ASSESSING SOCIAL SKILLS STRATEGY INFLUENCE ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF SPECIAL NEEDS LEARNERS AT ADEYEMI FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, ONDO, ONDO STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

Special needs learners have been recording prior academic performance or dwindling, traceable to myriad of factors, thus, necessitating using social skills strategy in their teaching. Descriptive survey research design was used. The population of the study comprise, learners with physical deformities, emotional problem, health and allied challenges at Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo, Ondo State, Nigeria. The sample size of the study was Ninety (90) respondents, selected through a snowballing sampling techniques. Data was collected through a research instrument, self-designed and structured by the researcher, titled, "Questionnaire on Academic Performance of Special Needs Learners at Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo, Ondo State, Nigeria". it was fashioned on four Likert rating scale of Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD) rating on 4, 3, 2, and 1. Two research questions were raised for the study. The research instrument were validated by an expert in Test and measurement, while, its reliability was determined through test retest method at two weeks interval. 0.68 coefficient reliability was obtained. Data generated on the research questions were analyzed, using descriptive statistics (simple percentages, frequency counts and mean), while data collected through FGDs were collated, analyzed and transcribed. Based on the results of the study conclusions were made that social skills strategy could positively influenced communication skills and of speed needs learners with their peers and also enhanced their abilities to solve their academic challenges. Based on the conclusions, recommendation were made that teachers should be well trained on how to be using social skills while teaching special needs learners among others.

Keywords: Social Skills, Strategy, Academic, Performance, Special needs learners

Background to the Study

The quest for quality education is a global phenomenon. Hence, every nation is committed towards aggressive actions, policies and programmes towards making education accessible and a right to individuals who feels, desires and want to acquire it. Education is a basic human right (Sarumi, 2001). Making education accessible to individuals has a long history, dated back to 1948 with the Universal Declaration of Human rights on "Education" as stressed firmly in the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization, Article (26), that "Education is a human right. This was also loudly re-echoed at many world summits, conferences and forum on education. The Jomitien world conference on Education for ALL (EFA) was held in 1990 and it was strongly emphasized that every individual in any human society has a right to standard and qualify education, this is not unconnected with the roles of education in individuals' development and nations' sustainable development.

> Education is a weapon to fight against poverty, ignorance and diseases, particularly in
> developing nation like, Nigeria (Osokoya et al., 2000).

Education is a catalyst for capacity building and utilization in all the spheres of the society (Oyekan, 2004). There is no nation that can develop without striving hand to recover success in her educational sector (Visarumi, 2001). Education is the "heart" and "engine room" of development in any human society (Erinsakin, 2018). Education is a way to guarantee technological advancement and economic prosperity. It is a gateway to any successful life,

enlivened with purposeful intellectual vision, managerial dexterity, moral rectitude and productive service to humanity (Oyekan, 2004).

It was on the basis of roles of education identified and explained above that makes education to be one of the major focal areas of government in Nigeria, thus, culminating into several institutional policies, programmes, synergy with foreign partners to give Nigerians dependable, quality and formational education for survival.

It should be bore in mind that the launching of Universal Basic Education (UBE) in the country, Nigeria is a way of fulfilling global agenda on education i.e eradicating of illiteracy and widening access to education, specifically the basic education. The implementation of UBE was a commitment to EFA Agenda i.e making education accessible to every Nigerian child in respect of religion and tribe, since education has been identified as a way to ensure development of individuals and the nation.

However, despite efforts made to side people quality education. Erinsakin (2007), observed that the sectors is still besieging with many factors which pror academic performance of students at all levels of education is one in Nigeria. the ugly trend has been a source of worry and serious concern to stakeholders in educational sector. Poor academic performance is when students do fail to display an impressive academic excellence or fail below the standard expected of them in their academic activities. Many scholars have been attributing the unsavory situation and trend to diverse factors. Oyekan (2004) attributed it to rapid population explosion, large classes, moral decadence and gross indiscipline, poor leadership, ineffective management system. Teachers' factors have also been associated with students' poor academic performance. There is no nation educational attainment that can rise beyond the teachers' level. The sustainable development of any nation depends on the quality of the teachers. The National Policy on Education 9th Edition (2004), righty affirmed that no nation's educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers. What this mean is that teachers occupy important position in any nation's educational sector. Teachers as important members of the school play pivotal roles in educating the students. School management and climate have also been identified as factors that can either positively or negatively affect academic excellence, school goals and learning contents (Ghaza, 2003).

