

SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS WORKING WITH SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN IN INCLUSIVE AND NON INCLUSIVE SETTINGS: PERCEPTION OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *The contributions of all support professionals are essential to the overall success of children with special needs. The study seeks to find out the perception of school management on the need for support personnel's and their availability in inclusive and non inclusive settings within Kaduna metropolis. Thirteen settings (three non inclusive and ten inclusive school) were involved in the study. Data was collected by questionnaire made up of three section and the data were analyzed using frequency count and average (mean). The findings revealed that Support personnel's seldom work in inclusive and non inclusive settings in Kaduna. Though school management understands the benefits of support professional to special need children, the percentage of support personnel's working with children with special needs in inclusive and non inclusive settings are very low. Therefore, there is need to employ supportive personnel's to work in inclusive and non inclusive setting for the benefit and overall development of special needs children.*

Keywords: school management, support professionals, Special Needs Children, Inclusive settings and Non Inclusive Settings

INTRODUCTION

Special needs children includes all categories of children who have either mild – severe forms of mental or intellectual, physical, emotional or sensory impairments. According to [1] these categories could stretched from the small group of those with physical handicaps of crippling and paralytic types to mild form of physical handicapped that affects the use of muscles of the hands and body movements needed for educational activities such as writing, drawing , throwing and catching etc.

The Nigerian school system, operate an inclusive setting, where the physically challenged children are taught with their peer, though, children whose condition are severe are taught in non inclusive settings. [4] maintained that, the overall goal of inclusive education is a school where every child participates in class activities and children are treated equally. How effective these children cope in inclusive and non inclusive classroom depends on the type of provision available to ameliorate the problems faced by them.

The school management ensured that all children develop mentally, physically and emotionally to their fullest potentials. In other words, children are taught by special teachers and helped by other supporting professionals to be able to attain to attain their fullest capacities. These support professionals includes speech therapist, mobility instructors, audiologist, physiotherapist, physical fitness teacher etc. Support- professionals are basically supportive experts and their importance cannot be over- emphasized in a situation or condition where functional mobility, balance, co-ordination, assistive technologies are compromised as in the case of special needs children. These professionals collaborate with regular teachers to ensure that every child receive the best possible educational attainments. [3] asserted that inclusive classroom should be well organized and allow for children to attend therapeutic sessions. [2] narrated in his study, how physical activities have improved motor coordination of persons with intellectual disabilities.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The paper focused on children with physical challenges who are in either inclusive or non inclusive settings. Therefore, it seeks to find out the availability of support professionals in inclusive and non inclusive settings for

provision of functional education to children with special need. The study will awaken the consciousness of school management on the importance of support personnel's, create awareness and evolve the process of planning for the number of special needs children requiring Support professional interventions in inclusive and non inclusive settings.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The important issue here is that special need children require the service of other professional. Children need to develop their fine and gross motor skills for writing, drawing, throwing, jumping, playing and movement. Lack of these skills may create a lag in the educational progress any child can attain. Others children require the service of physiotherapist, counselors, audiologist, audio-visual aids and assistive technologist experts, etc. Therefore, support professionals working with children with special needs in inclusive and non inclusive setting are a justified course, without them, many children with special needs will pass through school with difficulty, not achieving to the fullest of their potential, this result to waste of government resources and unproductive individuals at adulthood.

POPULATION AND SAMPLES OF THE STUDY

The population for this study comprised of head teachers or headmasters working in inclusive and non inclusive setting with ministry of education in Kaduna metropolis. The samples comprise of 13 head teachers from inclusive and non inclusive settings. Purposeful sampling procedure was used to select the head teachers and administrators.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The answers to the following research questions will help to shape the focus of the study.

1. Does support- professional work in inclusive and non inclusive settings?
2. Does school management understand the benefits of support professional to special need children in inclusive and non inclusive settings?
3. What percentage of support- professionals work with children with special needs in inclusive and non inclusive settings?

INSTRUMENT OF THE STUDY

A set of questionnaire was designed and administered to head masters, principals, head teachers and staff working

directly with inclusive and non inclusive setting in the ministry of education. The questionnaire contained eleven items of four sections (A, B, C & D). Section A sought responses of name of school and staff strength. Section B has Items 1-6 on with yes or no responses, section C has items 6- 11 on a 5-point Likert-type scale of strongly agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Undecided (UD), Disagreed (D), and strongly disagreed (SD) and section D required respondents to fill in specific number of support professionals in each school.

METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS

The data obtained was analyzed using descriptive statistic, involving the frequency counts of each response for sections A & C and calculating the mean response for section B using 5 point for strongly agreed (SA), 4 points for Agreed (A), 3 points for Undecided (UD), 2 points for Disagreed (D), and 1 point for strongly disagreed (SD). The average of $(1+2+3+4+5 = 15/5 = 3)$ three points above for any item will be accepted.

