



Counselling teachers for the education of people with special needs in Rivers state

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Abstract

Special needs are those people with one disability or the other from birth, body malfunction or accident. The main purpose of this study specifically was to establish their needs empirically and proffer counselling strategies through their teachers who have access to them. Two research questions and two hypotheses answered and tested the study respectively. There was no sample due to few number of teachers to the entire population of 72 special education teachers in Rivers State, Nigeria were used. The researchers designed the questionnaire for the study and it was properly validated by three experts in measurement and evaluation, special education and guidance and counselling respectively from the University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State. Data were analyzed using mean for the research questions and t-test for the hypotheses. The research findings reveal that all the counselling strategies for education of the people with special needs such as being ready to help them at the point of their need, caring for their personal needs through encouragement and reinforcing their desirable behavior were relevant as agreed by the teachers. Recommendations among others include that their teachers should be exposed to more training to enable them serve the people with special needs such as being ready to help them at the point of their need, caring for their personal needs through encouragement and reinforcing their desirable behaviours were relevant agreed by the teachers. Recommendations among others include that their teachers should be exposed to more training to enable them serve the people with special needs better.

Keywords: Education, special needs, disability, counselling strategies

Introduction

Education is an instrument for transformation and national development in every society. Therefore, it is recognized that all human beings including the challenged ones are who are educated and have acquired various useful skills and knowledge are the most important agents of change that leads to stability of any nation. It stated in the Nigerian National Policy on Education (2004) Section (5) that our philosophy of education includes:

- Development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen
- Pull integration of the individual into the community
- Provision of equal access to educational opportunities to all citizens of the country at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

The implication of this section 5 of the National Policy on Education is that every citizen must have a right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of ability or disability. The National Policy also described special education as the education of children and adults who have learning difficulty because of different sorts of handicaps, blindness, partial sightedness, deafness, hardness of hearing, mental retardation, social maladjustment, physical handicap etc. due to circumstances of birth, inheritance, social position, mental and physical health patterns or accident in later life. The policy went further that there are also specially gifted children who are intellectually precious and find themselves insufficiently challenged by the programme of the normal school and who may take to stubbornness and apathy in resistance to it.

Nwaogu (2016) ^[11] states that special education is a therapeutic form of education offered to pupils who show

evidence of either under achievement or over achievement in class. Class education is an individually planned and systematically monitored arrangement of physical settings, special equipment and materials, teaching procedures and other interventions designs to help the exceptional children achieve the greatest possible personal self-sufficiency and academic success, special education is also an ideal general education in which individual differences are manifested in the pupil's abilities, aptitudes, learning styles and motivation to learn (Mba, 2015) ^[9]. Special education in a nutshell, from the above definition is the educational provision for the exceptional children using the services of specially trained teachers and using special equipments, materials and techniques. People with special needs are people with any characteristics or who are under any situation that confer on them for the need for special attention beyond that which is usually required by unaffected people. Olakunbi (2015) ^[14].

Furthermore, Orange (2010), categorized these people as people with disability. According to Ehiozuwa (2013) ^[5], disability refers to a reduction of a particular body part or organ, for example, mental disability, physical impaired, deafness, dumb, mute speech impaired and the blind. Nwoye (2018) ^[13] had earlier classified the disabled as mentally retarded, the deaf and hard of hearing, speech impaired, visually impaired, behavior disordered, orthopedically impaired and learning disabled.

Lindgree (2012) ^[8] opined that disabled have some needs in the three major areas of counselling namely personal/social, educational and vocational. Furthermore, he ascertained that their social needs arise from their relationship with teachers and peer group and if these needs are not met they become disappointed, unhappy and antisocial. Also lack of social

support, non-acceptance prejudice and devaluation faced by these challenged individual compound their problems Eleri (2013) [6]. Abosi (2013) [2] also concluded the attitude of the average Nigeria as one of the problems of the challenged persons.

The challenged has little confidence in themselves and also low self-esteem (Abdul, 2015). Vocationally, the challenged is not encouraged in the labour market, he/she is denied job opportunities regardless of whether he/she is qualified for the job or not. With this type of negative attitude, the challenged person has little or no choice than to be emotionally down.

Educationally, challenged people have many problems despite the fact that they have separate schools and teachers. Ozojeck (2016) [16] ascertained that the problems include lack of trained teachers, paucity of teachers, lack of professional counsellors, lack of adequate classrooms, lack of water system (WC) toilet, lack of equipment to facilitate learning and the nagging nature of the few available teachers. Anagbogu (2017) [3] listed the needs of these challenged people as need to feel worthwhile, to be loved, cared, informed, assisted, accepted and to provide with adequate learning materials.