Today, academic performance is fast dwindling. The population of poor academic performance is a problem in Nigerian schools' public examination. There are several reports on poor academic performance from examination bodies (GSE, NECO, WASCE etc.) Poor academic performance in the last few decades has been a good topic for researchers. However, observably, much have not been done on influence of social skills on academic performance among the special need learners, particularly at tertiary level of education in Nigeria.

Social skills instructional strategy entails explicitly teaching behaviors to students who show social skills deficits, thus, assisting students in acquiring new behavioral skills, building fluency with existing skills, or generalizing existing skills to new situations. It teaches students the appropriate interpersonal communication skills, self-discipline and problem solving skills. It combines a number of strategies to prevent and replace problem behaviour and increases skills and behaviour leading to social competence (Wayne-RESA, 2022).

Disables World (2022), defined special needs students or learners as students that have challenges, such as learning difficulties, specific disabilities, mental and health issues and so on.

The researcher was however motivated to conduct a study a with a view or mind to establish whether social skills strategy could positively or negatively influence the academic performance of special need students at Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo, Ondo State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

It has been observed in the recent time that students' academic performance, especially among the special needs students i.e those students with challenges either physical, mental, health and psychological has been very poor. This has been generating some fundamental questions among stakeholders in education sector concerning its causes. Some factors has been attributed to this and it has also been a source of topic for conducting researches to many researchers and scholars.

Observably, several extant studies had not focused on social skills strategy influence on academic performance of special needs learners at Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo, Ondo State, Nigeria. It was this observed gap that motivated the researcher of the study to conduct the present study.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of the study was on assessing social skills strategy influence on academic performance of special needs learners at Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo, Ondo State, Nigeria. The specific purposed are to:

1. ascertain the influence of social skills strategy on special needs learners' communication with their academic peers
2. determine the impact of social skills strategy on special needs learners ability to solve their academic challenges.

Research Questions
Two research questions were raised to guide the conduct of the study. They are;
1. Can social skills strategy improve communication skills of special needs learners with their peers?
2. Will social skills strategy influence special needs learners ability to solve their academic challenges?

Significance of the Study
      The results of the study will be of importance to stakeholders in educational provision to special needs learners in Nigeria.

      Firstly, the results of the study will provide a concrete fact or base line information on the need to be using social skills strategy, while teaching special needs leaners in school by the teachers.

      Also, the findings of the research will assist the curriculum planners and developers of special education to stress the importance of using social skills strategy in the curricula.

Furthermore, the study will add to the existing literature within the confine of the study, thus, serves also as a good source of reference for researchers in future.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Skills
      Social skills have been defines by several scholars. Social skills are used to communicate with other daily in a variety of ways, including; verbal, non-verbal, written and virtual (Heurity, 2023). It is also explained as interpersonal or soft skills". They are skills we use to communicate and interact with each other, both verbally and non-verbally, through gestures, body language and our personal appearance. Human beings are sociable creatures. Therefore, many methods or ways are being used to communicate, express through opinion, view and opinion. It refers to ways people control their words and actions to set along better with others.

      Social skills are very important to everybody so that we can treat each other with courtesy respect, honesty, kindness etc (Brant, 2022). Social skills are explained as ways of interacting with others that make it easier to succeed, socially. It allows one's to communicate effectively and understand what others are trying to say or communicate to you verbally and non-verbally (Sander et al., 2022).

      Social skills makes one to establish more and better relationship, better communication, being happier, advancing career prospects, better academic performance, decreased homeliness, better health (Sander et al., 2022).

      According to Brant (2022), the following are some good examples of social skills; waiting your turn; noticing how someone is teaching, not interrupting, waiting in line; asking before you take or use something that belongs to someone else; telling the truth; respecting people's differences; considering how your actions impact other people etc.

