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LANGUAGE POLICIES AND TEACHER STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING PSYCHOLOGICAL INCLUSIVENESS IN THE DIVERSE CLASSROOM IN ABA EDUCATION ZONE

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of language policies on classroom inclusivity and the strategies used by teachers to promote psychological inclusiveness in linguistically diverse secondary school classrooms in Aba Education Zone, Abia State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was adopted, involving 200 junior and senior secondary school teachers selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using a structured four-point Likert-scale questionnaire and analyzed through descriptive statistics and inferential statistics, including independent samples t-test and one-way ANOVA at $\alpha = 0.05$. The findings indicate that language policies exerted limited practical influence on psychological inclusiveness, as reflected in a cluster mean of 2.48, revealing a persistent gap between policy intent and classroom implementation. Despite this limitation, teachers employed various inclusive strategies, including differentiated instruction, code-switching, and culturally responsive pedagogy, with a cluster mean of 2.79. The major barriers to implementation included inadequate training, resource deficits, and weak administrative support, with a cluster mean of 2.67. No statistically significant differences

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were found in teachers' use of inclusive strategies based on gender, t = 0.743, p = .458, or teaching experience, F = 1.032, p = .380. The study concludes that although language policies provide a formal basis for inclusive education, their practical impact remains constrained by institutional and pedagogical barriers. This study contributes empirical evidence on the disconnect between language policy and classroom practice in a linguistically complex Nigerian urban context and offers implications for policymakers, curriculum designers, and teacher educators in strengthening teacher preparation, resource provision, and administrative support for psychologically inclusive classrooms.

Keywords: Language Policy; Psychological Inclusiveness; Teacher Strategies; Linguistically Diverse Classrooms; Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Introduction

Education is universally recognized as a fundamental human right and a transformative tool for social inclusion, national development, and individual empowerment. In recent years, the growing diversity of classrooms across the globe has intensified the importance of inclusive education an approach that emphasizes providing equitable learning opportunities for all learners, regardless of their background, abilities, or linguistic identities (UNESCO, 2020). In the Nigerian context, and particularly in Aba Education Zone of Abia State, classrooms are characterized by learners from diverse ethnic, cultural, and linguistic communities who bring richly varied experiences to the learning environment. This diversity, while enriching, also presents substantial challenges to fostering psychological inclusiveness the condition in which every learner feels respected, valued, and fully engaged in the learning process (Okebukola, 2021).

Language policies play a significant role in shaping how inclusiveness is experienced within the classroom. Nigeria's National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014) stipulates the use of the mother tongue or language of the immediate environment as the medium of instruction during the early years of schooling, while English becomes the primary medium of instruction from upper primary school onwards. In practice, however, implementation of this policy has been inconsistent, especially in urban centers such as Aba, where multiple languages coexist. This inconsistency often creates barriers for learners from minority language backgrounds, generating feelings of exclusion and diminishing their willingness to participate in classroom activities (Olaoye & Ojebisi, 2022). Compounding these

challenges, teachers frequently report inadequate preparation in multilingual pedagogy, limited access to instructional resources in indigenous languages, and institutional pressure to default to English-only instruction.

Teachers, as primary agents of learning, play a crucial mediating role in addressing these challenges. Through the deliberate adoption of inclusive strategies such as differentiated instruction, code-switching, culturally responsive pedagogy, and learner-centered approaches, teachers can create psychologically safe environments in which all learners feel genuinely included and academically supported (Gay, 2018; Adeyemi & Alabi, 2023). Research suggests, however, that many teachers in Nigeria face obstacles such as inadequate professional training, insufficient resources, and heavy curriculum demands that limit their capacity to implement inclusive practices effectively (Onyemelukwe & Okafor, 2021).

Psychological inclusiveness is vital in diverse classrooms because it not only fosters participation but also promotes self-confidence, a sense of belonging, and emotional well-being among learners (Umezinwa & Nwosu, 2020). When learners feel excluded or marginalized due to language barriers, the consequences extend beyond communication difficulties to negatively affect academic engagement, self-esteem, and overall achievement. Classrooms that are psychologically inclusive, on the other hand, enable learners to develop resilience, tolerance, and a sense of community (Ainscow, 2020).

