

**Towards Inclusive Education in Nigeria:  
Appreciative Voices of Parents and Educators of Primary  
School Children With(out) Disabilities**

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## Declaration

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Salamah Osuji-Alatilehin', is written on a light green rectangular background.

Salamah Osuji-Alatilehin

02 May, 2016

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to examine inclusive basic education for children with disabilities (ages 6-11) within Nigeria from the understandings of the most positive experiences of school heads, teachers, and parents of children with and without disabilities in an inclusive primary school; uncover what gives life to their participation in inclusive education, and to identify opportunities they draw upon in achieving these positive experiences, and the advancement of inclusive education. The objective is to arrive at concepts of exemplary inclusive education practices that may be used to inform change strategies and generate an agenda for the advancement of primary level inclusive education programme.

Historically, societal attitude had assumed that disability is a result of “curse”, hence persons with disabilities are seen as “dependent” and “uneducable”. However, with the recent global trend in education, more structures are being setup not only to provide children with disabilities with basic education, but to enhance their full participation in the activities of their neighborhood schools. A review of the literature surrounding inclusive education and its practices showed that this topic has gained momentum. However, only a few studies focus on inclusive education from the community members’ perspectives and fewer still underscore the positive experiences of primary level school heads, teachers, and parents of children with and without disabilities. As a result, in order to sufficiently explore the phenomena of inclusive education, its advancement and sustainability from the participants’ point of view, and to arrive at their understandings of positive inclusive education, I used a qualitative case study which was conducted through an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) process.

The main data collection method was individual appreciative interviews. A sample of eight community members comprising of parents and educators from a private voluntary primary school in a South-Eastern state in Nigeria was used in the study. Data analysis was guided by Corbin and Strauss’ (1990) method of data analysis. As the participants shared their understandings of their most positive inclusive education experiences, significant findings emerged. Among these findings was that positive

inclusive experiences for the participants exist in the confluence of “growing capabilities,” “caring for the dignity of humanity,” and “building and strengthening community.” Importantly, another interpretation that was gleaned from the data was that accommodating “Conflicting attitudes” were deemed very important for the success of inclusive education as it creates atmospheres to meet on a common ground and continuously reflect on their values and actions.

The opportunities participants draw upon in advancing inclusive education practices revealed two major findings. Primarily, inclusive education advancement and sustainability is an embedded relationship between the school’s leadership practices and partnership with other related institutions. Consistent with the objective of this study, an agenda for the advancement of inclusive education program was recommended based on an incorporation of the understandings of the parents’ and educators’ most positive inclusive education experiences and the opportunities they draw upon in advancing inclusive education practices.

Having taken a positive and appreciative approach to understanding parents’ and educators’ inclusive education experiences, I conclude that the concepts that emerged are compelling arguments for nurturing the voices of these community members. There is also much more to be learned by deliberately engaging appreciative processes as it enhances our capacity to create community members who articulate optimistic support for inclusion in schools and the community for primary school children with disabilities.

**Keywords:** inclusive education, inclusive education practices, children with disabilities, Appreciative Inquiry, primary education, parents, teachers, head teachers, educators, Nigeria, developing country

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to all children with disabilities who struggle to make sense of their world, seeking acceptance, respect and dignity and looking to us to help improve the quality of their lives by unlocking the door of possibilities to learn as everyone else.

## **Acknowledgement**

***I prostrate in awe of you Oh Lord, bestower of knowledge and wisdom. Mighty Lord to whom belongs all praise.***

In the words of John Fletcher, “angels, or something like them, sometimes live among us, hidden within our fellow human beings.” I beg to agree with John Fletcher given that the people that guided me through this journey were angels in every sense of the word. Each person came along to offer help when I needed it most. Each person had the right personality, the needed resource, and the words of inspiration, the talents, and expertise that I needed to complete this journey. To my angels:

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# Table of Contents

<b>PERMISSION TO USE.....</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>DECLARATION .....</b>	<b>III</b>
<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>DEDICATION.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>14</b>
1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE INQUIRY .....	14
1.1.2 <i>Inclusive Education</i> .....	15
1.1.3 <i>Disability</i> .....	16
1.2 CONTEXT OF THE INQUIRY .....	17
1.2.1 <i>Nigeria: An Overview</i> .....	17
1.2.2 <i>Political Issues</i> .....	20
1.2.3 <i>Politics and Access to Basic Education</i> .....	20
1.2.4 <i>The Education of Children with Disabilities</i> .....	22
1.2.4.1 <i>UBE for Children with Disabilities</i> .....	22
1.3 SHAPING THE INQUIRY .....	24
1.4 POSITIONING MYSELF .....	26
1.5 PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	28
1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY.....	29
1.7 DEFINITIONS .....	31
1.8 ORGANISATION OF THE DISSERTATION.....	31
<b>CHAPTER TWO .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....</b>	<b>33</b>
INTRODUCTION .....	33
<b>PART ONE.....</b>	<b>35</b>
2.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO INCLUSION AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION .....	35
2.1.1 <i>Defining Inclusion</i> .....	37
2.2 INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES: THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT .....	43
<b>PART TWO .....</b>	<b>47</b>

2.3 INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN PRACTICE.....	47
2.3.1 <i>Social Dimension of Inclusive Education</i> .....	47
2.3.2 <i>Academic Opportunities</i> .....	51
2.3.3 <i>Continuous Professional Development for Teachers</i> .....	53
2.3.4 <i>Compassionate Learning Community</i> .....	55
2.3.5 <i>Assumptions about Change that Promote Inclusive Education Practices</i> .....	56
2.4 CONSTRUCTS FROM APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY (AI).....	58
2.5 FACTOR SUPPORTING THE ADVANCEMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION .	63
2.5.1 <i>Leadership</i> .....	65
2.5.2 <i>Partnering with Health Personnel and Other Related Institutions</i> .....	66
2.6 SUMMARY .....	67
<b>CHAPTER THREE .....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>69</b>
INTRODUCTION .....	69
3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN .....	71
3.1.2 RESEARCH EPISTEMOLOGY .....	72
3.1.3 <i>Theoretical Perspective</i> .....	73
3.1.4 <i>Research Methodology</i> .....	73
3.1.4.1 <i>Case Study</i> .....	74
3.1.4.2 <i>Appreciative Inquiry</i> .....	75
3.1.4.3 <i>The Research Instrument</i> .....	77
3.1.5 <i>Research Method – Appreciative Interview</i> .....	77
3.2 SAMPLE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE .....	78
3. 2.1 <i>Overview of the Participants’ Institution: Structure, Purpose, and Values</i> .....	79
3.2.2 <i>Setting</i> .....	81
3.3 <i>Data Collection Procedures</i> .....	82
3.4 DATA ANALYSIS .....	83
3.4.1 <i>Interpretation and Validation</i> .....	84
3.5 ROBUSTNESS OF STUDY .....	85
3.5.1 <i>Copious accounts of the phenomenon under inquiry</i> .....	86
3.5.2 <i>Reflexivity</i> .....	86
3.5.3 <i>Member checking</i> .....	87
3.5.4 <i>Examination of previous research findings</i> .....	87
3.6 PARAMETERS OF THE STUDY .....	87
3.6.1 <i>Limitations</i> .....	88
3.6.2 <i>Delimitations</i> .....	88
3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS .....	89
3.8 SUMMARY .....	90
<b>CHAPTER FOUR.....</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>THE STORIES UNRAVEL: ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>91</b>
INTRODUCTION .....	91
ORGANISATION OF CHAPTER.....	92

<b>PART ONE</b> .....	<b>92</b>
4.1 PARTICIPANTS’ UNDERSTANDING OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION.....	92
4.1.1 <i>Inclusive Education as “Growing Capabilities”</i> .....	94
4.1.1.1 “Growing Capabilities”: Expanding socio-functional capacity .....	94
4.1.1.2 “Growing Capabilities” through raising academic standard .....	97
4.1.1.3 “Growing Capabilities” through professional growth: professional learning and collaborative, co-constructive learning.....	100
4.1.2 <i>Inclusive Education as “Caring for the Dignity of Humanity”</i> .....	104
4.1.2.1 Love for Humanity .....	104
4.1.2.2 Nurturing the Spirit of Compassion.....	105
4.1.3 <i>Inclusive Education as “Building and Strengthening Community”</i> .....	107
4.1.3.1 The power of positive attitude: Quashing discriminatory criticisms ...	108
4.1.4 <i>The Unusual: “Finding the Middle Ground”</i> .....	110
4.1.5 <i>Summary of Participants’ Understandings of Inclusive Education</i> .....	112
<b>PART TWO</b> .....	<b>113</b>
4.2 OPPORTUNITIES PARTICIPANTS DRAW UPON IN ADVANCING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION .....	113
PRACTICES .....	113
4.2.1 <i>Institutions of Support</i> .....	113
4.2.1.1 Leadership .....	114
4.2.1.2 Partnership between the school and other related institutions.....	115
4.2.3 <i>Summary of Opportunities Drawn upon by Participants</i> .....	118
4.3 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER.....	118
<b>CHAPTER FIVE</b> .....	<b>120</b>
<b>DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS: A QUEST FOR DEEPER UNDERSTANDING</b> .....	<b>120</b>
INTRODUCTION .....	120
5.1 INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AS “GROWING CAPABILITIES” A DEEPER LOOK INTO THE .....	121
DEVELOPING CAPABILITIES DIMENSION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION .....	121
5.1.1 <i>The Social Dimension of Inclusive Education</i> .....	121
5.1.2 <i>Raising Academic Standards</i> .....	126
5.1.3 <i>The Place of In-service Professional Development</i> .....	128
5.2 INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AS “CARING FOR THE DIGNITY OF HUMANITY” .....	131
5.2.1 <i>Nurturing the Spirit of Compassion</i> .....	131
5.3 “FINDING THE MIDDLE GROUND”: AN INVERSE UNDERSTANDING OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION.....	133
5.4 <i>Institutions of Support as Opportunities for the Advancement of Inclusive Education</i> .....	135
5.4.1 Leadership.....	135
5.4.2 <i>Partnership between the school and other related institutions</i> .....	136
5.5 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER.....	138
<b>CHAPTER SIX</b> .....	<b>140</b>
<b>RECAP, RECOMMENDATIONS, REFLECTIONS, AND CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>140</b>

INTRODUCTION .....	140
6.1 RECAP OF THE INQUIRY.....	140
6.1.1 <i>Overview of the Findings</i> .....	142
6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ADVANCEMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY OF INCLUSIVE.....	145
EDUCATION PRACTICES.....	145
6.3 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH .....	149
6.4 REFLECTIONS .....	149
6.4.1 <i>Methodological Reflections</i> .....	149
6.4.2 <i>Personal Reflections</i> .....	151
6.5 CONCLUSIONS.....	152
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>155</b>
<b>APPENDICES .....</b>	<b>174</b>
<b>APPENDIX A.....</b>	<b>175</b>
<b>APPENDIX B.....</b>	<b>177</b>
<b>APPENDIX C .....</b>	<b>178</b>
<b>APPENDIX D.....</b>	<b>180</b>
<b>APPENDIX E .....</b>	<b>181</b>
<b>APPENDIX F .....</b>	<b>182</b>
<b>APPENDIX G.....</b>	<b>183</b>
<b>APPENDIX H .....</b>	<b>185</b>

## **List of Figures**

Figure 1.1: Map of Nigeria (the 36 States and Federal Capital Territory- FCT).....	5
Figure 3.1: The research design.....	58
Figure 3.2: The Appreciative Inquiry 4-D cycle.....	63
Figure 4.1: A summary of participants' understanding of inclusive education.....	81
Figure 4.2: The parts of opportunities drawn upon as institutions of support.....	101

## **List of Tables**

Table 1.1: NIGERIA – Selected Human Development and Human Poverty Indices.....	6
Table 2.1: Definitions of inclusive education.....	27
Table 2.2: Assumptions surrounding the concept of change.....	43

## **List of Abbreviations**

<b>AI:</b>	Appreciative Inquiry
<b>ASD:</b>	Autism Spectrum Disorder
<b>CT:</b>	Class Teacher
<b>CWD:</b>	Children with Disabilities
<b>HDI:</b>	Human Development Index
<b>HPI:</b>	Human Poverty Index
<b>HT:</b>	Head Teacher
<b>ICF:</b>	International Clarification of Functioning
<b>ID:</b>	Intellectual Disability
<b>IDEA:</b>	Individuals with Disabilities Act
<b>NAESP:</b>	National Association of Elementary School Principals
<b>NPE:</b>	National Policy on Education
<b>POCWID:</b>	Parent of Child with Disabilities
<b>POCWOD:</b>	Parent of Child without Disabilities
<b>PTA:</b>	Parent Teacher Association
<b>SEN:</b>	Special Educational Needs
<b>SST:</b>	Supervisor Support Teachers
<b>UBE:</b>	Universal Basic Education
<b>UNDP:</b>	[The] United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNESCO:</b>	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNICEF:</b>	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
<b>UNO:</b>	United Nations Organisation
<b>WHO:</b>	World Health Organisation

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction to the Inquiry**

As a critical tool for the attainment of the development agenda of any nation, education inspires people and strengthens nations (Uchem & Ngwa, 2014). It is indeed a fortifier of a nations' economic prospects as it lays "the foundation for sustained economic development" (The World Bank Report, 2010, p. 2).

However, Uchem, Ngwa, and Asogwa (2014) have argued that "the merits of education ... can only be realised if the educational system is such that integrates and addresses the particular needs and aspirations of all citizens within the mainstream educational system; irrespective of physical, socio-economic and political status or background, giving everybody a sense of belonging" (p. 48). By implication, an effectual, productive and dynamic educational system is one that is bereft of discrimination, exclusion, and inequality. According to UNESCO (2008), education systems which are characterised by inequality contribute to growing the existing social and economic discrepancies while deviating from the path of equitable development.

It was based on these understandings that the world education stakeholders, in alliance with some agencies of the United Nations Organisations (UNO), were able to put together some mechanisms targeted at addressing discrimination, exclusion, and inequality in education around the world; hence, the concept of inclusive education.

### **1.1.2 Inclusive Education**

Over the past two decades, the concept of inclusive education has evolved towards the idea that all children and young people, despite different cultural, social and learning backgrounds, should have equivalent learning opportunities in all kinds of schools. This implies “respecting, understanding and taking care of cultural, social and individual diversity, the provision of equal access to quality education, and close co-ordination with other social policies” (International Conference on Education – ICE, 2008, p. 8).

However, the development of more inclusive schools, which is one sure way of ensuring increased equal access to education of children identified as marginalised (UNESCO, 2008), remains one of the biggest challenges facing education systems throughout the world (Ainscow, Booth, Dyson, Farrell, Frankham, Gallannaugh, Howes, & Smith, 2006). These challenges are consequent upon controversies surrounding the views and meanings attributed to inclusive education by different people (Ainscow et al., 2000). Given these disparities in meaning, Ainscow et al. (2006) developed a typology of six ways of thinking about inclusion that bordered on:

- Inclusion as a concern with [student with disability] and/or others categorised as ‘having special educational needs’;
- Inclusion as a response to disciplinary exclusion;
- Inclusion in relation to all groups seen as being vulnerable to exclusion;
- Inclusion as developing the school for all;
- Inclusion as ‘Education for All’;
- Inclusion as a principled approach to education and society (p. 15).

Considering that children with disabilities account for one third of out-of-school children (UNESCO, 2010), this study investigates the inclusion of students with disabilities and others categorised as 'having special educational needs'.

### **1.1.3 Disability**

There is no consensus on the definition of disability. It has been defined from medical, economic, social, political, and administrative perspectives (Altman, 1984 as cited in Chirwa, 2011). Functional definitions view disability as the restriction of bodily functions. For example, Oliver (1990) stated that disability is "the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes no or little account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from the mainstream of social activities" (p.11). From the administrative perspective, disability is defined as weakness in which the affected person can hardly participate in productive activity due to medical, mental or physical limitations. Clinical view, on the other hand, defines disability on the basis of the authority that is closely linked to medicine and is determined by the clinicians. However, scholarly definitions of disability take into account the diverse factors that are at play in the relationship between health, functioning and other dynamic factors that go with the label 'disability' (Albrecht et al., 2001 as cited in Chirwa, 2011 ).

Leonard et al. (2006) make reference to the World Health Organisation's International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) definition of disability as "persons who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairment which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective

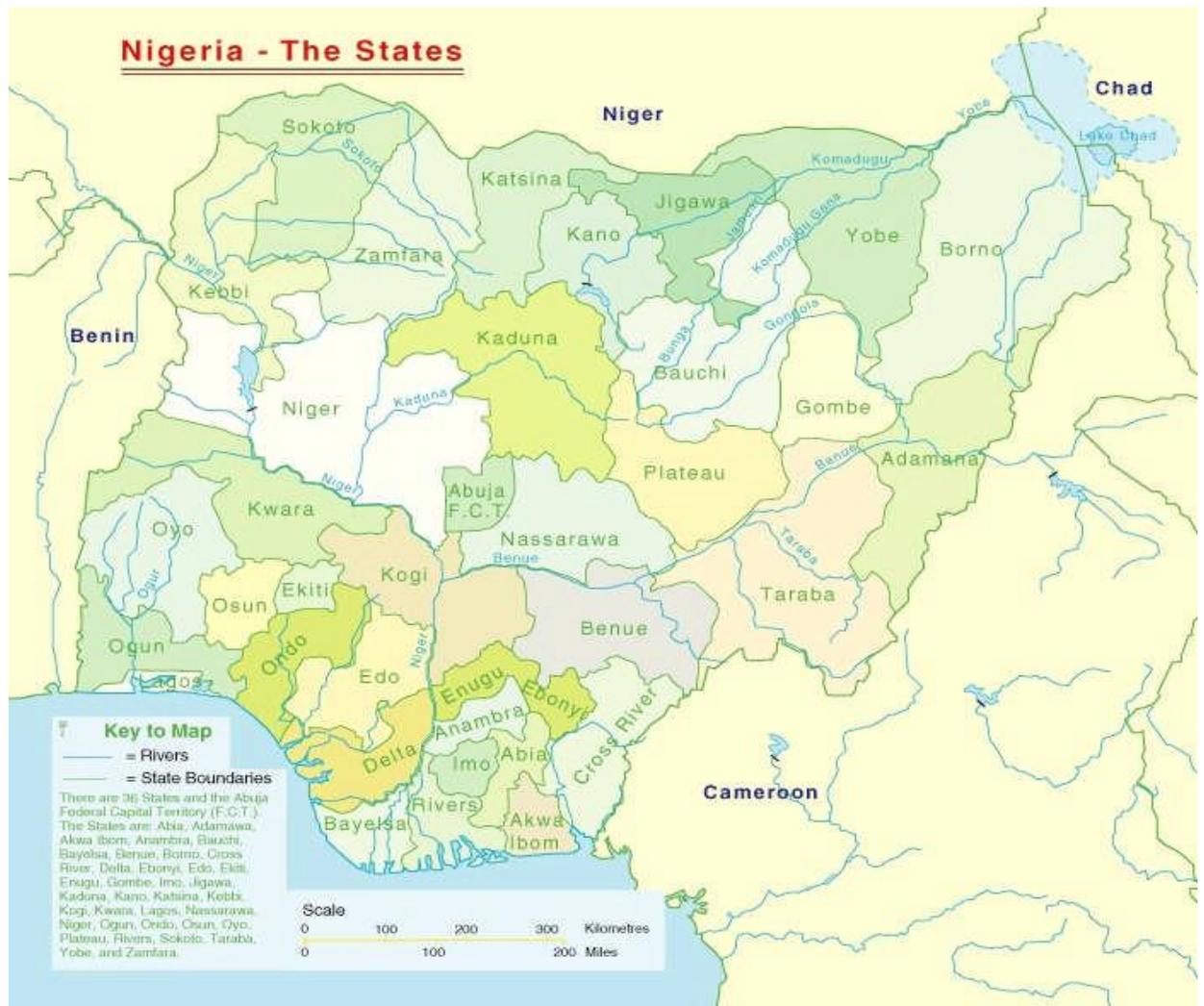
participation in society on an equal basis with others” (p. 9), particularly access to basic education.

## **1.2 Context of the Inquiry**

### **1.2.1 Nigeria: An Overview**

Nigeria has a large vibrant human population estimated at over of 155 million (Nigeria Population, 2011) – it is Africa’s most populous country. With a territory measuring 923,768 square kilometres, Nigeria is bordered on the north by Niger, on the east by Cameroon, on the west by Benin, and on the south by the Atlantic Ocean. It is a country whose greatest wealth is its diversity, in terms of geographical features, people, cultures, languages, ecology, and natural resources. It is a Federation of 36 states (and a Federal Capital Territory). Each state is divided into a number of local government areas – a total of 774 local government areas in the country. The political organisation of the country also comprises the concept of *geo-political zones* (a loose political portrayal of geographically contingent and sometimes linguistic-culture-sharing states) of which there are six - North West, North East, North Central, South East, South West, South-South (Obanya, 2011). Figure 1.1 shows the country and its political divisions.

**Figure 1.1: Map of Nigeria (the 36 States and Federal Capital Territory- FCT)**



*Adapted from world atlas: [www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/africa/ng.htm](http://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/africa/ng.htm)*

Theoretically, Nigeria is a rich country and a major petroleum exporter. Its 'huge human potentials' have remained under-developed while its huge petroleum earnings do not reflect improved standard of living for the people, as depicted in the country's low rating on most of the indices used for UNDP human development reports (Table 1.1).

The most revealing aspect of Table 1.1 is the third column, which shows Nigeria's global ranking on certain indices of human development. The country does not emerge among

the top 100 countries in all the indices; it ranks in fact appallingly low on Human Poverty Index (114 of 135 countries), Life Expectancy at Birth (167 out of 182), overall Human Development Index (158 out of 182), GDP per capita (141 out of 182), and access to potable water (142 out of 182) (UNDP, 2008).

**Table 1.1: NIGERIA – Selected Human Development and Human Poverty Indices**

<b>Index</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Ranking (out of 182 countries)</b>
Human development Index (HDI)	0.511	158
Life Expectancy at birth (years)	47.7	167
Adult Literacy (% of age 15 and above)	72	112
Combined gross enrolment ratio (%)	53	150
GDP per capita (PPP US\$)	1,969	141
Human Poverty Index (HPI)	36.2	114 (out of 135 countries)
Possibility of surviving till age 40	37.4	146
Adult Illiteracy	28	112
% lacking improved water source	53	142
Proportion of children underweight for age	29	112

*UNDP, 2008*

This abysmal situation, according to Obanya (2011), is linked to Nigeria’s bad and volatile political terrain which has made addressing issues of national development an ostensibly arduous and unrealistic task.

### **1.2.2 Political Issues**

Nigeria has suffered many political issues since her independence from the colonial British in 1960. These issues have given birth to other national crises including corruption, unemployment, poverty and other “negatives” (Uzochukwu, 2016). According to Obanya (2011), the sum total effect of these political issues on Nigeria in the post-independence era is one in which “democracy is yet to take firm roots, ... old ethnic and religious loyalties are still strong, and above all, political discourse is yet to address issues of national development” (p. 11). By implication, politics in Nigeria has not been directed at nation-building and as such has contributed to retarding national development, including the development of education (Adedokun & Olaleye, 2014; Obanya, 2011) especially, meaningful access to basic education.

### **1.2.3 Politics and Access to Basic Education**

The ushering of the democratic dispensation in 1999, having experienced 15 years of uninterrupted military rule in Nigeria, witnessed the launch of a new scheme that came to be known as ‘Universal Basic Education’ (UBE). According to Bolaji (2014), there has been little demonstration of achievement or success more than a decade since the introduction of the UBE despite a significant increase in terms of funding, financing, time, energy, and international interventions invested in the programme.

Designed to address sectorial issues such as access, increased student retention, equity and quality enhancement, “the issue of access, [however], remains the greatest challenge” (Bolaji, 2014, p. 3). This challenge, according to Obanya (2011), is attributed to the legacy of bad politics and bureaucratic nature of educational management which

has made it difficult for policies on access to basic education to be effectually drafted and implemented.

The bureaucratic nature of educational management, for example, is manifested in the NPE (FRN, 2004) which stated that “education boards or similar authorities shall be responsible for the management of schools and appointment, posting and discipline of teachers within defined areas of authority” (p. 59). This by implication, means that school heads have limited or no professional autonomy to make certain decisions without first passing through the hierarchical ladder of authority. For this reason, Obemeata (1984) argued that “heads of schools cannot be expected to use their initiative, to be innovative, and to adopt a positive and dynamic approach to their managerial responsibilities unless they are granted a generous measure of institutional autonomy” (p.71). In the absence of such autonomous support, it would be practically impossible for “school leaders to be held accountable for ensuring [equitable access and] higher levels of achievement for all students” (NAESP, 2004, p. 79). Consequently, the ‘huge chunks of its annual budget’ which every tier of the Nigerian government claims to be spending on education, and equitable access to basic education for especially the country’s disadvantaged and marginalised children still remains a mystery to be unraveled (Bolaji, 2014; Obanya, 2011).

Despite these inadequacies and to remain relevant in the global political play, the Nigerian government has, through a series of discreet measures, tried to fulfil its constitutional obligations under NPE, UBE Act [2/2] as well as international

commitments under the charter of DFAC on EFA and MDGs; one of which is quality access to basic education for children with disabilities.