      In the same vein, Brant (2022), also identified the following as bad social skills; someone lies to set what they want; someone cuts in line; someone interrupts other's conversation; someone has a tantrum when they don't get their way etc.

      In conclusion, social skills are what everybody must possess in order to be a good communicator.

Special Needs Learners
      Special need learners are students that need special educational needs because of their learning problems or disability that make it more difficult for them to learn than most children of their age. They are learners who differ significantly from their peers in terms of their individuals characteristics and educational competence for various reasons (IGI-Global, 2023). They are students or learners with learning challenges, those that are physically challenged and people that have health, mental, emotional problems, speech language and communication needs. These conditions make it difficult for the special need learners to learn.

      Across the globe, special need learners constitute a specific percentage of schools' populations. In academic setting i.e teaching and learning situations, they can be assisted in various ways, such as;
- Breaking learning tasks into small steps
- Probe regularly to check understanding
- Present information visually and verbally
- Provide independent practice
- Model what you want students to do
- Use diagrams, graphics and pictures to support instruction, and so on.

      In conclusion, teachers should always be ready and alert to assist students or learners that are having learning challenges so as for them to achieve their educational aspirations and dreams.

Methodology

Descriptive survey research design was used for this study. The study population comprised, special needs learners at Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo, Ondo State, Nigeria. The sample size of the study was Ninety (90) respondents, selected through snowballing sampling technique.

Data was collected through a self-designed and structured research instrument titled, "Questionnaire on Assessing social skills strategy Influence on Academic performance of Special Needs learners at Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo, Ondo State, Nigeria". It was fashioned on four likert rating scale of Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD) rating on 4, 3, 2 and 1, and complemented by qualitative instrument to Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to gather oral data. Two research questions were raised for the study.

The research instrument was validated by an expert in Test and measurement, while its reliability was determined through test retest method and 0.68 coefficient reliability was obtained. Data generated was analyzed using, descriptive statistics (simple percentages, frequency counts and mean).

Presentation of Results and Discussion of Findings
Presentation of Results
Research Question One: Can social skills strategy improve communication skills of special needs learners with their peers?
Table 1: Showing simple percentages, frequency counts and mean on can social skills strategy improve communication skills of special needs learners with their peers

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{X}$	REMARKS
1	Social skills strategy improve my interaction with my academic peers	59 65.55	14 15.55	9 10	9 10	3.38	Accepted
2	Social skills strategy does not improve my interaction with my academic peers	8 8.88	10 11.11	15 16.66	57 63.33	1.65	Rejected
3	Through social skills, I know how to communicate better with other learners	69 76.66	8 8.88	7 7.7	6 6.66	3.55	Accepted
4	Despite using social skills strategy, I can't communicate better with other learners	14 15.55	9 10	12 13.33	55 61.11	1.9	Rejected
5	Social skills strategy has positively improve my learning challenges	63 70	11 12.22	10 11.11	6 6.66	3.45	Accepted
6	My learning challenges remain unbated despite using social skill	13 14.44	10 11	23 25.55	44 48.88	1.91	Rejected
	TOTAL	226 41.77	62 11.46	76 14.04	177 32.71	2.62	Accepted

Table 1 presents the results on research question one. On item (1), responses obtained revealed, 59 (65.55), 14(15.55), 9(10) and 9(10) for strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed. On item (2), 8 (8.88), 10(11.11), 15(16.66) and 57(63.33) were gotten for strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed. On item (3), the following responses were obtained, 69 (76.66), 8(8.88), 7(7.7) and 6(6.66) for strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed. On item (4) responses obtained showed that; 14 (15.55), 9(10), 12(13.33) and 55(61.11) for strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed. On item (5), responses revealed that; 63 (70), 11(12.22), 10(11.11) and 6(6.66) for strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed. Finally, on item (6), the following responses were obtained; 13 (14.44), 10(11.11), 23(25.55) and 44(48.88) for strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed.

