

TEACHERS' ACCEPTANCE OF LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS AND INSTRUCTIONAL COMMITMENT AS PREDICTORS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION EFFECTIVENESS IN PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Inclusive education depends not only on formal policy and school access but also on the dispositions and sustained instructional effort of classroom teachers. This study examined teachers' acceptance of learners with special needs and instructional commitment as predictors of inclusive education effectiveness in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The study was anchored on the Theory of Planned Behaviour and adopted a quantitative cross-sectional correlational design. The target population comprised 18,738 teachers in public primary schools, based on the Universal Basic Education Commission's 2022 public-school digest. A sample of 392 was determined using Yamane's finite-population formula, and 376 usable responses were analysed. Data were collected with a structured questionnaire measuring teachers' acceptance, instructional commitment and teacher-rated inclusive education effectiveness. Internal-consistency coefficients were .913, .917 and .930 respectively. Pearson correlations and multiple regression were estimated at the .05 level. Acceptance was positively related to effectiveness ($r = .451, p < .001$), while instructional commitment showed a stronger positive relationship ($r = .559, p < .001$). Jointly, both predictors explained 37.2% of the variance in inclusive education effectiveness, $F(2, 373) = 110.31, p < .001$. Instructional commitment ($\beta = .450$) made the larger unique contribution, followed by teachers' acceptance ($\beta = .266$). The study concludes that favourable acceptance is important, but its practical value is amplified when teachers sustain inclusive instructional effort. It recommends coordinated teacher-development strategies that combine attitude formation with concrete support for differentiated instruction, learner participation and continued professional learning.

Keywords: inclusive education; teacher acceptance; instructional commitment; special educational needs; primary schools

Introduction

Inclusive education is increasingly treated as a system-wide obligation to remove barriers that limit learners' presence, participation and achievement in ordinary educational settings. UNESCO's inclusion and equity framework emphasises that diversity should be addressed through the design of the education system rather than by expecting learners to fit a uniform school structure (UNESCO, 2017). Nigeria has similarly adopted a national policy framework for inclusive education that seeks to improve access to quality education for learners with diverse needs in the same learning environment (Federal Ministry of Education, 2023). The policy direction is therefore clear: learners with disabilities and other special educational needs should not merely be enrolled in ordinary schools; they should be able to participate meaningfully in teaching, learning and school life.

The difficulty lies in converting policy intent into everyday classroom practice. The 2020 Global Education Monitoring Report identifies teacher preparation and beliefs as critical implementation conditions and notes major training deficits in inclusive education across many systems, including sub-Saharan Africa (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2020). In Nigeria, the problem is particularly consequential because inclusive education has developed within a system that still faces uneven teacher preparation, material constraints and a long-standing tension between special-school traditions and mainstream inclusion (Ajuwon, 2008). In Akwa Ibom State, the government reports 1,160 public primary schools (Akwa Ibom State Government, n.d.), making the primary-

school system a substantial arena in which inclusive policy must ultimately be enacted by classroom teachers rather than by policy documents alone.

Two teacher-level conditions are especially relevant. The first is acceptance of learners with special needs. Acceptance extends beyond passive tolerance. It incorporates teachers' beliefs about whether learners with disabilities belong in ordinary classrooms, their affective willingness to teach them and their behavioural openness to including them in academic and social activities. Mahat (2008) demonstrated that attitudes towards inclusive education have cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions, while later work has consistently shown that teacher attitudes are linked to intentions or reported inclusive practice (Hellmich et al., 2019; Schwab & Alnahdi, 2020; Urton et al., 2023). Acceptance is therefore a plausible psychological precursor of the choices teachers make when they encounter learner diversity.

The second condition is instructional commitment. Inclusive teaching regularly demands effort beyond routine whole-class instruction: teachers may need to adapt explanations, provide alternative tasks, monitor individual progress, collaborate with colleagues and families, and persist when learners require repeated support. Teacher commitment has been validated as a multidimensional professional construct involving commitment to students, teaching, school and profession (Thien et al., 2014). Recent evidence from inclusive settings also indicates that organisational conditions and self-efficacy can strengthen teacher commitment, underlining commitment as an important resource for sustaining inclusive reform (Emam & Al-Mahdy, 2026). A teacher may therefore express favourable views about inclusion yet fail to translate those views into effective classroom support if instructional commitment is weak.

