

Education inclusiveness among children with learning disabilities in Nigeria: Implications for counselling psychology

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Abstract: Education is seen as the cornerstone of every development forming the basis for literacy, skill acquisition, technological advancement as well as the ability to harness the natural resources of the state. Participants in the World Conference on “Education for All” pointed out that education is a fundamental right of all people, women, and men of all ages throughout the world. Learning disabilities occurs when the learning process is hampered due to problems within the central nervous system which results in an inconsistency between the individual’s intelligence quotient and academic achievement. Education for All programs emanated from UNICEF, UNESCO and the World Bank had some positive results for non-disabled children. School enrollment and literacy rates have risen in almost all countries to date; however the same cannot be said for children with disabilities. Despite the numerous meetings, declarations and encouraging developments that have followed over the years, progress has certainly not matched. The development of education inclusiveness can be viewed in three stages which include segregation, integration, and education inclusiveness. Successful inclusion is less to do with the individual factor such as amount of support for the child; rather, it is the interaction of certain key factors that bring about the likelihood of a more successful inclusion outcome for the child. Varieties of instructional skills which include assessment, communication, management, motivational and evaluation (ACMME) are needed by the teachers to build education inclusiveness. In view of the above, the study stressed that there should be a re-orientation of attitudes of people towards persons with disabilities in the society to reduce stigmatization and discrimination and that counselling psychologists and other educational stakeholders should be trained on the need to strengthen the to enhance the practice of inclusive education.

Keywords: education inclusiveness, children, learning disabilities, counselling psychology

1. Introduction

The importance of education in the total development of children cannot be over-emphasized. Education helps individuals to develop skills, social status and gain access to networks that could lead to enhanced social outcomes, independently from the effect of education on income. Education is globally-accepted as the most viable tool for sustainable human development. It is equally an indispensable tool for enhancing economic growth and national development. Education is seen as the cornerstone of every development forming the basis for literacy, skill acquisition, technological advancement as well as the ability to harness the natural resources of the state. Participants in the World Conference on “Education for All” pointed out that education is a fundamental right of all people, women and men of all ages throughout the world. It helps to ensure a safer, healthier, more prosperous and environmentally-sound world. It is an indispensable key for personal and social improvement. UNESCO (2021) has however pointed out that the

current provision of education is seriously deficient and that it must be made more relevant, qualitatively improved and universally available.

Learning disabilities is a special education category in which individuals who experience it show significant deficits in one or more areas of academic achievement. Learning disabilities occurs when the learning process is hampered due to problems within the central nervous system which results in an inconsistency between the individual's intelligence quotient and academic achievement (Muraina & Hassan, 2022). They also point out that over the past twenty years; the rate of individuals with learning disabilities being placed in special education classes has doubled while rates for other disabilities had remained relatively the same. Globally, children with disabilities experience marginalization within the educational system and also traditionally experience varying forms of discrimination and mainstream society (Imrie and Hall, 2021). Children with disabilities have remained relatively invisible in most government efforts to achieve universal access to primary education (UNESCO, 2021). As a result of all these, many children with disabilities are not reaping the full benefits of education.

Internationally, a growing focus has been placed on inclusion as the key strategy for promoting the right to education, including children with disabilities. Thus, global trends in special education have shifted from the institutionalization of children with disabilities in special schools towards inclusive approaches that enable children to access mainstream educational programs in the communities where they live (Ainscow and Sandill, 2021; Hutchinson and Martin, 2021). Inequality and discrimination in education are major concerns and need to be addressed. For instance the social inclusion of children with disabilities can only begin and be realized when accessibility to education inclusiveness for them is ensured. Historically, from the onset, the needs of children with disabilities were barely acknowledged. The limitations on the educational opportunities available to children with disabilities are one of the considerations underpinning the standard rules on the equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities (United Nations, 2016). This is due to the fact that, children with disabilities form a significant proportion of the out-of-school population and most marginalized within the educational system and the larger society. They experience discrimination, exclusion and segregation from the mainstream and have always been the last to be offered access to education.

