



INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: UNDERSTANDING THE ACADEMIC CHALLENGES AND COPING MECHANISM OF PHYSICALLY DISABLED STUDENTS FOR SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN CROSS RIVER STATE.



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Abstract

Empirical evidence is adequate in Nigeria to understand the link between coping mechanism and academic challenges of physically disabled students, educating the disabled in regular schools is basically for the achievement of universal education. So, this research focused on academic challenges and coping mechanism of physically disabled students in secondary schools in Bekwarra L.G.A., Cross River State. The study adopted descriptive survey design to ascertain academic & coping mechanism of secondary school students in Bekwarra L.G.A. One hundred and sixty-nine students with physical disabilities in regular schools was drawn using the purposive sampling technique. The instrument for the study was questionnaire titled "Academic Challenge and coping mechanism of physically disabled students' questionnaire". Validity was established and a correlational coefficient of 0.67 was derived indicating the reliability for challenges of students who are physically disabled in regular schools include lack of access to modern technologies, inappropriate teaching methods and non-availability of special education curriculum. The study discovered that the optional copy mechanism employed in the students are listening to inspiration talk/music, requesting assistance, working hard to solve problems, and learning to engage in personal activities. Gender also impact significantly challenges of physically disabled students and coping mechanism. Based on the finding of the study, the paper recommends that psychological counselling programmes should take more areas of rehabilitations counselling in order to facilitate additional support to students who are physically disabled. It also recommends government and stakeholders involvement in providing assistive technologies to students who are physically disabled.

Introduction

Preceding the adoption of universal declaration of human right in 1984, Formal Western Education within African contexts was characterized by significant socio-economic barriers to access. The beneficiaries of such education were typically individual of considerable wealth, royal lineage, or influence, who could afford to pursue recognized university education abroad. Article 26 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates that education shall be directed to the full development of human personality and to the strengthening of respect to human rights and fundamental freedoms. This declaration underscored the principle that education is a universal right, not a privilege reserved for the elite.

Following this realization, education began to garner significant attention from governments and stakeholders as a crucial instrument for fostering comprehensive human development

encompassing physical, political and socio-economic dimensions. In Nigeria, the government acknowledges education as a paramount tool for national development (FGN 2004). Consequently, numerous efforts have been initiated by United Nations Agencies, government and non-governmental organizations as well as other stakeholders in the education sector to enhance access, attendance and retention. A pivotal movement was the 1990 World Conference on education for all convened by UNESCO in Jomtien, Thailand, which proclaimed a global commitment to eliminating illiteracy and ensuring education for all; thereby mandating government-worldwide to pursue this ambitious agenda (Abraham & Tubotdip, 2006).

In response to the global Education for All Declaration, the Nigerian government initiated the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in September 30, 1999, which was subsequently backed by Universal Basic Education Act of 2004. This legislative framework mandates access to quality education for all Nigerian children without discrimination based on background, health status or physical ability. The United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) also prioritized universal primary education, emphasizing inclusivity and accessibility for individuals with disabilities. Despite this policy initiatives, individuals with disabilities continue to face significant barriers to education and socio-economic participation. However, there is a growing recognition of need to harness the potential of individuals with disabilities, leveraging their abilities and talents to contribute to society.

The position of individuals in relation to the education of those with physical disabilities, alongside the responses of governmental bodies, organization and concerned stakeholders addressing their challenges, necessitates thorough re-evaluation. Over 19 million Nigerians have been documented as experiencing various form of disability (Nigeria Bureau of Statistics, 2012). The adversities faced by disable individuals should ideally afford them a more privilege status within society; however, they are often relegated to a position of marginalization.

Despite the implementation of several initiatives, such as the establishment of specialized institutions tailored to the unique needs of learners (e.g., schools for the visually impaired, hearing impaired etc.), aimed at enhancing educational experiences and rehabilitation of physically disabled students, many scholars argued that this measures inadvertently perpetuate discrimination against individual with disabilities. If these students cannot be seamlessly integrated into the mainstream educational framework, supported by well-articulated services, it signifies their continued exclusion from the societal fabric in which they reside. Access to education and adequate support within academic environments remains a significant challenge for those with physical disabilities.

