

AN OBSERVATION OF SOME ACTIVITIES IN SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION CENTRES IN ANAMBRA STATE

By

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Abstract

The study was aimed to observe some activities in special need centres in Anambra State, Nigeria. Using observation design, it studied some curriculum imperatives like friendly co-existence traits, team spirit, cooperation, orderliness, self-esteem, ability in disability, personal hygiene, and focus among learners in two selected special needs centres in the State. Researcher engaged in a five-hour observation of activities and interactive sessions with teachers and care-givers based on the pre-established framework. Information obtained were critically analysed; and the study found that most of these curricular imperatives were observed in the centres at varying degrees and based on categories of specialty. It recommended, among others, that teachers be trained in modern techniques of handling learners with special needs to improve their activities in co-curricular activities, other than the core ones.

Introduction

Education is the right of every child. In creating the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1993), the international community has recognized that children are people who have rights that must be respected equally to those of adults.

Four main principles form the core of the CRC:

- Non-discrimination or universality (article 2): All children have rights, regardless of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.
- Best interests (article 3): The child's best interests must be a primary consideration in all decisions affecting her or him.
- Life, survival and development (article 6): All children have a right to life, and to survive and develop – physically, mentally, spiritually, morally, psychologically and socially – to their full potential.
- Respect for the views of the child (article 12): Children have the right to express themselves freely on matters that affect them, and to have their views taken seriously (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund's State of World's Children, 2014: 4).

In response to the educational right of children including those with one form of impairment or the other, the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013: 35) provides that "persons with special needs shall be provided with inclusive education services in schools which normal persons attend, in age appropriate (to) general education classes directly supported by general teachers". Special need persons who cannot benefit from inclusive education will be provided with special classes and units in special schools receiving the same quality of education.

Special need learners are defined differently in many climes. The Indian National Council of Educational Research and Training (2006:2) reported that special need learner has been erroneously defined as "a child with disability, namely, visual, hearing, locomotor, and intellectual". United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2000:58) states that special need education goes beyond physical disability. It also refers to:

... the large proportion of children- in the school age- belonging to the groups of child labour are, street children, victims of natural catastrophes and social conflicts, and those in extreme social and economic deprivation. These children constitute the bulk of dropouts from the school system.

In the context of this study, special need learners include those disadvantaged individuals, with one form of deformity/impairment or the other and who may not be able to benefit maximally from the normal classroom, and therefore deserve special attention to realise their potentials. Thus, special needs centres are provided by government and non-governmental organizations

to realise these objectives, while maintaining the same quality of education as in ‘the other settings’

Every society has its fair share of people in this category. Hence, in Anambra state, Nigeria, compassionate homes and special needs education centres can be found in several places. But, while it is usual to focus attention on the ability of these children to read and write, very little is done to reckon with other curriculum imperatives. Curriculum imperative does not just mean to read and write, but includes some other life skills. Some of these curriculum imperatives include friendly co-existence traits, team spirit, cooperation, orderliness, self-esteem, ability in disability, personal hygiene, and focus (Kanno, 2017). So, while learners are provided opportunity to learn how to read and write, they ought to be exposed to these necessary ingredients of existence as well. How far these activities are carried out in special education centres, therefore, need to be determined.

Statement of Problem

Special education centres in Anambra State provide education to people with special needs, especially those with one form of impairment or the other. Apart from providing these children skills in reading and writing, other curriculum imperatives like friendly coexistence traits, team spirit, personal hygiene and others are supposed also to be inculcated in learners. There is the concern, however, that teachers in special education centres have interest only in the core curriculum, and pay little or no attention to those areas. In as much as the ability to read and write is important, these people with one form of challenge or the other need the attributes mentioned in the foregoing to be able to live useful life. The problem of the study, therefore is: to what extent have the special need learners in the special centres in Anambra state performed in some curriculum imperatives other than reading and writing?

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study was to observe some activities in the special need centres in Anambra State. Specifically, the study sought to observe activities as regards the following: friendly coexistence traits, team spirit, cooperation, orderliness, self-esteem, ability in disability, personal hygiene and focus.

Method

The study adopted a naturalistic observation design of non-participant type. The design involves observing a behaviour in a natural setting. In an observation study of non-participant type, the researcher is a passive recorder of participants’ behaviour (Spata, 2003). Two special need centres in Anambra State, namely, Special Education Centre (SEC) Umuchu and Basden

Memorial Special Education Centre (BMSEC), Isulo were selected for the study. The SEC, Umuchu has two sections: one for the deaf-dumb and deaf, and another for those with mental retardation. The BMSEC, Isulo is a larger centre harbouring various specialized schools for the blind, deaf-dumb, and primary and secondary sections. Researcher engaged in a five-hour observation in each centre and recorded activities accordingly. Researcher also interacted with teachers and care-givers in the centres to clarify certain issues raised during observation.

