

ASSESSING EFFECT OF MOTIVATION ON ENHANCEMENT OF LEARNING FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS: PSYCHO-EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATION

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Abstract

For an individual to be able to acquire knowledge through learning, he needs to be motivated. This is because motivation facilitates learning. For children to do well academically, their interests, needs and motives must be put into consideration. Incentives, rewards and other forms of reinforcement motivate learners for academic achievement. By implication both normal and children with special needs require motivation to perform tasks. It has been observed that children with special needs still exist in regular school system in Nigeria. The concern of the researchers is how these special needs children cope in the regular school system in Nigeria, the psychological implications of struggling to cope in such schools. It is against this background that the paper examined the concept of motivation, effects of motivation on learning, children with special needs and roles of stakeholders in motivating and helping them to learn effectively. The paper also examined the psychological and counseling implications of motivating children with special needs to enhance their learning. Motivating children with special needs will go a long way in helping them not only to learn effectively but also to feel, behave and become adjusted as their counterparts in the regular schools and society where they find themselves. The paper recommended among others that there should be flexibility in our curriculum to accommodate the special needs childrens' interests.

Keywords: Special needs Children, Motivation, Learning enhancement, Psychological implications

Introduction

Human behaviour is influenced by a number of factors within and or without the individual. One then wonders what accounts for the brilliant academic performance of some learners while some of their mates in the same class fail. Motivation is at the centre of all human activity, including school learning and achievement. Like other parts of the learning process, motivation is an individual matter, because what motivates one learner may be a weaker motivation to some and no motivation at all to others. Carew and Ogwuche (2012) noted that motivation to learn is characterized by long-term, quality involvement in learning and commitment to the process of learning.

Everyone at one time or the other in life needs motivation to perform a certain task (Ako & James, 2012). As a result, both "normal" and people with special needs require motivation to perform tasks. This also applies to children with special

needs. Children with special needs are those children who need help in one way or the other to achieve their potentialities. There are different children with special needs who need to be motivated in order to achieve their aims and purposes in life.

In the Nigerian educational system, we have learners who have special needs. Most of them are found in the normal school setting mixed up with normal children. These children with special needs found in the normal classrooms in Nigeria include the visually and hearing impaired, motor (movement) impaired, mentally disabled or the gifted (Ako & James, 2012). The National Teachers' Institute (2001) regarded this group of children as children with special needs.

In the regular classroom, these children with special needs are given equal treatment as their normal counterparts. It is not supposed to be so. Teachers, school authorities and other stakeholders have not seen the need to identify and help these children with special needs in our normal school system. Rather, they hail the gifted children for doing well while they look down on those who could not perform well academically and call them derogatory names.

Most of these children with special needs found in the mainstream classrooms are neglected and as such they become discouraged in their bid to pursue their academics. Many of them become frustrated, emotionally and psychologically downcast and consequently become school dropouts. This situation has a psychological implication in the life of such learners. These children need to be motivated to help them achieve much in life. Ako and James (2012) noted that motivating children with special needs will go a long way in helping them not only to learn effectively but also to feel, behave and act as their "normal" counterparts in the school system and societies where they find themselves.

Motivation is a pushing or moving power that makes an individual to strive to achieve a set goal despite difficulties. Sasson (2001) defined motivation as the inner power or energy that pushes someone toward acting, performing actions and achieving. Mohammed (2008) defined motivation as "the art of getting people to do things or to do things more efficiently or quickly". Elliot, Kratochwill, Little-field and Travers (2000) reported that motivation influences human behaviour (learning and human performance) in four ways; a) Motivation influences the extent to which an individual is likely to engage in a certain activity intensively or halfheartedly. b) It affects choices people make and the results they find rewarding. c) It increases the likelihood that people will begin something on their own, persist in the face of difficulty and resume a task after a temporary interruption, and; d) It increases the likelihood that people will pay attention to something, study and practice it and try to learn it in a meaningful fashion.

Motivation to enhance the academic achievement of children with special needs cannot be over emphasized. They need motivation to improve and excel in their academic performance and psychological stability. It is however, regrettable to note that the neglect and lack of motivation of children with special needs has far reaching and negative effects on their psychological and academic achievement. This can be seen in their poor academic performance and exhibition of certain psychological disorders.

A number of researchers have been conducted for example Lyn (1970) and Campbell (1973) in Ozurumba and Ebuara (2002). These studies examined influences of students academic performance and why there should be deterioration in the achievement and motivation of students. The results have been interesting and divergent whereas Neelu (1981) and Ergen, (1971) hold the view that there exists significant correlation between self concept, motivation and achievement.