In the view of Nwokolo & Anagbogu (2016) [12], they advocated a set of strategies to help challenged children accept their condition and identify their positive areas of ability. This includes strategies such as making use of the services of the guidance counsellors. Guidance and counselling is the major educational services provide in schools to assist students manage their academic and personal/social problems, Onyehalu (2016). According to Echebe (2017) [4], it is the counsellor’s role to take measures and build strategies into the teachers of the challenged children who will in turn build capacities into these disabled children to ascertain that they imbibe intrinsic beliefs about the importance of proper adjustment.

This however, will help challenged children to face the challenges in life in terms of meeting their various needs. To effectively assist challenged children, their teachers need a pool of personal/social, educational and vocational strategies which they can draw from. The purpose of this study therefore, is to determine the counselling strategies that will be used by the teachers to educate people with special needs.

Research Questions

1. What are the needs of people in special schools in Rivers State?
2. What counselling strategies could be adopted by teachers to enhance the education of people in special schools in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant differences between the mean scores of the needs of people in public and private special schools in Rivers State.
2. There is no significant differences between the mean scores of the counselling strategies adopted by teachers in public and private special schools in Rivers State.

Method

The study adopted the descriptive survey research method. This design is ideal to use in this work because the study involved collecting and describing data obtained from a

population in order to determine the strategies to adopt in counselling teachers for the education of people with special needs in Rivers State, Nigeria. The study was carried out in six special education centres in Rivers State. The population is comprised of 72 special education teachers in the special schools in Rivers State. Data obtained from the State Ministry of Education reveals that there are 36 teachers in public special schools and 36 teachers in private special education schools as at 2022, Source Rivers State Ministry of Education (2023). However, there was no sample due to the paucity of professional teachers in these schools therefore the total population for this study comprised 72 respondents.

Table 1: Population Distribution of Teachers by School

S/No	Name of Public Schools	No. of Teachers
1.	Special School for the Handicap, Gborokiri, Port Harcourt.	15
2.	The Child Special School Ohato Street, D/line Port Harcourt	12
3.	Port Harcourt Behavioural Health/Autism Clinic and School for Special Need Elioiani	9

S/No	Name of Private Schools	No. of Teachers
1.	Otana Special School for the Handicap Rumuigbo	8
2.	Blazing Heart Autism Centre, Elokohia	15
3.	OLG Health Foundation and Autism Centre Woji	13
	Total	72

Source: Planning, Research Statistics, Ministry of Education, Port Harcourt, Rivers State (2023)

The instrument used in collecting data for this study was a questionnaire titled “Counselling Strategies for Meeting the Needs of Special People” (CSMNSP). The questionnaire consisted of two parts. Part A sought information on the respondents’ personal information, Part B consisted of 26 items divided into two sections A and B. Section A consisted of 11 items on the needs of the special people and section B consisted of the counselling strategies being investigated. The items of the questionnaire were derived from the reviewed literature and discussions with counsellors and ministry of Education officials. The responses to the questionnaire items were designed on a 4-point scale of measurements. Strongly Agree (SA) – 4, Agree (A) – 3, Disagree (D) – 2 Strongly Disagree -1. Mean ratings above 2.50 were taken to mean agreement with a strategy while mean ratings below 2.50 were taken to mean disagreement.

The instrument was subjected to face and content validity. To do this, the researcher submitted the initial draft of the questionnaire to three experts in Guidance and Counseling, Special Education and Measurement and Evaluation, all from University of Port Harcourt. Topic, purpose of the study, the research questions and hypotheses were given to them as a guide. The experts were asked to review the content coverage and appropriateness of the language structure and expressions. These experts made very useful suggestions. Corrections were reflected in the final modification of the items of the questionnaire. In testing for reliability, copies of the questionnaire were administered on a sample of 10 teachers from special schools for the

Handicap Port Harcourt state who were not part of this study. When the responses were analyzed using Cronbach Alpha, reliability coefficient value of 0.88 was obtained indicating that the items in the instrument were homogenous. The researchers distributed and retrieved filled copies of the questionnaire within three weeks. Responses for the two research questions were answered using mean ratings while the hypotheses were tested using t-test at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Table 2: Respondents’ mean ratings of the needs of people in special schools

Rank Order	Item (Needs)	Mean
6	Feeling worthwhile	3.50
9	Be loved	3.20
2	Be cared for	3.70
5	Be informed educationally	3.60
2	Be informed socially	3.70
2	Be informed personally	3.70
10	Be informed vocationally	3.10
8	Be provided with adequate learning equipment	3.30
7	Be provided with adequate classroom facilities	3.45
11	Be assisted in their daily endeavours	2.40
1	Be accepted as they are	3.80

Table 2 reveals that only rank order 11 – need to be assisted in their daily endeavours was rated below 2.50 so all the others are the needs of people in special schools in Rivers State.