Observation schedule was used to obtain information on friendly co-existence traits, team spirit, cooperation, orderliness, self-esteem, ability in disability, personal hygiene, and focus observed among the inmates. Information obtained, thereafter, were analysed critically.

Results/Discussion

1. *Friendly coexistence traits*

The study found children to be friendly, joining hands with one another and playing during recreation. These traits, however, were higher among the mentally retarded than those living with other forms of challenges. The observed friendly dispositions evaporated easily among the mentally retarded as soon as hunger set in. Their resilience to hunger was poorer, than observed among the rest of their counterparts.

2. *Team spirit*

This followed from the friendly disposition observed above. Children work together and shared materials together. This quality was higher among the deaf-dumb, and the blind than among the mentally retarded who appeared to be more individualistic and each kept to oneself.

3. *Cooperation*

While the level of cooperation could be adjudged good among different categories of inmates, it appeared better among the deaf-dumb and the blind. The deaf-dumbs' swift response to the cue to greet a visitor in their midst was an indication that they cooperated as occasion demanded. As soon as the researcher entered the classroom, one of them, obviously the class-head, tapped on the desk, and all stood to greet the visitor using a sign language. The blind expressed what could be termed an act of ingenuity that left one wondering how they knew that a visitor had entered the class. They, like their counterparts in the deaf-dumb, greeted as soon

as a visitor's presence was felt. One was wont to ask: how did they perceive the presence of a visitor?

4. *Orderliness*

Most of the classes were orderly except the junior classes for the mentally retarded. The senior class for the mentally retarded was unusually quiet. Although, the teacher explained that they could be unruly and stubborn when hungry; and if lesson extended beyond the usual time. The junior stream was just an opposite. Pupils with higher degree of retardation could be find outside the classroom laughing alone and busying themselves aimlessly. Their teachers had hectic job bringing them to order.

The deaf-dumb were orderly, however, converse freely in the absence of the teacher and showed comportment as soon as the teacher was in. Though their voice was denied them, they did give out occasional whine. Perhaps, the orderliness flowed from their impairment- inability to speak. The blind however, appeared the most orderly- spoke in low voice even in the absence of the teacher and more composed and articulate.

5. *Self-esteem*

The blind had very high esteem despite their impairment. The deaf-dumb also had comparable self-esteem, but tended to intimidate the mentally retarded who they regarded as being inferior to them. In fact, a simple threat that the deaf-dumb would be invited to handle them, often quietened the mentally retarded whenever they proved stubborn to handle. Due to this superior-inferior type of relationship, the mentally retarded were intimidated and at times their belongings were removed, hidden or stolen by the deaf-dumb.

6. *Ability in disability*

Although there was no immediate opportunity to observe the cognitive ability of inmates, interaction with teachers indicated that the blind generally had highest ability followed by the deaf-dumb. The mentally retarded had difficulty recognizing letters and numbers, and it was a herculean task teaching them.

7. *Personal hygiene*

There was remarkable cleanliness in the school compounds, and children could be seen tidying up their surroundings. The level of personal hygiene was high except for the mentally retarded though depending on their level of infirmity. Those with special cases had problem taking care of their personal hygiene, while those with mild cases appeared better.

8. *Focus*

The blind were highly focused even in their impairment. Perhaps, what they lost in vision was compensated with a highly aural capacity. The deaf-dumb had varying degrees of focus. Some followed their teachers' cues, while others were busy occupying themselves with some other things. The mentally retarded were the worst in terms of focus. They lacked concentration and it was hectic trying to control them.

Conclusion

It may be concluded that persons with special needs have varying responses to the various curriculum imperatives. From the observation made, there is reason to believe that these are being addressed, and that the centres understand that the needs of learners are beyond reading and writing. Improving the skills of people with special needs in the centres is a herculean task that requires increased motivation and incentives for teachers and learners alike.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

1. Teachers need to be exposed through in-service training to modern techniques in addressing the peculiar needs of special needs learners.
2. Government should provide a special salary structure for those teachers and care-givers in the special need centres in view of their workload and stress involved in addressing the problems of special need learners.
3. Special need learners should be provided facilities for greater cooperation and recreation in the schools.

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