Ozurumba and Ebuara (2002) investigated the relationship among academic as well as social concept, motivation and achievement, influence of socio-economic status on academic self-concept; social self concept, motivation and achievement of secondary school students in Rivers State of Nigeria. Four null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. Fifty one (51) senior secondary schools were used and 408 senior secondary school students were selected for the study.

Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient (PMCC) and two way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were employed for data analysis. The results showed among other things that there was a significant relationship among academic/social self-concept, motivation and achievement. This implies that the higher the academic or social self-concept of an individual, the higher his motivation for achievement. Further, there was a positive relationship between motivation and achievement implying that students who have high motivation also tended to perceive that they perform well in the academic work.

Mohammed and Ozoh (2012) studied the relationships between students home background in terms of socio-economic status, educational level, student motivation and academic performance. The result revealed that there are significant relationships between socio-economic status, parental educational level and school environment in terms of social interaction and physical facilities, influence on student motivation and academic performance. Research abound on the relationship between motivation and academic achievement.

Ozoh, Dantani and Aleje (2012) investigated the motivational factors that enhance the learning among primary school pupils. Findings of the study showed that motivational variables are provided by the social agents and the more the desire of the children for education increases and others. Motivation influence individuals academic behavior. It is a feeling of self directed competence and is still required for effective learning and academic performance. In this regard, formalized guidance and counseling services may contribute significantly in improving the academic achievement of children specially children with special needs.

The concept of learning is subjected to various definitions by experts in the field. Ortese, Akume and Yawe (2006) defined learning as a cognitive-behavioural process of acquiring new knowledge (declarative procedural and conceptual) norms and values, habits and attitudes, beliefs and technology of the society through training, practice or experience. These new knowledge, norms and values, attitudes lead to a relatively permanent change in behaviour (cognitive, emotional, moral, social, physical) of the learner. In the learning process, a number of elements must be present; the learner, learning materials, teacher and the learning environment (school,

laboratories etc). Of all these, the learner (pupil or student) is the most important. Consequently, emphasis should be placed on the strategies to motive and enhance the learner especially those with special needs in order to help them acquire new knowledge and excel in their academic performance. In doing this the teacher must be put into consideration since the learners future are mostly in the hands of the teacher. In the classroom, they should be equipped to be able to determine what motivates who and what motivates all. Lucid motivation must be provided if learners especially the children with special needs are to learn in a genuine and lasting ways.

Inserting students with special needs into the general classrooms without considering their needs or the teachers who teach them is not in the best interest of such students and their teachers. Students require an environment that will nurture their gifts, attend to the learning disabilities and provide the emotional/psychological support to deal with their inconsistent abilities.

Justification

It is no doubt that the federal and state governments have made efforts to establish schools for the gifted and disabled children in Nigeria. What bothers the researchers is the fact that the number of such special schools in Nigeria is not commensurate with the number of children with special needs in our school system. Only a significant number is found in such schools. A visit to such school will tell you that government and stakeholders are not really doing much to put such places in form. Most of those schools are not equipped enough to help these special needs children. The researchers have observed that majority of children with special needs are found in the regular classrooms. Teachers, school authorities, parents and government have not done much to identify and make special provisions for them. Parents, teachers, school authorities have non-challant attitude towards this categories of learners and this definitely affects them academically, emotionally, socially and psychologically. There is need to motivate them wherever they may find themselves. It is against this backdrop that the researchers examine the psychological implications of motivation on enhancement of learning for children with special needs in Nigeria.

Motivation, Learning and School Curriculum

It has been discovered that the Nigerian school curriculum is designed with the average pupils/students in mind. Children with special needs have no place in the school curriculum. As a result of this quality of curriculum in the school system, learners who have not attained the required level of cognition and those that are far above that level are bound to experience difficulties with the learning tasks. Balarabe (2012) confirmed this observation by stating that Nigerian classroom does not screen learners for deficiencies in cognitive, attentive and emotional inadequacies prior to instruction. This affirms the fact that students in the Nigerian classrooms are mixed up with different categories of learners. The implication in this situation is that these children with special needs are likely to experience difficulties with learning and may dropout of school.

The concern of the researchers is that the existence of these group of students (children with special needs) are not acknowledged nor cared for in the mainstream classrooms. Even on the administration of examinations both (local and national), they are not put into consideration. They are given the same type of examinations and the same time frame. This is not fair to children with special needs. These children should be put into consideration in all aspects of learning process.