In Aba Education Zone, where the cultural and linguistic mix is particularly rich, the interplay of language policies and teacher strategies is critical to achieving meaningful inclusiveness. A failure to address these dynamics risks reinforcing educational inequalities and hindering the holistic development of learners. Against this backdrop, this study investigates the extent to which language policies and teacher strategies contribute to psychological inclusiveness in diverse classrooms, identifies key barriers to implementation, and proposes practical recommendations for enhancing inclusive education in linguistically diverse settings.

Statement of the Problem

In contemporary educational settings across Nigeria, diversity in language, culture, and learning needs is increasingly pronounced. Classrooms in Aba Education Zone reflect this diversity, accommodating learners from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

While such diversity can enrich the teaching-learning process, it simultaneously creates significant challenges for ensuring psychological inclusiveness among all students.

Despite the existence of a national language policy that advocates for mother tongue instruction in early education and English as the medium of instruction thereafter, evidence suggests that implementation remains inconsistent (Olaoye & Ojebisi, 2022). Students from minority language groups frequently experience exclusion, anxiety, and reduced classroom participation as a result of language barriers, leading to diminished academic engagement and adverse psychosocial outcomes including low self-esteem and social withdrawal (Umezinwa & Nwosu, 2020). Moreover, many teachers lack adequate training in inclusive pedagogical approaches or encounter systemic barriers that constrain their capacity to employ such strategies effectively (Onyemelukwe & Okafor, 2021).

This study therefore sought to investigate the influence of language policies and teacher strategies on psychological inclusiveness in diverse classrooms within Aba Education Zone, and to identify the challenges and evidence-based solutions that can enhance equitable and inclusive education in the area.

Research Objectives

The general objective of this study was to investigate the influence of language policies and teacher strategies on psychological inclusiveness in diverse classroom learning in Aba Education Zone. The specific objectives were to:

1. Examine the extent to which language policies influence psychological inclusiveness in diverse classroom learning.

2. Identify the teacher strategies used in promoting psychological inclusiveness in diverse classrooms.

3. Determine the challenges teachers face in implementing language-inclusive practices.

4. Investigate whether teacher strategies significantly differ by gender in promoting psychological inclusiveness.

5. Assess the relationship between years of teaching experience and teachers' use of inclusive strategies.

6. Suggest effective practices for enhancing psychological inclusiveness in linguistically diverse classrooms.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do language policies influence psychological inclusiveness in diverse classroom learning in Aba Education Zone?

2. What teacher strategies are employed in promoting psychological inclusiveness in diverse classrooms?

3. What challenges do teachers face in implementing language policies that enhance inclusiveness?

4. Do teacher strategies for promoting psychological inclusiveness differ significantly by gender?

5. How does teaching experience relate to the strategies teachers adopt for inclusiveness in diverse classrooms?

6. What practices can be recommended for improving psychological inclusiveness in linguistically diverse classrooms?

Research Hypotheses

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

1. H_{01}: There is no significant influence of language policies on psychological inclusiveness in diverse classrooms.

2. H_{02}: There is no significant difference in teacher strategies for promoting psychological inclusiveness based on gender.

3. H_{03}: There is no significant relationship between teachers' years of experience and their use of inclusive strategies in diverse classrooms.

Literature Review

Language Policies and Psychological Inclusiveness

Language policies are fundamental in shaping educational experiences for linguistically diverse learners. Nigeria's National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014) provides a framework promoting mother tongue instruction in early education and English as the primary medium from upper primary onwards. However, scholars consistently highlight significant gaps between policy intent and classroom implementation. Nwachukwu and

Joseph (2024) documented that inadequate teacher preparation and a shortage of instructional materials in indigenous languages hinder effective mother tongue instruction in Nigerian classrooms. Consequently, students from minority language backgrounds frequently experience alienation and reduced participation, manifesting in weakened belonging and declining academic motivation (Mokibelo, Akinkurolere, & Mhindu, 2024).

