

Causes, Consequences and Counselling Strategies for Handling Secondary School Students with Learning Disabilities

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Abstract

This paper investigates the causes, consequences and counselling strategies for handling secondary school students with learning disabilities. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The study was guided by three research questions. The sample size for this study was 185 counsellors drawn through convenience sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire titled Causes, Consequences and Counselling Strategies for reducing learning disabilities (CCACSFRLDS). The instrument was validated by three experts from the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The reliability coefficient value of 0.75 was obtained for the instrument and used for the study. The researchers adopted a direct delivery method that is, face-to-face method of administration for the data collection. This is to ensure 100% return of the questionnaires administered. Data collected were analyzed using the arithmetic mean with a decision rule of 2.50. On the causes of learning disabilities, the findings indicated birth complications affecting oxygen flow to the brain, illness during and after birth, genetics, psychological trauma and physical abuse. Also, on the consequences of learning disabilities, the findings showed frustration in life, difficulty expressing oneself verbally, withdrawal from social activities, school dropout and avoidance of competitions. Moreover, the findings on the counselling strategies include: using visual aids for the students, allowing extra time for assignment completion, promoting self-advocacy skills, encouragement and reinforcement and breaking learning into small steps. The researchers suggested that the government should fund counselling programs, conferences, workshops and seminars where the causes, consequences and strategies for reducing learning disabilities among secondary school students would be taught both to new counsellors, teachers and staff for a collective management of the problem in secondary schools. Also, counsellors should use the medium of PTA to create awareness among parents on the causes, consequences and strategies for reducing learning disabilities which would help them to guard against the signs and report such acts to counsellors for necessary actions promptly.

Keywords: causes, consequences, strategies, learning, disabilities

Introduction

A disability is any condition of the body or mind (impairment) that makes it more difficult for a person with the condition to do certain activities and interact with the world around them. If a person has a disability, this means that they suffer with a condition of the mind or body that makes it difficult for them to communicate effectively with others or complete day-to-day activities in the same way as others. This means that the person's life is in some way limited. This disability can be physical, hidden or invisible and learning disabilities are among the examples of invisible disabilities (Invisible Disabilities Association 2010). Learning is a way of acquiring new

understanding, knowledge, behaviour, skills, values, attitudes, and preferences. Learning disabilities are nearly twice as prevalent in children with chronic illnesses as compared to healthy controls. Learning disabilities are present in approximately 5% of school-aged children globally. In the United States, data collected by the National Survey of Children's Health suggest a lifetime prevalence of 10% (Al-Mahrezi, Al-Futaisi and Al-Mamari (2016). Learning disability is defined by National Center for Education Statistics (2022) as any relatively permanent change in behaviour that occurs as a result of practice and experience. This definition has three important elements which are: learning is a change in a person's behavior which can be good or bad. It is also, a change that takes place through practice or experience and also changes due to growth. At times some learners may have what is called learning disability which is seen as anything that can hinder learning or bring setbacks or difficulties to learning for the learners. Smiley, Richards and Taylor (2022) opine that learning disabilities or disorders affect how a child's brain takes in and uses information.

On the other hand, Genetic and Rare Diseases Information Center (2022) states that learning disabilities represent a group of disorders that cause students to exhibit unexpected difficulty or low performance in one or more academic areas and ineffective or inefficient information processing. Moreover, Learning Disabilities Association of America (2013) opined that learning disabilities be recognized as a general term referring to a heterogeneous group of disorders and these disorders are realized as significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of one or more of the following functions: listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, and mathematical abilities (Lerner and Johns 2015). However, Ashkenazi, Black, Abrams, Hoefl and Menon (2013) and Genetic and Rare Diseases Information Center (2022) assert that different types of learning disabilities exist and they include: dyslexia, ADHD, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, and dyspraxia while Vidyadharan and Tharayil (2019) and National Health Service (2023) add **auditory processing disorder, language processing disorder, nonverbal learning disabilities and visual perceptual or visual motor deficit as among the types of learning disabilities and these learning disabilities have risk factors that are responsible for the problem.**

However, some researchers have identified some risk factors for developing a learning disability. Muhtaq, Malik, Cheema, Muhammad and Rauf (2014) opine that alcohol or drug use during pregnancy, premature birth, diabetes, meningitis, exposure to toxins, and poor nutrition cause learning disabilities. Also, Smiley, Richards and Taylor (2022) state that the causes include: poor prenatal healthcare, illness of the mother during pregnancy, problems during the birth that stop enough oxygen getting to the brain and the unborn baby having some genes passed on from its parents that enhances having a learning disability. Moreover, illness such as meningitis, that brain injury, brain development, or brain structure or injury in early child hood also, lend hand in causing learning disabilities (Levings (2021)

However, learning disabilities have pronounced signs or symptoms through which they are known. Further, Barto (2017) asserts that some genetic risk factors include fragile X syndrome, genetic mutation and chromosomal disorders can lead to learning disabilities. These disabilities have serious and pronounced symptoms.

