



THE PREVALENCE OF SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN IN TWO SELECTED LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN KADUNA STATE, NIGERIA

**Tauna, Stephen Juliet, Zibiri Rasheedah Adebola, Akpan Emem Effiong
Dr Ipadeola Hamid Mairo**

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ABSTRACT

It is imperative that all children must be educated irrespective of their disability. This can only be possible if their disability is identified early enough for proper intervention. The identification of learners with special needs can help limit future academic challenges and also provide the opportunity for the right kind intervention hence, this study sought to determine the existence of learners with Special Educational Needs in two selected Local Government (LG) of Kaduna State which are Kaduna North and Kaduna South. The study was guided by three objectives; first to identify the existence of different categories of Special Need learners in regular public primary schools. Secondly, to ascertain the percentage of each category of learners with Special needs in public primary schools and finally, to determine the gender distribution of the different categories of identified learners with Special Needs in regular public primary schools in Kaduna state. A simple random sampling method was used to select a sample of forty one (41) schools was selected from seventy seven (77) public primary schools of both Kaduna North and Kaduna South LG. The instruments for data collection comprise of a checklist and an open ended questionnaire; both instruments were pilot-tested. The data gathered was inputted into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27 and analyzed using descriptive statistic. The data revealed that eight (8) categories of learners with special needs were identified in public primary schools in Kaduna North and Kaduna South. The study also discovered a higher percentage of learners with learning Disabilities in all schools in both LG, also the gender distribution of learners with special needs revealed that more boys have one form of disability or the other. The study therefore recommended that the state Government should employ specialists to manage these learners and augment this by training regular teachers.

KEYWORDS: learners, special needs, public schools, identification, gender

INTRODUCTION

The term “special Needs” generally refers to children who have significantly deviated from what is considered normal because of the loss of function or impairment that limits their functional ability makes them unable to do normal everyday tasks by themselves, therefore requiring support. According to Ofuani in Tauna (2021), children with special needs are those “who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which in interaction with various barriers may interfere with their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”. Individuals with special needs are also those adults and children with significant deficits, who are impaired and go through life with disability (Nkwoagba, 2020). In the recent National Policy on Education (NPE, 2014), they have been captured to include persons with visual impairment, hearing impairment, intellectual disabilities, physical and health impairment, emotional and behavioral disorders, learning disabilities, multiple disabilities and the gifted and talented. The purpose and objectives of NPE include equalizing educational opportunities for all children, to provide adequate education for all children and young people with disability so that they can contribute to national development (NPE, 2014). In addition to the NPE is the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) agenda for 2030. One of the SDG is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (UN, 2015). Persons with special needs fall into the category of the ‘all’ specified in this SDG. However, their insignificant population that is supposed to be an added advantage to them is not. They are disadvantaged in terms of accessing education, training and employment (United Nations, 2012). The inclusion of persons with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in education and access to other opportunities provides the avenue for them to adequately function in their capacities.



Special education is the education designed to meet the educational needs of people with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in order to make them useful and also contribute to national development. Special schools have been responsible for providing special education in order to address specific needs. In Kaduna state, there is one Special Education school owned by the State government that is supposed to cater for the educational needs of the vast majority of children with SEN but is unlikely to. The other special schools are private, owned by individuals which may not be accessible because of the cost. The possibility of exploring other options is most unlikely, which may include enrolling them in regular public schools. An alternative to special education is a special unit or special classroom committed to the education of persons with special needs within a regular school where other children receive instruction (Hayes, Dombrowski, Shefcyk & Bulart, 2018). The special needs children receive instruction by a trained special educator or teacher. Teaching and learning instructions are carried out using different methods, depending on the type of special need and the degree or level of malfunction. Individualized Education Programme (IEP) is designed for the purpose of meeting the educational need of an individual.

The education of children with SEN has gone through reforms, from special education to integration and then mainstreaming. The latest is the inclusive philosophy which brings ‘all’ children together in the same environment to learn and meet the same academic standard (Johnson, 2012). Inclusive education was accepted as a new policy of education in Nigeria, however, its implementation has been challenging as the philosophy is not widely practiced. The inclusive education policy have given rise to the piloting of some schools in Kaduna state that are termed or called inclusive schools; a few out of the so many schools in Kaduna State. Although a step in the right direction, only a fraction of persons with special Needs are likely to be a part of this programme. The implementation of inclusive education is still farfetched in Kaduna State and it is unlikely that the special schools in the state can cater for the educational needs of the persons with SEN. It is also most likely that some of these learners with SEN end up enrolling in public schools for proximity and other reasons. Some of them could have passed unnoticed and attend regular schools. Identification of learning difficulties is therefore crucial before intervention.

