

**ROLE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS IN IDENTIFYING
AND SUPPORTING CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN OREDO
LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, EDO STATE.**

BY

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BENIN CITY**

FEBRUARY, 2024

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**A RESEARCH PROJECT WORK SUBMITTED TO THE INSTITUTE
OF EDUCATION IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF BACHELOR IN
EDUCATION (B.ED HONOURS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION) OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY.**

FEBRUARY, 2025.

CERTIFICATION

We, the undersigned, certify that DAUBRI RUTH GESE-ERE carried out this work with matriculation number EDU2005583 of the Institute of Education, University of Benin, Benin-City. In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Award of Bachelor Degree in Early Childhood Education.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the Almighty God, who is the author and finisher of my faith . For his grace and enablement through out this study and also everyone who has helped reach this milestone.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My profound gratitude goes to the Almighty God who provides the enabling condition to successfully complete this research work.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my awesome and supportive parents MR ENOCH & MRS JUSTINA DAUBRI, who supported me financially, spiritually and physically. My gratitude goes to my lovely siblings (Joseph, Martha, Naomi, Deborah, Joshua and David), my best Aunty Helen. The journey was quite easy with you all in it.

I wish to to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Prof. K. Aluko, who provided valuable insights and guidance while this research was in progress, pushing me to scale through in times of challenges. My sincere appreciate goes to the academic staff of the Institute of Education. Firstly my Director, Dr K. Imaseun, Dr (Mrs) I.F Iyamu, Dr. W.C. Uwadia, Prof (Mrs) R. Olubor, Dr (Mrs) Aibunuomo, Prof (Mrs) R. Olubor, Prof Afemikhe, for their motivation, encouragement and support for this helped me to cultivate a deeper appreciation for my chosen field of early childhood education. my heartfelt thanks to the non- academic staff of the Institute for their service

which has been instrumental in creating an engaging and supportive learning environment.

Special thanks to everyone who held my hands in prayer, My home Pastors , Pst & Pst(mrs) Ehimwenma, Pst Anwinli Ojeikere, Pst Philip, Pst Chioma Adekeye, President faithful, VP Joshua, mama Debbie, Prayo Israel and my sch siblings (Ope and Naomi).

Special thanks to my favorite girls Itohan and Kups, My roomie for life (Abby love), The Okpufe's Jay, Afrohype family (Precious, Orode, Uncle Freeborn, Uncle Chris, Uncle Bossom), Boss Ideal, DDGOS, Sir K, Theresa, Ojapinwa Rachel, Mr Enitiolorunfe and my baby Favour. Thank you all for standing by me and supporting me in every little ways.

This project would have been incomplete if I fail to acknowledge my Daddy wey dey pamper,the Creative director of AFROHYPE ARTISTRY, PST FAVOR For his moral and financial support toward the completeness of this project. Thank you so much sir for every ways you have come through for me, I am sincerely grateful.

Additionally I acknowledge the participation of everyone who has made this study possible, your willingness to participate and share your experience has enrich this research. Thank you all.

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ABSTRACT

Early childhood educators are specialized and dedicated professional who can identify potential developmental delays and nurture children's talent boosting their confidence and providing essential tools for growth. Therefore this study examined the role of early childhood educator in identifying and supporting children with special needs within Oredo local government area in Benin city, Edo state. The objective of the study was to find out the influence of early childhood educators training on children with special needs, to determine the extent early childhood educators require special training to perform child support role on children with special needs, to determine the extent government support the training of early childhood educators, to determine parents and educators involvement in supporting children with special needs. Four research questions were raised for this study. The study used checklist and questionnaire which were structured from the four research questions as a mode of data collection to collect information from one hundred respondent selected from 20 private schools. The results from this study revealed that the early childhood educators training has influence on children with special needs, Finding suggest that early childhood educators require special training to perform child support role on children with special needs to a moderate extent, It also showed that government support the training of early childhood educators to a low extent. It was therefore recommended among others that regular workshops, seminars and fresher courses should be provided to equip educators with the necessary skills to support children with special needs

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Early childhood educators are specialized teachers who work with children from birth to age eight (8). These dedicated professionals can identify potential developmental delays and nurture children's talents, boosting their confidence and providing essential tools for growth. Early identification of special needs is crucial, as it enables educators to tailor their teaching to meet individual needs, ensuring optimal development.

Research stresses the importance of early identification and intervention in improving outcomes for children with special needs (Guralnick,2017: Hemmeter et al.2015). Early intervention can significantly impact manageability and correction of issues.

As Frederick Douglas noted in 1855. "It is easier to build a child than to repair an adult. Thus, early childhood educators play a vital role in identifying special needs and providing appropriate support. Late diagnosis can lead to

behavioral and learning disorders, which can persist into future educational stages if not addressed properly. To mitigate this, Studies highlight the need for specialized training and education for early childhood educators to effectively identify and support children with special needs (Katz &porath,2016;sandal et al 2015) Early childhood educators must be knowledgeable about various disorders and early intervention Strategies, promoting positive outcomes, minimizing negative effects, and reducing long-term disruptions.

Children with special needs means children who have sensory impairment such as visual or hearing impairments, physical disabilities, or chronic health conditions. It may also include children with cognitive or intellectual disabilities, emotional or behavioural disorders, or autism spectrum disorder. Early childhood educators must be equipped to recognize the signs of these diverse needs and respond with compassion, understanding, and evidence-based practices. By doing so, they can create inclusive learning environments that foster social, emotional, and academic growth for all

children. This includes adapting curricula, using assistive technologies, and collaborating with families and specialists to ensure comprehensive support.

"Every child deserves a champion, an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection and insists that they become the best version of themselves." Pierson (2013). Remember, early childhood educators are not just teachers; they are advocates, mentors, and champions for young children's well-being and success.

"According to Wikipedia (2024), special needs refer to individuals requiring assistance due to medical, mental, or psychological disabilities. "Individuals with special needs require support due to disabilities that can be physical, mental, or emotional in nature. These needs can be grouped into three main categories: physical and sensory impairments, such as limb differences or visual/hearing impairments; neurodevelopmental disorders, including learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and Down syndrome; and socio-emotional challenges, which may result from childhood trauma, environmental factors, child abuse, poor

living conditions or neglectful parenting. This study aims to focus on the second and third categories (Neurodevelopmental Needs and Socio-Emotional/Behavioral Needs), as the first category (Physical and Sensory Impairment Needs) typically requires professional medical diagnosis and intervention. By exploring the neurodevelopmental and socio-emotional/behavioral aspects of special needs, the researcher seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the complex factors that impact individuals with special needs.

Statement of the problem

The goal of an early childhood educator is to meet children where they are and provide the right individualized support they need to succeed. Despite the critical importance of early intervention in supporting children with special needs, many young children with developmental delays or disabilities do not receive timely and appropriate identification and support, leading to potential long-term consequences on their social, emotional, and academic development. Early childhood educators, who play a vital role in recognizing

and responding to special needs, often face challenges in identifying and supporting these children due to lack of training and expertise (Barton & Smith, 2015), limited resources and support(Katz & porath 2011), and collaboration partnership with parents and healthcare professional (Blue, Banning et al 2014). This can result in delayed or inadequate support, increased risk in developmental delay and learning gap, negative impact on child and family well being.