Research Question Two: Will social skills strategy influence special needs learners' ability to solve their academic challenges?
Table 1: Showing simple percentages, frequency counts and mean on will social skills strategy influence special needs learners' ability to solve their academic challenges

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{X}$	REMARKS
7	Through social strategy, I have gain self-esteem towards my academic	66 73.33	12 13.33	9 10	3 3.33	3.56	Accepted
8	I do not have self-esteem despite social skills strategy	9 10	5 5.55	19 21.11	57 63.33	1.62	Rejected
9	I have developed communication fluency through social skills strategy	69 76.66	14 15.55	6 6.66	1 1.11	3.6	Accepted
10	My communication fluency is not enhanced despite	13	14	15	48	1.91	Rejected

	exposed to social skills strategy	14.44	15.55	16.66	53.33		
11	My problem solving skills have been enhanced through social skills strategy	59 65.55	23 25.55	6 6.66	2 2.22	3.61	Accepted
12	Despite social skills strategy, I am yet to acquire the appropriate problem solving skills	14 15.55	8 8.88	16 17.7	52 57.	1.82	Rejected
	TOTAL	230 42.59	76 14.07	71 13.14	163 30.81	2.69	Accepted

Table 2 presents the results on research question two as follows. On item (7), responses obtained showed, 66 (73.33), 12 (13.33), 9 (10) and 3 (3.33) for strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed. On item (8), responses obtained revealed 9 (10), 5 (5.55), 19 (21.11) and 57 (63.33) were gotten for strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively. On item (9), the following responses were got, 69 (76.66), 14 (15.55), 6 (6.66) and 1 (1.11) for strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed. On item (10), the following responses were got also; 13 (14.44), 14 (15.55), 15 (16.66) and 48 (53.33) for strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed.

On item (11), responses obtained showed the following responses; 59 (65.55), 23 (25.55), 6 (6.66) and 2 (2.22) for strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed.

Finally, on item (12), 14 (15.55), 8 (8.88), 16 (17.77) and 52 (57.77) for strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed.

Discussion of Findings

The results on research question one generally speaking indicated that the average rating scale of four ($\bar{X}$ = 2.50) is lesser than the mean of average rating scale of four ($\bar{X}$ = 2.62). This indicates that social skills strategy could positively influenced on special needs learners with their academic peers. This submission agrees with the opinion of

The above results was also buttressed by the submissions of some respondents during the (FGDs). A respondent says that;

> *Social skills strategy in recent time has impacted positively on my interaction and discussion on academic with my colleagues.*

(FGD) – A male physically challenged learners in the Department of Guidance and Counseling, AFUED, Ondo, Ondo State, Nigeria.

Another respondents reported that:

> *Social skills strategy has enable me effective exchange of ideas and opinion with other students.*

(FGD) – A female with health problem of Department of Biology, AFUED, Ondo, Ondo State, Nigeria.

The results on table two showed that the average of rating scale of four ($\bar{X}$ = 2.50) is lesser than the mean of average rating scale of four ($\bar{X}$ = 2.69), thus, indicated that social skills strategy could positively enhanced special needs learners ability to provide solutions to their academic challenges. The result is in consonance with the opinion of

The result was also buttressed by some respondents during the FGDs. A respondent had this to say that;

> *Social skills strategy has helped me to develop self-esteem towards my studies or academic, that is the major advantage of the strategy to me, personally.*

(FGD) – A female physically challenged learners, Department of Chemistry, AFUED, Ondo, Ondo State, Nigeria.

Similarly, another participants of the FGDs reported that;

> *I have achieved fluency while speaking through social skills strategy.*

(FGD) – A male emotional disturbed learners, Department of Agricultural Science, AFUED, Ondo, Ondo State, Nigeria.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the research, conclusions were made that special needs learners' communication skills with their peers could be positively achieved. Also, their abilities to solve their academic challenges could be enhanced at Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo, Ondo State, Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, the researcher made the following recommendations;

1. Teachers of special needs learners should teach their ability to use social skills strategy

2. Facilities or teaching aids to achieve teaching special social skills effectiveness should be made available at schools
3. Trained personal on special education i.e human resources should be employed to teach special needs learners.
4. On a regular basis, teachers' teaching special needs learners should be updating and upgrading their abilities to teach their social skills strategy. This can be achieved through seminars, conferences and workshops.

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