

OPINIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION IN ENHANCING LEARNING AMONG CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES IN AN INCLUSIVE SETTING

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Abstract

This study was designed to sample opinions from classroom teachers on effective collaboration strategies that can be used to enhance learning among children with Learning disabilities in an inclusive setting. To gather data for the study an 18- item questionnaire was designed and administered on 50 respondents who were selected through purposive sampling technique. To analyze data, mean scores (\bar{x}) were computed and used. The results showed the desired direction that collaboration should take for it to be effective. Based on this, it was recommended that teachers be trained on effective strategies in collaborative teaching through workshops and seminars.

Key Words: Opinions, Collaboration, Learning and learning disabilities

Background of the Study

Some issues that agitate the mind of stakeholders in the education of children with learning disabilities are, the 'why', 'how', and 'where' of the client's education. The 'why' talks about the justification or reasons for educating children with Learning Disabilities (LD), the 'how' is concerned with mode of instructional delivery often called instructional pedagogy and the 'where' is basically considering educational placement options or alternatives. In this work, the authors are primarily concerned with the 'where' and 'how' of the education of these clients.

Globally, the best approach to the education of children with special needs including those with LD, so far identified, is inclusion. Despite the objections from the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) to inclusion, pierangelo and Giniliani, (2006) still posit that it is the most worthwhile practice in the education of children with special needs (LD) considering its benefits for both the children and

stakeholders such as teachers. They maintained that inclusion gives teachers opportunities to gain from each other's wealth of experience and professional knowledge.

The cardinal mark of inclusion is the ability of stakeholders to teach collaboratively. According to Lerner (2003), the success of inclusion revolves round collaboration among the stakeholders particularly teachers (the special and regular education). Collaboration or collaborative teaching as it is called, is a feature of inclusive education which requires teachers to pool their professional skills, knowledge, experience to meet the varied needs of children in the classroom. Obi (2006) sees collaborative teaching as a new dimension to teaching where the regular and special education teachers depend on each other for improved pedagogy for deserving learners.

In collaboration, the pendulum of ownership of the classroom is shifted from 'my class' to 'our classroom'. This means that they are responsible and accountable for the success and failure of instruction as well as learning outcome. Collaborative teaching, if properly planned and implemented, is a plausible way to quality instruction and education of children with special needs particularly those with dyslexia. Obani (2006) noted that collaboration is an ideal instructional practice considering the nature and effect of LD. Learning Disability is a hidden handicap without facial and sensory evidence, yet, it is a silent killer because it is seemingly innocuous and it frustrates achievement at optimal level as it affects the key school subjects and skills that enhance success in other areas.

Children with learning disabilities are those who manifest significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning and numeracy abilities due to presumed central nervous system dysfunction. Egaga, Orim, Ewa and Olayi (2010) see children with LD as those who:

- Have difficulties with academic achievement and progress - exhibit discrepancies between potential for learning and what is actually learned.
- Have shown uneven pattern of development and growth.
- Have normal intelligence yet have significant difficulties in areas such as reading, spelling, quantitative reasoning, etc.
- Have dysfunctional input and output mechanism.

Statement of Problem

Researches such as Thousand and Villa (1990), Obi (2006) and scholarly discourse by professionals in both national and international conferences have shown that collaborative teaching of children with LD is a salient feature of an inclusive classroom. Authors' practical experience over the years as special Educator and counsellor shows that as interesting as collaborative teaching sounds, the practical dimension is problematic and tasking in terms of planning and actual delivery of instruction.

A critical review of studies and other literature on collaboration with other teachers indicates that there are issues that militate against effective collaborative

teaching. These issues are, who has control of the classroom, whose decisions is final? Who is more accountable for children's learning outcome, professional and personality clashes and most importantly, what strategies enhance effective collaboration for instructional benefits of children with LD. It is on the basis of issues highlighted above that this study is designed. Specifically, the problem of this study is to identify effective collaboration strategies, the problems that militate against such strategies and the measures that can be adopted to address such problems.

Purpose of the Study

This study is primarily designed to:

- i. Find out strategies for effective collaboration in instruction for children with LD.
- ii. Identify problems that are capable of militating against effective collaborative teaching of children with LD
- iii. Seek measures that could be adopted as panacea to problems that affect effective collaboration in instruction for children with LD.

Research Questions

The following questions were formulated to guide the study.

1. What strategies will enhance effective collaboration in instruction for children with LD?
2. What problems militate against effective collaboration in instruction for children with LD?
3. What measures can be adopted as solution to problems that hinder effective collaboration in instruction for children with LD.

Research Design

In this study, survey research design was adopted. It was considered appropriate for this study because it gives researchers the opportunity to gather information from representative sample of the population on what already obtains for a better and valid generalization of findings.

Sample-The sample for the study constituted 50 teachers drawn purposively among primary and secondary school teachers in Calabar Metropolis who have been exposed to rudimentary training on collaborative teaching through a retraining workshop. The sample constitutes of 20 special education teachers and 30 regular teachers.

Instrumentation

An 18-item questionnaire with four-point rating response scale of Strongly Agree, Agree,

Strongly Disagree and Disagree (SA, A, SD, D) was designed by the researchers and validated by experts in measurement, educational research and professionals in special needs education.

Its reliability was determined and a positive correlation coefficient of 0.76 was obtained.

Method of Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, particularly, mean score was used to analyze the data. Standard mean of 2.50 was set as a cut-off point for decision making. Any item with a mean score of less than 2.50 was considered not significant while items with a mean score of 2.50 and above were accepted as being significant.

Presentation of Results

Results from this study are presented in Tables 1-3 below:

Research Questions I

What strategies will enhance effective collaboration in instruction for children with LD?