Nigerian evidence reveals an uneven attitudinal environment. Odebiyi and Akinbote (2016) reported generally positive perceptions and attitudes among pre-primary and primary teachers in Ibadan, whereas Odo (2022) found that 74% of the teachers in the sampled Nigerian schools were negatively disposed towards inclusive education. Olusodo and Farrow (2021) similarly found that most primary teachers in their Lagos sample showed negative attitudes and that teachers' understanding of inclusive practice was an important influence. Earlier work by Fakolade et al. (2009) also demonstrated that teachers' attitudes towards inclusion vary across teacher and school conditions. These findings suggest that policy adoption does not produce a uniform teacher response and that local evidence remains necessary.

A second gap is that much Nigerian work has concentrated on attitudes, perceptions or demographic differences in attitudes, while the combined explanatory role of acceptance and teachers' sustained instructional commitment has received less attention. International studies increasingly link attitudes, efficacy, intentions and actual or self-reported inclusive practices, but these variables have often been studied separately or within contexts whose teacher preparation systems differ from those of Nigerian public primary schools (Hellmich et al., 2019; Lindner et al., 2023; Mentel et al., 2024). Consequently, evidence is needed on whether teachers' acceptance and instructional commitment make distinct and joint contributions to the effectiveness of inclusive education in Akwa Ibom State.

The purpose of this study was therefore to examine teachers' acceptance of learners with special needs and instructional commitment as predictors of inclusive education effectiveness in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, the study sought to: (a) determine the predictive contribution of teachers' acceptance of learners with special needs to inclusive education effectiveness; (b) determine the predictive contribution of instructional commitment to inclusive education effectiveness; (c) determine the joint contribution of teachers' acceptance and instructional commitment; and (d) compare their relative contributions. The study was guided by three null hypotheses: H01, teachers' acceptance of learners with special needs does not significantly predict inclusive education effectiveness; H02, instructional commitment does not significantly predict inclusive education effectiveness; and H03, teachers' acceptance and instructional commitment do not jointly significantly predict inclusive education effectiveness. By integrating attitudinal acceptance with commitment to instructional action, the paper contributes a

more implementation-oriented explanation of teacher-related conditions for inclusion in a Nigerian public primary-school context.

Literature Review

Conceptual Review

Teachers' Acceptance of Learners with Special Needs

Teachers' acceptance of learners with special needs refers to the extent to which teachers cognitively endorse, affectively support and behaviourally accommodate the participation of learners with disabilities or other special educational needs in regular classrooms. This conception treats acceptance as more demanding than a general statement that inclusion is desirable. It asks whether teachers believe learners with special needs can benefit from mainstream education, whether they are comfortable sharing responsibility for such learners, and whether they are willing to organise classroom interaction in ways that permit participation.

Mahat's (2008) Multidimensional Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education Scale provides a useful measurement foundation because it distinguishes cognitive, affective and behavioural components. The distinction is important in settings where a teacher may agree with inclusion as a policy but still feel anxious about teaching a learner with complex needs, or may express sympathy without adapting classroom behaviour. Lindner et al. (2023), in a systematic review of primary-school teachers' attitudes, likewise show that teacher attitudes are multidimensional and sensitive to learner characteristics and contextual conditions. In the present study, acceptance is therefore conceptualised through cognitive acceptance, affective acceptance and behavioural openness to inclusive participation.

Cognitive acceptance concerns beliefs about the educability, belonging and learning potential of learners with special needs in ordinary classrooms. Affective acceptance concerns teachers' comfort, willingness and emotional readiness to engage with learner diversity. Behavioural openness refers to willingness to interact, include, support and make classroom adjustments. Together, these dimensions represent the attitudinal platform from which inclusive instructional decisions may emerge.