Identification in early years is important because it is key to the development of children in the different aspects of life; social, emotional, physical, cognitive and otherwise. There must be identification of educational needs before any tangible intervention and support can be achieved. Ukute & Atukum (2016) asserts that when special needs are identified early, there is a greater chance that the intervention planned for them will be successful. While some children are easily identified because of the nature of their disability or hospital history (a child with Down’s syndrome), others are not because their learning difficulties are not visible (Hayes, et al (2018)). Lack of identification of children with SNE could impede their success in school and is likely to earn them a tag or label as “dullards” in the classroom. Children are likely to fail in school because they could have special needs that have not been identified and therefore no intervention for it. Regular teachers may or may not be aware that such children exist in their classroom. Teachers may be unable to identify and handle such cases if they come across it. Therefore the need for this study which will attempt to bridge any existing dearth. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) was introduced in Nigeria in 1999. The aim of the programme was to provide free Universal Basic Education for all children. The system is structured into 3 different stages. The first is the Lower Basic (LB) from primary 1 – 3, the second is referred to as the Middle Basic (MB) from primary 4 – 6, and the third stage is the first three years of junior secondary school (JSS) known as the Upper Basic (UB) (Eleke&Chuwang, 2020). The lower and middle basic stages are the focus of this study because it is the first stage of school, the foundation of learning, where children are either made or marred.

The assumption that persons with Special Needs attend special schools only for their education is highly unlikely. Those in urban areas are likely to have more advantage over those in the rural areas as they may have more access to schools and other facilities. The aim of this research therefore is to identify children with SEN in government primary schools and also determine the category of special needs they have that requires intervention. The data collected and analyzed from this research will indicate the statistic of special needs learners in regular classroom, as well as the areas where teachers need to improve upon. The needs assessment will necessitate the need for model development to ascertain its impact in the academic achievements of children with special needs in lower and middle basic primary schools in Kaduna state.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The education of persons with Special Needs has gone through series of reforms, from Special education to the current philosophy - inclusive education. These reforms like the establishment of policies and frameworks is an attempt by government, professionals and stakeholder to provide the best or most conducive system of education for persons with Special Needs. This however is beneficial to children who have been identified to have one form of Special Need or the other. There are children in regular public primary schools whose disability may not be glaring therefore pass unnoticed. Learners with special needs are likely to face difficulties and labeling on account of challenges they encounter which the regular teacher has no knowledge of. The identification of learners with special needs can help limit future academic challenges and also provide the opportunity for the right kind intervention. It therefore becomes pertinent



to identify learners who may have some special educational needs in our lower basic and middle basic primary schools with a view to ameliorate their challenges and pave way for better academic excellence not just at the foundation level but throughout their academic endeavors.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To identify the different categories of Special Need learners in regular public primary schools in Kaduna State.
2. To ascertain the percentage of learners with Special needs in public primary schools from Kaduna North and Kaduna South.
3. To determine the gender distribution of learners with Special needs in regular public primary schools in Kaduna state.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the different categories of Special Need learners in regular public primary schools in Kaduna State?
2. What is the percentage of learners with special needs in public primary from Kaduna North and Kaduna south local government?
3. What is the total number of male and female learners with Special Needs in regular public primary schools in Kaduna state?

METHODOLOGY

The study employed the survey method to identify the pupils with special needs in public primary schools in the Kaduna South and Kaduna North Local Government Areas. The population of this study was seventy seven (77) public primary schools which include all public primary schools in both local governments with 36 in Kaduna South and 41 in Kaduna North. Purposive sampling technique was employed to select these two (2) Local Government Areas (LGAs) from Kaduna central senatorial district. Also, Simple random sampling was used to select forty one (41) schools representing above fifty three percent (53%) from the total number of schools in Kaduna North (21) and Kaduna South Local Government (20). All the forty (41) schools and arms of primary 1 – 6 were included in the samples.

INSTRUMENTS

This research used two instruments, namely, open- ended questionnaire and checklist.

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

The instruments were scrutinized by a professional in special needs education to determine its appropriateness with the purpose of the study. The instrument was pilot tested and test re-test approach was used to establish the reliability of the questionnaire and checklist.

PROCEDURE FOR DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

A letter was written to SUBEB (see attached), seeking for permission to conduct the research in the selected school. Approval was given and the data collection lasted for three months. Upon the ethical approval from SUBEB (see attached), the researchers with the help of three research assistants visited each school. First point of call was the head master’s office to signify our intentions and to ask him few questions. Each researcher took one arm, say primary one (1) and moved from 1a to 1b and so on until the whole arms were exhausted. Upon entering the class, the class teacher is told about the research and the researcher moved across the classroom to identify and record the pupils observed to be a pupil with special need. The six researchers picked one arm in order to facilitate the collection of data. The data generated was analyzed using descriptive statistics.