The development of education inclusiveness can be viewed in three stages which include segregation, integration and education inclusiveness. The first stage, segregation, is the provision of education for children with various disabilities in separate institutions called special schools. Second integrated education is the provision of education in a mainstream school but for certain number of hours when it is beneficial to them. Integration education could take place with special units situated on the mainstream school (Imrie and Hall, 2021). The final stage, education inclusiveness, emerged as a response to criticism of the first two. The concept of education inclusiveness is a type of education aimed at accepting all children especially marginalized ones in mainstream schools irrespective of their background. However, it is believed that the school system and culture must change to accommodate the child's diverse needs. Hence, this paper concentrates into education inclusiveness among children with learning disabilities in Nigeria: Implications to counselling psychology.

2. Problem Statement

Education for All programs emanated from UNESCO and the World Bank had some positive results for non-disabled children. School enrollment and literacy rates have risen in almost all countries to date; however the same cannot be said for children with disabilities. Despite the numerous meetings, declarations and encouraging developments that have followed over the years, progress has certainly not matched. For example, UNESCO (2021) reports that exclusion from education is particularly more serious among persons with disabilities of whom approximately 97 percent do not have the basic reading and

writing skills. It further states that, most children with disabilities in developing countries are not attending school, and there is no inclusion of those with physical, emotional or learning impairments within the education system. According to World Bank (2021) on disability, approximately one billion people in the world are living with a disability which is 15%, with at least 1 in 10 being children and 80% living in developing countries. It is estimated that 93 million of these are children or 1 in 20 of those aged up to 14 years of age living with a moderate or severe disability. Global statistics on the number of out-of-school or excluded children vary with the source, but evidence suggest that the number is increasing. This paper therefore dwells into education inclusiveness among children with learning disabilities in Nigeria: Implications to counselling psychology.

Discrimination and Stigmatization of Children with Learning Disabilities

Discrimination refers to different forms of treatment meted out to persons as a result of their disabilities, whether intentional or unintentional due to stigma (Hutchinson and Martin, 2021). Hutchinson and Martin (2021) has noted that negative attitudes towards individuals with disabilities can be invisible barriers as persons with disabilities pursue community involvement and community resources geared towards achieving good quality of life. Discrimination as used in this study is any distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of disability which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. It includes all forms of discrimination, including denial of reasonable accommodation. In addition, it says that states must take all legislative and administrative measures to ensure such protection and care is provided for the wellbeing of persons with disabilities. It is common knowledge that, in Nigeria, persons with disabilities suffer greater levels of discrimination (Oyewumi, 2014).

Children with disabilities are widely and frequently discriminated against by other members of society (Hutchinson and Martin, 2021). Therefore, much of this discrimination is noted to be based on stereotypes about physical and mental impairments and disabilities (Baffoe, 2023). Discrimination may lead to societal exclusion, bullying, aggression, ridicule and devaluation of the self-worth of people and these could bring about oppression against such persons in all areas of life including the ability to obtain housing, maintain regular employment, access education, engage in meaningful relationships and enjoy quality of life (Baffoe, 2023).

Stigmatization on the other hand refers to the negative and prejudicial ways in which people living with disabilities are labeled (Agbenyega, 2017). Furthermore, stigma arises from a number of factors. Some of which include superstition, ignorance, lack of knowledge and empathy, old belief systems and a tendency to fear and exclude people who are perceived as different (Agbenyega, 2017; Baffoe, 2023).

Children with disability face intentional and unintentional discrimination from other people and the system. Fundamental to the disability rights movement is the belief that persons with disabilities are widely and frequently discriminated against by other members of society (Imrie and Hall, 2021). Empirical research data indicates that attitudes of individuals without disabilities toward disability tend to be negative unless these individuals have personal relationships with individuals with disabilities or specific disability related sensitivity training (Agbenyega, 2017; Muraina & Hassan, 2022). This is particularly evident in the area of employment (Hazer and Bedell, 2020). Scholars have attributed discriminatory attitudes towards persons with disabilities and beliefs about disabilities to a variety of factors, including aesthetic anxiety (Hahn, 1985), lack of personal contact with persons experiencing disability (Muraina & Hassan, 2022), public health campaigns citing disability as a result of engaging in high-risk behavior or parental behavior during pregnancy (Armstrong and Abel, 2020), and the frequent utilization of public funds by persons experiencing disability.

