Attitude and Behaviour of Teachers Towards Pupils with Learning Disabilities in Nigeria.

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Abstract

The study investigated the attitude and behaviour of teachers towards pupils with learning disabilities in regular primary schools in Nigeria. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design using a cross-sectional approach. Six specific objectives guided the study with four (4) null hypotheses tested at 0.05 alpha level. The population of the study consisted of 529 teachers from 39 government-owned primary schools in Ahoada East LGA of Rivers State, Nigeria. The sample size was 228 teachers from 6 selected primary schools from the three administrative districts of the LGA. A modified Teachers' Attitude and Behaviour Questionnaire (TABQ) was used as the instrument for data collection with reliability index of 0.67 and 0.78 for the subscales using Cronbach alpha. Descriptive statistics of percentage was used to analyze the demographic data while mean and standard deviation were used for the research questions. Lastly, Chi-square was used to test the null hypotheses. Findings from the study showed that teachers had positive attitude and positive behaviour towards children with learning disability with a mean value of 2.75±0.32 and 89% for attitude and behaviour respectively. Gender and educational qualification had no significant influence on attitude of teachers ($p>0.05$). However, findings revealed that gender and educational qualification of teachers significantly influenced their behaviour towards pupils with learning disabilities ($P<0.05$). Following the findings, it was recommended that incentives be provided to sustain and improve the attitude and behaviour of teachers towards pupils with learning disabilities. Again, training and retraining programmes should be organized in order to improve the educational qualification of teachers among others.

Keywords: Attitude, Behaviour, Teachers, Pupils, Learning Disability

Introduction

Effective implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria has remained a matter of great concern to experts as well as those affected as a result of the many challenges, they often encounter in their quests to acquire knowledge. The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities-(NJCLD, 1980) observed that children with learning disabilities are special needs children with a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. Similarly, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act-IDEA (1990) describes children with learning disabilities as children with disorders in one or more basic psychological processes involved in the understanding or use of language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. These disorders adversely affect their academic achievements and as such, imply that special attention is required for children with learning disabilities to cope with their

contemporaries academically. Consequently, segregated special schools were established in different parts of the world with experts in special needs education who have better understanding of the difficulties of children with learning disabilities in order to enhance their academic achievements (Odongo, 2012). Although, this yielded some positive results, the fact that they were segregated created room for a high level of discrimination between children in special schools and those who were educated in regular schools. This in turn, led to serious agitations by disability and parental advocacy groups for equality of access to educational opportunities at all levels irrespective of the differences in the psycho-social status of children (Dagnew, 2013).

In response to this massive outcry and in order to ensure that everyone was treated with human dignity, equity and justice, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) adopted the convention against discrimination in education in December, 1960 (UNESCO, 2009). This convention was later broadened and conceptualized as inclusive education which came into force during the 48th session of the International Conference on Education organized by UNESCO in November, 2008 at Geneva with 142 countries (Nigeria inclusive) appending their signatures to ensure education for all by the year 2015 through the enforcement of an inclusive education system at all levels. It is however, important to mention that Nigeria fully adopted the policy on inclusive education into her National Policy on Education in the year, 1998 (Fakolade *et al*, 2009). Since then till date, the enrolment rate of children with disabilities in regular schools has been on a steady rise. This is exacerbated by the endemic poverty profile of the country which makes it unaffordable for most parents with special needs children to educate their children in special schools.

Inclusive education refers to the practice of educating children with disabilities and their normal counterparts together in regular classrooms (Gwanshak & Milaham, 2015). It is an ongoing process aimed at offering quality education to all while respecting diversity and the different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of the learners and communities by eliminating all forms of discrimination (UNESCO, 2009). Study shows that teachers play pivotal roles in ensuring that inclusive education succeeds within the contemporary inclusive classrooms (Yero, 2012). It has been observed that the most difficult burden that children with disabilities bear is not that of their exceptionality, but the attitudes of people toward them, especially, those of their peers and teachers (Oluremi, 2015). Positive attitude of teachers towards children with learning disabilities will help to encourage them cope with learning tasks despite their peculiar challenges. They are required to be academically and psychologically prepared to take on the dynamic role of teaching all categories of learners without prejudice.

