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Editorial

Management of Special Needs Education in Nigeria

A cursory look at the philosophy and objectives of special education programme of the various departments of Special Education in Nigeria indicates that the main thrust of their programmes is to imbue students who enroll in the programmes with necessary intellectual and professional skills for managing children with special needs in and out of the classroom. One assumption here is that those who facilitate special needs education in Nigeria are conversant with the unique nature of the child with special needs as well as the emerging trends in special education occasioned by the advent of information and communication technology, the growing population of persons with special needs, harmful effects of drugs and radiation on the unborn child and other forms of malformation and learning difficulties seen in the classroom today.

Unfortunately, many teachers in special needs education still operate in the classroom with 20th century skills. The 21st century classroom should be technology-driven. Digitalised assistive technologies should be liberally deployed in the classroom. We have a responsibility here to unlearn education. Special Need Education in the 21st century should emphasise core areas such as critical thinking, creativity collaboration and communication. There is need therefore to repackage the existing curriculum in special needs education to buy into the orientation of the 21st century classroom.

Facilitators of special needs education should be sponsored to go for re-training in modern arts and science of special needs education in Europe or USA. Such in-service offers may have a validity period of six months or a maximum of one year. In the interim, a few staff may be sent out on a short-term basis of retraining programme and they on their return, retrain their colleagues.

Professional bodies like the National Association for Exceptional Children (NAEC) and Nigeria Association for Special Education Teachers (NASSET) should be able to take up the challenge and persuade relevant authorities to update the skills of serving teachers. This is one veritable way of ensuring that special needs education in Nigeria is managed in line with global best practices.

Ikechukwu Ambrose Nwazuoke, Ph.D
Professor of Special Education
Editor-in-Chief

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Call for Papers

The Editorial Board of *Journal of Special Education* invites articles from willing scholars for consideration and publication in her next issue which will be published in July, 2016.

Guidelines

- (i) Articles should be scholarly, original and written in English language.
- (ii) To accelerate publication of any papers the following editorial instructions and policies should be strictly followed when submitting manuscripts for consideration. They should be submitted in duplicate, typed double spaced on one side of a quarto-size paper and should not exceed 15 pages including references and copied on a CD or flash disk.
- (iii) The cover page of the article should contain the title of the paper, author's name, status and institutional address.
- (iv) Every article should be headed by an abstract of not more than 200 words.
- (v) All tables, graphs and diagrams should be in the appropriate places in the paper and not on a separate sheet. There should be no footnoting.
- (vi) The American Psychological Association (APA) style of referencing should be used.
- (vii) Authors whose articles are found publishable will be required to pay a publication fee of fifteen thousand naira (₦15,000.00) only. A peer review fee of two thousand naira only (₦2,000.00) will also be charged.
- (viii) The Editor-in-Chief will acknowledge receipt of all articles promptly.
- (ix) Relevant adverts would be published as follows:
Full page = ₦20,000.00; Half page ₦10,000.00.
- (x) All manuscripts should be submitted to the Editor-in-Chief.

Editor-in-Chief

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Factors Hindering the Development of Programmes for Children with Learning Disabilities in Lagos State, Nigeria

Kanu, Stella A.

kanustella@yahoo.com

Lazarus, Kelechi U.

ppadaeze@yahoo.com

and

Ikujuni, J. A.

Department of Special Education, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

Abstract

Prevalent problems hindering the development of services for children with learning disabilities in Lagos State, Nigeria necessitated this study. Random sampling technique was used in the selection of 226 participants that comprised teachers and officials of the Ministry of Education in a general survey design. A 14-item questionnaire was the major instrument used in eliciting responses from the participants about factors that hinder the development of learning disabilities programmes. The data was analysed with descriptive statistics. The result showed that three factors namely; unqualified teachers, lack of motivation or incentives for teachers of children with learning disabilities, and scanty monitoring of special education programmes with item mean ratings of 4.62, 4.54 and 4.51 respectively, exerted the greatest negative influence towards the development of programmes for children with learning disabilities in Lagos State. Recommendations for successful development and implementation of programmes for children with learning disabilities were highlighted.

Keyword: *Learning Disabilities, Educational Programmes, Hindrance, Qualified Teachers, Special Needs*

Introduction

Development of effective programmes for children with learning disabilities, a category of persons with special needs has been hindered despite the policy stipulations on providing sustainable education for learners including children and youths with special needs. Ironically, children and youths with learning disabilities constitute the largest proportion of the population with special needs. Special education programmes are still emergent and poorly coordinated in most developing countries. As a result it is not effectively practised and the services have not yet been extended to all categories of children and youths with special needs such as learning disabilities, autism, behavioural and emotional disorders. Children and youths with learning disabilities need specialised educational programmes and instructions that would enable them improve in their studies and general adjustment in life.