There is ample evidence to suggest that people with disabilities face discrimination in most spheres of their daily lives (Gleeson, 2021; Imrie and Hall, 2021). The social perception that disability equals inability and, thus people with disabilities are incapable of making a meaningful contribution to national development is one of the many forms of discrimination. Given the effects of discrimination, it can be said that discrimination against children with disabilities in schools could be reduced or eliminated if there is greater knowledge and understanding of disability and the practice of inclusion is achieved (Imrie and Hall, 2021). Generally discriminatory attitudes towards persons with disabilities persist in society because of lack of knowledge and awareness and little, or no, experience of living closely with them. It is difficult to break down these attitudinal barriers, but it is believed that within the right context, children can be more accepting of difference than adults.

On the basis of gender discrimination, disabled boys may be prioritized over girls with disabilities for family expenditure on education, while, in some contexts. The extents to which opportunities for disabled girls and boys differ depend on the cultural, and socio-economic, contexts. Girls with disabilities face discrimination with respect to security and safety, thus girls with disabilities are more vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse. In addition to abuse at home, it can happen in school, or on the way to school. According to Muraina (2023) girls are discriminated against from birth, have lower life expectancy and receive less care, especially if they are disabled. They may be considered an extra burden or cause of despair, and their rights are less likely to be upheld. Available data, mostly focused on literacy, indicate that women and girls with disabilities fare less well in the educational arena than either their male with disabilities or nondisabled female counterparts.

Education Inclusiveness among Children with Learning Disabilities: Implications to Counselling Psychology

Education inclusiveness is defined by UNESCO (2021) as a process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of all learners by increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structure and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the state to educate all children. It addresses common goals of decreasing and overcoming all exclusions from human rights to education, at least at the elementary level, and enhancing access, participation and learning success in quality basic education for all. The philosophy of education inclusiveness has been well accepted but there is lack of clarity about its operational meaning in terms of which groups are to be included and the defining characteristics of schools and classrooms (Muraina, Musa & Kamaldeen, 2023). Ainscow (2016) maintains that schools should focus on increasing the participation and attainment of groups who have historically been marginalized. Bala, Muraina and Sufyan (2018) suggested that meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse learner population effectively, education inclusiveness must be approached as an ongoing and evolutionary process.

More so, Barton (2019) explains that education inclusiveness is not integration and is not concerned with the assimilation or accommodation of discriminated groups or individuals within existing socio-economic conditions and relations. It is not about making people as “normal” as possible. It is ultimately about transformation of a society and its institutional arrangements such as education. Therefore when talking about education for disabled individuals, the topic of inclusion often comes up. Education inclusiveness demands that schools create, support and provide necessary resources to ensure that all pupils have access to education or meaningful learning. This suggests that education inclusiveness should embrace everyone and it is the responsibility of the nation, society and each individual to make a commitment to help provide equitable education to these categories of persons to realise their rights to belong. The principle of inclusion is a step in the right direction in developing the potentialities of persons with disabilities.

Inclusion has its implication for school administration in terms of school planning which includes school policy, organization, practices, teacher training, and curriculum design. Villa and Thousand (2015) provide detailed guidelines on how to involve children with a wide range of disabilities in regular classroom activities. He further acknowledges that inclusive practices involve substantial changes in both attitude and educational approaches, and the achievement of change is difficult. The benefits of special education and ancillary expertise are not in dispute. The point is that they can be applied to children in mainstream settings at least as well as in segregated settings. Barton (2019) further suggested that, inclusion is not just about maintaining the presence of the child in school, but also about maximizing their participation. He believes that education inclusiveness is not an end in itself but a means to an end. Thus it is about contributing to the realization of an inclusive society with the demand for a rights approach as a central component of policy making. However, Barton (2019) believed that education inclusiveness encourages the issue of change to be fore grounded, unlike integration; the change process is not assimilation but transformation of those deep structural barriers to change.

