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SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: QUALITY OF ITS SERVICE DELIVERY FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN ONDO STATE PRIMARY

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Abstract

Special Needs Education in Nigeria takes place majorly in formal school environment like other regular schools. This implies that the quality of its service delivery must not be different from regular education in the country. This study investigated the quality of service delivery provided for Children with Disabilities in Ondo State Nigeria. It adopted survey research design and the population consisted of all the children in the four public primary schools providing education for children with disabilities in the state. The respondents for the study comprised 4 Head Teachers and 8 Assistant Head Teachers in the schools. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the respondents. An instrument named Quality of Education Service Delivery for Children with Disabilities Checklist (QESDCDC) and interview was used. Data were analysed using frequencies, percentages and content analysis. The result showed that there was low provision of schools for CwDs, the children were not going through screening assessment before placing them in classes, the children classrooms were overcrowded and the curriculum available was inappropriate. The study concluded that the quality of education service delivery provided for CwDs in Ondo state needs urgent improvement and attention by the State and Local Government.

Keywords; Children with Disabilities, Special Needs Education, Service Delivery, Quality, Regular Education

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INTRODUCTION

The preparation for accepting and operating education for children with special needs vary globally as every society is finding the appropriate ways of caring for children who deviate physically or mentally from the normal typically developed children. Developed countries across the world have gone beyond categorising education for children with disabilities in their countries, while from observation Nigeria and most African nations are still struggling with the problem of providing standard education for these children even on exclusion basis. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) considers a holistic perspective on childhood development that is based on the strong principles of inseparable and interrelationship of all human rights. Therefore, all of the rights recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child are applicable to all children including children with disabilities (CRC.Article.1). This is also stated in all other adopted documents on child's right out of which right to education for children with disabilities is not excluded because it plays major role in identifying every child's potentials and allows them to contribute to societal and economic development of the country.

Dantata (2015) states that education for children with disabilities should be focused on educating the children in accordance to their individual needs towards assisting them to discover their potentials and contribute to the progress and development of the nation. Wosuet al 2016, was also of the opinion that education for children with special needs should be an educational programme that will be put in place by government for children with disabilities and exceptions, with the view of providing them the opportunities to give their own contribution to nation's progress and development.

This aforementioned could explain the notion behind United Nations General Assembly 1975's Declaration which states that children with Special Needs should be accorded all their rights for them to have sense of belonging in the society. From the foregoing, it could be agreed that either a child is well developed or having any form of disabilities they must be accorded their rights, this give the position on providing children with disabilities a quality and standard education in Nigeria, especially from the government who is the major source of funding for public school education.

Special needs education is considered within the regular educational settings as a system that would provide necessary infrastructural and learning facilities, specialized curriculum and instructional materials for children who are considered impaired or having developmental challenges or conditions (Ozoji, 2005). The topmost goal of education for these children is to equalize them with other children and to provide them with opportunities in the society like other children. Special needs education service delivery in Nigeria could be viewed as some clearly lay down standard of an educational system in meeting up with its desired goals on targeted audience. Any educational service delivery in special needs education should focus majorly on all that is needed to contribute to optimum development of the children. Sean (2017) also state that an effective educational service delivery will focus on holistic development of each child regardless of their challenges or conditions, as any type of education prepares every child for the future.

This inform that any quality educational service delivery that will be provided for the children must make provision for all resources that will ensure that each child learns in an environment that is conducive and they should also have access to individualized learning that is supported by qualified professionals. On this it can be agreed that to achieve effective quality educational service delivery for children with disabilities in Nigeria, it is very important to note the set standard and put the standard into consideration.

Aladejana and Adelodun (2003 in Ajayi, 2008) give some reflections on what standard of quality educational programmes entail which include the infrastructural facilities, curriculum process, implementation and reformation. In view of their reflections on what quality educational programmes involve, there must be availability of standard infrastructural facilities, assistive technologies, learning equipment and the curriculum must meet with the needs of children with disabilities. The Basic special needs education learning environment should allow children the opportunity to experience quality education it should be an environment for learning and exploration (Lain et al, 2014). A learning environment is said to be of standard when there is provision of adequate facilities that will promote the social, emotional, and physical development of every child (Iroegbu 2016).

Curriculum adaptations are also indispensable for the realistic and meaningful provision of educational service delivery for children with disabilities in Nigerian schools. The level of disability of children varies which could be mild or severe. Therefore, children with severe challenges may not be placed with typically developed children in the regular school in that case they cannot be exposed to same educational experiences. This is evident in the necessity of special needs education programme, but those with mild disabilities can be placed and exposed to same learning experience (inclusive) which could be of great assistance to them in achieving their potentials (Dantata, 2015).