Table I: Teachers' responses to items 1-6

Table 1: Teachers' responses to items 1-6

S.No.	Item	Mean Score(x)	Decision
1.	Establishment of common instructional goals will enhance collaborative teaching	4.25	*AAS
2.	Collaborative teaching will be more effective if participation is voluntary	2.00	**NAS
3.	Equality of teachers/professionals in collaboration enhances the process.	3.40	*AAS
4.	Sharing of instructional responsibilities among teachers will enhance collaborative teaching.	4.10	*AAS
5.	If collaborating teachers share instructional outcome (success and failure) the process will be more effective.	3.25	*AAS
6.	When each teacher contributes to the production of instructional resources, collaborative teaching becomes more effective.	4.20	*AAS

* Accepted as strategies

** Not accepted as a strategy

Data in Table 1 indicate that items 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6 with a means score of 4.25, 3.40, 4.10, 3.25 and 4.20 are effective collaborative strategies in instruction for children with LD, while item I with mean score of 2.00 is not a strategy for effective collaboration.

Research Question II

What problems militate against effective collaboration in instruction for children with LD'?

Table II: Teachers' responses to items 7-12

S.No.	Item	Mean Score(x)	Decision
7.	Personality clashes between teachers hinder effective collaboration	4.11	*AAP
8.	Inadequate planning impedes the success of collaboration.	4.00	*AAP
9.	Prof clashes/superiority affects the effectiveness of collaborative teaching	3.55	*AAP
10.	Lack of mutual trust among teachers distorts the success of collaboration.	4.55	*AAP
11.	The struggle of ownership/control of the Class affects collaboration	2.51	*AAP
12.	Overlapping of functions between teachers create instructional gap for students and the process.	2.40	**NAP

* Accepted as a problem

** Not accepted as a problem

Result in Table II reveals that item 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 are problems that constantly hinder effective collaboration hence they have a mean score of 4.11, 4.00, 3.50, 3.35, 2.51 and in contrast, item 12 does not militate against collaboration considering the mean score - 2.40.

Research Question III

What measures can be adopted as solutions to these problems?

Table III: Teachers' responses to items 13-18

S.No.	Item	Mean Score(x)	Decision
13.	Workshop/seminar on principles and practice of collaboration helps in Solving these problems	3.00	*AAS
14.	Proper planning for collaborative instruction helps to address issues affecting collaboration.	4.48	*AAS
15.	Application of safe guard principle will go a long way in solving problems associated with collaboration	2.00	*AAS
16.	Frequent team conferencing will help in resolving issues in collaboration	3.50	*AAS
17.	The use of research based strategies for collaboration in inclusive setting will enhance the process	4.00	*AAS
18.	Administrative support to teachers helps in sorting out issues in collaborative teaching	1.55	**NAS

* Accepted as solution ** Not accepted a solution.

From data in Table III it is clear that items 13, 14, 16 and 17 can be confidently used to solve problems associated with collaborative teaching considering their mean scores of 3.00, 4.48, 3.50 and on 4.00; and on the other hand, items 15 and 18 with mean scores of 2.00 and 1.55 cannot be considered as panacea to these problems.

Discussion of Findings

The study is quite revealing. The findings reveal that strategies such as establishing a common instructional goal, equality of teachers/professionals, sharing instructional responsibilities, joint contribution to instructional resources or process as well as sharing instructional outcome enhance collaborative teaching of children with LD in an inclusive classroom. This is in tandem with the findings of villa and Thousand (1991). Their studies agree that children with LD suffer conditions that are heterogeneous and multifaceted. Thus, teaching these clients will be service-based and satisfactory if it is collaborative. They specifically conclude that these strategies are highly effective and beneficial to a child who is dyslexic and most often his condition(s) are unidentified by a regular education teacher. This study also reveals issues that militate against teaching children with LD inclusively. It identifies personality clashes among

teachers/professionals, inadequate planning, etc as issues that hinder this approach of teaching. This study is supported by Bateman (1995) who has strong reservations about inclusion, general and collaborative teaching of children with LD particularly. His position is that third world countries do not have the economic resources and manpower as well as the willingness to support this instructional approach. Consequently it will result in problems that will likely hinder effective instructional delivery and undermine educational needs of clients.

Additionally, from this study it is seen that workshop/seminar on principles and practices of collaboration, proper planning, constant conferencing, use of research-based strategies could effectively enhance collaboration in instruction for clients with LD. This study is supported by Pierangelo (2004) whose study on meeting the challenges of children with LD through collaboration indicated that, despite the nature of this disability, its teachers meet constantly to discuss research-based strategies on teaching the children, stakeholders will discover that collaboration is a more rewarding instructional approach. Pierangelo and Giniliani (2005) and Polloway, Pottton, and Serna (2001) further confirmed that strategies articulated in this study are a panacea to problems that negate collaboration in the provision of instructions for children with LD.

Conclusion

Teaching children with learning disabilities is quite challenging and tasking considering the nature of the disability. However, researches have proved that collaboration among stakeholders especially the regular and special education teachers make the process look like bread and jam. As interesting and rewarding as collaboration in instruction for these clients is, teachers should be mindful of issues that militate against this approach.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, these recommendations are made:

- i. Collaboration is the best instructional approach in educating these clients in an inclusive setting.
- ii. Teachers should have common instructional goals, shared responsibilities for instruction, be accountable for both instructional input and output among other strategies to ensure effective collaboration in instruction for these clients with a hidden disability.
- iii. Frequent workshops and seminars on principles and practices of collaboration among other measures should be used as ways of addressing problems that are likely to hinder collaboration.

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