Compounding these issues is the disheartening reality that many of those fortunate enough to complete secondary education rarely advance to tertiary institution including teacher education programmes or colleges. This phenomenon may stem from the pervasive exclusion discrimination and segregation faced by disabled children within mainstream education, prompting one to question the underline reason for such treatment. Is it attributable to their physical condition or rather to systemic operational norms? The urgent necessity for a comprehensive integration of all students, particularly within teacher education programmes cannot be overstated. In the light of the persistent neglect in nurturing the potential of these substantial minority of physically challenged students, this study seeks to explore how they can be fully integrated into teacher education programmes in Nigeria. Thus, it is imperative to undertake a rigorous investigation into whether the education of these demographic is perceived within or outside of the concept of their recognition as integral members of Nigeria society. It is with this understanding that the researcher has resolved to examine academic challenges faced and the coping mechanism employed by physically challenged individuals in Cross River State.

The following research questions and hypotheses were raised for the study.

1. What are the major challenges faced by physically challenged persons in secondary schools?
2. What are the coping strategies employed by physically challenged student's secondary schools?
1. There is no significant difference in the academic challenges faced by students with physical disability in regular secondary schools in Nigeria based on gender.



2. There is no significant difference in the coping strategies employed by students with physical disability in regular secondary schools in Nigeria based on gender

Method

The research design adopted is the descriptive research survey which is used to collect data from students with physical disabilities in secondary schools in Bekwarra local government, Cross River State. Descriptive research is a systematic attempt to describe the characteristics of a given population in an area of interest; it comprises a systematic data gathering process which ensures meaningful description of the situation (Daramola, 2006). The descriptive research design is considered appropriate because it is capable of collecting information from a representative sample of students with physical disabilities and enabling the researcher to make inferences and generalization to all school-aged students with physical disabilities. The population of the study consisted of all school-aged students with physical disabilities in Bekwarra local government, Cross River State. The target population consisted of in-school students with physical disabilities (367) in the forty-two secondary schools in Bekwarra local government area of Cross River State. The target population is 169 sampled for the study based on the Research Advisors' (2006) table for sample selection at a confidence level of 95% with a margin of error of 0.05%. The researcher used the purposive sampling technique to select twenty secondary schools from the local government for the study. The instrument that was used in data collection for this study was a researcher-designed questionnaire tagged "Academic Challenges and Coping Mechanism of Students with physically disabled Questionnaire (ACCMSPDQ). A questionnaire is an instrument used by the researcher to gather information for the purpose of generating data for the study. The questionnaire for this study is divided into three sections (A, B and C); Section "A" comprised items eliciting personal information about the respondents such as gender, age, and parents' educational level. Section "B" contained 12 question items raised to elicit data about the challenges faced by students with physical disability in secondary schools in Cross River State. Section "C" comprised 15 items raised to elicit data about the coping mechanism employed by students with physical disabilities, making a total of 30 items. A four-point Likert type questionnaire was provided to elicit responses from the participants in the following other: Very True (4), True (3), Sometimes True (2), and Not True (1).

The Validity of the instrument was determined using face and content validity. Boriowo (2015) stated that one of the characteristics of a good instrument is that it should have face and content validity. The instrument for this study was given to five academic staff in Special Education and Educational psychology in university of Calabar, Cross River State, Nigerian. The reliability of the instrument was determined using a test re-test procedure. Ten questionnaire forms were administered to ten students with physical disabilities that were not part of the main respondents but share the same characteristics. After an interval of four weeks, the same set of questionnaires was administered to the same set of respondents. Then the two sets of scores were correlated using the Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient (PPMC) and a reliability coefficient of 0.67 was obtained which was considered adequate for a research of this nature.

Data collected from Section "A" of the instrument was analyzed and reported using simple percentages. Data from Sections "B" and "C" were scored on a four-point Likert-type scale with scores allotted as follows: Very True-4; True-3; Sometimes true-2; Not True-1. Negatively worded items were scored in reversed order. Section's "B" and "C" of the questionnaire contained 15 Items each which implies that the highest score any respondent could obtain in each of the sections was 60 (15x4) while the lowest score was 15 (15x1). The mean score was 2.50 (4+3+2+1/4). Therefore, any mean score ranging from 2.50 and above in Section's "B" and "C" was adjudged a major challenge, and preferred coping mechanism. However, mean scores below 2.50 indicated minor challenge and less preferred coping mechanism.