Effect of Motivation on Learning

Motivation and learning are two inseparable issues. It is impossible to learn without motivation which is the driving force. Motivation has several effects on students learning as observed by Carew and Ogwuche, 2012. They include;

- Motivation directs behaviour towards a particular goal. It determines the specific goal toward which learners strive. This means motivation helps the learner to concentrate and not distracted towards their goal.
- Motivation increases the amount of effort and energy that learners expend in activities directly related to their needs and goals. It determines whether they pursue a task passionately and sincerely or indifferently and unenthusiastically.
- Motivation increases persistence in activities. Therefore, learners are more likely to continue working at a task and complete it if they are motivated.
- Motivation determines consequences that are reinforcing and punishing. Consequently, the more the learners are motivated to achieve academic success, the more they are proud of an A and upset by low grades.
- Finally, motivation often enhances performance. Therefore, the impact and consequences of motivation is improved performance which is the concern of the researchers on children with special needs.

An Overview of Children with Special needs and ways Motivation Enhances their Learning

Children with special needs are those children who cannot fit in well in the regular school system due to their peculiar nature and therefore need help to actualize their potentiality. Okeke (2001) and Adamu (2007) view special needs persons as exceptional children or differently challenged persons who may be physically, socially or instinctively different from either below or above average which require individual planned and systematically monitored arrangement setting.

The federal government in its National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2004) expressed her intention to provide adequate education for all categories of people who require special education services as well as to provide diversified and appropriate curriculum for each category of disability. The question is, to what extent has the Federal Government fulfilled this promise. A cursory look at our normal school classroom will reveal that the government has failed to fulfill this policy.

Ako and James (2012) classified children with special needs into the following categories. Mental retardation, learning disability, behaviour disorder,

physical and health problems, speech, hearing and visual; impairments and gifted children.

i. **The Gifted Children**

These are children with an exceptionally high intelligence. They are also referred to as talented children. These intellectually gifted children have intelligent Quotient (IQ) above 140. Ako and James (2012) described a gifted child as a child whose intellectual ability, social maturity and specific abilities or talents are exceptional and constantly outstanding.

Denga (2009) described other characteristics of a gifted child as one who reasons faster than a normal child; solves problems that involve abstract reasoning and difficult concepts relatively easier compared to normal children. He further explained that he shows remarkable skills in making friends, usually with older peers. He is eager to assist others get out of troubles and is very respectful. He is careful not to make others angry but presents a likable personality to his peers. Early identification of the gifted and talented is useful and imperative for the early harnessing of their potentials.

The gifted/talented child should be helped to fully develop their capabilities as well as helping them to develop a harmonious and balanced personality. In the normal classroom, gifted children may become bored and perform at low level which may frustrate them out of school. Consequently, they need to be identified, adequately motivated to enhance their learning and achieve their potentials.

ii. **Learning Disabilities**

Ako and James (2012) described learning disability as a disability in which children have an IQ above the retarded range; have significant difficulty in an academic area; and have no other diagnosed problem or disorder, such as sensory disabilities or fewer emotional disorder causing the difficulty. Learning disabilities are by far the most common disabilities among school age children and more than half of students with disabilities are learning disabled (Azubike & Nnaobi, 2012). Students with disabilities whether physical, emotional or cognitive in nature respond to the curriculum differently from other students (CEC, 2002).

Students with learning disabilities have average or above average intelligence, yet they do not achieve at the same academic level as their peers. Children with learning disabilities who are taught in the regular classroom without extensive support rarely achieve the level of competence of even children who are low-achieving and do not have disability (Hocutt in Ako and James, 2012). Children with learning disabilities therefore need modifications such as instructional support, additional practice and time to complete their assignments. This is not practicable in regular classrooms.

iii. **Mental Retardation**

Mental retardation is a serious disorder of childhood which progresses into adulthood and interferes with the intellectual and social functioning of that

individual. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) (1994) defined mental retardation as “subnormal general intellectual functioning which originates during the developmental period and is associated with impairment of either learning and social adjustment or maturation or both”. From this definition, it is implicit that the overall intellectual functioning of this individual is below normal. This is to say that there are deficiencies in the intellectual functioning and social skills of such individual.