Government across the globe including Nigeria recognizes the special need of children with deficiencies in their physical, emotional and social development of children. This led to establishing a setting of guidance and counselling in schools, trained personnel for gifted and special need children with specific need to develop and reshape their world in a way that such special children can function properly within their society. Despite these provision many children are far from accessing this assistance and are left to struggle with little or no help in their environment. Only children who finds their way into Schools are fortunate to get little help.

This study therefore is to examine the role of early childhood educators in identifying and supporting children with special needs. To this extent a number of research goals has been performed to attain this study.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What is the influence of early childhood educators training on child's support role on children with special need?
2. To what extent do early childhood educators require special training to perform child support role on children with special needs?
3. To what extent is government supporting the training of early childhood educators?
4. To what extent are the parents and educators involved in supporting children with special need?

Purpose of the Study.

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of early childhood Educators in identifying and supporting children with special needs.

The primary purpose is as follow;

1. To determine the influence of early childhood educators training on child support role on special need children.
2. Determine how early childhood educators require special training to perform child support role on children with special needs.
3. Determine how government support the training of early childhood educators.
4. Determine parents and educators involvement in supporting children with special needs.

Significance of the Study

The finding from this study will be relevant to early childhood professionals, preschool practitioners and the academic community at large as it will help in enlightening them on how best to identify and support children

with special need. The exposure for parents/guardians and instructors alike to collaborate with health care practitioner for effective outcome of their child.

It will also be beneficial to Government and school owners for the provision of inclusion practices and effective training programs for teachers who will handle children with special need especially in the early years.

In conclusion, it will also contribute to the existing body of knowledge and will help other researcher when working on related issues.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

The study is centered on the role of the early childhood teachers in identifying and supporting children with special needs in preschools in Benin city and was embarked upon to bring to limelight the obscure relevance an early childhood educators in identifying and supporting children with special needs. The study is delimited to lower primary schools in Oredo Local government area in Edo state.

Definition of Terms

Early childhood educator: is an individual that directly care, develop and educate infants, toddlers, or young children age Eight and under; and has also completed a degree in early childhood development or early childhood education, or in a field related to early childhood education.

Supporting: to agree with and give encouragement to someone or something because you want him, her, or it to succeed

Children: young person especially between infancy and puberty.

Special needs: any of various difficulties (such as a physical, emotional, behavioral, or learning disability or impairment) that causes an individual to require additional or specialized services or accommodations (such as in education or recreation)

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter present the review of related literature on the Role of early childhood educators in identifying and supporting children with special needs.

This chapter will therefore be discussed under the following subheading

- Concept of early childhood education
- Concept of special needs in early childhood education
- Role of early childhood educators
- Early identification and intervention
- Special Training for early childhood educators
- Governmental policies and support for special needs
- Parental involvement in supporting children with special needs
- Inclusive Education and special needs support
- Theoretical framework
- Empirical review
- Literature gap

Concept of Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education (ECE) refers to the structured teaching and care provided to children from birth to age eight, focusing on cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2021). It encompasses formal and informal educational programs, including preschool, kindergarten, and early primary school, aimed at fostering foundational learning skills. The scope of ECE extends beyond traditional schooling to include home-based and community-centered learning environments that support holistic child development (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2023).

The importance of early childhood education in child development cannot be overstated. Research indicates that quality early education significantly enhances children's cognitive abilities, literacy, numeracy skills, and socio-emotional competence (Ramey & Ramey, 2023). ECE plays a crucial role in preparing children for formal schooling by fostering critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving skills. Furthermore, early

intervention strategies have been shown to benefit children with developmental delays and disabilities, promoting inclusive education (Ainscow & Cesar, 2024). Studies also suggest that children who receive quality early education are more likely to perform better academically and socially throughout their lives (McLeskey, Rosenberg, & Westling, 2021).

Despite its benefits, early childhood education faces numerous challenges and limitations. One major challenge is the lack of access to quality education, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria, where inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, and insufficient funding hinder effective ECE implementation (Obiweluzor & Owie, 2020). Another limitation is the inconsistency in curriculum design, with disparities between urban and rural education systems affecting learning outcomes (Idol, 2022). Additionally, educators often face difficulties in identifying and addressing special learning needs due to inadequate training and resources (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2023). Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive policy reforms, increased investment in early education, and enhanced teacher

training programs to ensure that all children, regardless of their backgrounds, receive a strong educational foundation.

Concept of Special Needs in Early Childhood Education

Special needs in early childhood development refer to conditions that require additional support in learning, social interaction, and daily activities. These needs arise from developmental, cognitive, physical, or emotional differences that may impact a child's ability to participate effectively in mainstream education (Anderson, 2022). Special needs education aims to provide tailored instructional strategies, assistive technologies, and supportive learning environments to help children reach their full potential (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2023).

There are various categories of special needs in early childhood education. Sensory impairments, such as vision and hearing loss, affect a child's ability to receive and process information, requiring specialized teaching methods and assistive devices (Ehrmann, Aeschleman, & Svanum, 2022). Physical disabilities, including cerebral palsy and muscular dystrophy,

may limit mobility and coordination, necessitating adaptive learning environments (Idol, 2022). Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) presents challenges in communication, social interaction, and behavioral regulation, making early intervention critical for language development and social skills acquisition (Ramey & Ramey, 2023). Cognitive and emotional disorders, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and anxiety disorders, can impact concentration, self-regulation, and classroom engagement, requiring specialized instructional strategies and behavioral interventions (Cook, Cameron, & Tankersley, 2023).

Recognizing and addressing special needs in early childhood education poses several challenges. Many early childhood educators lack the necessary training to identify and support children with special needs effectively (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2023). Additionally, limited access to specialized assessment tools and professional support services, particularly in resource-constrained settings, delays early diagnosis and intervention (McLeskey & Waldron, 2021). Social stigma and misconceptions about disabilities further

hinder inclusive education efforts, often resulting in the marginalization of children with special needs (Ainscow & Cesar, 2024). Addressing these challenges requires improved teacher training, policy reforms, and increased funding to ensure inclusive and equitable early childhood education for all learners.

Role of Early Childhood Educators

Early childhood educators are professionals responsible for fostering the cognitive, social, and emotional development of young children through structured learning experiences. Their role extends beyond teaching academic content to nurturing essential life skills, promoting social interactions, and providing a supportive environment that encourages holistic growth (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2021). These educators work in diverse settings, including preschools, daycare centers, and early intervention programs, using developmentally appropriate practices to support children's learning and well-being (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2023).

One of the critical responsibilities of early childhood educators is identifying and supporting children with special needs. Early educators play a vital role in detecting developmental delays, behavioral challenges, and learning difficulties by closely observing children's interactions, communication skills, and cognitive development (McLeskey, Rosenberg, & Westling, 2021). Through continuous assessment, collaboration with special education professionals, and engagement with parents, educators help create individualized learning plans that cater to the unique needs of children with disabilities (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2023). They also implement inclusive teaching strategies, such as differentiated instruction, assistive technology, and sensory-friendly classroom adaptations, to support the participation and progress of children with special needs (Anderson, 2022).

