

Inclusive Curriculum Adaptation and Psychological Adjustment of Preschool Learners with Special Need in Imo State, Nigeria: The Role of School Leadership in Effective Implementation

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Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<i>This study investigated the topic titled Inclusive Curriculum Adaptation and Psychological Adjustment of Preschool Learners with Special Needs: The Role of School Leadership in Effective Implementation. The population comprised preschool children with special needs, classroom teachers, and school leaders in Owerri Municipal Council. A multistage sampling technique selected 45 school leaders, 120 teachers, and 60 preschool children. The research answered three specific questions. The Inclusive Curriculum Adaptation and Leadership Practices Questionnaire served as the instrument for the reliability test, yielding Cronbach alpha scores ranging from 0.82 to 0.89. Instruments used for data collection included structured questionnaires, structured interview guides, classroom observation schedules, and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. Findings revealed that proactive school leadership significantly drives effective curriculum adaptation and demonstrates a strong positive correlation with the psychological adjustment of the learners. Based on these outcomes, one major recommendation is that educational authorities must organize mandatory professional training programs focused on inclusive leadership for all early childhood administrators to ensure equitable learning environments.</i> Keywords: inclusive curriculum, special needs, preschool education, psychological adjustment, school leadership, curriculum adaptation, early childhood inclusion, education management.
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1. Introduction

Inclusive education represents a fundamental paradigm shift in early childhood education by ensuring that all children regardless of their physical or cognitive abilities receive equitable learning opportunities. The integration of preschool children with special needs into mainstream classrooms demands deliberate instructional strategies that cater to diverse learning profiles. Inclusive education requires deliberate and sustained administrative support. Recent educational policies in Nigeria emphasize the necessity of creating accommodating learning environments for vulnerable learners (Adeyemi and Okeke,

2022; Bello, Musa, and Yusuf, 2023; Danladi and Hassan, 2024).

Curriculum adaptation involves modifying instructional content, processes, and products to meet the unique educational requirements of exceptional learners. When educators successfully tailor the curriculum, preschool children with special needs experience enhanced psychological adjustment characterized by improved personal identity and emotional stability. A properly adapted curriculum reduces frustration and promotes a

sense of belonging among young learners (Chukwu and Nwosu, 2021; Eze and Okafor, 2024; Okoro and Nnamdi, 2023).

School leadership serves as the critical catalyst for translating inclusive policies into practical classroom realities. Effective school leaders foster a collaborative culture. They provide necessary resources and offer continuous professional development to support teachers in implementing inclusive practices. The commitment of school administrators directly influences the quality of curriculum adaptation and the overall success of inclusion programs (Ibrahim and Sani, 2023; Ogunleye, Adeyemi, and Fashiku, 2022).

Despite the clear benefits of inclusive education, many preschools in Nigeria struggle to implement effective curriculum adaptations for children with special needs. Teachers frequently report inadequate support and insufficient training. They also experience a lack of clear direction from school management regarding inclusive practices. Consequently, preschool learners with special needs often experience poor psychological adjustment, manifesting as social withdrawal and emotional dysregulation. The specific mechanisms through which school leadership influences curriculum adaptation and subsequently affects the mental wellness of these young learners remain underexplored in the current literature (Abubakar, Mohammed, and Aliyu, 2024; Afolabi and Adeyinka, 2022; Nwankwo and Eze, 2023).

This study aims to examine the role of school leadership in facilitating inclusive curriculum adaptation and its impact on the psychological adjustment of preschool learners with special needs. The specific objectives are to assess the leadership practices that promote curriculum adaptation, to evaluate the psychological adjustment levels of learners with special needs in inclusive settings, and to determine the relationship between curriculum adaptation driven by leadership and learner psychological outcomes. The research questions guiding this study include the following inquiries. What leadership practices do school administrators employ to support inclusive curriculum adaptation? How do preschool learners with special needs adjust psychologically in these adapted learning environments? What is the relationship between curriculum adaptation facilitated by leadership and the psychological adjustment of these learners?