These group of children are also found in the normal classrooms. Nwankwo (2013) pointed out that the mental retarded can be helped by devising special teaching methods to correct their specific disabilities. How many teachers in our school system are ready to apply such teaching methods in the normal classrooms where there are few mentally retarded students. These categories of students need to be motivated to adjust to the normal programmes and as such enhance their learning.

iv. **Visual Impairment**

According to the Oxford Dictionary of Psychology (2003), visual impairment is any defect of vision, especially one falling short of total blindness. Santrock (2008) identified visual impairment to include the need for corrective lenses, low visions and being educationally blind. Children with low vision have a visual acuity of between 20/70 and 20/200 (on the familiar snellen scale, in which 20/200 vision is normal) with corrective lenses. Visually impaired children have problem in reading, writing, spellings and this affects their academic performance. They find it difficult to read what the teacher wrote on the chalk board. Most of these children are found in the normal classrooms and are from poor homes who cannot afford to aid them with magnifying glasses when they could not get help, they become frustrated. They need to be motivated to enhance their learning.

v. **Hearing Impairment**

Denga (2009) defines hearing impairment as hearing defect that interferes with the processing of linguistic information through hearing. Children who are born deaf or experience a significant hearing loss in the first several years of life usually do not develop normal speech and language (Ako & James, 2012). A hearing impairment can make learning very difficult for children. Students who usually turn one ear towards a speaker or frequently ask to have something repeated or do not follow directions are often frustrated and can back out of school if not motivated.

vi. **Speech and Language Disorders**

Speech and language disorders, according to Hulit and Howard in Ako and James (2012), include a number of speech problems (such as articulation disorders, voice disorders and fluency disorders) and language problems (difficulty in receiving information and expressing language). Articulation

disorders are problems in pronouncing sounds correctly. A child with an articulation problem might find communication with peers and teachers difficult or embarrassing. As a result, the child might avoid asking questions, participating in discussions or communicating with peers to avoid being ridiculed. This language disorders can result in significant learning problems. Therefore, they need special attention and motivation to encourage and enhance their learning.

vii. **Behaviour Disorder**

Denga (2009) deviant behaviours deviate from normal behaviours or behaviours and may be harmful to other people and do not promote learning. Behavioural disorders consist of serious persistent depression, fears associated with personal or school matters and other inappropriate socio-emotional characteristics. Denga (2009) further observed that behaviour disordered children looks sad, withdrawn, moody and uninterested in things that go around them. Many behaviour disordered children would always fall behind in school or in the acquisition of basic skills for effective living in their environment. Children with these characteristics exist in our normal school systems and need motivation to enhance their learning.

Viii. **Physical and Health Disorders**

According to Ako and James (2012), physical and health disorders in children include Orthopedic impairments, such as cerebral palsy, and seizure disorders. According to them, orthopedic impairment involves restricted movement or lack of control over movement due to muscle, bone or joint problems. Cerebral palsy is a disorder that involves lack of muscular co-ordination, shaking or unclear speech.

Children with special needs should not be written off, if they are shown love and motivated, they will still do better academically.

Motivating Children with Special needs:

For an individual to be able to acquire knowledge through learning, he needs to be motivated. This is because motivation facilitates learning. incentives, rewards and other forms of reinforcement motivates an individual. Again, if the material requirements for effective learning are provided, it could serve as a motivating factor.

When a student is strongly motivated, all his efforts and personality are directed toward the achievement directed toward the achievement of specific goals. Modupe and Ofole (2010) stated that high motivation consistently been linked to reduction of students success. So, without motivation, success is minimized and may be difficult to come by.

i. **Role of Teachers**

In the school, the teacher is charged with the responsibility of not only implementing the curriculum but also teaching learners to acquire relevant and

qualitative knowledge, skills, norms and values, attitudes, technology etc necessary for the learners survival and growth of the society. The task of teaching is not only a special one, it is equally a tasking one, which is not motivated enough the teacher cannot effectively carry out his tasks and responsibilities. This implies that the teacher should be motivated to be able to motivate students.

However, the teacher should himself as active socialization agents capable of stimulating students to learn better. Teachers can motivate the students through creating a positive classroom climate, use of project work, using praise skillfully and conveying expectation to the learner.

Teachers should use verbal and other small gifts to raise the moral of children with special needs whenever he notices improvement in their school performance. He should be able to identify such children in his class. He should show love, care and have special interest on the general welfare of the special children. Partially hearing and vision impaired should be placed in the front row to help them hear the teacher clearly and see what is written on the chalkboard without straining their eyes. Other children in the class should be made to accept these special need children and also apply peer tutoring to enhance their learning and improve social integration. If these children are neglected they become frustrated and psychologically disturbed especially in classroom environment.

ii. **Role of School**

The environmental conditions of the school can motivate learners. This is called a situated motivation, a situation where the learner's environment motivates him to learn. The school should identify the children with special needs in their schools early enough in order to integrate them well in the school. The school should make sure these children are not stigmatized.