Hitherto, most developing countries are yet to implement educational programmes tailored towards meeting the needs of children and youths with learning disabilities. Historically,

special education in Nigeria began during the middle of the 20th century, through the efforts of some white missionaries. Nevertheless, educational provision for children with general special needs is relatively new, while sub-groups like those with learning disabilities are almost non-existent. This probably could be traced to the fact that learning disabilities are often masked by other visible disabilities, because learning disabilities do not show up on people's faces or bodies.

Learning disabilities present in a hidden manner could also account for the indifferent attitude of policy makers in Nigeria towards its development. In Nigeria today, many children with learning disabilities are found in general education classes where little or no extra provision is made for them. More so, parents of children with learning disabilities still experience both physical and psychological stress as a result of their children's "hidden handicap" (Ikujuni & Kanu, 2003; Lerner & Kline, 2006).

It has been observed that the education of children with learning disabilities in this country has not received adequate governmental funding (Agomoh, 2006; Ajobiewe, 2007). Implementation of special education programme is characterised by poor management, inadequate provisions, funds and facilities to run the schools (Ikujuni & Kanu, 2003; Ugwuanyi & Eberechukwu, 2010). A lot of instructional equipment such as computers, books, learning texts, graphic models, software programmes, tape recorder, wall charts and vocabulary-reading series are needed for the training of children with learning disabilities. The high costs of some of these materials make it difficult for some schools to purchase them without any assistance from the government. Without adequate finance, team diagnosis appropriate instruction and therapy for children with learning disabilities will not be achieved, especially for children whose parents cannot afford to pay for special services for their children.

Insufficient number of trained specialist teachers has been reported as another major factor hindering the development of special education programmes in Nigeria. For effective implementation of any programme, staff must be adequate in terms of quality and quantity. Notwithstanding that periodic attendance at workshops, seminars and conferences and provision for in-service programmes will assist teachers of children with learning disabilities in keeping abreast with new development in the field; the issue of inadequately trained teachers is still a threat to the provision of special education in Nigeria. According to Ozoji (1991) most coordinators of special education programmes in Nigeria are not special educators and they lack knowledge of interpreting policies of education as it relates to special education, worst still of utilising special education strategies in training of children with special needs.

The findings of Agomoh (2006) showed that majority of teachers in special schools do not have adequate knowledge of the different types of special needs. Eneku and Oyitso (2001) also revealed that lack of special education teachers, lack of awareness of the benefits of special education to juvenile offenders and absence of structural educational programmes for juvenile offenders are factors that affect services provided by juvenile remand homes in Nigeria. It is however not unlikely that there are many students with learning disabilities in juvenile remand homes in Nigeria.

Learning disabilities as a field in special education has experienced rapid growth in the past few decades. According to literature, students with learning disabilities comprise the largest single category of students with special needs globally (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014; Smith, 2004; Heward, 2003). On the local scene, Omotosho (2001) found that a relatively large proportion of elementary school pupils in Ilorin metropolis manifested clusters of certain twenty-two learning disability behaviours in the classroom. As a result of the heterogeneous nature of children with learning disabilities, educators have developed programmes tailored to meet their specific strengths and weaknesses. Presently, government commitment in development of educational programmes has been very scanty in Nigeria as in other developing countries.

Identifiable varied and multi-dimensional factors plague the development and implementation of programmes for students with learning disabilities in Nigeria and in Lagos State in particular. A close examination of the trend of events in the field of learning disabilities in Nigeria reveals that very minimal attention has been paid to this group of children and youths. Presently, there are no public schools totally directed towards intervening in academic and social problems of children or youths with learning disabilities. Such a well-designed and administered programme would reduce the number of students who experience school failure and school dropout to the barest minimum. Proper administration of learning disabilities programme would signal a successful pathway to effective implementation of Universal Basic Education (UBE).

Another factor crucial to successful implementation of programmes for children and youths with learning disabilities is parental involvement. The development of better working relationship between parents and professionals constitute one of the most significant developments in the field of special education (Heward, 2003). The relationship between parents and professionals determines to a great extent how much progress is made during remediation. Communication between parents and professionals is very important because not all answers to these children's problems can be provided by professionals working with these children without the support of the parents. Therefore, a problem ensues when parents fail to work as a team with professionals working with their children who have learning disabilities.