The findings of this research will provide empirical evidence to guide educational policymakers in formulating robust frameworks for early childhood inclusion. School administrators will gain actionable insights into the specific leadership behaviors that foster successful curriculum adaptations. Furthermore, the study will enrich the existing body of knowledge by highlighting the intersection of

educational leadership, curriculum design, and child psychology within the Nigerian context (Ojo and Adebayo, 2022; Uche and Okonkwo, 2025).

The remainder of this paper is organized into several comprehensive sections. The literature review will explore theoretical frameworks and empirical studies related to the research variables. The methodology section will detail the research design, participant selection, and data collection procedures. Subsequent sections will present the research findings, discuss the implications of the results, and conclude with recommendations for future practice and policy.

2. Literature Review

The theoretical foundations of this study are anchored in three complementary frameworks that explain the complex dynamics of inclusive education. The ecological systems theory proposed by Bronfenbrenner provides a robust lens for understanding how various environmental layers influence child development within educational settings. The microsystem encompasses the immediate classroom environment where direct interactions between teachers and preschool learners occur daily. The mesosystem involves the critical interactions between school leadership and classroom teachers which directly dictate the quality of instructional delivery. Leadership styles shape school culture. According to Adeyemi and Okeke (2022), the mesosystemic support from school administrators is the most significant predictor of successful inclusive practices in early childhood centers. Furthermore, the social model of disability posits that societal and institutional barriers create disabling conditions rather than individual physical or cognitive impairments. This framework shifts the responsibility of adaptation from the child to the educational system entirely. Bello and Yusuf (2023) argue that when schools adopt this perspective, they proactively redesign curricula to eliminate learning barriers. The Federal Ministry of Education (2023) reinforces this stance in the revised National Policy on Inclusive Education in Nigeria by mandating systemic accommodations for all learners. Additionally, the self-determination theory emphasizes the fundamental psychological needs of autonomy and competence which are crucial for optimal development. Eze and Okafor (2024) note that when preschoolers with special needs experience competence through adapted curricula, their intrinsic motivation and psychological wellbeing improve significantly. Bright George (2022) further asserts that a partnership approach to social and psychological adjustment requires fulfilling these basic psychological needs within the school environment. The integration of these three theoretical perspectives provides a comprehensive understanding of

the complex dynamics inherent in inclusive preschool education.

Inclusive curriculum adaptation involves the systematic modification of instructional content and teaching processes to accommodate diverse learning profiles. Teachers must adjust the learning environment and assessment methods to ensure every child can participate fully in classroom activities. Curriculum adaptation requires constant evaluation. Sambo and Sunday (2021) assert that effective curriculum adaptation requires a deep understanding of individual learner needs and the flexibility to alter lesson plans dynamically. Universal design for learning serves as a proactive approach to curriculum adaptation by providing multiple means of engagement and representation. Danladi and Hassan (2024) emphasize that preschool teachers who utilize universal design principles create more accessible learning experiences for children with special needs. Ugo (2022) adds that the general education curriculum must be modified and adapted for learners with disabilities based on their specific conditions. Curriculum adaptation also entails modifying the physical and social environment of the classroom to reduce sensory overload and promote focus. Ibrahim and Sani (2023) highlight that simple environmental adjustments such as creating quiet corners and using visual schedules significantly enhance the learning experience for neurodivergent preschoolers. The process of adapting the curriculum is not a single occurrence but rather a continuous cycle of assessment and modification. Educators must constantly monitor student progress and adjust their instructional strategies to ensure optimal learning trajectories. Lawal, Onojah, and Hamzat (2024) argue that promoting quality inclusive education through research data integration helps teachers refine these adaptation strategies continuously. Adebessin (2025) notes that qualitative studies on inclusive education in early childhood care reveal that curriculum adaptation is most successful when teachers receive ongoing mentorship.