Instructional Commitment to Inclusive Practices

Instructional commitment describes the sustained professional effort a teacher is willing to invest in enabling learners to participate and learn. In inclusive settings, this commitment is visible when teachers persist with differentiated explanations, modify tasks, monitor individual progress, seek additional knowledge, collaborate with support personnel and resist the tendency to disengage when a learner progresses slowly. It therefore captures the action-oriented dimension of teachers' responsibility for inclusion.

Thien et al. (2014) validated teacher commitment as a multidimensional construct comprising commitment to students, teaching, school and profession. These dimensions can be translated to inclusive education without treating commitment as a new or unrelated construct. Commitment to students is reflected in persistence in meeting diverse learning needs; commitment to teaching is reflected in deliberate adaptation of pedagogy; commitment to school is reflected in support for the school's inclusion goals; and commitment to profession is reflected in willingness to develop the knowledge and skills required for inclusive practice. Emam and Al-Mahdy (2026) further demonstrate that teacher commitment is meaningfully embedded in inclusive school environments and is strengthened by inclusive climate and self-efficacy.

For this study, instructional commitment is operationalised as teachers' sustained effort towards learners with special needs, persistence in inclusive teaching, support for school inclusion goals and professional learning for inclusion. This emphasis distinguishes commitment from general job satisfaction: the construct concerns willingness to expend and sustain instructional effort in response to learner diversity.

Inclusive Education Effectiveness

Inclusive education effectiveness refers to the extent to which the school and classroom arrangements enable learners with diverse needs to gain access, participate, receive responsive instruction and make meaningful learning progress alongside their peers. UNESCO (2017) frames inclusion around overcoming barriers to presence, participation and achievement. This perspective is preferable to defining effectiveness solely by placement because a learner can be physically present in a regular classroom while remaining socially or instructionally excluded.

In the present study, effectiveness is represented through three related domains. The first is presence and access: learners with special needs are admitted, retained and given opportunities to engage in ordinary classroom activities. The second is participation and belonging: learners interact with peers, are treated as members of the class and are not routinely excluded from learning or social activities. The third is responsive learning support: teaching is adjusted where necessary, learners receive feedback and assistance, and classroom practices enable progress. Because the respondents are teachers, the construct is measured as teacher-rated inclusive education effectiveness rather than as a direct test of pupil achievement.

The distinction is methodologically important. Teacher ratings can capture implementation conditions that are difficult to observe at scale, but they remain perceptions. The interpretation of results should therefore concern teachers' reported effectiveness of inclusive practice rather than causal proof of pupil-level outcomes.

Relationships among the Constructs

Acceptance should influence inclusive education effectiveness because teachers who regard learners with special needs as legitimate members of the regular classroom are more likely to initiate inclusive interactions, maintain equitable expectations and support participation. Evidence based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour shows that attitudes towards inclusion are associated with intentions and, in some studies, with everyday inclusive practice (Hellmich et al., 2019; Schwab & Alnahdi, 2020; Urton et al., 2023). Acceptance is thus expected to contribute positively to effectiveness.

Instructional commitment should also contribute to effectiveness because inclusive education requires sustained action. A favourable attitude cannot differentiate instruction, monitor progress or provide additional explanation by itself. Commitment supplies the persistence through which inclusive beliefs are converted into repeated classroom behaviour. The two predictors are related but not redundant: acceptance captures evaluative orientation towards learners with special needs, while commitment captures the willingness to sustain effort in teaching them. Their simultaneous inclusion in a regression model therefore permits assessment of both shared and unique contributions.

Theoretical Review: Theory of Planned Behaviour

The study is anchored on Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). The theory proposes that behaviour is proximally influenced by behavioural intention and perceived behavioural control, while intention is shaped by attitude towards the behaviour, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. Attitude reflects favourable or unfavourable evaluation of the behaviour; subjective norm concerns perceived expectations from significant others; and perceived behavioural control concerns the perceived capacity to perform the behaviour. The theory is especially relevant where policy expectations do not automatically produce action because it explains why individuals may respond differently to the same institutional requirement.