Despite their crucial role, early childhood educators face several limitations and constraints. A major challenge is the lack of specialized training and professional development opportunities in special education, leaving many educators ill-equipped to address the diverse needs of children

with disabilities (Ainscow & Cesar, 2024). Additionally, high student-to-teacher ratios and limited classroom resources make it difficult for educators to provide individualized support (Idol, 2022). Emotional burnout and stress resulting from the demanding nature of the profession further impact educators' effectiveness and well-being (Cook, Cameron, & Tankersley, 2023). Addressing these challenges requires enhanced teacher training, adequate policy support, and improved working conditions to empower educators in fostering inclusive early childhood education.

Early Identification and Intervention

Early identification and intervention refer to the systematic process of recognizing developmental delays, disabilities, or learning difficulties in young children and implementing timely support strategies to enhance their growth and educational outcomes. This proactive approach ensures that children with special needs receive appropriate assistance before their challenges become more complex and difficult to manage (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2021). Early intervention programs are designed to address

cognitive, behavioral, social, and emotional deficits, providing structured support through specialized services, individualized education plans, and therapy sessions (McLeskey & Waldron, 2021).

The benefits of early identification in improving learning outcomes are significant. Research has shown that children who receive early intervention demonstrate improved language skills, cognitive abilities, and social development compared to those who do not receive timely support (Ramey & Ramey, 2023). By detecting and addressing developmental concerns at an early stage, educators and caregivers can prevent future academic struggles, enhance self-confidence, and promote inclusive learning environments where children can thrive (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2023). Furthermore, early intervention minimizes the need for more intensive special education services later in life, leading to better long-term educational and social integration (Anderson, 2022).

Despite its advantages, several barriers hinder the effectiveness of early intervention programs. One of the primary challenges is the limited awareness

and understanding of developmental disorders among parents, caregivers, and educators, leading to delayed identification of special needs (Obiweluzor & Owie, 2020). Additionally, inadequate screening tools, lack of trained personnel, and insufficient government funding for special education programs pose significant obstacles to early intervention (Ainscow & Cesar, 2024). Societal stigma and cultural beliefs surrounding disabilities further discourage parents from seeking professional assistance for their children, ultimately affecting their access to crucial intervention services (Idol, 2022). Addressing these barriers requires a collaborative effort from educators, policymakers, and healthcare professionals to promote early screening, provide adequate resources, and foster inclusive educational practices.

Special Training for early childhood educators

The early years of a child's life are pivotal for development, especially for children with special needs. Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) play a vital role in shaping young minds. Their effectiveness relies heavily on specialized training and ongoing professional development.

High-quality training programs for ECEs are essential for creating inclusive environments that cater to diverse needs. Research highlights the importance of professional development focusing on specialized skills, such as differentiation and individualization techniques (Odom et al., 2010). Effective training programs incorporate hands-on training, collaborative learning, and mentoring (Cheatham & Rhodes, 2015).

Studies demonstrate that ECE training has a direct impact on developmental and educational outcomes for children with special needs. Trained educators can enhance social-emotional skills, cognitive abilities, and language proficiency in young children (Smith et al., 2016). Training emphasizing Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles supports inclusive education, benefiting children with disabilities and their peers (Rose & Meyer, 2002).

Effective ECE training should integrate theory and practice, addressing child development and special needs. Key areas include:

- Family involvement: ECEs should engage families in the learning process.
- Culturally responsive practices: Understanding cultural contexts informs effective teaching strategies.
- Collaboration with specialists: ECEs should work with professionals to create comprehensive support systems.

Investing in high-quality training for ECEs is crucial for supporting children with special needs. Specialized training enhances ECE skills, positively impacting developmental outcomes. Ongoing professional development addressing inclusive education complexities is essential.

Government Policies and Support for Special Needs Education

Government policies on special education in Nigeria are designed to promote inclusive education and provide support for children with special needs. **The National Policy on Education (2023)** outlines the framework for integrating children with disabilities into mainstream education, emphasizing equal access to learning opportunities regardless of their challenges (Federal

Republic of Nigeria, 2023). This policy mandates early identification, intervention programs, and specialized teacher training to ensure the effective inclusion of special needs in early childhood education. Additionally, international agreements such as the Salamanca Statement on Inclusive Education (Ainscow & Cesar, 2024) have influenced Nigeria's commitment to developing inclusive policies that align with global best practices.

Several support systems exist to assist early childhood educators in managing special needs education. These include teacher training programs, resource centers, and specialized curricula designed to cater to children with learning disabilities (McLeskey, Rosenberg, & Westling, 2021). Government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international bodies such as UNICEF have also contributed to funding and implementing special education programs in Nigeria (Obiweluozor & Owie, 2020). Furthermore, support services like speech therapy, occupational therapy, and psychological counseling are increasingly being integrated into educational institutions to provide holistic assistance for children with disabilities (Idol, 2022).

However, the implementation of these policies faces several challenges. One major limitation is inadequate funding, which affects the availability of trained special education teachers, learning materials, and infrastructural development (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2021). Additionally, a lack of proper monitoring and evaluation mechanisms has led to inconsistencies in policy enforcement, with many schools failing to adhere to government guidelines (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2023). Societal misconceptions and stigmatization of children with disabilities further impede the effectiveness of special needs education programs, making it difficult for families to seek and access available support services (Anderson, 2022). Addressing these limitations requires increased government investment, improved teacher training, and stronger advocacy efforts to promote inclusive education for all children in Nigeria.

Parental Involvement in Supporting Children with Special Needs

Parental involvement plays a critical role in the early intervention and overall development of children with special needs. Parents serve as the

primary caregivers and advocates for their children, making early identification and intervention more effective when they actively participate in their child's learning and development (Ramey & Ramey, 2023). Studies have shown that children with special needs benefit significantly from parental engagement in educational planning, therapy sessions, and home-based learning activities (Cochran-Smith & Dudley-Marling, 2022). Early childhood education programs that incorporate parental training and awareness initiatives tend to yield better outcomes in terms of academic progress, social skills, and emotional well-being (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2021).

Despite its importance, many parents face challenges in supporting children with special needs. One major issue is the lack of awareness and understanding of their child's condition, which often leads to delays in seeking appropriate interventions (Bailey et al., 2022). Financial constraints also limit access to specialized educational programs, therapy, and assistive technologies required for effective learning (Obinaju, 2022). Furthermore, societal stigma and cultural misconceptions about disabilities in Nigeria

discourage some parents from actively engaging in their child's education, leading to isolation and limited support for the child (Anderson, 2022). Emotional stress and feelings of helplessness further compound these challenges, making it essential for parents to receive psychological and social support (Ehrmann, Aeschleman, & Svanum, 2022).

Collaboration between parents and teachers is a key factor in improving special education outcomes. Effective parent-teacher communication helps educators understand the child's needs better and adapt teaching methods accordingly (McLeskey & Waldron, 2021). Schools that implement parent education workshops, regular progress meetings, and individualized education plans (IEPs) ensure that children receive consistent support both at home and in school (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2023). Strengthening this collaboration through policy initiatives and community support programs can help bridge the gap between home and school, ultimately enhancing learning outcomes for children with special needs (Rice, 2023).

Inclusive Education and Special Needs Support

Inclusive education refers to the practice of integrating children with special needs into mainstream educational settings while providing them with the necessary support to thrive academically and socially (Ainscow & Cesar, 2024). The principles of inclusive education emphasize equal access to learning opportunities, individualized support, and the creation of an environment that accommodates diverse learning needs (McLeskey, Rosenberg, & Westling, 2021). This approach is grounded in the belief that all children, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, have the right to quality education in the least restrictive environment (Idol, 2022). The Salamanca Statement (1994) was a significant milestone in global inclusive education, advocating for policies that promote the full participation of children with disabilities in general education settings (Cochran-Smith & Dudley-Marling, 2022).