#### **1.2.4 The Education of Children with Disabilities**

##### **1.2.4.1 UBE for Children with Disabilities**

Nigeria is becoming aware of the gross inequalities in educational opportunities for its population with disabilities. This is understandable given that less than 10% of children with disabilities currently have access to any type of formal or non-formal education (Ajuwon, 2008). More so, Nigeria as well as other countries of Africa, Latin America and Asia have, in principle, adopted several international protocols that seek to promote equal access to appropriate quality education as articulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the World Declaration on Education for All (1990), the Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disability (1993), the UNESCO Salamanca Statement on Framework for Action (1994), and the World Education Forum in Dakar (2000) (Ajuwon, 2008).

Of particular significance is the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994) which, *inter alia*, asserts that:

*Regular schools with inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discrimination, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all (Salamanca Statement, Art. 2).*

A closer examination of the above statement reveals that the ideals articulated in the Salamanca Agreement can be seen as being in consonance with the provisions of

Section 7 of the revised National Policy on Education – NPE - (2008) and the goals of Nigeria’s UBE (FGN, 2004). While the NPE explicitly recognises that children and youths with special needs shall be provided with inclusive education services irrespective of their physical, sensory, mental, psychological or emotional disabilities, the objectives of the UBE as enunciated in the 2004 UBE Act articulates the provision of free, universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school-going age, which includes an unfettered access to nine years of formal education.

The promulgation of the UBE Act can further be perceived as the recognition of the importance of primary education by the Nigerian government (past and present). This conceivably may be due to the fact that it is the foundation of the whole educational pursuit, which is anticipated to provide literacy and enlightenment to the citizens (Labo-Popoola, Bello & Atanda, 2009). The significance of primary education can therefore be seen in the sense that all beneficiaries of the other levels of education by obligation have to pass through this level (Oni, 2008 as cited in Labo-Popoola, Bello & Atanda, 2009). In essence, primary education defined as the education given in an institution for children aged 6-11 years (Labo-Popoola, Bello & Atanda, 2009). As well, it constitutes “the bedrock upon which the entire education system is built” (p. 1). Undeniably, the success and failure of the entire education system, and obviously the success of inclusive education, are determined by it.

In practice however, it is only one government owned school in one of the thirty six states of Nigeria that has recently started the implementation of the inclusive education at the primary school level (Fakolade, Adeniyi & Tella, 2009), other states of the

federation are just starting up “by creating a unit in each of the schools for their inclusive classrooms” (p. 157).

However, “prior to the implementation of inclusive education in Nigerian public schools, private schools had started to proliferate” (Larbi et al., 2004, p. 6). Garuba (2003) contended that private voluntary organisations (PVOs) and humanitarian/the missionary were the driving forces behind the establishment and maintenance of education services and programmes for children and youths with disabilities. These programmes continue to thrive albeit “the government’s major role in providing educational services for its citizenry” (p. 192).

Given that the implementation of inclusive education in Nigerian public schools is still in its embryonic stage, (Fakolade, Adeniyi &Tella, 2009) and that this is compounded by a significant body of literature on special education and inclusion asserting that many challenges are still to be faced (Ajuwon, 2008; Akyeampong, Sabates, Hunt & Anthony, 2009; Fakolade, Adeniyi &Tella, 2009; Edho, 2009; Moja, 2000), investigations into the inclusive schooling through the exploration of the experiences of PVOs and humanitarian/missionary primary schools who have long been involved in inclusive education practices is thus, warranted.

### **1.3 Shaping the Inquiry**

While a brief review demonstrates that inclusive education has been well studied over the past two decades, our knowledge base is never sufficient to keep pace with the current demands, hence, a call for a reconfigured understanding of the concepts of

inclusive education (Ajuwon, 2012). Among the prospects for research, there remains an opportunity for inclusive education to be described from community members' (school heads, teachers and parents) points of view. In other words, emphasizing the "inside out" perspective instead of the "outside in" perspective. The insiders' perspectives are critical in providing more robust and authentic insights into the opinions of community members toward inclusive education (Ajuwon, 2012).

Research on inclusive education using an appreciative voice is sparse. I choose to be an appreciative scholar, a sculptor of conversation. I set out to give new voice to the mystery of inclusive education, not the challenging experiences, but rather to search for strengths, opportunities, and aspirations that needed elaboration and attention. Approaching inclusive education from an appreciative viewpoint, using elements of the Appreciative Inquiry approach, I believe, uncovers and highlights existing strengths, hopes and dreams, and recognises and enlarges the positive core of inclusive education.

In sum, this study addresses the recognition of the need for varied ways of understanding the concept of inclusive education and for varied approaches in implementing inclusive education. Based on a literature review on inclusive education, only a few studies focus on inclusive education from community members' perceptions and fewer still underscore the positive experiences of primary school patrons. This study, therefore, addressed this dearth in the literature by focusing on inclusive education from an appreciative viewpoint using primary school internal community members' views of their most positive experiences with inclusion.

#### **1.4 Positioning myself**

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) stated that “your research is autobiographical in that some aspect of yourself is mirrored in the work you choose to pursue” (p. 178). Therefore, in order for the reader to appreciate the reasons behind the proposed methodology and topic choice, I will briefly outline my story.

I have an adorable 13 years old daughter who, at five (5) months old, was diagnosed of multiple disabilities bordering on ADHD, intellectual disability and speech impairment. Given her disabilities, my daughter was refused admission to pre-school and primary schools in the district. The lack of adequate resources to cater for students with disabilities and the belief that she would be a distraction to other students accounted for refusing her access. Since Nigeria has not enacted the disability discrimination act which may have afforded us the right to take legal actions, we were left with the only option of enrolling her, at the age of 8, in a special school serving about 18 districts in the state and approximately 40 kms away from home. Prior to the enrollment in the special school, my daughter received support in learning various functional skills from the family.

After a year, the family decided to withdraw her from the special school as we noticed relapses in her already acquired skills. We concluded that her effective participation in the society would require exploring opportunities that allows her to learn among her peers without disabilities. Hence, we approached the proprietress of the mainstream private school which her siblings attended with the intention to secure her admission. The school was willing to accept my daughter, however, they were concerned that they

lacked resources to support her learning needs. After considerable deliberations, she was enrolled with the condition that she may be withdrawn if she proved disruptive.

To ensure that this does not happen and to ensure that my daughter benefited from learning alongside her peers, I reached an agreement with the proprietress to work as a volunteer teacher alongside the class teacher as she lacked the knowledge and skills to support children with disabilities. I stayed awake most nights trying to work out activities she could be engaged with in the class to minimise the distractions she could experience. I shared them with her class teacher who was wonderfully empathetic. At first it appeared we were not making headways. Just when we were about giving up, we observed that she was gradually becoming interested in some of the activities presented to her and largely so because some of her classmates got interested in the activities as well and were beginning to be more friendly towards her.

The collaboration with the class teacher had a positive impact on my daughter's learning as it helped the teacher to involve and engage her in class activities alongside her peers. This allowed my daughter to participate in her classroom learning while building friendships.

Although my daughter did not demonstrate much progress academically, she, however, exhibited better communication and social skills. It was evident, therefore, that the inclusive education had positive impact (Villa & Thousand, 2005) on her education.

Two years on, my determination and the support I had from the proprietress and other teachers helped to create opportunities for some children with disabilities to not only have access to basic education in that school, but to be accepted and understood by their peers. Therefore, my strengths-based approach to life is my motivation for choosing to take an appreciative approach to the study.

It is my belief, therefore, that people's voices and outlooks should be appreciated, particularly in matters that directly affect them. Systems cannot claim to be transforming if the perceptions of those involved are not considered. Otherwise, one may possibly end up with a disconnection between the practices of the individuals within the organisation and the developed policy. Thus, I have concluded that people are supporters of co-creation. For this reason, I believe that it is vital to get the insider's perspective if one wants to generate transformative change in any human system. My predominant perspective, can therefore, be surmised as a positive approach to the idiosyncratic nature of human understanding.

### **1.5 Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to examine inclusive basic education for children with disabilities (ages 6-11) within Nigeria from the understandings of the most positive experiences of school heads, teachers, and parents of children with and without disabilities in inclusive private voluntary primary school; uncover what gives life to their participation in inclusive education, and to identify opportunities they draw upon in achieving these positive experiences and the advancement of inclusive education.

The objective is to arrive at concepts of exemplary inclusive education practices that may be used to inform change strategies and generate an agenda for the advancement of primary level inclusive education program. The key questions that will guide this inquiry are:

- ◆ What are parents' and educators' understandings of their most positive experiences in inclusive education?
- ◆ What opportunities do parents and educators draw upon in achieving these positive experiences and advancing inclusive education practices?

### **1.6 Significance of the study**

Kilbourn, (2006), posited that the significance of a study focuses on the gap in existing literature by showing how the study fills the gap and contributes to “theoretical or practical knowledge base [which] is educationally significant” (p. 544) The use of Appreciative Inquiry processes in this study increases the methodological arena of research in inclusive education. Appreciative Inquiry provides for a more relational process over traditional methods of research (Gergen & Gergen, 2000) which presume a more instrumentalist approach, differentiating or estranging the researcher from the researched. Instead of using participants to simply respond to research questions or explain the phenomenon, Appreciative Inquiry facilitates the participants to uncover the most “life-centric” experiences as a result of their engagement in dialogue.

Given the present state of the narrow discussion and research into the positive core of inclusive education, this research seeks to explore the gap that was recurrently cited in the literature by researchers and practitioners in the field of inclusive education.

Theoretically, this study will provide special and mainstream teacher educators with conceptualisations of inclusive education based on the understandings and experiences of primary school heads, teachers, and parents of children with and without disabilities. These concepts can be used to formulate theories upon which inclusive education programs may be constructed.

In practice, inclusive and special education researchers and scholars may find the results of this study of particular interest by investigating the accounts and stories of how inclusive education in an inclusive school functions when it is at its best. Policy makers and education planners may use the results to make informed decisions in creating and launching inclusive education professional learning or inclusive education advancement programmes.

Additionally, more focused research into the positive core of inclusive education practices may afford space for designing programs that are in synergy with that positivity. Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) observed that “human systems grow in the direction of what they persistently ask questions about” (p. 9). Therefore, research that seeks to discover the best of *what is* and *what has been* in the advancement and sustainability of inclusive education practices may prove catalytic in creating a promising future for the education sector.

## 1.7 Definitions

The following basic terms are operationally defined for use in this study. They are applied as stated for the context of the study.

**Inclusive Education:** Inclusive education means that all students in a school, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses in any area become part of the school community. They are included in the feeling of belonging among other students, teachers and support staff (Huston, 2007, p. 1).

**Children with Disabilities:** Children with disabilities refer to children with physical or sensory impairments (FGN, 2004, p. 41)

**Educators:** Persons who support children's learning. In this context, teachers and head teachers.

**Head teachers:** The overall head teacher of the school and other heads of department

**Parent:** Caretaker of a child; where a child refers to "offspring".

**Primary Education:** In this context, the education of children between the ages of 6 and 11 years in a school. It is seen as the foundation of all levels of the education system.

**Appreciative Inquiry (AI):** Appreciative Inquiry is a method of inquiry which is participatory, co-constructive, and dialogical. It seeks to uncover the best of what is, what could be, and what should be. Appreciative Inquiry prizes and emphasises the positives, and focuses on how positive states can be increased (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

## 1.8 Organisation of the Dissertation

Chapter one provides the introduction to the inquiry, context of inquiry, purpose, research questions, and significance of the inquiry. This chapter also features a

description of terms, the researcher's position, and an overview of the proposed study's organisation. Chapter Two features reviews of the literature through a thematic synthesis of benefits of inclusive education, attitudes of school heads, teachers and parents toward the inclusion of children with disabilities as well as paradigms that arise from Appreciative Inquiry (AI). Chapter Three describes the research design used to explore educators and parents' perceptions, and includes a discussion on the qualitative case study methodology with elements of Appreciative Inquiry. Furthermore, it provides a description of the participants, the data collection and analysis procedures, ethical considerations, and issues related to trustworthiness in qualitative research. Chapter Four presents the results of the data analysis and highlights participants' understandings that emerged from the data as well as presents an interpretation of these understanding. Chapter Five discusses the findings of the data analysis. Finally, Chapter Six reports the methodological reflections, conclusions, and recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Review of Literature**

#### **Introduction**

In 2002, Farrell and Ainscow noted that inclusive education has progressively become a point of consideration in debates relating to the development of educational policy and practice the world over. In many countries, the education of children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities has now become an instituted significant policy objective (Lindsay, 2007). The legislative and policy inclinations of the past two and a half decades have experienced a conspicuous deviance from segregated education for children with special educational needs. This move was pioneered by the US with the introduction of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, which was amended in 1990 and updated in 1997 to become what is presently known as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in a bid to promote 'whole school' approaches to inclusion (Evans & Lunt, 2002). Following in the footsteps of the US, all EU countries have presently enacted legislations aimed at promoting inclusion and inclusive education (Winter & O'Raw, 2010). Thus, inclusive education has become, in the description of some commentators (e.g. Pijl, Meijer, & Hearty, 1997), a 'global agenda'.

Inclusive education has now been embraced for its significance in achieving the human rights and equal opportunities priority policy objective of liberal democracies. In this regard, inclusion defies all previous and yet existing policies and practices that oblige the exclusion of some children from their rights to education. Inclusive education is grounded on the ideal that all children have the right to be educated together irrespective of any special need or disability. However, it should not be presumed that

the wisdom of inclusion has been fully accepted. There is extensive debates over its achievability, and in what manner it could be achieved. There are also existing debate concerning the degree to which this embroils the [...] construction of a regular education system that ought to meet the needs of all students (Norwich, 2002).

Given that the principles of inclusion explicates inclusive education as a system in which tolerance, diversity and equity is striven for, the approach through which these ideals could be accomplished, however, remains a nut to be cracked.

The academic discontent and the increasing literature in inclusive education, though mostly positive, generate difficulty in situating inclusive education practices as well as the exploration of opportunities for its advancement and sustainability. As a result, scholars (e.g. Florian, 2005) have argued that the process of advancing inclusive education practices should be influenced by procedures that expound beyond traditionally accepted views of inclusive education considering that the context in which inclusive education functions is both fundamentally different and diverse. Accordingly, this literature review allows for an exploration of the conceptualisations of inclusive education practices that came to prominence in the past twenty-five years while examining the efforts that have been expended in inclusive education, and its advancement and sustainability during this period. More particularly, the literature review is divided into two parts. Part one examines the historical background of inclusion and inclusive education while acknowledging the Nigerian context and the controversies surrounding the definition of inclusive education. Part two presents inclusive education undertakings that defined and still currently defining inclusive

education practices as well as constructs of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) that lends credence to other theoretical base form for situating inclusive education practices. The chapter ends with a discussion of the factors that support the advancement of inclusive education.

## **Part One**

### **2.1 Historical Background to Inclusion and Inclusive Education**

The concept of inclusion has its beginnings in the field of special education and disability. The 19th century saw the forerunners of special education contending for and helping in the development of provision for children and youths who were excluded from education (Reynolds and Ainscow, 1994). Later on, governments took over responsibility for such provision. Following this development, the twentieth century experienced the rise and expansion of the field of special education, and special schools became the exact norm for pupils with disabilities. Segregating the education of children according to their abilities was deemed vital because they were seen as unable to benefit from conventional ways of teaching (Thomas, Walker and Webb, 1998). Traditionally, segregated special education was held-up by the medical model of disability which understood the barriers to learning as existing within the child. This view was as well reinforced by developments in psychometrics. Both of these models aided labelling and secluded educational delivery based on the pupil's disability. This segregated approach mostly went unopposed for several years. As the special education arena expanded, it became the established and undisputed wisdom that isolated delivery was the suitable and most operational alternative for meeting the needs of a

minority of children while protecting the efficient education of the majority (Pijl and Meijer, 1994).

Not until the 1960s' upsurge of the world-wide civil rights movement that the system of comparable delivery started to be questioned. As people with disabilities confronted the stigmatisation and restrictiveness presented by segregated education, while giving voice to their resentment and displeasure, concerns of equality in access and educational opportunity gained momentum and integration assumed center stage. With this development, political pressure from parental and advocacy disability groups started to change society's ideals and would eventually enhance legislative transformations in educational reforms. Thomas, et al. (1998) related that while educators intensified their exploration of ways through which previously segregated groups could be supported so as to secure a place in regular schools, the efficiency and end results of segregated education came under scrutiny. Particularly, indications of the dearth of success of segregated provision began to amass with such regularity that it could no longer be discounted. Towards the end of the twentieth century there was a rising agreement, ensuing from moral obligations and experiential evidence, that inclusion was "an appropriate philosophy and a relevant framework for restructuring education" (Thomas et al., 1998, p.4).

The present highlights on inclusive education can be viewed as an additional stride along this historical path. However, it is a far-reaching step, given that its purpose is to transform the mainstream in ways that will increase its capability for responding to all learners (Ainscow, 1999). The move in the direction of inclusion is not merely a

methodical or structural change but also an undertaking with a clear philosophy that is entrenched in the ideology of human rights:

This view implies that progress is more likely if we recognise that difficulties experienced by pupils result from the ways in which schools are currently organised and from rigid teaching methods. It has been argued that schools need to be reformed and pedagogy needs to be improved in ways that will lead them to respond positively to pupil diversity—seeing individual differences not as a problem to be fixed, but as opportunities for enriching learning’ (UNESCO, 2005, p. 9).

### **2.1.1 Defining Inclusion**

Slee (2001) has contended that inclusive education is yet subjected to intense debate and defining best practices is no simple undertaking. As earlier noted that while the significance of aiming for the development of an inclusive education system in which tolerance, diversity and equity are striven for goes unchallenged; the means through which this is to be achieved still remains contentious. This has further permeated the elusiveness of the concept of inclusion.

Despite the complex and contested nature of inclusion (Florian, 1998), it is a generally accepted idea that inclusive education espouses both the rights of students, and how education systems can be transformed to respond to different groups of learners. It underscores the need for opportunities for equal participation for any student with disabilities or special needs in the education system, preferably in a mainstream setting (Ainscow, et al., 2006).

The concept of inclusion replaced the earlier term 'integration', which was used in the 1980s to refer to the placement of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools. As Farrell and Ainscow (2002) pointed out, the problem with defining integration solely in terms of placement is that it tells us little about the quality of the education received in that context. The integration movement was based on an assimilation model. Its emphasis was on providing supports to individual students to enable them to 'fit in' to the mainstream programme without any changes being made to that programme.

The word 'inclusion' alters the focus from the child to the school. In contrast to integration, which fails to identify what should be done, inclusion describes the degree to which a child with special educational needs participates as a full member of the school community with full access to and involvement in all ramifications of education. 'Inclusion' better expresses the right to belong to the mainstream and a common strive to end discrimination while working towards equal opportunities for all (CSIE, 2002).

In this present literature, the definition of inclusion varies in focus. While some prominence is given to rights, values and community, others focus on school capacity to accommodate difference.

Ainscow (2005), highlighted that 'inclusion is a process and not a state'. This underscores the dynamic and evolving nature of inclusive educational practices. It also reframes inclusion as concerned with school reform and school development contrary

to being a process of expecting children to fit into existing structures. The same reference to process is seen in UNESCO's description of inclusive education:

Inclusion is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. ... [As such,] it involves a range of changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children' (UNESCO, 2005, p.13).

A study on developing inclusion in schools defined inclusion as "an approach to education embodying particular values concerned with all learners and with overcoming barriers to all forms of marginalisation, exclusion and underachievement" (Ainscow et al, 2006, p.5). Ainscow et al. (2006) summarised the situation thus,

Inclusive practice requires significant changes to be made to the content, delivery and organisation of mainstream programmes and is a whole school endeavour which aims to accommodate the learning needs of all students. The discourse on inclusion has moved beyond simply focusing on the response to individuals to explore how settings, policies, cultures and structures can recognise and value diversity' (Ainscow et al, 2006, p.2).

A useful summary of a range of definitions of inclusive education and their various sources was provided by Florian (2005) as presented in table 2.1 below:

**Table 2.1: Definitions of inclusive education**

Definition	Source
Being with one another, how we deal with adversity, how we deal with difference	Forest and Pearpoint, 1992
A set of principles which ensures that the student with a disability is viewed as a valued and needed member of the school community in every respect	Uditsky, 1993
A move towards extending the scope of 'ordinary' schools so they can include a greater diversity of children	Clark et al, 1995
Schools that deliver a curriculum to students through organisational arrangements that are different from those used in schools that exclude some students from their regular classrooms	Ballard, 1995
Schools that are diverse problem-solving organisations with a common mission that emphasises learning for all students	Rouse and Florian, 1996
Full membership of an age-appropriate class in your local school doing the same lessons as the other pupils and it mattering if you are not there. Plus you have friends who spend time with you outside of school	Hall, 1996
The process by which a school attempts to respond to all pupils as individuals by reconsidering its curricula organisation and provision	Sebba, 1996
Schools that are accepting of all children	Thomas, 1997

(Florian, 2005, p. 31)

Florian further stated that, “opportunity to participate implies active involvement and choice as opposed to the passive receipt of a pattern or condition that has been made available” (2005, p.32).

The variations in definition and interpretation submit that the connotation of inclusion may be contextual and that it will assume different forms depending on the state of affairs (Florian, 2005). This means that the demands for inclusive education will be

different according to viewpoint of the individual or group involved. It also means that inclusion will not look the same in every school even when it is argued on the basis of human rights. Ainscow et al (2006) recommend that in order to be able to assess the extent to which inclusion is happening in our schools, some decisions concerning the use of the term must be effected. Hence, they developed a typology of six ways of thinking about inclusion as noted in Chapter One. While this literature review acknowledges all six typologies given that the issue of discrimination and exclusion from education is not exclusive to children with disabilities, the literature is inclined more on investigating inclusive education for children with disabilities for various but substantiated reasons.

The numbers of children with disabilities is grossly underestimated, particularly in developing countries such as Nigeria. Children with severe and moderate disabilities may be acknowledged, but children with mild or hidden disabilities and the large population of children with learning disabilities or difficulties are ignored. These children account for an enormous percentage of children who drop out and do not complete primary education. They have no noticeable disability, however, they may experience great difficulty with learning in one or more areas. Children with “hidden” disabilities may consist of those with intellectual disabilities and mental health problems, but may also comprise children with unrevealed disabilities such as hearing loss. Children from many of the groups enumerated above may fall into any of these categories (UNESCO, 2009).

Mba (1995) and Oluremi (2012) argued that most of the initial action and advocacy for the right to education of these groups of children has traditionally been taken by non-government agencies. This is again particularly true in developing countries. Children with disabilities arguably form the largest group of readily identifiable children who have been and continue to be persistently excluded from education. The World Bank estimates that of the 115 million children worldwide who are not in school, 30-40 per cent are children with disabilities (World Bank, 2003).

According to (UNESCO, 2009), children with disabilities have been prevented from accessing educational rights that are freely available to other typical growing children. They have also been denied access to the disability-specific services that they need in areas such as early intervention and rehabilitation. The inability to access these services, coupled with prejudice and rejection, has resulted in economic and social exclusion for children with disabilities and their families. This marginalisation has meant that their needs have not been considered in the development of basic mainstream services such as education and health (UNESCO, 2009). Where services have been provided, it has usually been in the context of welfare or charity, often initiated by non-governmental organisations, with responsibility less likely to be taken by the government (Mba, 1995; Oluremi, 2012). Education has most commonly been provided in segregated special schools, to a minority of children in urban areas (UNESCO, 2005). This helps to explain the extremely low enrolment rates cited above.

Bunch (1999) has argued that we should not accept that difference in learning ability should mean segregation of so many young people. He states that, “[i]t simply is

preferable and better to educate all students together. All the teachers teaching inclusively today prove that inclusion is possible and practical” (p.1). For him, the word inclusion means that, “all children have the right to go to the same school attended by their brothers, sisters, and neighbourhood friends [and furthermore] ... [p]lacement in a programme should depend on the needs of individual children for a natural environment, and not on some form of quasi-medical diagnosis or psychological measurement” (1999, p.4).

He proposes the following approach to inclusion:

- We learn to talk by talking
- We learn to read by reading
- We learn to write by writing
- We learn to include by including (Bunch, 1999, p. 9).

## **2.2 Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities: The Nigerian Context**

Like many other developing countries in Africa, Nigeria system of education has continually evolved over the years. From the early 1940s, a separate, segregated system of schooling for pupils classified as ‘handicapped’ was established through the efforts of Christian Missionaries, International and local group of humanitarians and private voluntary organisations (Mba, 1995). Notably was the establishment of the Chesire home for the physically ‘handicapped’ children, the incurably sick and the homeless children which was autonomously run by the Lord Leonard Chesire foundation (Onwuchekwa, 1985; Sowumi, 1992). The oldest of the Nigerian homes - the Oluyole Cheshire Home - located in Ibadan started operations on 6th June, 1959 by a local group of humanitarians made up of both Africans and the British people who were inspired by the example of Group Captain Cheshire (Oluremi, 2012). According to Oluremi

(2012), the residents were mainly physically challenged children who had been abandoned by their parents by the roadside or in the bush; “some of whom were happily married working adults, having received special secondary education” (p. 176). Other projects geared towards facilitating the education of children and youths with disabilities before the 1960s were the establishment of a school for the ‘blind’ in northern Nigeria in 1944 by the Sudan United Mission Church, Wesley School for the Deaf in 1956, Ibadan Mission School for the Deaf in 1960, among others.