Applied to inclusive education, teachers' acceptance of learners with special needs corresponds most directly to the attitudinal component of the TPB. A teacher who evaluates inclusive participation positively should be more disposed to undertake inclusive instructional actions. Instructional commitment is not a direct synonym for TPB intention, but it is conceptually close to the strength and persistence of the teacher's behavioural orientation towards inclusive action. It captures a professional willingness to invest effort repeatedly rather than a single stated intention. The

outcome, inclusive education effectiveness, represents the reported implementation consequence of these dispositions within the classroom.

The relevance of the theory is supported by empirical work. Hellmich et al. (2019) found that primary-school teachers' attitudes predicted everyday inclusive practices and that intention mediated part of the attitude-practice relationship. Urton et al. (2023) reported that attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control were related to primary teachers' intentions to implement inclusive practices. Mentel et al. (2024) likewise found that TPB-related factors remained relevant to teachers' inclusive intentions across two cohorts separated by eight years. Schwab and Alnahdi (2020) found that attitudes and self-efficacy were associated with reported inclusive teaching practices. Collectively, these studies support the use of an attitude-to-action framework while also indicating that acceptance alone is insufficient; capability, commitment and context matter.

A limitation of the TPB for this study is that it does not fully represent institutional constraints such as class size, material resources or specialist support. The present model therefore does not claim that acceptance and commitment exhaust the determinants of inclusive effectiveness. Rather, the TPB provides a defensible explanation for the teacher-level pathway under investigation, while the unexplained variance in the empirical model is expected to include school, resource, learner and policy factors.

Empirical Review

Fakolade et al. (2009) investigated Nigerian teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of learners with special needs in general education. Using a descriptive survey of 60 teachers in Oyo State and a questionnaire with an overall reliability coefficient of .83, the study confirmed that attitudes varied across teacher characteristics. Although the sample was small and focused on selected secondary schools, the study established early Nigerian evidence that teacher acceptance is not uniform and may affect the feasibility of mainstream inclusion.

Odebiyi and Akinbote (2016) examined perception and attitudes towards inclusion among 200 pre-primary and primary-school teachers selected from 15 schools in Ibadan. Their descriptive study reported generally positive perceptions and attitudes, with no significant difference between teachers from regular and special schools. The result provides evidence that positive acceptance is possible within Nigerian primary education, but the study concentrated on perception and attitude rather than linking these dispositions to a direct measure of inclusive implementation effectiveness.

Olusodo and Farrow (2021) surveyed primary-school teachers in Lagos State using 120 distributed questionnaires. Their results indicated that most teachers held negative attitudes towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs or disabilities, and teachers' understanding of inclusive practice emerged as an important influence. The study is particularly relevant because it focused on primary education in Nigeria, but it did not jointly examine instructional commitment as a predictor of inclusion effectiveness.

Odo (2022) used a descriptive survey with 472 teachers drawn from public primary and junior secondary schools and reported that 74% of respondents were negatively disposed towards inclusive education. The study also identified age and experience as relevant factors and recommended specialised professional training. Its larger sample reinforces the conclusion that teacher acceptance remains a substantive implementation issue in Nigeria, yet the analytical focus remained on attitude levels and demographic differences rather than the simultaneous contribution of acceptance and commitment to perceived effectiveness.

Hellmich et al. (2019) examined 290 German primary-school teachers using the Theory of Planned Behaviour. Teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and their intentions concerning inclusive education significantly predicted reported everyday practices, and intention mediated the effect of attitudes on practice. The study provides strong conceptual support for treating acceptance as an antecedent of implementation behaviour, although differences in institutional capacity and teacher preparation constrain direct transfer to Nigerian public schools.

Schwab and Alnahdi (2020) studied 221 Austrian in-service teachers and found that attitudes and self-efficacy were associated with inclusive teaching practices, while self-efficacy significantly predicted reported use of inclusive practices. Their evidence shows that favourable dispositions operate alongside action-related personal resources, strengthening the rationale for modelling both acceptance and commitment rather than relying on attitudes alone.

Urton et al. (2023) collected data from 585 German primary-school teachers and used multilevel multivariate regression to examine the full Theory of Planned Behaviour. Attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control were significantly related to intention to implement inclusive practices. The study further illustrates that teachers' inclusive action is multiply determined and that attitude is one part of a broader implementation system.

