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Identification and Teaching of Students with Specific Learning Disability: Counselling Implications

ABSTRACT: This study – using the qualitative approach and literature review – investigates identification and teaching of students with specific learning disability and its counselling implications. The study revealed challenges that are quite universal for teaching learners with developmental disability. The study establishes that learners with developmental disability pose challenges to special needs education teachers. Teachers in this study expressed the need for reduced class sizes, modern teaching materials, motivations to teachers, and additional support services from the government. This study also showed that placement of learners with developmental disability in the inclusive classrooms with ordinary learners is not enough, for example learners with developmental disability at school placed in an ordinary class with no proper support. It is important to make sure that learners with developmental disability receive all the necessary support and services for accessing the curriculum facilities. Lastly, the study suggested that government should give priorities to special case, such as learners with developmental disability; collaboration between special needs education teachers and parents for children with developmental disability is necessary for the wellbeing of their children; and in order to improve the poor learning environment for special needs educational for children with developmental disability, the teachers, parents/guardians, society, and government should work together.  

KEY WORDS: Identification; Teaching; Students; Learning Disability.

INTRODUCTION

Disability is a restriction or an inability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being, mostly resulting from impairment (WHO, 1980; Jones, 2001; and Barbotte et al., 2011). In this context, NCSE (National Council of Special Education), in 2014, stated that special educational needs are defined in this act as:

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A restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health, or learning disability, or any other condition, which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition (NCSE, 2014).

Children with special educational needs are children with a variety of different disability, such as health and mental health conditions that require special intervention, services, or support. Parenting a child with special needs can be particularly challenging (Ainscow, 2016; Adegboyega, 2019; and Kirk et al., 2019).

In order to ensure proper and quality education for children with disabilities, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization), in 2019, elaborated on what an inclusive education system should be; it was pointed that “inclusive” education system can only be created if ordinary schools become more inclusive in other words, if they become better at educating all children in their communities (cf Ferrante, 2012; Ainscow, 2016; and UNESCO, 2019).

Orientation is the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society, and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency, and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system (Minou, 2011; Ainscow, 2016; and UNESCO, 2019).

D.R. Mmbaga (2012), and other scholars, argued that inclusive education needs to be part of the whole school equal opportunity policy; in this case, children with learning difficulties, girls’ and boys’ learning needs would be incorporated into the curriculum and the school-learning environment (Ferrante, 2012; Mmbaga, 2012; and Mortimore & Zsolnai, 2015).

According to J. Weiss, A. Sullivan & T. Diamond (2013), and other scholars, when a child is diagnosed with a certain disability, all the attention is focused upon him. It is very important that parents understand the fact that their children’s progress will come gradually and that they will not be forced to neglect their children, regardless of the problems they are faced with (most important is that all parents accept their children as they are). Some parents are also stressed by the fact that they will have to provide their children with a lifelong support (Townsend & Bates eds., 2007; Weiss, Sullivan & Diamond, 2013; and Mortimore & Zsolnai, 2015).

Children with disabilities will experience some of the following problems throughout their school years. They may be subjected to a multitude of obstacles and barriers, like non-acceptance, discrimination, and stereotypically thinking. In some cases, these children experience
more than their normal share of frustration and difficulty in attempting to resolve the issues that are encountered with daily living activities (Kuper et al., 2014; Soto, Poblete & Blume, 2018; and Maciver et al., 2019).

It is not uncommon for children with disabilities to experience chronic hopelessness as a result of anxiety and depression. Sometimes, they have access and performance problems in schools, which could or could not be related to the disability. Also, they show delayed development of self-concept that can influence one’s sense of self-worth, and viewing one’s self as dumb, damaged, weak, and vulnerable (Cohen, 1986; Alesi, Rappo & Pepi, 2015; and Ogundele, 2018).

Counselling is a helping relationship; the counselling services provided to children with disabilities are significantly outside the average range of general counselling. Many areas of the counselling profession in schools have fallen short, with a lack of understanding and appreciation (e.g. attitudes, values, and beliefs), a limited repertoire of skills (e.g. techniques, strategies, and interventions), and knowledge base. When school counsellors do not provide services or develop programs to accommodate the needs of children with disabilities, they deny these students of their expertise and themselves of the enrichment that comes with working with children with disabilities, who are challenging, deserving, and responsive (Malikiosi-Loizos, 2013; Oluka & Okorie, 2014; and Famolu, 2020).