It must be noted that most of the early humanitarian projects were fronted by missionaries, benevolent individuals or private voluntary organisations. Government participation was originally insignificant until 1957, when an Act (Article 6) was passed in the then Northern Nigeria, which established the Special Education Directorate in Northern Nigeria (Abosi & Ozofi, 1988). This 1957 Act prompted government support for the cause of special education in Nigeria. From this time on, Regional and State governments initiated occasional grant-in-aid to voluntary organisations which aided in caring for the people with disabilities (Oluremi, 2012). Today, special education has pervaded all aspects of Nigeria education system.

Since the 1960s when the government began participating actively in the education of persons with disabilities through the establishment of more special schools and support for existing ones, the educational programme with special needs has experienced series of changes (Olukotan, 2004). These changes were mostly influenced by international trends. Given the segregating nature of special education, its demerits compared to the merits of mainstreaming came under scrutiny as, according to Hasazi,

Johnson, and Hull (1989), it failed to acknowledge the fact that the special needs children are part of the community and the society at large. With the realisation of the shortcomings of segregation, the need for these learners to be educated in regular schools gained acknowledgement in the National Policy on Education (NPE) document (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981) and the 2004 revised NPE. The NPE (2004, revised) stated that:

The government has decided that integration is the most realistic form of special education since the special needs children are eventually expected to live in the same society with the 'normal'. In this recent time, inclusive education has become an educational placement for the special needs children, which enable them to be fully integrated/mainstreamed into the larger society (NPE, 2004).

Thanks to numerous United Nations declarations on the "rights of the [people with disabilities]," inclusive education has been accepted, at least in principle, in Nigeria and many other developing countries (Cherema, 2010; UNESCO, 2009). Apparently, the provision of operational special education and related services to persons with disabilities in the country requires more inclusive environments to assist with fighting discrimination and enhancing equality and access to programs and services (Nkechi, 2013; Obiakor & Eleweke, 2014). However, there has been concerns about the availability of the necessary resources and supports to ensure the success of inclusive programmes in the country. Evidence has consistently shown that inclusion programmes in educational settings are not being adequately implemented in Nigeria (Ajuwon, 2008; Gamba, 2003; Obiakor & Bragg, 1998; Obiakor & Offor, 2012). Factors such as the absence of support services, relevant materials, and support personnel are

major problems that hinder the implementation of effective inclusion of students with disabilities in regular Nigerian schools (Eleweke, 2001, 2013; Nkechi, 2013; Obiakor & Eleweke, 2014). This situation, apparently, suggests that learners with disabilities and SEN in Nigeria are not receiving the type of education they deserve.

Regardless of the present challenges in providing effective inclusive education and services for its citizens with disabilities by the Nigerian government, the legacies of some private voluntary organisations and humanitarians has endured the provision of inclusive education in its autonomous capacity, to children and youths with disabilities (Eleweke, Agboola, & Guteng,2015). This situation has led some commentators (e.g. Ikoya & Onoyase, 2008) to conclude that despite the NPE and the launching of the UBE following the EFA agenda, which was expected to solve the problem of poor access to basic education, the failure of the government to adequately implement inclusive basic education for its citizens with disabilities stems from “over centralisation of provision and management of school infrastructures” (p. 21).

According to Nzekwe (2013), granting schools a certain level of autonomy in the performance of their job as the facilitators of the inclusive education implementation would go a long way in making school management easier as schools would most likely be “able to take initiatives and solve their problems without much bureaucratic bottlenecks” (p. 182). Apparently, the success recorded thus far by PVOs and humanitarian agencies in the inclusive education journey lies heavily on the self-management they enjoy.

## **Part Two**

### **2.3 Inclusive Education in Practice**

In its most rudiment form, inclusive education means including all students within the education system. However, in practice inclusive education involves so much more, from ensuring all students gain access to the curriculum by differentiation and targeted teaching strategies, to training and supporting teachers to meet the challenge of inclusion and creating a whole-school inclusive culture.

This section describes a range of whole-school practices of inclusive education and their resultant effects that emerged from previous literature, which are grouped together under various thematic headings depicting a general structure for considering inclusive education practices and their outcomes in a school.

#### **2.3.1 Social Dimension of Inclusive Education**

Internationally, social participation has been considered a key issue in the inclusive practices debate. The inclusion of students with disabilities and those identified as having SEN is a particular concern given that these students are “often reported to experience difficulties in participating fully in regular education” (Bossaert, Colpin, Pijl, & Petry, 2013b, p. 60) as a result of lacking social skills.

This finding is consistent with the works of Camargo et al., (2014); Carter and Hughes (2005); and De Monchy, Pijl, and Zanderberg (2004) which reported that one of the causative factors known to hinder the social participation of children with disabilities in the society is the absence of social skills. Where skill-based interventions are effected,

they focus exclusively on children with disabilities and often take place in unnatural settings such as clinical settings, resource rooms, or other pullout settings (Gresham, Sugai, & Horner, 2001). Although this 'in isolation' social skill intervention may have a small effect on children with disabilities' social acceptance (Forness & Kavale, 1996; Quinn et al., 1999), the setting inhibits the generalisation of the learned social skills into the natural context, which may involve different persons and different social situations (Camargo et al., 2014; Gresham et al., 2001). A recent meta-analysis of single-case studies by Whalon, Conroy, Martinez, and Werch (2015) supports the importance of the setting where social skills are learned indicating that child-specific social skills interventions taking place in the children's natural school setting do have a sufficient and long-lasting positive effect on the social interactions of children with disabilities.

The fact that children with and without disabilities learn in the same environment creates a space for children without disabilities to sharpen their already existing social skills first, while enhancing the social participation of their counterparts with disabilities, which could only be achieved in an environment of humans with heterogeneous social skills (Garrote & Dessemontet, 2015).

From a social perspective, inclusion in a general education school setting allows pupils with disabilities more contact with their typically developing peers than do special schools or any other 'in isolation' setting. These regular contacts lets them to have an optimum social participation in the society – the classroom, the school environment, and the society at large. According to recent studies on this topic, social participation in inclusive schools encompasses four key themes: being socially accepted by classmates,

feeling socially accepted by them, having social relationships/friendships, and having positive social interactions with classmates (Bossaert, Colpin, Pijl, & Petry, 2013b; Koster, Nakken, Pijl, & van Houten, 2009). However, simply including children with disabilities in a regular school environment is not enough to guarantee their social participation in each of these four key aspects. This view is supported by most studies on this topic which revealed that pupils with disabilities experience more difficulties in their social acceptance equal to their peers without disabilities (Bossaert, Colpin, Pijl, & Petry, 2013a; Bossaert, de Boer, Frostad, Pijl, & Petry, 2015; Cambra & Silvestre, 2003; Chamberlain, Kasari, & Rotheram-Fuller, 2007; Estell et al., 2008; Grutter, Meyer, & Glenz, 2015; Koster, Pijl, Nakken, & van Houten, 2010; Krull, Willbert, & Henneman, 2014; Nadeau & Tessier, 2003; Nepi, Fioravanti, Nannini, & Peru, 2015; Pijl, Frostad, & Flem, 2008; Pijl, Skaalvic, & Skaalvic, 2010). Some studies also concluded that pupils with disabilities also felt less socially accepted than their peers without disabilities (Bossaert et al., 2015; Cambra & Silvestre, 2003; Schwab, Gebhardt, Krammer, Gasteiger-Klicpera, 2015). Moreover, it was revealed that these students are most likely to have less friends than their typically developing counterparts (Avramidis, 2013; Chamberlain et al., 2007; Estell et al., 2008; Frostad, Mjåvatn, & Pijl, 2011; Kasari, Locke, Gulsrud, & Rotheram-Fuller, 2011; Koster et al., 2010; Pijl et al., 2010). It is vital, therefore, to take measures to prevent the difficulties with social participation experienced by many children with disabilities or to implement interventions that help them to overcome these difficulties (Cambra & Silvestre, 2003; Koster et al., 2010; Maras & Brown, 1996; Terpstra & Tamura, 2008). Among inclusive education practices that enhance the prevention of many difficulties children with disabilities may

experience in accomplishing the four key aspects of social interaction is the peer-assisted learning.

The concept of peer-assisted learning is supported by several research findings that demonstrate that peers can also help students with disabilities access the general education curriculum (Olson, Roberts, & Leko, 2015). Within this arrangement, one or two same-age peers can be trained to support a student with a disability in the general education classroom (Carter, Cushing, Clark, & Kennedy, 2005; Carter, Sisco, Melekoglu, & Kurkowski, 2007). This arrangement leads to improvements in student engagement for both students with and without disabilities, enhanced social interactions, reduced off-task and challenging behaviour, the advancement of functional skills, and academic growth (Spooner, Dymond, Smith, & Kennedy, 2006). Moreover, individuals with disabilities can learn from their same-age peers, cultivate friendships with their peer tutors or partners, and build friendships with other peers in the classroom (Carter & Kennedy, 2006).

Some other instances of the benefit of peer-assisted learning can be found in the single-case studies carried out in preschool or elementary schools where typically developing children have been trained to interact with their peers with disabilities. For example, in the single-case study of Goldstein, English, Shafer, and Kaczmarek (1997), typically developing children were taught three strategies intended to improve their social interactions with eight peers with Intellectual Disability (ID): mutual attention to the play activity, commenting about ongoing activities, and general acknowledgment of communicative behaviours. This type of intervention was found to increase the social

interactions between children with (ID) and their classmates without disabilities during free play, lunchtime, or recess. Enhanced maintenance effects were detected when some peers had been trained or when children were encouraged to use the learned skills not only in the course of free play but also while carrying out various activities across the day. This type of intervention was also found to increase the social acceptance of some children with ID (Goldstein et al., 1997). Remarkably, the single-case study of Owen-DeSchryver, Carr, Cale, and Blakeley-Smith (2008), conducted in elementary schools, showed that untrained peers surprisingly increased their interaction initiations with three children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) during lunchtime and recess. This is a submission that untrained peers observed and modeled the behaviors of their trained peers toward the children with disabilities. The focus of the social dimension of inclusive education practices could be said to be unapologetically biased towards life-giving and generative human conditions, which, if emphasised more, can open up new possibilities and methods to inclusive education practices and its sustainability.

### **2.3.2 Academic Opportunities**

Importantly, inclusive education practices does not end with the learning of social skills. Rather social skills learning is seen as a spring board to improving on other practices as it creates the opportunity to not only improve the academic performances of all pupils but also develop practices which are responsive to different learning styles (Boston-Kemple, 2012). Contrary to most literature on the negative effects of inclusive education on the academic achievement of pupils without disabilities, (Campbell, 2009; MacBeath, Galton, Steward, MacBeath, & Page, 2005; Peck, Staub, Gallucci, & Schwartz,

2004; Upchurch, 2007), recent findings have shown that rather than have negative effects, inclusive education challenges practitioners to continuously search for the best ways to academically assist children with disabilities, which translates into raised academic standard (Ekeh & Oladayo, 2013) for all learners, not just those [with] labels of [abilities]. For example, studies conducted by (Cole, Waldron, & Majid, 2004) found that students without disabilities made significant greater progress in reading and math when served in inclusive setting. Similarly, research by Ruijs, Van der Veen, and Peetsma (2010), and Sermier Dessemontet, and Bless (2013) both found that there was no significant difference found in the academic achievement of students without disabilities when served in classrooms with or without inclusion. Time spent engaged in the general education curriculum is strongly and positively correlated with math and reading achievement for students with disabilities. (Cosier, Causton-Theoharis, & Theoharis, 2013), while students with intellectual disability that were fully included in general education classrooms made more progress in literacy skills when compared to students served in special schools. (Dessemontet, Bless, & Morin, 2012). These findings correlate with several other studies on the positive effects of inclusive education on the academic achievement of pupils with and without disabilities (Burstein, Sears, Wilcoxon, Cabello, & Spagna, 2004; Castro, 2007; Farrell, Dyson, Polat, Hutcheson, & Gallannaugh, 2007; Fore, Burke, Burke, Boon, & Smith, 2008; Fruth & Woods, 2015; Idol, 2006; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Rea, McLaughlin, & Walther-Thomas, 2002; Spence, 2010; Wischnowksi, Salmon, & Eaton, 2004; Zaretsky, 2005). Given these results, it is recommended that improved academic opportunities be considered when developing agenda for inclusive education practices.

### **2.3.3 Continuous Professional Development for Teachers**

At the heart of successful inclusive education practices are mainstream teachers who take ownership of inclusion and who believe in their own competence to educate students with special educational needs (Thomas et al, 1998). This may present a challenge since the underlying assumption has been that students identified as having special needs belong in a different place, as well as a different pedagogical category, and thus could not be taught successfully by ordinary teachers (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000). Hence, inclusive education practices become transforming when the results of the challenges it presents are positive while “[drawing] out, [inspiring], and [developing] the best and highest within the people [involved] from the inside out” (Covey, 1998, p. xii).

Many teachers, when faced with the prospect of including a child with disabilities in their class, become less positive and experience anxiety and stress. This, however, can be controlled by access to training, resource provision, and additional supports (Lindsay, 2007).

Research suggests that when inclusion is carefully managed and planned, mainstream teachers gradually move from an attitude of scepticism to wanting to improve (Fredrickson, 2001) while collaborating as part of a team (Wood, 1998) thus generating ripple effects (Ingleton, 2014).

Interestingly and contrary to the literature on professional development that emphasises the initial school certification of teachers - through teacher education

programmes - as essential for successful inclusive education practice (Cardona, 2009; Carroll, Forlin, & Jobling, 2003; Sharma, Forlin, Loreman, & Earle, 2006; Van Laarhoven, Munk, Lynch, Bosma, & Rouse, 2007), studies on teachers continuous professional development for a successful inclusive education have found that targeted and ongoing professional development is critical in supporting and maintaining inclusive education practices in schools (Friend, Cook, Chamberlian., & Shamberger, 2010; Pugach & Winn, 2011). However, while not dismissing the fact that teacher preparation programmes remain the formal groundwork upon which the knowledge of inclusive education is built – as teachers are familiarised with the history, policies, and philosophies of inclusion, it does not adequately train pre-service teachers for most situations that may occur in the inclusive education setting (Shady, Luther, & Richman, 2013). This is because inclusive education is evolutionary and usually context specific (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2010). This development has continued to generate debate between supporters of flexible training routes and advocates of teaching professionalisation. The supporters of de-regulation view certification as ‘an unnecessary regulatory hurdle’ (McLeskey and Ross, 2004) and suggest a ‘utilitarian’ approach to teacher education, which increasingly takes it out of the academic arena (Bartell, 2001). Similarly, Cochran-Smith (2005) has challenged the purpose of schooling and of teacher education, seeking a move away from a focus on producing learners who can pass tests. Given the evolutionary and context specific nature of inclusive education (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2010), it has been argued that regardless of the foundational knowledge of inclusive and/or special education legislation and teaching strategies teachers are been equipped with, additional guidance related to inclusion through sustained professional

development and continued support from administrators (Casale, 2011; Jenkins & Yoshimura, 2010; Worrell, 2008) are necessitated for teachers to successfully “respond to the ever-evolving inclusive education milieu” (Hemmings & Woodcock, 2011, p. 6).

### **2.3.4 Compassionate Learning Community**

Compassion is at the heart of learning and teaching. Wolpow, Johnson, Hertel, and Kincaid (2009) defined compassion as “a feeling of deep empathy and respect for another who is stricken by misfortune and the strong desire to actively do something about it” (p. 17). This means that compassion is the human quality of appreciating others’ suffering with a desire to help alleviate it. However, compassion goes beyond feeling for others. We are compassionate when we act on those feelings in soothing, helping, caring, accepting, and/or being protective (Katz, 2012).

Katz (2012) further highlighted that successful inclusive education practices recognise that in educating diverse individuals in the same educational setting, the need to build a compassionate learning community that recognises the deeper needs of all people, including a sense of safety, a sense of belonging, and the feeling of being part of something meaningful, arises. This view is consistent with Palmer’s (2007) allusion to a learning community as a phenomenon that leads participants to lifelong understanding of who they are, why they are here, and what they have to contribute. According to Miller (1998/1999), in order to build a less violent and more compassionate world, we need to nurture a deeper sense of self in our children while expanding their ability to empathise with and value diverse others. The formal way to achieve this feat according to Hertel, Johnson, Wolpow, & Kincaid (2009), is to nurture

our schools into compassionate schools whose “policies, procedures, and paradigms recognise students as whole people” (p. 19). Such schools strive to meet the needs of all community members without judgement. Community members are empowered to experience success emotionally, socially, and academically (Hertel, Johnson, Wolpov, & Kincaid, 2009). In other words, in order to fight dissociation while meeting academic and curricular demands, schools must explore instructional structures that incorporate “the teaching *to the heart as well as to the mind*, exploring the deeper meanings of what we learn, connecting with the community we learn and live with, and coming to know ourselves” (Katz, 2012, p. 2 *Emaphasis in original*). It is within this comprehensive inquiry arrangement, therefore, that compassionate schools and invariably, compassionate society evolve, which, can mostly be attained through the espousal of inclusive education practices.

### 2.3.5 Assumptions about Change that Promote Inclusive Education Practices

In understanding the implications of inclusive education practices, it is important to recognise the assumptions surrounding the concept of change. Fullan (1991) has identified a number of ‘do’s’ and ‘don’ts’ regarding these assumptions that are worth considering. They are as follows:

**Table 2.2: Assumptions Surrounding the Concept of Change**

S/N	ASSUMPTIONS
1.	Assume that conflict and disagreement are not only inevitable but fundamental to successful change
2.	Do not assume that your version of what the change should be is the one that should or could be implemented.
3.	Assume that any significant innovation, if it is to result in change, requires individual implementers to work out their own meaning.

4.	Assume that people need pressure to change (even in directions that they desire), but it will be effective only under conditions that allow them to react, to form their own position, to interact with other implementers, to obtain technical assistance etc. Relearning is at the heart of change.
5.	Assume that effective change takes time. It is a process of 'development in use'. Persistence is a critical aspect of change.
6.	Do not expect all or even most people in groups to change. Progress occurs when we take small steps that increase the number of people affected. Be encouraged by what has been accomplished.
7.	Assume that you will need a plan that is based on the above assumptions and that addresses the factors known to affect implementation.
8.	Assume that no amount of knowledge will ever make it totally clear what action should be taken. Action decisions are a combination of factors.
9.	Assume that changing the culture of institutions is the real agenda, not implementing single innovations

**Adapted from Fullan, M. (1991). *The new meaning of educational change*. London: Cassell Educational Ltd. (p.105-107).**

It is important to remember that any change, as presented by inclusive education practices, is unpredictable, and its success essentially depends on monitoring that change and modifying our approach to keep it on track (Winter & O'Raw, 2010). It is imperative therefore that we have some means of gauging the effect of the various factors at play so as to successfully effect inclusive education practices, and be able to involve all stakeholders in both implementing inclusive education practices and in monitoring the progress of that initiative. According to Fullan (1991), "the answer is not found by seeking ready-made guidelines, but by struggling to understand and modify events and processes that are intrinsically complicated, difficult to pin down, and ever changing" (pp. 107-108) through school self-assessment.

Ainscow, et al. (2006) suggested that schools that decide to pursue self-assessment should take into account the perception and attitudes of its community members given that the key outcome of good self-assessment is that it allows each school to set individual goals which are particular to the context and to the existing status. It allows schools to describe what these goals might look like in the classrooms and in the school in general. It also facilitates schools in developing a collective perspective on how well the school is fulfilling its goals of becoming more inclusive (Winter & O'Raw, 2010). This means that inclusion cannot be dissociated from the contexts in which it is developing, nor the social relations that might nourish or restrict that development (Dyson, 2006). Bolman and Deal (2008) concluded that creating the atmosphere for people to air “their ideas and concerns” making sure that the necessary mechanisms are put in place to translate these ideas and concerns into a win-win accomplishment “is a requisite for successful innovation” (p. 382).

This suggests that it is in the composite interaction amongst individuals, and amongst groups and individuals, that mutual beliefs, values, and change exist, which are recipes for successful inclusive education practice.

#### **2.4 Constructs from Appreciative Inquiry (AI)**

At the heart of growing supporting evidence for inclusive education, Dempsey (2008) concluded that “(t)he argument over whether inclusion works is ended. Inclusion does work when children, families and educators are supported to develop a positive understanding of inclusive education. On the bases of this, false assumptions and low expectations regarding the capabilities and behaviours of certain children (or groups of

children) are to be challenged (Ainscow, 2007). This requires that children, families, and educators are to be supported to think outside the box - “enlarging their capacity to [appreciate their strengths while imagining how] more might be achieved” (p. 6). Thus engaging in inclusive education through fostering the concept of positive inquiry is what is required to bring about change towards inclusion (Ainscow, 2007).

Developing such change process enables children, families, and educators to come away with a more positive view of inclusive education, and a profound belief in themselves and their schools (UNICEF, 2013). One emerging theory of organisational change through which such feat could be achieved is the AI.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a philosophy which deals with “the study of what gives life to human systems when they function at their best” (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010, p. 1). It is concerned with identifying the best in people and the world around them, recognising those things which give life and quality to living human systems, and affirming past and present strengths, achievements, and possibilities. Instead of concentrating on the root cause of failure, it focuses on the root cause of success.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) has a catalytic impact. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) revealed that by tapping into accounts of organisations that function at their best, AI releases commitment that “creates energy for positive change” (p. 4). When Appreciative Inquiry is used to investigate human behaviour or organisational phenomena, the *good* becomes *better* because a positive drive is created within/among individuals and organisations (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Van Tiem, 2004). AI

captures the imaginations, rewards the contribution of individuals, and stimulates individuals in an organisation (Zolno, 2002 as cited in Ingleton, 2014). It strives to render best intentions into reality.

Appreciative Inquiry has “the relational capacity to mobilise creative potential and to turn it into positive power - to set in motion positive ripples of confidence, energy, enthusiasm and performance - to make a positive difference in the world” (Whitney, Trosten-Bloom, & Rader, 2010, p. 3). Appreciative Inquiry seeks to find the intrinsic positive potential in every human being and every situation. Appreciative Inquiry uses “positive approaches to get positive results” (Whitney et al, 2010, p. 9). It seeks to reward, to uncover, to identify and amplify the best of what is. The outcome is then used in designing systems or formulating strategies that are in consonance with that positivity to produce or create more ripple effects.

Carr-Stewart and Walker (2003) employed the Appreciative Inquiry procedure to conduct research with educational administrators/superintendents. The research involved these individuals in appreciative interviews about their leadership success. They concentrated on the best of what is by asking participants to identify a time in their experience when they felt most effective and engaged, as well as to think of a time when they felt especially creative in their leadership. They invited participants to write down their stories, share their experiences, and describe their dreams and aspirations. By engaging in such a process, Carr-Stewart and Walker noted that superintendents defined their future role “as partnership builders and brokers; programme deliverers, guardians of public education; change agents; advocates and visionaries” (p. 12).

Through this extraordinary engagement strength-based process, individuals were able to create ideologies and visualise a desired future. Carr-Stewart and Walker reported that the AI process enabled participants to come away with a more positive view of leadership, and an intense belief in themselves and their organisations.

Whitney et al. (2010) suggest that appreciative questioning is an enormously positive force. Positive questions open up the prospects of best practices, success stories, and creativity. Moreover, positive questions further unlock “positive emotions essential to high performance such as acceptance, validation, job satisfaction, and courage” (p. 28). The questions raised in Appreciative inquiry process are intentional positive questions meant to guide people towards elevated levels of consciousness. Positive questions lead to curiosity, learning, deepened relationships, and a change towards more positive outcomes (Whitney et al, 2010).

Furthermore, inclusion has been identified as one of the factors needed for the successful operation of appreciative inquiry. Given today’s multicultural, multi-generational, and multi-talented workforce, the practice of inclusion is fundamental to the success of organisations (Rost, 1993; Whitney, et al, 2010). The practice of inclusion dictates that “all voices matter” (p. 2). The appreciative inquiry takes into account the perspective of all relevant and interested persons, all whose future is affected in the decision making process. Whitney et al (2010) stated that appreciative inquiry “draws on the generative capacity of inclusion.” In doing so, diverse groups of people are invited to co-construct and coauthor their future. This process of inclusion fosters team work, shared visions, and shared control (Whitney et al, 2010).

Inspiration has the potential to create new opportunities, hope for the future, and vision. Crucial to the practice of appreciative inquiry is emphasising what inspires people (Ingleton, 2014). As a result, positive questions are continuously fielded in appreciative inquiry “in order to find out what people care about and what moves people to action” (p. 35). When people are inspired their creative potential is released and they function at their optimum level in their teams and organisations (Whitney, et al, 2010). Therefore, appreciative inquiry seeks ways to inspire people so that they can create individuals, teams, and organisations with far-reaching creative capacity, and communal wisdom.