Mentel et al. (2024) compared German teacher samples from 2014 and 2022 and found that the predictive importance of self-efficacy for inclusive intentions increased over time, while subjective norms also changed. The result is important because it demonstrates that the relative importance of teacher-level predictors is not fixed. Educational reform, accumulated experience and implementation conditions can alter which personal resources matter most.

Emam and Al-Mahdy (2026) investigated 535 general-education teachers in Omani public schools operating an inclusive learning-disabilities support programme. Structural equation modelling showed that inclusive school climate enhanced teacher commitment directly and indirectly through self-efficacy. Although commitment was treated as an outcome rather than a predictor of classroom effectiveness, the study establishes teacher commitment as a meaningful construct within inclusive settings and highlights its dependence on supportive organisational conditions.

Synthesis and Research Gap

The reviewed evidence produces three consistent conclusions. First, teacher attitudes towards inclusion matter, but the direction and strength of those attitudes vary across settings. Nigerian studies report both positive and negative patterns, showing that acceptance cannot be assumed from national policy alone. Second, international studies increasingly connect attitudes to behavioural intentions and inclusive practices rather than treating attitudes as an end in themselves. Third, action-related resources such as self-efficacy and commitment appear important for sustaining inclusive practice.

The principal gap addressed by this study is therefore not the existence of teacher attitudes research, but the limited integration of attitudinal acceptance and instructional commitment within one explanatory model of inclusive education effectiveness in Nigerian public primary schools. Existing Nigerian studies located for this review are concentrated in states such as Oyo and Lagos and frequently emphasise attitude levels or demographic correlates. The present study extends that evidence to Akwa Ibom State and tests whether acceptance and commitment explain distinct and joint variance in teacher-rated inclusive education effectiveness.

Conceptual Framework

The framework proposes that teachers' acceptance of learners with special needs and instructional commitment to inclusive practices independently and jointly predict inclusive education effectiveness. Acceptance is represented through cognitive acceptance, affective acceptance and behavioural openness. Instructional commitment is represented through commitment to learners, inclusive teaching effort, school inclusion goals and professional learning. Inclusive education effectiveness is represented through presence/access, participation/belonging and responsive learning support.



Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study.

Source: Researchers' conceptualisation based on Ajzen (1991), Mahat (2008), Thien et al. (2014), and UNESCO (2017).

Methodology

Research Design and Study Context

The study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational survey design. The design was suitable because the study sought to estimate the individual and joint statistical contribution of naturally occurring teacher characteristics without manipulating classroom conditions. The unit of analysis was the individual public primary-school teacher. Akwa Ibom State comprises 31 local government areas organised within three senatorial districts. The state government reports 1,160 public primary schools (Akwa Ibom State Government, n.d.), providing a broad institutional base for the study.

The design was deductive and was guided by the Theory of Planned Behaviour. The use of the term predictor is statistical rather than causal: the cross-sectional design estimates unique associations in a regression model but does not establish temporal precedence or experimental causality.

Population, Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The target population comprised teachers in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State. The Universal Basic Education Commission's 2022 Digest of Public Schools reported 18,738 teaching staff in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State (Universal Basic Education Commission [UBEC], 2024). Using this population, the sample size was determined with Yamane's finite-population formula at a 5% precision level:

$$n = N / [1 + N(e^2)] = 18,738 / [1 + 18,738(0.05^2)] = 391.64 \approx 392$$

A multistage sampling procedure was used. First, the three senatorial districts constituted the principal strata to preserve geographic coverage. Second, local government areas and public primary schools were selected within the strata. Third, teachers were selected from the sampled schools by simple random procedures using staff lists as sampling frames. Of the 392 questionnaires allocated for administration, 376 usable responses were retained for analysis, representing a 95.9% usable-response rate.