RESULTS

Table 1: Categories of Learners with Special Needs Based on Local Governments

Local Govt	Learning Disability	Visual Impairment	Hearing Impairment	Speech Impairment	Intellectual Impairment	Physically Challenged	Health Imp.	Multiple Disabilities	Total
Kaduna North	33	22	6	1	7	21	5	11	106
Kaduna South	52	28	9	3	7	9	5	7	120
Total	85	50	15	4	14	30	10	18	216



From table 1 above , it shows that a total of 216 (two hundred and sixteen) learners were identified from both local governments to have special needs ranging from learning disabilities, hearing impairment, visual impairment to others (speech impairment, intellectual impairment, physically challenged learners, learners with health impairment as well as those with multiple disabilities). The table shows that 85 learners had learning disability, 50 had Visual Impairment and 30 learners showed characteristics of intellectual impairment. Learners who had multiple disabilities were identified to be 18 whereas 15 of them experience Hearing problems. 10 others were observed to show health impairment which was mostly Psychological Problems. The least observed category based on the study was Speech Impairment with only 4 learners. The table also clearly shows that a higher number of learners in Kaduna South (120) have been identified to have special needs as compared to Kaduna North (106). This may be an indication that the rate of admission of pupils with special needs into public schools in Kaduna North is low which could mean that either the pupils are denied entry into the schools, or the admission requirements are too stringent and these learners cannot meet the criteria for admission or there is possibly stigmatization of the learners with special needs which can eventually lead to the drop out of learners from school.

Table 2: Distribution of learners showing special needs learners based on gender (girls)

Condition	Learning Disability	Hearing Impairment	Visual Impairment	Total
Kaduna South	22	2	16	40
Kaduna North	14	4	5	23
Total	36	6	21	63

The study also identified learners with special needs based on gender. Table 2 shows that in Kaduna South 22 girls have learning disabilities, 2 have hearing impairment while 16 other females have visual impairment. In Kaduna North, 14 girls have learning disabilities, 5 of them have visual impairment while 4 have hearing impairment. This means that in Kaduna South 40 learners with special needs were girls while 23 was recorded in Kaduna North.

Table 3: Distribution of learners showing special needs learners based on gender (boys)

Condition	Learning Disability	Hearing Impairment	Visual Impairment	Total
Kaduna South	30	7	12	49
Kaduna North	19	2	17	38
Total	49	9	19	87

Table 3 above shows the distribution of boys who have special needs. In Kaduna South 30 boys have learning disabilities, 12 were identified to have visual impairment while 7 other male pupils have hearing impairment. In Kaduna North a lesser number of boys (2) have hearing impairment, 17 have visual impairment and 19 boys have learning disabilities.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Based on the data collected and analyzed, the following are the major findings:

1. The learners with special needs found in regular primary schools in Kaduna state were in the following categories: Learning disability, Visual Impairment, Hearing impairment, Intellectual impairment, Speech impairment, physically challenged, Health and multiple disabilities.
2. Kaduna South local Government area has more learners with special needs compared to those in Kaduna North.
3. There was a high prevalence of pupils with learning disability in both LGAs.
4. The gender distribution of learners with special needs revealed that more boys in both local government areas have one form of disability or the other.
5. Majority of learners with special needs in regular primary school have mild form of disability.
6. It was discovered that special need learners enrolled into the public primary school in both local governments were less than 1% of the total population. This calls for concern. Therefore, efforts should be made to ensure more learners with Special Educational Needs are enrolled to demonstrate the inclusive nature of schools in Kaduna state.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that Kaduna state has learners in regular primary school with different categories of disabilities. Learning disability is a more prevalent disability while Kaduna South has more learners with special need. Male learners had the most disability.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the findings of this study, these recommendations were made.

- There should be more special needs educators as well as support workers deployed to these two local government areas.
- SUBEB should embark on regular training of its teaching staff with emphasis on identification of learners with special needs
- The state government should support parents of learners with special needs to assist in identification as well as enrollment of such learners in the regular primary schools as a way of entrenching the spirit of inclusive education in the state.
- Regular awareness campaign about learners with special needs should be undertaken in all local government educational areas of the state.
- Special incentives should be given to parents of children with special educational needs who willingly enrolled their wards or children in inclusive settings to serve as encouragement to other parents.

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