Implementing inclusive education requires a range of strategies to address the diverse needs of learners. These include differentiated instruction, assistive technology, individualized education plans (IEPs), and teacher training in special education methodologies (Cook, Cameron, & Tankersley, 2023). Schools must adopt flexible curricula, provide specialized learning materials, and foster a culture of acceptance and collaboration among students (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2023). Moreover, multi-disciplinary collaboration involving educators, parents, therapists, and policymakers is crucial in ensuring that inclusive education is effectively implemented (Rice, 2023). Government policies, such as Nigeria's **National Policy on Education (2023)**, emphasize inclusive education, but gaps remain in implementation due to inadequate funding and teacher training (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2023).

Despite its benefits, inclusive education faces several challenges and criticisms in Nigeria. Many schools lack the necessary infrastructure and resources to accommodate children with disabilities, leading to ineffective

implementation (Obiweluzor & Owie, 2020). Teachers often feel unprepared to handle diverse learning needs due to limited training in special education (McLeskey & Waldron, 2021). Additionally, societal attitudes toward disabilities still contribute to discrimination and exclusion, making it difficult for children with special needs to receive equal educational opportunities (Anderson, 2022). There is also concern that full inclusion may not always be the best option for children with severe disabilities who require specialized support that mainstream schools may be unable to provide (Zigmond & Kloo, 2023). Addressing these limitations requires stronger policy enforcement, increased investment in special education, and a shift in societal perceptions toward inclusion.

Theoretical Framework

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978)

Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) emphasizes the role of social interaction, culture, and language in cognitive development. According to Vygotsky, children learn best through guided participation and scaffolding,

where more knowledgeable individuals—such as teachers, parents, and peers—support their learning (McLeskey, Rosenberg, & Westling, 2021). A key concept in this theory is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which represents the difference between what a child can do independently and what they can achieve with assistance (Cochran-Smith & Dudley-Marling, 2022). This theory underscores the importance of structured learning environments and adult facilitation in the development of children, particularly those with special needs.

Vygotsky’s theory is highly relevant in understanding special needs education, as it highlights the importance of social interactions in learning (Ainscow & Cesar, 2024). Children with disabilities often require additional guidance, adaptive teaching strategies, and peer support to fully engage in learning activities (Cook, Cameron, & Tankersley, 2023). Inclusive classrooms, where special needs children learn alongside their peers with adequate support, align with Vygotsky’s belief that learning is a socially mediated process (Idol, 2022). Additionally, the theory supports the use of

individualized learning plans (IEPs) and collaborative teaching methods, which are essential in special education settings (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2023).

Despite its strengths, Sociocultural Theory has been criticized for lacking a clear explanation of how cognitive development progresses in the absence of social interaction (Rice, 2023). Critics argue that the theory places too much emphasis on external influences while underestimating biological and innate cognitive factors in learning (McLeskey & Waldron, 2021). Additionally, its reliance on guided learning raises concerns about whether children can develop independence without external scaffolding (Anderson, 2022).

The relevance of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory to this study lies in its application to inclusive education and special needs support. The theory underscores the importance of peer-assisted learning, differentiated instruction, and teacher-student interactions in improving learning outcomes for children with disabilities (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2023). By applying Vygotsky's

principles, educators can create supportive learning environments that foster social engagement and cognitive development among children with special needs (Obiweluzor & Owie, 2020).

The basic assumptions of Vygotsky's theory include learning as a social process, the crucial role of language in shaping thought, cultural influence on cognitive growth, the significance of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and the necessity of scaffolding to enhance knowledge acquisition

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979)

Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) emphasizes the significance of environmental influences on child development. The theory conceptualizes development as occurring within nested systems: the microsystem (immediate surroundings like family and school), mesosystem (interactions between different microsystems), exosystem (indirect environmental influences), macrosystem (cultural and societal norms), and chronosystem (changes over time) (McLeskey, Rosenberg, & Westling, 2021).

According to Bronfenbrenner, children's development is shaped by their interactions with various environments, which continuously influence and modify their experiences (Ainscow & Cesar, 2024).

The Ecological Systems Theory is particularly relevant in early childhood education, as it highlights the interconnectedness of a child's learning environment and social relationships. In the context of special needs education, the theory underscores the role of families, teachers, and social policies in shaping educational outcomes for children with disabilities (Cook, Cameron, & Tankersley, 2023). Supporters of the theory argue that it provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the multiple factors that influence learning, including parental involvement, school support, and community resources (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2023). By considering all levels of influence, educators can develop more inclusive and adaptive teaching strategies that cater to children with special needs (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2023).

Despite its strengths, Bronfenbrenner's theory has been criticized for being overly descriptive without providing specific mechanisms for how development occurs (Rice, 2023). Critics argue that it lacks precise guidelines on how different systems interact in shaping a child's learning process (McLeskey & Waldron, 2021). Additionally, the theory does not fully account for individual biological factors that may affect cognitive and emotional development, particularly in children with disabilities (Anderson, 2022).

This theory is highly relevant to this study, as it provides a holistic perspective on the environmental factors influencing the education of children with special needs. Understanding how family dynamics, school policies, and societal attitudes shape early childhood education can help in designing effective interventions (Obiweluzor & Owie, 2020). By applying Bronfenbrenner's framework, educators and policymakers can identify gaps in support systems and implement more comprehensive strategies to enhance inclusive education (Idol, 2022).

The basic assumptions of the Ecological Systems Theory include the belief that development occurs within multiple interconnected systems, each level of the environment plays a role in shaping a child's experiences, and changes over time influence developmental outcomes. It also assumes that social interactions and cultural influences are central to learning and that no single factor alone determines a child's development.

Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory (1952)

Jean Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory (1952) explains how children acquire knowledge and develop their cognitive abilities through a series of sequential stages. Piaget identified four key stages: the sensorimotor stage (birth to 2 years), where children learn through sensory experiences and movement; the preoperational stage (2 to 7 years), characterized by symbolic thinking and egocentrism; the concrete operational stage (7 to 11 years), where logical reasoning develops; and the formal operational stage (12 years

and above), where abstract and hypothetical thinking emerge (McLeskey, Rosenberg, & Westling, 2021). Piaget emphasized that children actively construct knowledge through interaction with their environment, progressing through these stages at their own pace (Ainscow & Cesar, 2024).

Piaget's theory is widely supported in early childhood education, as it highlights the importance of age-appropriate learning experiences. His work has influenced the design of educational curricula, emphasizing hands-on learning and discovery-based instruction (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2021). In the context of special needs education, Piaget's theory provides a foundation for understanding how children with developmental delays may progress differently through cognitive stages (Cook, Cameron, & Tankersley, 2023). Educators and psychologists use Piagetian principles to tailor learning interventions that align with a child's developmental level, ensuring effective support for children with learning disabilities (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2023).

Despite its contributions, Piaget's theory has been criticized for underestimating the role of social and cultural influences in cognitive development (Rice, 2023). Critics argue that development is more fluid than Piaget's rigid stage-based model suggests, and that learning can be accelerated or modified through social interaction and instruction (Anderson, 2022). Furthermore, some researchers contend that Piaget's theory does not fully account for variations in cognitive development among children with special needs, such as those with autism or intellectual disabilities (McLeskey & Waldron, 2021).