Instrument and Measurement

Data were collected using the Teachers' Acceptance, Instructional Commitment and Inclusive Education Effectiveness Questionnaire (TAICIEEQ). Section A obtained limited background information. Section B contained eight items measuring teachers' acceptance of learners with special needs, informed by Mahat's (2008) multidimensional attitude framework. Section C contained eight items measuring instructional commitment, adapted conceptually from the teacher-commitment dimensions validated by Thien et al. (2014) and rewritten for inclusive instructional contexts. Section D contained ten items measuring teacher-rated inclusive education effectiveness in relation to presence/access, participation/belonging and responsive learning support, consistent with UNESCO's (2017) inclusion framework. Items in Sections B-D used a five-point response format from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicated more favourable acceptance, stronger commitment or higher perceived effectiveness.

Variable	Operational dimensions	Items	Scale / interpretation	Primary basis
Teachers' acceptance	Cognitive; affective; behavioural openness	8	5-point Likert; higher = greater acceptance	Mahat (2008)
Instructional commitment	Learners; teaching effort; school inclusion goals; professional learning	8	5-point Likert; higher = stronger commitment	Thien et al. (2014)
Inclusive education effectiveness	Presence/access; participation/belonging; responsive learning support	10	5-point Likert; higher = greater teacher-rated effectiveness	UNESCO (2017)

Validity and Reliability

Content alignment was assessed against the study constructs, the conceptual framework and the source measurement traditions. The acceptance items retained explicit cognitive, affective and behavioural content; commitment items were mapped to learner, teaching, school and professional commitment; and effectiveness items were mapped to inclusion-oriented access, participation and learning support. Internal consistency was assessed with Cronbach's alpha. Coefficients of .913 for acceptance, .917 for instructional commitment and .930 for inclusive education effectiveness indicated strong score consistency for the analytical scales.

Method of Data Analysis and Model Specification

Data analysis was conducted in four stages. First, frequencies and percentages described selected respondent characteristics. Second, mean scores, standard deviations and reliability coefficients summarised the principal scales. Third, Pearson product-moment correlation assessed bivariate relationships. Fourth, multiple linear regression estimated the unique and joint contribution of teachers' acceptance and instructional commitment to inclusive education effectiveness. The model was specified as:

$$IEE = \beta_0 + \beta_1(TALSN) + \beta_2(ICIP) + \varepsilon$$

where IEE is inclusive education effectiveness, TALSN is teachers' acceptance of learners with special needs, ICIP is instructional commitment to inclusive practices, β_0 is the constant, β_1 and β_2 are regression coefficients, and ε is the error term. Statistical decisions were made at $\alpha = .05$. Diagnostics examined multicollinearity, residual independence, heteroscedasticity and residual distribution. Because the design was cross-sectional, regression coefficients were interpreted as predictive associations rather than causal effects.

Results, Analysis and Discussion

Response Profile and Descriptive Results

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	263	69.9
	Male	113	30.1
Inclusive-education training	Yes	141	37.5
	No	235	62.5
Prior experience teaching learner with SEN	Yes	214	56.9
	No	162	43.1
Years of teaching	<5 years	67	17.8

	5-10 years	105	27.9
	11-15 years	88	23.4
	>15 years	116	30.9

The profile shows that women constituted 69.9% of the usable sample, while 62.5% of respondents reported no prior inclusive-education training. Slightly more than half reported prior experience teaching a learner with special educational needs. The experience distribution was broad enough to include both relatively new and long-serving teachers.

Construct	Items	Mean	SD	Cronbach alpha
Teachers' acceptance	8	3.244	0.794	0.913
Instructional commitment	8	3.002	0.829	0.917
Inclusive education effectiveness	10	3.106	0.781	0.930

Teachers' acceptance recorded the highest mean ($M = 3.244$, $SD = .794$), followed by inclusive education effectiveness ($M = 3.106$, $SD = .781$) and instructional commitment ($M = 3.002$, $SD = .829$). The means indicate generally moderate-to-favourable responses rather than ceiling-level endorsement. All three scales showed strong internal consistency.

Bivariate Relationships

Variable	1	2	3
1. Teachers' acceptance	1.000		
2. Instructional commitment	0.410	1.000	
3. Inclusive education effectiveness	0.451	0.559	1.000

Teachers' acceptance was moderately and positively associated with inclusive education effectiveness ($r = .451$, $p < .001$). Instructional commitment showed a stronger positive association with effectiveness ($r = .559$, $p < .001$). Acceptance and commitment were also positively related ($r = .410$, $p < .001$), but the magnitude was well below the level that would suggest they were measuring the same construct.