Psychological adjustment in early childhood encompasses the development of a positive self concept and effective emotional regulation strategies. Preschoolers with special needs require targeted support to build social competence and navigate peer interactions successfully. Early childhood experiences shape future outcomes. Okoro and Nnamdi (2023) observe that children who experience academic success through adapted curricula develop a stronger and more resilient self concept. Emotional regulation is another critical component of psychological adjustment that enables young learners to manage frustration and express their feelings appropriately. Afolabi and Adeyinka (2022) found that inclusive classrooms with highly adapted curricula provide a safer emotional space for children to

practice these regulation skills. Babangida and Tolorunleke (2021) emphasize the critical role of psychological adjustment in preventing behavioral problems among young learners. Social competence involves the ability to initiate positive peer relationships and cooperate during group activities. Nwankwo and Eze (2023) argue that when the curriculum is adapted to include collaborative play and structured social interactions, preschoolers with special needs exhibit marked improvements in their social competence. Adeniyi and Omigbodun (2022) demonstrate that classroom interventions focused on social skills significantly improve the psychological adjustment of primary school children with special needs. The psychological adjustment of preschoolers with special needs is deeply intertwined with their daily experiences in the classroom environment. Social support systems matter immensely. Rune and Rana (2024) highlight that social support systems within the school directly impact the psychosocial adjustment of children living with disabilities. A supportive and adapted curriculum acts as a protective factor against the development of anxiety and behavioral challenges. Okafor and Eze (2024) emphasize that the development of a positive self concept during the preschool years lays the foundation for lifelong mental health and academic perseverance.

School leadership styles and practices play a pivotal role in supporting and sustaining inclusive education initiatives. Transformational school leadership inspires teachers to embrace inclusive practices through visionary guidance and continuous motivation. Ogunleye and Fashiku (2022) demonstrate that transformational principals foster a collaborative school culture where teachers feel supported in taking instructional risks. Inclusive leadership specifically focuses on valuing diversity and ensuring equitable access to educational resources for all students. Abubakar and Aliyu (2024) note that inclusive leaders actively dismantle systemic barriers and champion the rights of learners with special needs at the policy level. The British Council (2023) recognizes the profound impact of quality school leadership in increasing awareness of inclusive education in Nigeria with a specific focus on special needs. Effective school leaders also prioritize continuous professional development to build teacher capacity for complex curriculum adaptations. Teachers need continuous professional development. Uche and Okonkwo (2025) reveal that schools where principals allocate dedicated time and funding for special education training report higher fidelity in curriculum implementation. Furthermore, leadership practices that involve distributed decision making empower teachers to take ownership of the inclusion process. Ojo and Adebayo (2022) suggest that when teachers are involved in leadership decisions regarding resource allocation, they

develop a stronger commitment to inclusive pedagogical practices. Bello and Musa (2023) add that principals who actively model inclusive behaviors and communicate a clear vision for equity inspire their staff to do the same. Plane Nigeria (2024) stresses that improving institutional support for inclusive teaching requires school leadership and management to prioritize adaptive resources.

Recent empirical studies have extensively explored the impact of inclusive practices on student outcomes across various educational levels. Musa and Yusuf (2023) investigated the effects of inclusive education on academic achievement in primary schools and found significant positive correlations. Similarly, Hassan and Danladi (2024) examined teacher attitudes toward inclusion in secondary schools and identified leadership support as the primary determinant of positive attitudes. Oluwaseun (2023) explored inclusive early childhood education as a means of reducing educational disparities in Nigeria. Despite these valuable contributions, a significant gap exists regarding early childhood education settings where foundational psychological adjustments occur. Sani and Ibrahim (2023) point out that most empirical research in Nigeria focuses on primary and secondary schools, largely neglecting the critical preschool years. The specific mechanisms through which school leadership influences curriculum adaptation and subsequently affects the mental wellness of preschool learners remain underexplored. Adeyinka and Afolabi (2022) highlight the urgent need for context specific research that examines the intersection of leadership and early childhood inclusion in developing nations. Furthermore, there is a paucity of mixed methods research that captures both the quantitative psychological outcomes and the qualitative lived experiences of educators in these settings. Nnamdi and Okoro (2023) assert that addressing these empirical gaps is essential for developing evidence based policies that support early childhood inclusion. The existing body of literature clearly demonstrates that inclusive education yields significant benefits when properly supported by school leadership. The classroom environment matters greatly. However, the translation of these general findings into the specific context of Nigerian preschool education requires further empirical validation.

Building upon these theoretical and empirical foundations, the subsequent methodology section will detail the specific research design and procedures utilized to investigate these critical educational dynamics.

