

CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT

PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF VARIOUS IMPAIRMENTS

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Introduction

Impairment refers to the loss of any part of the body, it could also be injury or loss of functions of the body to the extent that it prevents an individual from properly engaging in normal daily routines. Impairment also refers to injury, malformation, disfunctioning, hurt or damage to the structures of the body, which can either be anatomical or physiological in nature. Anatomical structures of the body implies that these injuries or damage can be seen and observed, while physiological impairment implies that the injury or damage is latent, affecting the functioning of organ(s) of the body, which can affect the daily functioning of an individual, in this case, child with special educational needs, to the extent that they may require special education to help them adjust. Impairment can be congenital, which means experienced from birth, or acquired later in life, as a result of interaction with people and the environment. One of the most fundamental consequences of impairment is that is often leads to various disabilities

Disability is an inability which can either be partial or total, which prevents, preclude, and/or hinders an individual from properly engaging an activity within the range considered normal, in order words, impairment often restricts an individual to the boundaries of disability. Disability describes an inability (which could either partial or total) in accomplishing a task, activity, programme or an event within the rage considered "normal" in the society. Normal here implies that cultures, norms, beliefs which constitutes normalcy varies in different societies. Disability manifests only when an individual with impairment is unable accomplish a task. This implies, that an individual could have an impairment that may not necessarily lead to disability. In other words, there is an ability in disability. This statement is instructive because it means that children with impairment can be properly guided to achieve usefulness and satisfaction in life, which is the goal of any special needs education programme.

Persons with disability are individuals who have various impairments that are so severe and/or profound that it precludes them from properly engaging normal daily routine to the extent that they need some form of special needs educational programme to help them to adjust properly into society. Andzayi (2002) opined that a disabled child is one whose impairment reduces his ability to perform certain tasks.

Special needs education is an area within general education, it is a type of education that provides unique teaching and meaningful learning experiences for children with special educational needs. These meaningful experiences are provided through a continuum of special curriculum, support services, special teachers and a special learning environment, aimed at helping the child attain their highest level of functioning and well-being which they are capable. Special needs education covers all forms of children with diverse forms of impairments, disabilities and/or handicaps. Traditionally, they were categorized into three: visual impairment, hearing impairment and learning disability, however, the National policy on education (2013) expanded it to cover other types such as physical /health impairment, intellectual impairment, emotional/behavioural impairment, speech/language impairment, multiple impairment, albinism, gifted and talented.

Psychology is the study of behavior, probing the mind in order to discover how it translates to human behaviour, in this case, the behaviour of persons with special needs. The way special needs individuals behave and conduct themselves is a reflection of their thought process, in analyzing the information at their disposal at any given point. It studies the life problems of exceptional people, develops and administers an array of psychological, intelligence, ability, and personality test. These tests are often used as yardstick in decision making in special education (Ozaji, 2005).

Psychological effects implies that the implications of impairment are not only physical in nature, but they also affect the way the individual sees his/herself at the onset of impairment, and has the tendency of affecting a person's mind, this is because it may cause the individual to manifest certain habits and behaviours that can separate the person from society. Psychological effects also suggest that there must be a definite effort in the identification and management of behaviours that are perceived to be counter-productive to the individuals' well-being. For this to be effective certain steps need to be taken to help individuals with disabilities adjust and fit into their new roles, with their families also included. This may be achieved through a collaborative effort leading to social inclusion on the part of various stakeholders in special needs education, including non-governmental agencies, the government, academia to mention a few. Social inclusion here implies that persons with special needs should be properly emancipated in all aspects of life and learning within school environment and especially outside school environment.

