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Assessment of Special Needs Teacher Educators' Knowledge Level and Utilization of Innovative Psychological Techniques in Classroom Management

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ABSTRACT
This study assessed the knowledge level and utilization of innovative psychological techniques in classroom management among special needs teacher educators in public universities in South-East Nigeria. The study was guided by two research questions and adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised 120 special needs teacher educators, from which a sample of 92 respondents was selected using the Taro Yamane formula and a multistage sampling technique. Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled Soecial Needs Teacher Educators' Knowledge and Utilization of Innovative Psychological Techniques Questionnaire (SNTEKUIPTQ). The instrument was validated by experts in Educational Psychology, Measurement and Evaluation, and Special Needs Education, while its reliability was established using the Cronbach Alpha method, yielding an overall reliability coefficient of 0.84. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The findings revealed that Special Needs teacher educators possessed a very high level of knowledge of innovative psychological techniques in classroom management (Grand Mean = 3.52, SD = 0.69). The study further showed that they utilized these techniques to a high extent (Grand Mean = 3.29, SD = 0.75). The study concluded that special nneds teacher educators have adequate knowledge and make substantial use of innovative psychological techniques, thereby promoting effective classroom management, improved students' behaviour, enhanced learning outcomes, and stronger teacher-student relationships. The study recommended regular professional development programmes, curriculum review, and increased institutional support to strengthen the effective application of innovative psychological techniques in teacher education.

Keywords: Special Needs Teacher Educators, Innovative Psychological Techniques, Classroom Management, Knowledge Level, Utilization, Teacher Education.

INTRODUCTION

Education is widely recognized as a fundamental process through which individuals acquire knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary for personal development and societal progress. It is a lifelong process that shapes human behaviour and prepares individuals for effective participation in social, economic, and political life. UNESCO (2021) describes education as a basic human right and a key driver of sustainable development, social transformation, and global citizenship. In a broader sociological sense, Durkheim (1956) explains education as a mechanism through which society transmits its norms, values, beliefs, and culture from one generation to another. This suggests that education plays a crucial role in maintaining social order and ensuring continuity of societal expectations. Similarly, Bruner (1960) views education as an active process of discovery in which learners construct knowledge through engagement and interaction with their environment, rather than passive reception of information. Education is a process through which individuals acquire knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary for personal and societal development. The achievement of educational goals largely depends on the effectiveness of teachers in creating a conducive learning environment and innovative activities that enhance classroom management.

Classroom management according to Dooloard (2024) is the action a teacher takes to create an environment that supports and facilitates instructions, academic, social and emotional learning. It is the process of creating favourable conditions to facilitate instructions as well as that of regulating social behaviour of students. Duke (1979) viewed classroom management as the provisions and procedures necessary to establish and maintain an environment in which instruction and learning can occur. Classroom management according to David (1996) involves a positive classroom environment, appropriate standards of behaviors for students, effective management of daily routines and instructions, and engaging the students in classroom activities throughout the lessons to ensure quality education. Classroom management include all the efforts teachers make in the following areas, organizing the students, co-coordinating their activities, monitoring their behaviours, ensuring effective learning process, providing instruction through interactive communication, getting feedbacks from learners, preparing and utilizing instructional materials in facilitating learning, maintaining discipline among learners, evaluating learning outcome, ensuring that the problems of above average learners are being solved, relating on one to one basis with learners, being mindful of their basic needs, providing basic information to learners, assisting learners in developing coping skills, providing an exemplary behaviour for learners to imitate, and generating interest among learners as well as reinforcing their performance through motivational techniques (Egbule, 2005). Classroom management is the process of enhancing the learning environment, physical interaction between teachers and students, student to student, parents and others, stimulating and motivating children to learn to learning objectives, control and supervise throughout the school to facilitate and encourage co-operation in teaching and learning activities in the classroom smoothly, will as a result, improve the quality of student's performance (Wisetrinthong, Sirisuthi & Weangsamoot, 2012).