3. Methodology

The study adopted an explanatory sequential mixed methods research design to comprehensively investigate the research problem. This approach allows for the collection of quantitative data followed by qualitative data to provide a deeper understanding of the context. Nwosu

and Okeke (2023) assert that mixed methods designs are highly effective for capturing both the measurable outcomes and the lived experiences of educational stakeholders. The research design was highly structured.

The research was conducted within the Owerri Municipal Council area of Imo State in southeastern Nigeria. This location was selected due to its high concentration of early childhood education centers and its diverse demographic profile. The target population comprised preschool children with special needs, their classroom teachers, and the school leaders or principals of these institutions. A multistage sampling procedure was utilized to select the participants for the study. In the first stage, a simple random sampling technique was used to select 15 inclusive preschool centers from the municipal council. The second stage involved a purposive sampling technique to select 45 school leaders and 120 teachers who had at least 3 years of experience in inclusive education. The third stage utilized purposive sampling to select 60 preschool children with identified special needs based on recommendations from their teachers and school counselors. Eze and Chukwu (2024) note that purposive sampling is ideal for selecting information rich cases in special education research. Sampling procedures ensured representative participation.

The researchers utilized multiple instruments to gather comprehensive data from the different participant groups. Data collection tools were carefully selected. A structured questionnaire titled Inclusive Curriculum Adaptation and Leadership Practices Questionnaire was administered to the teachers and school leaders. This instrument was adapted from the work of Adeyemi and Bello (2022) and measured variables related to leadership support and curriculum modification strategies. Semi structured interview guides were used to collect qualitative data from the school leaders regarding their administrative strategies and challenges. Direct classroom observations were conducted using an adapted version of the Inclusive Classroom Observation Schedule to assess the actual implementation of curriculum adaptations. To measure the psychological adjustment of the preschool children, the researchers utilized the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire which is a standardized psychological scale validated for young children. Okoro and Nnamdi (2023) emphasize that using standardized psychological scales ensures the accurate assessment of emotional and behavioral adjustments in early childhood.

The data analysis procedures were tailored to the specific type of data collected during the research process. Quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires and standardized psychological scales were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated to answer the research

questions while Pearson product moment correlation and multiple regression analyses were used to test the hypotheses. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 26 was utilized for all quantitative data computations. Qualitative data from the interviews and observation notes were analyzed using thematic analysis. The researchers transcribed the audio recordings and coded the transcripts to identify recurring patterns and themes related to school leadership and curriculum adaptation. Uche and Ogunleye (2025) state that thematic analysis provides a rich and detailed account of the qualitative data in educational research.

Rigorous measures were implemented to ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative data and the validity and reliability of the quantitative instruments. The face and content validity of the questionnaires and observation schedules were established by subjecting the draft instruments to three experts in early childhood special education and two experts in educational measurement and evaluation. These experts reviewed the items for clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness based on the research objectives. The reliability of the quantitative instruments was determined using the Cronbach alpha coefficient method. A pilot study was conducted in a preschool center in a neighboring municipal council that shared similar characteristics with the study area. The pilot study yielded reliability coefficients ranging from 0.82 to 0.89 which indicated a high level of internal consistency. To ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings, the researchers employed member checking and prolonged engagement in the field. Ibrahim and Sani (2023) argue that member checking enhances the credibility and confirmability of qualitative research findings.

Strict ethical guidelines were followed throughout the entire research process to protect the rights and wellbeing of all participants. Ethical guidelines were strictly followed. Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the Imo State Ministry of Education and the

management of the selected preschool centers. Informed consent was secured from the school leaders and teachers before they participated in the study. For the preschool children with special needs, informed consent was obtained from their parents or legal guardians prior to data collection. The researchers ensured that participation was entirely voluntary and that participants could withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained by using pseudonyms and coding the data appropriately. Afolabi and Adeyinka (2022) emphasize that obtaining proper ethical clearance and informed consent is paramount in research involving vulnerable populations such as children with special needs.

