

**THE IMPACT OF PARENTAL ECONOMIC STATUS ON THE
PRIMARY SCHOOL ENROLMENT OF CHILDREN WITH
DISABILITIES IN BWARI AREA COUNCIL ABUJA
A PAPER BEING PRESENTED**

Nwabueze Oluchukwu (B. Ed)
Angelwings Comprehensive College
Kubwa, Abuja

And

Nwabueze Josephine Nneka (M. Ed)
Department Of Educational Psychology
FCT College of Education
Zuba, Abuja

Abstract

This study examined the impact of parental economic status on the enrolment of children with disabilities into primary schools in Bwari area council of the Federal Capital Territory Abuja. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study is made up of all the parents and teachers of children with disabilities in Bwari area council. A total of eighty (80) respondents made up of 50 parents and 30 teachers of children with disabilities were sampled using purposive sampling technique. Two research questions guided the study. An instrument titled The Impact of Parental Economic Status on the School Enrolment of Children with Disabilities (IPESSECD) was developed by the researchers, validated by experts in the field of special needs education and assessed for internal consistency and used for the study. Data collected was analyzed with mean and standard deviation. The result of the study showed that low enrolment for children with disabilities in primary schools has been blamed on parental illiteracy, limited physical facilities, and low economic status of parents among others. The study also showed that the level of the economic status of parents influenced the extent to which children with disabilities are provided with: learning materials, medical assistance, mobility equipment as well as payment of tuition fees among others. Based on these findings conclusion was drawn and it was recommended among other things that there should be awareness creation on the importance of the education of children with disabilities to all parents and that in order to alleviate the economic burden on the parents of children with disabilities, the government should make provision for grants to such students.

Introduction

Education is a right of every child whether she/he is disabled or non-disabled as education equips children to meet the challenges of the life. Limaye (2016) stated that International organizations declarations, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), and UN Convention on the Rights of children with Disabilities (2006) prohibit any sort of exclusion from educational opportunities on

the basis of sex. However, according to Limaye, millions of children continue to experience exclusion within (and from) education systems across the world most especially those with disabilities. World conference on Education For All that was held in Jomtien, Thailand 1990 indicated in its first goal stressing the need to ensure that by 2015 all children get enrolled for learning from earliest years (UNESCO 2015 in Owoko 2016).

Enrolment in schools represents the largest component of the investment in human capital in almost all societies. Enrolment in primary school is significant in improving a child's learning and developmental outcomes whether he/she has disabilities or not. Primary education is the core of the schooling system. It builds the bedrock for human capital development (Lassibille & Tan, 2003). Enrolment in primary schools is thus of policy significance and relevance in Nigeria. This is because parents are known to invest in children according to sex, birth order or natural endowments. Under such situation, children with disabilities and other children are not exact substitutes.

A parent is a person who has the responsibility of the welfare, upbringing and education of the child. Parental involvement in the education of their children with disabilities include timely enrolment for them to join the general classrooms, gathering information to help make decisions about which school activities are best for their children to attend, to participate in the assessment process and the individual educational planning process helping own child to make transitions from one setting to another. They are entitled to participate with the school in their children's education and to provide the necessary support required by their children for learning. But because of economic hardship, families may find it difficult to provide educational facilities and it becomes challenging for poor families to send their children with disabilities to the school. Economic status is a total measure of an individual's or family's position in relation to others, based on income and occupation. Accordingly, the parental economic status includes the household income, earners' and occupation as well as combined income when their own attributes are assessed. Most commonly, it is measured by father's or mother's occupation and income (Memon, Muhammad & Muhammad, 2010).

In the absence of parental financial support, enrolment rate right from primary school reduces. Moreover, the primary school age is a time when a child goes through remarkable physical changes of all kinds. At this stage children with disabilities whose parents are on a low income status may not be enrolled into the school. But it should not be ignored that education is capable of empowering, creating opportunities and improving children with disabilities chances for success in life as adults while at the same time breaking the vicious cycle of poverty and inequality.

The World Health Organization's (WHO) (2004) definition of disability, which is contained within its *International Classification of Functioning (ICF), Disability and Health*, known as ICF, is that disability is a dynamic interaction between health conditions (diseases, disorders, injuries, traumas, etc) and contextual factors. The ICF model has two components: the first looks at the issues of functioning and disability (the individual's body functions and structures), while the

second part looks at the environment and context in which the person lives and how these factors impact on the individual's participation in society. It points to a dynamic interaction between health conditions (diseases, disorders, injuries, traumas, etc) and contextual factors. A person with disability is any person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; has a record of such impairment; or is regarded as having such an impairment"(Castro in Nwabueze 2016). Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Children in schools are termed "disabled" when they have real, persistent, and substantial individual differences and educational needs that regular education has been unable to accommodate. These individual differences as confirmed by Morgan, (1996) vary widely, from medical conditions such as cerebral palsy, to dyslexia, to pervasive and chronic maladaptive patterns of behavior. They are an extremely heterogeneous group, varying by type and severity of disability, as well as by the many variables found in the population at large, such as family income, characteristics, temperament, and intelligence. This heterogeneity means that some of them have highly specialized educational needs, such as sign language interpretation or braille reading and writing. Children with disabilities in schools, otherwise known as children with special educational needs are those children with one form of disabilities or the other, capable of limiting their involvement and participation in the regular educational programmes, and subsequently affect their academic performance and functionality in the society. They can be classified into eight, with respect to the type and nature of their disability problems.