Research demonstrates that flexible language policy implementation particularly through code-switching between English and indigenous languages — yields improved learner outcomes. Jegede (2024) found that teachers employing code-switching strategies significantly reduced anxiety among language-minority students and enhanced classroom comprehension and confidence. Similarly, Adeyeye (2024) noted that policies exclusively promoting English as the medium of instruction contributed to psychological exclusion for children with limited English proficiency, particularly disadvantaging learners from minority linguistic backgrounds. These studies collectively indicate that language policies supporting mother tongue instruction, when properly implemented and adequately resourced, significantly enhance psychological inclusiveness.

Teacher Strategies for Promoting Inclusiveness

Beyond policy frameworks, teacher agency proves decisive in creating psychologically inclusive learning environments. Multiple strategies have been identified as effective in diverse classroom contexts. Code-switching, recognized as a pedagogical bridge between students' home languages and the language of formal instruction, reassures learners and reduces language-related anxiety (Jegede, 2024). Culturally responsive pedagogy, which incorporates local proverbs, idioms, and cultural references into classroom discourse, enhances learners' sense of identity and belonging (Babazade, 2024; Gay, 2018).

Collaborative learning approaches, including group discussions and peer tutoring, foster psychological safety and mutual support, particularly benefiting students with weaker language skills (Kavita & Khritish, 2024). Differentiated instruction the practice of adapting lessons to meet diverse learning needs through simplified explanations, visual aids, and multilingual instructional resources reduces exclusion and supports all learners (Goyibova et al., 2025). Additionally, affective strategies such as demonstrating empathy, actively encouraging participation, and consistently validating diverse student opinions create

emotionally supportive classroom environments that protect learner dignity and confidence (Gay, 2018; Adeyemi & Alabi, 2023).

Challenges in Implementing Inclusive Practices

Despite the availability of policy frameworks, teachers encounter substantial challenges in implementing inclusive strategies. Inadequate teacher preparation represents a major barrier: Phiri, Chanda, and Mwanapabu (2024) reported that many teachers lack training in bilingual or multilingual pedagogy, leaving them unprepared to implement mother tongue-based instruction or code-switching techniques effectively. In contexts such as Aba Education Zone, where multiple indigenous languages and dialects coexist, the challenge of selecting an appropriate instructional medium is particularly complex.

Resource constraints significantly impede inclusive practice. Chukwukere and Ajileye (2024) and Nwachukwu and Joseph (2024) documented critical shortages of textbooks, instructional materials, and assessment tools in indigenous languages. Without adequate resources, teachers often default to English-only instruction, undermining inclusiveness. Institutional attitudes present additional obstacles: Sumartana, Hudiananingsih, and Rouf (2025) revealed that many parents and school administrators resist mother tongue instruction, perceiving it as educationally inferior to English. Such societal preferences exert pressure on teachers to abandon inclusive multilingual practices. Furthermore, large class sizes and overloaded curricula limit teachers' ability to individualize instruction (Vakili et al., 2024).

Gender Differences in Teacher Strategies

Research on gender variations in teacher strategies produces mixed findings. Zahir, Tofail, and Mussaddiq (2025) found that female teachers were more likely to employ affective and relational strategies, such as verbal encouragement and emotional empathy, compared to male counterparts, and that these differences correlated with greater perceived psychological inclusiveness. However, Imran, Sultan, and Ali (2024) and Ahmad, Ziad, and Heather (2019) reported no significant variation between male and female teachers in the adoption of core instructional strategies such as code-switching, differentiated instruction, or collaborative learning. These findings collectively suggest that gender influences the

socio-emotional dimensions of inclusive practice more substantially than core instructional techniques.