From observations, education for children with disabilities has been part of the major educational section in Nigeria that has been witnessing lack of attention from the government and it is important to note that children with special needs in any nation require priority and special attention from all stakeholders. Adebisi et al, 2014 notes that challenges to special needs education in Nigeria can be in different forms which could be inadequate funding, barrier of access to education, policy issues, unavailability of facilities, poverty or governments' inability to provide all the needed facilities for the children's education.

The goal of special needs education is for children with disabilities to make progress in school environment and prepare them for their future (Patricia & Latham, 2019). However, it can be observed from researches that children with disabilities in Nigeria are being denied of their right to access quality public basic education as they

seem not to be receiving all the services they need to benefit from all forms of instructions being offered to them in the school. It is therefore necessary to know the quality of education being offered to children with disabilities in Ondo State Nigeria.

Objectives

The overall objective of this study was to assess the quality of education service delivery provided for Children with Disabilities in Ondo State, Nigeria.

The specific objectives were to:

1. Investigate the provision of Basic Education made available by the Government for Children with Disabilities in Ondo state
2. Determine the mode of diagnostic assessment made available for Children with Disabilities before placing them into classes in Ondo State public primary schools.
3. Examine the availability of classrooms and individualized appropriate curriculum provided for the children in the schools.

Research questions

1. What is the level of government provision on Basic Education for children with disabilities in Ondo state?
2. What mode of diagnostic screening assessment are being put in place for Children with Disabilities before Class placements?
3. Is there availability of enough classrooms and provision of individualized appropriate curriculum for Children with Disabilities in the state?

Methodology

This study adopted descriptive survey research design. The population of the study consists of all children with disabilities in the public primary schools offering education for Children with Special Needs in Ondo State. The respondents consist of all the 4 Head Teachers and 8 Assistant Head Teachers that were purposively selected in the schools for the study. The Head of schools were purposively selected based on their year of experiences in the teaching service in a special school. An instrument named Quality of Education Service Delivery for Children with Disabilities Checklist (QESDCDC) and interview was used to gather data for the study. The checklist had three sections: Section A consists of the school bio-data. Section B contains twelve (12) items that was used to collect information on the categories of children with disabilities that were provided with school in the states, availability of classrooms and individualised appropriate curriculum for CWDs. Section C contains five (5) interview questions that answer mode of assessing children before placement into the available classes. The checklist was validated and tested for reliability and found reliable with a reliability coefficient of 0.71. The data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools (frequency count and percentage) with SPSS software and the interview responses were transcribed using Atlas.ti software.

Results and discussions Research question 1

What is the level of government provision on Basic Education for children with disabilities in Ondo state? To answer this research question frequency count and percentage was used to analyse the data collected.

Table 1:Frequency Counts and Percentage Showing Availability of Schools for Children with Disabilities in Ondo State

Number of LGAs in the State	Number of Inclusive School	Number of Public Primary Special Schools	% of PPSSs Available per Local Government in the State	Number of Public Regular Primary Schools	% of PPSSs per Number of PRPS in the State
18	00	04	22.2	880	0.45

Table 1 above showed that in Ondo state there was availability of only 4 public primary special schools compared to 880 regular public primary schools. It indicates 0.45% to regular basic schools and 22.2% per local government.

Table 1.1: Frequency Counts and Percentage Showing Levels of Educational Provisions Available for Children with Disabilities in Public Special Primary Schools in Ondo State

Categories of Pupils	No. of schools/%	Type of school	Referral class	Pre-Basic	Basic One	Basic Two	Basic Three
Children with intellectual disability	1 (25)	Special	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Children with visual impairment	4(100)	Special	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Children with hearing impairment	4(100)	Special	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Children with physical disability	4(100)	Special	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Children with behavioural disorder	1(25)	Special	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Children with autism	NIL	NIL	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Children with learning disabilities	NIL	NIL	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Children with speech disorder	2(50)	Special	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 1.1 above showed that there is educational provision for children with visual impairment, hearing impairment and physical disability in all the 4 (100%) special schools in the state, only 1

(25%) of the schools had provision for children with intellectual disability and behavioural disorder, 2(50%) of the schools had provision for children with speech disorder while none of the schools had provision for children with autism and learning disabilities.

Research question 2

What mode of diagnostic screening assessments are being put in place for children with disabilities before class placement?

To answer this research question content analysis was used to transcribe the interview responses gathered from the Head Teachers and their assistants.