On the symptoms of learning disabilities, Learning Difficulties Association of America (2023) and Gupta (2024) opine that poor memory, difficulty focusing, short attention span, difficulty with reading or writing, inability to distinguish between sounds, letters, or numbers including difficulty sounding out words are among the symptoms of learning disabilities. Also included are: disorganization, trouble with listening and following instructions, inappropriate responses, restlessness and impulsiveness, tendency to act out, difficulty with discipline and resistance to

change Kohli, Sharma and Padhy (2018). Learning disabilities have serious effects on the children that are victims.

Learning disabilities in children can impact the children's level of success in academics and even in other aspects of life. In particular, students with learning disabilities encounter both attitudinal and structural barriers that can prevent them from achieving their educational goals (Barto 2017). Researchers like Smiley, Richards and Taylor (2022) and Muhtaq, Malik, Cheema, Muhammad and Rauf (2014) adduce that a person with a learning disability might have some

difficulties in understanding complicated information, learning some skills, looking after themselves or living alone and interact with other people.

Also, Lerner and Johns (2015) and Ashkenazi, Black, Abrams, Hoefft and Menon (2013) assert that most of the times these type of learners are being underestimated, experience social barriers and isolation, have difficulty in finding and keeping a job and being unable to complete everyday tasks. In addition, Vidyadharan and Tharayil (2019) adduce that the individuals suffering from learning disabilities are being stigmatized, faced with discrimination and due to the lack of visible signs, they also, encounter challenges in receiving the support they need. If no intervention is taken to improve the well-being of these children, their lives will be worthless and nothing good can come out of them thereby denying them the opportunity to contribute their quota towards the development of their society. Al-Mahrezi, Al-Futaisi and Al-Mamari (2016) opine that learning disabilities can be manageable with interventions or strategies that can help children learn in a different way and also succeed in life. It is to arrest this ugly situation that the present researchers embark on this topic: causes, consequences and counselling strategies for handling secondary school students with learning disability.

Statement of the Problem

Every parent sending his child to school is always in expectance that his child will be bringing good reports of which that of academic performance is included. Constant poor academic performances of learners always discourage parents and stake holders in education without knowing that the problem is beyond the learners. The children on the other hand are not happy in sending home poor results because it can appear as if they are not serious with their studies at school and they too are unaware of the causes of their problems.

It has been observed by the current researchers that some children with learning disabilities find it difficult to learn, develop new skills, understand information and interact with other people. These children with learning disabilities need careful handling to thrive despite their unique personalities and needs. Learning disabilities (disorders) affect how a child's brain takes in and uses information and such children will no longer want to go to school, will not read out loud or do mathematical problems in front of their peers, will be blaming their teachers for their grades, do not want to show school work to their parents and care givers and will be avoiding teachers' assignments to mention a few. An affected student will find it difficult to compete with their peers in any worthwhile competition and will not have the courage to continue his education. Also, if this problem is unaddressed, it will contribute to school dropout, teenage pregnancy, joining of cultism, armed robbing, kidnapping and loss of courage to continuing their education thereby hindering the children from contributing their quota to the development and growth of their families and the society at large.

Moreover, the societal unrest that is being witnessed today which is trying to make the environment not habitable for the citizens will be on the increase. This is the why these present researchers embarked on this topic to determine the: Causes, consequences and counselling strategies for reducing learning disabilities among secondary school students.

Research objectives

The objectives of this research is to:

1. Determine the causes of learning disabilities
2. Determine the consequences of learning disabilities
3. Determine the counselling strategies for handling learning disabilities

Research Questions

The following three research questions guided the study:

1. What are the causes of learning disabilities among secondary school students?
2. What are the consequences of learning disabilities among secondary school students?
3. What are the counselling strategies for reducing learning disabilities among secondary school students?