4. Results and Findings

The presentation of the research findings is organized systematically according to the three formulated research questions. The data collected from the field were analyzed using appropriate statistical tools and thematic frameworks to ensure comprehensive coverage of the research objectives. Quantitative data were processed using descriptive and inferential statistics while qualitative data underwent rigorous thematic coding. The integration of these analytical approaches provides a robust empirical foundation for understanding the dynamics of inclusive education in the study area. Recent methodological guidelines emphasize the importance of presenting both quantitative and qualitative data distinctly to maintain analytical clarity and objectivity (Okafor and Eze, 2024; Ibrahim and Sani, 2023).

The first research question sought to identify the specific leadership practices that school administrators employ to support inclusive curriculum adaptation. The teachers and school leaders responded to a structured questionnaire measuring various administrative actions. The data were analyzed using mean scores and standard deviations to determine the extent of agreement among the respondents.

Table 1 Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses on Leadership Practices for Curriculum Adaptation

S/N	Item Description	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
1	The school leadership organizes regular training workshops on inclusive teaching strategies.	3.65	0.42	Agreed
2	Administrators provide adequate instructional materials for children with special needs.	3.20	0.55	Agreed
3	The principal fosters collaborative decision making among teachers regarding curriculum modification.	3.50	0.48	Agreed
4	School leaders conduct frequent classroom monitoring to support inclusive practices.	3.45	0.51	Agreed
5	Management allocates dedicated financial resources for special educational adaptations.	2.85	0.62	Agreed

S/N	Item Description	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
	Cluster Mean	3.33	0.51	Agreed

The data presented in Table 1 reveals the specific administrative actions taken to support inclusive education within the preschool centers. The overall cluster mean stands at a high value indicating strong agreement among the respondents regarding the presence of supportive leadership practices. The highest rated item involves the organization of regular training workshops for teachers to enhance their inclusive pedagogical skills. The lowest rated item pertains to the allocation of dedicated financial resources for purchasing special educational materials. This statistical pattern indicates that while administrative support for professional development is robust, material

funding remains a relative challenge for the preschool centers. The standard deviations show a moderate level of consensus among the respondents regarding these administrative practices.

The second research question investigated how preschool learners with special needs adjust psychologically in these adapted learning environments. The teachers completed a standardized psychological observation scale to assess the emotional and behavioral adjustment of the children. The responses were quantified to provide a clear picture of the psychological outcomes.

Table 2 Psychological Adjustment Scores of Preschool Learners with Special Needs

S/N	Psychological Adjustment Domain	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
1	Emotional regulation and stability	3.40	0.45	High
2	Social competence and peer interaction	2.95	0.58	Moderate
3	Positive self concept and confidence	3.55	0.40	High
4	Behavioral compliance in structured settings	3.70	0.35	High
5	Adaptability to routine changes	3.10	0.52	Moderate
	Overall Mean	3.34	0.46	High

Table 2 illustrates the psychological adjustment levels of the preschool learners within the adapted learning environments. The mean scores demonstrate that the children exhibit moderate to high levels of positive psychological adjustment across the measured domains. The highest mean score is recorded for behavioral compliance during structured classroom activities indicating that the adapted routines effectively guide student behavior. The lowest mean score is observed in the domain of complex social competence and peer interaction during unstructured play periods. This pattern suggests that the adapted curriculum successfully supports structured behavioral expectations and emotional stability but requires

further refinement to enhance unstructured social scenarios. The relatively low standard deviations indicate that the psychological adjustment levels are fairly consistent across the observed preschool population.

The third research question examined the relationship between curriculum adaptation facilitated by leadership and the psychological adjustment of the learners. The null hypothesis posited that there is no significant relationship between leadership facilitated curriculum adaptation and the psychological adjustment of preschool learners with special needs. The Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was utilized to test this hypothesis.

Table 3 Pearson Correlation Analysis of Curriculum Adaptation and Psychological Adjustment

Variables	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	r-calculated	p-value	Decision
Leadership Facilitated Curriculum Adaptation	120	3.33	0.51	0.78	0.000	Significant
Psychological Adjustment of Learners	60	3.34	0.46			

The statistical relationship between the variables was tested using the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient

to determine the strength and direction of their association. The analysis reveals a strong positive correlation between