Table 3: Respondents mean ratings of the counselling strategies, for teachers’ use in special schools

Rank Order	Item (Needs)	Mean
5	Making these people feel worthwhile will enhance their self-esteem	3.40
8	Showing them love increases their general performance	3.20
14	Accepting their flaws will empower their personality	2.90
1	Being ready to help them at the point of their need	3.70
6	Being patient with them will improve their social disposition	3.30
12	Playing with tem will give them a sense of belonging	3.05
13	Caring for their academic needs by providing adequate study materials	3.00
3	Caring for their personal needs through encouragement	3.55
8	Caring for their social needs by providing interpersonal skills	3.20
15	Caring for their vocational needs by exposing them to the world of work.	2.85
10	Making their lecture delivery interesting and lively	3.15
2	Reinforcing their desirable behaviours	3.65
11	Making their classroom environment conducive an	3.10
4	Helping them to change their thought processes	3.50
7	Assisting them to modify their undesirable behaviours threat free	3.25

In table 3, all the items were rated above 2.50. this means in the respondents’ opinion, that all the counselling strategies listed are acceptable to the teachers for the education of people with special needs.

Table 4: T-test summary of the Mean Rating of the needs of people in public and private special schools in Rivers State.

Group	Sample	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	t-crit
Public School Teachers	36	3.0	0.62	71	1.01	1.96
Private school teachers	36	3.30	0.68			

The cal-t value of 1.01 is less than the t-crit 1.96. Therefore the null hypothesis; there is no significant difference between the mean scores of the needs of people in public and private special schools in Rivers State is upheld.

Table 5: T-test summary of the mean ratings of counselling strategies adopted by teachers in public and private special schools in Rivers State.

Group	Sample	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	t-crit
Public School Teachers	36	3.20	0.78			
				71	1.14	1.96
Private school teachers	36	3.10	0.82			

Results in Table 5 reveal that at 5 percent level of significance the calculated t-value 1.14 is less than the critical t-value 1.96. The hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, there is no significant differences between the mean scores of counselling strategies adopted by teachers in public and private special schools in Rivers State.

Discussion

The study revealed that people in special schools have basic needs in the major domains of life as shown in Table 2. All the items except being assisted in their daily endeavours were universally accepted as being their needs that can facilitate their education. This finding is in conformity with Lindgree (2012) [8] who identified that disabled people have some needs in educational, vocational and personal social domains of life. He pointed that their social needs arise from their relationship with teacher and peer-group and if these needs are not met, they become disappointed, unhappy and antisocial. The finding also has the support of Anagbogu (2017) [3] and Ozojeck (2016) [16] who enlisted the needs of special people to include to feeling worthwhile to be loved, care for, informed, assisted, accepted and to be provided with adequate learning materials including trained and committed teacher. There is no gainsaying that is these people are not loved, educated and trained, they would become a liability to the society in which they live. However, the society should rather build bridges to accommodate them instead of further building traditional walls of bias and discrimination.

The study recorded a universal acceptance of the counselling strategies listed in table 3 as being relevant for empowering teachers of people with special needs. No significant differences were also observed in the mean rating of the needs of people in public and private special schools in the state as shown in Table 4. Both the inmates of public and private special centers share the same needs. Furthermore, the study did not observe any significant differences between the mean scores of strategies adopted by the teachers of public and private special schools in Rivers State. It is in view of the relevance of these counselling strategies that Nwokolo and Anagbogu (2017) [3] advocated strategies to empower teachers to help children accept their condition and identify their positive areas of ability irrespective of the school they find themselves. Their advocacy border on the use of guidance and counselling to

address the academic, vocational and personal social needs of the special people.

Onyehalu (2016) observed that it is the counsellor's role to take measures and build strategies into the teachers of the disabled children who will in turn build capacities into the disabled children. This will no doubt enable them to imbibe intrinsic belief about the importance of proper adjustment and equip them with the competence necessary to face the challenges in life in relation to meeting their various needs. The researchers advocate the adoption of the counselling strategies by teachers to help them handle the education of people with special needs effectively and efficiently.

Recommendations

In view of the findings, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. There is need to establish conducive and threat free school environment for the people with special needs.
2. Special teachers need to be trained to handle the education of the people with special needs.
3. Effective Guidance and Counselling Unit should be established in each special school to take care of the counselling needs of the disabled.
4. Communities should build bridges to accommodate people with special needs rather than raise traditional walls that create bias and discrimination.
5. Orientations, workshops, seminars and conferences should be occasionally organized by the counsellors for people with special needs to make them feel worthwhile, raise their identify, self-esteem and enlighten them.
6. Teachers needs to adopt the counselling strategies in this study and apply them in the education of people with special needs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study investigated the counselling strategies the special education teaches will use to counsel the people with special needs. The study found out that people in special schools have needs and that the needs can be met using some counseling strategies such as helping them at the point of their needs amongst others. It is then recommended that teachers should be given proper training to enable them use the strategies effectively. This is because their efficient and effective use of the strategies will enhance the needs of these special people in the three areas of counselling. Also the communities should accommodate these people instead of discriminating against them.

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