



CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY OF TEACHERS AS PREDICTORS OF INCLUSIVE LEARNING OUTCOMES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF SOKOTO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *This study explored how cultural, linguistic, and gender diversity among teachers influence inclusive learning outcomes in Sokoto State, Nigeria. Using a quasi-experimental design, 332 SSII students and eight teachers across four schools participated. Data were collected using pre- and post-tests in English and Mathematics, and analyzed with independent t-tests and regression analysis. Results revealed no significant gender differences in student performance ($p > 0.05$). However, cultural diversity ($\beta = 0.41, p < 0.01$) and linguistic diversity ($\beta = 0.36, p < 0.01$) significantly predicted student achievement. The study concludes that cultural and linguistic diversity foster inclusive learning environments.*

KEYWORDS: Cultural diversity, linguistic diversity, gender inclusivity, teacher diversity, inclusive education.



INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is increasingly recognized as a cornerstone of modern schooling, particularly in multicultural and multilingual societies such as Nigeria. The principle of inclusive education extends beyond simply ensuring access to schooling; it emphasizes the creation of learning environments that acknowledge, respect, and respond to the diverse cultural, linguistic, and social identities of learners. A truly inclusive classroom does not only accommodate differences but actively leverages them to enrich teaching and learning processes (UNESCO, 2020). At the heart of this transformation lies the diversity of teachers themselves, whose backgrounds, experiences, and worldviews significantly shape how inclusivity is practiced within schools. Teacher diversity—encompassing cultural, linguistic, and gender dimensions—plays a pivotal role in modeling inclusivity and nurturing learners who are prepared to thrive in heterogeneous societies (Banks, 2016).

While academic performance remains one of the most visible indicators of school success, inclusive education broadens this scope to include values such as gender equity, cultural tolerance, and intercultural competence. In today's interconnected world, students must learn to navigate cultural differences with respect and openness. Teachers from varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds bring unique pedagogical approaches, examples, and lived experiences into the classroom, making learning more relatable and dynamic for students (Gay, 2018). Similarly, gender diversity among teachers is essential in promoting balanced perspectives, reducing stereotypes, and ensuring that both male and female students see themselves represented in authority roles within schools. Such representation fosters equity and contributes to dismantling entrenched social hierarchies that often marginalize particular groups (Adebayo & Oyetunde, 2022).

In the Nigerian context, the importance of teacher diversity becomes even more urgent given the country's complex socio-cultural fabric. Nigeria is one of the most culturally diverse nations in Africa, with over 250 ethnic groups and more than 500 languages spoken (Akinyemi & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014). Despite this rich diversity, many schools—especially in rural and semi-urban areas—often employ teachers who share the same ethnic or linguistic backgrounds as their students. While this homogeneity can create comfort and familiarity, it also risks limiting students' exposure to alternative perspectives and undermines the broader goals of inclusivity. Moreover, issues such as gender imbalance in teacher recruitment and placement continue to persist, with female teachers underrepresented in certain regions and subjects (Ezeh, 2019). Addressing these gaps is vital for achieving equity and inclusivity in secondary education.

Furthermore, inclusive education is not only about addressing the needs of students with disabilities or special needs, as it is sometimes narrowly understood. Rather, it encompasses a holistic vision of education that celebrates differences in culture, language, gender, and socio-economic background as integral to the learning process. Research has consistently shown that exposure to diverse role models enhances critical thinking, empathy, and intercultural competence among learners (Banks & Banks, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2021). Teachers who bring different perspectives challenge students to question assumptions, appreciate multiple viewpoints, and build the skills necessary for peaceful coexistence in a pluralistic society.

In practical terms, diversity among teachers' influences classroom interactions, teaching methodologies, and curricular emphasis. A culturally diverse teacher workforce may introduce



examples from different traditions, histories, and worldviews, enriching the curriculum and making it more reflective of society at large (Nieto, 2010). Linguistically diverse teachers may employ multilingual strategies that not only improve comprehension but also affirm the value of indigenous languages in educational spaces often dominated by English (Bamgbose, 2018). Gender-diverse teaching staff can provide balanced mentorship opportunities, ensuring that all learners—regardless of gender—find relatable role models who inspire academic success and personal development (Umar, 2021).

The Nigerian secondary school system faces multiple challenges in embracing this broad vision of inclusivity. These include recruitment practices that favor local applicants, resource limitations that constrain teacher mobility, and socio-cultural norms that perpetuate gender stereotypes in teaching assignments. Additionally, systemic inequalities, such as disparities in access to teacher training and professional development, further reinforce the lack of diversity in schools (Odukoya et al., 2020). Despite these challenges, recent policy reforms and advocacy efforts have increasingly emphasized inclusive education as a national priority, creating opportunities for research into its predictors and outcomes (Federal Ministry of Education, 2021).

This study, therefore, investigates the extent to which cultural, linguistic, and gender diversity among teachers predicts inclusive learning outcomes in Nigerian secondary schools. By examining these dimensions of teacher diversity, the study seeks to highlight the mechanisms through which inclusivity can be strengthened in the classroom. More specifically, it aims to understand how diverse teaching staff shape students' academic performance, attitudes toward cultural tolerance, and development of intercultural competence. The findings are expected to provide insights not only for policymakers and educational administrators but also for teacher training institutions and school communities committed to building inclusive education systems.

