

EDUCATIONAL COUNSELLING AND LEARNING IMPAIRMENTS AMONG ELDERSTOWN PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN IN WARRI-SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

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Abstract

The article is focused on examining the extent to which the administration of guidance and counselling services influences learning impairments among primary school children in a special needs school. The study had a sample size of 100 pupils that were purposively selected, and three research questions were adopted. A questionnaire titled Questionnaire on Educational counselling and learning impairments (QECLI) was developed to

elicit a response from the pupils. Section A had the respondents' demographic information, while section B had fifteen items. The findings revealed that educational counselling greatly influenced and improved pupils reading and speaking disorder as well as their writing deficiency positively. Conclusively, the study recommends that government should provide schools equipped with facilities, teachers and counsellors trained for that purpose

Keywords: Learning Impairments, Educational Counselling Service

Introduction

Children with special needs can be found in almost all parts of the world. They belong to family circles and may also be in educational settings to acquire educational knowledge. They may have their special schools, yet some are in schools for normal children. They seek educational knowledge just like any normal child hence the quest to attend a school or be educated. They have the learning capabilities like others.

They are regarded as individuals with special needs because of their peculiarities concerning being handicapped, talented or gifted. They are like any normal human beings that have rights and privileges. In other words, they have the right to life and education. The right to learn is embedded in their rights to education. These kinds of children have been grievously neglected; hence we have more of them on the streets of Nigeria as beggars, some looking like mad children.

The Nigerian three-tier education system needs to include learning activities in the curriculum that could enable those with special needs to acquire skills that could make them useful to themselves, their families and society in general. Given this, this article examines educational counselling services that may be useful to learners with special needs.

There are three main services guidance and counselling. Educational guidance and counselling are one of them, and it is like a package meant to meet the needs of individuals with special needs. The other two are vocational and personal-social services. Other servicing programmes include information service, counselling service, orientation, referral, evaluation, research, excursion, career day or week, work visit, etc. This study, therefore, seeks to discuss the extent to which the administration of educational counselling services could influence the improvement of pupils learning impairments, such as reading and speaking disorders, as well as their writing deficiencies.

The word **special needs** may not be the main heading for this study, but it is necessary to expand on it. It could be termed disabled, handicapped or exceptional. These words mean

that there are hindrances that prevent the individual from acting normally. Again, the word special need may connote the special nature and requirements of children with one or more numbers of handicapping or gifted conditions. It is further described as the kind or type of area of need where individuals require assistance or support. They are those aspects of special needs that are peculiar to persons referred to as learners with learning impairments. Learning impairments, therefore, is one of the special needs of a learner.

Learners, as used in this study, are children that experience a relatively permanent or persistent change in behaviour patterns that occurs due to previous practice, training or experience (Kinble, 1985, 1979). They could be described as those who hunger and thirst for knowledge or skills in a specific area of need through the process of seeking and acquiring those above in a schooling environment or non-school setting for the singular purpose of gaining a lasting change in behaviours such as acting, feeling or thinking derived from practice or experience.

Learners with Special Needs are sets of learners who are handicapped or disabled either during conception, birth or after birth. They are learners with one or more forms of disabilities that tend to obstruct them in the course of learning and from performing other duties as other normal learners can perform (Ogbebor, 2004). Some learners have just one type of disability, referred to as **single**. That is, the learner has only one disability or problem that affects performance in school, while learners with **multiple** handicaps have two or more types of disabilities. Such learners may be deaf and, at the same time, crippled. Learning impairment is one of the disabilities that could be single or multiple in a child, and it forms the thrust of this study

Learning impairment is a disorder that disturbs the acquisition of knowledge and skills in such a way that the child is seen not to be able to meet the intended purpose of education and schooling. The evidence of learning among children of school age is shown according to Awanbor (1997) in areas such as reading, speaking, writing and calculations that require the use of symbols. They are discussed accordingly:

Reading Disorder: A child may first be able to read before writing and performing any other skill. They differ from one another in their reading ability. Reading is essential to schooling, especially at the kindergarten and primary levels. Reading is a skill dependent upon processing, written, phonics, syntactic and semantic information in response to visual graphic display (Wiig & Semel, 1976). Some of the basic steps in reading reiterated by Awanbor (1997) has to do with graphic input, encoding and decoding; that is, a child has poor reading habits due to visual defect. Reading difficulties could be attributed to eye fixation that leads to an inability to read fluently. Other issues in reading are jerky reading styles emanating from poor word grouping, word counting and difficulty in word pronunciation. Inability to spell is also a reading-related case. Examples of this are the inability to identify alphabets or letters in a word; they may also reverse alphabets, i.e. b for d, or a for o, p for q or g. All of these could lead to the wrong pronunciation of words. Other signs of reading difficulties include articulation disorder (inability to manipulate speech organs to produce sounds). Most learning disability is characterized by reading deficiencies. A child who cannot read effectively may have issues with other subjects, including mathematics, that deal with figures or numbers.

Speaking Disorder: Speaking is the act of uttering words through a voice (Oxford dictionary, 2015). It is an exercise that reveals the intent of the mind and unspoken words. Reading is saying out a given or group of words put together as a word or sentence. **Spelling** is directly

connected to reading. A child will have to spell correctly before it can be adjudged to read accurately and have good comprehension. **Spelling disorder** is an aspect of speaking or speech deficiency. Speech deficiency is difficulty in bringing out words when speaking (Ogbebor, 2004). It becomes a disorder when a child cannot effectively express himself. It is shown as stuttering, stammering and voice deficiencies.

Writing Deficiency: Writing could be described as the act of using an object, that is, pencil, pen, or chalk, to make meaning or sense on paper as a means of expression as it was in the early eighties and nineties, According to oxford dictionary (2015) writing is written words. The act tends to pose a problem to some children who find it difficult to write. Some of them overcome it after a while. It persists with others till adolescence or even adulthood. Signs of the difficulties might be that the child is unable to construct the letters legibly and in speed, irregular spacing in letter writing, slow writing, poor writing quality and illegible writing quality. The signs mentioned above may be seen during class exercises, assignments, note-taking and examinations. Some of these cases may be associated with left-handed children, as stated by Orton (1964). The writing deficiencies are revealed in their mode of letter formulation and quality of writing. Awanbor (1987) noted that the defect in writing eventually causes the children's written work to be limited in scope and quantity. It is pertinent to note that children differ in their deficiencies. A child who writes well may not be able to read well, while the reverse may be the case for others. In all, their performance in academics or any other activities may be affected in a way that leads to backwardness.

This is where educational guidance and counselling is relevant in providing the necessary assistance required to overcome the challenges of poor reading and writing habit through implementing its multifarious activities. This is summarized in the words of Awanbor (1984), "whatever the handicap and the attitude, the will to conquer is what matters; although the beginning may pose the greatest threat". The child's interest in learning and the mind to win in the long run is what the counsellor needs from the child to render quality assistance. The above assertion was succinctly corroborated by Oladele (1987), who noted that they require special help and assistance.

Educational Guidance and Counselling Service

This is one of the three major guidance and counselling services. It is centred on issues of studying and school adjustments. It precedes all the other services. However, it is closely related to vocational and personal-social guidance. It is the assistance given to handicaps students or pupils to enable them to understand themselves, fully annex and develop their potential, and function well in society (Egbule, 2004).

It is also the assistance given to parents and teachers so that they can teach and help the learners map out the right educational goals and make the appropriate vocational choices. Educational guidance and counselling are aimed at providing current educational information, according to Iwuama (1991) and Egbule (2004), on the nature of the school and how to adjust to it; school curricular and extra curriculum activities suitable for the learning impaired; how to function effectively in the school; the value of pursuing education; appropriate educational opportunities and requirements; planning, preparing and progressing in them, etc. The goals mentioned above can be achieved through the under-listed activities: orientation service, study habit programmes, academic counselling, excursions, field trips, parent conferences, college assemblies, etc. These activities are selected and adapted to the kind of impairment of learners.

Educational guidance and counselling service provides information that meets the educational needs of learning impaired children. Some of the educational counselling instruments that could be employed in generating data from learners include Student Problem Inventory (SPI), Study Habit Inventory (SHI) (Bakare, 1994) and others.