Regrettably, most teachers in developing Countries lack the requisite knowledge and qualification to handle special needs children (Dapudong, 2013; Timothy *et al*, 2014; Gwanshak & Milaham, 2015; Adeboye et al, 2017). This adversely affects their attitude and behaviour towards students with special needs. Studies also revealed that many teachers demonstrate negative attitudes to students with special needs in secondary schools (Nwazuoke, 2000; Mittler, 2000; Berry, 2010; Larrivee & Cook, 2014; Oluemi, 2015; Essa et al, 2015; Margalit *et al*, 2017;). Sadly, this situation negatively affected the education and performance of children with special needs. Although inclusive education has come to stay, it is not clear whether teachers are exhibiting the right attitude and behaviour towards children with learning disabilities. Again, not much has been documented about the attitude and behaviour of teachers towards children with learning disabilities in regular schools within the study area and the extent to which, this has affected the academic achievements of such children. It is in view of the above that this study investigated the attitude and behaviour of teachers towards pupils with learning disabilities in regular primary schools in Nigeria.

Methods

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design using a cross-sectional approach. A sample of 228 teachers from six (6) primary schools that have pupils with learning disabilities were randomly selected from the three administrative districts of a semi-urban Local Government Area (LGA) of Rivers State, Nigeria. A modified Teacher's Attitude and Behaviour Questionnaire (TABQ) using 4-point Likert scale response options adapted from Khan, (2011) was used as the instrument for data collection. Reliability index of the instrument was 0.67 and 0.78 for attitude and behaviour sub-scales respectively using Cronbach alpha. Retrieved copies of the instrument were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The descriptive statistics of percentage was used for the demographic data and research question 2; mean and standard deviation were used to answer research question 1 using a criterion mean of 2.50. Values above the criterion means were considered as positive while those below were termed negative. Pearson's contingency coefficient (r) was however, used to answer research questions 3-6. Pearson's contingency coefficient (r) was considered appropriate because the research questions sought to find out the extent to which selected demographic variables (gender and educational qualification) influenced the main variables of the study and the fact that the values were ordinal. Lastly, Chi-square was used to test all the hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level of significance.

Results

Table 1: Attitude of Teachers towards Pupils with Learning Disabilities

S/N	Items/Statements for Consideration	A	D	$\bar{x}$	Sdt.	Decisin
1	Inclusion of pupils with learning disabilities into regular schools is the best way to meet their academic needs	88 (44.0%)	112 (56.0%)	1.45	0.98	-ve
2	Teachers have a major role to play in the academic achievements of pupils with learning disabilities	191 (95.5%)	9 (4.5%)	3.57	0.58	+ve
3	I feel pupils with learning disabilities should be in special schools.	170 85.0%)	30 (15.0%)	1.85	0.77	+ve
4	I feel that teachers should give more attention to pupils with learning disabilities in order to help them improve	188 (94.0%)	12 (6.0%)	3.52	0.70	+ve
5	I believe that pupils with learning disabilities will never improve no matter the level of attention given to them	184 (92.0%)	16 (8.0%)	1.56	0.75	+ve
6	I feel that pupils with learning disabilities should be allowed to mix up with others in the classroom	146 (73.0%)	54 (27.0%)	2.97	0.92	+ve
7	I feel that inclusion of pupils with learning disabilities into regular schools will be detrimental to the education of other pupil	106 (53.0%)	94 (47.0%)	2.48	0.89	+ve
8	I do not want pupils with learning disabilities in my class	161 (80.5%)	39 (19.5%)	3.00	0.74	+ve
9	I do not see pupils with learning disabilities achieving much in regular schools	173 (86.5%)	27 (13.5%)	3.14	0.72	+ve
10	It is my responsibility to protect pupils with learning disabilities within the school hours	186 (93.0%)	14 (7.0%)	3.39	0.69	+ve
11	I do not think I can touch or hug any pupil with learning disability	177 (88.5%)	23 (11.5)	1.74	0.77	+ve
12	I need some trainings in special needs education to be able to effectively teach pupils with learning disabilities	14 (7.0%)	186 (93.0%)	1.46	0.71	-ve
	Overall Attitude	**74.3%**	**25.7%**	**2.51**	**0.32**	**+ve**

Source: Researchers' field Survey, 2022; Key: -ve= Negative Attitude; +ve= Positive Attitude

Table 1 above showed the attitude of teachers toward pupils with learning disabilities in regular primary schools. Findings from the table revealed that majority of the respondents (74.3%) agree to the items, 25.7% disagree while the overall mean score was 2.51±0.32. The mean score is greater than the criterion mean of 1.50. Teachers were therefore said to have positive attitude towards children with learning disabilities in regular primary schools in the target area.