The thesis statement of this study examined the traditional impairments: hearing impairment, visual impairment and learning disabilities, and psychological effects of each impairment. Conclusions and suggestions will end the discussion.

a. Types and nature of impairments

i. Hearing impairment:

Hearing impairment is an umbrella term which refers to damage to the organ of hearing- the ear, to the extent that the individual experiences considerable difficulty in the perception of speech-sound for all intent and purposes. It is considerable difficulty in the perception and use of speech sound through the ear to the extent that it affects an individual's normal daily routine so that some form of special education programme is required to help the person to adjust. Babudoh (2021) opined that hearing impairment may be defined using three major criteria namely, time of onset, degree of hearing loss and the site of lesion.

Hearing impairment on the basis of time of onset include congenital hearing loss which is a situation whereby an individual was either born with hearing impairment, before meaningful and fluent language is formed, it is also called pre-lingual hearing loss. Onset of time can also include adventitious hearing loss which is a situation whereby an individual acquired it later in life as a result of interaction with people and the environment. This type of hearing loss is also known as post-lingual or acquired hearing impairment.

ii. Visual impairment:

Visual impairment refers to the inability of the organ of sight-the eye to perceive and interpret visual imagery. Ozoji (2005) opined that visual impairment involves individuals whose sense of vision is defective and this could range from ability to see little to total blindness. Visual impairment significantly affects the ability of the individual in performing daily tasks, so that they may become a nuisance to both themselves and the society if not properly guided in order to attain competencies that will make up for the impairment and/or disability. Visual impairment affects visual efficiency which refers to the ability, for example, to control eye movements and to use visual information quickly and accurately (Barraga & Erin, 2001).

iii. Learning disabilities:

Learning disabilities generally refers to problems involving difficulty in the acquisition of basic processes necessary for comprehension, and language formation. Learning disabilities according to the National Joint Committee on Learning disabilities (1989) considered learning disabilities as:

A general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders that is manifested by significant difficulty in the acquisitions and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual, presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction, and may occur across the life span. Problems in self-regulatory behaviours, social perception and social interaction may exist with learning disabilities but do not by themselves constitute a learning disability.

This impairment is very difficult to identify outside school activities and mostly restricted to inadequate patterns of behaviour within school curriculum. Learning

disabilities manifest itself in several disorders such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, attention deficit hyperactive behaviour, behavioural disorders amongst other, a combination of which can cause significant difficulty to the individual in engaging, executing or implementing school tasks.

b. Psychological effects of various impairments

i. Hearing Impairment

The psychological effects of hearing impairment are multiple and are experienced in varying degrees as earlier mentioned. This is based on the premise that every child with special needs is unique and experiences events and situations differently. One of the psychological effect of impairment is that the child has a loss of the sense of communicating amongst his/her peers, as a result of certain stereotyped behaviours due to the impairment that may be unacceptable to the group, the consequences of losing the ability to say, do and/or experience certain things in school and indeed the society could lead the child to experience devaluation and a sense of rejection.

When a child becomes impaired, a lot of things spontaneously changes in the child's life: the way the child thinks, acts and feels may change completely, there may also be withdrawal from school activities, friends and even the family. The reduction or inability of the child to do many things can lead society to use derogatory terms in referring to the special needs child, derogatory terms such as useless, imbecile to mention a few, may present depression and even suicidal tendencies when there is a loss in the ability to accept and deal with the ensuing impairment. In addition, there may be an overwhelming sense of inadequacy on the part of the child, the child becomes aware of everything around him/her and generally encounters inner crises. Effective management of the impairment through collaborative efforts become paramount as it will determine whether or not the child adjusts properly in order to achieve social inclusion.

The psychological effects of impairment affects communication as earlier noted, which a difficult task becomes for the child, making it difficult for the child to relate with family, friends and engage in things they enjoyed doing. The family of the child with special needs is not also left out as they also face significant difficulty living and interacting with a sibling with special needs. All these inadequacies translates into the way the child behaves towards the society, traditions, culture and policies, often negative in nature. The way and manner the society relates with the child determines how quick the child will adjust. In other words, if the society treats the child harshly, the child will normally respond with aggressive behaviours and hostilities, whereas, if the society accepts the child, in spite of the impairment, the child will respond favourably to the society. Other psychological effects of impairment could include suspicion, especially by reading negative meanings to facial expressions and gestures of "normal" counterparts, indecision, mistrust, low tolerance, and overall diminished psychological health.