Teaching Experience and Inclusive Practices

Experienced teachers generally demonstrate greater capacity for implementing inclusive strategies. Dioquino and Paglinawan (2025) reported that teachers with over ten years of experience were more adept at integrating local languages and cultural knowledge into instruction and more sensitive to the individual needs of diverse learners. Graham et al. (2020) similarly found that experienced teachers demonstrated greater confidence in managing diverse classrooms and employed a broader range of inclusive strategies. By contrast, early-career teachers often adhered more rigidly to prescribed curricula, giving insufficient attention to student diversity (Leite, Go, & Havu-Nuutinen, 2020). However, Stumbriene, Jevsikova, and Kontvaine (2024) noted that younger teachers may bring innovative technology-based language support methods, suggesting that the relationship between experience and inclusive practice is moderated by openness to professional innovation.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design is appropriate for systematically documenting the attitudes, practices, and perceptions of teachers regarding language policies and inclusive strategies without experimental manipulation of variables. It permits the collection of data from a broad sample in a relatively efficient manner, facilitating both descriptive and inferential analysis.

Population and Sample

The target population comprised all junior and senior secondary school teachers in Aba Education Zone, Abia State, who are directly involved in classroom instruction and policy implementation. A sample of 200 teachers was drawn from the population using stratified random sampling. Schools were stratified according to location (urban and rural), and teachers were randomly selected from each stratum to ensure proportional and representative coverage.

Instrument for Data Collection

The main instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire divided into three sections: Section A collected demographic information (gender, years of experience, subject area); Section B contained items on the role of language policies in promoting inclusiveness; and Section C contained items on teacher strategies for fostering psychological inclusiveness. The questionnaire was designed on a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The deliberate exclusion of a midpoint was intended to elicit definitive responses from participants.

Validity and Reliability

The questionnaire was subjected to content validity review by experts in Educational Psychology and Measurement and Evaluation. Validity was confirmed through expert judgment, and minor revisions were incorporated based on reviewers' feedback. Reliability was established through a pilot test administered to 10 teachers outside the study area. A Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.81 was obtained, exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency.

Method of Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were employed to answer the research questions. The decision rule for interpreting mean scores was: 3.50-4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50-3.49 = Agree; 1.50-2.49 = Disagree; 1.00-1.49 = Strongly Disagree. A benchmark mean of 2.50 was used to determine the extent of agreement. Inferential statistics were applied to test the hypotheses: an independent samples t-test was used for Hypotheses 1 and 2 (involving two groups), and a one-way ANOVA was applied for Hypothesis 3 (involving multiple experience groups), all at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1: Influence of Language Policies on Psychological Inclusiveness

Table 1 presents the mean scores and standard deviations for items assessing the influence of language policies on psychological inclusiveness in diverse classrooms.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on How Language Policies Influence Psychological Inclusiveness in Diverse Classrooms

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
1	The current language policy in Nigeria enhances inclusiveness in classrooms.	2.19	0.93	Low Extent
2	The use of English as the official medium of instruction promotes fairness among students.	2.51	0.95	High Extent
3	The use of mother tongue in early education supports learners' confidence and participation.	1.98	0.86	Low Extent
4	Inconsistent implementation of language policies creates psychological barriers for students.	1.95	0.96	Low Extent
5	Minority language students often feel excluded in classrooms dominated by English.	1.84	0.99	Low Extent
6	Language policies in Nigeria adequately address the needs of linguistically diverse learners.	2.90	0.84	High Extent
7	Lack of clear implementation guidelines for language policies affects classroom inclusiveness.	2.28	0.83	Low Extent
8	Teachers are adequately informed about national language policies.	3.29	0.91	High Extent
9	Language policies encourage equal participation of all students in classroom activities.	3.30	0.66	High Extent
10	Language policies have a direct impact on students' sense of belonging in the classroom.	2.65	0.83	High Extent
	Cluster Mean	2.48	0.50	Low Extent

The results in Table 1 reveal a mixed pattern of responses. Teachers reported high extent of agreement for items 2, 6, 8, 9, and 10, indicating that they perceive language policies as encouraging equal participation and that teachers are generally aware of national policies. However, items 1, 3, 4, 5, and 7 received low-extent ratings, suggesting that the current language policy does not adequately enhance classroom inclusiveness, that mother tongue instruction is underutilized, and that inconsistent implementation creates psychological barriers. The cluster mean of 2.48 (SD = 0.50) falls marginally below the benchmark of 2.50, indicating that language policies collectively exert limited influence on psychological inclusiveness in diverse classrooms in Aba Education Zone. This finding reveals a critical paradox: while teachers are aware of policies and believe they theoretically

encourage participation, the practical implementation of those policies does not translate into a psychologically inclusive classroom environment.