For the purpose of this study, the researcher identifies developmental disability as a case. The term developmental disability was essentially created by the 91st United States Congress in 1970. Before developmental disability, there was many terms used, which are no longer used today. For this study the term of “Developmental Disability” will be used (cf Parmenter, 2011; Michael, 2013; and Parette & Peterson-Karlan, 2018).

Developmental disability is referred to as an intellectual disability. The AAIDD (American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities) uses the following definition: “Intellectual disability” is a disability characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and in adaptive behaviour, which covers many everyday social and practical skills. “Developmental disability” reflects the fit between the capabilities of individual and the structure and expectations of their environments (Michael, 2013; Tassé, Luckasson & Schalock, 2016; and Parette & Peterson-Karlan, 2018).

Developmental disability is caused by many different kinds of trauma to the developing brain and nervous system. In many cases, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact cause of the damage or time when it occurred. Brain injury, or infection before, during or after birth, growth or nutrition...
problems, and abnormalities of chromosomes and genes. Babies born long before the expected birth date also called extreme prematurity. Poor diet and health care. Drug misuse during pregnancy, including excessive alcohol intake and smoking. Child abuse can also have a severe effect on the development of a child, specifically the socio-emotional development (Connolly, 2006; Michael, 2013; and Tassé, Luckasson & Schalock, 2016).

The general purpose of this study – using qualitative approaches and literature review – was identification and teaching of students with specific learning disability and its counselling implications, to find out what challenges do teachers face, when teaching children with developmental disability; and how do they try to overcome these challenges. The methodology and approaches used by the teachers to teach children with developmental disability (Creswell, 2003; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Udoba, 2014; and Parette & Peterson-Karlan, 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Teaching Approaches and Methodology. Challenges faced by teachers, when teaching children with developmental disability, are: (1) Teaching material; (2) Lack of teacher trained in special needs education; (3) Lack of enough classes and poor learning environments; (4) Curriculum structure; (5) Acceptance in the society; (6) Motivation and poor salary; (7) Expectations from parents; and (8) How they overcome some of the challenges (cf Udoba, 2014; Alias & Salleh, 2017; and Faiz, Arif & Zia, 2019).

The teachers opined that children with developmental disability are just home where they do not learn anything, and have been mistreated by some members of the family. Many were left in the street to wander around. Ordinary children made fun of them by throwing stones at them and calling them names, which are derogatory words that change people’s perceptions about people with disability (Balescut & Eklindh, 2006; Udoba, 2014; and Maturana, Mendes & Capellini, 2019).

Teachers also think that developmental disability is the outcome of epilepsy if this continues for a long time the brain can be damaged. Children with developmental disability are those children, who are mentally handicapped. Many children are born normal, but later due to epilepsy the brain is damaged leading to mental disability. It was explained that all children with developmental disability are given equal opportunity as ordinary students to attend ordinary classes (WHO, 2011; Udoba, 2014; and Maturana, Mendes & Capellini, 2019).

Many children with developmental disability are born this way: they cannot perform as an ordinary person. They have limited ability to learn or
live an independent life; thus, some for the rest of their life will need support in many aspects (Connolly, 2006; WHO, 2011; and Linn et al., 2019).

Teachers understood students with developmental disability as having limitations in learning ability compared to ordinary students; thus, making some of them dependent for the rest of their lives. Developmental disability may be caused by many situations, accidents, problems during birth, cerebral malaria, and genetic disorders (WHO, 2011; Michael, 2013; and Udoba, 2014).

In our society, especially in villages, people believe in witchcrafts, meaning that if somebody has a child with down’s syndrome, it is because she/he has been bewitched. Special need teacher need to educate the society about this, because many people do not understand. Neither of the parents should blame one another for having a child, who has a developmental disability and the good solution to this is to find how to help a child to manage the basics of everyday life (cf Groce & McGeown, 2013; Udoba, 2014; and Paul, 2019).

Developmental disability is delays in child cognitive development due to several reasons, during birth, due to epilepsy, and genetic disorders. She/he gave an example of a child with down’s syndrome, saying that her/his cognitive development is slow compared to an ordinary child. For instance, the development of speech of the two children is very different in many ways (Buckley, 2005; Michael, 2013; and Udoba, 2014).

