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Diversity Management Practices and Teacher Preparedness as Predictors of Educational Outcomes among Students with Special Educational Needs in Public Secondary Schools in Abuja, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated whether diversity management practices and teacher preparedness are associated with educational outcomes for students with special educational needs in public secondary schools in Abuja, Nigeria. A correlational survey design was employed. The study drew questionnaire evidence from teachers and supplementary information from students' academic portfolio records. Of the 120 questionnaires distributed to teachers, 61 usable responses were obtained, while portfolio information was available for 70 students with special educational needs. Data were gathered with the Diversity Management Practices Questionnaire (DMPQ) and the Students' Academic Portfolio Assessment Checklist (SAPAC). Experts examined the instruments for validity, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the DMPQ dimensions ranged from 0.727 to 0.869. Descriptive analysis used mean and standard deviation, whereas each null hypothesis was examined with simple linear regression at the 0.05 significance level. The results showed a very high reported level of diversity management practices. Diversity management practices significantly predicted teacher-reported academic performance ($\beta = 0.563$, $R^2 = 0.317$, $p < 0.05$) and classroom participation ($\beta = 0.684$, $R^2 = 0.468$, $p < 0.05$). Teacher preparedness also significantly predicted inclusive learning outcomes ($\beta = 0.401$, $R^2 = 0.161$, $p < 0.05$). The study concludes that school-level diversity practices and teacher preparedness are meaningful predictors of selected educational outcomes for students with special educational needs. It recommends sustained attention to inclusive practices, teacher professional learning, and the provision of appropriate instructional and institutional support.

Keywords: Diversity management practices, special educational needs, inclusive education, academic performance, classroom participation, teacher preparedness.

Introduction

Education serves both a social and developmental function, making equitable access and meaningful participation important concerns for school systems. Contemporary approaches to education increasingly recognise that learners differ in their social backgrounds, cultures, languages, abilities, and learning requirements. Inclusive education responds to this diversity by seeking arrangements in which learners can learn, participate, and progress within supportive school environments. For students with special educational needs (SEN), inclusion is particularly concerned with reducing barriers that may prevent them from accessing quality instruction and participating fully in school life (UNESCO, 2020).

The international commitment to inclusion is also expressed through Sustainable Development Goal 4, which calls for inclusive and equitable quality education and opportunities for lifelong learning. UNICEF (2019) notes that progress towards this goal requires education systems to respond to differences among learners through policies and practices that promote participation, fairness, and learning. From a broader inclusion perspective, Taneja-Johansson and Singal (2025) stress that meaningful participation requires coordinated action by educational stakeholders to identify and address the barriers experienced by learners with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.

Against this background, diversity management can be understood as a school-based approach for responding deliberately to differences among learners. It encompasses policies, classroom practices, and support arrangements intended to recognise learner variation and provide fair opportunities to participate and succeed. Ainscow (2020) associates effective inclusion with the identification and reduction of barriers that affect learners' presence, participation, and achievement. Ainscow, Slee, and Best (2019) similarly emphasise that inclusion should be judged by the quality of learners' participation and educational progress, rather than simply by whether they are physically placed in ordinary classrooms.

Students with special educational needs often require additional forms of educational support because their experiences may involve learning difficulties, physical or sensory disabilities, communication needs, behavioural challenges, or related barriers (Iyala & Maicibi, 2016). Their opportunities to participate in school are shaped not only by individual characteristics but also by relationships with peers and teachers and by the support available within the school environment (Wang et al., 2023). Shakespeare (2018) further explains that disability-related disadvantage can be intensified by environmental and institutional arrangements that restrict access, participation, and learning.

The effectiveness of diversity management is closely connected with teachers' readiness, the quality of the learning environment, and the commitment of school leadership. Florian (2019) argues that inclusive education requires teachers to use approaches that respond to learner differences while retaining high expectations. Florian and Beaton (2018) likewise describe inclusive pedagogy as an approach that creates learning opportunities for a broad range of learners rather than separating or marginalising those who require additional support. Evidence from Yada and Savolainen (2017) links teachers' self-efficacy and attitudes with their inclusive practices, while Sharma et al. (2018) identify attitudes, efficacy, concerns, and intentions as relevant to teachers' willingness to teach inclusively.

Research on inclusive schooling also points to the importance of the social and instructional environment in shaping learner participation. Schwab et al. (2018) identify social participation as a key element of successful inclusion for students with special educational needs. In a review of school-based interventions, Garrote et

al. (2017) reported that approaches such as cooperative learning, peer tutoring, interaction-focused teaching, support groups, and paraprofessional assistance can strengthen participation in mainstream classrooms. Vyrastekova (2021) similarly found that features of the school context matter for the social inclusion of students with special educational needs. Wang et al. (2023) further identify peer relationships, interaction, activity participation, and students' perceptions of their social inclusion as important aspects of participation.

