

BIBLIOTHERAPY FOR BREAKING BARRIERS TOWARDS SOCIAL INCLUSION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

*Three assumptions underpin this study. First, persons with disability (PwDs) are educationally excluded by society's attitude barriers. Second, when broken/changed attitudes can grow educational and eventually social inclusion because, a fully inclusive society begins in a school. Third, the basis of any form of inclusion is attitude change. The study proceeded to investigate the attitude directions of primary school children towards PwDs and then determined the relative effect of bibliotherapy to change attitudes in the children. A survey and quasi-experimental (pretest posttest control group) designs were employed to investigate the two study objectives. Two thousand and eighty pupils respectively were sampled from 76,481 primary six school children in Imo state, Nigeria for the two designs. The Attitude Towards the Disabled Rating Scale (ATDRS) adapted from Ozoji 1988 ATBS ($r=0.72$) was used to measure the attitude directions of the children while Nwachukwu Bibliotherapy Programme (NBP) (involving two story books: *Class Bully* and *Magic Stone*) served the experimental intervention for the study. The experimental study lasted twelve weeks in two intact schools, in urban and rural areas respectively. Descriptive and *t*-test statistics were engaged in data analysis. The results showed that on the average the respondents demonstrated negative attitudes towards the PwDs. The one null hypothesis was rejected affirming that NBP significant change effects on attitudes due to bibliotherapy intervention. The implications of the study in line with the stated assumptions were pointed out. Recommendations were made to the Ministry of Education responsible for approving books for basic education to encourage authors to emphasize the portrayal of heroic roles of PwDs in their books.*

Introduction

Persons with disability (PwDs) constitute about 10% of Nigeria's estimated population of 182 million (National Population Commission) which translates roughly to about 18.2 million Nigerians. These Nigerians experience various forms of exclusion through inter-group attitudes of discrimination, stereotypes and prejudice. School age children with disability experience similar attitudes of name calling, bullying, marginalization, rejection and only rarely acceptance in school settings (Ozaji, 2003). UNICEF (2012) said "stigma, ignorance, neglect, superstition and communication barriers are among the social factors that explain the discrimination and isolation from society that children with disabilities face" All together, PwDs are subjected to the phenomenon of peripherization. Though rooted in medicine, peripherization has come to be associated with persons and issues considered by society to be of lesser degree of importance compared to significant others. As a status, it depicts people who are pushed to the fringe of the society or the marginalized. As an issue, it reflects matters of inconsequential importance or relevance. PwDs experience both sides of social peripherization - they are outside mainstream of the society and their issues are treated with levity because they are of lesser importance in society.

Bernt and Colini (2013) looked at peripherization from three perspectives: economic (e.g re-structuring), social (e.g discrimination) and political (dependence). Each of these dimensions of peripherization is a barrier and when broken access to the economic, social and political opportunities in the society is created for everyone. PwDs necessarily need access to these windows to end their peripherization and to be included in the society.

The world today is more than ever before concerned about creating an inclusive society that leaves no one behind, that does not place any emphasis on race, gender, physical/mental capacities, that creates access to available opportunities, that provides safety-nets for everyone. An inclusive society is one in which there is full participation of all people regardless of any real or imagined shortcomings. Social inclusion is the most enduring of the marks of an inclusive society and it resides in the heart of mankind. An inclusive heart will not only make case for but will also pursue inclusive economic environmental, educational, political inclusion of PwDs in the society. The crust of social inclusion is attitudes.

Treatment meted to PwDs has improved over the decades as attitudes become more favourable or more accepting, but this has not yet led to their full inclusion into the mainstream of the society. Ozaji (2008) observed that while people make statements that portray integration of PwDs in the society, actions and practices depict living in the hostile and protective attitude era in

dealing with them. There are barriers of sorts but the most intractable is society's attitudes towards PwDs. Helen Keller - the deaf blind genius's assertion that attitudes are the greatest burden to bear, not blindness, remains the ever prevailing truth. Jones and Guskin (1984) insist that if we want to know how society treats PwDs, then we must understand the attitudes that underlie society's actions and treatments toward them. Burtner (no date) noted that society treats PwDs as object of fear and pity adding that prevailing attitudes indicate that they were incapable of participating in or contributing to society (an instance of peripherization).

However, psychologists believe that attitudes are learned and can be unlearned. This fact has given rise to many attitude change theories, strategies and studies. Triandis (1994) indentified three broad strategies for changing public attitudes: informational, behavior modification and experiential strategies.

One form of informational strategy is the use of bibliotherapy. It is a form of therapy that relies on carefully selected books, which content is primed to periscope the challenges of the client. It is a method by which helping professionals in the schools assist students in resolving difficulties by using source of literature. (Sullivan and Strang, 2003). They described bibliotherapy as non-invasive and student-friendly, noting that books selected normally should enable children to see characters like themselves playing heroic roles that contradict their stereotypic role understanding. Inclusion bibliotherapy is the use of books that portray a PwD as being a hero of a book. Such portrayals help change the attitude of school children who had negative perceptions about such characters.

The concept of children with disabilities has been expanded beyond those with obvious physical or mental deviations to those with terminal illness such as HIV/AIDs, diabetic, asthma and haemophilia and includes those with mild deviations such as children with learning disabilities. The WHO has a listing of fourteen categories of children with special needs including those at risk.

By some form of occurrence, some children with special needs find themselves in regular schools. It is difficult to regard such schools as inclusive because the necessary conditions have not been put in place. However, such children manage at great risk and threats to complete prescribed course of learning. The non provision of the necessities of inclusion is a barrier to quality education for the children.

