation, and resource constraints (Nwankwo & Agbo, 2020). By promoting inclusive education as a transformative mechanism, the system can move towards more effective English language teaching that respects learners' differences and enhances engagement and learning outcomes. This process is vital for the educational transformation needed to prepare Nigerian students for the demands of a diverse and globalized world.

Effective teaching

Effective teaching is generally understood as the ability of educators to facilitate student learning by employing strategies that promote understanding, retention, and application of knowledge. According to Nwankwo & Agbo, (2020) effective teaching is characterized by the teacher's capacity to influence student achievement positively through clear instructional goals, appropriate feedback, and an engaging learning environment. It involves not only the mastery of subject content but also the pedagogical skills that enable teachers to address diverse learning needs and styles in the classroom. This dynamic process aims to foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and meaningful knowledge construction among learners.

Moreover, effective teaching encompasses the continuous assessment and adaptation of instructional methods to ensure that learning objectives are met efficiently. As described by Stockwell, (2014), effective teachers are reflective practitioners who use assessment data

to tailor their teaching approaches, providing timely interventions and support for students who struggle. This responsiveness to students' needs ensures that the teaching process is inclusive and equitable, promoting academic success for all learners. Furthermore, effective teaching involves creating a supportive classroom climate where students feel motivated and valued, which contributes significantly to their engagement and overall achievement (Stockwell, 2014).

In the context of language education, effective teaching is particularly crucial due to the communicative nature of the subject. According to Stockwell, (2014), effective teaching of languages requires interactive and student-centered methodologies that encourage authentic use of the language in various contexts. Teachers must employ techniques that develop students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills while considering the linguistic and cultural diversity present in the classroom. Therefore, effective teaching in English language education is not merely about content delivery but also about facilitating meaningful communication and cultural competence, which are essential for language acquisition and use.

Principles and Practices of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is grounded in the principle that every learner, regardless of ability, background, or circumstance, has the right to equal access to quality education within mainstream classrooms (UNESCO, 2020). Central to this principle is the rejection of segregation or exclusion based on disability, ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic status. Inclusive education promotes the idea that diversity enriches the learning environment and that schools should adapt to meet the varying needs of all students rather than expecting students to conform to a fixed system (Ainscow, 2020). This approach not only fosters equity but also supports social cohesion and the development of inclusive societies.

One key principle of inclusive education is learner-centeredness, which emphasizes tailoring teaching methods and curriculum to the unique abilities and learning styles of each student

(Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). This principle encourages flexible pedagogical strategies, such as differentiated instruction and Universal Design for Learning (UDL), to ensure that all students can participate meaningfully (Tomlinson, 2014). For example, teachers may use multimodal teaching techniques combining visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning activities to accommodate diverse learners and improve engagement (Tomlinson, 2014). This learner-centered approach requires ongoing assessment and adaptation to address individual progress and challenges.

Another vital principle is the promotion of collaborative partnerships among teachers, parents, specialists, and students themselves (Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2015). Inclusive education thrives in environments where communication and teamwork enable shared responsibility for learners' success. Collaborative practices might include co-teaching models, where general and special educators work together to support diverse learners, or involving parents in individualized education planning to ensure consistency between home and school (Friend & Cook, 2017). Such partnerships enhance the support network around each student, leading to more holistic and effective education outcomes.

In terms of practice, accessibility and accommodation are critical to making inclusive education functional. Schools must remove physical, curricular, and attitudinal barriers that hinder participation by students with disabilities or other needs (Slee, 2011). This involves modifying classroom layouts, providing assistive technologies, and adapting materials to different languages or formats, such as Braille or sign language interpretation (Smith & Tyler, 2011). Additionally, cultivating positive attitudes and reducing stigma through awareness campaigns and teacher training is essential to foster an inclusive culture within schools and communities.

Finally, the practice of continuous professional development for educators underpins successful inclusive education (Booth & Ainscow, 2016). Teachers need specialized training to recognize diverse learning needs,

implement inclusive pedagogies, and manage diverse classrooms effectively. Professional development programs often focus on building skills in differentiated instruction, behavioural management, and culturally responsive teaching. When educators are empowered and confident, they are better positioned to transform classrooms into inclusive spaces where all students can thrive (Loreman, Deppeler, & Harvey, 2010).

Effective teaching strategies for English language

1. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT): Communicative Language Teaching focuses on enabling learners to communicate meaningfully and fluently in real-life situations rather than just memorizing grammar rules or vocabulary. This strategy encourages interaction through pair work, group discussions, role plays, and problem-solving activities that simulate authentic communication contexts ((Stockwell, 2012). By emphasizing the functional use of language, CLT helps students develop their speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills in an integrated and practical way, making English learning more relevant and engaging.

2. Differentiated Instruction: Differentiated instruction involves tailoring teaching methods, materials, and assessment techniques to accommodate the diverse learning styles, abilities, and interests of students (Tomlinson, 2014). In the English language classroom, this might mean providing texts at varying reading levels, using multimedia resources for auditory or visual learners, or offering choices in writing assignments. This strategy helps ensure that all learners can access the content and progress according to their individual needs, which is particularly effective in mixed-ability classrooms.

3. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT): Task-Based Language Teaching centres on using meaningful tasks as the core unit of learning rather than isolated language exercises. Tasks might include planning a trip, writing a letter, or conducting interviews, which require students to use English to complete authentic objectives

(Ellis, 2003). This approach fosters active learning and motivates students by focusing on practical outcomes, thus improving their problem-solving skills and ability to use language communicatively in real-world contexts.