Successful inclusion is less to do with the individual factor such as amount of support for the child; rather, it is the interaction of certain key factors that bring about the likelihood of a more successful inclusion outcome for the child. Children are more likely to be included if the teacher takes a central role in the management of children with disability education and their support. Thus successful inclusion is dependent on how the teacher works with other support staff in the school and curriculum structured in a way to involve the child. In spite of the suggested positive outcomes of inclusion, Wishart and Manning (2016) claimed that, it was increasingly difficult in secondary schools to meet the educational needs of young people with disabilities in a mainstream class. One reason for this assertion according to (Muraina et al., 2023) was that staff often felt they were either not skilled enough or did not have the time to adapt the curricula to accommodate the needs of young people with disabilities. Muraina and Hassan (2022) supported these conclusions stated by Bala et al. (2018) by revealing that young people with disabilities make better academic progress within a mainstream setting even though the differences may only be slight in some circumstances.

Instructional Skills needed by Teachers for Effective Education Inclusiveness

Teachers are those who take care of the educational needs of children in general classrooms, and provide instruction to the children in the schools (Okeke, 2016). A teacher is that person who provides experiences and guidance, designed to promote learning on the part of those engaging in the activities in a general classroom (Muraina et al., 2023). Alpren (2021) views a teacher as a professionally trained individual whose duties is to implement the curriculum in education. In the context of this study therefore, a teacher is a trained person who provides, directs and guides the activities and materials in order to promote learning in a general classroom. The process of teaching by implication involves a teacher to apply strategies and instructional skills in presenting materials to the learners. Instructional skills are therefore necessary for effective learning for both teachers regular and special educator.

Special educators are teachers who teach in persons with special needs. Special educator is teachers who educate students with special needs in a way that addresses their individual differences and needs (Bala et al., 2018). Special educator is teachers who help learners with special needs achieve a higher level of personal self-sufficiency and success in school and their community (Muraina, Umar & Kirti, 2021). According to Herit (2009), special educators are teachers that educate exceptional children and adult to enable them benefit maximally from the educational programmes planned for them. These teachers are trained in such way that they use signs to help the special need children. In the context of this study therefore, special educator is a trained person who provides, directs and guides the activities and materials in order to promote learning of special need children.

Instructions are process of passing information in the classroom. Muraina et al. (2021) define instruction as the implementation of the curriculum plan usually, but not necessarily, involving teaching in the sense of student teacher interaction in a school setting. Bennett and McNomara (2009) see instruction as a process of interaction. Similarly, Muraina (2023) look at the process of instruction as “the pupil-teacher interaction situation”. The conceptions held by both authors imply that in the process of instruction, the teacher does something to the learner in return and as a result of this reciprocal action the students learn. Instructional skills are the knowledge a teacher acquires to effectively interact with the learner (Okeke, 2016). Instructional skills according to Muraina (2023) are the most specific category of teaching behaviours. They are necessary for procedural purposes and for structuring appropriate learning experiences for students. Instructional skills are knowledge and ability which teachers acquire to make their teaching skillful (Shostak, 2016). Instructional skills in this present study therefore are the knowledge and the ability of teachers to instruct, through order, command or direction, requiring the learner to perform certain tasks.

A variety of instructional skills according to Shostok (2016) include: assessment instructional skills, communication instructional skills, management skills, motivational skills and evaluation skills. Assessments are frequently used to sum up a person’s achievement (Knight, 2021). Assessment provides ‘feedout’, in the shape of a warrant to achievement or competence (such as a degree certificate), and in the form of information that can be used as performance indicators in appraising the work of teachers, departments, college and national systems of education (Knight, 2021). Assessments are also used to identify what learners need to do in order to improve their work (Muraina, 2023). Diagnostic assessment, which involves using carefully designed tasks to try and identify barriers to learning, can be seen as a type of formative assessment that is little used in higher education (Knight, 2021).

