School Environment and its Influence on Education of Children with Learning Disabilities in Awka South LGA

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Abstract

This study dwells on school environment and its influence on education of children with learning disabilities in Awka South L.G.A. The study adopted a survey design and was guided by two research questions. The population of the study comprise of 665 public primary school teachers among the 45 public primary schools in Awka South L.G.A. The study adopted simple random sampling for this study. The researchers used balloting without replacement to select 15 public primary schools in Awka South L.G.A. Among these selected schools, the researchers selected 8 teachers from each of the selected schools giving a total of 120 primary school teachers. The instrument for the study was questionnaire drafted by the researchers with 24 items and titled School Environment and its Influence on Education of Children with Learning Disability (SEIECLD). The instrument was validated by three experts and later subjected to test on 15 primary school teachers in Awka North. Cronbach Alpha was used to compute score on this and a reliability value of 0.72 proved the reliability of the instrument. Mean was used to analyze the data collected. Findings from the study reveals among others that the school environment really has an influence on the education of the learning disabled child. Non availability of meaningful toys, and books coupled with location of the school and overgrown bushes, lack of functional ICT laboratory and other instructional materials such as insufficient whiteboards and play gadgets where challenges that influenced the education of the learning disabled child. Based on these findings, it was recommended among others that both governmental and non-governmental agencies should also ensure that basic schools are stocked with needed educational materials needed for the academic needs of children with learning disabilities.

Keywords: School environment, influence, education, learning disabilities

Introduction

Education is a character building process which enhances one's personality and makes one rational, capable, responsive and intelligent. Education is also widely regarded as the route to economic prosperity, the key to scientific and technological advancement, the means to combat unemployment, and the foundation of social equity. In the views of Usha (2007), education is the process of teaching and training of the child which has to do with imparting and acquisition of skills for a particular trade or profession in which applicable methods are used. Nuhu (2015), defined education as a process by which an individual acquires physical and social capabilities demanded by the society in which they are born into in order to be useful to themselves and contribute to the development of the society at large. These definitions corroborate Itulua-Abumere (2013), who posits that education is the process of teaching, training and learning in school or college to improve knowledge and develop skills. From what has been viewed as education by different authorities, the researcher can say that education

involves training a child through processes of teaching and learning which equips him with desired knowledge and skills required for effective living. Formally, education begins at the school environment.

The school environment comparable to learning environment is that environment where learning takes place. Booth & Okely (2005), defined school environment as the physical environment (e.g. facilities and equipment), school policies (e.g. time allocated for physical and health education sports) and school practices regulating physical education and sports banners to participation and strategies to promote participation. Odeh, Oguche and Ivagher (2015), defined the school environment as the environment equipped with educational facilities formally used in teaching and learning. Odeh *et al* outlined the characteristics of the school environment to include school buildings, furniture, playgrounds, sporting facilities and other related equipment which aid the teacher's delivery of lesson. Examples of buildings found in the school includes classroom blocks, libraries and laboratories; while furniture's connotes tables and desk, seats, cupboards for housing specimens and models. Play ground includes the space created for plays and games while sporting facilities includes football, table tennis equipment, hand ball, sports wears. In the context of this study, the school environment encompasses all components found in the school which facilitates teaching and learning. These components include the school building, furniture, equipment, instructional materials, teachers, peers, play-ground, group and other people involved in the development of a child. Educational facilities in primary schools should be of immense benefit to both normal children and children with learning disabilities.