Teaching Approaches and Methods Used by Teachers. Teachers faced serious problem when teaching. Teaching materials are made locally; thus, the methods and approaches are difficult when they have unclear teaching material. Teachers always struggle with teaching methods. But, some of the methods and approaches used are involvement of parents and guardians regarding their children’s progress, use of peers in the classroom, participatory method in small groups, picture drawings, and approaches of using positive reinforcement. The good teaching approaches and methods are those that make students enjoy the teaching and learning process (Villegas-Reimers, 2003; Townsend & Bates eds., 2007; and Udoba, 2014).

Some teachers normally use teaching methods that help to get the attention of students, use pictures, divide students into small groups, use the reinforcement approach, use physical material that students can see and feel, and also use the approach of including parents (Shinn, 1997; Townsend & Bates eds., 2007; and Hossain, 2015).

With regard to teaching methods and approaches, teachers manage the teaching and learning process in the classroom. Used methods, such as role-plays, songs, and pictures. Some of the approaches uses are such as
team teaching, reinforcement in a positive way, and including the parents of whatever is happening at school regarding the children (Townsend & Bates eds., 2007; Hossain, 2015; and Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

We constantly use the small groups when teaching; dividing students according to their ability of learning. Lastly, teachers also use some sign language to some of pupils, who are not able to communicate verbally, but they understand everything you tell them (Udoba, 2014; Hossain, 2015; and Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

**Challenges Faced by the Teachers.** The challenges are: (1) Related to Teaching Material; (2) Lack of Special Needs Teachers; (3) Lack of Enough Classrooms and Poor Learning Environment; (4) Acceptance in the Society; (5) Expectations from the Parents; and (6) Motivation for Teachers and Poor Salary. The explanations for each section are following here:

Firstly, **Related to Teaching Material.** When explaining about this challenge, teacher had the following to say regarding teaching materials. “If you do not have proper teaching materials, the teaching and learning is very difficult”. We need things like books, nice blackboards, and different good drawings to help the students; chalk and dust boards. Teachers should be creative and find his or her own methods to help the students in class with teaching materials (Townsend & Bates eds., 2007; Shabiralyani et al., 2015; and Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

Secondly, **Lack of Special Needs Teachers.** Potential teachers do not want to specialize in Special Needs Education. This is a big problem in the country; we do not have enough special needs teachers to teach in special schools. This is not a problem with regular teachers in ordinary classes. Government should look into this problem, because many special needs education teachers use their specialization as a stepping stone to get other jobs, which are not related to their profession (Ainscow, 1994; Udoba, 2014; and García & Weiss, 2019).

Thirdly, **Lack of Enough Classrooms and Poor Learning Environment.** Addressing this challenge, teachers had stated the following regarding the lack of classrooms: “We have only one classroom, the same room acts as our office, our store to keep things, our eating room, and our learning space” (Udoba, 2014; OECD, 2018; and García & Weiss, 2019).

Children with developmental disability need enough space to do many activities. Therefore, dividing students into groups according to their ability was crucial. In order to do this, they needed an extra classroom rather than mixing all the children in the same classroom (Ferrante, 2012; Udoba, 2014; and NCD, 2018).

Fourthly, **Acceptance in the Society.** With this challenge, the society treats children with developmental disability. No one is perfect in this
world, and for this reason. “They are humans like you and me, and due to this fact they deserve to be treated right, making fun of them and calling them all sorts of negative names is against human rights”. People should accept these children as members of society (DePoy & Gilson, 2004; Stough, 2009; and Udoba, 2014).

Fifthly, **Expectations from the Parents**. On this topic, the teacher blamed the parents for expecting rapid changes after their children start school. Children with developmental disability cannot progress the same way as ordinary children. They need time to learn and to practice; every child in the class has his or her own difficulties in learning. Their learning capability is much different from ordinary pupils (Healey, 1996; Russell, 2003; and Udoba, 2014).

Sixthly, **Motivation for Teachers and Poor Salary**. Teaching is a hard job to do; it is funny enough that it is one of the lowest paid jobs in this country. “If I am not happy, then, my students will be affected, because my mind will be focused on my situation rather than on them. I have to look to other means to earn money for living rather than waiting for a low salary at the end of the month” (cf Al-Tayyar, 2014; Udoba, 2014; and CEDEFOP, 2016).