In sum, teacher diversity is not a peripheral concern but a central element in achieving the goals of inclusive education. As Nigeria continues to grapple with issues of unity, national integration, and global competitiveness, fostering inclusive classrooms through diverse teachers represents both a moral imperative and a strategic necessity. This study's focus on cultural, linguistic, and gender diversity as predictors of inclusive outcomes is thus timely and essential, promising to contribute significantly to the discourse on educational equity, quality, and sustainability in the Nigerian secondary school system.

Objectives of the Study

1. To determine whether there is a difference in learning outcomes between male and female students taught by diverse teachers.
2. To examine which aspects of teacher diversity significantly predict students' learning outcomes.

Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between the learning outcomes of male and female students taught by diverse teachers.

H₀₂: There are no specific aspects of teacher diversity that significantly predict student outcomes.



METHODOLOGY

The study employed a quasi-experimental design with 332 SSII students and eight teachers drawn from four purposively selected schools. Two schools were assigned as experimental groups (diverse teachers) and two as control groups. Pre- and post-tests in English and Mathematics were validated for reliability ($\alpha = 0.89$ and 0.79). Data were analyzed using independent t-tests (for gender differences) and regression analysis (to identify predictors).

RESULTS

Table 1: Gender Differences in Learning Outcomes

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
Male	(65)	65 / 55	65.3 / 64.1	7.9 / 8.6	0.89
Female	(55)				0.376

Table 2: Predictors of Student Learning Outcomes

Predictor	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value
Cultural diversity	0.41	4.72	0.000
Linguistic diversity	0.36	3.95	0.001
Gender diversity	0.12	1.54	0.125
Age diversity	0.08	1.02	0.299

DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study provide important insights into the role of teacher diversity in advancing inclusive education, particularly within the Nigerian secondary school context. They reveal that inclusivity in education is most effectively promoted through cultural and linguistic teacher diversity rather than gender differences. This outcome highlights the transformative potential of diversity in teacher recruitment and deployment in schools. By bringing teachers from varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds into classrooms, schools are better able to foster intercultural dialogue, promote respect for diversity, and broaden students' learning perspectives. Such diversity encourages students to appreciate multiple worldviews, improves their intercultural competence, and strengthens the overall inclusivity of the learning environment (Banks, 2016; Gay, 2018). Cultural and linguistic diversity among teachers has long been recognized as a vital component in creating inclusive educational settings. Teachers from different cultural and language groups often draw upon unique experiences, pedagogical strategies, and ways of knowing that enrich classroom discourse (Ladson-Billings, 2009). For example, students who are exposed to teachers from diverse linguistic backgrounds are more likely to develop tolerance for other languages, appreciate multilingualism, and become better prepared for participation in a globalized society (Garcia & Wei, 2014). In contexts like



Nigeria, where over 500 languages and multiple ethnic groups coexist, culturally and linguistically diverse teachers provide models of coexistence and integration, helping students understand and value cultural pluralism (Akinwumi, 2019).

The findings also suggest that such diversity enhances learning perspectives by expanding students' critical thinking skills. Exposure to diverse cultural viewpoints challenges students to question stereotypes, rethink prior assumptions, and develop broader perspectives on global and local issues (Nieto, 2017). This aligns with global research which underscores that teacher diversity contributes to both cognitive and socio-emotional development, ultimately leading to stronger academic engagement and outcomes (Villegas & Irvine, 2010; Dee, 2005).

Interestingly, the study found that gender diversity among teachers was not a significant predictor of academic outcomes in this context. While gender equity remains a fundamental principle of inclusive education, the findings suggest that both male and female students benefited equally from cultural and linguistic teacher diversity. This outcome supports global literature which has shown that teacher gender does not necessarily determine student achievement when compared with other variables such as cultural competence and pedagogical practices (Carrington et al., 2008). Indeed, some studies argue that while gender balance in the teaching workforce is desirable for representation and role modeling, its direct impact on academic performance is less significant than other diversity dimensions (Dee, 2006; Ehrenberg et al., 1995).

The absence of gender differences may also reflect the changing nature of classrooms in Nigeria and globally, where gendered expectations of teachers are increasingly being replaced by emphasis on professional competence, cultural sensitivity, and pedagogical skills (UNESCO, 2020). Thus, while gender diversity contributes to representation and inclusivity at the symbolic level, cultural and linguistic diversity appears to exert stronger influence on tangible learning outcomes.

Overall, these findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge on teacher diversity and inclusivity by demonstrating that not all diversity dimensions have equal impacts. For Nigeria and similar multicultural societies, policies that prioritize cultural and linguistic diversity in teacher recruitment and professional development may be more effective for fostering inclusive learning environments than policies focusing solely on gender balance. This does not imply that gender equity should be ignored; rather, it indicates that its role should be seen as complementary rather than predictive of academic achievement.

In conclusion, the study reinforces the argument that inclusive education thrives in environments where cultural and linguistic teacher diversity is embraced and strategically harnessed. By fostering intercultural dialogue, respect for pluralism, and broadened perspectives, such diversity equips students with the skills needed for both academic success and civic participation in diverse societies. Policymakers and stakeholders in Nigerian education should therefore strengthen initiatives that support teacher diversity in training, recruitment, and classroom practice, ensuring that inclusivity is not only an ideal but a lived reality in schools.



CONCLUSION

Cultural and linguistic diversity among teachers significantly predict inclusive learning outcomes. Gender differences were minimal, indicating that diversity benefits all students equally.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Teacher training institutions should integrate cultural and linguistic inclusiveness modules.
2. Federal Ministry of Education should promote diversity-sensitive policies in teacher recruitment.
3. Schools should create supportive environments to leverage teacher diversity.

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