Learning disability is a two coined words with different meaning when separated. Learning according to Nwamuo (2010), is a situation whereby a child is exposed to learning experiences and in turn, such learning experiences changes the behavior of such child. A disabled child is defined as someone who has a physical or mental disability which has an effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities" (Riddell in Itulua-Abumere, 2013). Learning disability is therefore a situation where a child is engaged with learning activities but finds it difficult to learn. Obiozor, Onu and Ugwoegbu (2010), defined learning disability as a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not apply to individuals who have learning problems that are primarily

the result of physical or mental disabilities, behavioral disorder, or environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. Similarly, the Encyclopedia of Early Childhood Development (2017), viewed learning disabilities as problems that affect the child's ability to receive, process, analyze or store information. Learning disability makes it difficult for a child to read, write, spell or solve math problems. This calls for urgent attention especially in schools where children with learning disabilities are enrolled. By right, primary schools with such children are to equip their school environment, with special human and material resources to assist children with diverse difficulties in learning.

It is important that the school environment is well equipped to aid the education of children with learning disabilities. Some of the instructional materials that will help in teaching children with learning disability are interactive whiteboard, computers among others. The interactive whiteboard in schools is not just a presentational device; it provides method of multisensory teaching that are recommended for dyslexic learners. Walker and Logan (2009), posits that digital creativity can play in unlocking the interest of particular learners, drawing on different abilities in an incidental way.

Again, the various ICT's the computer plays significant role in helping children with learning difficulties such as providing sounds that could help the child spell out words, identify alphabets and objects. This is achieved when appropriate software is installed in the computer and used for such instruction. Dwight (2013), identified VoiceDream as an app that can help children with reading disabilities such as dyslexia, blindness and low vision. It can even be effective with Attention Deficit Syndrome (ADD)/ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). VoiceDream is an eBook, pdf and text to speech reader. The app reads text aloud and also highlights current word selection so that readers can keep track of location, using both auditory and visual stimulation to deepen learning. When reading passages presented on a device with TTS (Text To Speech), a nonjudgmental learning environment is created, where a student can reread the same passage with a fluent model as frequently as needed (Silver-Pacuilla & Ruedel, 2004).

It is interesting to note that the another feature of the school environment is its surroundings. When the bushes and grasses are well cut, children with disabilities can easily participate with their peers during physical education (Nwamuo, 2010). A child who finds it difficult to learn through classroom activities may find play as a pleasurable way of learning. The school environment when fully equipped with teacher specialist and special educational facilities has the tendencies to significantly influence the learning disabled child to be active in

lessons. Influence here means the effects, repercussion, and retaliation of something. Muogbo (2013), defined influence as the effects or repercussion of an event, a process or that of a detailed experiment. Gina, Melinda and Jeanne (2019), asserts that facilities like videos, computers, picture books and audio materials help children with learning disabilities remain active than passive during lessons. Gina et al also recommended the use of activity based learning strategy, use of memory games & flashcards and studying with music to educate these set of children in school environments. The essence of the school environment according to World Bank Report on Disability (2010), states that children with disabilities receive good quality education. Thus, an equipped school environment should have meaningful influence on education of children with learning disabilities especially in primary schools.

Unfortunately, the nature of most primary school environment in Nigeria is nothing to write home about. Recent observations show that there is decay of infrastructures and little or no effort by appropriate authorities to fix up these decays. Odeh, Oguche and Ivagher (2015), reported epileptic power supply, poor classrooms and bad nature of school play grounds as problems affecting education of the disabled child in primary schools. Asenath (2015), posits that teachers' attitude to children with disabilities, poor use of instructional facilities and lack of training among teachers were among school environmental factors that challenges education of children with learning disabilities. Asenath maintained there is shortage of trained personnel to handle children with learning difficulties; no money; no equipment or materials; no static policy or legislation. Against this backdrop therefore, the researcher tends to determine school environment and its influence on education of children with learning disabilities in Awka South L.G.A.