They include those with hearing impairment, having little or no ability to hear sounds through one ear or both ears; the ones with visual impairment having difficulties in one or more functions of their visual system. The people with speech/communication disorders are also a group of them that lack development and stimulation which affect the effective mental formation of words or their physical production; the individuals with emotional disorder experiencing problems in their emotional development; the ones with intellectual disability whose mental ability, is significantly sub average co-occurring with maladaptive behaviours. Included also are the individuals with physical disabilities who are physically disadvantaged due to conditions that permanently prevent them from exercising normal body control and movement and the ones with learning disabilities having disorders in one or more of the fundamental psychological processes involved in the understanding, reading, speaking and writing of language, and mathematics.

Education as a fundamental human right is not just limited to a certain group and exempting others. Children with disabilities as well have their right to express their wishes with regard to their education as long as it can be achieved. Along this path, parents of children with disabilities as well have an inherent right to be consulted on the form of education best suited to the needs, circumstances and aspirations of their children to any extent they deem fit. According to UNICEF

(2009), parents of children with disabilities are encouraged to actively get involved in important discussions and decisions to identify the problems and support their children's need throughout school life. It is amazing the degree to which the economic situations of our present world has drawn a line against the accentuation of the supposed right of children with disabilities and their enrolment into schools.

School enrolment is a period during which a pupil officially registers in a school after being eligible. The low enrolment of children with disabilities has been blamed on parental illiteracy, unlimited physical facilities, outdated cultural beliefs and low socio-economic status (Swamura and Sifuna, 2008). Tavernise (2012) found that enrolment gap between children with disabilities from rich and poor families is widening, a phenomenon that he posits, threatens to dilute education's leveling effects for this group. In general, children with disabilities from affluent families tend to find better chances in primary school set up than their counterparts from poor and ignorant families (Tavernise, 2012; Willingham, 2012).

These children with disabilities are in most occasions left in custody of teachers who are inadequately trained. Though they are on the job of caring and teaching of these children with disabilities, they lose interest in updating their knowledge, developing new approaches and focusing on new ways to help these children improve their performance. Further, the teacher's training course for special school teachers fails to train teachers adequately to work in an integrated setting (Mondal & Mete 2013). Flexible curricula and learning materials, for meeting the learning needs of children with disabilities both in content and format, are not readily available in schools. Schools are sometimes far from home and there is lack of transportation and lack of accessibility of travelling. Also, children with disabilities find school facilities inaccessible and this to a great deal has affected their enrolment in Nigeria.

Based on the factors influencing enrolment of learners with disabilities and the particular place of parental economic status on such enrolment in Buwari Area Council of the FCT.

Statement of problem

Children with disabilities face a number of barriers to achieving their full potentials. Due to various hurdles, particularly for those who are poor and who suffer other forms of humiliations, there are immense obstacles for them to get out of their whirlpool of deprivations. They are more likely to live in poverty and face increased risk of social exclusion. Despite several efforts of governmental and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), there is still a pressing need to facilitate enrolment of children with disabilities into schools. Parental literacy level, socio economic status, cultural beliefs and awareness influence their involvement towards provision of learning resources and provision of valuable learning facilities for the enrolment of their children with disabilities into primary schools.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

- What are the enrolment problems of children with disabilities into schools in Bwari area council of the Abuja FCT?
- To what extent does parental economic status affect the enrolment of children with disabilities into schools in Bwari area council of the Abuja FCT?

Method

Design of the study was descriptive survey. The population of the study were the teachers and parents of children with disabilities in Bwari area council of Abuja FCT. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 80 teachers and parents of children with disabilities schools. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire titled The Place of Parental Economic Status on the School Enrolment of Children with Disabilities (PPESSECD). The questionnaire has two sections. The first was on what problems of enrolment of children with disabilities into primary schools are while the second was on the extent parental economic status affect the enrolment of children with disabilities into primary school. The questionnaire was structured in 4 likert rating scales of Strongly Agree (SA) 4, Agreed (A) 3, Disagreed (D) 2, and Strongly Disagreed (SD) in the first research question. In the second research question, Very Great Extent (VGE) 4, Great Extent (GE) 3, Little Extent (LE) 2, and Very Little Extent (VLE) 1 of the likert rating scaling was used. Data was collected through direct administration of the questionnaire by the research assistant retrieving them on the spot. Data from the study were collated and analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions. Mean rating of 2.5 and above were considered as positive responses while below 2.5 were considered as negative responses.

Results.

The results of the study are presented in tables 1-2 below

Research Question 1: What are the enrolment problems of children with disabilities into schools in Bwari Area Council of the Abuja-FCT?