Statement of the Problem

Children with learning impairments could be found in most schools in Nigeria. Some of them may have one or more cases, such as the inability to identify letters correctly, the wrong pronunciation of letters or words and sometimes poor writing habits. Early identification of these deficiencies and close support may correct their predicament hence the need for this study to determine the extent to which the administration of educational counselling influence the improvement of learning impairments among primary school children.

Purpose of the Study

- To determine the extent to which educational guidance and counselling service influences the improvement of reading disorder in pupils of elderstown primary school, Warri.
- To ascertain the extent to which the administration of educational guidance and counselling service influences the improvement of writing deficiency in pupils of elderstown primary school, Warri.
- To ascertain the extent to which the administration educational guidance and counselling service influences the improvement of speaking disorder in pupils of elderstown primary school, Warri.

Research Questions

- To what extent does the administration of educational guidance and counselling service influence the improvement of reading disorder in pupils of elderstown primary school, Warri
- To what extent does the administration of educational guidance and counselling service influence the improvement of writing deficiency in pupils of elderstown primary school, Warri
- To what extent does the administration of educational guidance and counselling service influence the improvement of speaking disorder in pupils of elderstown primary school, Warri

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design because of the need to describe the learning disabilities selected in the study. The population is disabled primary school children from which 100 primary five and six pupils with learning disabilities were purposively selected with the assistance of the teachers and school counsellors. The questionnaire titled Questionnaire on educational counselling and learning impairments (QECLI) was developed to elicit a response from the pupils. Section A had demographic information of the respondents while section B had fifteen items. The Likert scale with four points is employed for scoring. A pivoted test was conducted using a test-retest technique where the consistency of the items was determined by applying the Spearman-Brown correlation coefficient to derive an r of .96,

which shows that the instruments were reliable. Descriptive statistics that involve the application of mean and standard deviation were employed to analyze the data collected. A cut-off mid-point or mean of 2.50 was derived by dividing the total scoring point of 4, 3, 2 and 1=10 by the number of scoring points=4.

Results

Research Question 1

To what extent does the administration of educational guidance and counselling services affect the improvement of reading disorders in pupils?

Table 1: Influence of educational guidance and counselling service on pupils reading disorder

S/N	Items	SD	D	A	SA	SUM	MEAN	SD
1	Group/play therapy is created in my school to assist fluent reading	7	8	17	68	346	3.46	.92
2	The counsellor could not identify the cause of my poor reading behavior	8	9	44	39	314	3.14	.89
3	I am motivated to read with boldness and confidence	7	9	38	46	323	3.23	.89
4	I am encouraged to read in spite of my shortcomings	9	6	42	43	319	3.19	.91
5	Pupils are adjudged to have reading disorder without identification of alphabet letters	8	8	28	56	332	3.32	.93
Grand Mean						1634	3.37	.88

Table 1 reveals that the mean level of the influence of the administration of educational counselling on the reading disorder in pupils is 3.37 (SD=.88). It implies that this means is above the benchmark of 2.50, meaning that the application of educational counselling has greatly affected the improvement of the poor reading behaviour in the pupils positively.

Research Question 2

To what extent does the administration of educational guidance and counselling services affect the improvement of writing deficiency in pupils?

Table 2: Influence of educational guidance and counselling on pupils writing deficiency

S/N	Items	SD	D	A	SA	SUM	MEAN	SD
1	Counsellor's encouragement to write at one's pace prevents muddling up letters or figures	12	7	29	52	321	3.21	1.02
2	The cause of pupils inability to write legibly cannot be identify	9	10	32	49	321	3.21	.96
3	Counselling intervention provided special attention on how to effectively write	9	8	28	55	329	3.29	.96
4	Pupils enjoy special counselling sessions organized to improve writing	8	8	31	53	329	3.29	.92
5	The kind words from the counsellor spur up interest in continuous writing despite writing errors	8	8	33	51	327	3.27	.92
Grand Mean						1627	3.31	.88

Table 2 shows that the mean for the influence of the administration of educational counselling on the writing deficiency of pupils in primary school is 3.31 (SD=.88). Here, the mean is above the accepted standard. The implication of this is that the influence of the administration of educational counselling on the pupils' poor writing habits is very great. There is an improvement.