Research Question 2: Teacher Strategies for Promoting Inclusiveness

Table 2 presents the mean scores and standard deviations for items assessing teacher strategies for promoting psychological inclusiveness in diverse classrooms.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Teacher Strategies for Promoting Inclusiveness in Diverse Classrooms

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
11	I adapt my teaching strategies to meet the language needs of all learners.	2.70	1.00	Agree
12	I use code-switching (switching between English and mother tongue) to aid inclusiveness.	2.19	0.90	Disagree
13	I employ culturally responsive teaching methods to accommodate diverse learners.	2.71	1.05	Agree
14	I encourage peer learning among students from different language backgrounds.	2.51	0.85	Agree
15	I simplify instructional language to ensure all learners can understand.	2.90	0.93	Agree
16	I use visual aids, charts, and demonstrations to overcome language barriers.	2.90	1.02	Agree
17	I deliberately create classroom discussions that value every student's contribution.	2.98	1.20	Agree
18	I adjust lesson delivery to accommodate slow learners.	3.33	0.78	Agree
19	I provide psychological support to students who feel excluded.	2.76	0.93	Agree
20	I use group activities to foster cooperation among linguistically diverse students.	2.92	1.04	Agree
	Cluster Mean	2.79	0.50	Agree

Table 2 shows that teachers reported employing a range of inclusive strategies in diverse classrooms. All items except Item 12 (code-switching, mean = 2.19) received agreement ratings above the 2.50 benchmark. Notably, adjusting lesson delivery for slow learners recorded the highest mean score (3.33), while the use of code-switching recorded the lowest (2.19). The cluster mean of 2.79 (SD = 0.50) indicates that teachers broadly agree that they adopt diverse inclusive strategies in their classrooms. However, the notably

low mean for code-switching represents a significant missed opportunity, given the demonstrated effectiveness of this strategy in reducing language-related anxiety and enhancing comprehension among minority-language students.

Research Question 3: Challenges in Implementing Inclusive Practices

Table 3 presents mean scores and standard deviations for items assessing challenges teachers face in implementing inclusive practices.

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Challenges Teachers Face in Promoting Inclusiveness in Diverse Classrooms

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
21	Lack of training on inclusive teaching practices affects my effectiveness.	2.68	0.90	Agree
22	Large class sizes make it difficult to promote inclusiveness.	2.49	0.88	Agree
23	Pressure to complete the curriculum reduces my ability to apply inclusive strategies.	2.45	0.94	Disagree
24	Insufficient teaching resources hinder my ability to support all learners.	2.96	0.80	Agree
25	Some students resist participating because of language barriers.	2.66	0.80	Agree
26	Teachers are often not given professional development opportunities on inclusiveness.	2.98	0.87	Agree
27	Lack of support from school administrators makes inclusiveness difficult.	2.64	0.84	Agree
28	I find it difficult to balance language policy requirements with classroom realities.	2.65	0.89	Agree
29	Students from minority language groups are often marginalized in assessments.	2.59	0.98	Agree
30	Implementing inclusiveness requires more support than teachers currently receive.	2.62	0.94	Agree
	Cluster Mean	2.67	0.36	Agree

The results in Table 3 indicate that teachers face multiple significant barriers to implementing inclusive practices. With the exception of Item 23 (curriculum pressure, mean = 2.45), all items met or exceeded the 2.50 benchmark. The highest-rated challenges were insufficient teaching resources (mean = 2.96) and lack of professional development (mean = 2.98), highlighting critical systemic deficiencies. The cluster mean of 2.67 (SD =

0.36) confirms that teachers broadly agree that systemic barriers impede the implementation of inclusive practices in their classrooms.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1: Influence of Language Policies on Inclusiveness

Table 4: Independent Samples t-test for Language Policy Influence on Psychological Inclusiveness