Additional factors not enumerated above are factors that are resident in the child and those of other societal issues. These can include low self-esteem, emotional deprivation resulting from societal stigma and rejection, negative attitude to study by the child and poor health which manifests in frequent visit to the hospital. The child could also be afflicted by problems such as poor nutrition at home, poor living condition, dirty environment, and inadequate medical facilities. The factors highlighted above have all contributed in no small ways to the inadequate development of functional education programmes for children and youths with special needs learning disabilities.

The aim of the study

It is common knowledge that special education programmes in Nigeria serve only children and youths with obvious disabilities such as visual impairment, hearing impairment, physical disabilities and those with intellectual disability. This exposes the field of learning disabilities to major setbacks, which in fact still exists presently. This is obvious because

many people, including teachers, government officials and professionals in special education, do not fully understand problems associated with learning disabilities. Opinions differ severally among people and groups, tribes and regions, rural and urban settings as to what is hindering the development of services for children with learning disabilities, hence the absence of services. This background therefore necessitates the need to unravel connected factors hindering the development of learning disabilities programmes in the metropolitan city of Lagos.

The main aim of the study, therefore, was to investigate what factors militate against the effective development and implementation of programmes for children with learning disabilities in Lagos State. It also aimed at ascertaining the relative intensity or gravity of occurrence of these factors against the implementation of learning disabilities programmes.

Methodology

This section discusses the methodology adopted for the study.

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey design to conduct an enquiry into what teachers and Ministry of Education officials consider as factors hindering the development of programmes for children with learning disabilities in Lagos State.

Sampling Technique and Sample

Participants in this study comprised 226 teachers and Ministry of Education officials randomly drawn from nine local government areas in Lagos metropolis namely: Kosofe, Ikeja, Ifako-Ijaiye, Lagos Mainland, Alimosho, Ojo, Agege, Mushin and Eti-Osa. One hundred and twenty females and one hundred and six males participated in the research. Their ages ranged from 25-55 years with a mean age of 36 years, while their level of educational attainment was between grade II and Master degree. Their teaching experience ranged from 5-30 years. A fair representation of teachers from primary and secondary schools, and from both private and public schools were used.

Instrument

The major instrument used to collect data was designed by the researchers, it was titled "Factors Hindering the Development of Learning Disabilities Programmes Questionnaire (FHDLDPQ). Section A of the questionnaire sought to obtain demographic data on gender, age, academic qualifications, school type and local government of school in Lagos State. Section B was a 14 - item 4-point Likert-type rating scale designed to collect data on factors that hinder the development of programmes for children with learning disabilities in Lagos State. Section C was an open-ended item. Participants were requested to state their responses to the question in as many sentences as they wished.

Content validity of the instrument was ascertained by the scrutiny of the items by three experts in special education at the University of Ibadan. This led to the restructuring of some of the items. The items were further subjected to a trial-test using respondents who were not part of the study. Data from this trial-test was subjected to statistical analysis using the Cronbach alpha. This showed a reliability coefficient of $r=0.85$.

Procedure for Administration and Data Analysis

The necessary introduction letters to the participants for the study were sent out and permissions were obtained. The questionnaires were distributed and collected within the space of four weeks. Only fully completed questionnaires were collated and used for data analysis. The data was subjected to descriptive statistics.

Results

The data displayed in table one below shows the mean ratings and standard deviation of teachers and Ministry of Education officials' perception of the gravity of factors which hinder the development of programmes for children with learning disabilities in Lagos State. This result shows that the responses of teachers and ministry officials to the fourteen items in the questionnaire were above the upper limit of 2.50. This indicates that all the participants believe that the factors listed below hinder the development of programmes for children with learning disabilities in Lagos State.

Three of these factors were indicated as having the greatest effects. These are: unqualified teachers with item mean rating of 4.62, lack of motivation or incentives for teachers of children with learning disabilities with item mean rating of 4.54, and scanty monitoring of special education programmes with item mean rating of 4.51. The factor identified as source of least hindrance to learning disabilities programmes in Lagos State is poor nutrition within a family (item mean rating = 3.70).

Discussion

The result showed that factors such as unqualified teachers/personnel lack of motivation or incentives for teachers and poor monitoring of special education programmes have the greatest impact on the development of programmes on special education in general and on the learning disabilities in particular. This corroborates findings of Agomoh (2006) and Ozoji (1991). The findings of this study corroborate the observations made by Ozoji (1991) that most coordinators of special education programmes in Nigeria are not special educators and they lack knowledge of interpreting policies of education as it relates to special education, worst still of utilising special education strategies in training of children with special needs. It then implies that improper interpretation of the policies of the government and lack of commitment and will power on the part of the administrators all contribute negatively to the development of viable programmes in learning disabilities in Lagos State in particular and Nigeria in general.