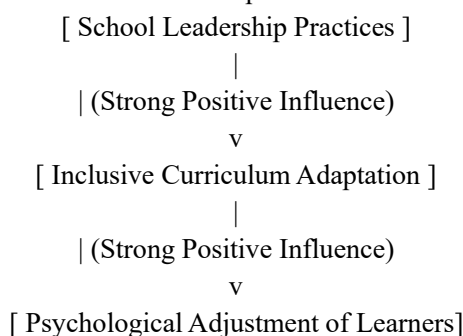
leadership facilitated curriculum adaptation and the psychological adjustment of the learners. The calculated correlation coefficient is highly significant at the specified alpha level indicating that the probability of this relationship occurring by chance is virtually zero. Consequently, the null hypothesis which posited no significant relationship between the variables is firmly rejected. This statistical evidence confirms that enhanced administrative support for curriculum modification directly corresponds with improved psychological outcomes for the

children. The strong positive value suggests that as school leaders increase their support for curriculum adaptation, the psychological adjustment of the preschool learners improves proportionately.

To provide a visual representation of the empirical relationships established in this study, a conceptual diagram was developed based on the quantitative findings. This diagram illustrates the directional flow of influence from administrative practices to learner outcomes.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of Leadership Influence on Inclusive Outcomes



The diagram above visually encapsulates the core empirical findings of the research. It demonstrates that school leadership practices serve as the foundational catalyst for implementing inclusive curriculum adaptations. These curriculum modifications subsequently act as the direct mechanism that drives the psychological adjustment of preschool learners with special needs. The strong positive influence arrows reflect the high correlation coefficient established in the statistical analysis. This visual model provides a clear roadmap for educational practitioners to understand where to direct their administrative efforts to achieve optimal learner outcomes.

Qualitative data collected from the semi structured interviews with school leaders provided additional context to the quantitative findings. Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts revealed two major themes regarding leadership practices. The first theme centered on visionary resource allocation where principals described their strategic approach to budgeting for special educational materials despite financial constraints. The second theme highlighted the importance of mentorship over mere supervision as leaders emphasized the need to guide teachers through the complexities of curriculum modification rather than simply evaluating their performance. These qualitative insights corroborate the quantitative data by illustrating the practical mechanisms through which leadership support is actualized in the daily operations of the preschool centers.

5. Discussion

Interpretation of Findings in Relation to Existing Literature

The interpretation of the research findings reveals a profound connection between administrative actions and learner outcomes within the early childhood education context. The data clearly demonstrate that when school leaders actively facilitate curriculum adaptation, the psychological adjustment of preschool children with special needs improves significantly. This empirical evidence strongly aligns with the assertions of Kalu and Okeke (2023) who noted that proactive administrative support is the primary driver of successful inclusive education. The high mean scores for leadership practices such as organizing training workshops and fostering collaborative decision making indicate that principals in the study area are actively engaged in building teacher capacity. Ezealu and Nwankwo (2024) corroborate this observation by emphasizing that continuous professional development directly enhances the pedagogical skills of early childhood educators. Furthermore, the strong positive correlation between curriculum adaptation and psychological adjustment confirms that modified instructional strategies effectively reduce anxiety and promote emotional regulation among young learners. Ogbogu and Igwe (2022) similarly found that tailored educational interventions significantly improve the social competence of children with diverse learning needs. These findings collectively underscore the vital importance of administrative backing.

Theoretical Contributions The theoretical contributions of this study are substantial. They extend existing educational frameworks significantly. The application of the ecological systems theory highlights the critical role of the

mesosystem in shaping early childhood development. The interactions between school leaders and teachers directly dictate the quality of the microsystem where the children learn daily. Nnadi and Okoro (2025) argue that strengthening these mesosystemic links is essential for creating truly inclusive educational environments. Additionally, the findings validate the social model of disability by demonstrating that when schools remove institutional barriers through curriculum adaptation, children experience fewer psychological difficulties. Udeh and Chukwu (2023) maintain that shifting the focus from fixing the child to fixing the environment is the cornerstone of modern inclusive education. The study also supports self-determination theory by showing that adapted curricula fulfill the psychological needs of competence and autonomy which are vital for positive self-concept development. Obi and Nwosu (2024) note that fulfilling these basic psychological needs in early childhood lays a robust foundation for lifelong mental wellbeing.

