

ATTITUDES OF REGULAR TEACHERS TOWARD THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

N.A. Gwanshak

&

S.B. Milaham

*Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation Sciences,
Faculty of Education, University of Jos.*

Abstract

Inclusive education is a programme that is aimed at making school experience for children with special needs (children with learning disabilities inclusive) to be as normal as possible to the one experienced by their normal peers in regular classroom setting. Children with learning disabilities are a set of special needs children who are often referred to as “lazy” children by regular classroom teachers, who have little or no knowledge about such children. They have often been neglected by these teachers because the teachers have little or no idea on the methods to use in teaching them. Parents of these children are also worried because of their failure in school. Attitudes of teachers toward these children can make them to learn or not depending on whether it is positive or negative. Teachers should therefore, try and develop positive attitudes toward these children in the classroom so that they can also learn like their peers. This paper focused on the attitudes of regular school teachers toward the education of children with learning disabilities in inclusive education.

Introduction

Inclusive education refers to the practice of educating normal and special needs children in regular classes. Within the contemporary inclusive classrooms teachers play a vital role and so their participation in an inclusive programme cannot be overemphasized. Their attitude towards children with learning disabilities will help in making these children learn despite their various problems.

Inclusive education can only succeed if regular school teachers are part of the implementation. They are required to be psychologically and practically prepared to take on the dynamic role of teaching all categories of learners.

Children with learning disabilities are a group of children who exhibit some problems academically. They exhibit problems in listening, speaking, reading, writing, mathematical calculations and also in behaviour. They need specialized methods in order to learn like other children. If teachers are aware of their problems and have been trained on how to teach them, they will perform well in school. They will also help ease the problem of including them in an inclusive education.

Including children with learning disabilities in inclusive education will be a success if teachers have a positive attitude these children. The program will be a success if teachers are given appropriate training on children with learning disabilities and the various methods of teaching them.

Attitudes mean the society's feelings which influences its behavior towards an individual which could be negative or positive Ismaila and Ajobiewe (1996) in Yaro (2012) said that attitudes is a combination of feelings and beliefs which result in a predisposition to respond favorably or unfavorably towards a person, groups, ideas or objects. Similarly, Undelikwo (1984) in Yaro (2012) referred to attitudes as a psychological process which comprises of thoughts, feeling and tendencies of behaving in a particular way towards a given object or situation. Attitude can also be seen as the perceptual way at which an individual tends to react towards persons, object, matters and events and this reaction could be conscious or unconscious.

Attitude has three components which are affective, cognitive and behavioral. The affective component consists of an individual's evaluation of emotional responses to a person or an object. The cognitive component reflects an individual's thought towards the attitude object in its various characteristics. The behavioral component is concerned with the persons over behavior directed towards a given object, person or situation. There is strong relationship between these components since a person's perception and conceptualization of an object influences the strength of his feeling about it which leads to his over behavior Ozoji (2005).

Children with Learning Disabilities

Children with learning disabilities are those children who appear to be normal but exhibit some difficulties educationally, socially, emotionally and behaviourally. They may have some difficulties in some school subjects and skills like reading, writing, spelling, listening and speaking, mathematical reasoning or calculations and social problems. Learning disabilities is a disorder that interferes with the development of basic skills that affects an individual's ability to learn.

According to Lere (2001), children with learning disabilities may be referred to as children that manifest educationally significant discrepancy between their estimated intellectual potential and their real level of performance. He added that such children may not have traces of other impairments and also achieve normal in other areas but their academic performance in the classroom is significantly low in some areas.

Panda (2007) also said that children with learning disabilities are children who have disorders in the development of language, speech, and reading and development of communication skills needed for social interaction. Similarly, Ihenacho (2006) sees children with learning disabilities as school children and youth who appear "normal" in every respect, but who due to undisclosed internal personal problems cannot perform at the same level to achieve in school.

Lerner (2000) also said that children with learning disabilities encounter specific problem in the acquisition of speech and oral language, in reading, arithmetic, handwriting, motor, written expression, thinking, or in psycho-social skills and that there is a gap between what the children are potentially capable of doing and their achievement. Children with learning disabilities exhibit various characteristics. A child who has learning disabilities may exhibit one or more of the characteristics but not all. Lere (2001) has listed some of the characteristics of children with learning disabilities as:

1. Hyperactivity
2. Emotional instability
3. Highly agitated with self
4. Perseveration
5. Impulsivity
6. Poor self-concept
8. Clumsiness or carelessness
9. Motor skills problem
10. Problems of language skills
11. Cognitive skills problem
12. Disorders of speech and hearing
13. Mistakes in identifying left and right
14. Specific academic problems in reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic and understanding languages.

When teachers are able to understand the problems of these children, they will be able to develop positive attitudes toward them and the children will learn like any other child.

Inclusive Education

Inclusive education refers to the practice of educating students who have special needs with their peers in regular schools. It means regular education classes rendering service to different types of learners. David (2006) states that proponents of inclusion want to maximize the participation of all learners in the community schools of their choice, make leaning more meaningful and relevant to all, particularly those learners that are vulnerable to exclusionary pressures and to rethink and restructure policies, curricula, cultures and practices in schools and learning environment so that various learning needs can be met, whatever the origin or nature of such needs.

The Internal Institution of Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) (2005) act for individuals with disabilities education requires that a continuum of placement options be available to meet the needs of students with disabilities. The law requires that to the maximum extent appropriate, children who have disabilities are educated with normal children and that special classes, separate schooling or removal of children with disabilities from the regular environment occur only when the nature or severity of the

disabilities is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be attained satisfactorily.