Multiple Regression and Hypothesis Tests

Predictor	B	SE B	Beta	t	p	95% CI for B
Constant	0.983	0.151	-	6.499	< .001	[0.685, 1.280]
Teachers' acceptance	0.262	0.044	0.266	5.922	< .001	[0.175, 0.349]
Instructional commitment	0.424	0.042	0.450	10.002	< .001	[0.341, 0.507]

The regression model was statistically significant, $F(2, 373) = 110.31$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.372$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.368$. Thus, teachers' acceptance and instructional commitment jointly accounted for approximately 37.2% of the variance in inclusive education effectiveness. Teachers' acceptance made a significant unique contribution ($B = 0.262$, $SE = 0.044$, $\beta = 0.266$, $t = 5.92$, $p < .001$). Instructional commitment also made a significant unique contribution ($B = 0.424$, $SE = 0.042$, $\beta = 0.450$, $t = 10.00$, $p < .001$), and its standardised coefficient was larger.

Accordingly, H01 was rejected because teachers' acceptance significantly predicted inclusive education effectiveness. H02 was rejected because instructional commitment significantly predicted effectiveness. H03 was also rejected because the overall two-predictor model was significant. On the relative-contribution question, instructional commitment emerged as the stronger predictor after controlling for acceptance.

Regression Diagnostics

Diagnostic	Result	Interpretation
Predictor VIF	1.20	No material multicollinearity
Durbin-Watson	2.08	Residual independence acceptable
Breusch-Pagan	$p = 0.253$	No evidence of heteroscedasticity
Shapiro-Wilk residual test	$p = 0.788$	Residual normality not rejected

The diagnostics did not indicate a material violation of the assumptions relevant to the estimated model. The predictor VIF was close to 1, residuals were approximately independent, the Breusch-Pagan test did not detect heteroscedasticity, and the residual normality test was non-significant. These checks support the internal statistical coherence of the regression estimates.

Discussion of Findings

The first finding was that teachers' acceptance of learners with special needs significantly predicted inclusive education effectiveness. This supports the proposition that teacher evaluation of inclusion is not merely an abstract opinion; it is related to how effectively inclusion is perceived to operate in the classroom. The finding is consistent with Hellmich et al. (2019), who found that teacher attitudes predicted everyday practices and were connected to practice through intention, and with Schwab and Alnahdi (2020), who reported an association between attitudes and inclusive teaching practices. Urton et al. (2023) similarly showed that attitudes were related to primary teachers' intentions to implement inclusive practice. From a TPB perspective, favourable acceptance increases the likelihood that inclusion will be approached as a desirable professional behaviour rather than as an externally imposed obligation.

The result also helps interpret the mixed Nigerian evidence. Odebiyi and Akinbote (2016) reported positive attitudes in Ibadan, whereas Odo (2022) and Olusodo and Farrow (2021) found substantial negative disposition in their respective samples. The present finding suggests that these attitudinal differences are practically important: where acceptance is lower, inclusive implementation may be correspondingly weaker. This does not mean acceptance alone determines effectiveness, but it supports treating teacher attitude as an implementation variable rather than as a background characteristic.

The second and stronger finding was that instructional commitment significantly predicted inclusive education effectiveness. The standardised coefficient for commitment was approximately .450 compared with .266 for acceptance. This difference is theoretically plausible. Acceptance can create willingness, but commitment sustains the labour of inclusive teaching: modifying tasks, explaining content in alternative ways, monitoring progress, collaborating and persisting. Thien et al. (2014) conceptualised teacher commitment across students, teaching, school and profession, dimensions that are directly relevant to sustained inclusion. Emam and Al-Mahdy (2026) further show that commitment is an important feature of inclusive settings and can be strengthened by supportive climate and efficacy.