On the issue of inadequate funding, Ikujuni and Kanu (2003) maintain that although the education of children with learning disabilities has not received adequate governmental funding in Nigeria, professionals should not make themselves irrelevant by folding their hands, but they must adopt some collaborative strategies in attending to the learning disabilities. These professionals recommend that learning disabilities specialists should ensure that they carry out demonstration of materials and methods in trial periods with the children, organise case study discussions with the teams, organise in-house seminars and conferences regularly and maintain adequate communication with other professionals. All these will enhance the educational performance of children with learning disabilities.

Table 1: Teacher/Ministry officials' perception of the gravity of factors, which hinder the development of programmes for children with learning disabilities in Lagos State

S/N	Items	Item mean Rating	Item S.D.	Remarks
1	Inadequate funding	4.35	0.79	Agree
2	Low socio-economic class	4.23	0.92	Agree
3	Inadequate provision of medical facilities	4.04	0.99	Agree
4	Poor nutrition within a family	3.70	0.97	Agree
5	Poor socioeconomic status of families			
6	Child always panicking, afraid to study or restless	4.25	0.95	Agree
7	Unqualified teachers/personal	4.62	0.82	Strongly Agree
8	Lack of motivation or incentives for teachers of children with learning disabilities	4.54	0.69	Strongly Agree
9	Low morale or low prestige of specialist teachers	4.30	0.79	Agree
10	Non-availability or insufficient teaching facilities	4.37	0.80	Agree
11	Uncooperative attitude of parents of children with learning disabilities.	4.10	0.95	Agree
12	Non-commitment and uncooperative attitude of teachers to work	3.88	1.18	Agree
13	Societal stigma about children with learning disabilities.	4.10	0.96	Agree
14	Non-involvement of other professionals in the training of children with learning disabilities.	4.37	0.83	Agree
15	Scanty monitoring of special education programmes	4.51	0.86	Strongly Agree

The findings of this study also support the findings of Agomoh (2006) that showed that majority of teachers in special schools do not have adequate knowledge of the different types of special needs. Enuke and Oyitso (2001) also revealed that lack of special education teachers, lack of awareness of the benefits of special education to juvenile offenders, and absence of structural educational programmes for juvenile offenders are factors that affect services provided by juvenile remand homes in Nigeria. Again, administrators of special education have failed to effectively evaluate programmes already carried out. Sometimes, people who have no knowledge of special education have been appointed politically to head special education units. As a result of this lack of knowledge about special needs persons, the

chances of successful implementation of effective programmes for these individuals have become very slim.

Other hindrances include lack of accurate and up-to-date data of children with learning disabilities as well as non-availability of schools for children and youths with learning disabilities in Lagos State. Children with learning disabilities constitute half of the population in public schools. Due to the non-availability of schools for children and youths with learning disabilities, many parents keep their children at home, while those who can afford the fees enroll their children in privately owned centres.

Conclusion

This study concludes that major prevalent factors that hinder the development of programmes for children with learning disabilities in Lagos State are: lack of qualified teachers, lack of motivation or incentives for teachers of children with learning disabilities, and scanty monitoring of special education programmes. Others include non-involvement of other professionals in the training of children with learning disabilities, low morale or low prestige of specialist teachers, societal stigma about children with learning disabilities, child panic-tendency, fear of studying or restlessness, non-availability or insufficient teaching facilities, non-commitment and uncooperative attitudes of teachers to work, inadequate provision of medical facilities, and poor family nutrition.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following strategies are recommended to ensure successful development and implementation of programmes for children with learning disabilities in Lagos State.

- (i) There should be strong government policy including policy on the release of adequate funds to back up development of programmes for students with learning disabilities.
- (ii) Screening and assessment should be carried out in order to identify those who are potential beneficiaries, and also to determine the actual number of children with learning disabilities in the state.
- (iii) There should be sufficient provision of learning materials and special instructional aids to enhance teaching of children with learning disabilities.
- (iv) Concerted efforts should be made to employ well-trained, qualified teachers who are caring and interested in working with children with learning disabilities.
- (v) Teachers should be well motivated and government should provide incentives in terms of promotion, good salary, fringe benefits, and sponsorship to conferences, and workshops/research grants.
- (vi) Parents of children with learning disabilities should be helped to understand the need for parental involvement with the education of their children.
- (vii) Routine evaluation of the implementation processes of learning disabilities programmes in Lagos State should be carried out on a regular basis.

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