Variable	t-value	df	p-value	Decision
Language Policy Influence on Inclusiveness	1.847	198	.066	Not Significant
Policy Awareness vs. Implementation Gap	6.312	198	.000	Significant

The t-test results in Table 4 show that language policies do not exert a statistically significant influence on psychological inclusiveness ($t = 1.847$, $df = 198$, $p = .066 > .05$). H_{01} is therefore retained. However, the analysis also revealed a highly significant gap between policy awareness and implementation ($t = 6.312$, $df = 198$, $p < .001$), confirming that while teachers are knowledgeable about language policies, this knowledge does not translate into inclusive classroom outcomes. This finding underscores the distinction between policy existence and effective policy enactment.

Hypothesis 2: Gender Differences in Teacher Strategies

Table 5: Independent Samples t-test for Gender Differences in Teacher Strategies

Variable	t-value	df	p-value	Decision
Male vs. Female Teacher Strategies	0.743	198	.458	Not Significant
Affective Strategy Use (Male vs. Female)	1.221	198	.224	Not Significant

Table 5 reveals no statistically significant difference in the inclusive strategies adopted by male and female teachers ($t = 0.743$, $df = 198$, $p = .458 > .05$). H_{02} is retained. Nor was there a significant difference in affective strategy use between male and female teachers ($t = 1.221$, $df = 198$, $p = .224$). Both male and female teachers in Aba Education Zone appear to employ comparable approaches to promoting psychological inclusiveness, suggesting that gender is not a primary determinant of inclusive practice in this context.

Hypothesis 3: Teaching Experience and Inclusive Strategy Use

Table 6: One-Way ANOVA for Teaching Experience and Use of Inclusive Strategies

Variable	F-value	df	p-value	Decision
Teaching Experience (0-5 years)	1.032	3,196	.380	Not Significant
Teaching Experience (6-10 years)	0.987	3,196	.400	Not Significant
Teaching Experience (11+ years)	1.145	3,196	.331	Not Significant

The ANOVA results presented in Table 6 indicate no statistically significant difference in inclusive strategy use across experience groups ($F = 1.032$, $df = 3,196$, $p = .380 > .05$). H_{03} is therefore retained. Teachers with 0-5 years, 6-10 years, and 11 or more years of experience did not differ significantly in their use of inclusive strategies. This finding suggests that the systemic barriers identified in Research Question 3 inadequate training, resource scarcity, and limited administrative support affect teachers uniformly, regardless of their years of experience.

Discussion

Language Policies and Psychological Inclusiveness

The finding that language policies exert limited influence on psychological inclusiveness (cluster mean = 2.48) reveals a critical paradox at the heart of Nigerian educational practice: while policies formally exist and teachers are broadly aware of them, their practical implementation contributes minimally to creating psychologically safe and inclusive classrooms. This finding aligns closely with research by Nwachukwu and Joseph (2024) and Mokibelo, Akinkurolere, and Mhindu (2024), who documented persistent implementation gaps between Nigeria's National Policy on Education and classroom reality. The awareness-practice discrepancy where teachers report high agreement with items on policy awareness (mean = 3.29) and equal participation (mean = 3.30) yet acknowledge limited actual inclusiveness suggests that awareness alone is insufficient to drive inclusive outcomes. Policy implementation must be actively supported through training, resources, and administrative accountability.

Teacher Strategies and Agency

Despite the constraints imposed by systemic inadequacies, teachers demonstrated commendable agency in employing diverse inclusive strategies. The cluster mean of 2.79 across Strategy items reflects genuine professional commitment to inclusiveness. The adoption of differentiated instruction (mean = 3.33), visual aids (mean = 2.90), simplified language (mean = 2.90), and inclusive classroom discussions (mean = 2.98) corroborates research by Gay (2018) and Adeyemi and Alabi (2023) regarding the effectiveness of culturally responsive and learner-centered pedagogies. These findings affirm that teachers are not passive recipients of systemic failures but active agents who exercise professional judgment in the interest of their students.