Fundamentally, AI is an embodiment of inquiry, inclusion, and inspiration. These philosophies, in practice, make good things happen in life affirming ways. However, the inspiring and profoundly positive principle of AI are not devoid of limitations. One of the most prevalent concerns present in the literature on AI is that a focus on the positive experiences and stories silence the negative experiences of participants, hence inhibits hypothetically significant negative conversations that need to take place (Busche, 2011; Miller, Fitzgerald, Murrell, Preston & Ambekar, 2005). Additionally, Oliver (2005) raised the argument that proponents of AI treat the concepts of positive and negative as having intrinsic meaning, that is, negating the possibility that what may be positive for some, may be negative for others (Busche, 2011). Other scholars have questioned the possibility of inquiry into the positive without conjuring instances of the negative, given that behind every positive image lies a negative one (Bushe, 2011; Fineman, 2006). Fitzgerald, Oliver, and Hoxsey (2010) cited instances where AI generated uncomfortable feelings in participants, as well as brought to fore previously repressed

thoughts. Rather than dismiss those feelings the authors used the break to facilitate inquiry into those censored experiences. According to Fitzgerald et al. (2010), inquiring into the negative had a favourable influence. They referred to the embrace of the negative and the positive as “authentic appreciation” (p. 230). In this sense, appreciation is knowing, being conscious of, and taking full or adequate account of all aspects of human and organisational life (Grant & Humphries, 2006).

Regardless of these criticisms, however, AI has practical implications and provides a fresh conversation and a rather powerful process through which individuals and organisations can learn, grow, and change. Notably, its advocates maintain that “we do not dismiss accounts of conflict, problems, or stress. We simply do not use them as the basis of analysis or action” (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p. 18).

### **2.5 Factor Supporting the Advancement and Sustainability of Inclusive Education**

According to Ainscow et al. (2006), there appears to be a recurrent theme in the literature on inclusion that suggests that schools that have made a commitment to inclusion are characterised by particular kinds of ‘culture’, usually related to a set of inclusive values and frequently in response to school principals who take a stand on these values, and who engage the staff to work together to accept and value difference. There is also the case that these inclusive values cannot be imposed externally but can only be “created around the shared commitments of those who are centrally involved” (2006, p.163).

Fullan (1991) makes the point that school reform efforts which are imposed or led from the 'top' and are passed 'down' to teachers in the classroom often fail. This is because those who have to implement the reforms have not been sufficiently involved in the decision making process and those who create the policies are unaware of the contexts in which teachers work on a daily basis. Effective leadership from the top should be accompanied by bottom-up support, and a partnership approach, in order to ensure the successful implementation of necessary reforms or changes (Winter & O'Raw, 2010). This means that the teachers and other staff who have to implement the changes must not only support the reforms themselves but also be supported as they strive to make the changes (UNESCO, 2005). They must also view the changes as a significant improvement on their existing practice. As Thomas et al. (1998) assert, the move to inclusion rests upon partnership at all levels; legislation at the national level may provide the framework, and the resources and financial backup may come at the regional level but it is critical that the ideas and initiatives for change come from and are supported by those who do the work in the schools. Inclusion is a process that requires changes at both school and systems levels (UNESCO, 2005).

According to Winter and O'Raw (2010), the changes that take place as a school moves towards becoming more inclusive should involve overcoming some potential obstacles. These include existing attitudes and values, lack of understanding, lack of necessary skills, limited resources, and inappropriate organisation. Overcoming these requires clarity of purpose, realistic goals, motivation, support, resources and evaluation. (UNESCO, 2005). As Fullan (1991) contended, good change processes are characterised by trust, relevance, and the desire to get better results. He suggested that accountability

and improvement should become interwoven in the process but require a level of autonomy to be granted to individual schools in effecting the required change. Autonomy when granted to individual schools to effect inclusive change ensures effective leadership, wider impact on policies, practices, ideas and beliefs, enhanced pupil participation, reduced discrimination, strengthened partnerships and collaboration, strengthening of the education system to include all learners (UNESCO, 2005).

### **2.5.1 Leadership**

A research conducted by Bryk, Sebring, Kerbow, Rollow, and Easton (1998) who demonstrated improvements in approximately 473 elementary schools over time as a result of successful school head leadership. Their report indicated that these school heads collaboratively facilitated change (i.e., including parents, community, teachers, etc.), maintained an attention on student learning, possessed operational management abilities, and integrated pressure for the transformation with support (as cited in Fullan, 2001). Hargreaves (2004) also explained that school heads must foster positive power as leaders, demonstrating a moral purpose and strength to advocate for what is best for the children and attainable by teachers.

Findings have also indicated that school leaders with more positive attitudes towards inclusion were more likely to believe that less restrictive placements were most appropriate for pupils with disabilities, both in primary (Praisner, 2003; Ramirez, 2006) and in secondary schools (Cox, 2008). It was also revealed that school leaders supported the inclusion of children irrespective of the severity of the disability, being

either mild (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998 as cited in Hadjidakou & Mnasonos, 2012) or severe (Horrocks et al., 2008). This singular attitude singles them out as exemplars of genuine inclusion as well as reliable factors that support the advancement and sustainability of inclusive education as “they influence [school community members’] attitudes and beliefs about inclusion” (Irwin, Lero, & Brophy, 2004, p. 118).

### **2.5.2 Partnering with Health Personnel and Other Related Institutions**

Within the context of educational change, as is the case with inclusive education, Fullan (2006) proposes a new kind of leadership which transcends the successes of increasing student achievement and move towards leading organisations to sustainability. With this in mind, he argues for ‘system thinkers in action’, in which leaders expand their domain of influence and engagement by cooperating with other schools and related institutions so as to develop what he calls lateral capacity building towards sustainable development.

This call has been exemplified in the works of Mariga, McConkey and Myezwa (2014) drawn from their experiences from three African countries – Lesotho, Tanzania, and Zanzibar, which demonstrated that key factors that support the sustainability of inclusive education, especially in rural African communities, is embodied in the partnership between schools, health personnel and related institutions. In this sense schools tend to use specialised school and community resources effectively to support and strengthen what happens in schools and classroom. They develop support teams to assist with academic, social, and medical needs (Evans, Lunt, Wedell and Dyson, 1999; Idol, 1997; Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin and Williams, 2000).

Therefore, in a move towards sustainable inclusive education practices, drawing upon supporting factors such as effective leadership who can set the scene for partnering and collaborating with health and other related personnel would go a long way in ensuring that desired change is achieved at a considerable low cost Mariga, McConkey and Myezwa (2014).

## **2.6 Summary**

The concept and practices of inclusive education have taken diverse meanings and interpretations over the decades. Consistent with the objective of this study, this review focused essentially on inclusive education for children with disabilities. While acknowledging other forms of inclusive education as depicted by Ainscow, focusing particularly on inclusive education for children with disabilities stems from the knowledge that they are the most excluded of all the categories of marginalised children who experience difficulties in accessing basic education and other amenities.

Moving towards inclusion can be a slow process as a result, many factors need to come together for successful systemic change (Topping & Moloney, 2005). Inclusive education has the potential to benefit all students, their families and the whole school community. There are accumulating lessons from research and practice which provide us with the means to begin to provide quality inclusive education for diverse learners, including those with significant disabilities. In an attempt to develop or enhance inclusive education practices and competencies, educators and scholars have emphasised purposeful approaches such as down-to-top administration. Moreover, with the acknowledgement of the demanding challenges of inclusive education, scholars has conceptualised theoretical perspectives that reinforces the concept of the

inclusion paradigm of inclusive education. However, these perspectives are not flawless and continue to evolve with ongoing practice. As such I suggest that researchers need to continue to reconsider, re-tool, and reflect on new ways to address issues surrounding inclusive education practices, advancement and sustainability consistent with the evolving nature of inclusion.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

*It is practically inconceivable to visualise any human behaviour that is insubstantially mediated by the context in which it occurs (Owens, 1982)*

#### Introduction

The field of educational administration has experienced a long battle for supremacy between two distinctly different paradigms in systematic inquiry – the rationalistic and the naturalistic (Owen, 1982). Each of these paradigms is premised on varied views about the nature of social situations and ways of understanding them.

Distinguished by its objective, structural, and technocratic approach, which “yields lean spare description stripped of contextual reference” (Owen, 1982, p. 7), the rationalistic paradigm is akin with deductive thinking and enfolds the positivist ways of knowing. Contrarily, the naturalistic paradigm is concomitant with inductive thinking and encompasses a subjective, consensual, and interpretivist approach to understanding social and organisational situations (Crotty, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Owens, 1982). It produces copious description, leaves room for re-clarification, and strives to understand human experience from the actor’s own locus (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Merriam, 2009).

Notwithstanding these debates, several researchers have opined that the rationalistic and the naturalistic paradigms are authentic methods of inquiry. They further noted that one can only be accentuated over the other subject to the objective or nature of the research project, the phenomena under consideration, and the constraints of the

situation (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). In this study, I choose to adopt that logical perspective while concurring with Miles and Huberman's (1994) statement that "research is actually more a craft than a slavish adherence to methodological rules" (p. 5).

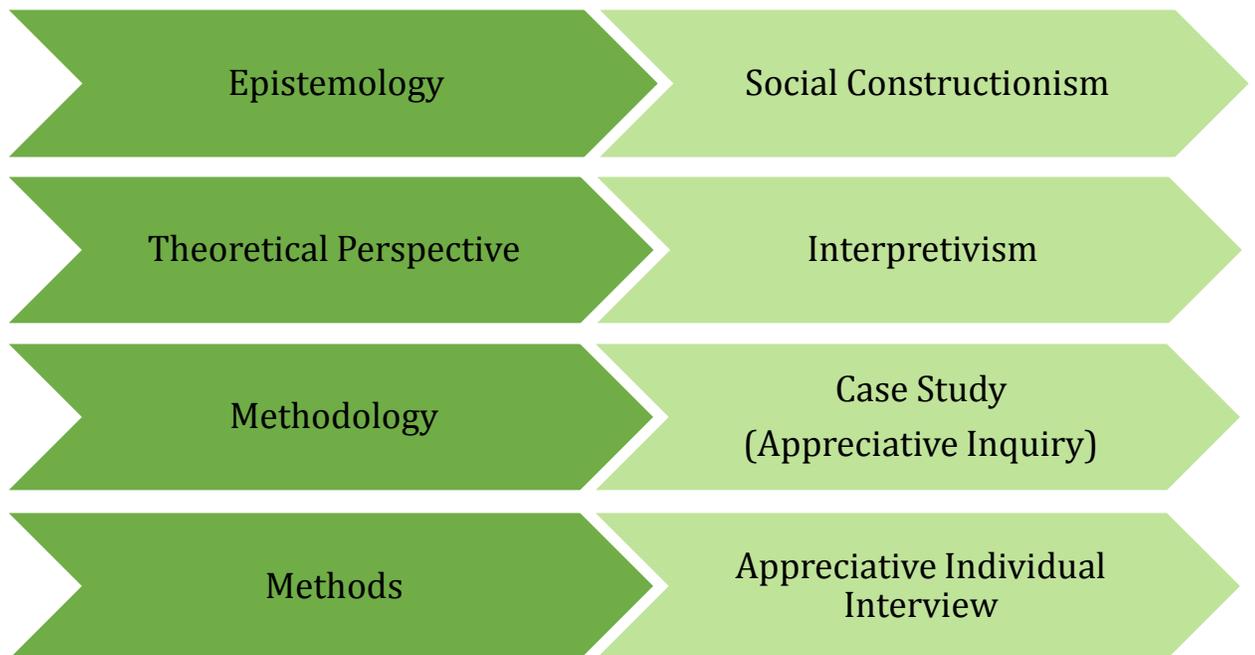
Keeping this in view, I crafted my research by employing a case study approach using elements of AI to examine parents and educators of children with and without disabilities' understandings of their most positive inclusive education experiences, unearth what gives life to their involvement in inclusive education, and to identify ways in which they conceptualise the advancement and sustainability of inclusive education. Responding to these issues necessitated a methodological approach that was co-constructive, participative, and dialogical. In order to sufficiently explore the phenomena of inclusive education, its advancement and sustainability from these participants' points of view, and to appreciate their understanding of positive inclusive education, I employed a qualitative case study; conducted through an AI process. In this chapter, I demonstrate that a case study using elements of AI was commensurate with the stated purpose of the study.

Additionally, this chapter outlines the research design, procedures of the research methodology, research methods, and the epistemological and theoretical alignments that served as the underpinning to the methodology. Furthermore, this chapter provides an account of the instruments and the processes of data analysis. This chapter also presents the parameters of the study, and concludes with my ethical duties, highlighting measures that I took to ensure anonymity and trustworthiness.

### 3.1 Research Design

This study uses a qualitative approach. Qualitative approaches focus on interpretation rather than quantification and are subjective rather than objective in nature (Brewerton & Milliard, 2004). Consistent with the nature of qualitative research, the design followed Crotty's (1998) framework in constructing a qualitative study. Accordingly, this design is developed along the following four paradigms: epistemology, methodology, theoretical perspective, and method as visually represented below:

*Figure 3.1: The research design. Adapted from Crotty (1998).*



### 3.1.2 Research Epistemology

The epistemology recognises the underlying assumptions about reality and human knowledge that the researcher possesses and therefore brings to the study. The epistemological foundation that underpins this study is embedded in social constructionism. According to Crotty (1998) social constructionists view “all knowledge and ... all meaningful reality [as] dependent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of relations between human beings and their world, and established and conveyed within a fundamentally social context” (p. 42).

It is the social constructionists believe that “words create worlds” (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010, p. 51). Notably, in social constructionism, the “locus of knowledge” is relationships, rather than individuals (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Therefore, I approached the study with the supposition that through dialogues and stories about the best of *what is* and *what has been* in inclusive education, a meaning of inclusive education and a process for advancing inclusive education for children with disabilities may be uncovered among the participants.

Additionally, given my personal experience, I actively co-constructed the meaning with the participants by constantly applying my background knowledge of inclusive education. Consistent with this paradigm, I was not a passive observer, but played an active role (Blaike, 2007) in the research process.

### **3.1.3 Theoretical Perspective**

The theoretical perspective that undergirds this study is the interpretivist's worldview. In contrast to the positivist context, interpretivism offers an understanding of the social world that is discrete from the natural world. The interpretivist paradigm proposes that "social reality is constructed and interpreted by people rather than something that exists objectively out there" (Denscombe, 2002, p. 18). For the interpretivist, individuals do not respond homogeneously to stimuli; rather, people act upon interpretations based on the meaning they attribute to objects or actions (Abbot, 2010). Interpretivism presents an understanding of the social world from the point of view of those being studied. It is grounded in the belief that "to understand this world of meaning one must interpret it" (Schwandt, 1994, p. 18). For this research, therefore, meanings were multiple and varied, leading me to look for the intricacy of views. In line with this viewpoint, my aim for this study was to comprehend inclusive education for children with disabilities as it is constructed and interpreted by the school heads, teachers and parents who are directly involved in inclusive education practices.

### **3.1.4 Research Methodology**

Qualitative research involves rigorous data collection through interviews, and the cautious documentation of all evidence (Tracy, 2010). The major aim of qualitative research is to understand the phenomenon from the participants' viewpoints. Merriam (2009) explained that the "emic" or insider's perspective rather than the "etic" or outsider's perspective is the focus of qualitative research. This kind of method is deemed appropriate for the study since I seek to comprehend the concept of inclusive education and its practices from school heads, teachers, and parents' perspectives.

Marshall and Rossman (1995) related that “the researcher is the instrument” (p. 59) in qualitative research. Being the primary instrument for the collection and analysis of data, the personal contact with the participants facilitated prompt response to certain circumstances, assisted me to promptly process data, and provided a space for me to clarify and summarise answers as the need arose.

#### **3.1.4.1 Case Study**

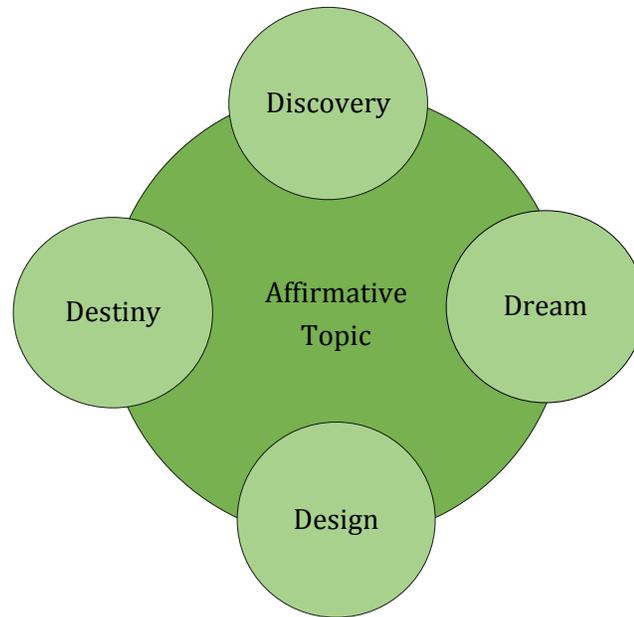
Hatch (2002) related that case studies are “a special kind of qualitative work that investigates a contextualised contemporary phenomenon within specified boundaries” (p. 30). Jones, Torres, and Armino (2006) contended that the “single most defining characteristic of a case study methodology is the emphasis on the bounded system or the case” (p. 55). This means that the unit of study or the case is defined by certain boundaries. These boundaries, Merriam (2009) expounded, can be in the form of the people involved, a programme, a policy, an institution or a community. Applying these considerations to this study, the unit of analysis used for this study was the internal community members of an inclusive private voluntary primary school.

Given that this research is a unique focus on internal community members’ understandings of inclusive education practices, a qualitative case study materialises as the suitable method. Moreover, Merriam (2009) revealed that the results derived from case studies are assumed to be evidence-rich-accounts, and can impact policy, practice, and future research.

### **3.1.4.2 Appreciative Inquiry**

Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) highlighted that Appreciative Inquiry is “the cooperative, co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organisations and the world around them” (p. 8). With AI, the focus of analysis is redirected, thus facilitating individuals’ rise above initial existing problems (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). By tapping into what makes an organisation function at its best, AI releases possibilities for affirmative transformation, increasing spirals of performance, and sustainable success (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Through skilfully and repetitively asking positive questions, a system’s or an individual’s capacity can be amplified and begin to perform at its optimal (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Whitney & Tosten-Bloom, 2010).

Appreciative Inquiry can take place in four stages, usually construed as the 4-D cycle – ‘Discovery’, ‘Dream’, ‘Design’, and ‘Destiny’. These four phases, as depicted in Figure 3.2 function as the basis on which change is constructed (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010).



*Figure 3.2: The Appreciative Inquiry 4-D cycle. Adapted from Appreciative inquiry: A positive revolution in change (p. 16) by D. Cooperrider & D. Whitney. Copyright (2005) by San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, INC.*

For the interview process, I focussed on the 'Discovery' phase:

- **Discovery:** This phase is a far-reaching, cooperative exploration for the best and most positive experiences participants had had in the school.

Appreciative Inquiry is about creating meaning through the telling of compelling stories. It lays emphasis on metaphor and narrative, relational ways of knowing, on language, and on its prospects as a source of generative theory (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2012; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

Given that this study is about constructing meaning, it inquired into the times and experiences that held the greatest meaning for the participants with the help of a research instrument – the interview guide.

### **3.1.4.3 The Research Instrument**

For this study, I used a comprehensive interview guide as the research instrument. It is an instrument used in eliciting answers about procedures and meanings. The comprehensive interview guide (see Appendix A) that was used for this study comprises the following first five, out of the six, parts recommended by Whitney & Trosten-Bloom (2010, pp. 152-153). Given the focus of AI, the questions were semi-structured to elicit the best experiences, and identify concepts and issues that contributed to participants' success.

1. Introductory texts - used to set the stage of the interview.
2. Stage setting questions - used to build rapport and elicit information about interviewee.
3. Topic questions - in-depth and 'lead-in' questions.
4. Concluding questions - these wrap up the interview.
5. Summary sheets - repository for the best stories, quotes, and ideas.

### **3.1.5 Research Method – Appreciative Interview**

Congruent with the purpose of the study, I employed appreciative individual interviews. Appreciative interviews are seen as an immutable constituent of the Appreciative Inquiry process (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). The discovery phase, which is the first of the four stage cycle of AI, revolves around appreciative interviews. The discovery phase involved writing interview questions and creating an interview guide that probed for best experiences, personal values, and life-giving energy sources (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010), which stimulated a variety of ideas on how to get to the best of what parents and educators were about. The appreciative interviews provided opportunities for individuals to share stories that “illuminate[d] distinctive

strengths and potentials” (p. 143). The interview questions were focussed on the past, and the present. These time frames were crucial as it allowed the interviewees to reflect and negotiate their experiences while envisioning the possibilities of a positive future (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010).

### **3.2 Sample and Sampling Technique**

In a qualitative study, the sample includes a ration of the populace from whom data is collected (Creswell, 2014; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). According to Perry et al. (2009), qualitative research uses purposeful sampling by deliberately choosing participants as they can provide insight into the inquiry. They further highlighted that in comparison to quantitative study, the sample size for a qualitative study is much smaller. Therefore I employed purposeful sampling technique in selecting eight participants for the study.

The participants were structured in four diverse categories comprising of two participants with similar features in each category. Category one: two school heads; category two: two teachers; category three: two parents of children with disabilities, and category four: two parents of children without disabilities. The four categories of participants were selected for their information rich characteristics as Patton (2002) stated, “the logic and power of purpos[eful] sampling lies in selecting *information-rich* cases for study in-depth” (p. 230); he further highlighted that “[i]nformation-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (p. 230). I chose to use these participants in order to get a comprehensive account of what they consider to be their best practices as school

community members based on their direct engagement in the decision making process and policy procedures at the school.

At the time of data collection, all the participants were community members who have been part of the same school for more than three years. The School heads and the teachers have been working full time in the school and actively involved in the school's decision making process since their time of assumption of duty. Both parents whose children are with and without disabilities have been actively involved in the school's decision making process as well as the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) of the school. Of the eight participants, a parent of a child with disabilities works as a voluntary teacher in the school's literacy resource room.

### **3. 2.1 Overview of the Participants' Institution: Structure, Purpose, and Values**

In order to present the reader with a clear idea of the participants' frame of reference as community members of the school under study, I present an overview of the structure, purpose, and values of the participants' institution. The participants in this research are parents and educators of children with and without disabilities of a private voluntary primary school in a South-Eastern Nigerian State. The school is about one of the remaining PVOs that have remained autonomous since the taking over of PVO/Missionary owned schools by the Nigerian government in the late 1970s.

Founded in 1979 with the sponsorship of a PVO from a West-Central European country, the initial aim of the school was the early furthering of children with intellectual

disabilities, learning disabilities, physical disabilities, severe emotional and behavioural disturbance, and multiple disabilities.

Five years later, it developed to a center with nursery school, primary school, and a sheltered vocational workshop taking care of about 700 children and adolescents with the previously mentioned disabilities, autism, speech and hearing impairment, cerebral palsy, while integrating children without disabilities.

In the primary school section (primary 1-6) 16 qualified teachers, and 14 special support teachers with secondary school certificates work with about 340 children in 18 different classes through holistic basic education including individualised speech training, behaviour therapy, physiotherapy, among others. For the children with mild learning disabilities, normal primary school curriculum is used, but for children with moderate to severe learning disabilities, the curriculum is individually adjusted.

At both the nursery and primary school levels, children with disabilities learn alongside their counterparts without disabilities. While some children can move on to secondary school, others who cannot proceed are transferred to the sheltered workshop where they learn different vocational skills.

Additionally, the school has in its employ several well-qualified educationists, professionals, and volunteers. Others learn on the job while a good number have been trained by the school either in professional schools in Nigeria for the purposes of being

professionally certified (NCE, B.Ed, etc) or were enrolled in correspondence courses with London Montessori Centre.

One important aim of the school is to reduce the prejudice against special needs children in Nigeria, which is partly culturally determined. Therefore, it is their advocacy that special needs children should be mainstreamed and included not segregated. Among their values was what the director views as being consciously committed “... choosing to remove blinders while acknowledging and facilitating the multiple needs of the children and their families” (The School Director, 2015).

In the future, the school intends to continue with its policy of giving service to all segments of society and not only to children of the well-to-do parents as indicative of their ridiculously low tuition fees. Hence, the school prides itself of being a model for inclusive education in Nigeria.

### **3.2.2 Setting**

Entry to a research site typically entails consultations with gatekeepers (Creswell, 2014). “Gatekeepers are persons or groups who control entrée to participants and data” (p. 38). The support of ‘gatekeepers’ in the selected site is a precondition. A West-Central European country sponsored PVO which has established an inclusive primary school for children ages 6 - 11 in a South-Eastern Nigerian state was the site for this study. Once I gained ethical approval from Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Appendix B), I contacted the Director of the school

(Appendix C) via email and got an approval grant to proceed with the research (Appendix E).

Davies (2007) contended that the researcher is expected to engage with the interviewees in a serene, relaxing, and familiar setting, conducive to a conversation. This is to ensure that participants can converse liberally about possible emotional and confidential matters. Therefore, I sought for and got approval from the Director for the use of an appropriate room within the school to conduct the interviews (Appendix E).

### **3.3 Data Collection Procedures**

Upon receiving an approval grant from the director of the school (Appendix E), envelopes containing a letter of introduction, a consent form and, an information sheet, each, were given to the director who had agreed to hand them out to as many participants as possible who were within the category of intended participants. Interested participants subsequently contacted me, using the phone number I left with the director, to schedule the date, time, and place for the interview.