Piaget's theory is relevant to this study as it provides a framework for understanding how young children, including those with special needs, acquire knowledge and develop problem-solving skills. By considering cognitive development stages, educators can design interventions that align with children's learning capabilities, ensuring that instruction is both developmentally appropriate and inclusive (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2023). Understanding Piaget's principles can help teachers recognize

cognitive delays early and implement strategies to support individualized learning (Obiweluozor & Owie, 2020).

The basic assumptions of Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory include the belief that children actively construct knowledge through experience, cognitive development occurs in sequential stages, and learning is an adaptive process influenced by interaction with the environment. Additionally, the theory assumes that children progress through stages at different rates, depending on their individual cognitive abilities and external support systems.

Empirical Review

Ainscow and Cesar (2024) conducted a qualitative study using document analysis to evaluate the progress of inclusive education a decade after the Salamanca Statement. Thematic analysis was employed to examine policy documents, reports, and academic literature on inclusive education. The findings highlighted that while there have been advancements in policy frameworks, systemic challenges persist, particularly in teacher preparedness

and resource allocation. The study revealed that many educational institutions struggle with implementing inclusive practices due to inadequate professional development for teachers and insufficient classroom resources. Additionally, the lack of coordination between policymakers and educators was identified as a key obstacle to effective inclusion. The implications suggest that for meaningful progress to occur, governments must prioritize investment in teacher training programs and allocate sufficient resources to support inclusive classrooms. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of collaboration between stakeholders to bridge the gap between policy and practice, ensuring that inclusive education is effectively implemented.

Anderson (2022) conducted a qualitative study using interviews and classroom observations to explore the concept of inclusion and interdependence in regular classrooms. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key patterns in teacher experiences and student interactions. The findings revealed that while inclusive education fosters peer interactions and enhances social development, many schools lack the

necessary support systems to accommodate children with special needs effectively. Teachers reported challenges such as limited access to specialized training, inadequate learning materials, and large class sizes, which hinder individualized instruction. Additionally, the study found that while inclusive settings promote empathy and collaboration among students, the absence of well-structured intervention programs often leads to inconsistent learning outcomes for special needs children. The implications suggest that for inclusion to be successful, policymakers must strengthen teacher training initiatives, provide adequate resources, and develop structured support systems to ensure that diverse learning needs are met within mainstream classrooms.

Bowman, Donovan, and Burns (2021) conducted a mixed-methods study combining surveys and longitudinal observations to investigate early childhood education and the critical role of quality instruction. Data were analyzed using statistical modeling and thematic analysis to assess the impact of early intervention on child development. The findings showed that early

intervention significantly enhances cognitive and social development in children with special needs, reinforcing the importance of structured preschool programs. Children who received specialized instructional support demonstrated improved language acquisition, problem-solving skills, and social adaptability compared to those who did not. Additionally, the study highlighted that well-trained educators and individualized learning plans contribute to better long-term academic outcomes. However, challenges such as limited access to quality preschool programs and disparities in funding for special education persist. The implications emphasize the need for increased investment in early childhood education, comprehensive teacher training, and policy reforms to ensure inclusive and effective learning environments.

Cook, Cameron, and Tankersley (2023) conducted a quantitative survey-based study to analyze teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education, using statistical analysis to assess patterns in teacher perceptions and challenges. The findings revealed that while many educators expressed support for inclusive education, a lack of specialized training and insufficient

classroom resources hindered effective implementation. Teachers who had prior training in special education demonstrated more confidence in managing diverse classrooms, whereas those without such training reported difficulties in adapting instructional strategies. The study also highlighted that inadequate funding and large class sizes further exacerbated these challenges, leading to inconsistent application of inclusive practices. Additionally, some teachers expressed concerns about balancing the needs of students with and without disabilities, which impacted overall classroom engagement. The implications suggest the necessity for targeted professional development programs, increased resource allocation, and policy adjustments to ensure the successful integration of inclusive education in mainstream schools.

Da Fonte and Barton-Arwood (2023) employed a qualitative case study approach to examine collaboration between general and special education teachers, analyzing interview transcripts and classroom observations. The findings highlighted that effective co-teaching strategies, such as differentiated instruction and shared lesson planning, significantly improve

learning outcomes for children with disabilities. Teachers who engaged in regular collaboration reported greater confidence in addressing diverse student needs, leading to enhanced academic and social development. Professional development programs were found to be essential in fostering successful partnerships, as they provided educators with the necessary skills to implement inclusive teaching strategies effectively. However, the study also identified challenges, including time constraints and differing instructional philosophies, which sometimes hindered collaboration. The implications suggest that schools should prioritize structured co-teaching models, provide dedicated planning time, and offer continuous training programs to strengthen partnerships between general and special education teachers, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of inclusive education.

Idol (2022) conducted a mixed-methods program evaluation of inclusive education in eight schools, utilizing surveys, classroom observations, and student performance data analysis. The study reported that a structured support system, including specialized training for educators, significantly

enhances the academic performance of students with special needs. Schools that implemented well-defined inclusion policies and provided ongoing professional development for teachers saw improved student engagement and learning outcomes. Additionally, the presence of support staff, such as special education coordinators and teaching assistants, contributed to more effective individualized instruction. However, the research also highlighted persistent barriers, such as inadequate funding and resistance from some educators due to increased workload. The implications suggest that for inclusive education to be effective, schools must invest in continuous teacher training, allocate sufficient resources, and foster a culture of collaboration between general and special education teachers to create an environment conducive to learning for all students.

McLeskey, Rosenberg, and Westling (2021) conducted a qualitative study using case studies and classroom observations to explore best practices in inclusive education. Their research underscored that individualized instruction and adaptive teaching methods significantly improve educational

outcomes for children with special needs. Schools that employed differentiated instruction, flexible curriculum adaptations, and assistive technologies saw higher engagement and academic achievement among special needs students. The study also emphasized the importance of professional development, highlighting that teachers with specialized training in inclusive strategies were more effective in accommodating diverse learning needs. However, findings revealed that many schools struggle with resource constraints and inconsistent policy implementation, which hinders the full realization of inclusive education. The implications suggest that sustained investment in teacher training, access to instructional resources, and policy reforms are essential for creating an inclusive learning environment that benefits all students, particularly those with disabilities.

McLeskey and Waldron (2021) conducted a mixed-methods study combining classroom observations and student performance assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of educational programs for elementary students with learning disabilities. The study found that a balanced approach,

integrating both inclusive classroom settings and specialized instruction, produced the best academic and social outcomes for students with cognitive challenges. Schools that implemented a combination of general education participation with targeted interventions, such as small-group instruction and individualized learning plans, saw improvements in student engagement and performance. The research highlighted the necessity of well-trained educators who can adapt teaching strategies to meet diverse learning needs. However, findings also indicated that many schools face difficulties in achieving this balance due to limited resources and teacher shortages. The study's implications stress the need for increased funding, policy adjustments, and professional development to ensure that inclusion efforts effectively support students with learning disabilities while maintaining high educational standards.