All the Head Teachers and their assistants in the schools responded that in their 20-28 years of experience in teaching service as a special teachers and becoming the Head of schools, they are yet to experience any service provider that would screen the children when for admission placements. They responded further that there was no provision of any equipment or facilities from the government, NGOs or philanthropist that can support them in screening assessment for the children before placing them in any classroom. They were of the opinion that if government had provided the necessary equipment for the children screening assessment they won't know how to handle it as a teacher because it requires the service of experts. The teachers were using their years of experience and training they got during their pre-service training at Teacher's Training College to arrive at likely disabilities the children may be experiencing. The children were not being placed according to their disabilities needs as they were all placed together in same classes and no age was used to place them for classification of classes (Pry 1-6) as it is being done in regular primary school due to their disabilities.

Research question 3

Is there availability of enough classrooms and provision of individualized appropriate curriculum for children with disabilities in the state?

To answer this question observation checklist report was used.

SCHOOLS	**CLASSROOM OBSERVATION**	**INDIVIDUALISED CURRICULUM**	**REGULAR CURRICULUM**
1	OVERCROWDED	NOT AVAILABLE	AVAILABLE
2	NOT CROWDED	NOT AVAILABLE	AVAILABLE
3	OVERCROWDED	NOT AVAILABLE	AVAILABLE
4	OVERCROWDED	NOT AVAILABLE	AVAILABLE

The observation showed that the classrooms available in three (3) out of the four (4) public special primary schools available in Ondo State were overcrowded and no availability of individualized appropriate curriculum in all the schools but there is availability of regular curriculum in all the schools.

Discussions

The study findings on educational provision for children with disabilities in Ondo state revealed that there was provision of just four (4) schools for children with disabilities in the State and no provision of inclusive education for the children. The educational provision available were for children with visual impairment, hearing impairment and physical disabilitties, only a school had provision for children with intellectual disability and behavioural disorder, two out of the schools had provision for children with speech disorder while none of the schools had provision for children with autism and learning disabilities. This finding is in line with Lawalet al, 2022who found out that the provision of public basic school for children with special needs in southwest Nigeria was very low. It also corroborated the observation of Salami and Nweke (2015) that, the most common measure of basic special needs education for children with challenges in Nigeria was exclusion education, it also agrees with arguments of Abigail, Felix and Emmanuel (2019) that for a society to progress, education of children with challenges must be an inclusion exercise in other to achieve Sustainable Development Goals number four (SDG4) in Nigeria. It was discovered in the findings that no mode of screening assessment was put in place for assessing children with disabilities before placement into classes as there was no availability of service providers for the procedure in the schools and the children were just being placed in classes as it is being done in regular school settings, the result corroborated the finding of Adeleke (2016) who discovered that there was no provision of referral classes for educational placement of all categories of children with challenges in Nigerian basic schools. It also supported the assertion of Akogun et al 2018that, there was no availability of service providers that can attend to children with challenges in public primary schools. The finding was also in line with Fehintola (2019) who found that problem faced by children with disabilities on accessibility to quality education was inadequate plans for the identification of children with disabilities in Nigerian schools. It further revealed that that the classrooms available in the schools available in Ondo State were overcrowded and no availability of individualized curriculum in all the schools but there is availability of regular curriculum in all the schools, this finding supported Lawalet al 2022 who asserted that there was no provision of individualized curriculum for children with disabilities in Southwestern basic special schools and also corroborated Salami and Nweke (2015) that the classrooms available in basic special schools in southwestern Nigeria were totally inadequate.

Conclusion

It can be confirmed from the findings that educational provision available were very low to cater for children with disabilities education. There was no provision for screening assessment for the children placement in the classes as there was no availability of any service providers for the screening assessment. The classes available were overcrowded and the curriculum available in the schools were not individualized appropriate curriculum. It can be concluded that the government of Ondo State as a major provider of quality educational service delivery is still making efforts to provide quality educational service delivery for children with disabilities in Ondo State, Nigeria

Recommendations

Government should provide more schools for the children and make inclusive education a priority in the state this would build more confidence in children with disabilities and enhance sense of belonging. There should be provision of health providers that would attend to the children for proper assessment and placement of children into classes. Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council and other curriculum planners in education should develop individualised curriculum that would meet the needs of all children with disabilities at the primary school level in both special and inclusive schools. Government should rehabilitate abandoned classes in the schools in other to reduce the problem of overcrowded classrooms and the government can encourage the support of philanthropists, parents, community leaders and NGOs in rehabilitation process.

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