Table 2: Behaviour of Teachers towards Pupils with Learning Disabilities in Primary Schools

S/N	Statements for Consideration	Always	Rarely	Mean	Std	Decision
1	I encourage inclusion of pupils with learning disabilities into regular schools	63(31.5%)	137(68.5%)	1.38	0.47	Negative
2	I do not get upset whenever I see pupils with learning disabilities in my class	176(88.0%)	24 (12.0%)	1.89	0.31	Positive
3	I assist pupils with learning disabilities by given them more attention	40(20.0%)	160(80.0%)	1.20	0.40	Negative
4	I associate freely with pupils with learning disabilities	176(88.0%)	24(12.0%)	1.88	0.32	Positive
5	I protect pupils with learning disabilities within the school	186(93.0%)	14(7.0%)	1.93	0.25	Positive
6	I touch or freely hug pupils with learning disability	193(96.5%)	7(3.5%)	1.96	0.18	Positive
7	I allow every child to participate freely in the classroom	151(75.5%)	49(24.5%)	1.76	0.42	Positive
8	I select suitable instructional materials that make it easy for children with learning disabilities to learn	186(93.0%)	14(7.0%)	1.93	0.23	Positive
9	I set instructional objectives to cover the learning needs of all children including those with learning disabilities	174(87.0%)	26(13.0%)	1.87	0.33	Positive
10	I give sufficient time to pupils with learning disabilities to complete their tasks in the classroom	186(93.0%)	14(7.0%)	1.93	0.25	Positive
11	I give additional attention to pupils who need help	172(86.0%)	28(14.0%)	1.86	0.35	Positive
12	I mix up pupils into common groups whenever they are performing group task or assignment	184(92.0%)	16(8.0%)	1.92	0.27	Positive
13	I vary my teaching methods in order to carry all pupils along	185(92.5%)	14(7.5%)	1.93	0.25	Positive
14	I select learning tasks that pupils with learning disabilities can do	63(31.5%)	137(68.5%)	1.48	0.47	Negative
	Average	**76%**	**24%**	**1.82**	**0.29**	**Positive**

Overall Positive Behaviour =76%; Overall Negative behaviour=24%

Table 2 showed the behaviour of teachers toward children with learning disabilities in regular primary schools. The findings revealed that majority of the respondents (76%) always carried out enabling activities under consideration while 24% rarely did same. The table also showed that the overall mean score was 1.82±0.29. This indicated that majority of teachers have positive behaviour towards children with learning disabilities in regular primary schools in the study area.

Table 3: Extent to Which Gender Influences Attitude of Teachers toward Children with Learning Disabilities

Gender	Mean score	Standard deviation	Criterion	Mean difference	Decision
Females	1.25	.15	1.50	1.04	
Males	2.29	.13			Positive
Average	1.77	.14			attitude

Key: <1.50=Low Extent; 1.50-2.49=Moderate Extent; 2.50 & above=High Extent

Table 3 showed the extent to which gender influenced the attitude of teachers towards children with learning disabilities in regular primary schools. Result from the table revealed that respondents had positive attitude towards children with learning disabilities in regular primary schools based on gender as the overall mean score of 1.77±0.14 was higher than the criterion mean of 1.50. The result also showed a mean difference of 1.40 between the female and male respondents which suggest a low extent of influence of gender on attitude of teachers towards children with learning disabilities.

Table 4: Influence of Gender on Behaviour of Teachers toward Children with Learning Disabilities

Gender	Mean score	Standard deviation	Criterion	Mean difference	Decision
Females	1.80	.16	1.50	0.07	Positive
Males	1.87	.10			behavior
Average	1.83	.14			

Key: <1.50=Low Extent; 1.50-2.49=Moderate Extent; 2.50 & above=High Extent

Table 4 showed the extent to which gender influenced the attitude of teachers towards children learning disabilities in regular primary schools. Results from the study revealed that respondents had positive behaviour towards children with learning disabilities in regular primary schools based on gender as the overall mean 1.83±0.14 was higher than the criterion mean of 1.50.

The result also showed a mean difference of 0.07 between the females and males which suggests a low extent of influence of gender on the behaviour of teachers towards children with learning disabilities.

Table 5: Extent at which Educational Qualification Influence their Attitude towards
Key: <1.50=Low Extent; 1.50-2.49=Moderate Extent; 2.50 & above=High Extent

Table 5 showed the extent to which educational qualification influenced the attitude of

Educational qualification	Mean and Standard deviation		Criterion mean	Mean difference	Decision
	Mean	Standard deviation			
TC11/NCE	2.84	0.37	1.50	0.14*	Positive
HND/BED/BSC	2.70	0.29			
MSC/MED	2.73	0.05			
PhD	2.80	0.00			
Average	2.75	0.32			

teachers towards children with learning disabilities in regular primary schools. Results from the study revealed that the average mean score was 2.75±0.32 which is higher than the criterion

mean of 1.50 with a mean difference of 0.14 between the highest and lowest mean scores. This indicated that educational qualification had a positive influence on the attitude of teachers toward children with learning disabilities in regular primary schools in AELGA to a high extent.