Classroom management, therefore, could be seen as an integrant part of effective teaching which deters behaviour problems through good planning, organizing and managing of classroom activities, good presentation of instructional materials and good teacher-student interaction aiming at increasing students' involvement and co-operation in learning to ensure quality education. Classroom management is an art and a science with many identifiable characteristics that result in smooth periods of learning, flexible enough to recognize what is needed and has the ability to keep control of the situation(s) that arises. Classroom management is a critical component of teaching effectiveness because it influences students' academic achievement, social development, and classroom behaviour. Effective classroom management involves the use of appropriate strategies and techniques to establish order, maintain discipline, and promote meaningful learning experiences. Classroom management involves the application of psychological principles to promote positive behaviour, enhance learning, and create a conducive learning environment. Okoye (2020) emphasized the use of innovative psychological techniques in classroom management. These approaches help teachers address classroom challenges proactively while promoting learners' academic and social development. Some of the major psychological techniques include:

Positive Reinforcement: Positive reinforcement refers to the use of rewards or positive consequences to increase the likelihood that a desired behaviour will be repeated. In classrooms, this may include praise, tokens, or privileges when students perform well. Research shows that positive reinforcement improves student engagement and academic performance by strengthening desirable behaviours (Skinner, 1953; Simonsen et al., 2008).

Motivation: Motivation is the internal or external drive that initiates and sustains behaviour toward achieving goals. It can be intrinsic (interest, enjoyment) or extrinsic (grades, rewards). Self-Determination Theory explains that autonomy, competence, and relatedness enhance student motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Motivated students show higher persistence and achievement (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Behaviour Modification: Behaviour modification is a systematic approach to changing behaviour using learning principles such as reinforcement, punishment, and shaping. According to applied behaviour analysis, structured interventions significantly reduce disruptive behaviour and improve learning outcomes (Cooper et al., 2020).

Modeling: Modeling is a learning process where individuals learn by observing others' behaviour and its consequences. Bandura's Social Learning Theory emphasizes that students imitate teachers and peers, especially when behaviours are rewarded (Bandura, 1986). Modeling improves skill acquisition and moral development.

Effective Communication: Effective communication involves clear, respectful, and purposeful exchange of information between teachers and students. Research indicates that teacher clarity and feedback improve student achievement and classroom engagement (Hattie, 2009). Communication reduces misunderstanding and enhances learning.

Classroom Rules and Expectations: Classroom rules are structured guidelines that define acceptable behaviour, while expectations outline desired academic and social conduct. Consistent rules improve classroom order and academic performance (Emmer & Sabornie, 2015). Clear expectations reduce behavioural problems and increase learning time.

Group Dynamics and Cooperative Learning: Group dynamics refer to interactions among students in a group, while cooperative learning involves structured group work to achieve shared goals. Johnson and Johnson (2009) found that cooperative learning improves academic achievement, social skills, and peer relationships.

Cognitive Restructuring: Cognitive restructuring is a psychological technique that helps individuals identify and change negative or irrational thoughts. In education, it improves student self-esteem and reduces anxiety, enhancing academic performance (Beck, 2011).

Self-Regulation Techniques: Self-regulation refers to students' ability to manage their thoughts, emotions, and behaviours to achieve learning goals. Zimmerman (2002) shows that self-regulated learners perform better academically due to goal setting, monitoring, and reflection.

Emotional Support and Counseling: Emotional support involves providing empathy, care, and guidance to students facing academic or personal challenges.School counseling improves students' mental health and academic success (ASCA, 2021). Emotional support enhances resilience and motivation.

Building Positive Teacher–Student Relationships: This refers to developing trust, respect, and emotional connection between teachers and students. Research shows that positive teacher–student relationships improve engagement, behaviour, and academic achievement (Roorda et al., 2011). Warm relationships reduce dropout rates.

Research has shown that teachers' classroom management knowledge significantly influences their instructional effectiveness and students' learning outcomes. Recent studies indicate that effective classroom management requires evidence-based psychological strategies, strong teacher self-efficacy, positive teacher-student relationships, and proactive behaviour management approaches. Furthermore, teacher educators are expected to possess adequate knowledge of contemporary classroom management practices to equip future teachers with the necessary competencies for managing diverse classroom situations. Empirical evidence consistently shows that positive reinforcement significantly improves students' classroom behaviour and academic engagement. Karlberg et al. (2024) conducted a quasi-