4. Use of Technology and Multimedia: Integrating technology, such as language learning apps, interactive whiteboards, videos, and online platforms, enhances the English learning experience by making lessons more interactive and accessible (Stockwell, 2012). Technology can provide instant feedback, a wide variety of listening and reading materials, and opportunities for practice beyond the classroom. It also allows for personalized learning, where students can progress at their own pace, and supports collaboration through online discussion forums and group projects.

5. Formative Assessment and Feedback: Formative assessment involves ongoing evaluation of students' language progress during the learning process, rather than relying solely on final exams ((Ainscow, 2020). Teachers use quizzes, peer reviews, oral presentations, and journal entries to monitor understanding and provide timely, constructive feedback. This strategy helps learners identify their strengths and areas for improvement, fosters self-reflection, and allows teachers to adjust instruction to better meet students' needs, ultimately enhancing language acquisition.

Inclusive Education as Transformative Mechanism for Effective Teaching of English Language

Inclusive education is widely recognized as a powerful approach that promotes equity, diversity, and participation in educational settings by ensuring all learners, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds, have access to quality education (Ainscow, 2020). In the Nigerian school system, where English language proficiency is critical for academic and socio-economic advancement, inclusive education serves as a transformative mechanism by accommodating diverse learner needs within mainstream classrooms (Eze, 2018). This

approach shifts the traditional focus from merely delivering standardized content to creating flexible, learner-centered environments that enhance engagement and comprehension, thus fostering more effective teaching of English.

The effectiveness of English language teaching in Nigeria is often hindered by heterogeneous classrooms where learners vary significantly in linguistic, cognitive, and socio-cultural backgrounds (Oladejo & Oladejo, 2019). Inclusive education addresses this challenge by implementing differentiated instruction and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, which tailor teaching strategies to meet diverse learning styles and needs ((Oladejo & Oladejo, 2019). For instance, using multimodal resources such as visual aids, audio materials, and collaborative activities in English classes enables learners with different abilities to participate actively and improve their language skills, thereby enhancing overall teaching effectiveness ((Oladejo & Oladejo, 2019).

Moreover, inclusive education fosters positive attitudes among teachers and students, which is essential for effective English language teaching. Teachers trained in inclusive practices are more likely to adopt empathetic and innovative pedagogical methods that promote peer collaboration and reduce stigma against learners with disabilities or linguistic challenges (Okoro & Nwankwo, 2020). Such an environment encourages learners to develop confidence and communication skills in English, which are critical for their academic success. As a result, inclusive education not only transforms teaching methodologies but also the social dynamics within the classroom, creating a supportive atmosphere conducive to learning (Ajuwon, 2017).

Despite its transformative potential, implementing inclusive education in Nigerian schools faces systemic challenges such as inadequate teacher training, limited resources, and large class sizes (Olaitan, 2019). Addressing these barriers requires comprehensive policy reforms and increased investment in teacher education to equip educators with the skills necessary for managing inclusive classrooms effectively (UNESCO, 2020). When these

structural challenges are mitigated, inclusive education can significantly improve English language learning outcomes by fostering an environment where every learner's unique needs are acknowledged and supported.

Inclusive education holds great promise as a transformative mechanism for effective teaching of English in Nigeria's school system. By promoting equity, adapting instructional strategies, and fostering inclusive attitudes, it can address the diverse challenges faced by learners in mastering English (Ainscow, 2020; Oladejo & Oladejo, 2019). However, to fully realize its benefits, there must be concerted efforts to overcome systemic constraints through policy support and capacity building. Ultimately, inclusive education paves the way for a more equitable and effective English language teaching landscape in Nigeria, empowering all learners to achieve their full potential.

Conclusion

Inclusive education holds significant potential as a transformative mechanism for enhancing the effectiveness of English language teaching in Nigeria's school system. By embracing diversity and ensuring that learners of all abilities and backgrounds participate fully in the learning process, inclusive education fosters an environment where every student can develop language skills essential for academic success and social integration. This approach not only addresses the barriers faced by marginalized and special needs students but also enriches the overall classroom experience through collaborative and differentiated teaching strategies. For Nigeria to achieve quality and equitable English language education, educational policies and practices must prioritize inclusive frameworks that support teacher training, resource provision, and curriculum adaptation. Ultimately, inclusive education stands as a vital pathway to improving English language proficiency and, by extension, empowering learners to contribute meaningfully to the nation's socio-economic development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is

recommended that;

- 1 . The Nigerian government should develop and implement policies that mandate and support inclusive education practices across all levels of the school system to ensure equal access to quality English language instruction for all learners.
- 2 . Educational authorities should provide continuous professional development and training programs for English language teachers on inclusive teaching strategies, classroom management, and differentiated instruction to effectively address diverse learners' needs.
- 3 . Schools should be equipped with adequate teaching and learning resources, including assistive technologies and learning materials, to facilitate inclusive English language teaching.
- 4 . Curriculum developers should integrate inclusive education principles and adaptable teaching materials into the English language curriculum to accommodate learners with different abilities and learning styles.
- 5 . School administrators should foster a supportive school culture that promotes collaboration among teachers, parents, and specialists to enhance the implementation of inclusive education in English language classrooms.
- 6 . Researchers should conduct further studies on the impact of inclusive education on English language learning outcomes to provide ongoing evidence-based recommendations for improving practice in Nigeria.

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