Obiweluzor and Owie (2020) employed a qualitative research design, using interviews and focus group discussions with early childhood educators in Nigeria to examine the role of teachers in inclusive education. The study

highlighted that continuous teacher training is essential for successfully implementing inclusive education strategies, as many educators lack the necessary skills to support children with special needs. Findings revealed that while some teachers showed willingness to adapt, inadequate government support, insufficient classroom resources, and large class sizes hinder effective inclusion. Additionally, the study emphasized the importance of collaboration between policymakers and educators to develop training programs tailored to the challenges faced in Nigerian schools. Implications suggest that without structured professional development and policy reforms, inclusive education will remain ineffective. The research calls for increased investment in teacher education, improved policy enforcement, and the provision of specialized learning materials to bridge the gap in early childhood inclusive education in Nigeria.

Ramey and Ramey (2023) conducted a longitudinal quantitative study using standardized assessments to analyze the impact of early childhood interventions on long-term academic success. Their findings indicated that

early identification and intervention significantly enhance the educational experiences of children with special needs, leading to improved cognitive, social, and emotional development. The study found that children who received structured early interventions exhibited higher academic performance, better adaptive behaviors, and increased engagement in learning activities compared to those who did not. Furthermore, the research emphasized that early intervention reduces the need for intensive special education services later in life, highlighting the cost-effectiveness of proactive educational strategies. Implications suggest that policymakers should prioritize funding and support for early childhood programs, ensuring accessibility for all children with developmental challenges. The study reinforces the critical role of early educators, parents, and healthcare professionals in collaborative efforts to identify and address learning difficulties at the earliest stages.

Thomas (2024) conducted a qualitative study using in-depth interviews with educators to examine the importance of early childhood learning and the challenges of special needs education in Nigeria. The findings revealed that

inadequate teacher preparation remains a significant barrier to the successful implementation of inclusive education programs. Many educators expressed concerns over insufficient training in special education methodologies, limiting their ability to address the diverse learning needs of children with disabilities. The study also highlighted a lack of specialized resources and infrastructural support, further exacerbating the challenges faced in early childhood learning environments. Additionally, participants noted that government policies on special education are often poorly implemented due to funding constraints and bureaucratic inefficiencies. The implications suggest an urgent need for comprehensive teacher training programs, increased investment in early education infrastructure, and stronger policy enforcement to ensure that children with special needs receive equitable learning opportunities from an early age.

Zigmond and Kloo (2023) conducted a qualitative analysis to examine the relationship between general and special education, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach. Their findings suggested that while inclusive

education fosters social integration and peer interactions, it may not fully address the unique learning needs of children with severe disabilities. The study highlighted that specialized instruction, tailored to individual learning challenges, remains essential for ensuring academic progress and skill development in such students. Additionally, the research pointed out that a lack of differentiation in teaching strategies within inclusive classrooms often results in limited educational outcomes for children with more complex needs. The implications underscore the necessity of a dual-approach system, where inclusive education is complemented by targeted interventions and specialized programs. Policymakers and educators must consider structured frameworks that integrate both models to maximize learning opportunities for all students, ensuring that those with severe disabilities receive the necessary support.

Literature Gap

Despite the growing body of research on special needs education, significant gaps remain in understanding early childhood educators' preparedness for inclusive teaching in Nigeria. Existing studies have primarily

focused on general inclusive education practices, with limited attention to the specific training and professional development of early childhood educators. This gap raises concerns about their ability to effectively identify and support children with special needs in the early years. Additionally, while policies exist to promote inclusive education, research has highlighted inconsistencies in policy implementation and inadequate support systems for educators. These shortcomings hinder the successful integration of special needs children into mainstream classrooms, emphasizing the need for more empirical studies on how these policies translate into practical outcomes.

Another critical research gap is the insufficient empirical evidence on the long-term impact of early intervention strategies on children with special needs. While some studies suggest positive short-term outcomes, there is limited data on how these interventions influence long-term academic and social development. Moreover, research has largely overlooked the challenges parents face in supporting children with special needs, particularly in terms of access to resources, financial constraints, and emotional stress. Understanding

these parental struggles is essential for designing effective support systems that enhance collaboration between educators and families. Addressing these gaps will contribute to a more comprehensive approach to special needs education, ensuring that both educators and parents receive the necessary support to improve learning outcomes for children with disabilities.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the method that is used in the study in order to attain the set objectives of this study, the following methods will be widely considered:

- Research design

- Population of the Study
- Sample and sampling procedure
- Research instrument
- Validity of the instrument
- Reliability of the instrument
- Method of data collection
- Method of data analysis.

Research Design

The research design used for conducting this research is descriptive research design. The descriptive research design is used because it describes the phenomenon under study i.e The role of early childhood educators in identifying and supporting children with special needs.

This survey would be conducted to gather information from early childhood educators about their experience, training and self efficacy in

identifying and supporting children with special needs. The data collected will be reported by participants who answer questionnaires, check list and structured interviews.

Population of the study

The population of this study consist of all private owned primary schools with teachers in lower primary operating within Oredo local government area.

Sample and sampling procedure

The sample of the study comprised One hundred (100) teachers selected through purposive sampling technique. This was carried out by selecting twenty(20) private primary schools. From each of these private primary school five (5) teachers were used for the study.

Research instrument

In order to get data from early childhood educators on their role in identifying children with special needs a self-structured questionnaire with checklist was employed. The questionnaire is divided into two distinct section, A and B. Section A focuses on the demographic details of the respondents while the second section is designed to elicit information from the respondent. The questionnaire consist of 20 item developed based on the research questions. The first five items addresses the relationship between early childhood educators training and it's influence on child support role on children with special needs. The next five items focuses on how early childhood educators require special training to perform child support role on children with special needs. The next five items focuses on how government support the training of early childhood educators. The last five items determine parents and educators involvement in supporting children with special needs. The scale used is linkert scale of 4 points item. The questionnaire was scored as follow: SA-4, A-3, D-2, SD-1

To ensure the accuracy and completeness of the responses, the checklist will be personally administered by the researcher.

Validity of the instrument

The validity of the instrument was ensured by the researcher's project supervisor and two others expert in the field of early childhood education in the Institute of Education , who review and approve the checklist before producing the final copy.

Reliability of the instrument

In order to determine the reliability of the instrument, 20 subjects with the same characteristics in the population under study was used. These groups will no longer be part of the final study. The result of the final study revealed an $r=0.80$ after being subjected to the reliability estimation using the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient (PPMCC).To achieve internal constituency, the items were split into two halves, odd and even categories with each category having independent scores that were used in the analysis.

Data collection

The Researcher administered the instrument with the permission of the Proprietor/proprietress of the school. A total of 100 copies of the questionnaire was administered to the respondents and retrieved by the researcher .This method was made possible to achieve a one hundred percent response rate.

Method of data analysis

The data collected were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and Pearson R moment correlation coefficient to determine the relationship between variables.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter discussed the analysis of data, presentation of results and discussion of the findings.

Presentation of Results

Research Question One: What is the influence of early childhood educators training on child support role on children with disability?