The problem of this study is to survey the attitudes of primary school children towards their peers with disability, and to determine the effects of bibliotherapy on changing those attitudes. Johnson and Matross (1975) aver

that attitude change could be acquisition, intensification and reversal of attitudes.

To carry out this study, one research question and one hypothesis were stated:

What is the attitude direction of primary school pupils in Owerri Educational Zone towards learners with special needs?

There will be no significant difference between the mean attitude scores of children exposed to bibliotherapy and those in the control group.

Method

The quasi experimental design of the pre-test post-test genre in which two intact classes in two different public primary schools was used. The experimental group was treated to a bibliotherapy intervention while the control group was given two similar books but without heroic characterization of PwDs. The survey design was used to determine the attitude direction of the children toward their peers with special needs.

The population of the study comprised primary six pupils in the 502 primary schools in Owerri Educational Zone in Imo State, totaling 76,481 (Imo State SUBEB, 2010). The choice of primary school population is the conviction of the researchers that basic education is the best place to embark on attitude change towards PwDs and the fact also that schools represent the microcosm of the society. This population was for the survey aspect of the study. The representative sample size of 2000 was selected for the survey design while a sample size of 80 drawn from the target population in two intact schools based on urban-rural divide was used for the experimental design. The children's age ranged between 10-12 years.

The Attitude towards the Disabled Rating Scale (ATDRS) was adapted from Ozoji's Attitudes towards the Blind Scale (ATBS, 1988). ATDRS took the pattern of Likert Summated rating of agree-disagree, has twenty-five items (13 positively phrased and 12 negatively worded), with a maximum of 100 scores and a minimum of 20. It was content validated by experts in special education. Its Pearson-product moment correlation application yielded a r -value 0.72. The Nwachukwu Bibliotherapy Programme (NBP) consists of two books: *Class Bully* and *the Magic Stone*; they portrayed the heroic deeds of persons with special needs. The administration of NBP treatment lasted for 14 weeks. The first and last weeks were used for the administration of ATDRS as pre and post test with the engagement of two trained research assistants.

Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the only research question while t-test was used for the null hypothesis of study.

Table 1: Mean Deviation Analysis of Attitude Score of Pupils toward learners with Special Needs as measured by ATDRS

Groups	F	Mid X	FX	X	ATDDRS	Sd	SD
100-109	38	104.5	62.47				
90-99	71	94.5	52.47		69.99		
80-89	188	84.5	42.47				
70-79	170	74.5	32.47	42.03		18.77	30.92
60-69	256	63.5	22.47				
50-59	304	54.5	12.47				
40-49	373	44.5	2.47				
30-39	304	34.5	-7.53				
20-29	296	24.5	-17.53				

INTERPRETATION KEY: Attitude is positive when the calculated mean is equal to or above the ATDRS mean. It is negative when the calculated mean is below or less than the ATDRS mean.

Table 2: Result of t-test Analysis of mean Difference between Post-Test Control and Post-Test (NBP) Experimental Group Attitude Toward the Disabled Rating Scale (ATDRS)

Stage of Test	Mean	SD	dF	t-cal	t-critical	Sig. Level
Post (Cont. Grp)	43.15	8.83				
Post (Expt. Grp)	95.95	7.05	38	9.87	1.68	0.05

Results

The data in Table I shows that the attitude scores of the respondents showed a marked difference between the instrument mean (69.99) and the children's mean score (42.03). This is data-based evidence that the children's attitudes towards their peers with disability were generally negative. The result is expressive of the society's general attitude towards PwDs. The present and future population of the country are on the average in the same attitude direction towards PwDs. This is a major threat to the quest for social inclusion

and practices in the country. This is because the practices require positive attitudes of significant others to be successful.

Bibliotherapy intervention was successful in changing the attitudes of the children towards their peers with disabilities. This was possible probably because the heroic action of the actors was a contradiction of their stereotypic understanding and perception of their peers with disability. This fresh appreciation constitutes both a dissonance and a displacement of the earlier unfavourable attitudes towards PwDs. The result is in line with Winsler, 1998, Rohner & Rosebery, (2003) findings that books can help explain disability in uncomplicated, jargon free language, eases fear fueled by ignorance and replaces negative stereotypes with scientific information needed to develop awareness and empathy towards PwDs.

Conclusion

The major findings of the study indicate that:

1. The baseline attitudes of the primary school children towards their peers with disabilities were on the average negative.
2. The bibliotherapy intervention on the experimental group was effective in changing the attitudes of the school children towards their peers with disabilities.

Recommendations

In view of the world quest for inclusive societies in which everybody including PwDs is included and in recognition of the fact that prevailing attitudes towards them are negative, which are barriers to achievement of inclusive society, the following recommendations are advanced:

- a. Ministry of Education should as a principle begin addressing school children's negative attitudes towards PwDs right from basic education level where attitudes are developing and can easily be changed using bibliotherapy as a major strategy of change. Ministry of Education responsible for approving books for basic education should encourage authors to emphasize the portrayal of heroic authors to emphasize the portrayal of heroic roles of PwDs in their work.
- b. Ministry of Education should take every step necessary to make primary schools PwDs-friendly through imbining the spirit of inclusion in admission, classroom practices, curriculum and instruction, school environment and social restructuring. These measures, with favourable attitudes of pupils, will lay the foundation for building enduring social inclusion of PwDs now and in the future.

- c. If developing countries must grow and develop rapidly, every body's ability must count, those on the periphery should be attracted to the mainstream of the society where everyone has equal access to available rights, opportunities, privileges and responsibilities. This recommendation is based on Franklin D Roosevelt's view that:

“We are trying to construct more inclusive society. We are going to make a country in which on one is left out”

Inclusive society is constructed (built); it does not just happen.

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