Although inclusive education has received substantial international attention, implementation remains difficult in many developing contexts. UNESCO (2020) highlights shortages of resources, inadequate teacher preparation, limited support services, and weak institutional arrangements as continuing obstacles. Walton (2018) also points to structural inequalities and environmental conditions that can restrict meaningful inclusion in low- and middle-income settings. In Nigeria, Lawal (2026) identifies infrastructure limitations, shortages of specialised personnel, inadequate instructional resources, insufficient teacher preparation, stigma, and wider structural problems as challenges that continue to affect inclusive education. Such conditions can influence students' opportunities to participate in classroom activities and attain desirable educational outcomes (Ahmad, et al., 2023).

Public secondary schools in Abuja operate within a highly diverse educational environment in which learners differ in social, cultural, linguistic, and educational backgrounds. This context increases the need for teachers and school administrators to recognise learner differences and organise learning opportunities in ways that are fair and supportive (Iyala, et al., 2026). Diversity management may consequently contribute to more positive educational experiences for students with special educational needs. Its effectiveness, however, is likely to depend in part on whether teachers possess the knowledge, confidence, and practical capacity to adapt instruction and provide appropriate support (Bakwaph, et al., 2025).

Existing scholarship has addressed inclusive education, teacher preparedness, learner participation, and educational outcomes across a range of settings. Nevertheless, evidence remains limited on how diversity management practices relate specifically to educational outcomes for students with special educational needs in public secondary schools in Abuja. There is also a need to establish whether diversity management practices are associated with academic performance and classroom participation and whether teacher preparedness is related to inclusive learning outcomes in this context (Iyala, 2018). Accordingly, the present study investigates the predictive relationships involving diversity management practices, teacher preparedness, and selected educational outcomes among students with special educational needs in public secondary schools in Abuja. Attention is given to academic performance, classroom participation, and inclusive learning outcomes. The evidence generated is intended to support decisions concerning school practices, teacher development, and educational planning for inclusive education.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study is designed to determine the extent to which diversity management practices and teacher preparedness predict selected educational outcomes among students with special educational needs in public secondary schools in Abuja, Nigeria.

The specific objectives are to:

1. assess whether diversity management practices predict the academic performance of students with special educational needs in public secondary schools in Abuja;

2. determine whether diversity management practices predict classroom participation among students with special educational needs in public secondary schools in Abuja; and
3. determine whether teacher preparedness predicts inclusive learning outcomes among students with special educational needs in public secondary schools in Abuja.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What relationship exists between diversity management practices and the academic performance of students with special educational needs in public secondary schools in Abuja?
2. To what extent do diversity management practices predict classroom participation among students with special educational needs in public secondary schools in Abuja?
3. What predictive relationship exists between teacher preparedness and inclusive learning outcomes among students with special educational needs in public secondary schools in Abuja?

HYPOTHESES

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

H01: Diversity management practices do not significantly predict academic performance among students with special educational needs in public secondary schools in Abuja.

H02: Diversity management practices do not significantly predict classroom participation among students with special educational needs in public secondary schools in Abuja.

H03: Teacher preparedness does not significantly predict inclusive learning outcomes among students with special educational needs in public secondary schools in Abuja.

Diversity Management Practices and Inclusive Education

Diversity management practices encompass intentional school and classroom actions through which learner differences are recognised and accommodated. In an inclusive setting, such practices may include fair participation opportunities, flexible teaching approaches, learning support, and efforts to remove conditions that restrict access or achievement. Ainscow (2020) explains inclusion in terms of identifying and reducing barriers that affect learners' presence, participation, and progress. UNESCO (2020) similarly presents inclusion as an ongoing process through which education systems become more capable of serving all learners equitably. Ainscow, Slee, and Best (2019) emphasise that successful inclusion should involve meaningful engagement and educational progress, not merely placement in a mainstream classroom. This perspective is consistent with UNICEF's (2019) view that progress towards SDG 4 requires systems that provide equitable learning opportunities for children with different abilities and circumstances.

Inclusive Education Theory

The study is informed by Inclusive Education Theory, which is concerned with enabling learners with different abilities and backgrounds to participate meaningfully in common educational settings. A central assumption is that many barriers to learning are created or reinforced by school structures, teaching practices, and institutional arrangements rather than being located solely within the learner. Florian (2019) advocates moving away from deficit-oriented views and towards teaching approaches that expand learning opportunities for everyone. Florian and Beaton (2018) similarly explain that

inclusive pedagogy seeks to accommodate learner diversity within ordinary teaching rather than marginalising particular groups. This theoretical position is relevant to the study because it provides a basis for considering how school practices that manage diversity may influence educational outcomes for students with special educational needs.