The school should provide social amenities and other social and intellectual competitions and activities to expose the exceptional children and boost their interest to achieve more. Those with learning activities who are not coping with classroom learning can be directed to extracurricular activities where they can even excel.

iii. **Role of the Home**

The home is the first school for every child/learner. The parent of children with special need should be able to identify such child early enough in order to give them proper attention and direction. They should teach them the norms and values of the society so as to be integrated into the society.

The motivation to learn should start at home by their families support and encouragement. Parents should also provide learning materials for such children. They should show them love and affection also be proud of them. It is disheartening that parents hide their mentally retarded children away from people. This attitude has a psychological implication on the life of such a child. Even the exceptional children are sometimes seen as being too clever and as such suppress their intelligence. This can be frustrating to such a child.

Parents should be interested in the activities of their assignments. This can be of great encouragement to the child with special needs. When these children are performing well academically and otherwise, the parents should buy some gifts and use verbal praise to service as an incentive to put more effort.

iv. **The Role of Government**

The federal, state and Local Government should motivate the special needs children. Few special schools have been built by the government for children with special needs but many special needs children exist in regular school system. Government should therefore provide resource materials such as Braille Machines, tape recorders, hearing aids, wheel chairs, well equipped libraries in regular school systems to help and motivate the special needs children to learn. Scholarships should be given to such identified children which will serve as a motivating factor that will enhance their learning.

For the gifted children found in the regular school or classrooms, they will always feel unchallenged and as such may become disruptive, aggressive, skip classes and loose interest in learning. Such child would become frustrated and channel his intellect to other antisocial activities. Denga (2009) therefore suggested that teachers should challenge children who are gifted to reach high expectation.

Hertzog (2008) identified four programme options for motivating children who are gifted. They are:

- i. **Special Classes:** He advocated that special classes should be provided for gifted children in regular schools. These special classes are called “pullout programmes”. These special classes could be held after school, on Saturday or during holidays.
- ii. **Acceleration and Enrichment in Regular Classroom Setting:** This include early admission to kindergarten, grade skipping known as double promotion telescoping (completing two grades in one year), advanced placement and self-paced instruction.
- iii. **Mentoring and Apprenticeship Programmes:** the gifted children should be mentored and educated by experts who will challenge them to do greater things.
- iv. **Work/study and or Community Service Programme:** The emphasis here is on problem-based learning such as doing projects, creating portfolios and critical thinking. Schools therefore should try to challenge and motivate gifted children in the regular classroom.

Psychological Implications

It is very important to note that individuals differ and consequently we have children who have special needs. Whether a special needs child is adequately or not adequately motivated, it has psychological implication on the general wellbeing of such a child. The children with special needs, whether with learning disabilities, physically disabled or gifted are not like other children and therefore need motivation to enhance their learning. In this regard, if they are highly motivated in the class or school, they will be well adjusted which enhanced their learning. However, if these

children are neglected and not adequately motivated, they become frustrated, depressed, perception of self becomes low and they become emotionally disturbed. This situation affect their mental health negatively and they may become maladjusted and consequently will not be able to cope with their environment. This will definitely affect their academic performance and may lead to becoming dropouts.

Counseling Implications

Counseling the special needs children in the regular school system for educational achievement cannot be over emphasized. The teacher should make effort to refer these children to the school counselor for counseling. Counseling special needs children for learning effectiveness, the characteristics of the learner should be known. Counseling children with special needs will help boost their self-concept and overcome distress and despair. It is also the job of the counselor to identify these children and when counseled, it will help them get re-adjusted and be able to achieve their educational goal.

Conclusion

It is important to understand that the challenges faced by special needs children in our regular class or school system are enormous. Consequently, they should be helped to overcome such challenges through motivation so that they would do well academically and adjusted in the society. As a result, all hands must be on deck. Parents, family members, teachers, counselors, school administrators, special educators and government should do all they can to help special needs children to achieve their potentialities academically. The issues, challenges and trends of conclusive education should be highlighted in this regard with appropriate resources in place.

Recommendations

In addition to many suggestions made already in the work, the following recommendations are made:

1. It is only motivated teachers that can motivate their students. Therefore there is need to motivate teachers by at least paying their salaries regularly so that they can motivate their students.
2. There should be flexibility in our curriculum to accommodate the special needs interest.
3. Schools and classroom environment should be made interesting to enhance curiosity, creativity and comfortable.
4. Peer tutoring should be encouraged where children with special needs are paired with normal children to help them in their academic work.
5. Inclusion education should be emphasized with adequate resources to empower, encourage and enhance motivation of special needs children in classroom setting.

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