The relative strength of commitment also reinforces a key implication of the Theory of Planned Behaviour. Attitudes are important precursors of behavioural intention, but behaviour depends on more than favourable evaluation. Inclusive education is effort intensive. A teacher who accepts learners with special needs but lacks persistence, support or professional investment may still deliver

a largely undifferentiated lesson. Conversely, a teacher with strong instructional commitment is more likely to translate an inclusion goal into repeated classroom action. This interpretation is compatible with Mentel et al. (2024), whose longitudinal comparison showed that action-related psychological resources can change in predictive importance over time.

The joint model explained 37.2% of the variance in teacher-rated inclusive effectiveness. This is substantial enough to demonstrate meaningful teacher-level influence while leaving most variance unexplained. The unexplained portion is not a statistical weakness alone; it reflects the multi-level nature of inclusion. School leadership, specialist support, class size, assistive resources, infrastructure, curriculum flexibility, family engagement and learner characteristics may all contribute. The finding therefore argues against approaches that place the entire responsibility for inclusion on individual teachers. Teacher acceptance and commitment matter, but they operate inside organisational and policy environments.

For Akwa Ibom State, the practical implication is that attitude-focused sensitisation should be paired with implementation support. The fact that 62.5% of the analysed respondents reported no prior inclusive-education training reinforces this point. Training should therefore move beyond general advocacy and provide teachers with strategies for differentiated instruction, classroom participation, behaviour support, assessment adaptation and collaboration. At the same time, school leaders should create conditions that protect teacher commitment by providing materials, realistic workload expectations, peer support and opportunities for continuing professional learning.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The study examined whether teachers' acceptance of learners with special needs and instructional commitment predict inclusive education effectiveness in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State. Both predictors made statistically significant unique contributions, and together they explained 37.2% of the variance in teacher-rated effectiveness. Instructional commitment made the larger relative contribution. The central conclusion is that inclusive education is strengthened when teachers both accept learner diversity and sustain the instructional effort required to respond to it. Positive attitudes are therefore necessary but insufficient; inclusion becomes more credible when acceptance is converted into persistent teaching behaviour.

Recommendations

1. Akwa Ibom State education authorities and SUBEB should integrate practical inclusive-pedagogy modules into continuous teacher development. Training should combine disability and inclusion awareness with differentiated instruction, classroom participation strategies, assessment adaptation and case-based practice.
2. Head teachers should establish school-level inclusion support routines, including peer consultation, collaborative lesson planning and periodic review of barriers faced by learners with special needs. These mechanisms can help convert individual teacher commitment into sustained school practice.
3. Teacher-development programmes should explicitly address cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects of acceptance. The objective should be to challenge low expectations, reduce discomfort around disability and provide teachers with successful contact and practice experiences.
4. Inclusive-education monitoring should assess classroom participation and instructional responsiveness in addition to enrolment. Physical placement alone should not be treated as evidence that inclusion is effective.
5. Future intervention programmes should monitor teacher commitment over time and examine how leadership, workload, assistive resources and self-efficacy strengthen or weaken the conversion of acceptance into inclusive practice.

Implications of the Study

Theoretically, the study extends a TPB-informed interpretation by demonstrating that attitudinal acceptance and action-oriented instructional commitment provide complementary explanatory value. Practically, the stronger coefficient for commitment shifts attention from attitude change alone to the conditions that help teachers sustain inclusive action. For policy, the findings imply that implementation indicators should include teacher preparation and classroom practice, not only formal access. For research, the model offers a parsimonious base to which school climate, self-efficacy, resource availability or leadership can be added in subsequent studies.

Limitations and Directions for Further Research

The cross-sectional design limits causal interpretation and the use of teacher ratings creates the possibility of common-method and social-desirability bias. The outcome reflects teachers' perceptions of inclusive effectiveness rather than independently observed pupil participation or achievement. Future studies should combine teacher surveys with classroom observation, learner participation indicators and school-level resource measures; use longitudinal designs to examine change; and test whether self-efficacy, school climate or instructional resources mediate or moderate the relationships identified here. Comparative work across Nigerian states would also clarify whether the pattern is specific to Akwa Ibom or reflects a broader basic-education dynamic.

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