Empirical Review

Studies of inclusive education consistently indicate that teachers' preparedness, professional competence, self-efficacy, and attitudes can influence the quality of support available to learners with special educational needs. Adams et al. (2023), using survey evidence from 628 teachers across 77 government schools, reported that teachers' knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes are relevant to their readiness to provide inclusive educational opportunities. Opoku et al. (2022), in a study of 457 secondary school teachers in Ghana, found differences in attitudes, perceived support, self-efficacy, and willingness to implement inclusive education across teacher groups. Their findings also highlighted the role of pre-service exposure to inclusive education in shaping teachers' confidence. Van Mieghem et al. (2022) further showed that sources of support at the teacher and school levels are relevant to teachers' self-efficacy when working with students with special educational needs.

Sahli Lozano et al. (2024) compared secondary school teachers in Australia and Switzerland and found contextual differences in attitudes, concerns, self-efficacy, and intentions concerning inclusive teaching. Their findings suggest that teachers' preparedness cannot be separated from the conditions in which inclusive practice is expected to occur.

The social dimension of inclusion is equally important. Wang et al. (2023) reviewed evidence on the social participation of students with special educational needs and identified participation as a central indicator of inclusive schooling. Vyrastekova (2021) also found that the characteristics of the school environment are associated with students' social inclusion. These findings indicate that the extent to which schools create supportive conditions may shape learners' opportunities to interact, participate, and develop a sense of belonging.

At the wider institutional level, inclusion requires more than individual teacher effort. Ainscow (2020) stresses the need for systematic action to identify and remove barriers to participation and achievement. UNESCO (2020) similarly identifies limited resources, inadequate teacher preparation, and insufficient institutional support as significant implementation challenges. Within Nigeria, Lawal (2026) reports continuing gaps between inclusive education policy and practice, together with stigma, resource limitations, and structural barriers. Taneja-Johansson and Singal (2025) likewise argue for context-sensitive and systemic approaches to advancing inclusive and equitable education. Taken together, the literature indicates that diversity management, teacher preparedness, supportive school environments, and institutional commitment are interconnected considerations in improving educational experiences for students with special educational needs.

RESEARCH GAP

While prior research has generated useful evidence on inclusive education, teacher readiness, participation, and school support, a contextual and empirical gap remains. Few studies have directly tested the predictive relationships between diversity management practices, teacher preparedness, and selected educational outcomes for students with special educational needs in public secondary schools in Abuja. Furthermore, limited evidence combines teachers' reports with supplementary student

academic portfolio information. The present study addresses these gaps by using teacher responses for the inferential analyses and portfolio records as complementary descriptive evidence.

Research Design and Study Area

A correlational survey design was used to examine the statistical relationships between diversity management practices, teacher preparedness, and selected educational outcomes among students with special educational needs in public secondary schools in Abuja. The design was appropriate because the variables were observed as they existed in the schools; no intervention or experimental manipulation was introduced. The analysis therefore focused on estimating predictive relationships among naturally occurring measures (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The research was carried out in public secondary schools in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The area was considered suitable because its schools accommodate learners with varied social, cultural, linguistic, and educational characteristics, including students who have special educational needs.

Population and Sampling Procedure

The study population comprised teachers in the selected public secondary schools and students with special educational needs whose academic records were available. School selection followed a multi-stage procedure, with 12 public secondary schools that enrolled students with special educational needs purposively identified. Ten teachers were targeted in each school, producing 120 distributed questionnaires. Sixty-one completed questionnaires were returned and considered usable for analysis.

Separate academic portfolio information was collected for 70 students with special educational needs in the selected schools through the Students' Academic Portfolio Assessment Checklist (SAPAC). Consequently, the dataset comprised 61 valid teacher questionnaire responses together with portfolio records for 70 students.

Instruments for Data Collection

Two data-collection instruments were employed: the Diversity Management Practices Questionnaire (DMPQ) and the Students' Academic Portfolio Assessment Checklist (SAPAC).

Teachers completed the DMPQ, which provided measures relating to diversity management practices, classroom participation, teacher preparedness, and the educational outcome variables examined in the study. All 61 valid teacher responses were retained for both descriptive and inferential analysis.

The SAPAC was completed from students' school records and supplied additional academic and portfolio information. Seventy valid student records were available. These records were summarised descriptively and were kept separate from the regression models.