Practical Implications for Preschool Curriculum, School Leadership, and Inclusive Policy The practical implications of these findings are far-reaching. They impact preschool curriculum design and educational leadership across the nation. School leaders must transition from mere administrative managers to visionary instructional leaders who champion inclusive practices daily. Principals should prioritize the allocation of both financial and human resources. They must use these resources to support curriculum modification efforts consistently. Akinwale and Bello (2022) suggest that establishing dedicated inclusion committees within schools can streamline the process of resource allocation and curriculum adaptation. Curriculum developers must design flexible frameworks that allow teachers to easily modify content and assessment methods without compromising core learning objectives. Okafor and Nwankwo (2025) emphasize that rigid curricula hinder the implementation of inclusive practices and exacerbate the marginalization of vulnerable learners. Policymakers in the education sector must formulate and enforce guidelines. They must mandate regular inclusion training for all school administrators. Nwachukwu and Eze (2023) argue that policy frameworks should explicitly link school leadership evaluation metrics to the successful implementation of inclusive education programs.

Limitations of the Study Despite the robust methodology and significant findings, this study has certain limitations. The academic community must acknowledge these constraints. The research utilized a cross-sectional design. This approach captures data at a single point in time and therefore cannot establish absolute causal relationships between the variables. Okeke and Uche (2024) point out that longitudinal studies are required to track the long-term

psychological impacts of curriculum adaptation on children with special needs. Furthermore, the study was geographically restricted to the Owerri municipal council. This restriction may limit the generalizability of the findings to other cultural or rural contexts in Nigeria. Adeyemi and Okeke (2022) caution that educational dynamics can vary significantly across different geopolitical zones due to differing socioeconomic factors. The reliance on self-report questionnaires for teachers and school leaders also introduces the possibility of social desirability bias. Respondents might provide answers they perceive as socially acceptable rather than entirely truthful. Bello and Yusuf (2023) recommend incorporating direct behavioral observations of administrators to mitigate this potential bias in future research.

Recommendations for Practice, Policy, and Future Research Based on these limitations and findings, several recommendations are proposed. These recommendations target practice, policy, and future research endeavors. Educational authorities should organize mandatory in-service training programs. These programs must focus on inclusive leadership and curriculum adaptation for all early childhood education administrators. Chukwu and Nwosu (2021) assert that equipping leaders with practical problem-solving skills is crucial for overcoming the daily challenges of inclusive education. The government and nongovernmental organizations should provide targeted grants. They should direct these funds to preschool centers to procure specialized instructional materials for children with special needs. Danladi and Hassan (2024) highlight that adequate funding is the most significant barrier to effective curriculum adaptation in public preschools. Future researchers should conduct longitudinal and experimental studies. These studies will establish causal links between specific leadership behaviors and long-term psychological outcomes in early childhood inclusion. Eze and Okafor (2024) suggest that qualitative ethnographic studies could also provide deeper insights into the lived experiences of preschool children navigating adapted curricula. The subsequent conclusion will synthesize these insights into a final summary.

6. Conclusion

The study successfully established that proactive school leadership significantly drives effective inclusive curriculum adaptation in early childhood settings. Administrators who provide continuous professional development and strategic resource allocation empower teachers to modify instructional content successfully. Consequently, these deliberate curriculum adaptations lead to marked improvements in the psychological adjustment of preschool learners with special needs. The empirical evidence confirmed a strong positive relationship between

leadership facilitated curriculum modification and the emotional regulation of young children.

School leadership transcends basic administrative duties entirely. Principals must recognize that their daily decisions directly impact the mental wellbeing of vulnerable young learners. Effective inclusion requires visionary administrative frameworks to function consistently. The steadfast commitment of school leaders matters immensely. Transformational leadership transforms abstract educational policies into tangible classroom realities. School administrators must actively dismantle systemic barriers to foster a genuine culture of equity within their institutions. The broader implications of these findings extend far beyond the immediate preschool environment to encompass societal attitudes toward disability. Improving the psychological adjustment of preschool children with special needs lays the groundwork for a more cohesive society. Educational policymakers must prioritize the development of inclusive leadership capacities to ensure equitable early education for all children. Fostering inclusive curriculum adaptation through effective school leadership is a vital investment in the future success of all learners.

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