experimental study on School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SW-PBIS) and found that structured reinforcement systems improved classroom climate, reduced disruptive behaviour, and increased student participation in learning activities. Similarly, Owens et al. (2022) reported that teachers who increased the use of praise and positive feedback experienced higher levels of student engagement and reduced behavioural disruptions. These findings suggest that reinforcement strategies create a supportive learning environment that enhances students' motivation and academic performance. Atiku et al. (2022) conducted a quasi-experimental study on secondary school chemistry students and found that learners exposed to behaviour modification strategies performed significantly better academically than those in conventional classrooms. In addition, Djamnezhad et al. (2025) found that structured behavioural interventions, such as the Good Behaviour Game, significantly reduced disruptive behaviour and improved attention and task completion among students. These findings confirm that behaviour modification enhances classroom discipline, which directly supports improved academic achievement. Classroom management is a key determinant of teaching effectiveness and student success. Putra and Yanto (2025), in a meta-analysis of 14 studies, found that effective classroom management strategies significantly improve students' academic performance across different educational contexts. Lockwood et al. (2015) also confirmed that classroom management is one of the strongest predictors of student achievement, alongside instructional quality. Their study emphasized that well-managed classrooms provide more instructional time and better learning conditions, leading to higher academic outcomes. Cooperative learning has been widely recognized as an effective instructional and psychological strategy for improving student learning outcomes. Johnson and Johnson (2009) reported that cooperative learning significantly enhances academic achievement, interpersonal relationships, and student engagement. Further empirical findings in Contemporary Educational Psychology (2022) revealed that students engaged in cooperative learning environments demonstrate higher cognitive and emotional engagement compared to those in traditional teacher-centered classrooms. This indicates that group dynamics and peer interaction play a crucial role in academic success. Positive teacher–student relationships have a strong influence on student academic achievement and engagement. Roorda et al. (2011), in a meta-analysis, found that supportive and emotionally positive teacher–student relationships significantly improve academic performance and school engagement. Emotional support also contributes to better learning outcomes. The American School Counselor Association (2021) reported that emotional counseling and support services improve students' psychological well-being, reduce anxiety, and enhance concentration in academic tasks. These findings highlight the importance of emotional connection in effective classroom management. Self-regulation is an important psychological technique that enables learners to take control of their own learning processes. Zimmerman (2002) found that self-regulated learners perform better academically because they are able to set goals, monitor their progress, and evaluate outcomes effectively. Cognitive restructuring is another psychological intervention that improves student performance by addressing negative thought patterns. Beck (2011) explained that cognitive restructuring reduces anxiety and improves academic confidence, thereby enhancing students' ability to perform in challenging academic tasks. Motivation plays a central role in determining students' academic success. Deci and Ryan (2000) found that students who experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness demonstrate higher intrinsic motivation and academic achievement. Wilkinson et al. (2026) further confirmed that instructional choice increases student motivation, engagement, and self-regulation. Allowing students to make choices in learning tasks promotes autonomy and reduces off-task behaviour, leading to improved academic outcomes. Modeling is a psychological technique that allows students to learn by observing teachers and peers. Bandura (1986) emphasized that observational learning is essential in developing cognitive and behavioural skills. Teachers who demonstrate learning processes effectively enhance student understanding and skill acquisition. Effective communication is also essential in classroom management. Hattie (2009) found that clear instructional communication and feedback significantly improve student achievement. When teachers communicate expectations clearly, students are more likely to understand tasks and perform better academically.

Despite the growing importance of innovative psychological techniques in classroom management, observations suggest that some mathematics teacher educators may still rely heavily on traditional disciplinary approaches. This situation may limit the development of effective classroom management skills among pre-service teachers. Therefore, there is a need to assess the knowledge level of special needs teacher educators regarding innovative psychological techniques in classroom management.

Statement of the Problem

Classroom management remains one of the most challenging aspects of teaching and learning. The increasing diversity of learners, technological advancements, behavioural challenges, and changing educational demands require teachers to adopt innovative psychological techniques for effective classroom management. Special Needs teacher educators are expected to possess adequate knowledge of these techniques to prepare future special needs teachers for contemporary classroom realities. However, evidence suggests that many teacher preparation programmes continue to emphasize traditional classroom management approaches rather than innovative psychological strategies. Consequently, some mathematics teacher educators may possess inadequate knowledge of contemporary psychological techniques such as emotional intelligence, self-regulation, positive reinforcement, social-emotional learning, and collaborative learning strategies. This inadequacy may negatively affect the quality of teacher preparation and classroom management competencies of prospective special needs teachers. The problem of this study, therefore, is to assess the knowledge level of special needs teacher educators on innovative psychological techniques in classroom management.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to assess special Needs teacher educators' knowledge level on use innovative psychological techniques in classroom management. Specifically, the study seeks to:

i. Determine special needs teacher educators' knowledge level on innovative psychological techniques in classroom management.
ii. To find out the extent special needs teacher educators' utilization level of innovative psychological techniques in classroom management.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the knowledge level of special needs teacher educators on innovative psychological techniques in classroom management?
2. To what extent special needs teacher educators utilize innovative psychological techniques in classroom management.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to collect data from mathematics teacher educators regarding their knowledge level and utilization of innovative psychological techniques in classroom management without manipulating any variable. The survey design provided an opportunity to obtain opinions and factual information from respondents concerning the phenomenon under investigation. The population of the study comprised all 120 Special Needs Teacher Educators Faculties of Education in public universities in South-East Nigeria. The estimated population consisted of 120 special needs teacher educators. A sample size of 92 special needs teacher educators was selected for the study using the Taro Yamane formula. A multistage sampling technique was adopted. Firstly, purposive sampling was used to select institutions offering special needs Education programmes. Secondly, proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to select respondents from each institution to ensure adequate representation. The instrument used for data collection was a researcher-developed questionnaire titled: “Speecial Needs Teacher Educators’ Knowledge and Utilization of Innovative Psychological Techniques Questionnaire (SNTEKUIPTQ)” The questionnaire consisted of two sections: Section A: Demographic information of respondents while Section B: Items on knowledge level and utilization of innovative psychological techniques such as: Positive Reinforcement, Motivation, Behaviour Modification, Modeling, Effective Communication,

Classroom Rules and Expectations, Group Dynamics and Cooperative Learning, Cognitive Restructuring, Self-Regulation Techniques, Emotional Support and Counseling, Building Positive Teacher–Student Relationships. The questionnaire was structured on a four-point Likert scale: Knowledge Level Scale, Very High Knowledge (VHK) = 4, High Knowledge (HK) = 3 Moderate Knowledge (MK) = 2 and Low Knowledge (LK) = 1. Utilization Scale. Very High Extent (VHE) = 4 High Extent (HE) = 3, Low Extent (LE) = 2, Very Low Extent (VLE) = 1. The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by three experts: one expert in Educational Psychology, one expert in Measurement and Evaluation, and one expert in Special needs Education from Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri. Their observations and suggestions were incorporated in producing the final version of the instrument. The reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot test conducted among 20 special needs teacher educators outside the study area. Data obtained were analyzed using Cronbach Alpha Statistics. Reliability coefficients of 0.82 for knowledge level and 0.86 for utilization level were obtained, yielding an overall reliability coefficient of 0.84, indicating that the instrument was reliable for the study. The researcher administered the questionnaire directly to the respondents with the assistance of two trained research assistants. The questionnaires were collected immediately after completion to ensure a high return rate. Data collected were analyzed using Mean and Standard Deviation. The decision rule was based on the criterion mean of 2.50: Mean Range Interpretation 3.50 – 4.00 Very High**,** 2.50 – 3.49**.** High 1.50 – 2.49**,** Moderate/Low**,** 1.00 – 1.49 Very Low Mean was used to answer the research questions while standard deviation was used to determine the closeness of respondents' opinions.

RESULTS

Research Questions one: *What is the knowledge level of special needs teacher educators on innovative psychological techniques in classroom management.*

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation on knowledge level of special needs teacher educators on innovative psychological techniques in classroom management.

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	Positive Reinforcement	3.62	0.65	Very high
2	Motivation:	3,54	0.71	Very high
3	Behaviour Modification	3.48	0.68	high
4	Modeling	3.45	0.72	high
5	Effective Communication	3,71	0,60	Very high
6	Classroom Rules and Expectations	3.59	0.63	Very high
7	Group Dynamics and Cooperative Learning	3.41	0.76	high
8	Cognitive Restructuring	3.22	0.81	high
9	Self-Regulation Techniques:	3.27	0.81	high
10	Emotional Support and Counseling	3.56	0.67	Very high
11	Building Positive Teacher–Student Relationships	3.78	0.59	Very high
	Grand Mean	**3.52**	**0.69**	**Very high**

The result showed a grand mean of 3.52, indicating that special needs teacher educators utilized innovative psychological techniques in classroom management to a high extent.

Research Question 2: *To what extent special needs teacher educators utilize innovative psychological techniques in classroom management.*

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation on knowledge level of special needs teacher educators on innovative psychological techniques in classroom management.

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	Positive Reinforcement	3.40	0.72	High extent
2	Motivation:	3.28	075	High extent
3	Behaviour Modification	3.14	0.80	High extent
4	Modeling	3.20	0.76	High extent
5	Effective Communication	3.60	0.68	Very high extent

6	Classroom Rules and Expectations	3.47	0.70	High extent
7	Group Dynamics and Cooperative Learning	3.12	0.82	High extent
8	Cognitive Restructuring	2.95	0.85	High extent
9	Self-Regulation Techniques:	3.05	0.79	High extent
10	Emotional Support and Counseling	3.36	0.74	High extent
11	Building Positive Teacher–Student Relationships	3.58	0.66	Very high extent
	Grand mean	**3.29**	**0.75**	**High extent**