Prior to conducting the interviews, I piloted an interview session to enable me clarify the terms of the research, assess the language and substance of the questions, the audio effectiveness, and to improve the general field process. One sample appropriate participant that met the delimitations requirements participated in the pilot interview. Piloting the interview questions revealed that the interview questions needed to be a little less structured, in order to allow space for discussions and clarifications. The questions were, thus, accordingly modified.

Before conducting each interview, participants signed the consent forms after its contents were duly explained as detailed in the ethical consideration section of this study. Each participant was individually interviewed in a quiet private office allocated by the director for the interview. Each interview was averagely 45 minutes in length. All interviews were recorded through the use of audio taping and observational field notes. These notes were documented as precisely as conceivable, recording participant information (type of interview, name, start and end time, etc.), as well as non-verbal communications and behaviours that illuminated the meanings attached to certain experiences by the participants. The observational field notes offered richer comprehension when used alongside the audio taped interviews. To ensure for greater precision and to minimise the amount of interpretative errors, I read the observational notes to participants at the end of each interview so as to allow for any corrections (Creswell, 2005).

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

The process of data analysis is to make meaning out of the data (Merriam, 2009). This process includes merging, reducing and consolidating the data into themes, sub-themes or codes in order to arrive at the findings of the study (Merriam, 2009).

The recorded appreciative individual interviews were transcribed verbatim. Having completed this process, the transcripts were emailed to participants to add, delete or elaborate as they considered necessary (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The transcripts were then analysed to ascertain if there were recurring sub-themes and themes. In doing this, I employed open coding. Open coding involved reading and re-reading

transcripts, and commenting on the data by making notes in the margins of the transcripts, highlighting and questioning responses (Creswell, 2014). Congruent with Corbin and Strauss' (1990) method for analysing data, I coded each participant's responses one paragraph at a time. I searched for the main idea in each paragraph as well as examined the paragraphs in relation to concepts of inclusive education. I methodically allocated short descriptors to each paragraph. Where an idea in a particular paragraph was the same, it was allotted the same descriptor.

The recurrence of a particular descriptor two or more times meant that the particular descriptor would become a sub-theme. This process amounted to the formulation of meaningful concepts. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990) "once concepts begin to accumulate, the analyst should begin the process of grouping them ... under more abstract explanatory terms, that is, [themes]" (p. 114). As a result, I created themes. The themes represented the broader, overarching idea of the participants' understandings. The sub-themes were then carefully re-examined in order to ensure their relationship among the themes. That is, I consistently examined how closely a particular sub-theme related to a theme. The result of this process was the emergence of insights into the participants' understandings of the phenomena of inclusive education, its advancement, and its sustainability.

### **3.4.1 Interpretation and Validation**

The final stage of data analysis addressed the interpretative process. In this stage, I reviewed descriptors, sub-themes, and themes so as to explore the possible implications and relationships. I scrutinised each sub-theme, going back and forth

through transcripts to ensure that the sub-theme was represented more than once or by more than one individual. I used the participants' words and phrases as sub-themes as much as possible so as to lend even more authenticity to the interpretation. I then sought validation, by appraising alternate explanations. As part of this process, I shared the data with my participants, seeking their opinion on my thematic and sub-thematic choices. Furthermore, I sought my supervisor's opinion in providing me with alternative understandings. I carefully reflected on the interpretations from the two groups and examined the new insight I gained from them to ensure that these understandings could be supported by the participants' words. These methods aided in refining the concepts during the report writing stage of the study.

### **3.5 Robustness of Study**

Perry et al., (2009) expounded that the "qualitative research doesn't aim to discover something that is 'objectively' true, and therefore replicable by others" (p. 16), therefore, concepts such as reliability are not used rather the focus is on the trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

A number of researchers, including Creswell (1998), Lincoln and Guba (2000), Merriam (2009), Noonan (2002), and Silverman (2000) delineated several steps that can be taken to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings in a qualitative study. In an effort to present a holistic clarification of the findings, I employed the following corroborative measures.

**3.5.1 Copious accounts of the phenomenon under inquiry:** Creswell (1998) posited that in depth account of the research situation increases credibility as it aids the findings to “ring true” when the researcher communicates the actual phenomenon that was explored. I presented the participants’ understandings with abounding, copious details in order to present the reader with a robust sense of the setting, while facilitating the reader’s entry to the context of the research. The quotations were presented precisely as hugely as possible. However, only a few trivial grammatical adjustments were effected, and pseudonyms were basically used to ensure identity protection of the participants, while preventing the reader from locating the participants’ institution.

**3.5.2 Reflexivity:** Reflexivity, known as researcher’s position is “the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, ‘the human instrument’” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 183). To ensure the credibility of my findings, I constantly and consciously examined my emerging conceptions. To enable this process, I maintained an interview journal in which I wrote down and queried my own biases, presumptions, and assumptions in the course of the research. I continuously pondered on my interaction with the participants given that “the researcher affects the participants and the research process, just as the researcher is affected by the participants and the research process” (Neilson & Suyemoto, 2009, p. 89). Moreover, as indicated in Chapter One of this study, I admitted and accounted for my biases and inclinations. These illuminations are premeditated in order that the reader may understand how my values may impact the conclusions of the study (Merriam, 2009).

**3.5.3 Member checking:** Lincoln and Guba (2000) regarded member checking as the only most significant provision that can be made to reinforce a study's trustworthiness. The method of member checking afforded the avenue for rectifications and interpretations. Participants were asked to check for accuracy of the data at the end of the data collection process. Additionally, as noted in section 3.6.1, I sought for the opinions of the participants and my supervisor in interpreting and validating my thematic and sub-thematic choices. This process aided in refining the concepts during the report writing stage of the study.

**3.5.4 Examination of previous research findings:** Silverman (2000) posited that the researcher's ability to correlate his/her findings to an extant body of knowledge is an essential component in guaranteeing trustworthiness in qualitative research. Therefore, I drew relationships between the findings of this study and previous research that dealt with comparable methodology, topic, themes, and concepts.

### **3.6 Parameters of the Study**

Patton (2002) noted that "there are no perfect research designs" (p. 223). Consistent with this fact, this study has made no idealistic claims, nor claimed any definiteness in its findings. The study has certain limitations which are conditions outside of the researcher's control, and delimitations; comprising those conditions set by the researcher to contract the scope of the study (Mauch & Park, 2003).

### **3.6.1 Limitations**

Essentially, it is not in the nature of qualitative studies to accomplish generalisability or replicability, rather qualitative studies explore and examine topics in-depth and in context in order to generate copious descriptions of the phenomenon. Consequently, this study is restricted to the extent to which its findings can be generalised. Even though rich, thick description and analysis of the phenomenon is preferred, the length of this thesis which has resulted into a smaller sample and succinct discussions of issues which could be clearer if explored in depth is yet another limitation.

### **3.6.2 Delimitations**

The study was limited to three out of the four categories that make up the school community members – parents, teachers, head teachers and students. In addition, only one (Discovery) of the four phases of the Appreciative Inquiry approach was used in this study. Focusing on the dream, design and destiny phase was beyond the scope of this study due to the articulated purpose of the study and time constraints. However, the findings have provided abounding awareness into how such a program could be implemented and sustained. Further studies might consider integrating the second, third and fourth phases, thus increasing the theoretical foundation provided by this study.

Additionally, this research concentrated solely on the best of *what is* and *what has been*, in inclusive education practices, rather than what is deficient. Therefore, perspectives that enhance the processes of inclusive education, its advancement, and its sustainability were presented. Also, the choice of locating the study in a specific

exemplary site afforded the means of managing the quantity of data that might have otherwise be generated.

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

Ethics corresponds to how one deals with those involved in a research, and how the established relationships between a researcher and participants may deviate from some formation of an ideal (Smith, 1990). Smith further noted that inquiry “should not harm the subjects of that inquiry” and that “the two most important principles for the protection of the human subjects are informed consent and anonymity” (p. 260). For this study, I established a meaningful relationship with my participants, which was characterised by openness, truth, and solidarity.

I developed good rapport with the decision-making team of the school, who were impressed with the research methodology given the cultural dimensions of disability and persons with disabilities in the country. As a result, it was rather easy for me to gain their full trust and support to proceed with recruiting participants for my research. This good rapport was also applicable to the participants both during and after the data collection stages of the study. During data collection, my participants were on time for their individual interviews and were eager to relate their experiences.

Following Smith’s admonitory expression on anonymity in qualitative research, I informed the participants of the purpose of the study, and how the findings would be communicated. Moreover, I informed the participants that all the transmitted information will be anonymously presented. I also followed the procedures outlined by

the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee regarding the guidelines concerning consent, confidentiality, right to withdraw participation in a study, and opportunity for feedback. The participants were also asked to sign a data release form, authorising dissemination of the data as outlined in the consent letter.

### **3.8 Summary**

This chapter examined the research design and the research genres used in the study. It additionally describes the instruments employed in the data collection procedure and explains the sampling techniques. The major activities used in the investigation including accounts of how the data collected was analysed, is also delineated. The chapter concludes with the parameters of the study, a clarification of the ethical considerations, and the issues of trustworthiness that were embodied in the research. The next chapter presents the participants' stories of their most positive inclusive education experiences and understanding of inclusive education advancement and sustainability.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **The Stories Unravel: Analysis and Interpretation of Findings**

*Words matter – they not only make a difference, they literally bring things to life, creating the world as we know it (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010)*

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to examine parents and educators' understanding of their most positive inclusive education experiences, and to uncover what gives life to their involvement in inclusive education. This purpose was realised by exploring accounts of exemplary actions of the participants and seeking for understandings of what was happening in the participants' inclusive education experiences when they were most engaged. The data which was collected through appreciative individual interviews lent a substantial bulk of information on parents and educators' understanding of inclusive education. According to Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010), engaging in appreciative interviewing "evokes hopes and dreams for the future and generates life-giving possibilities" (p. 57). Undeniably, the appreciative interviews for this study involved purposeful positive dialogues which ultimately provoked positive promises.

The participants were a distinctive combination of different community members of the school. However, they were affiliated in their motivations, their beliefs, and their drive to make a difference. The quality and depth of their inclusive understanding were reflected in the value they placed on their roles.

All personal names and names of places has been pseudonymised.

## **Organisation of Chapter**

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part of the chapter presents parents and educators' understanding of their most positive inclusive education experiences. This part embodies "an all-embracing" search to understand the best of "what has been" (Whitney & Trosten- Bloom, 2010, p. 7) in the participants' inclusive education experiences. The second part of the chapter explicates opportunities the participants draw upon in achieving these positive experiences and advancing their inclusive education practices. This part relays the "what is" (Whitney & Trosten- Bloom, 2010, p. 7) of the participants' most innovative approaches to expanding and sustaining inclusive education in their cultural context. Following excerpts from the participants' narrations, I elaborate on the findings of the study. A brief summary is also presented at the end of each section.

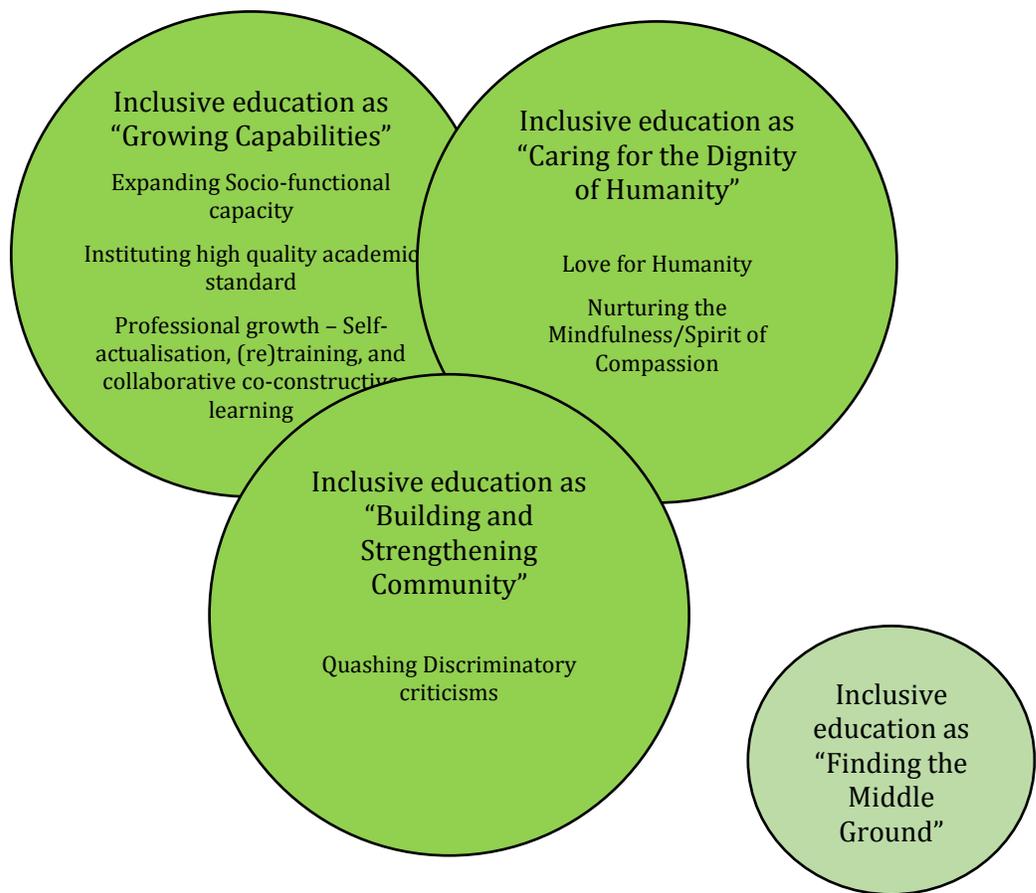
### **Part One**

#### **4.1 Participants' Understanding of Inclusive Education**

In this part, the participants' understanding of inclusive education are presented in three major themes. These themes are made-up of sub-themes that emerged from the coding process as illustrated in Figure 4.1. The interwoven position of the circles suggests that each theme is a representation of a distinctive but interrelated collection of understandings about inclusive education. The three main themes consist of inclusive education as "growing capabilities", inclusive education as "caring for the dignity of humanity", and inclusive education as "building and strengthening community".

Sub-themes were also selected based on the rate of responses made by any one or more participants, or an idea or experience reflected by two or more participants. Narrative excerpts were selected based on their ability to satisfactorily communicate the central idea in the sub-themes and the major themes.

During the coding process a sub-theme emerged that did not quite fit into any of the major themes. I referred to this theme as the “unusual.” This unusual denotes a dissonant or divergent view when analysed in relation to the predominant understandings of the participants, and the philosophy of inclusion. This unusual supported my view that individuals like organisations are quite “complex and the diagnostic categories less well-defined” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 12). It was, consequently, essential to examine this “unusual” as it might have been a key to unravel what was actually extant in the participants’ disclosures of their inclusive education experience.



*Figure 4.1: A summary of participants' understanding of inclusive education*

#### **4.1.1 Inclusive Education as “Growing Capabilities”**

Within the data gathered there was a clear theme suggesting that participants felt their experiences were positive where their engagement led to growth in capabilities. This growth was expressed across social, academic, and professional growth - professional learning and collaborative, co-constructive learning.

##### **4.1.1.1 “Growing Capabilities”: Expanding socio-functional capacity**

The aspiration to create success and the positive changes recorded in their lives and the lives of people they associate with were strongly present in participants' understanding of their most positive experiences in inclusive education. Mrs Chinyere's understanding were embedded in the growing of capabilities through the “enhancement of the socio-

functionalities” of children with disabilities and their counterparts without disabilities. Mrs Chinyere’s inclusive education experiences emphasised attention to and respect for the social development dimension.

When I look back, I would say that the way knowledge is imparted [to] the children here, especially the children with disability, has left a remarkable impression on me. If one has not come here, you might have perceived these children with disability as useless in the society and cannot contribute even in the home. But coming here has really educated me; it has opened my eyes to the fact that not only are they performing and socialising well in school and among their peers, they also do very well at home. If so how much more a child without disabilities. This is one aspect of inclusive education that informs my continued Involvement with this school (POCWOD1)

Other participants discussed how essential enhancing socio-functional capacity of students with disability and other students is to developing a positive attitude to life. Mrs Nwachigoziri said that “my son is already exposed to “normal” children in the school. Therefore, meeting “normal” children outside is no more a big deal for him. He is not frightened, his social adaptability is beefed, and I believe that is important to his well-being” (POCWID1).

Furthermore, Mrs Nwachigoziri embraced the idea that the “No marginalisation policy” in place is a means of propagating a feeling of social acceptability in the school community. She emphasised this while comparing her experience with her son’s previous school:

Our son comes out, goes to church and he is able to associate with others because fundamentally, the school he is coming from has not marginalised him. If he had continued in that Harbor Island school where he ... you know...has been marginalised, he would not have become what he is today. At least, for now, the line of divide in language and association that draws between him and the normal children is so close (POCWID1)

Mrs Nwachigoziri, as reflected in her comments, further expressed how positively their decision to enroll her son in an inclusive school has contributed to enhancing his socio-functional capabilities.

We [my husband and I] found out that the special school run by *Offspring's of Charity* in Harbor Island was not what we wanted. It was our belief that if he [was] left in such a school, he would not be challenged for the best in him and we would have contributed to further worsening his situation. In our minds, we knew we needed an inclusive school where he can aspire, build relationships and learn to adapt to social behaviours, and day to day living ... bathe himself, wash his plates, and even sweep... from his [counterparts without disabilities], which he is presently enjoying here, and which we knew we were not going to get from his former school (POCWID1).

Mrs Mmadubuihe expressed in her interview that a point of focus for the school was building relationship among students by fostering an environment where students with withdrawn personalities (disabilities) understand that they are accepted and encouraged to communicate and interact with their counterparts. She narrated,

One of our students, Christine, there are many of them but I want to cite an example. As at the time she was enrolled in this school, she had

learning disabilities and was self-contained – she couldn't write anything, couldn't communicate with anybody, she was more on her own always. She [didn't] allow anybody to talk to her, touch her or any of her things. However, she gradually socially adapted after series of counselling sessions and friendly peer support approaches, where some of her classmates who are identified as intelligent and have been trained to assist their classmates in learning were assigned in the same group with her during group activities. These classmates were always encouraging her to contribute to the success of the group activities. More so, because the activities requires that the contribution of every member of the group must be, no matter how [little], written beside the students name and submitted to the teacher at the end of the group activity. She now mixes up well and [has] made a couple of friends too. Now she laughs and chats and participates in outdoor activities unlike when she first arrived (SST).

From these participants' perspectives, socio-functional capabilities were developed from being in environments where one can aspire, and learn to adapt to social behaviours, activities of everyday life, and where genuine respect for differences is manifested. Their statements suggested that an investment in building relationships among the students by propagating a feeling of social acceptability and well-being of others were fundamental to their inclusive education practices.

#### **4.1.1.2 “Growing Capabilities” through raising academic standard**

Another sub-theme that emerged from the data, which speaks of participants' positive experience in their journey through inclusive education was the aspect of growing capabilities through academic accomplishment. The academic accomplishment to which Mrs Nwachigoziri refers is “about all learners, not just those without labels of

disabilities”. She closely relates this to “valuing of differences”, which she expressed in terms of teacher behaviour;

How you talk and respond to children is very essential. As long as the teacher understands that all the children in her class are not going at the same pace. As long as the teacher is flexible in her teaching approach. As long as the teacher is not derogatory in her comments or in her assessments or in her corrections towards the children with disabilities; building an ethos where all children feel confident to question and challenge. This ensures all children benefit from the learning process not just a defined group (POCWID1).

She further noted that in her experience as a parent and a voluntary teacher in the literacy resource unit, and with the flexible approach she and her “team of resource teachers” employ during their sessions, she is “yet to see the academic heights each of the students [with and without disabilities] can attain being diminished as a result of studying together in the same environment and under the same situation” (POCWID1).

Mrs Igwebuike expressed a similar sentiment about “valuing of differences” and the importance of employing flexible approaches and procedures in order to “improve quality for all students” not just a distinct group.

The first time I was assigned to the classroom to teach primary 6 children and prepare them for the external exams leading to secondary school, I was made to understand that there were three students with disabilities, two of whom were autistic. To ensure that every child was involved in the learning process, I made use of the timetable called *a specialist*

*programme for autistic children*, which was developed by the Directress, for the whole class. This was meant to prepare them for what will happen in the day. This was also to reassure the whole class as well as the three children with disabilities. Because according to the targets in the termly reviews of the children with disabilities, they were expected to cover 50% of equivalent curriculum, which they were doing up until the preparation for the external exam. We also have special support teachers who withdraw individual children to work for short sessions using their skills. They as well use these skills with all the children, not just those with specific learning difficulties. Where expert procedures were used, they were made accessible to the whole class (CT2).

Mrs Okwukwe identified the search for the best ways to academically assist children with disabilities, which has translated into “raised [academic] standards” for all learners as her belief for the positive results being recorded by the school.

For me I believe... because the school was initially set up for children with special needs and at a point started enrolling children without disabilities. So I think that it is the scope they have been using to nurture the former that has really assisted them in raising the [academic] standard for children without disabilities as well in that they had to find every means possible to assist children with disabilities especially the ones with learning and intellectual disabilities. So by doing so, the learning task becomes easier for children without disabilities. If my son can achieve more academically by being here, then why not? His academic progress for 9 years now since he started in the ECC (*Early Childhood Care*), motivated me to [enroll] his other two siblings (POCWOD2).

From these participants' perspectives, high quality academic progress was recorded by developing practices which were responsive to different learning styles. Their statements suggested that inclusive learning, when judiciously applied, has the capacity to open up boundaries to draw from other ways of understanding and being; making the teaching and learning experience more meaningful and productive for all involved, which is fundamental to their inclusive education practices and beliefs.

#### **4.1.1.3 “Growing Capabilities” through professional growth: professional learning and collaborative, co-constructive learning**

Another facet of inclusive education as “growing capabilities” that emerged was the idea of professional learning, and collaborative, co-constructive learning. The data that formed the sub-theme “professional growth” suggested that inclusive education comes to light when participants' feelings of lack of expertise to address the needs of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms were doused with the spur of professional learning and collaborative, co-constructive learning synonymous with the cultural dimensions of the school. For Mrs Ndubuaku, her perception of a valuable inclusive education experience was her being able to constantly record positive results after “dissipating energy on set goals”. She related,

You know, when you are in the class teaching the children and there is improvement and at the same time their parents are testifying to the improvement, then you [will] be so happy to do more. When a child that was initially thought of being useless but with time that child proves you wrong especially after you have exerted much effort that alone is enough to spur you on to do more, explore possible ways of doing it better and actually becoming better than you were in the process (CT1).

Other participants expressed how fundamental continuous professional learning was to their professional growth. In highlighting a distinction between school certification and on the job professional learning, Mrs Igwebuike offered a different conceptualisation of the relevance of graduate qualification to tackling real life inclusive education challenges. Mrs Igwebuike perceived graduate qualification as good but “useless without real life/on the job training experience”. To her, the on the job professional learning is what she “see[s] as essential” as despite her being a qualified graduate, it was “the (re)training I experienced here that has really accounted for my professional growth” (CT2).

Interestingly, Mrs Ndubuaku who has been with the school for 5 years admitted that she was employed by the school with just her secondary school certificate and without any prior knowledge of schooling children. However, the continuous professional learning, which “come intermittently, especially when I (as a support staff) and the permanent class teachers are working in the classroom, have enhanced my career” (CT1).

Similarly, Mrs Nwachigoziri’s response indicated that the school has massively advanced regardless that the professional learning of the support staff was informal based. In comparing the physiotherapy services her son received in the school to what she was previously offered at the hospital, for example, the former far surpasses the latter.

If you see what the support teachers are doing it’s amazing ... because these are people that have received training informally. Take for example

the kind of physiotherapy they even give to children who have needs for physiotherapy far surpasses the kind I was receiving when I was in UPTH (University of Harbour Island Teaching Hospital (POCWID1)).

The participants were also of the understanding that practicing inclusive education successfully involved not just the individual learning but a collaborative, co-constructive learning among individuals.

Mrs Ndubuaku expressed how the lack of knowledge and skills would have demoralised her enthusiasm and hampered her attaining an “advanced stage in the life of my career” but for “the co-operation and collaboration from my colleagues”. (CT1)

Mrs Ndubuaku further cited an example illustrating how the efforts of she and her three colleagues paid off while trying to organise a cultural dance performance which was to be presented in their PTA meeting, and which included all interested student irrespective of abilities, through the adoption of a collaborative, co-constructive learning approach.

We, three teachers and I once had a cultural dance session with some children in preparation for the upcoming termly PTA meeting. At initial stage there was a stumbling block regarding how to teach the challenged children and the other children without disabilities together at the same time in such a way [that] they would understand the steps. At a point, one of the teachers advised that we should discuss with the participating students what strategies they thought would elicit the best dancing steps – including areas of doubt and misconceptions. In fact, we presented the students with a sense of the nature of the final outcome at the start. This

helped them to shape the process better from the start. The students were then encouraged to volunteer key stepping ideas. Being guided by the teachers, the students developed a sequence through these ideas and generated a working pattern of procedure. And because we thought that students would be able to learn comfortably and faster if led by their colleagues, we divided the students into groups led by a lead-volunteering student. However, we did not leave this task solely to those lead-volunteers, we made sure that we alternated student-led instructions with our own instructions. Like that, we were able to manage the process and ensured that key feedbacks processes were undertaken while regularly reviewing the whole process – what steps have we learned so far? Do all the participating students feel carried along? Are we still on track? Where are we going next? ... you know... and so on. After everything when we went to the hall on the day of the PTA meeting to perform, the children with disabilities were actually the center of parents' attraction as parents looked on with surprise to the extent that when parents came on stage to spray money on them it was the children with disabilities that were mainly focused on (CT1).