Assessment according to Muraina (2023) does not mean testing, although tests and examination are ways of assessing. Assessment plans are necessary and, ideally, should be in course handbooks given to students and on the course website that they use communication instructional skills. Communication is the art and process of creating and sharing ideas (Muraina & Hassan, 2022). Effective communication depends on the richness of those ideas communication skills take the basic skills of communication and frame them within a general understanding of how the communication process works when you understand all of the elements involved when people communicate, they can learn to influence not only your own communication, but the communication of others (Muraina & Hassan, 2022). Communication means a systematic way of formulating information, knowledge, ideas, opinions, feelings, among others and passing it over to an audience who successfully interprets (decodes) it and reacts to it. Communication in a language may be in the oral (spoken) or in the written form. Communication skills are the tools that we use to remove the barriers to effective communication (Muraina & Hassan, 2022). A person might experience only one of these barriers at a time, or the person might find himself facing them all.

Getting message to the other person requires that the person recognize these barriers exist between him, and that he then applies the proper tools, or communication skills, to remove those barriers preventing his message from getting through. Communication is a two-way street. The person on the other side of those barriers will also try to send messages back to you. His ability to understand them clearly could be left to a dependence on their ability to use communication skills (Muraina, 2023). Management is an explicit process. It can be taught, and it can be learned. It takes time, dedication, and self-discipline, management is often the difference between success and failure. There are almost as many definitions of management as there are managers.

Management skills consist of identifiable sets of actions that individuals perform and that lead to certain outcomes (Muraina, 2023). Second, management skills are controllable. The performance of these behaviors is under the control of the individual. Third, management skills are developable. Performance can improve. Unlike intelligent quotient or certain personality or temperament attributes that remain

relatively constant throughout life, individuals can improve their competency in skill performance through practice and feedback (Muraina et al., 2021). Individuals can progress from less competence in management skills, and that is the primary objective of this study. Motivation has to do with the internal state or mental and psychological set in an individual which compels, energizes, sustains and directs the individual's activity toward a goal (Ngwoke, 2015). The author also defined motivation as a psychological construct which explains purposive or goal-directed behavior in human beings.

Motivation explains, for example, why some students sweat to pass their examinations, while some students wait for manners from heaven; it explains why an individual perseveres and deprives himself of some pleasures in order to achieve a life goal; motivation explains why some persons who can afford the luxury of doing no work choose not just to stay alive, eat, sleep and grow like vegetable but rather to work for self-competence (Ngwoke, 2015). Muraina and Hassan (2022) include personal characteristics that help students succeed academically by focusing and maintaining energies on goal-directed activities. Motivational skills are knowledge and ability an individual acquires to do certain action (Muraina & Hassan, 2022).

3. Recommendations

There are challenges needed to be resolved to have successful inclusive education practice. The following recommendation has been suggested to address the imbalance in the education system for successful and full implementation of inclusive education.

1. There should be a re-orientation of attitudes of people towards persons with disabilities in the society to reduce stigmatization and discrimination. Change of attitudes in the society is very important because attitudes from the teachers, children and the staff in the school define the meaning and understanding of the situation of children with disabilities in school and society.

2. The parents of children with learning disabilities should be encouraged to institute and provide basic education for the children irrespective of affected disabilities in such child

3. Classroom teachers should ensure skills, methods and strategies that could enhance the learning of students of learning disabilities are put into considerations during teaching, this is because teachers is one of the main facilitators of the practical implementers needed to change beliefs, values and attitudes to promote effective inclusive education.

4. Counselling psychologists and other educational stakeholders should be trained on the need to strengthen the to enhance the practice of inclusive education.

The adolescent psychologists and other educational stakeholders should always intensify their effort to organize seminars and workshops for the teachers, parents, and other significant stakeholders in society towards improved education inclusiveness.

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