Table 6: Extent which Educational Qualification Influence Behaviour of Teachers toward Children with Learning Disabilities

Educational qualification	Mean and Standard deviation		Criterion mean	Mean difference	Decision
	Mean	Standard deviation			
TC11/NCE	1.87	0.11	1.50	0.13*	Positive
HND/BED/BSC	1.81	0.59			
MSC/MED	1.88	0.05			
PhD	1.94	0.00			
Total	1.84	0.14			

Key: <1.50=Low Extent; 1.50-2.49=Moderate Extent; 2.50 & above=High Extent

Table 6 showed the extent to which educational qualification influenced the behaviour of teachers towards children with learning disabilities in regular primary schools. Results from the study revealed that the average mean score was 1.84±0.14 which is higher than the criterion mean with a mean difference of 0.14 between the highest and lowest mean scores. This indicated that educational qualification had a positive influence on the behaviour of teachers towards children with learning disabilities in regular primary schools to a moderate extent.

Table 7: Chi-square Analysis Showing the Influence of Gender on Teachers' Attitude toward Children with Learning Disabilities

Gender	Category of attitude		Total	X^2-value	df	p-value	decision
	Negative	Positive					
Females	13 (11.7%)	98(88.3%)	111 (100%)	0.142	1	0.434	Accept*
Males	12 (13.5%)	77 (86.5%)	89 (100%)				

X^2 =0.142; p>0.05

Table 7 showed that the X^2 calculated was (0.142) with a degree of freedom of 1 and at 0.434 level of significance which is greater than the one set for this study (X^2 =0.142; p>0.05). This indicated that gender had no significant influence on the attitude of teachers towards children with learning disabilities. Thus, null hypothesis was accepted.

Table 8 showing Chi-square Analysis of the Influence of Educational Qualification on the Attitude of Teachers towards Children with Learning Disabilities

Educational qualification	Category of attitude		Total	X^2-value	Df	p-value	decision
	Negative	Positive					
TC11	0 (0%)	2 (100%)	2 (100%)	2.497	5	0.77	Accept*
NCE	7 (10.6%)	59 (89.4%)	66 (100%)				
HND	0 (0%)	2 (100%)	2 (100%)				
BSC/BED	18 (14.8%)	104 (85.2%)	122 (100%)				
MSC/MED	0 (0%)	6 (100%)	6 (100%)				
PhD	0 (0%)	2 (100%)	2 (100%)				

X^2 =2.497; p>0.05

Table 8 showed that the X^2 calculated was (2.497) with a degree of freedom of 5 and at 0.77 level of significance which is greater than the one set for this study (X^2 =2.497; p>0.05).

This indicated that educational qualification had no significant influence on the attitude of teachers towards children with learning disabilities. Thus, null hypothesis was accepted.

Table 9: Chi-square Analysis Showing the Influence of Gender on Teachers' Behaviour toward Children with Learning Disabilities

Gender	Category of behaviour		Total	X^2-value	Df	p-value	decision
	Disagree	Agree					
Males	4 (4.5%)	85 (95.5%)	89 (100)	0.142	1	0.008	reject*
Females	18 (16.2%)	93 (83.8%)	111 (100%)				
Total	22 (11%)	179(89%)	200(100%)				

X^2 calculated=0.142; $p<0.05$

Table 9 revealed that the X^2 calculated was (0.142) with a degree of freedom of 1. However, the p-value was (0.008) which is less than the level of significance set for this study (X^2 =0.142; $p<0.05$). This indicated that gender had significant influence on the behaviour of teachers towards children with learning disabilities. Thus, null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 10: Chi-square Analysis Showing the Influence of Educational Qualification on Behaviour

Educational qualification	Category of behaviour		Total	X2-value	Df	p-value	decision
	Negative	Positive					
TC11	0 (0%)	2 (100%)	2 (100%)	23.456	5	0.00	Reject*
NCE	7 (10.6%)	59 (89.4%)	66 (100%)				
HND	0 (0%)	2 (100%)	2 (100%)				
BSC/BED	18 (14.8%)	104 (85.2%)	122 (100%)				
MSC/MED	0 (0%)	6 (100%)	6 (100%)				
PhD	0 (0%)	2 (100%)	2 (100%)				

X^2 calculated; $p<0.05$

Table 10 revealed that the X^2 calculated was (23.456) with a degree of freedom of 5. However, the p-value was (0.00) which is less than the level of significance set for this study (X^2 =23.456; $p<0.05$). This indicated that educational qualification had significant influence on the behaviour of teachers towards children with learning disabilities. Thus, null hypothesis was rejected.