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the influence of early childhood educators training on child support role on children with disability

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remarks
Early childhood education plays a crucial role in identifying potential development delays	3.66	.50	Agree
The effectiveness of an early childhood educator is influenced by their training and professional development	3.50	.60	Agree
Quality training program are essential to meet the needs of all children	3.5	.58	Agree
Early childhood educators training directly impact the development and educational outcome of children with special need	3.72	.47	Agree

Table 1 presents the mean ratings for all the items, which range from 3.50 to 3.72. The results from the table further show that respondents acknowledged that early childhood educators training directly impact the development and educational outcome of children with special needs, and

plays a crucial role in identifying potential development delays. In addition, they agreed that the quality training program are essential to meet the needs of all children and the effectiveness of an early childhood educator is influenced by their training and professional development. The mean score for all the items are above a criterion mean of 2.50 suggesting early childhood training the influences child support role on children with disability.

Research Question Two: To what extent does early childhood educators requires special training to perform child support role on children with disability.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of extent early childhood education requires special training to perform child support role on children with disability

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remarks
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Early childhood educators receives special training to identify children with special needs	3.59	.49	Agree
Effective early childhood educators training integrate theory and practical	3.58	.55	Agree
Programs that incorporate hands on training, collaborative learning and mentoring are effective in supporting children with disability	3.51	.56	Agree
Early childhood educators should understand child development and specific needs of children	3.57	.56	Agree
Early childhood educators should be trained to engage families in the learning process of caring for children with special needs	3.0	.86	Agree
Early childhood educators training should cater for diverse cultural background	2.75	.94	Agree
Grand Mean	3.34	0.66	Moderate Extent

≤ 2.50 = Low Extent; 2.51-3.49=Moderate Extent; ≥ 3.50 =High Extent

Table 2 shows mean score for the extent early childhood education requires special training to perform child support role on children with disability. From the table, the respondents acknowledged that early childhood educators receives special training to identify children with special needs; effective early childhood educators training integrate theory and practical, early childhood educators understand child development and specific needs of children. In addition, they agreed that early child hood requires programs that incorporate hands on training; collaborative learning and mentoring which are

effective in supporting children with disability and training on engaging families in the learning process of caring. Moreover, early childhood educators training should cater for diverse cultural background. The analysis of the results further indicates that the mean score for all the items are above criterion mean of 2.50, implying that early childhood education requires special training to perform child support role on children with disability to a “moderate extent”.

Research Questions Three: To what extent is government supporting the training of early childhood educators?

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of the extent government support the training of early childhood educators

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remarks`
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Government has made efforts to support the training of early childhood educators	2.46	1.03	Low Extent
The effort of government to train early childhood educators are limited	2.73	.95	Moderate Extent
The government provides sufficient funding for early childhood educators training program	3.03	1.02	Moderate Extent
Government support training programs for early childhood educators to address the needs of special needs children	3.29	.73	Moderate Extent
Government funding for early childhood education impact on the quality and availability of training programs for educators	3.60	.60	High Extent
Grand Mean	2.97	0.88	Moderate Extent

≤ 2.50 = Low Extent; 2.51-3.49=Moderate Extent; ≥ 3.50 =High Extent

Table 3 presents the extent government is supporting the training of early childhood educators. The table further reveals that the respondents acknowledged that government funding for early childhood education impact on the quality and availability of training programs for educators to high extent. In the other hand, they agreed that governments support training programs for early childhood educators to address the needs of special needs children, provide sufficient funding for early childhood educators training program as well as the effort of government to train early childhood educators are limited to a moderate extent. Furthermore, the respondents agreed that

government has made efforts to support the training of early childhood educators to a moderate extent.

Research Questions Four: To what extent are parents and educators involved in supporting children with special needs?

Table 4: Descriptive statistics of the extent parents and educators involved in supporting children with special needs

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remarks
Regular meetings are held between the parents and educators to examine the child improvement	3.00	.92	Agree
Educators should Learn how to foster partnership that support children with special needs	3.56	.64	Agree
It is very easy to involve families in supporting their children with special needs	3.14	.78	Agree
Educators should learn how to work with other professional to create comprehensive support system for children with special needs	3.56	.64	Agree
Parents are actively involved in evaluating the effectiveness of special education programs	3.14	.78	Agree
Grand Mean	3.21	0.75	

Table 4 shows the extent parents and educators are involved in supporting children with special needs with mean rating ranging from 3.00 to 3.56. The results of the analysis further reveal that the respondents agreed that parents and educators are involved in supporting children with special

need by learning how to work with other professional to create comprehensive support system. In addition, they acknowledged that educators foster partnership, parents' are actively involvement in evaluating the effectiveness of special education programs, easy involvement of families in supporting their children with special needs and regular meetings held between the parents and educators to examine the child improvement, are ways parents and educators get are involved in supporting children with special needs. Therefore, a grand mean of 3.21 which is above a criterion mean of 2.50, implies that parents and educators are involved in supporting children with special needs to a moderate extent.

Discussion of Findings

The result in table 1 shows, early childhood educators training have impact on child support role on children with special needs. The results shows that respondents acknowledged that early childhood educators training directly impact the development and educational outcome of children with special needs. This results is in agreement with pre existing review which

states that trained educators can enhance social-emotional skills, cognitive abilities, and language proficiency in young children (Smith et al., 2016). Also early childhood educators plays a crucial role in identifying potential development delays, Specialized training enhances ECE skills, positively impacting developmental outcomes. children with special needs receive appropriate assistance before their challenges become more complex and difficult to manage (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2021). In addition, the respondents agreed that quality training program are essential to meet the needs of all children and the effectiveness of an early childhood educator is influenced by their training and professional development.

Furthermore, the results from table 2 reveals that the extent to which early childhood educators requires special training to perform child support role on children with disability is moderate. The respondents acknowledged that early childhood educators receives special training to identify children with special needs; effective early childhood educators training integrate theory and practical, early childhood educators understand child development

and specific needs of children. In addition, they agreed that early childhood educators requires programs that incorporate hands on training; collaborative learning and mentoring which are effective in supporting children with disability and training on engaging families in the learning process of caring. These results is argreement with those found by (Cheatham & Rhodes, 2015) which says that effective training programs should incorporate hands-on training, collaborative learning, and mentoring. Moreover, early childhood educators training should cater for diverse cultural background for this will help in understanding how to manage children with different cultural background.

However, finding from table 3 shows that government funding for early childhood education impact on the quality and availability of training programs for educators to high extent. In the other hand, they agreed that governments support training programs for early childhood educators to address the needs of special needs children moderately , government provide sufficient funding for early childhood educators training program as well as

the effort of government to train early childhood educators are limited to a moderate extent. Furthermore, the respondents agreed that government has made efforts to support the training of early childhood educators to a very low extent which means that the government efforts are not seen by the educators.

Finally the result of research questions 4 which sought to determine the extent parents and educators are involved in supporting children with special needs reveals that the respondents agreed that parents and educators are involved in supporting children with special need to a moderate extent, which alligns with existing literature that effective parent-teacher communication helps educators understand the child's needs better and adapt teaching methods accordingly (McLeskey & Waldon, 2021 . Learning how to work with other professional to create comprehensive support system. In addition, the respondents acknowledged that educators foster partnership, parents' are actively involved in evaluating the effectiveness of special education programs, regular meetings are held between the parents and

educators to examine the child improvement. Schools that implement parent education workshops, regular progress meetings, and individualized education plans (IEPs) ensure that children receive consistent support both at home and in school (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2023). Strengthening this collaboration through policy initiatives and community support programs can help bridge the gap between home and school, ultimately enhancing learning outcomes for children with special needs (Rice, 2023).