Result

Fig 1: Gender distribution of sample

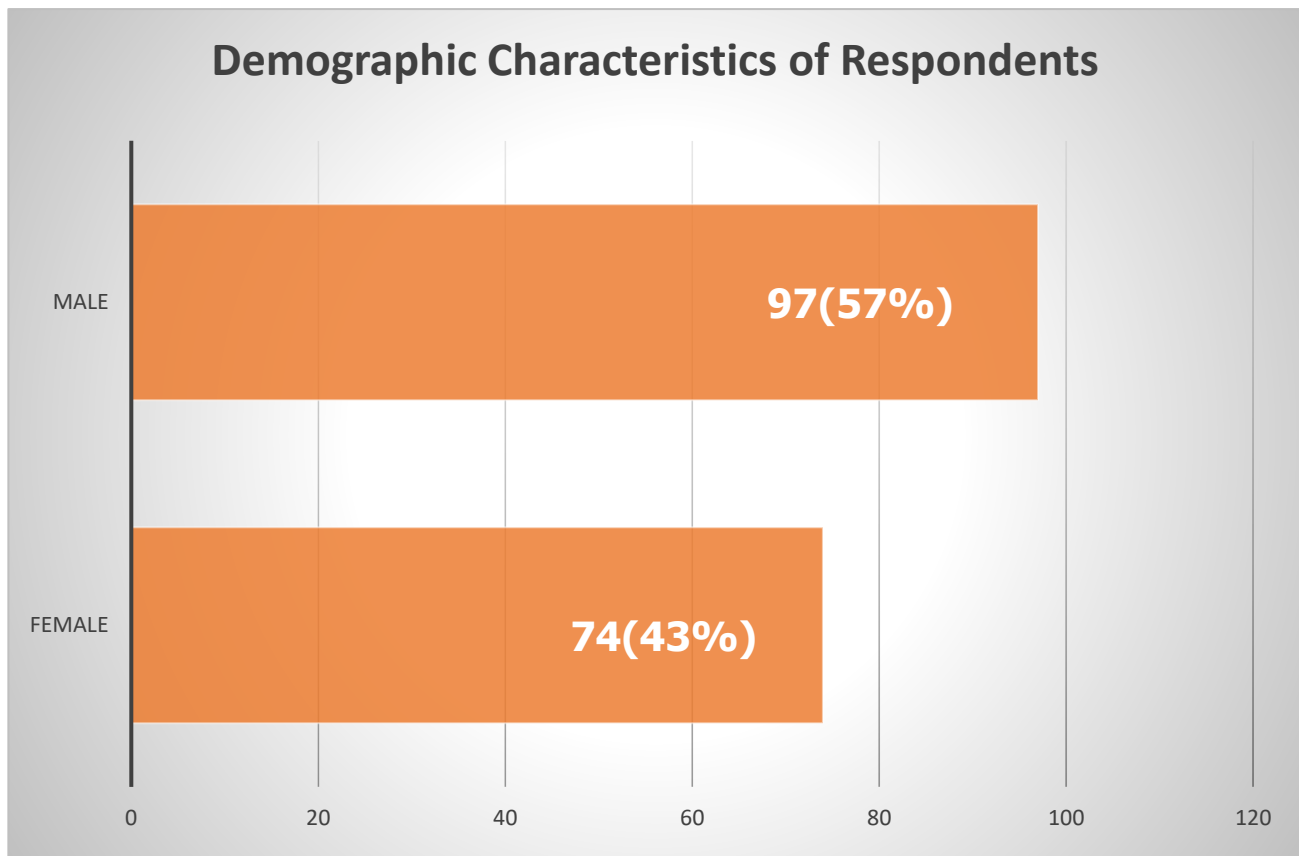


Figure 1 shows that 97 (57%) of the 169 respondents were males, while 74(43%) were females. This means that there were more male students with physical disabilities than females involved in this study.