This example illustrated Mrs Ndubuaku's understanding that collaborative, co-constructive learning is a vital ingredient in achieving successful inclusive education. She noted that, "this experience led me to the understanding that each and every person has "capabilities yet untapped". Her story may suggest that irrespective of who takes the baton of the learning process, "*anyuko mamili onu ogba ufufu*", a proverb she used which literarily means "if the appropriate environment is created, much could be achieved" (CT1).

From these participants' perspectives professional growth was experienced through professional learning and collaborative co-constructive learning and their genuine

desire to be better than they were. Their statements suggested that these dimensions were fundamental to their understanding of inclusive education practices and beliefs.

#### **4.1.2 Inclusive Education as “Caring for the Dignity of Humanity”**

The information contained in the data for the first research question suggested that the participants considered their inclusive education experience as positive when the spirit of love was constantly fostered; inspiring new hopes for many, and ensuring the proliferation of the human rights precepts. I therefore themed it; inclusive education as “caring for the dignity of humanity”. The sub-themes that emerged from this theme were ‘Love for humanity’ and ‘nurturing the spirit of compassion’.

##### **4.1.2.1 Love for Humanity**

In her interview session, Mrs Nwachukwu related that throughout her experiences, she has learnt that a factor that contributed to the sustainability of inclusive education in the school was the “love for humanity” being exuded by students for one another, which students have continued to demonstrate beyond the walls of the school.

Talk about caring for instance, what is not obtainable in any other school is obtainable here. Imagine a boy of 6years seeing a boy of 20years who is physically challenged and the former struggling to be of help to the latter despite that he knows he won't be of much help – physically – yet he would persist. And if another comes to help, the previous initiator would start crying “I am the first to approach for help”. Can you understand the spirit of love for humanity? These sorts of attributes make the children without disabilities much better citizens outside having studied with children with disabilities (HT).

Mrs Nwachigoziri expressed similar convictions about the genuine love for humanity been demonstrated by the children with disabilities towards the children without disabilities and its impact on the life of her son in particular and all the students in general.

To a great extent, the way I have observed the [...] children [without disabilities] in this school relate with children with disabilities impacts humanity, and it has really helped my son a lot. He does not dwell on his inabilities, and this has assisted his psychological well-being, which fundamentally if you lose, the rest of your life kind of hangs in the balance. Notwithstanding that nothing is ever 100%, however, to a great extent, it impacts humanity into those ones without disabilities (POCWID1).

To Mrs Nwannedinamba, without the understanding and living up to the encapsulated 'values of the school' – peace, love, care, compassion and valuing differences, which “every school member knows and recites by heart” – it would not have been easy for the members of the school community to develop genuine love for one another. In referring to the importance of the school's values, Mrs Nwannedinamba related “I think [that] the school's values help to develop in all of us the understanding that first of all we are all humans and we are all entitled to equal rights of love and care” (POCWID2).

#### **4.1.2.2 Nurturing the Spirit of Compassion**

An additional sub-theme that materialised was nurturing the spirit of compassion. Participants in their interviews spoke of how encouraging the development of the spirit of compassion in children without disabilities facilitates them to understand that persons with disabilities are human beings like them. Mrs Igwebuiké related,

Children act the way they see adults act. The way we adults relate with them in the school influences their relationship [with] one another. That the ones without disabilities come to the aid of children with disabilities is because they have learnt from us [adults] and they have understood how to support or contribute to the support of their colleagues. They feel fulfilled assisting them unlike other children outside this school or schooling in other schools [who] run away from [children with disabilities] or snub them, or send them away or worse still pass derogatory comments [on] them – an ‘imbecile’ and so on. Even when they see them meet with as little as casual minor accident, they would rather laugh at them than assist them. But in this school, when a child with disabilities, or any other child for that matter, meets with such accident nobody ridicules them in such situation; even before a teacher interferes, you would see other children rallying around the person trying to help the person. So, the compassion and empathy has been cultivated in their hearts (CT2).

Mrs Igwebuike went further to expatiate the significance of “sowing the seeds of compassion” in the children in the present corrupt state of the country. She continued,

Given the high level of corruption among the Nigerian leaders today, I believe that sowing the seeds of compassion in these children is a milestone achieved for them becoming better future leaders. Because it is when you have that compassion that you will feel and actually know that somebody is feeling pain and you know that you ought not to embezzle the money that is meant for their betterment, rather you would be made to think of how best to relieve them of their pains (CT2).

Mrs Igwebuiké's convictions were also embraced by Mrs Nwachigoziri. She was of the opinion that by been educated in the same environment, the children learn to share, to accommodate and to have empathy that is "seriously lacking in the society now". Mrs Nwachigoziri communicated that, "the [school] environment has been able to cultivate in children without disabilities the mind of heavy compassion so much so that if they should grow up [in such manner] the challenged and marginalised people would, to an extent, be widely accepted in our society" (POCWID1).

The participants' comments suggested that the way students grew to care, accept and love their fellow students were mostly influenced by the way adults related with the children. Cultivating this mindfulness in the children who they hoped would use such attributes to instill the much lacked compassion into the wider society was revealed as an aspect of participants' most positive inclusive education experience.

#### **4.1.3 Inclusive Education as "Building and Strengthening Community"**

Another theme that emerged from the data in response to the first research question suggested that the parents and educators understood inclusive education as positive and rewarding when the results of their works are manifested in ways that strengthen and support their community to overcome discriminatory vulnerabilities and adapt positively to the change mantra of inclusivity. In this context, inclusive education was seen as "a bridge," focused on connecting the school and the wider community while creating awareness geared towards enhancing inclusive education practices.

#### **4.1.3.1 The power of positive attitude: Quashing discriminatory criticisms**

Mrs Ndubuaku believed that the only way to quash discriminatory criticisms in the wider society, which was rooted in the socio-cultural beliefs about persons with disabilities was for persons like her who have had personal experience with a school such as the *Healing School* to exude positive attitude. She believed that by so doing, others may take cue. She said, “Before my sojourn to this school, I didn’t know much about persons with disabilities. Whenever I [see] them outside, I would be calling them derogatory names. Now that I am part of the system, I understand that instead of belittling them, I have to treat all [children] equally like my [children]; by so doing, the society at large may come to appreciate them” (CT1).

For Mrs Nwachukwu, a treasured inclusive education experience was being able to “quash the discriminatory criticisms” of neighbours and relatives and winning them over through her consistent positive attitude.

Having observed my children and seen that their performances superseded their wildest imagination in terms of positive progressions - For example, when three of my children sat for and passed in flying colours to attend the most sought after secondary schools in the country, my neighbours were like, “so something good could come out of the desert?” So staying positive and getting results helps to quash the discriminatory criticisms of people (HT).

Mrs Nwachukwu further intimated that having been convinced that ‘something good could come out of the desert’, “virtually all my neighbours living in the same compound

with me, as at 2years ago, have brought their children here – all enrolled from primary 1 to Junior Secondary 2 – if they are counted, they should be up to 10 in number” (HT).

For Mrs Nwachigoziri, the establishment of a forum by parents of children with disabilities in the school is a way of building relationships and extending the concepts of inclusive education from the school to the wider community.

Because inclusive education in Nigeria is still at its teething stage and majority of our people still hold dear their superstitious beliefs about persons with disabilities being a curse, and their conditions being infectious, it will take series of awareness programmes to convince parents and the society at large to come to terms with the need for inclusive education as practiced by this school to be accepted and appreciated. This was one of the reasons we formed the Association of Parents of Children with Special Needs in this school. Among what we have achieved was creating a forum which affords us to meet and talk with people who are in local areas who don't have access to this school as we do. We also have awareness program to educate parents – our friends and relatives – about disabilities and persons with disabilities. The idea is that, when such parents go back to their places of work and respective homes, they would be able to, an extent, sensitise those who are not already aware of the purpose and benefits of inclusive education.

These comments illustrated participants' understandings that their inclusive education experience was most positive and impactful when they engaged in community building beyond the walls of the school to the wider community. For them, maintaining positive attitude, showcasing positive results of their involvement with the school, and creating

awareness were crucial in quashing society's discriminatory criticisms and developing people's confidence that inclusive schooling could provide quality education.

#### **4.1.4 The Unusual: "Finding the Middle Ground"**

Interestingly, while participants continuously demonstrated an understanding of inclusive education as socio-constructive and humane, and though they viewed positive attitude among the school community members as a means of "quashing discriminatory criticisms" in the wider community, they still expressed the importance of "accommodating negative attitudes", especially within the school community. The following excerpts reflected Mrs Mmadubuihe's views.

We do have our differences in sensitivities. Occasionally, even those that have children with disabilities scorn other children that are worse than their children. For me personally, I don't see it as an offence. Normally, accommodating such negative attitudes brings some sort of realism to our progression (SST).

In prodding Mrs Mmadubuihe further to find out why she believed accommodating negative attitudes brings realism to their progression, Mrs Mmadubuihe responded,

Yes it does because if such scenarios don't come about, then we wouldn't know if we are actually making progress or we are just living a mirage...having some people occasionally express such reservations, helps us create atmospheres to meet [on] a common ground; it also makes us continuously reflect on our values and actions like that we won't be like pilgrims without a destination (SST).

Mrs Nwachukwu stated her views on why it was necessary to accommodate “conflicting attitudes” while ensuring that such attitudes from community members are contained within the walls of the school.

Although conflicting attitudes when displayed in the presence of a parents of a child with disabilities could cause psychological distress, it is important, however, for people to express their feelings even if it is by displaying negative behaviours. It is through disagreeing that we come to agree...if people within the school community aren't coming up with negative attitudes, but rather decides to do it outside, we are never going to be aware so we could put mechanisms in place through our system's support – counselling, training, and other activities to bring them to order and by so doing stronger relationships are built and love, care and compassion which are the bedrocks of our inclusive education practices are promoted. We believe that our positive attitudes are fundamental to them, and their negative attitudes are fundamental to sustaining inclusive education practice (HT).

“Conflicting attitudes” were deemed very important to the school by the participants. Obliging such negative attitudes affords the school the opportunity to explore ways to suppress possible loopholes that could affect the sustainability of inclusive education practices in the school while containing it within the school. Contrarily, accommodating such negating attitude may suggest that the school may not be experiencing a complete liberation from the influences of the wider community's perceptions of inclusive education, hence its accommodation; paving way to curtailing the excesses through system's support. This may further be demonstrated in Mrs Mmadubuihe's equation of the failure to create atmospheres to meet [on] a common ground and reflect on their values and actions to that of “pilgrims without a destination”.

#### **4.1.5 Summary of Participants' Understandings of Inclusive Education**

In this section, I presented the participants' understanding of their most positive and rewarding inclusive education experiences by enlisting the data that emerged in three major themes; inclusive education as "growing capabilities", inclusive education as "caring for the dignity of humanity", and inclusive education as "building and strengthening community". These themes were further broken down into sub-themes. A brief summary of the response to the first research question showed that the participants saw themselves at their best when they were: part of enhancing socio-functional capacities, humane, nurturing humanness, engaged in professional and co-constructive learning, raising academic standards, and positively influencing discriminatory criticisms. In the course of the discussions, an unusual understanding was reflected, which I themed inclusive education as "finding the middle ground". This theme suggested that participants' understanding of inclusive education may represent some compromising elements contrary to the philosophies of inclusive education yet necessitated in ensuring the viability of inclusive education practice.

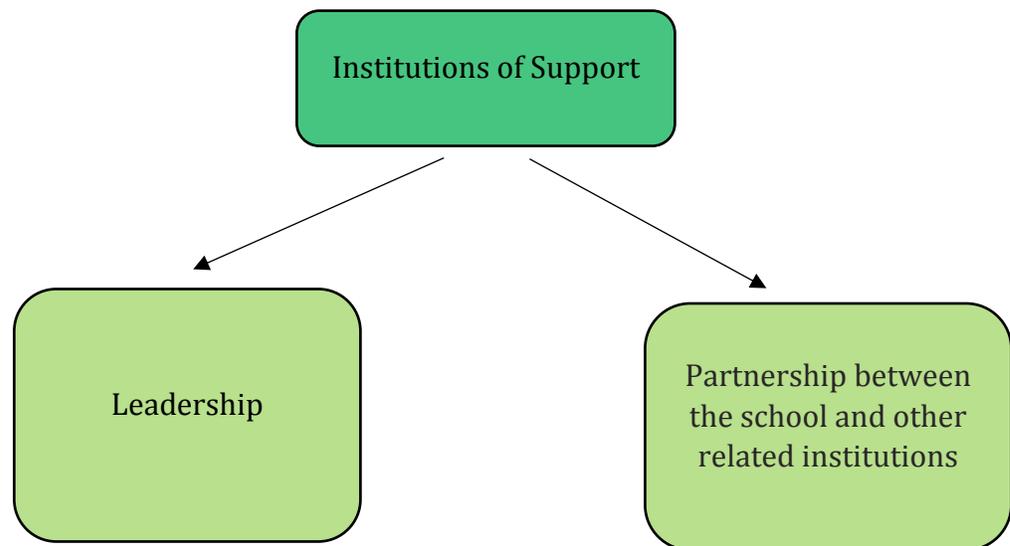
## **Part Two**

### **4.2 Opportunities Participants Draw upon in Advancing Inclusive Education Practices**

This part presents opportunities the participants' draw upon in achieving their positive experiences and advancing inclusive education practices. One theme emerged from the data regarding opportunities participants draw upon in advancing inclusive education. This theme I termed "Institutions of Support". This theme was further broken down into sub-themes.

#### **4.2.1 Institutions of Support**

The data suggested that the opportunities explored in achieving positive experiences and advancing inclusive education was not limited for within the school or drawn from particular individuals. The context of inclusive education required the exploration of some crucial bodies which concern "institutions" in order to further develop inclusive education objectives while maximising the essence of inclusion. The sub-themes that support this idea were 'leadership' and 'partnering with health service personnel, disability specialist schools and trainee students'. Figure 4.2 demonstrates the different parts of this theme.



*Figure 4.2: The parts of opportunities drawn upon as institutions of support*

#### **4.2.1.1 Leadership**

Mrs Nwachigoziri related that “leadership” showcased through “the directress’ commitment” is one of the inspirational ingredients behind her positive experiences and the advancement of inclusive education practices.

The directress’ commitment is inspiring. She is a visionary leader that mere being in close contact with her makes you feel you can achieve anything. She does not ... for the fact that she is the directress and the hierarchical head of all affairs in this school [does] what she likes and [when] she likes...NO... she is an instrumental figure in creating and carrying out the vision for this school, and she obviously leads by example. Every day that the sun rises she’s here on her table, doing the necessary follow-ups.... Even other parents can attest to that as they are encouraged to talk about the inadequacies they see in the school and in their children. We see her leadership as a foundation of support and a huge opportunity which has sustained the school for more than three decades (POCWID1).

Interestingly, Mrs Nwachigoziri may be suggesting that “leadership” is not necessarily flouting one’s hierarchical dispositions. Instead, it is the ability to be committed to a cause and “inspiring” others around to stay true to the same cause by “lead[ing] by example” while encouraging participation.

However, Mrs Ndubuaku was of the view that for a school such as theirs to have sufficiently exploited the resources at their disposal, “the commitment of both the followership and the leadership was never undermined”.

If the teachers involved have not been guiding their conscience to do the right thing, then the system would have been rendered useless. It’s all about the leadership’s commitment and the followership too because no one can do it alone. That we have been able to succeed this long and able to have adequately utilised the resources at our disposal is because the commitment of both the followership and the leadership is never undermined. These are the options we explore although not dismissing that without the genuine commitment of the directress which have influenced most of us, the system may have since been history (CT1).

For Mrs Ndubuaku, commitment by both the followership and the leadership; basically influenced by the genuine commitment of the leadership are one of the key opportunities the school leverages in sustaining inclusive education practices.

#### **4.2.1.2 Partnership between the school and other related institutions**

Another facet of the opportunities explored by the school as suggested by Mrs Nwachukwu was building partnerships between the school and other related institutions. For Mrs Nwachukwu, leveraging the skills of related institutions such as

health service personnel, disability specialist schools and trainee students have assisted the school to improvise on the limited resources they have. She related,

Even before your child is enrolled in this school whether you think he or she is with or without disabilities, the directress, through the help of related service personnel like the psychologists, the speech therapists, physiotherapists, and disability specialists will ensure the child goes through thorough assessment.

When probed on why the special support teachers were the ones mentioned as the school's physiotherapists and speech therapists by some participants and not the certified personnel as indicated by her. Below was what transpired:

Interviewer: But I gathered from some participants that the special support teachers who are informally trained here assume the role of these health service personnel you mentioned. How is that?

Mrs Nwachukwu: Yes, they are absolutely right. Because of the limited funds to employ these professionals on a full time basis, the school had to improvise by partnering with these personnel I mentioned by using them as facilitators to train the special support teachers who are equipped to act in their stead. Like that we only consult them when there are critical situations (HT)

Implicit in Mrs Nwachukwu's submission is the school's ability to manage the limited funds at their disposal through the improvisational leveraging of skills needed to sustain the inclusivity of the school. That is, their understanding that to move forward, and given their financial power, capitalising on opportunities such as partnering with

related service personnel on a part-time basis and using them as facilitators to upskill their special support teachers, though informally, is integral to the sustainability of their inclusive education practice.

Interestingly, Mrs Mmadubuihe communicated that,

With the knowledge that we needed to explore other personnel besides the health personnel, we had to explore possibilities of partnering with disability specialists. What we did was that ... through the influence of the directress, we were able to approach *Apia Special* – a disability specialist school requesting them to send their students to our school during their practical training year. We actually capitalised on this partnership to attract the best brains out of these trainees to come back to the school after completing the remaining six months of their study. Although we are not lucky all the time to get a ‘yes’ from these students that is why we are currently planning on proposing to our major international donor agency to see ways in which we could establish a package whereby the best brains are sent for [industrial training] to countries which have successfully established inclusive education practice to learn skills and see how we can integrate the new knowledge to the cultural dimensions of our school (SST).

For Mrs Mmadubuihe, the inability of the school to successfully attract student trainees at all times, has triggered a plan which I choose to align with the dream phase of the appreciative inquiry paradigm where these students would be enticed with the offer of further international professional development.

### **4.2.3 Summary of Opportunities Drawn upon by Participants**

The data suggested that the opportunities drawn upon by participants in achieving positive experiences and advancing inclusive education revolved around institutions of support which constituted 'leadership' and 'partnership between the school and other related institutions'. Leadership referred to the leadership's commitment to a cause while "inspiring" others to stay true to the same cause by "leading by example" and encouraging participation. The participants also believed that to have been able to maximally utilise the limited resources at their disposal, followership support as influenced by the leadership was never undermined. However, opportunities explored in advancing inclusive education was not limited for within the school or drawn from particular individuals, rather the exploration of opportunities were also extended to the improvisational leveraging of the skills of health service personnel, disability specialist schools and trainee students.

### **4.3 Summary of Chapter**

Chapter Four presented analyses of the data that were collected in the study. The first part presented data on the participants' understanding of their most positive inclusive education experiences. The second part presented data on the opportunities participants draw upon in achieving these positive experiences and advancing inclusive education practices. The findings were presented in themes which were further broken down into sub-themes. The data analyses revealed that the participants considered inclusive education as positive when they were growing capabilities, caring for the dignity of humanity, and building and strengthening community. The data also suggested that participants saw inclusive education as viable when conflicting attitudes

are accommodated within the walls of the school. The second part of the chapter revealed that to sustain inclusive education practices, participants draw upon opportunities which were espoused in one main theme, “institutions of support”.

To arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the participants’ understanding of their most positive inclusive education experiences, I will, in Chapter Five, “re-search” some thematic and sub-thematic findings. I will also research the opportunities drawn upon by participants’ in advancing inclusive education practices and offer an interpretation of these views.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Discussion of Findings: A Quest for Deeper Understanding**

*He to whom understanding is granted, is indeed granted abundant good (Qur,  
2:269)*

#### **Introduction**

Chapter Four provided abundant and copious accounts of the participants' most positive inclusive education experiences and the opportunities they leverage in achieving these positive experiences and advancing inclusive education. Having examined the numerous themes and sub-themes that emerged in the course of reviewing the data gathered, I went on to pull together vital bits of data into a logical arrangement so as to grasp an understanding of what was happening. This quest for deeper understanding of the experiences of the participants was "affective". It was affective" given that my thoughts, presumptions, and positioning were continuously brought under scrutiny in the process of extracting meaning from the participants' experiences. This comprehension process supports assertions by "sage" qualitative scholars that the interaction between the inquirer and the subject cannot be eliminated as realities are multiple and constructed leading to the influence of the inquirer on the subject and vice versa (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Owens, 1982).

In this Chapter, I "re-search" significant ideas of the participants' understandings that were incorporated under the three understandings of positive inclusive education ("growing capabilities," "caring for the dignity of humanity," and "building and strengthening community") alongside these three concepts. Notably, some of the participants' words used in Chapter Four are repeated. This process is employed to honour the voices of the participants and to demonstrate how their words steered the

conclusions presented in this study. Additionally, I reviewed the “unusual”, inclusive education as “finding a middle ground,” and the opportunities participants draw upon in achieving their positive experiences and advancing inclusive education while connecting these viewpoints to previous literature on the phenomena of inclusive education, its advancement and its sustainability.

### **5.1 Inclusive Education as “Growing Capabilities” A Deeper Look into the Developing Capabilities Dimension of Inclusive Education**

As discussed previously, inclusive education as “growing capabilities” is a concept that refers to *expansion of capabilities as a benefit of inclusive education* while highlighting how differences might steer school cultural practices in developing the knowledge and resource capabilities of both students and school practitioners.

#### **5.1.1 The Social Dimension of Inclusive Education**

One significant characteristic of inclusive education as “growing capabilities” that materialised from the data was the concept of expanding socio-functional capacity and its place in the social dimension of inclusive education. This finding is consistent with the works of Camargo et al., (2014); Carter and Hughes (2005); and De Monchy, Pijl, and Zanderberg (2004) which reported that one of the causative factors known to hinder the social participation of children with disabilities in the society is the absence of social skills. Where skill-based interventions are effected, they focus exclusively on children with disabilities and often take place in unnatural settings such as clinical settings, resource rooms, or other pullout settings (Gresham, Sugai, & Horner, 2001). Although this ‘in isolation’ social skill intervention may have a small effect on children with disabilities’ social acceptance (Forness & Kavale, 1996; Quinn et al., 1999), the

setting inhibits the generalisation of the learned social skills into the natural context, which may involve different persons and different social situations (Camargo et al., 2014; Gresham et al., 2001). A recent meta-analysis of single-case studies by Whalon, Conroy, Martinez, and Werch (2015) supports the importance of the setting where social skills are learned indicating that child-specific social skills interventions taking place in the children's natural school setting do have a sufficient and long-lasting positive effect on the social interactions of children with disabilities. The participants' understanding of inclusive education implied that socio-functional capabilities were developed from being in environments where one can aspire, and learn to adapt to social behaviours and activities of everyday life, hence fostering an enabling environment for learning. When Mrs Chinyere related her experience with the school, she expressed her initial misgivings about children with disabilities and their inability to contribute to the society which was later doused with her contact with the school and her experience with the teaching and learning pattern of the school:

...coming here has really educated me; it has opened my eyes to the fact that not only are [children with disabilities] performing and socialising well in school and among their peers, they also do very well at home. If so how much more a child without disabilities.

The fact that children with and without disabilities learn in the same environment creates a space for children without disabilities to sharpen their already existing social skills first, while enhancing the social participation of their counterparts with disabilities, which could only be achieved in an environment of humans with heterogeneous social skills (Garrote & Dessemontet, 2015).

Mrs Nwachigoziri also expressed the importance of socially participating in an environment of people with diverse social skills,

My son comes out, goes to church and he is able to associate with others because fundamentally he has been exposed to “normal” children in the school. Therefore, meeting “normal” children outside is no more a big deal for him. He is not frightened, his social adaptability is beefed ... at least, for now, the line of divide in language and association that draws between him and the normal children is so close that if we have left him in the special school run by *Offspring's of Charity* in Harbor Island he would not be challenged for the best in him and we would have contributed to further worsening his situation.