Statement of the Problem

Education in Nigeria as observed over decades, has been engulfed with numerous problems ranging from lack of suitable human resource personnel to insufficient material resources. In primary school for instance, the case is not different. These observed problems led the Federal Government of Nigeria into the launch of different educational programmes such as the Universal Primary Education (UPE) and the Universal Basic Education (UBE) respectively. Despite the launch of these educational programmes, studies show that most primary schools still remain poor in terms of infrastructures and personnel needed in for service delivery. This seems to have negatively influenced inclusive education and thus, for children with learning disabilities seems not to have gained much in terms of academics. The researcher observed that most primary school environments are not conducive to drive home learning

experiences especially for children with learning disabilities. Most primary schools in Nigeria are not fully stocked with books, ICT's and charts which are among core materials needed for effective education for both normal and children with learning disabilities are lacking. However, these observations are not akin to primary schools in Awka South because the researcher is yet to ascertain the nature of school environment in this area and how its influence on the education of children with learning disabilities. The problem of this study therefore is to examine the influence of primary school environment on the education of children with learning disabilities in Awka South L.G.A.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study is to examine school environment and its influence on education of children with learning disabilities in Awka South L.G.A. Specifically, this study seeks to;

1. Examine the influence of school environment on the education of children with learning disabilities in Awka South L.G.A.
2. Determine the challenges of school environment on education of children with learning disabilities in Awka South L.G.A.
3. Find out possible solutions to the challenge of school environment on education of children with learning disabilities in Awka South L.G.A.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What are the influences of school environment on the education of primary school pupils in Awka South L.G.A?
2. What are the challenges of school environment on education of children with learning disabilities in Awka South L.G.A?
3. What are the possible solutions to the challenge of school environment on education of children with learning disabilities in Awka South L.G.A?

Method

This study dwells on school environment and its influence on education of children with learning disabilities in Awka South L.G.A. The study adopted a survey design and was guided by two research questions. The population of the study comprise of 665 public primary school teachers among the 45 public primary schools in Awka South L.G.A. The study adopted simple random sampling for this study. The researchers used balloting without replacement to select 15 public primary schools in Awka South L.G.A. Among these selected schools, the researchers selected 8 teachers from each of the selected schools giving a total of 120 primary school teachers. The instrument for the study was questionnaire drafted by the researchers with 24 items and titled School Environment and its Influence on Education of Children with Learning Disability (SEIECLD). The instrument was validated by three experts and later subjected to test on 15 primary school teachers in Awka North. Cronbach Alpha was used to compute score on this and a reliability value of 0.72 proved the reliability of the instrument. A four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA) =4, Agree (A) =3, Disagree (D) =2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) =1 were used to answer research questions. Mean was used or the data analysis. The criterion mean was set at 2.50. Any item scoring 2.5 and above were regarded as agree while any item scoring below 2.5 were regarded as disagree.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the influences of school environment on the education of children with learning disabilities in Awka South L.G.A?

Table 1: **Respondents mean score on the influence of school environment on education of children with learning disabilities in Awka South L.G.A.**

S/N	Influence of school environment on education of children with learning disabilities	$\bar{X}$	Decision
1	My school has meaningful toys needed for learning among children with disabilities	2.19	Disagree
2	The location of my school has meaningful influence on the education of children with learning difficulties	2.16	Disagree
3	Available books in my school has meaningful influence on education of children with learning disabilities	1.41	Disagree
4	There are overgrown bushes in my school which disrupts learning	2.25	Disagree
5	The lighting in my school classroom do not assist children in reading text	2.45	Disagree
6	Children with learning disabilities do not catch up with learning because most pictures in the class are uncoloured	3.11	Agree
7	Pupils are poorly evaluated on motor activities due to lack of special play materials	2.79	Agree
8	The learning disabled child prefers whiteboard for learning which are insufficient in my school	2.96	Agree

Table 1 above shows that the mean scores from item 1-8 were 2.19, 2.16, 1.41, 2.25, 2.45, 3.11, 2.79 and 2.96 respectively. Items 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 were disagreed because their mean score were below 2.50. Other items were agreed because their mean score were 2.50 and above. This shows that only three items were agreed as the influence of school environment on education of children with learning disabilities in Awka South L.G.A.