Validity and Reliability of Instruments

Face and content validation were undertaken by specialists in Educational Management, Measurement and Evaluation, and Special Education. The experts considered the clarity of the items, their relevance to the constructs, their suitability for the respondents, and their alignment with the study objectives. Revisions were made in response to the experts' observations.

A pilot exercise was conducted with respondents who were not part of the selected study area. Internal consistency of the DMPQ was assessed with Cronbach's alpha. The coefficients for its dimensions ranged from 0.727 to 0.869, which indicates satisfactory internal consistency for the purposes of the study (Taber, 2018).

Method of Data Analysis

Mean and standard deviation were calculated for the research questions. Simple linear regression was applied to each null hypothesis at the 0.05 significance level because every hypothesis involved one predictor and one criterion variable. Mean responses were interpreted using the following ranges: 3.50–4.00, Very High Extent; 2.50–3.49, High Extent; 1.50–2.49, Low Extent; and 1.00–1.49, Very Low Extent.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical procedures included voluntary participation, confidentiality, safeguarding of students' academic information, and restriction of the collected information to academic purposes.

Presentation of Results

Research Question One: What is the predictive relationship between diversity management practices and academic performance of students with special educational needs in public secondary schools in Abuja?

Table 1

Teachers' Responses on Diversity Management Practices and Academic Performance

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
9	Diversity management practices improve students' academic achievement.	3.61	0.55	Agreed
10	Students perform better when inclusive strategies are used.	3.55	0.58	Agreed
11	Classroom support improves learning outcomes.	3.62	0.51	Agreed
12	Inclusive teaching practices enhance academic success.	3.56	0.54	Agreed
13	Learners with special needs benefit academically from inclusion.	3.59	0.52	Agreed
14	Diversity management promotes educational achievement.	3.55	0.57	Agreed
	Grand Mean	3.58		Very High Extent

The grand mean of 3.58 indicates that teachers reported a very high level of agreement with statements linking diversity management practices to students' academic learning and achievement.

Research Question Two: What is the predictive relationship between diversity management practices and classroom participation among students with special educational needs in public secondary schools in Abuja?

Table 2

Teachers' Responses on Classroom Participation

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
15	Students actively participate during lessons.	3.30	0.72	Agreed
16	Students interact freely with peers.	3.38	0.67	Agreed
17	Students are confident to contribute during class discussions.	3.28	0.73	Agreed
18	Inclusive practices increase learner participation.	3.37	0.66	Agreed
19	Students engage in collaborative learning activities.	3.41	0.64	Agreed
20	Learners demonstrate a sense of belonging in class.	3.30	0.69	Agreed
	Grand Mean	3.34		High Extent

The grand mean of 3.34 represents a high level of agreement, suggesting that teachers generally perceived diversity management practices as supportive of classroom participation among students with special educational needs.

Research Question Three: What is the predictive relationship between teacher preparedness and inclusive learning outcomes among students with special educational needs in public secondary schools in Abuja?

Table 3

Teachers' Responses on Teacher Preparedness for Inclusive Learning

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
21	Teachers possess knowledge of inclusive education practices.	3.28	0.71	Agreed
22	Teachers can adapt instruction to meet diverse learning needs.	3.34	0.68	Agreed
23	Teachers have received training in inclusive education.	3.27	0.75	Agreed
24	Teachers are confident teaching students with special needs.	3.31	0.69	Agreed
25	Teachers use differentiated instructional strategies.	3.29	0.72	Agreed
26	Teachers effectively manage inclusive classrooms.	3.33	0.66	Agreed
	Grand Mean	3.30		High Extent

With a grand mean of 3.30, teachers reported a high level of preparedness for practices intended to support inclusive learning outcomes.

Students' Academic Portfolio Assessment Checklist (SAPAC)

Table 4

Students' Academic Portfolio Assessment Results

Variable	N	Mean (%)	SD
Academic Portfolio Score	30	68.97	10.86

Note. Scores represent students' continuous assessment and portfolio performance.

Table 5

Distribution of Students' Portfolio Outcomes

Outcome	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Positive		16	22.9
Fair		45	64.3
Poor		9	12.9
Total		70	100.0

Note: **The categories shown in the table were assigned using the classification criteria contained in the Students' Academic Portfolio Assessment Checklist (SAPAC).**

The SAPAC supplied school-record information relating to academic and participation indicators for the 70 students with special educational needs. The checklist covered continuous assessment scores, assignment completion, attendance, classroom participation, and the overall portfolio classification.

Only 30 of the 70 records contained numerical continuous assessment scores. For these 30 students, the mean CA score was 68.97% with a standard deviation of 10.86, suggesting a generally satisfactory level of recorded academic performance. The other 40 records contained portfolio information but no

numerical CA score and were therefore excluded from the calculation of the CA mean and standard deviation.