From Mrs Nwachigozirim's submissions and from a social perspective, inclusion in a general education school setting allows pupils with disabilities more contact with their typically developing peers than do special schools or any other 'in isolation' setting. These regular contacts lets them to have an optimum social participation in the society – the classroom, the school environment, and the society at large. According to recent studies on this topic, social participation in inclusive schools encompasses four key themes: being socially accepted by classmates, feeling socially accepted by them, having social relationships/friendships, and having positive social interactions with classmates (Bossaert, Colpin, Pijl, & Petry, 2013b; Koster, Nakken, Pijl, & van Houten, 2009). However, simply including children with disabilities in a regular school environment is not enough to guarantee their social participation in each of this four key aspects, which could lead to “beefing their social adaptability” as experienced by Mrs Chigozirim's son. This view is supported by most studies on this topic which

revealed that pupils with disabilities experience more difficulties in their social acceptance equaled to their peers without disabilities (Bossaert, Colpin, Pijl, & Petry, 2013a; Bossaert, de Boer, Frostad, Pijl, & Petry, 2015; Cambra & Silvestre, 2003; Chamberlain, Kasari, & Rotheram-Fuller, 2007; Estell et al., 2008; Grutter, Meyer, & Glenz, 2015; Koster, Pijl, Nakken, & van Houten, 2010; Krull, Willbert, & Henneman, 2014; Nadeau & Tessier, 2003; Nepi, Fioravanti, Nannini, & Peru, 2015; Pijl, Frostad, & Flem, 2008; Pijl, Skaalvic, & Skaalvic, 2010). Some studies also concluded that pupils with disabilities also felt less socially accepted than their peers without disabilities (Bossaert et al., 2015; Cambra & Silvestre, 2003; Schwab, Gebhardt, Krammer, Gasteiger-Klicpera, 2015). Moreover, it was revealed that these students are most likely to have less friends than their typically developing counterparts (Avramidis, 2013; Chamberlain et al., 2007; Estell et al., 2008; Frostad, Mjawaatn, & Pijl, 2011; Kasari, Locke, Gulsrud, & Rotheram-Fuller, 2011; Koster et al., 2010; Pijl et al., 2010). It is vital, therefore to take measures to prevent the difficulties with social participation experienced by many children with disabilities or to implement interventions that help them to overcome these difficulties (Cambra & Silvestre, 2003; Koster et al., 2010; Maras & Brown, 1996; Terpstra & Tamura, 2008).

For the participants, inclusive education was positive not only when social participation is fostered among the students, but also when measures to prevent the many hindrances experienced by children with disabilities in all the four key aspects of social participation are implemented and yield results. For example, Mrs Mmadubuihe expressed in her interview that one point of focus for the school was fostering an environment where students with disabilities understand that they are accepted and

encouraged to communicate and interact with their counterparts. While citing an example of one of their students with autism, learning disabilities and withdrawn personality in her early days of enrolment, Mrs Mmadubuihe noted that

she gradually socially adapted after series of ... friendly peer support approaches, where some of her classmates who are identified as intelligent and have been trained to assist their classmates in learning were assigned in the same group with her during group activities. These classmates were always encouraging her to contribute to the success of the group activities. She now mixes up well and [has] made a couple of friends too. Now she laughs and chats and participates in outdoor activities unlike when she first arrived.

These findings show that the school does not only preach social interaction rather a holistic social interaction for pupils with disabilities is driven by establishing measures to prevent many difficulties children with disabilities may experience in attaining the four key aspects of social interaction through peer-assisted learning. The concept of peer-assisted learning is supported by several research findings that demonstrate that peers can also help students with disabilities access the general education curriculum (Olson, Roberts, & Leko, 2015). Within this arrangement, one or two same-age peers can be trained to support a student with a disability in the general education classroom (Carter, Cushing, Clark, & Kennedy, 2005; Carter, Sisco, Melekoglu, & Kurkowski, 2007). This arrangement leads to improvements in student engagement for both students with and without disabilities, enhanced social interactions, reduced off-task and challenging behaviour, the advancement of functional skills, and academic growth (Spooner, Dymond, Smith, & Kennedy, 2006). Moreover, individuals with disabilities can learn

from their same-age peers, cultivate friendships with their peer tutors or partners, and build friendships with other peers in the classroom (Carter & Kennedy, 2006). I argue that implementing measures to curtail the social adaptability difficulties that pupils with disabilities experience through peer assisted learning was a fundamental inclusive education strength that yielded multiple interrelated benefits such as its cost effectiveness – it is free, and if correctly implemented it becomes a win-win approach as it facilitates social connection and individual growth – expands social-functional capacity while improving academic achievement.

### **5.1.2 Raising Academic Standards**

Importantly, though, for the participants, inclusive education was positive not only when the four key aspects of social interaction was attained by pupils with disabilities, but also when high quality academic progress for all pupils were recorded by developing practices which are responsive to different learning styles as exemplified by the social adaptability measures depicted by the peer-assisted learning. Contrary to most literature on the negative effects of inclusive education on the academic achievement of pupils without disabilities, (Campbell, 2009; MacBeath, Galton, Steward, MacBeath, & Page, 2005; Peck, Staub, Gallucci, & Schwartz, 2004; Upchurch, 2007), the participants' words suggest that rather than have negative effects, inclusive education challenges them to continuously search for the best ways to academically assist children with disabilities, which has translated into "raised academic standard" (Ekeh & Oladayo, 2013; Mrs Okwukwe, 2015) for "all learners, not just those [with] labels of [abilities]". In referring to her experience as a parent and a volunteer teacher in the school, Mrs Nwachigozirim noted that with the flexible approach she and her

“team of resource teachers” employ during their sessions in literacy resource unit for both pupils with and without disabilities, she is “yet to see the academic heights each of the students [with and without disabilities] can attain being diminished as a result of studying together in the same environment and under the same situation”.

This finding is consistent with several research on the positive effects of inclusive education on the academic achievement of pupils with and without disabilities (Burstein, Sears, Wilcoxon, Cabello, & Spagna, 2004; Castro, 2007; Dessemontet, Bless, & Morin, 2012; Farrell, Dyson, Polat, Hutcheson, & Gallannaugh, 2007; Fore, Burke, Burke, Boon, & Smith, 2008; Fruth & Woods, 2015; Idol, 2006; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Rea, McLaughlin, & Walther-Thomas, 2002; Spence, 2010; Wischnowksi, Salmon, & Eaton, 2004; Zaretsky, 2005).

The participants’ statements suggest that inclusive learning, when judiciously applied, has the capacity to open up boundaries to draw from other ways of understanding and being; making the teaching and learning experience more meaningful and productive for all involved. However, most opponents of inclusive education have based their argument on the fact that the main cause of failure of inclusion and inclusive education is the lack of initial teacher education of teachers to address the needs of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. While the participants were in agreement with some of their propositions, their understanding of expertise and skill acquisition in ensuring the success of inclusive education is largely dependent on, according to Mrs Igwebuiké “on-the-job professional development”.

### **5.1.3 The Place of In-service Professional Development**

The participants' understandings of positive inclusive education experiences were not only limited to growing capabilities of "all the pupils," but encompassed growing capabilities of "all the teachers" through encouraging their continuous professional growth". Inclusive education becomes transforming when the results of the challenges it poses are positive while "[drawing] out, [inspiring], and [developing] the best and highest within the people [involved] from the inside out" (Covey, 1998, p. xii). The participants' words suggest that by recording positive results in the educational experiences of the pupils and the positive affirmations from other individuals, they felt amply motivated "to do more, explore possible ways of doing it better and actually becoming better than [they] were in the process". The features of positive affect permitted for the strengthening and "spur" of the participants' potential and personal conviction in their capabilities. As revealed by Fredrickson (2001), when the works and qualities of individuals are valued, they can intensify what they are already doing well. This may lead to continual increase in performance, which generates ripple effects (Ingleton, 2014). The notion of positive affirmation producing undulatory effects is supported by Whitney et al. (2010) who noted that when people's best qualities are illuminated "it is like the sun: when it radiates, people feel it, and are warmed by it – and are therefore eager to give their best" (p. 59). For example, the affirmation Mrs Ndubuaku received from the progress made by her students and the testimony of such improvements from parents stimulated her confidence in her abilities. Her new found confidence gave her the "spur ... to explore possible ways of doing it better and actually becoming better than [she] was". The recognition pattern can therefore facilitate

individual's success in future (Fredrickson, 2001) enabling them to continually improve their teaching skills to match the challenges of inclusive education.

Interestingly and contrary to the literature on professional development that emphasises the initial school certification of teachers - through teacher education programmes - as essential for successful inclusive education practice (Cardona, 2009; Carroll, Forlin, & Jobling, 2003; Sharma, Forlin, Loreman, & Earle, 2006; Van Laarhoven, Munk, Lynch, Bosma, & Rouse, 2007), the participants offered a different conceptualisation of the relevance of graduate qualification in tackling real life inclusive education challenges. For example, Mrs Igwebuike perceives graduate certification as good but "useless without real life/on the job training experience". To her, the on the job professional learning is what she "see[s] as essential" as despite her being a qualified graduate, it was "the (re)training I experienced here that has really accounted for my professional growth". Similarly, Mrs Ndubuaku who has been with the school for 5 years admitted that she was employed by the school with just her secondary school certificate and without any prior knowledge of schooling children. However, the continuous professional learning, which "come intermittently, especially when I (as a support staff) and the permanent class teachers are working in the classroom, have enhanced my career".

For Mrs Nwachigoziri, regardless that the "professional learning of the support staff was informal based" if she was to equate the physiotherapy services her son receives in the school, for an example, with the one she received in an accredited hospital, the former far surpasses the latter.

I submit that the notion of continuous in-service professional learning which participants alluded as essential for successful inclusive education practice is generally consistent with research on professional development for a successful inclusive education, which found that targeted and ongoing professional development is critical in supporting and maintaining inclusive education practices in schools (Friend, Cook, Chamberlian., & Shamberger, 2010; Pugach & Winn, 2011). However, while not dismissing the fact that teacher preparation programmes remain the formal groundwork upon which the knowledge of inclusive education is built – as teachers are familiarised with the history, policies, and philosophies of inclusion, it does not adequately train pre-service teachers for most situations that may occur in the inclusive education setting (Shady, Luther, & Richman, 2013). This is because inclusive education is evolutionary and usually context specific (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2010). Situations and methods of addressing it in one inclusive education context may be totally different if not impossible to be used in addressing a similar situation in another inclusive education setting, hence making on-site professional/in-service training a condition for successful inclusive education. This development has continued to generate debate between supporters of flexible training routes and advocates of teaching professionalisation. The supporters of de-regulation view certification as ‘an unnecessary regulatory hurdle’ (McLeskey and Ross, 2004) and suggest a ‘utilitarian’ approach to teacher education, which increasingly takes it out of the academic arena (Bartell, 2001). Similarly, Cochran-Smith (2005) has challenged the purpose of schooling and of teacher education, seeking a move away from a focus on producing learners who can pass tests. Given the evolutionary and context specific nature of inclusive education, I argue that regardless of the foundational knowledge of

inclusive and/or special education legislation and teaching strategies teachers are been equipped with, additional guidance related to inclusion through sustained professional development and continued support from administrators (Casale, 2011; Jenkins & Yoshimura, 2010; Worrell, 2008) are yet necessitated for teachers to successfully “respond to the ever-evolving inclusive education milieu” (Hemmings & Woodcock, 2011, p. 6). For students to continue to experience success in inclusive education, educators need additional resources and opportunities to build their foundational knowledge and perceived ability to effectively educate all students as articulated by participants as fundamental to the inclusive education process.

## **5.2 Inclusive Education as “Caring for the Dignity of Humanity”**

As discussed in the previous chapter, the concept of inclusive education as “caring for the dignity of humanity” suggests that participants understand their inclusive education experiences as positive and effective when they are constantly searching for ways of bettering the human condition. During their interviews, participants related their efforts to consciously inspire new hopes for many, while ensuring the proliferation of the human rights precepts. They expressed that an aspect of their inclusive education experience that was most positive and impactful was fostering a caring school environment in ways that nurture the spirit of kindness, consideration, and empathy among all students.

### **5.2.1 Nurturing the Spirit of Compassion**

A careful analysis of participants’ inclusive education experiences and understandings revealed their understanding that to school different range of individuals in the same

educational setting, the need to build a compassionate learning community that recognises the deeper needs of all people, including a sense of safety, a sense of belonging, and the feeling of being part of something meaningful, arises. This view is consistent with Palmer's (2007) allusion to a learning community as a phenomenon that leads participants to lifelong understanding of who they are, why they are here, and what they have to contribute. Mrs Nwachigoziri's comment, "to a great extent, the way I have observed the [...] children [without disabilities] in this school relate with children with disabilities impacts humanity, and it has really helped my son a lot. He does not dwell on his inabilities, and this has assisted his psychological well-being, which fundamentally if you lose, the rest of your life kind of hangs in the balance" captures the symbiotic relationship between successful inclusive education practices and the holistic development of the self. Equating how a child with disability is treated by children who do study in an inclusive education environment to that of a child from a regular/segregated school background when met with a minor accident, Mrs Igwebuike related that "the compassion and empathy already cultivated in the hearts" of the former would drive them to assist the victim rather than "ridicule" the victim. Mrs Igwebuike went further to expatiate the significance of "sowing the seeds of compassion" in the children in the present corrupt state of the country. She related,

Given the high level of corruption among the Nigerian leaders today, I believe that sowing the seeds of compassion in these children is a milestone achieved for them becoming better future leaders. Because it is when you have that compassion that you will feel and actually know that somebody is feeling pain and you know that you ought not to embezzle the money that is meant for their betterment, rather you would be made to think of how best to relieve them of their pains.

Mrs Igwebuiké's convictions were also embraced by Mrs Nwachigoziri who was of the opinion that "the [school] environment has been able to cultivate in children without disabilities the mind of heavy compassion so much so that if they should grow up [in such manner] the challenged and marginalised people would, to an extent, be widely accepted in our society".

As reflected in Chapter Two, the participants' views were similar to those of Miller (1998/1999) who revealed that to build a less violent and more compassionate world, we need to nurture a deeper sense of self in our children while expanding their ability to empathise with and value diverse others, and Katz (2012) who stated that to fight dissociation while meeting academic and curricular demands, schools must explore instructional structures that incorporate "the teaching *to the heart as well as to the mind*, exploring the deeper meanings of what we learn, connecting with the community we learn and live with, and coming to know ourselves" ( p. 2 *Emphasis in original*). It is within this comprehensive inquiry arrangement, therefore, that compassionate schools and invariably, compassionate society evolve, which, as evidenced by participants' understandings can mostly be attained through the espousal of inclusive education practices.

### **5.3 "Finding the Middle Ground": An Inverse Understanding of Inclusive Education**

Though the participants communicated their various understandings of the positive facets of inclusive education as socio-constructive and humane, and though they viewed positive attitude among the school community members as a means of "quashing

discriminatory criticisms”, their view of inclusive education as “finding the middle ground” was clear. When it came to some critical scenarios, they refuse to live an illusion of a perfect society. They still expressed the importance of “accommodating negative attitudes”. Acknowledging the limitations of inclusive education in their cultural context became vital and the bringing of “some sort of realism to [their] progression” became critical. When the participants were challenged to consider the detrimental effects of accommodating such negating attitude and its opposition to the philosophies of inclusive education, they clung to the notion that “having some people occasionally express such reservations helps [them] disagree to agree, create atmospheres to meet [on] common ground... and continuously reflect on [their] values and actions; like that, [they] won’t be like pilgrims without a destination”. These findings are consistent with the views of AI expressed in Chapter Two. AI operates from the premise that “all voices matter” (Whitney et al, 2010, p. 2). Hence, in honouring the voices of all, conflict and disagreement becomes not only inevitable but fundamental to successful change (Fullan, 1991). Accordingly, the participants expressed the importance of meeting on a common ground driven by negative attitudes in their inclusive education journey, positioning it as a factor for building stronger relationship and promoting care, love, and compassion, which are crucial to the inclusive education process. Bolman and Deal (2008) concluded that creating the atmosphere for people to air “their ideas and concerns” making sure that the necessary mechanisms are put in place to translate these ideas and concerns into a win-win accomplishment “is a requisite for successful innovation” (p. 382).

The implication of this development is that becoming more inclusive is translated to discerning and conversing, appraising and refining processes, while making attempt to develop a more inclusive culture. This interpretation means that inclusion cannot be dissociated from the contexts in which it is developing, nor the social relations that might nourish or restrict that development (Dyson, 2006). This suggests that it is in the composite interaction amongst individuals, and amongst groups and individuals, that mutual beliefs, values, and change exist.

#### **5.4 Institutions of Support as Opportunities for the Advancement of Inclusive Education**

Integral to the opportunities participants draw upon in achieving positive experiences, and advancing inclusive education was the idea of exploration of crucial bodies which concern “institutions”. Opportunities drawn upon lies first and utmost in the idea of institutions of support. It consisted of leadership and partnering with health service personnel, disability specialist schools and trainee students.

##### **5.4.1 Leadership**

The participants revealed that opportunities explored entailed the acknowledgement and appreciation of a leader who is committed and is an embodiment of the philosophies of inclusive education. Mrs Nwachigoziri related that “leadership” showcased through “the directress is “an instrumental figure in creating and carrying out the [inclusive education] vision for this school, and she obviously leads by example”. Implicit in this quotation is that school leaders with a clear sense of purpose are one of the foundational support for advancing and sustaining the inclusive education process. This notion is supported by research carried out by Bryk, Sebring, Kerbow, Rollow, and

Easton (1998) who demonstrated improvements in approximately 473 elementary schools over time as a result of successful school head leadership. Their report indicated that these school heads collaboratively facilitated change (i.e., including parents, community, teachers, etc.), maintained an attention on student learning, possessed operational management abilities, and integrated pressure for the transformation with support (as cited in Fullan, 2001). Hargreaves (2004) also explained that school heads must foster positive power as leaders, demonstrating a moral purpose and strength to advocate for what is best for the children and attainable by teachers. The participants' view of leadership as an opportunity explored may stem from the idea that "leadership" is not necessarily flouting one's hierarchical dispositions. Instead, it is the ability to be committed to a cause, "inspiring" and influencing others around to stay true to the same cause by "lead[ing] by example" while encouraging participation.

#### **5.4.2 Partnership between the school and other related institutions**

Within the context of educational change, as is the case with inclusive education, Fullan (2006) proposes a new kind of leadership which transcends the successes of increasing student achievement and move towards leading organisations to sustainability. With this in mind, he argues for 'system thinkers in action', in which leaders expand their domain of influence and engagement by cooperating with other schools and related institutions so as to develop what he calls lateral capacity building towards sustainable development. Amidst many efforts going on in this direction, the participants' school, through the directress' leadership, improvised a cost effective way of sustaining their inclusive education practice which borders on promoting partnership between the

school and other related institutions. According to Mrs Nwachukwu, leveraging the skills of related institutions such as health service personnel - psychologists, speech therapists, physiotherapist; disability specialist schools, and trainee students have assisted the school to improvise on the limited resources they have. She related,

Because of the limited funds to employ these professionals on a full time basis, the school had to improvise by partnering with these personnel I mentioned by using them as facilitators to train the special support teachers who are equipped to act in their stead. Like that we only consult them when there are critical situations (HT)

Implicit in Mrs Nwachukwu's submission is the school's ability to manage the limited funds at their disposal through the improvisational leveraging of skills needed to sustain the inclusivity of the school. That is, their understanding that to move forward, and given their financial power, capitalising on opportunities such as partnering with related service personnel on a part-time basis and using them as facilitators to upskill their special support teachers, though informally, is integral to the sustainability of their inclusive education practice. This finding is congruent with the works of Mariga, McConkey and Myezwa (2014) drawn from their experiences from three African countries – Lesotho, Tanzania, and Zanzibar – which have introduced Inclusive Education and the significant achievement that have been realised at a relatively low cost.

Leveraging skills of health service personnel and disability specialists in advancing inclusive education for the participants is a holistic approach that emphasises the

provision of education for the most disenfranchised and marginalised groups in a country like Nigeria which boasts of massive wealth yet classified as one of the world's poorest countries, especially considering its insignificant financial commitment in the areas of human development and provision of resource for the implementation of effective inclusive basic education system (Eleweke, 2001, 2013; Nkechi, 2013; Obiakor & Eleweke, 2014) for its citizens with disabilities and other SE needs.

### **5.5 Summary of Chapter**

This chapter presented a discussion of the data gathered in the study. Having analysed the data from the themes, sub-themes were extracted and developed that were prominent in the participants' articulation of their inclusive education experiences. A quest for a deeper understanding into how the participants understood their most positive inclusive education experiences revealed that inclusive education resided in the confluence of "growing capabilities", "caring for the dignity of humanity", and building and strengthening community". Inclusive education was a concurrent process which enhances the four key aspects of social relations, advances functional skills, spurs continuous search for the best ways to improve academic learning, generates possibilities leading to affirmative feedback while creating opportunity for the acquisition of new knowledge, and producing life affirming results. The participants understood inclusive education as the teaching *to the heart as well as to the mind* whereby a caring school environment is fostered in ways that nurture the spirit of kindness, consideration, and empathy among all students in particular, and the school and society in general. An additional interpretation was that the advancement and sustainability of inclusive education is quintessentially dependent on 'system thinker'

leaders who could expand their domain of influence and engagement by cooperating with other schools and related institutions so as to develop 'lateral capacity building' towards sustainable development. Notably, a different construal of inclusive education that was garnered from the data was that the notion of obliging "negative attitude" yet lingers and functions as a means for continuous reflection on inclusive values and actions subject to the influence of the cultural context within which inclusive education needs to succeed.

Consistent with the objective of this study, the following chapter draws conclusions and recommendations on how participants' understanding of inclusive education and the opportunities they draw upon in advancing inclusive education practices may apprise the agenda for the advancement and sustainability of inclusive education and its practices essentially for developing countries whose major excuses for the non-implementation of holistic inclusive education practices borders on inadequate finance and underdeveloped human capacity.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **Recap, Recommendations, Reflections, and Conclusion**

#### **Introduction**

This inquiry was a case study that employed components of Appreciative Inquiry to examine parents and educators of primary school children with and without disabilities' understandings of their most positive inclusive education experiences, and the opportunities they leverage in advancing and sustaining inclusive education practices. This chapter presents a recap of the inquiry by appraising the context of the inquiry, the purpose of the inquiry and the methodology used. I also present recommendations for the advancement and sustainability of inclusive education practices, suggestions for future research, methodological and personal reflections, and conclusion.

#### **6.1 Recap of the Inquiry**

The idea for this study evolved from the recognition of the need for varied ways of understanding the inclusive education phenomenon and for varied approaches to advancing and sustaining inclusive education practices. Research on inclusive education and inclusive education practices is quite extensive. However, based on a review of the literature, only a few studies focus on inclusive education from the collective understandings of school community members and fewer still emphasise the positive experience of school community members. This study was undertaken with the objective of arriving at concepts of exemplary inclusive education practices that may be used to inform change strategies while generating an agenda for the

advancement of primary school level inclusive education programme that is congruent with school community members' collective understandings of positive, life affirming concepts of inclusive education, and the advancement and sustainability of its practices.

With the understanding that inclusive education is an evolving, socially constructed phenomenon, a qualitative research methodology was the most appropriate to conduct this inquiry. Wright (2003) highlighted that qualitative research can offer a "rich, full picture of a research situation" (p. 8). I therefore engaged in such an experience to enter into the world of the participants in order to understand their collective understandings of positive inclusive education, and the opportunities they leverage in advancing and sustaining inclusive education practices. The research type was a case study, which afforded for an exploration of a "bounded" system through detailed data collection. I made use of the case study design so as to gain a thorough understanding of the inclusive education phenomenon and the meaning that is attributed to it by those involved. The participant sample comprised eight parents and educators of children with and without disabilities of a private voluntary primary school in a South-Eastern Nigerian State, who were actively involved in the school's decision making process as well as the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) of the school at the time of data collection. The method for data collection was semi-structured appreciative individual interviews. Appreciative interviews were employed in order to allow focus on strengths and successes.

A systematic analysis of the data was carried out so as to construe the participants' responses on inclusive education, advancement and sustainability of its practices. Data

analysis procedures comprised open coding which included reading and re-reading transcripts, and commenting on the data by making notes in the margins of the transcripts, highlighting, and questioning responses. After this process, a preliminary list of codes and sub-themes was generated. The second stage was the formulation of meaningful concepts. Formulation of meaningful concepts was facilitated by grouping the codes and sub-themes under more abstract explanatory terms called themes.

The final stage of data analysis addressed the interpretative and validation process in which I reviewed descriptors, sub-themes, and themes. This stage was facilitated by my participants and my supervisor whom I shared the data with, seeking their opinion on my thematic and sub-thematic choices. Furthermore, I sought my supervisor's opinion in providing me with alternative understandings. I carefully reflected on the interpretations from the two groups and examined the new insight I gained from them. The process of data analysis led to key findings which were further used to generate an agenda for the advancement and sustainability of inclusive education practices for participants' school, country, or elsewhere. This agenda is represented in the recommendation section of this chapter.

### **6.1.1 Overview of the Findings**

Participants' understandings of inclusive education revealed four themes. These themes were inclusive education as "growing capabilities," inclusive education as "caring for the dignity of humanity," and inclusive education as "building and strengthening community," and a "finding a middle ground" inclusive education understanding.

The theme of inclusive education as “growing capabilities” revealed sub-themes that demonstrated that inclusive education was considered positive when it expands social-functional capacities, raises academic standard and enhances professional growth. In their respective interviews, the participants shared stories, beliefs, and convictions where service were primacies and thus had an impact on how they have grown to understand and practice inclusive education.

The inclusive education as “caring for the dignity of humanity” thematic strand reflected fundamentally new ways of acting and thinking and reinforced existing inclusive education practices. This theme reflected the participants’ conscious effort to ensure that the spirit of love, care, acceptance and compassion were cultivated in the hearts of students for one another. It is their understanding that inclusive education is not 100% without challenges. However, their responses indicated that ensuring that every human being is recognised as a person with equal rights to be loved, respected, cared for through sowing the seeds of love for humanity and cultivating the spirit of compassion in their hearts and the hearts of their students were essential to establishing the purpose of inclusive education and their positive inclusive education experiences.