Table 1: Rank Order on Challenges of Students with physical disabilities in Secondary School

Item no	As a result of my physical disabilities, the academic challenges I experience include:	Mean	Rank
3	Inability to access modern technologies	3.73	1 st
2	Inappropriate teaching methods	3.64	2 nd
9	Non availability of special curriculum	3.61	3 rd
12	Barriers in the environment	3.57	4 th
14	Inability to move from one place or the other at a good pace	3.56	5 th
5	Non specialist teachers in the subject matters	3.56	5 th
13	No resource room for improved learning	3.42	7 th
4	Inadequate facilities for learning in the regular schools	3.19	8 th
8	Inappropriate learning facilities	3.13	9 th
10	Inability to access financial support from the government	3.11	10 th
6	Difficulty in getting admission into higher institution	2.64	11 th
15	Feeling inferior in the class	2.54	12 th
11	Lack of school authority's support	2.32	13 th
1	Teachers doubting my abilities	2.32	14 th
7	Unfriendly attitude of student	2.43	15 th



Table 1 shows in rank order, the magnitude of the challenges of students with physical disabilities face in secondary schools in Bekwarra L.G.A of Cross River State. The analysis showed that item 3 ("in ability to access modern technologies") ranked 1st with a mean score of 3.73. Item 2 "inappropriate teaching methods" ranked 2nd with a mean score of 3.64. Item 9 "non availability of special curriculum" ranked 3rd with a mean score of 3.61, item 12 (barriers in the environment) ranked 4th and the last items with mean scores of 2.32 and 2.43 ranked 14th and 15th respectively. Thirteen of the 15 items (70.0%) have mean scores above 2.50, the cut-off point for determining the level of the challenges. Hence 70.0% of the challenges were major ones while the remaining two were minor ones (Items 1 and 7). The analysis indicated that a large proportion of the challenges facing students with physical disabilities are major challenges.

Table 2: Rank Order on Coping Mechanism Employed by Students with physical disabilities in secondary schools Bekwarra L.G.A, Cross River State?

Item No.	As a student with visual impairment in regular secondary school, I cope by	Mean score	Rank
8	learning to do my daily activities myself	3.80	1 st
13	listening to inspirational talk/music on tape	3.78	2 nd
4	requesting for assistance from friends	3.77	3 rd
1	working hard to solve my problems	3.70	4 th
11	talking to myself that I am not alone in my condition	3.68	5 th
6	praying to God	3.53	6 th
2	ignoring negative attitude towards me	3.41	7 th
10	aspiring to be independent	3.38	8 th
2	adjusting to the facilities available for my studies	3.35	9 th
14	listening/reading the word of God	3.33	10 th
9	Interacting with others freely	3.33	10 th
7	hoping that my situation could be better	3.31	12 th
12	planning my schoolwork and following it up	3.13	13 th
5	avoid thinking about my situation	2.94	14 th
15	relying on family for support	2.90	15 th

Table 2 shows, in rank order of magnitude, the preferred coping mechanism employed by students with physical disabilities in secondary schools in Cross River State. The analysis revealed that items 8 "learning to do my daily activities myself", ranked 1st with a mean score of 3.80. Item 13 "Listening to inspirational talk/music" with a mean score of 3.78 ranked 2nd, item 4 "requesting assistance from friends" with a mean score of 3.77 ranked 3rd, while item 1 "working hard to solve my problems" ranked 4th with a mean score of 3.70. The results revealed that 15 items have (100.0%) mean scores above the cut-off point of 2.50. Hence, the whole items were highly preferred coping mechanism among the students.

Table 3: Results of t-test comparing the challenges faced by students with physical disabilities in secondary schools based on gender

Gender	Number	Mean	Df	t-Cal.	t-Crit.	SD	Decision
Male	93	53.18	5.74	168	2.16"	1.96	Rejected
Female	76	54.54	8.59				

*Significant, $p < 0.05$

The result indicated that the mean score of the challenges for male (53.18) and that of females (54.54) yielded a calculated t-value of 2.16 which is greater than the critical t-value of 1.96. Therefore, hypothesis 1 was rejected; $t(525) = 2.16, p < 0.05$. Hence there was a significant difference in the challenges faced by students with physical disabilities in regular secondary schools based on gender. The former had a mean score (53.18) lesser than the latter (54.54).