Thus, there is need to deal with the needs of students with disabilities properly to avoid the potential future negative results, such as the failure to get a job and social adjustment or even to suicide (Thompson & Littrell, 1998; Fall, Navelski & Welch, 2002; and Milsom, 2007).

F. Wamocho, G. Karugu & A. Nwoye (2018), and other scholars, emphasized that students with disabilities need continues support and guidance, they also need to counselling programs in all their levels and steps, because the students with disabilities often had negative feelings. F. Wamocho, G. Karugu & A. Nwoye (2018), and other scholars, also emphasized that the urgent need to develop counselling programs to face the problems of students with disabilities (Wamocho, Karugu & Nwoye, 2018; Wulz, Gasteiger & Ruland, 2018; and Famolu, 2020).

There are many rapid changes, due to scientific and technical progress, imposed on students with disabilities great challenges to face personal and professional needs. These challenges emphasize the need of students with disabilities at the university to counselling and guidance (Ainscow, 1994; Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2020; and Famolu, 2020).

**Discussion and Implications for School Counsellors**. The results of this study are intended to bring greater awareness to both the school community and to counsellor education programs regarding the role and preparation of the school counsellor in providing services to students with learning disabilities. The results of this study contribute to the knowledge
base of the counsellor’s responsibilities for addressing the needs of all students (Shaterloo & Mohammadyari, 2011; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; and Famolu, 2020).

The counselling needs of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities, the categories of needs expressed by pupils with special educational needs and disabilities were the social, physical and health, emotional, career, and communication needs. The social needs of pupils with special educational needs. Pupils also highlighted various social needs in their interactions with their colleagues, teachers, parents, and siblings (NCSE, 2014; Oluka & Okorie, 2014; and Famolu, 2020).

Reports of rejection, denial of academic support and disrespect from colleagues at the State School for the Deaf put the pupils at risk of inferiority complex, low self-esteem, and lack of respect. The pupils’ further request for their colleagues to help them in their studies, offer them some snacks and even some pocket money further confirmed their dependence on their peers for social development. These results also underscored the social value pupils with special educational needs, in particular, placed on their colleagues (cf Gillies & Ashman eds., 2003; Ferrante, 2012; and Ocansey & Gyimah, 2016).

The situation of the studied pupils further highlights a lack of therapeutic environment as reflected by C. Rogers’ Client-Centred Theory in 1959. So, C. Rogers (1959)’s Theory was of the view that if people can fulfil their potentials and become the best in life, it will depend more on the nature of their environment. Without the right therapeutic relationship, this would be impossible. Through such interactions, pupils will gain insights into their challenges and make meaningful adjustments to progress in life. This therapeutic relationship revolves round empathic understanding, unconditional positive regard, and genuineness (Rogers, 1959; Rogers, Lyon & Tausch, 2013; and Ismail & Tekke, 2015).

Additionally, the finding that teachers scolded, beat, and insulted pupils in some of the studied schools leaves much to be desired. In this context, A. Cohn & A. Cantor (2013); the CAS (Council on Scientific Affairs), in 2002, and other scholars, confirmed the existence of verbal abuse (insults) in Elementary, Middle, and High schools. A. Cohn & A. Cantor (2013), and other scholars, specifically report that as many as twenty-five percent teachers perceived bullying as normal in schools and would, thus, not intervene when they saw any such incident taking place (CAS, 2002; Cohn & Cantor, 2013; and Ocansey & Gyimah, 2016).

J. Hoover & P. Stenhjem (2013), and other scholars, on the other hand, blamed teachers for their indulgence in such unloving acts in schools. Reports of caning emphasized many severe damaging and long-term
psychological effects on its victims. The effects include guilt feelings, shame, anxiety, and poor social relationships in pupils (cf Hwangbo, 2004; Hoover & Stenhjem, 2013; and Ocansey & Gyimah, 2016).

Suicidal attempts have also been linked to such teacher mistreatments. All these effects of caning create a crippling psychological environment for the development of pupils, as emphasized by the client-centred theory (Wango, 2006; The HSC, 2014; and Ocansey & Gyimah, 2016).