The findings in table 2 showed that special needs teacher educators utilize innovative psychological techniques in classroom management to a high extent, with a grand mean of 3.29.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study revealed that special needs teacher educators possess a very high level of knowledge of innovative psychological techniques in classroom management, with a grand mean of 3.52. This indicates that the respondents are well informed about contemporary psychological approaches such as positive reinforcement, motivation, behaviour modification, effective communication, classroom rules and expectations, cooperative learning, cognitive restructuring, self-regulation techniques, emotional support and counselling, and the promotion of positive teacher–student relationships. The high knowledge level may be attributed to the respondents' professional training, teaching experience, continuous exposure to educational research, and participation in academic and professional development programmes. As teacher educators, they are expected to remain updated with emerging classroom management strategies capable of preparing prospective teachers for contemporary classroom challenges. The finding is consistent with the position of Bandura (1986), who maintained that teachers' knowledge of psychological principles enhances effective classroom practices through observational learning and modelling. It also agrees with Ryan and Deci (2017), who argued that knowledge of motivational principles enables teachers to promote learners' engagement and academic success. Similarly, Hattie (2009) observed that teachers who possess sound knowledge of effective communication and feedback strategies significantly improve students' learning outcomes. The finding further corroborates Karlberg et al. (2024), who reported that teachers with adequate knowledge of positive reinforcement create more supportive classroom climates and reduce disruptive behaviours. The result also supports Cooper et al. (2020), who concluded that adequate knowledge of behaviour modification strategies enables teachers to manage classroom behaviour more effectively and improve students' academic engagement. The implication of this finding is that soecial needs teacher educators possess the professional knowledge required to prepare future students teachers to apply innovative psychological techniques for effective classroom management in higher education and school settings.

Also, the findings showed that special needs teacher educators utilize innovative psychological techniques in classroom management to a high extent, with a grand mean of 3.29. The result suggests that the respondents frequently apply positive reinforcement, effective communication, classroom rules and expectations, emotional support, motivation, behaviour modification, cooperative learning, and positive teacher–student relationships during instructional activities. Although cognitive restructuring and self-regulation techniques recorded comparatively lower mean ratings than other techniques, they were still utilized to a high extent. The high level of utilization suggests that special nedds teacher educators appreciate the effectiveness of psychological techniques in promoting classroom discipline, improving students' participation, enhancing learning outcomes, and fostering positive interpersonal relationships. The application of these techniques is likely to create learner-centered classrooms that encourage active participation, critical thinking, collaboration, and emotional well-being. This finding is in agreement with Putra and Yanto (2025), who reported that effective classroom management strategies significantly improve students' academic performance across diverse educational settings. The finding also supports Owens et al. (2022), who found that teachers who frequently used praise and positive reinforcement experienced increased student engagement and fewer classroom disruptions. Similarly, Johnson and Johnson (2009) observed that cooperative learning strategies enhance students' academic achievement, interpersonal relationships, and classroom participation. The finding further agrees with the American School Counselor Association (2021), which reported that emotional support and counselling contribute significantly to students' psychological well-being, improved concentration, and

academic success. In addition, Roorda et al. (2011) found that positive teacher–student relationships promote higher academic achievement, stronger school engagement, and better classroom behaviour. The implication of this finding is that special needs teacher educators are not only knowledgeable about innovative psychological techniques but also integrate them into their classroom practices. This practice is likely to improve the quality of teacher preparation by equipping prospective special needs teachers with practical classroom management competencies required for effective teaching in the twenty-first century.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that special needs teacher educators possess a high level of knowledge regarding innovative psychological techniques in classroom management. The findings further revealed that these educators utilize the techniques to a high extent in managing classroom activities. Therefore, innovative psychological techniques remain valuable tools for promoting effective classroom management, improving students' behaviour, enhancing learning outcomes, and strengthening teacher–student relationships.

RECOMMENDATION

1. Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:
2. Special needs teacher educators should be encouraged to participate regularly in workshops, seminars, and conferences on innovative psychological techniques in classroom management.
3. Universities management should organize periodic professional development programmes to update teacher educators on emerging classroom management strategies.
4. Educational administrators should provide support and resources that will facilitate the effective application of innovative psychological techniques in teaching and learning.
5. Special needs teacher educators should place greater emphasis on cognitive restructuring and self-regulation techniques, which recorded comparatively lower utilization levels.
6. Teacher education curricula should be reviewed periodically to incorporate contemporary psychological techniques required for effective classroom management.
7. Government and educational stakeholders should provide adequate funding for training programmes aimed at enhancing classroom management competencies among teacher educators.

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