Table 4: Results of t-test comparing the coping mechanism of students with visual impairment based on gender

Gender	Number	Mean	SD	Df	t-Cal.	t-Crit.	Decision
Male	93	63.78	7.78	168	2.04	1.96	Rejected
Female	76	57.07	6.50				

* Significant $p < 0.05$

The results indicated that the mean score for male (63.78) and that of female (57.07) yielded a calculated t-value of 2.04 which is greater than the critical t-value of 1.96. Therefore, there was a significant difference in the coping mechanism employed by male and female students with physical disabilities in secondary schools in Cross River State. Thus, hypothesis 2 was rejected; $t(168) = 2.04$, $p < 0.05$.

Discussion

The demographic characteristics of the respondents revealed that there were more male students (57%) as against (43%) female students who participated in the study. The low enrolment of female students with physical disability in schools generally may be associated with perceived fear by parents that female students with physical challenges may not be able to cope with the rigors of academic activities in the school system. This finding is consistent with an earlier finding by Esere, Okonkwo and Omotosho (2014), which reported that there are more male than female students with physical disabilities in secondary schools in the southeastern states of Nigeria. In addition, some parents may feel ashamed of being associated with such a situation hence they prefer to "imprison" their girl-children with physical disability (Jurmang & Jurmang, 2014). The most important challenge is inability to access modern technologies. The result is not surprising because education today is technology-driven and their disabled students are most times unable to access such technologies like the computer, and internet (Iroegbu, 2007).

Coping with the school environment, adjusting to infrastructural inadequacies of regular schools, how to bear the negative attitude of other students, instructional strategies and adaptation techniques, acquisition of resource materials and so on were all considered by the respondents as significant areas of coping. These findings support Lazarus and Folkman's (2014) view that coping is not just a fixed set of strategies that has to be used whenever needed but depends on the situations being faced. The findings also aligned with Olso, McElheron and Pilorget's (2011) findings that there are wide ranges of personal coping strategies used by people who are physically challenged which they categorized into three: Mental/attitude, Leisure/occupational and Support/social network. It should be noted that some of the items in this arrangement are like the ones in this study.

The hypotheses tested revealed that there was a significant difference in the challenges faced when compared because of gender. This implies that male and female students with physical disabilities face different challenges in the school system in Nigeria. This finding supports the work of Durosaro (2010) who observed that the school-related gender-based violence against girls who are physically disabled comes in various forms such as sexual, physical, verbal, emotional and psychological. While physical, verbal, emotional, and psychological violence may be experienced by both male and female, sexual violence is exclusive for female students. The finding runs contrary from the result of an earlier study by Esere, Okonkwo and Omotosho (2014) in which no significant difference was found when challenges were compared between male and female students with physical disabilities in south-eastern Nigeria. Hypothesis two showed that a significant difference existed between the coping mechanism employed by male and female students with physical disabilities in secondary schools in Bekwarra LGA, Cross River State. Similar findings were reported by Esere, Okonkwo and Omotosho (2014) between the coping mechanism employed by male and female students with physical disabilities in regular secondary schools in the South-eastern states of Nigeria.



Conclusion

The findings from the study revealed that students with physical disabilities in secondary schools in Nigeria are faced with many challenges and employ a lot of coping strategies in their attempts to acquire education which is acclaimed to be a right rather than a privilege.

Implications for Counseling

Considering the enormity of the challenges, the veracity of the counseling and the multitude of the coping strategies of student with physical disability in regular secondary schools in Nigeria, it is imperative that counseling programmes should cover more areas of rehabilitation counseling to give more support to students with physical disability. This is because, producing counselors with deeper knowledge of counseling students with physical disabilities will provide the necessary services needed by these students in mainstream secondary schools to address the challenges constituting barriers to effective school performance. Counseling is about changing/restructuring peoples' behaviour for better functioning in the society, counselors will modify students' maladaptive behaviours based on some counseling theories such as Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy, Reality Therapy and Social Model of Disability.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommended the following

In the study, female students faced more challenges than the male students. The researcher recommended that parents especially mothers should train female students with physical disabilities on how to be confident and not to feel inferior to others, to be independent and to explore their environment. This could be through participation in house chores and other family engagements. At school, teachers should provide special curriculum such as mobility and orientation, independent travel, and skills of daily living. School authority should provide resource room services where specialized services will be provided for students. Such resource rooms should contain assistive and adaptive technologies, computer-assisted technologies that can help to ease the education of students with physical disabilities; such as screen readers, abacuses, thermoforms, talking watches, talking calculators and so on.

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