Research Question 3

To what extent does the administration of educational guidance and counselling services affect improving speaking disorders in pupils?

Table 3: Influence of educational guidance and counselling on pupils speaking disorder

S/N	Items	SD	D	A	SA	SUM	MEAN	SD
1	Referrals to a medical specialist are not an appropriate way to treat deficiency in speaking	12	11	23	54	319	3.19	1.05
2	Talking slowly at one's pace is an easy method of managing stammering in counselling	11	6	37	46	318	3.18	.97
3	Seminar on self-confidence enhances speaking ability	9	7	30	54	329	3.29	.95
4	It is difficult to identify speaking deficiencies	9	14	28	49	317	3.17	.99
5	Providing special attention to individual counselling could help overcome the fear of speaking in the class	8	6	24	62	340	3.40	.92
Grand Mean						1623	3.32	.89

From table 3, it is clear that the mean level of the influence of the administration of educational counselling on pupils speaking disorders is 3.32 (SD = .89). This means it is equally above the cut-off mean of 2.50. In other words, the positive influence of educational counselling on the speaking disorder of pupils is high.

Discussion

The study examined the extent to which educational counselling service influences the improvement of learning impairment in primary school pupils. The data elicited result in table 1 showed that the mean level of the influence of educational counselling on reading disorder is 3.72 with a Standard deviation of .88. This is quite a positive influence that could improve their reading behaviour. There is also a commensurate influence of the administration of educational counselling on the writing deficiency of the pupils. It has a mean of 3.31 with a SD=.88. The mean level of the influence of educational counselling on the pupils speaking disorder is quite appreciable.

The three types of learning impairment were all positively improved upon by the administration of educational counselling on the pupils that showed traces of defect in these areas of special need. These findings were corroborated by Wilma (2022) in a study on the importance of educational guidance and counselling for children with special needs. He noted that this service provides support and intervention to improve children's learning in an ideal learning environment.

Awanbor (1997) gave credence to the submission above by proposing the following steps that were adopted in administering the educational counselling service on reading and

speaking disorders as well as writing deficiency in this study: identifying pupils with learning disabilities by a medical specialist to ascertain the degree of impairment to determine how and what treatment measure to apply (**Diagnoses**), thorough examination to evaluate the extent, degree and nature of the specified defect (Assessment), detailing out of the treatment measures, approaches and techniques to be adopted by the therapist in consonance with the client's consent (**Goal Setting**), implementation of the educational counselling activities planned to meet the need of the learning impaired learner (**Treatment**), holistic evaluation of the completed counselling process or the progress and achievement made so far by the learner. The suitability of the planned activities, the accuracy of the diagnosis and the effectiveness of the counselling approaches are all included in the evaluation process (**Evaluation**), decisions taken based on set goals, type of treatment strategies and evaluation of outcome, termination of the counselling session due to the success achieved or a review of part of the process; or to begin the whole process again to achieve the counselling objective (Decisions) and finally **Referral** where necessary

Conclusion

The study has shown that pupils with learning impairment require special attention from counsellors. The assistance could be rendered through the administration of guidance and counselling services. The services are meant to expose them to educational information that will inform their world of learning how to read, speak and write effectively through forms of individual or group counselling.

Recommendations

The following recommendations may be useful to the government, non-governmental organizations, parents, teachers, counsellors and significant others in spurring them to assist pupils with learning impairments to learn effectively:

- Federal and state governments should provide schools suitable for pupils with learning impairments.
- The federal and state governments should train teachers in the technical know-how of how to teach and manage their learning deficiencies so that they can learn effectively.
- Opportunities should be made open to all disabled and not to only those with special connections with those in charge of affairs to gain employment and other societal benefits
- Parents should be given orientation on how to care for and love their children with learning impairments.
- The government should also support parents with funds to support their schooling and correct their learning impairment where necessary.
- Special schools should be built in all the federal, state and local government areas by government or private sectors with consideration for the learning impaired.
- Schools for the disabled should be well equipped with modern facilities for impaired learners and have counselling units headed by a professionally trained counsellor.
- Policymakers in Nigeria should make policies that will benefit and assist these types of learners.
- The curriculum should contain sections that enhance the growth and development of impaired learners.

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