Research Question 2: What are the challenges of school environment on education of children with learning disabilities in Awka South L.G.A?

Table 2: Respondents mean score on the challenges of school environment on education of children with learning disabilities in Awka South L.G.A.

S/N	Challenges of school environment on education of children with learning disabilities	X	Decision
9	There is scarcity of functional ICT laboratory	2.92	Agree
10	Meaning toys for play and learning are not sufficient	2.70	Agree
11	Picture books and specialized materials for learning (for example Braille machine and audio aids) are poorly supplied	1.45	Disagree
12	Whiteboards in schools are limited in desired quantity	2.00	Disagree
13	Flashcards and special education teachers are lacking in the school	3.01	Agree
14	The environment for play is not friendly for children with disabilities to participate in sports and other play related activities	2.11	Disagree
15	There is high rate of negative attitudes towards children with learning disabilities by the teachers	3.10	Agree
16	The classroom lightening is in a very poor condition	2.63	Agree

Table 2 above shows the challenges of school environment on education of children with learning disabilities. All the items so listed were agreed as the challenges of school environment on education of children with learning disabilities except items number 11, 12 and 14. Their mean scores are below 2.50.

Research Question 3: What are the possible solutions to the challenge of school environment on education of children with learning disabilities in Awka South L.G.A?

Table 3: Respondents mean score on the possible solutions to the challenge of school environment on education of children with learning disabilities in Awka South L.G.A.

S/N	Possible solutions to the challenge of school environment on education of children with learning disabilities	$\bar{X}$	Decision
17	Government should provide primary schools with special instructional materials	2.61	Agree
18	Children with learning disabilities should be enrolled near homes where parents can easily visit them	2.18	Disagree
19	Primary school managers should always engage labourers to cut grasses on time	3.12	Agree
20	Erection of an ICT laboratory to cater for educational needs of children with special needs	2.95	Agree
21	Teachers should be involved meaningful in improvising coloured materials for learning	2.16	Diagree
22	Only special trained teachers should be employed to teach children with learning disabilities	1.52	Disagree
23	None special teachers should be constantly be retrained on strategies to teach children with learning disabilities	2.81	Agree
24	Assorted toys should be procured for the educational needs of these children	2.62	Agree

Table 3 above shows the mean scores of items number 17-24 to be 2.61, 2.18, 3.12, 2.95, 2.16, 1.52, 2.81 and 2.62 respectively. Items 18, 21 and 22 were disagreed because their mean score were below 2.50. Other items were agreed as the possible solutions to the challenge of school environment on education of children with learning disabilities because their mean score were 2.50 and above.

Discussion of Findings

Findings in table 1 sought the influence of school environment on education of primary school pupils. Findings reveal that available toys and books were not meaningful to the educational needs of children with disabilities. Location of schools and overgrown bushes also had bad influences on education of children with learning disabilities. In consonance with these findings, DaCosta and Seok (2013) discovered that none availability of educational materials such as charts, books, pictures, toys as well as play materials were among the factors limiting the progress of pupils in early years of academics. Commenting on location as a barrier, Odeh Oguche and Ivagher (2015) held that location of school pose a challenge to both pupils, students and parents in that, most times, it becomes barriers for parents or teachers to visit and ask about the progress of academics of their children or barriers to teachers visiting such parents to report or discuss observed difficulties in a child.

In agreement with overgrown bushes Okoro (2012) also revealed that most public primary schools in Nigeria are bushy and unkept. This attracts vectors and rodents in such school environment which in-turn destroys educational properties. Findings also show that primary schools lack instructional materials such as coloured pictures, play materials and insufficient whiteboards for teaching and learning. This finding agrees with Obasi (2016) who earlier reported the poor state of infrastructures in basic schools and suggested the need for the procurement of educational material to schools by government at all levels to enhance teaching and learning. Kipkosgei, Wanjala and Reirchi (2017) also reported backlog of infrastructure provisions and shortage of classrooms, particularly in poor communities and that existing infrastructures were generally in poor condition due to lack of investment capital, poor construction standard and inadequate maintenance.