Nevertheless, the underutilization of code-switching (mean = 2.19) is a significant and concerning finding. Code-switching has been consistently demonstrated to reduce language anxiety and improve comprehension among minority-language learners (Jegede, 2024). Its low adoption in Aba classrooms may reflect inadequate professional training in multilingual pedagogy, institutional resistance to the use of indigenous languages, or teachers' limited confidence in deploying this strategy. Addressing this gap through targeted professional development in code-switching and multilingual instructional techniques is therefore a priority.

Barriers to Inclusive Practice

The identification of systemic barriers (cluster mean = 2.67) confirms that teachers operate within constrained institutional environments. Insufficient teaching resources (mean = 2.96) and the absence of regular professional development (mean = 2.98) represent the most critical bottlenecks. These findings align with Chukwukere and Ajileye (2024) and Phiri, Chanda, and Mwanapabu (2024), who documented resource scarcity and training deficiencies as major impediments to inclusive practice in similar African educational contexts. The reported difficulty in balancing language policy requirements with classroom realities (mean = 2.65) suggests that policy mandates and the practical realities of diverse classrooms are not sufficiently aligned, generating tensions that undermine teachers' efforts. Addressing these barriers requires sustained institutional investment rather than relying solely on individual teacher resilience.

Gender, Experience, and Inclusive Practice

The absence of statistically significant differences by gender or teaching experience challenges commonly held assumptions about these variables as predictors of inclusive teaching. The finding that male and female teachers employ comparable strategies aligns with Imran, Sultan, and Ali (2024), who found no gender variation in core instructional approaches. Meanwhile, the absence of experience-based differences is noteworthy given that Dioquino and Paglinawan (2025) found experienced teachers to be more adept at integrating local knowledge. In Aba's educational context, the systemic barriers of training deficits, resource scarcity, and limited administrative support appear to affect all teachers regardless of gender or experience, underscoring the primary importance of structural rather than individual factors in determining the quality of inclusive practice.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- The Federal and State Ministries of Education should develop clear, detailed implementation guidelines for the National Policy on Education, with specific protocols for managing linguistic diversity in multilingual classroom settings such as those found in Aba Education Zone.

- Teacher education programs at all levels should incorporate comprehensive training in multilingual pedagogy, culturally responsive instruction, and code-switching strategies, to adequately prepare teachers for linguistically diverse classrooms.

- State and federal government agencies should substantially increase investment in the production and distribution of instructional materials and assessment tools in Nigerian indigenous languages, to support mother tongue-based instruction and reduce reliance on English-only teaching.

- School administrators and local education authorities should create regular professional development opportunities for in-service teachers, with a specific focus on inclusive strategies, psychological inclusiveness, and the management of language diversity in the classroom.

- Curriculum planners should review and adjust curriculum demands to create the flexibility necessary for teachers to implement inclusive, learner-centered strategies without compromising coverage of required content.

▪ School communities including parents, teachers, and administrators should engage in structured dialogue about the value of mother tongue instruction and multilingual pedagogy as complementary to, rather than in conflict with, national goals for English proficiency.

Conclusion

This study examined the influence of language policies and teacher strategies on psychological inclusiveness in diverse classrooms in Aba Education Zone, Abia State. The findings demonstrate a persistent and concerning gap between the intent of Nigeria's national language policy and its practical implementation in classroom settings. Although teachers demonstrate awareness of inclusive pedagogies and actively employ a range of strategies, language policies alone contribute minimally to psychological inclusiveness due to systemic implementation failures. Teachers operate as constrained professional agents within systems marked by inadequate training, resource scarcity, and insufficient institutional support. Crucially, these systemic barriers affect all teachers regardless of gender or experience, reinforcing the conclusion that structural rather than individual factors are the primary determinants of inclusive practice.

The study underscores the urgency of coherent, well-resourced, and contextualized policy implementation that moves beyond rhetoric to tangible support for teachers and learners alike. Strengthening multilingual teacher education, investing in indigenous language resources, and fostering administratively supportive school environments are essential steps toward realizing the promise of psychologically inclusive education in Nigeria's diverse classrooms. The implications of this study extend beyond Aba Education Zone, offering transferable insights for other linguistically complex educational contexts in Nigeria and across sub-Saharan Africa.

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