Table I: Mean and standard deviation analysis of enrolment problems of children with disabilities

s/n	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
•	Parents are not aware of their children's right to education.	3.33	0.89	Agree
•	Inadequately trained teachers.	2.70	1.20	Agree
•	Appropriate teaching materials are insufficient.	2.99	1.02	Agree
•	Schools are quite a distance and are as well inaccessible.	3.30	0.86	Agree
•	Poor economic status of parents.	3.29	0.94	Agree

•	Negative parental attitudes about learning capabilities of their children	2.96	0.97	Agree
•	Curriculum and evaluation system are inflexible.	3.00	1.01	Agree
•	Segregated and inferior quality of education.	3.35	0.82	Agree
	Table Mean	3.12		

Table I shows mean and standard deviation analysis of enrolment problems of children with disabilities in Bwari Area Council of FCT-Abuja. The table further indicates that the items in the table had statistical means greater than the Decision Mean of 2.50. Furthermore, the Table Mean of 3.12 revealed positive responses from the respondents on the enrolment problems of children with disabilities. Based on these statistical values (means), it can be concluded that the respondents agreed with the researchers on the enrolment problems highlighted. Such problems included parents are not aware of their children's right to education, inadequately trained teachers, appropriate teaching materials are insufficient, schools are quite a distance and are as well inaccessible and poor economic status of parents.

Research Question 2: To what extent does parental economic status affect the primary school enrolment of children with disabilities in Bwari Area Council of the Abuja-FCT?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation analysis on the extent parental economic status can affect the school enrolment of children with disabilities

s/n	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
•	Ability to buy sufficient learning materials.	3.26	0.89	VGE
•	Providing mobility equipment such as wheelchairs and prosthesis.	3.24	0.90	VGE
•	Conveying children with disabilities to schools far from home.	3.04	0.93	GE
•	Providing assistive technology.	3.14	1.00	VGE
•	Payment of necessary school fees.	3.30	0.90	VGE
•	Ability to provide medical assistance.	2.91	0.87	GE
•	Employing class assistants for the children in school.	3.16	0.77	GE
•	Payment for specialist personnel like brailist or sign language interpreter	3.53	0.61	VGE
•	Buying of school uniforms	2.83	1.03	VGE
	Table Mean	3.16		

Table 2 shows mean and standard deviation analysis of parental status and enrolment of children with disabilities in Bwari Area Council of FCT-Abuja. The

table indicates that the items in the table had statistical means greater than the Decision Mean of 2.50. Furthermore, the Table Mean of 3.16 revealed positive responses from the respondents on the parental status and enrolment of children with disabilities. Based on these statistical values (means), it can be concluded that the respondents agreed with the researchers on the parental status and enrolment of children with disabilities highlighted. Therefore, to a very great extent the parental economic status affected the primary school enrolment of children with disabilities in Bwari Area Council of FCT-Abuja.

Discussion

Based on this study's findings, it has been revealed that all the items in table one are problems responsible for the enrolment situations of children with disabilities. Therefore, low enrolment for children with disabilities has been blamed on parental illiteracy, unlimited physical facilities, out dated cultural beliefs and low socio-economic status. Most parents are unaware of the right to education of their children with disabilities and they question the learning capabilities of their children with disabilities among others. This finding is in line with Limaye (2016) who listed the perceptions of parents of children with disabilities, inadequate levels of training of teachers, poverty, poor physical access and inflexible curriculum as some of the problems hindering the educational enrolment of children with disabilities.

Furthermore, the result in table two unveils the extent to which the economic status of parents affect the primary school enrolment of children with disabilities. The degree of the economic status of parents affect the extent to which children with disabilities are provided with; sufficient learning materials, medical assistance, mobility equipment like wheelchairs and prosthesis, assistive technology, as well as payment of tuition including buying of uniforms and lack of class assistants and the rest of the items on the table for the children with disabilities in schools. This fact is supported by Owoko (2016) who enumerated among other things that the economic status of parents determine the extent of the provision of educational materials and school uniforms for the enrolment of children with disabilities into primary schools.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it could be concluded that there are many factors constituting as barriers to the school enrolment of children with disabilities. Also of prominence is the fact that the economic status of parents has direct implication for the levels of enrolment of children with disabilities into primary schools. There is therefore a significant need to facilitate access to children with disabilities into primary schools and to education in general. This calls for the empowering of parents of children with disabilities to enhance their participation in the education of those children.

Recommendations.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made.

The government should make education at the primary level compulsory and free for the children with disabilities more especially now that is the era of inclusive education.

There should be awareness creation on the importance of the education of children with disabilities to all parents.

In order to alleviate the economic burden on the parents of children with disabilities, the government should make provision for grants to such parents.

Sufficient learning resources and mobility equipment are to be provided by sponsors, government and non-governmental agencies who have interest in the education of children with disabilities.

There should be availability of medical assistance in every primary school where children with disabilities are present to help improve their health life.

Arrangement for conveying children with disabilities to schools which seem to be a distance from their residence should be made adequately by the government.

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