Findings in Table 2 sought the challenges that influence education of children with learning disabilities. Findings reveal that lack of functional ICT laboratory, lack of meaningful toys, insufficient flashcards, teachers attitude and poor lighting in classrooms were among the challenges faced with children with learning disabilities. Some of the findings agrees with Okwudishi in Manuel (2008) enumerated challenges faced by the use of ICT in schools to include unavailability of some ICT components; frequent electricity interruption, high cost of ICT facilities, as well we inadequate ICT manpower in schools. Oduah in Adirika (2012) also reported that use of ICT in schools are faced with challenges such as incessant power problem and high cost of running generating sets. Some other findings from this study also confirms Alanazi (2017) identified absent and insufficient use of flashcards in early years of learning were among challenges faced by learning disability children as it also makes the work of the teacher tedious, trying to relate facts, concepts and certain learning experiences to these set of children. In support of one of the findings of this study; Stock, Dennis and Rueter (2014) identified adapted commercial toys as one of the assistive technologies mostly lacking in some early childhood education centers, and mostly, were insufficient in schools. Stock et al (2014) insisted that absence of toys de-motivates disabled children from learning. Merely, when toys are present, it allows for mutual enjoyment between typically developing peers and children with learning disabilities, absent or insufficient toys lead to bias and frustration among these set of children. Another finding of the research on teacher attitude agrees with the findings of Vranda (2016) discovered that most teachers who were charged to handle an inclusive classroom displayed incompetency in taking care of these children at their best and thus, called

for employment of teachers who cares about the welfare of children with different disability issues.

Findings in Table 3 sought solutions to curb influences that challenge education of children with learning disabilities. Findings suggest that government should intervene by providing schools with special instructional materials for the educational needs of these children. This finding agrees with Karanja in Kipkogei et al (2017) suggested funding from both government and non-governmental agencies to ensure that basic schools are well stocked with needed educational facilities for academic needs of the disabled child. It also suggested availability of funds to school heads to accommodate hiring of labourers to ensure that the school environment is constantly kept clean and attractive. This suggestion agrees with one of the findings of this research that managers of primary school should engage labourers in clearing overgrown bushes in their various schools. Findings also reveal that non specialized teachers be engaged in retraining exercise to be conversant with strategies to teach children with learning disabilities. This idea corroborates Acheck (2014) emphasized the need for re-training of teachers as a measure to reduce problems children with learning disabilities encounter on daily basis on their bid to learn. Acheck (2014) further revealed that re-training exercise in this area is also a kind of motivation to serving teachers in teaching profession. Barasa (2015) suggested that the re-training should begin during pre-service stage when the would-be-teacher is still undergoing teacher education at the teacher training institution. It was also revealed that assorted toys should be procured in schools for the educational needs of pupils with learning disabilities. This finding agrees with Donal (2011) whose findings identified the educational needs of children with learning disabilities to include provision of educative materials such as interactive media, educative toys and assistive technologies to cater for their type of education.

Conclusion

Education of children with learning disabilities is influenced by challenges in the school environment such as toys, ICT's play gadgets for physical education, insufficient books and lack of coloured pictures for use during instructions.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended as follows;

1. Federal, state and local government should ensure that education of children with disabilities (learning disability inclusive) should be a priority. This could be achieved by providing primary schools with instructional materials to include toys, ICT's books, coloured materials and play gadgets to cater for the educational needs of these category of children. Funds should also be made available for primary schools to hire labourers to clear overgrown bushes and keep the entire school compound clean.
2. The challenges that influence education of children with learning disabilities should be put to order and maintained for effective educational service delivery.
3. As solution, both governmental and non-governmental agencies should also ensure that basic schools are stocked with needed educational materials needed for the academic needs of children with learning disabilities.

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