Insults and ridicules from teachers, as found by the study also debunks reports by E. Walton et al. (2019), and other scholars, who project teachers as the direct providers of learner support in inclusive schools. The teacher mistreatment of pupils as found by the current study can adversely affect the relationship pupils have with their teachers in schools. It can also trigger negative academic behaviours like truancy, absenteeism and dropout (Agaba, 2014; Walton et al., 2019; and Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

The current study finding, thus, portrays a contrary picture of teachers and it would be useful to eradicate the unacceptable teacher behaviours through the provision of teacher support in inclusive schools (Burden, 2010; Ferrante, 2012; and Hall, 2012).

In their interaction with their parents and siblings at home, some pupils at the New Horizon school also wanted to have more time to watch television, less noise and shouting at home as well as same sex siblings to play with. All these requests have implications for the social development of the pupils with special educational needs. Lessons should, thus, be drawn from the findings to make provision and facilitate the social development of pupils with special needs in inclusive and special schools (Lansdown, 2011; Wilson, 2011; and Ocansey & Gyimah, 2016).

The emotional needs of pupils with special educational needs emotional challenges, like teasing, rejection, lack of advice, and comfort as reported by pupils from the State School for the Deaf have also been confirmed by A. Cohn & A. Cantor (2013); J. Hoover & P. Stenhjem (2013); and W.L. Heward (2013). In this context, W.L. Heward (2013), for instance, observes that children with hearing loss often reported feeling isolated, without friends and unhappy in school (Cohn & Cantor, 2013; Heward, 2013; and Hoover & Stenhjem, 2013).

Study findings on pupils’ emotional needs generally have implications for their personal development and self-actualization, according to Abraham H. Maslow (1968)’s Needs Achievement Theory. In this theory, the need for love, care, and a sense of belonging significantly enhances the individual’s personal growth (cf Maslow, 1968; Gobin et al., 2012; and Coon, 2016).
The pupils' lack of love, care, and belonging thus exposes them to low self-esteem, timidity, and delayed self-actualization. In this context, R.F. Baumeister et al. (2013); D. Coon (2016); and other scholars, describe low self-esteem for instance as the root cause of all social vices; and these findings do not augur well for special needs pupils (Prihadi & Chua, 2012; Baumeister et al., 2013; and Coon, 2016).

However, the warm collaboration between parents and teachers at the New Horizon school, as found by the study, deserves commendation. Personal observations by researchers and the interviews reports from the school guidance officer and administrators also confirmed these cordial relations (Zabel, 2007; Ocansey & Gyimah, 2016; and Walsh, 2018).¹

N. Frederickson & T. Cline (2012), and other scholars, in fact, identify such positive relations as a major contributory factor in the overall development of pupils with special educational needs. It is, thus, not surprising that pupils at New Horizon were found to have fewer counselling needs, as compared to their colleagues in the other studied schools (Frederickson & Cline, 2012; Leahy, 2012; and Ocansey & Gyimah, 2016).

CONCLUSION

The study revealed challenges that are quite universal for teaching learners with developmental disability. The study establishes that learners with developmental disability pose challenges to special needs education teachers. Teachers in this study expressed the need for reduced class sizes, modern teaching materials, motivations to teachers, and additional support services from the government.

Most teachers teaching children with developmental disability did not receive any special needs education training from the university, they feel that they are not qualified to teach the children with developmental disability. This study revealed that the classrooms for children with developmental disability in developing countries at large have poor learning environment to support the learners with developmental disability.

It could also be concluded that placement of learners with developmental disability in an inclusive classrooms with ordinary learners is not enough, for example learners with developmental disability at school placed in an ordinary class with no proper support. It is important to make sure that learners with developmental disability receive all the necessary support and services for accessing the curriculum facilities.

¹See also, for example, “Scolded by Teacher for Talking to Boys, Schoolgirl Tries to Kill Herself” in The Times of India, on December 10, 2014. Available online also at: www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com [accessed in Osogbo, Nigeria: December 27, 2019].
The study suggested that: (1) the Government should give priorities to special case such as learners with developmental disability; (2) Collaboration between special needs education teachers and parents for children with developmental disability is necessary for the wellbeing of their children; and (3) In order to improve the poor learning environment for special needs educational for children with developmental disability, the teachers, parents/guardians, society and government should work together.²

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²Statement: I, undersigned below, state that my paper is not product of plagiarism, not to be submitted to the other journal(s), reviewed as well as published by other scholarly journals; and finally having received, it will also not to be withdrawn by Author from this TAWARIKH journal. This statement letter was made to be used by the Editor as an appropriate.


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