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Table 1: Perception of school management on the need for support personnel's

s/n	Items	Responses		
		Yes	No	Total
1	Does the school have support professional staff working with special need children within your school	5 (38%)	8 (62%)	13
2	Does the school require the service of support professional working with special need children	13 (100%)	0	13
3	Can special teachers play the role of support professionals	12 (87%)	1 (13%)	13
4	Do you agree that support professional can augment the role of special teachers	11 (74%)	2 (26%)	13
5	The school should provide a platform for all round development (educational, physical, emotional and psycho social) for special need children	13 (100%)	0	13
6	Has any supportive professional ever been invited or attached to the school	4 (31%)	9 (69%)	13

Table 2: Responsibilities of other personnel's toward children with special needs

s/n	Items	Responses				Remark
		Strongly Agreed	Agreed	Total Response	mean	
1	Educational and mental development of children with special needs is guaranteed by special teachers	8	5	13	4.5	Accepted
2	Physical development of children with special needs is guaranteed by physiotherapist, physical experts and	10	3	13	4.5	Accepted
3	Emotional development of children with special needs can be guaranteed by counselor and therapist	2	11	13	4.5	Accepted
4	Psycho social development of children with special needs can be guaranteed by psychologist/ therapist	3	10	13	4.5	Accepted
5	Health expert take care of wellness of children within the school	4	9	13	4.5	Accepted

Table 3: Availability of support personnel's in inclusive and non inclusive settings

Support personnel	No of school present	Percentages
Assistive technology experts	0	0
Speech Therapist,	0	0
Audiologist	0	0
Behavior therapist,	0	0
Physiotherapist	1	13%
Health and wellness experts	6	78%
Counselor	3	39%
Psychologist	0	0
Mobility instructor	0	0
Interpreters	6	78%
Special teachers	13	

Table 1.0, show that 62% of the respondents do not have support personnel in their settings while 38% had (item 1). 100% of the school requires the service of support personnel (item 2), About 87% agreed that special teachers can play the role of support personnel while 13% believed otherwise (item 3), 74% agreed that support personnel can augment the role of special teachers and 26% said no (item

4), 100% agreed that the school should provide a platform for all round development for the special need children (item 5), and 69% agreed that no support personnel has ever been invited or attached to the school while 31% disagreed (item 6).

Table 2.0 indicate 8 respondents for strongly agree and 5 respondents for agree to item 1 that educational and mental

needs of special needs children is guaranteed by support personnel. For item 2, 10 respondents strongly agree that physical development of children with special needs is guaranteed by physiotherapists and physical experts while 3 respondents agreed. 11 respondents agree and 2 strongly agreed that emotional development of children with special needs is guaranteed by counselors and therapist in item 3. For item 4 which is that psychosocial development of children with special need is guaranteed psychologists, 10 agreed and 3 strongly agreed. In item 5, 9 respondents agreed and 4 strongly agreed that health expert take care of wellness of children with special needs.

Table 3.0 show that 1 school representing 13% have a physiotherapist, 3 settings has counselor representing 39%, 6 settings has interpreter as well as health and wellness experts representing 78% and all the settings have special teachers representing 100%.

FINDINGS

The study revealed that perception of inclusive and non inclusive school management on the need for support personnel's are positive. The management recognize that they require supportive staff to augment the role of special teachers for overall development of children with special needs in inclusive and non inclusive settings.

All items on responsibilities of supportive personnel's toward children with special needs have a mean average above three, therefore accepted. The findings imply that school management recognized the responsibilities of supportive personnel's in inclusive and non inclusive settings.

Generally, the findings indicate that support personnel's seldom work in inclusive and non inclusive settings in Kaduna. Though school management understands the benefits of support professional to special need children, the percentage of support personnel's (assistive technology experts, speech therapists, audiologists, behavioral therapists, psychologists, mobility instructors) working with children with special needs in inclusive and non inclusive settings are very low and in some instance absent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from this study, school heads should demand or request for adequate number of supportive professionals to be posted or employed by government or school owners to inclusive and non inclusive settings in Kaduna metropolis

More efforts should be put into awareness program to sensitize government of Kaduna state to look into the area of provision of basic prerequisite for optimal nurturing of special needs children which can adequately be taken care of by supportive professionals.

CONCLUSION

Children with special need account for a sizable percentage of population in Nigeria. As part of the United Nation Convention for people with disability, people with disabilities are entitled to good education, whether they are inclusive and non inclusive settings. Functional education make provision for physical, mental, emotional and psycho social development, all round development cannot be achieved by special teachers alone.

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