The theme of inclusive education as “building and strengthening community” presented evidence that participants had a desire to make a difference in inclusive education. They demonstrated their understanding that being involved in inclusive education in a society such as theirs means that they would inevitably grapple with conflicting dissenting and discriminatory reactions from the wider society. Their responses,

however indicated that keeping a positive attitude, recording positive results, and creating awareness were essential to expanding the purposes of inclusive education to the wider community and the sustainability of inclusive education practices.

Finally, a “finding the middle ground” understanding of inclusive education emerged. Though the participants communicated their various understandings of the positive facets of inclusive education as socio-constructive and humane, and though they viewed positive attitude among the school community members as a means of “quashing discriminatory criticisms”, when it came to some critical scenarios, they refuse to live an illusion of a perfect society. Acknowledging the limitations of inclusive education in their cultural context became vital and the bringing of some sort of realism to their progression became critical as participants clung to the notion that occasionally accommodating negative attitudes help them to disagree to agree, create atmospheres to meet on common ground while continuously reflecting on their values and actions.

The findings for research question two, “what opportunities do parents and educators draw upon in achieving these positive experiences and advancing inclusive education practices?” suggest that the participants understood the advancement and sustainability of inclusive education practices as the exploration of crucial bodies which concerns institutions of support. The concept of institutions of support was undergirded by notions of leadership and partnership with health service personnel, disability specialist schools and trainee students. The view of leadership as an opportunity leveraged in advancing inclusive education practices stems from the understanding that sustainable inclusive education practices required leaders who

possess acute awareness of their skills as well as their place in the leadership relationship. The participants also reflected that effective leadership refers to a leader's capacity to encourage participation of school members in decision making while articulating ways of improvising for the limited resources necessary for the successful advancement of inclusive education practices. However, opportunities explored in advancing inclusive education was not limited for within the school or drawn from particular individuals, rather the exploration of opportunities were also extended to the improvisational leveraging of the skills of health service personnel, disability specialist schools and trainee students.

## **6.2 Recommendations for the Advancement and Sustainability of Inclusive Education Practices**

It is the concern of this study that each Nigerian child with disabilities must have an equal opportunity to fully participate in society and access education. Despite the enactment of the NPE, which recognises access to basic education in their neighbourhood schools, the marginalisation and discrimination against this group of children and their families continue to perpetuate. This anomaly has been attributed mostly to the challenges experienced by educators in an attempt to accommodate CWD in regular schools.

In this study, however, it is apparent that the predominant positive attitude toward CWD is the fundamental basis of implementing inclusive education within Nigeria. This research has identified some factors supporting the advancement and sustainability of inclusive education practices in Nigeria. Following the objective of this study, an agenda

for the advancement and sustainability of inclusive education practices is herein presented as recommendations.

It is recommended that a policy establishing the kind of professional autonomy school leaders required in running their schools will be in order as that will afford school leaders to bring their professional expertise to bear on the way they go about their job of facilitating the implementation of inclusive education practices in Nigerian primary schools. Given that the school under study is a PVO owned school, the school leader is afforded a high level of professional autonomy making it possible and easier to plan her work and take decisions in such a way that facilitating the implementation of inclusive education practices did not negatively influence their practices.

While not dismissing the fact that it is majorly the responsibility of the government to provide quality inclusive basic education for its teeming primary school age population, we should also not lose focus of the fact that the PVOs, the missionaries, among others, were the ones to have laid the foundation of SPED and later transitioned to inclusive education. In this light, it will be appropriate, and for the sake of the advancement and sustainability of inclusive education practices that the government go into a public-private partnership with these institutions. Like that, the huge chunks of the annual budget which every tier of the Nigerian government claims to be spending on education will be well accounted for.

Relevant resources and related personnel have also been shown to be of crucial importance in the advancement and sustainability of inclusive education practices. It is

evident from the present study that rather than dwell on the inadequate resources especially with regards to the services of related health and disability specialist personnel that can help to make learning accessible to learners who experience barriers to learning, the school innovatively improvised the leveraging of skills of these personnel in further empowering their support staff. However, the provision of such resources cannot be left to the discretion of schools and educators to improvise. Hence, it is strongly recommended that the government should create a platform for partnering with PVOs as previously mentioned. In so doing, the inclusive practices inherent within these institutions could be extended to other public schools. As a result, schools will be supported to overcome the barriers to learning while concretising inclusive education practices.

With regards to professional development, it is positive that teachers attend educational institutions in order to be certified as capable of teaching children with disabilities in regular schools. However, this course is only introductory in nature, and does not take into account the *nitty gritty*s of teaching students with diverse needs in a class. It would be beneficial to institutionalise on-going professional learning within school contexts. It is recommended that this on-going professional learning be context and situation specific. Learning should be specific to immediate, specific difficulties being experienced by educators in actualising credible inclusive education practices as against occasional workshop and seminar which usually have a central theme that mostly bear no significance to specific difficulties experienced by educators in their day-to-day duties. Considering the evolving nature of inclusive education, it may perhaps be appropriate to encourage pre-service student teachers' longer involvement

in teaching practices in inclusive schools. This would help to bolster their confidence in their abilities to manage inclusive education classrooms on assumption of duty after graduation. Undoubtedly, further sponsoring of new and existing teachers to study in countries which have successfully reached a certain zenith of inclusive education practices, learn how they are able to sustain their practices while keeping in view the different cultural contexts, is recommended.

Once these individuals are equipped with the necessary skills to support the diverse learning needs of all children, they may then build a team of professional supports. This team may be responsible for the educational services and progress of children in inclusive education settings within Nigeria in the public-private partnership between the government and the PVOs as earlier mentioned. Hall and Figueroa (1998) suggested implementing a “carousel model”, where this team of professionals rotate weekly among various schools within the country (Hall & Figueroa, 1998). They may also serve to enhance the professional learning of educators and promote educational awareness for CWDs.

Yet another recommendation is that more parental support groups be established for those with children with disabilities. The allocation of funds toward such groups should be taken into account in order to afford parents the means with which to serve as defensible advocates for CWDs and inclusion. These groups are also a means of bringing transformational change in feelings of shame, humiliation, and degradation experienced by many families of CWDs. Considering that these support groups provides parents with the courage and freedom to encourage the participation of their children

within the wider community and to attend school, the benefits for both parent and child cannot be over-emphasised.

### **6.3 Suggestions for Future Research**

Methodologically, it is beneficial to explore incorporating the other three phases of the AI cycle – the dream, the design, and the destiny phases in a related study to further ascertain the '*what might be*' of inclusive education practices following some of the recommendations.

Additionally, it would be worthwhile conducting the study with the inclusion of the student voices to complete the cycle of school community members. In this light, and given the inclusivity of AI, integrating focus group interviews in addition to individual interviews will further afford researchers the opportunity to dig into the positive experiences of participants when they are functioning collectively and collaboratively. As well, the aim of such a study would be to examine whether the inclusive education experiences of all community members coalesce or diverge. Furthermore, it is essential to continue investigating strength-based approaches of transforming attitudes and beliefs towards CWDs amidst the sociocultural and sociopolitical climate within Nigeria in particular and the world in general.

### **6.4 Reflections**

#### **6.4.1 Methodological Reflections**

I took time to reflect on how the methodology that I used in this study has both reformed and reiterated my views on inclusive education. Remarkably, by employing

appreciative interviews, there was a drive that generated effectual and gratifying discussions that may not have ensued otherwise. By its very nature the appreciative process invites people into positive dialogue and moves discussion beyond mere problem solving level to the aspiration, envisioning, and big picture discerning processes.

Notably, the use of Appreciative Inquiry methodology stimulated reflection, introspection, and enabled participation that transcends the cognitive level. I would argue that the principles of the appreciative process are not just a way of *doing*, but also a way of facilitating *growth in capabilities*. Appreciative Inquiry afforded me to look into the participants' souls, to connect with their inner self, and to bring to the limelight their positive human capacities.

The participants conveyed how inspiring and fulfilling the experience was because they had an opportunity to liberally talk about the things that were going well in their school. This view is consistent with that of Whitney et al. (2010) who, having engaged in a series of appreciative interviews concluded that "positive power is something everyone implicitly wants; yet few have an explicit framework for talking about it, doing it, or [growing] it" (p. xxi). This study afforded that platform for speaking about "positive power" as it created the space for individuals to share exemplary inclusive education thoughts and practices in their own words. This experience was emancipating for them, as they felt they were able to express their strengths, not for recognition purposes, but for expressing sake.

Employing interpretive and validation process was also valuable. It created opportunity for fresh insights, and most essentially, facilitated my thinking more critically about my own assumptions and beliefs.

#### **6.4.2 Personal Reflections**

As a teacher as well as a mother of a child with disabilities, embarking on a study of this nature has led to change in certain personal beliefs which I held prior to this study. The condition leading to this change, of course, is recursive; as some of my beliefs have changed, so has my work intentions.

My first and principal belief is that **all personal and social action, including but not limited to research, is unavoidably moral.** We cannot make any impact in the world without ethical considerations. While considering views from my personal experience that have influenced my personal beliefs of inclusion, I feel that in many ways, both my positive and negative experiences with the education of children with disabilities have directly shaped my own philosophy of inclusion. As an educator and mother of a child with disabilities, I have been in the teaching profession with criticism of the entire system of education, especially with the cultural inclination of discriminating attitude towards persons with disabilities. However, I think that I now have a more open mind about accommodating negative attitude within inclusive school environments situated in certain cultural beliefs provided that mechanisms are put in place to convert such attitude into a beneficial progression for the education system. In this light, it appears that the concept of implementation, advancement, and sustainability of inclusive

education practices can be extended to include the importance of learning from all involved.

My hope, therefore, is that our schools be built in ways, where we all feel like family - a place where we all know that we each have our own issues, our own special something about us, where we are all accepted as we are for who we are while building upon our strengths.

## **6.5 Conclusions**

The challenge for Nigerians as a nation, in trying to meet the demands for future generations in a democratic world, is to prepare learners, through the provision of quality foundational basic education, to accommodate one another irrespective of abilities.

The study suggests that to meet the above challenges, the phenomenon of inclusive education requires varied ways of understanding and varied approaches to advancing and sustaining inclusive education practices. Through accessing parents and educators of primary school children with and without disabilities' understandings of their most positive inclusive education experiences, and the opportunities they leverage in advancing and sustaining inclusive education practices, six factors which are potential supporters to the implementation, advancement, and sustainability of inclusive education in Nigeria were identified. The present study draws attention to current strengths which may be targeted and built upon to assist in the implementation and support of inclusive education within Nigeria.

Leaders for inclusive education, teachers, parents, resources, and the intervening nature of past or present positive experiences with children with disabilities may collectively influence the sustained societal attitudes toward inclusive education and CWDs.

Participants highlighted caring for the dignity of humanity as the predominant positive attitudes/understandings towards CWDs within the school; this was emphasised as one of the greatest facilitators to implementing and advancing inclusive education practices within the school and among the school community members. In caring for the dignity of humanity, participants noted that they are driven to search for more and better ways of improving the lives of the students. By so doing, capabilities are grown and the positive results they record attract the society to appreciate their involvement in inclusive education. As a result, the larger society is strengthened, hence quashing discriminatory aspersions experienced by all those involved in inclusive education practices. Due to the relationship between these dynamics, strategies have been employed, which accordingly continue to facilitate the advancement and sustainability of inclusive education practices in the school.

The institutional and financial autonomy enjoyed by the school leader in running the school appear to enhance the advancement of inclusive education practices. Being able to liaise with related personnel through leveraging their skills in facilitating the informal upskilling of the support staff while partnering with specialist schools who

send their students for field training ensures the leader's liberty to channel their limited resources where and when it is most needed.

Considering that this level of autonomy is consequent upon the school being a private owned entity, thus the school is able to look beyond the challenges of inclusive education to build upon their strengths. It is worthy of note that this portrays them as being more accountable for more successes in the inclusive education agenda than most government owned schools. Arguably, there are huge possibilities that inclusive education could successfully become a central common practice within the Nigerian education system. In achieving this feat, the Nigerian government, the Federal Ministry of Education, and PVOs must actively be involved in a public-private partnership to further ensure accountability.

There is little skepticism in my mind that without on-going professional development of educators with focus on specific challenges while building upon the strengths of what is working well in inclusive education settings, the advancement and sustainability of inclusive education would be drastically affected. While not dismissing the foundational importance of initial teacher education, totally relying on its capacity to help upcoming and existing inclusive education teachers in actualising the advancement of the ever evolving inclusive education practices, may significantly affect the sustainability of inclusive education in Nigeria.

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## APPENDICES

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Interview Guide**

#### **Introductory texts**

Thank you for willing to share your experiences and understandings of inclusive education with me. I am very enthusiastic about this research and feel particularly honored to be interacting with you. Together, we will be talking about your involvement in inclusive education and exploring the facets of inclusive education that you deem most positive. Additionally, we will be discussing the opportunities you draw upon in advancing and sustaining inclusive education practices. Your stories will help researchers and teaching professionals to learn how (participant – school head, teacher, or parents) understand inclusive education and what inclusive education means to (participants). I will be asking you several questions that will help us to discover that. Feel free to stop me at any time as we work together.

#### **Stage Setting Questions**

- 1. How long have you been involved in inclusive schooling?**
- 2. What do you most enjoy about being an inclusive teacher/inclusive school head teacher/parents of a child in an inclusive school?**

#### **Core Interview Questions: one-on-one Interviews**

1. Identify a time in your experience as a school head/teacher/parents when you felt most inspired by inclusive education practices. Describe this. What was it like? Who was involved? What made this situation possible?
2. What strengths do you draw on – within yourself, your teachers, parents and community?
3. Can you tell me about what enables your continued engagement in inclusive education?
4. What three or four opportunities do the school leverage? What kind of resources do the school use to take full advantage of these opportunities?

## **Concluding Questions**

- 1. How was this interviewing experience?**
- 2. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?**

## APPENDIX B

### Human Ethics Committee Final Approval

Dear Salamah,

The Chair of the [Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee \(SBREC\)](#) at Flinders University considered your response to conditional approval out of session and your project has now been granted final ethics approval. This means that you now have approval to commence your research. Your ethics final approval notice can be found below.

#### FINAL APPROVAL NOTICE

Project No.:

6770

Project Title:

Towards Inclusive Education in Nigeria: Appreciative Voices of School Heads, Teachers and Parents of Primary School Children with and without Disabilities

Principal Researcher:

Mrs Salamah Osuji-Alatilehin

Email:

[osuj0001@finders.edu.au](mailto:osuj0001@finders.edu.au)

Approval Date:

13 March 2015

Ethics Approval Expiry Date:

13 March 2018

The above proposed project has been **approved** on the basis of the information contained in the application, its attachments and the information subsequently.

Kind regards

Rae Tyler

Ethics Officer and Executive Officer, Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee

## APPENDIX C

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### LETTER OF PERMISSION TO THE DIRECTOR

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**Title:** *Towards Inclusive Education in Nigeria: Appreciative Voices of Parents and Educators of Primary School Children with and without Disabilities.*

**Investigator:**

Ms Salamah Osuji-Alatilehin  
School of Education  
Flinders University

**Supervisor(s):**

Dr Michael Bell  
School of Education  
Flinders University  
Ph: +61 8 8201 2266

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Salamah Osuji-Alatilehin. I am currently undertaking a Master of Education (Leadership and Management) M.Ed. in Faculty of Education at Flinders University South Australia. As part of the course I am required to carry out a research. My proposed study aims to examine inclusive education for children with disabilities (ages 6-11) within Nigeria from the understandings of the most positive experiences of school heads, teachers, and parents of children with and without disabilities in inclusive private primary school.

I am requesting permission to conduct the study in the school and with your help and consent recruit participants. I propose to conduct one-on-one semi-structured interviews with eight participants. Participant's names and the name of the school will be held confidentially and will not be disclosed to anyone other than me. All participants will be given a Letter of Introduction, an Information Sheet and asked to sign a consent form. Participants will be advised that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and their data will not be included in the study. Issues of ethics, confidentiality and anonymity have been addressed within the proposed study. I would be grateful if I could conduct the interviews in a conference or meeting room within the school where the participants will feel comfortable and confidentiality can be maintained.

It is this researcher's belief that exploring inclusive education for children with disabilities (ages 6-11) within Nigeria from the understandings of the most positive experiences of school heads, teachers, and parents of children with and without disabilities in inclusive private primary school will enhance inclusive education practices and understanding in this area, which will in turn contribute to evidence based practice.

A letter of Introduction from my supervisor will be presented to you on receipt of a correspondence from you granting me the permission to recruit teachers, school heads and parents from your school to participate in the proposed study. I would also appreciate it if the permission reflects your acceptance to or not to assist the researcher in recruiting the proposed participants. Details of the letter would be communicated to you on receipt of the permission grant.

I will be guided by my research supervisor from Flinders University, Adelaide, South Australia throughout the study. If you would like to discuss this further, please contact me on 080 57417848 or alternatively at the above address.

Yours sincerely,



Osuji-Alatilehin Salamah (Mrs)

*This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project Number : 6770). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email [human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au](mailto:human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au)*

## APPENDIX D

### Letter of Introduction to the Director

#### To Whom it May Concern

Dear Sir/Madam,

This letter is to introduce Ms Salamah Osuji-Alatilehin who is a Masters student in the Department of Education at Flinders University, Adelaide, South Australia. She will produce her student card, which carries a photograph, as proof of identity.

She is undertaking research leading to the production of a thesis on the subject of "What positive experiences motivate school heads, teachers and parents' participation in inclusive education?"

She is soliciting for your assistance in recruiting interested participants who will be interviewed to cover certain aspects of this topic and who match the following criteria:

- School heads (head teacher and heads of departments) and teachers who are working full time in the school.
- Parents whose children are with or without disabilities and actively involved in the school's Parent Teacher Association (PTA).

She intends to approach four school heads (head teachers and head of departments), six teachers, six parents of children with disabilities, and six parents of children without disabilities who match the above criteria. To this effect, she would like you to give some addressed return-stamped envelope which contains a Letter of Introduction, an Information Sheet and a Consent Form to these potential participants.

She would also like you to give potential participants the option of contacting the researcher, or gain their approval for their contact details to be given to the researcher (if it is in line with your organisational policies). This is to afford her the opportunity to further explain the purpose, benefits and risks of the study to potential participants as outlined in the attached Information Sheet.

Any enquiries you may have concerning this project should be directed to me at the address given above or by telephone on +61 8 8201 2266, or by email ([Michael.bell@flinders.edu.au](mailto:Michael.bell@flinders.edu.au))

Thank you for your attention and assistance.

Yours sincerely



Dr Michael Bell

## APPENDIX E

### Permission Grant from Research Site

**Title:** *Towards Inclusive Education in Nigeria: Appreciative Voices of Parents and Educators of Primary School Children with and without Disabilities.*

**Investigator:**

Ms Salamah Osuji-Alatilehin  
School of Education  
Flinders University

**Supervisor(s):**

Dr Michael Bell  
School of Education  
Flinders University  
Ph: +61 8 8201 2266

Dear Sir/Madam,

The *Healing School* is willing to participate in the study. The following permissions are thus granted:

1. Permission to conduct one-on-one interviews in the school
2. Permission to conduct interviews with our teachers, parents and school heads
3. Permission to use a quiet room within the school premises for the interviews.

Wishing you a rewarding study.

Yours Sincerely

Wilkins Edna M.

(Directress)

## APPENDIX F

### Letter of Introduction to Potential Participants

#### To Whom it May Concern

Dear Sir/Madam,

This letter is to introduce Ms Salamah Osuji-Alatilehin who is a Masters student in the Department of Education at Flinders University, Adelaide, South Australia. She will produce her student card, which carries a photograph, as proof of identity.

She is undertaking research leading to the production of a thesis on the subject of "What positive experiences motivate school heads, teachers and parents' participation in inclusive education?"

She is soliciting for your participation in a one-on-one interview to cover certain aspects of this topic

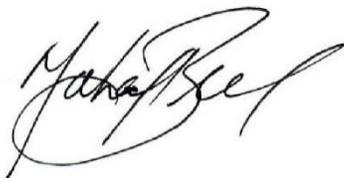
The purpose, benefits and risks of the study is outlined in the attached Information Sheet. She would also like to inform you that:

- Participation in the study is voluntary and refusal to participate will not affect your job and in the case of parents, your children enrolment in the school,
- An audio recording will be made of the interview which will be transcribed
- Any information that identifies you will not be transcribed,
- You can withdraw from the study at any time, without consequence, and
- You can ask for any part of your interview to be omitted from the study

Any enquiries you may have concerning this project should be directed to me at the address given above or by telephone on +61 8 8201 2266, or by email ([Michael.bell@flinders.edu.au](mailto:Michael.bell@flinders.edu.au))

Thank you for your attention and assistance.

Yours sincerely



Dr Michael Bell

## APPENDIX G

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### INFORMATION SHEET

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**Title:** *Towards Inclusive Education in Nigeria: Appreciative Voices of Parents and Educators of Primary School Children with and without Disabilities.*

**Investigator:**

Ms Salamah Osuji-Alatilehin  
School of Education  
Flinders University

**Supervisor(s):**

Dr Michael Bell  
School of Education  
Flinders University  
Ph: +61 8 8201 2266

**Description of the study:**

This study is part of the project entitled ‘Towards Inclusive Education in Nigeria: Appreciative Voices of Parents and Educators of Primary School Children with and without Disabilities.’ This project will investigate positive experiences that motivate school heads, teachers, and parents’ participation in inclusive education practices. This project is supported by Flinders University Education department.

**Purpose of the study:**

The purpose of this study is to examine inclusive education for children with disabilities (ages 6-11) within Nigeria from the understandings of the most positive experiences of school heads, teachers, and parents of children with and without disabilities in inclusive private primary school, uncover what gives life to their participation in inclusive education, and to identify opportunities they draw upon in advancing and sustaining inclusive education practices. The aim is to arrive at concepts of exemplary inclusive education practices that may be used to inform change strategies and create an agenda for the advancement of primary level inclusive education programme.

**What will I be asked to do?**

You are invited to attend a one-on-one interview with an education student who will ask you a few questions about your understandings of your most positive experiences in inclusive education practices. The interview will take about 45 - 60 minutes. The interview will be recorded using a digital voice recorder to help with looking at the results. Once recorded, the interview will be transcribed (typed-up) and stored as a computer file and then destroyed once the results have been finalised. This is voluntary.

### **What benefit will I gain from being involved in this study?**

By sharing your experiences, there are possibilities that your own thinking regarding inclusive education practices and the advancement of inclusive education practices would be stimulated. The dialogical approach to the study may also allow you to generate new and more positive visions.

### **Will I be identifiable by being involved in this study?**

We do not need your name and you will be anonymous. Once the interview has been typed-up and saved as a file, the voice file will then be destroyed. Any identifying information will be removed and the typed-up file stored on a password protected computer that only the supervisor, Dr Michael Bell will have access to. Your comments will not be linked directly to you.

### **Are there any risks or discomforts if I am involved?**

The investigator anticipates few risks from your involvement in this study. If you have any concerns regarding anticipated or actual risks or discomforts, please raise them with the investigator.

### **How do I agree to participate?**

Participation is voluntary. You may answer 'no comment' or refuse to answer any questions and you are free to discontinue at any time without effect or consequences. A consent form accompanies this information sheet. If you agree to participate please read and sign the form and send it back to me at the address stated on the envelope.

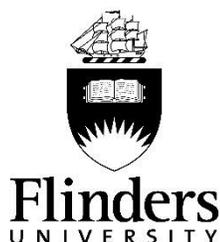
### **How will I receive feedback?**

Outcomes from the project will be summarised and given to you by the investigator if you would like to see them.

**Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and we hope that you will accept our invitation to be involved.**

*This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project Number : 6770). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email [human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au](mailto:human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au)*

## APPENDIX H



### CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

#### Individual Interview

<p><b>Towards Inclusive Education in Nigeria: Appreciative Voices of Parents and Educators of Primary School Children with and without Disabilities.</b></p>
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I .....

being over the age of 18 years hereby consent to participate as requested in the Information Sheet for the research project on Inclusive Education in Nigeria: Appreciative Voices of School Heads, Teachers, and Parents of Primary School Children with and without Disabilities

1. I have read the information provided.
2. Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.
3. I agree to audio recording of my information and participation.
4. I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for future reference.
5. I understand that:
  - I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
  - I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and am free to decline to answer particular questions.
  - While the information gained in this study will be published as explained, I will not be identified, and individual information will remain confidential.
  - Whether I participate or not, or withdraw after participating, will have no effect on any service that is being provided to me.
  - Whether I participate or not, or withdraw after participating, will have no effect on my job.

- I may ask that the recording be stopped at any time, and that I may withdraw at any time from the session or the research without disadvantage.
- I may ask that any part of my interview may be omitted from the study.

**Participant's signature.....Date.....**

I certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

**Researcher's name.....**

**Researcher's signature.....Date.....**

*NB: Two signed copies should be obtained. The copy retained by the researcher may then be used for authorisation of Items 8 and 9, as appropriate.*

6. I, the participant whose signature appears below, have read a transcript of my participation and agree to its use by the researcher as explained.

**Participant's signature.....Date.....**