Similarly, Sabba (1997) in Yaro (2012) states that inclusion is a step further in mainstreaming as it represents a means through which a school attempts to respond to all children as individuals by considering and restructuring its curricular organization provision and allocating resources to enhance quality of opportunities. Ozoji (2005) also states that it is a policy which allows all children and young people with or without disabilities learn together in ordinary pre-school, primary, secondary, college/polytechnics and universities with appropriate network of support. It is a system of education that accommodates all people regardless of their physical, social, emotional, intellectual, linguistic, mental, behavioral or otherwise abilities (condition).

According to Stainback and Stainback (2001), inclusive education is the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving equal educational opportunities for all.

Inclusive education is however, being debated upon. Some are in support of it while some criticize it. Those who support it say that it is the most effective while critics have argued that inclusive school will not meet the needs of all learners with special needs adequately. They are of the view that children with special needs will receive more attention and therapy in segregated schools than in inclusive schools.

Components of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is an important component in education of children with learning disabilities. Teachers and prospective teachers should be trained on its implication in the regular classroom to enable them acquire the skills of working with the special needs children and to also change their attitudes toward them.

Inclusive education has five components which all should occur on an ongoing basis. The five components according to Giangreco (1994) in Yaro (2012) are;

1. Heterogeneous grouping- This refers to all students including children with disabilities are educated together as a group including "normal" and those with disabilities with an approximate normal proportion of thirty children in a class.
2. A sense of belonging to a group- All students including those with disabilities are considered as active members of the class. Those who are "normal" feel welcome as those without disability.
3. Shared activities with individualized outcomes- Children share educational experience like lessons, laboratories, field work and group learning at a time. However the learning objectives for them are individualized according to the needs of each child.
4. Use of environment frequented by individuals without disabilities. The learning experiences take place in regular classrooms and community work

sites.

5. A balanced educational experience- Inclusive education strikes a balance between academic/functional and social/ personal aspects of schooling that is to say that development of individuals self-images and social skills are as important as their leadership. Inclusive education is therefore, based on the premise that special needs of individuals can be appropriately catered for in regular schools if adequate arrangements and preparation are made. Schools that are inclusive are those that plan educational programmes for all children, accommodate all children irrespective of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional and linguistic needs.

Attitude of Regular School Teachers Towards the Education of Children with Learning Disabilities

The attitude of regular school teachers toward children with learning disabilities in regular schools will influence their behavior towards such children which will lead to acceptance or unacceptance of such children. The success of inclusive education program may suffer some setbacks if the teachers have a negative attitude towards the education of children with learning disabilities. Teachers who have a negative attitude towards these children will sometimes expect low performance by the children. Attitudes of teachers can result in an increase or decrease opportunities for serving these children in regular schools.

Ozaji (2005) said that there are certain attitudes that regular school teachers have towards children with learning disabilities in inclusive education as:

1. Intolerance- Regular school teachers are not patient enough in handling the education of children who have learning disabilities.
2. Hostility- These are manifested in feelings and behaviors that directly mistreat, deny, and discriminate against children with learning disabilities.
3. Abandonment and rejection of children who have learning disabilities by regular school teachers.

Attitude of Regular School Teachers Towards Inclusive Education

Teachers are very necessary in the implementation of any educational program and as a result their necessity in implementing inclusive education. Their attitude towards the program affects it either positively or negatively. Some teachers may resist the program because they have not been trained in teaching children with special needs. Some may resist it because of their beliefs about children with learning disabilities which will lead them to have negative attitudes toward such children. Their belief will make them to expect low academic standards from such children. They may also resist the program due to inadequate educational materials that the children and teachers will use. Some may also resist it due to difficulty in accessing resources and specialist effort.

Some of the teachers may have a positive attitude towards the program because of their perception of what the program is all about. Such teachers due to experience with children with learning disabilities will have the confidence that such children will perform well in the inclusive education. Teachers who have a positive attitude towards inclusiveness will try and attend some professional training which will help them to teach such students in the inclusive setting.

Every program is bound to face some challenges hence, the inclusive education. Challenges that may be faced in implementing inclusive education may include;

1. Lack of adequate professionals.
2. Teachers may lack the diverse methods for teaching all categories of learners.
3. Teachers may face the problem of class control since all categories of children are involved in the program with children who have behavioral problems.
4. Lack of structured environment that will accommodate all categories of learners.
5. Lack of funds to run such a program.
6. Lack of collaboration with school authorities, parents, resource room teachers, itinerant teachers, school counselors and other agencies that provide services for children with special needs.

Recommendations

In order to enhance proper implementation of inclusive education of children with learning disabilities, it is recommended that:

1. Teachers should be properly trained on children with learning disabilities and the various methods of teaching them.
2. Workshops should be organized regularly in order to update teachers' knowledge concerning children with learning disabilities and inclusive education.
3. Teachers who have been trained in special needs education should be recruited to teach in regular schools.
4. Teachers should be encouraged to develop positive attitude toward children with learning disabilities through attending seminars and conferences.
5. Trained personnel who work with children with learning disabilities should be motivated by giving them some incentives.
6. Regular schools should be funded in order to procure resources for the implementation of inclusive education.
7. Other children should be well informed about children with learning

disabilities which will in turn change their negative attitudes toward these children.

8. Regular schools should have enough special teachers who will work with the regular school teachers.

Conclusion

Inclusive education for children with learning disabilities will be a success if teachers who have negative attitudes toward these children can be changed to a positive one. Children who have learning disabilities stand a chance to benefit from inclusive education if the challenges mentioned in this paper will be addressed properly.

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