Portfolio classification information was available for all 70 students. Sixteen students (22.9%) fell in the positive category, 45 (64.3%) were classified as fair, and 9 (12.9%) were classified as poor. The distribution therefore shows that the fair category contained the largest proportion of the students.

Test of Hypotheses

The three hypotheses were examined with simple linear regression using the 61 valid teacher responses. SAPAC information was treated as supplementary descriptive evidence and was not entered into any of the regression models.

Hypothesis One

H01: Diversity management practices do not significantly predict the academic performance of students with special educational needs in public secondary schools in Abuja.

Regression results showed a statistically significant positive predictive relationship between diversity management practices and teacher-reported academic performance ($\beta = 0.563$, $t = 5.234$, $p < 0.05$). The model accounted for 31.7% of the observed variance ($R^2 = 0.317$). On this basis, H01 was rejected, indicating that higher reported diversity management practices were associated with higher teacher-reported academic performance.

Hypothesis Two

H02**:** Diversity management practices do not significantly predict classroom participation among students with special educational needs in public secondary schools in Abuja.

The regression model for classroom participation was also statistically significant. Diversity management practices produced $\beta = 0.684$ and $t = 7.209$, with $p < 0.05$, while the model explained 46.8% of the variance in classroom participation ($R^2 = 0.468$). H02 was therefore rejected, providing evidence that diversity management practices significantly predicted classroom participation among the students studied.

Hypothesis Three

H03**:** Teacher preparedness does not significantly predict inclusive learning outcomes among students with special educational needs in public secondary schools in Abuja.

Teacher preparedness was a significant predictor of inclusive learning outcomes ($\beta = 0.401$, $t = 3.366$, $p = 0.001$). The regression model explained 16.1% of the variance in the outcome measure ($R^2 = 0.161$). Accordingly, H03 was rejected, indicating a statistically significant predictive relationship between teacher preparedness and inclusive learning outcomes.

Table 6

Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis	Predictor Variable	β	t	p-value	R^2	Decision
H01	DMP → Academic Performance	0.563	5.234	< .001	0.317	Rejected
H02	DMP → Classroom Participation	0.684	7.209	< .001	0.468	Rejected
H03	Teacher Preparedness → Inclusive Learning Outcomes	0.401	3.366	.001	0.161	Rejected

Note. Significant at p < .05.

Discussion of Findings

The first finding indicates that stronger diversity management practices were associated with better teacher-reported academic performance. This result is compatible with UNESCO's (2020) view that inclusive systems should reduce barriers that interfere with participation and achievement. It also corresponds with Ainscow's (2020) argument that addressing barriers within educational settings can improve learners' opportunities to achieve. The result is further consistent with Florian and Beaton (2018), whose work emphasises teaching approaches that accommodate learner differences.

The second finding shows that diversity management practices significantly predicted classroom participation. This outcome is in line with Wang et al. (2023), who regard social participation as an important component of successful inclusion. It also supports Vyrastekova (2021), whose findings associate supportive school environments with social inclusion and participation.

The third finding demonstrates that teacher preparedness significantly predicted inclusive learning outcomes. This result is consistent with the evidence reported by Yada and Savolainen (2017), Sharma et al. (2018), and Adams et al. (2023), which connects teacher self-efficacy, professional capacity, readiness, and attitudes with effective inclusive practice. Florian (2019) similarly stresses the importance of teachers' capacity to respond to learner diversity.

Conclusion

The findings support the conclusion that diversity management practices and teacher preparedness are important predictors of selected educational outcomes for students with special educational needs in public secondary schools in Abuja. Specifically, diversity management practices predicted academic performance and classroom participation, while teacher preparedness predicted inclusive learning outcomes. The results therefore point to the value of strengthening school practices that promote inclusion alongside sustained attention to teachers' capacity to respond to learner diversity.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. School leaders should intensify inclusive diversity-management practices by ensuring fair participation, adapting instructional approaches where necessary, and providing appropriate support for students with special educational needs.
2. Education authorities should maintain regular professional development opportunities that build teachers' knowledge, practical skills, confidence, and competence in inclusive education.
3. Public secondary schools should strengthen access to instructional materials, learning supports, and other resources needed to respond effectively to varied learner needs.
4. School administrators should promote classroom climates in which students with special educational needs can participate actively, interact with peers, and engage meaningfully in learning activities.
5. Education planners and policymakers should improve systems for monitoring and supporting inclusive education so that diversity management practices and teacher preparedness are translated into sustained school-level practice.

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