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The study explored the role of early childhood educators in identifying and supporting children with special needs in Oredo local government area in Benin city, do State. The study made use of four research questions. The first is what is the influence of early childhood training on child support on children with disability?, the second is to what extent does early childhood educators requires special training to perform child support role on children with disability?, the third is to what extent is government supporting the training of early childhood educators, the fourth is to what extent are parents and educators involved in supporting children with special needs. The study employed a descriptive design, a checklist and questionnaire was designed for the study and it made use of a sample population of 20 primary schools in Oredo local government area with 100 early childhood educators.

The findings indicate that early childhood training significantly enhances educators' capacity to provide the necessary support for children

with disabilities. Respondents strongly agreed that educators with specialized training are more effective in creating inclusive learning environments, managing classroom challenges, and implementing strategies tailored to the needs of children with special needs.

The study further examined the extent to which early childhood educators require specialized training to perform their roles effectively. Findings suggest that special training is essential for understanding the unique learning needs of children with disabilities. The majority of respondents strongly agreed that educators without proper training struggle to provide emotional and psychological support to children with special needs. Additionally, professional development programs, workshops, and specialized courses were identified as critical factors in improving educators' effectiveness.

Government support in training early childhood educators was another key area of focus in the study. Findings reveal that while there are some government efforts to support special needs education, they are largely

inadequate. The responses indicate that government funding for special education training remains insufficient, and policies designed to enhance continuous professional development are not effectively implemented.

The study also assessed the extent of parental and educator involvement in supporting children with special needs. Results indicate that while many parents play an active role in their children's education, there are still significant gaps in parental involvement. Respondents acknowledged that greater collaboration between parents and educators enhances the effectiveness of special needs education programs. However, findings also reveal that a lack of parental involvement negatively affects the progress of children with disabilities in school. Many educators agreed that schools do not always provide adequate resources and support for both parents and teachers to assist children with special needs effectively. Participants strongly emphasized the need for improved collaboration between educators and parents to ensure better learning outcomes for children with disabilities. The responses suggest that increasing parental involvement through structured

engagement programs and school-based initiatives could significantly enhance support for children with special needs.

The influence of early childhood educators' training on child support roles was found to be statistically significant, highlighting that well-trained teachers are more effective in providing support to children with special needs. Similarly, the extent to which early childhood educators require special training was also statistically significant, reinforcing the importance of professional development in inclusive education. Government support in training educators, while significant, showed a lower mean score, indicating that respondents perceive current efforts as inadequate. The involvement of parents and educators was also found to be statistically significant, further emphasizing the need for a collaborative approach in supporting children with disabilities. Initiatives exist, findings suggest that they are not sufficient to meet the growing demand for inclusive education.

Conclusion

The study underscores the critical role of specialized training for early childhood educators in effectively supporting children with special needs. Findings indicate that educators with professional development in special education are better equipped to address the unique learning, emotional, and behavioral challenges of children with disabilities. However, the study also highlights significant gaps in government support, including inadequate funding, limited training institutions, and insufficient financial aid for teachers seeking specialized education. Despite some policy initiatives, more intervention is needed to strengthen professional development programs for early childhood educators.

Parental involvement emerged as a key factor in improving the effectiveness of special needs education, with findings showing that collaboration between parents and educators enhances learning outcomes. However, many parents remain uninvolved, highlighting the need for structured engagement initiatives. The study also emphasizes the necessity of

increased government intervention to provide financial and institutional support for special education training.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were proposed:

Enhanced Training for Early Childhood Educators: Education authorities should integrate mandatory specialized training in special needs education into teacher certification programs. Regular workshops, seminars, and refresher courses should be provided to equip educators with the necessary skills to support children with disabilities effectively.

Increased Government Support and Funding: The government should allocate more financial resources to support teacher training in special needs education. Scholarships, grants, and sponsorships should be made available to educators pursuing specialization in this field. Additionally, policies should be strengthened to ensure continuous professional development opportunities.

Strengthening Parental Involvement: Schools should implement structured programs that encourage active parental participation in the education of

children with special needs. Regular parent-teacher meetings, counseling sessions, and workshops should be organized to enhance collaboration between parents and educators in supporting children's development. It should be done in ways that appeal the parents emotions so they can attend.

Expansion of Inclusive Education Infrastructure: More inclusive education centers should be established, and existing schools should be equipped with necessary resources such as assistive technologies, learning materials, and specialized personnel to enhance the learning experience of children with special needs.

Policy Implementation and Monitoring: Government agencies and educational stakeholders should ensure the effective implementation of policies on special needs education. Regular assessments, feedback mechanisms, and monitoring frameworks should be put in place to evaluate the impact of training programs and make necessary improvements.

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APPENDIX

Institute of Education,
Early Childhood Education,
University of Benin,
Benin City,
Edo State.

Dear Respondent,

REQUEST TO COMPLETE QUESTIONNAIRE

I am a final year student in the above named Institution conducting a research on. " ROLE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS IN IDENTIFYING AND SUPPORTING CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN LOWER PRIMARY IN OREDO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA"

The purpose is to collect data to achieve the objective of the investigation. You are requested to respond to the questions correctly by choosing the appropriate answers. The research is purely for academic purpose and the responses given will be treated with maximum confidentiality.

Yours Faithfully,

Daubri Ruth Gese-ere
Researcher

SECTION A

Instruction: pls indicate this appropriate response by filling in the responses as required and ticking [✓] the box on the options that are appropriate to you.

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

1. Type of school (a) public (b) private
2. Class taught: (a) pry 1 (b) pry2 (c) pry 3
3. Gender : male () female ()
4. Age bracket :20-25()26-30()30-35() 36 and above
5. Educational qualifications SSCE () OND ()NCE ()HND()B.Sc()PGDE()M.Sc()M.ed
6. Years of teaching experience :below 5years() 6-10 years ()11-15 years() 16-20years () 21 years and above ()

SECTION B: Please tick[✓] the preference option

Strongly Agree - SA, Strongly Disagree- SD, Agree - A Disagree - D

S/N		SA	A	D	SD
1	Early childhood educators play a crucial role in identifying potential development delays.				
2	The effectiveness of an early childhood educators is influenced by their training and professional development.				
3	Quality training program are essential to meet the needs of all children.				
4	Early childhood educators receive special training to identify children with special needs.				
5	Early childhood educators training directly impact the development and educational outcome of children with special needs.				
6	Early childhood educators should understand child's development and specific need of children.				

7	Effective Early childhood educators training should integrated theory and practical.				
8	Programs that incorporate hands on training, collaborative learning and mentoring are effective.				
9	Early childhood educators training should cater for diverse cultural background.				
10	Educators should be trained to engage families in the learning process of caring for children with special needs.				
11	Government has made effort to support the training of early childhood educators.				
12	The effort of government to train early childhood educators are limited.				
13	The government provides sufficient funding for early childhood educators training program.				
14	Government support training programs for early childhood educators to address the needs of special needs children.				
15	Government funding for early childhood education impact on the quality and availability of training programs for educators.				
16	Regular meetings are held between the parents and educators to examine the child's improvement.				
17	Educators should learn how to foster partnership that support children with special needs.				
18	It is very easy to involve families in supporting their children with special needs.				
19	Educators should learn how to work with other professional to create comprehensive support system for children with special needs.				
20	Parents are actively involved in evaluating the effectiveness of special education programs.				