Discussion of Findings

Results from the study revealed that teachers had positive attitude and exhibited positive behaviours towards children with learning disabilities in regular primary schools in the study area. This is in line with the findings of similar studies carried out in Southwest and Northern Nigeria (Oluremi, 2015; Lawan, *et al*, 2016). This also agrees with the findings of previous studies in which majority of teachers who had positive attitude towards children with learning disabilities also exhibited positive behaviours when compared with those who had negative attitude (Lawan, *et al*, 2016). Again, the findings of a previous study which revealed that positive change in attitude was a precondition for a positive change in behaviour of

respondents exposed to health education intervention programmes (Ajunwo, 2008). From that study, improvement in knowledge positively influenced the wrong perceptions teachers hitherto had about children with learning disabilities and this change in turn ultimately resulted in positive behaviour change. Although the result of this study was considered unique because a vast majority of similar studies conducted in Nigeria revealed that teachers consistently exhibited negative attitude towards special needs children in mainstream schools (Nwazuoke, 2000; Bevan-Brown, 2000). It is believed that this outcome may have been influenced by the renewed public awareness programmes by the government and other stakeholders against all forms of discrimination in regular schools. The implication of this to practice is that children with learning disabilities will achieve better academic performance when compared with others whose teachers are not favorably disposed to their conditions.

Again, results from the study revealed that gender and educational qualification had no significant influence on the attitude of teachers towards children with learning disabilities (X^2 =0.142; p>0.05); (X^2 =2.497; p>0.05). This is in agreement with the findings of an earlier study conducted in Southeast Nigeria where socio-demographic variables such as age, sex, educational qualification and marital status had no significant influence on the attitude of teachers (Berry, 2010). This also agrees with the findings of a study carried out in Monrovia. Findings showed that gender had no significant influence on the attitude and behaviour of teachers towards pupils with learning disabilities (Larrivee & Cook, 2014). This indicated that the tendency of a teacher to exhibit either negative or positive attitude towards pupils with learning disabilities was not dependent on whether such teacher is a male or female. Again, this indicated that irrespective of the higher degrees acquired by teachers, their attitude towards children with learning disabilities remained the same. This is in agreement with the findings of previous studies where educational qualification in terms of advancement in degrees had no significant effect on the attitude of teachers towards children with learning disabilities (Gwanshak & Milaham, 2015). However, the study noted that teachers who specialized in special needs education were more favorably disposed in their attitude towards special needs children than those in other areas of specialty. Although this study did not compare the attitude of teachers based on their areas of specialty, it is understandable that teachers who specialize in special needs education will be more favorably disposed because, they have better understanding of the problems of special needs children and also possess the basic skills required to handling such problems.

Results from the study however, revealed that gender and educational qualification had significant influence on the behaviour of teachers towards children with learning disabilities (X^2 =0.142; p<0.05); (X^2 =23.456; p<0.05). The mean scores had earlier indicated that female teachers exhibited better positive behaviours than their male counterparts. This is line with the findings of previous studies where female teachers exhibited more acceptable behaviours towards children with learning disabilities when compared with their male counterparts (Larrivee & Cook 2014). The study also revealed that the academic achievements of pupils with the female teachers were far better than those in other classes handled by the males. The implication of this to practice is that in selection of teachers to handle special needs children, gender must be taken into serious consideration since female teachers seemed to be more empathetic to the plight of special needs children. This also indicated that teachers' behaviour improved positively as they acquired higher qualifications. This is contrary to the findings of previous studies where educational qualification had no significant influence on the behaviour of teachers towards children with learning disabilities (Berry, 2014). This was not surprising because, as individuals advance academically, a lot of transformation in terms of behaviour expectedly take place. The implication of this to practice is that engaging teachers with higher degrees will be more effective in handling children with learning disabilities when compared with those with lower degrees. It also revealed that children with learning disabilities have the

potential to perform better if their teachers exhibit positive behaviours that are not discriminatory and intolerant.

In view of the above, the study recommended that teachers should be provided with incentives in order to sustain their attitude and behaviours towards children with learning disabilities in regular primary schools; there should be training and retraining programmes to improve the educational qualification of teachers which will in turn, improve their behaviours towards children with learning disabilities in regular primary schools; there should be orientation programmes for male teachers on the need to improve their behaviours towards children with learning disabilities.

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