ii. Visual Impairment:

One of the most profound psychological problems individuals with visual impairment and more specifically, blindness encounter is orientation and mobility problems. Orientation and mobility skills refer to the ability to have sensation of where an individual is in relation to other people, objects and landmarks and the ability to move through the environment. This skill vary significantly amongst individuals with visual impairment and it is very important for the adjustment of individuals with visual impairment. Many of them, especially those who acquire blindness find it difficult to move from one place to another. This restricts them to the boundaries of disabilities. Orientation and mobility skills depends greatly on special ability, and one of the most elaborate ways that individuals with blindness process spatial information is through cognitive mapping. This involves depicting the general relation of various points in the environment; this ability is significantly difficult for individuals with blindness to develop these cognitive maps.

Individual with visual impairment in many cases show low academic achievement in comparison to their sighted counterparts or peers. Their inability to read print presents them with limited information which is often transcribed into braille, the result is that they have problems with engaging school tasks, especially tasks that require hands-on application for problem solving which cannot be transcribed. In addition, many individuals with visual impairment show low competence in braille reading and writing skills, which can also translate in low academic achievement. Observation has shown that low academic achievement may not be necessarily linked with failure in accomplishing school tasks but rather, low expectation or lack of exposure to the usage of braille.

iii. Learning disabilities:

Learning disabilities presents significant social-emotional problems, even though not all individuals may be affected in this way, many are at risk of social rejection, suicidal tendencies and loneliness amongst others. These problems may be as a result of deficits in social cognition, misreading social cues, general misinterpretation of the feelings and emotions of others leading to problems with social interactions. There are ongoing studies that have revealed that challenges and encumbrances with social interface amongst individuals with learning disabilities tend be more manifest in individuals who have problems in mathematics, visual-spatial tasks, tactile tasks and self-regulation and organization. In adulthood, the scars from the years of rejection can be painful and not easily healed (Mcgrady, Lerner & Boscardin, 2001).

The individuals with learning disabilities may have significant problems in motivation- their ability to deal with the many challenges that life presents to them as a result of their impairment and disabilities. They may show indifference and/or negligence in controlling the events that influence certain things around them even when they have the ability to manage those influences. They may prefer to remain in the background, consenting to failure, and showing tendency of giving-up, and

expecting the worst in situations without making deliberate efforts of changing things. In other words, they believe that their lives are controlled by external factors such as luck or fate rather than by internal factors such as determination or ability (Hallahan et al., 2005). Non-motivational patterns of behaviour can manifest by a constant expectancy of failure which is re-enforced by previous experiences of failure, which in turn can cause the individual to deliberately fail in the face of challenges in school tasks. The result is that the individual fails to learn new skills leading to feeling of loneliness and helplessness. Morgan and Fuch (2007) posited that what makes these motivational problems so difficult for teachers, parents and individuals with learning disabilities to deal with is the interrelationship between learning and motivational problems.

Conclusion

The psychological effects of various impairment has significant implications on the development and adjustment of persons with special needs. The interventions should therefore be a collaborative effort and partnership from relevant professionals cutting across different fields, which is channeled constructively towards helping persons with special needs obtain usefulness and independence.

Suggestions

1. The government should encourage more effective methods of developing braille reading and writing competencies amongst individuals with visual impairment. This can done through funding extensive research.
2. The education of individuals with impairment should be implemented in an inclusive system in school. This will help them overcome their challenges through interactions with peers who may encourage them.
3. Government should take deliberate steps in subsidizing equipment such as mobility canes, Perkins braille machines, hearing aids and others.
4. Counseling services should be implemented in order to attend to the emotional needs of individuals living with disabilities.
5. Government should be more deliberate in addressing problems affecting individuals with impairment/disabilities in order to help them adjust properly into society.

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