Methods

This study is carried out in Anambra state and the research design adopted for this study is descriptive survey research design. The study is guided by 3 research questions. The sample size for this study is 185 counsellors drawn through accidental sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was questionnaire titled Causes, Consequences and Counselling Strategies for reducing learning disabilities (CCACSFRLDS). The instrument is developed by the researchers. The instrument is validated by three experts from the faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The reliability coefficient value of 0.75 was obtained for the instrument which was used for this study. The researchers adopted a direct delivery method that is, face to face method of administration for the data collection. This is to ensure a hundred percent return of the number of the questionnaire. Data collected was analyzed using the arithmetic mean of which its decision rule is 2.50.

Results and Discussion

Research Question 1

What are the causes of learning disabilities among secondary school students?

Table 1 (USE 115 COUNSELLORS)

Mean ratings of respondents on the causes of learning disabilities

S/N	ITEM	MEAN X	REMARKS
	Causes of learning disabilities are:		
1	birth complications that block the flow of oxygen to the baby's brain	3.67	Accepted

2	illness during and after birth	3.57	Accepted
3	psychological trauma	3.46	Accepted
4	Genetics	3.64	Accepted
5	physical abuse	3.58	Accepted

In Table 1, all the items in (1 to 5) above obtained the mean ratings that is above the criterion mean of 2.50 which indicated that the Counsellors agreed that all the items in 1-5 above are the causes of learning disabilities among the public secondary school students. The following items were therefore the causes of learning disabilities among students: birth complications that block the flow of oxygen to the baby's brain, illness during and after birth, genetics, psychological trauma and physical abuse. Their respective means falls between 3.46 and 3.67.

Question 2

What are the consequences of learning disabilities among secondary school students?

Table 2 Mean ratings of respondents on the consequences of learning disabilities

S/N	ITEMS	X	REMARKS
	consequences of learning disabilities are:		
1	Frustration in life	3.66	Accepted
2	Difficulty expressing oneself verbally	3.70	Accepted
3	withdrawal in social activities	3.67	Accepted
4	school dropout	3.62	Accepted
5	avoiding competitions	3.60	Accepted

Table 2 above, showed that the counsellors agreed to all the items above as the consequences of learning disabilities because each item there obtained the mean rate that is above the criterion mean of 2.50. The following items were therefore the consequences of learning disabilities among public secondary school students: frustrations in life, difficulty expressing oneself verbally, withdrawal in social activities, school dropout and avoiding competitions. Their mean rating were between 3.60 and 3.70.

Research Question 3

What are the counselling strategies for reducing learning disabilities among secondary school students?

Table 3

Mean ratings of respondents on counselling strategies for reducing learning disabilities

S/N	ITEMS	X	REMARKS
	Counselling strategies for reducing learning disabilities are:		
1	using visual aids for the students	3.46	Accepted
2	allowing extra time for assignments completion	3.60	Accepted
3	promoting self-advocacy skills	3.64	Accepted
4	encouragement and use of reinforcement	3.62	Accepted
5	breaking learning into small steps	3.46	Accepted

Table 3 above indicated that the respondents accepted all the items in the table as the counselling strategies for reducing learning disabilities because each of the items obtained the mean ratings above the criterion mean of 2.50. The following items were therefore the counselling strategies for reducing learning disabilities among secondary school students: using visual aids for the students, allowing extra time for assignments completion, promoting self-advocacy skills, encouragement and use of reinforcement and breaking learning into small steps. These items obtain the mean rate ranging from 3.36 to 3.64.

Discussion of the Findings

The first research question of this study was posed to determine the causes of learning disabilities among secondary school students in Anambra state. However, from the analysis of the data obtained in table 1 above, the findings of this study under the research question 1 revealed that

birth complications that block the flow of oxygen to the baby's brain, illness during and after birth and genetics were in line with the findings of Barto (2017) and Gupta (2024) who identified in their specific works that birth complications that block the flow of oxygen to the baby's brain, illness during and after birth and genetics could lead to the problem of learning disabilities. Also the findings revealed that psychological trauma and physical abuse contributes to the causes of learning disabilities collaborated with the findings of Levings (2021) who identified that psychological trauma and physical abuse are among the causes of the problem.

Moreover, the findings of this study under the research question 2 revealed that the consequences of learning disabilities included the following: frustrations in life, difficulty expressing oneself verbally, withdrawal in social activities, school dropout and avoiding competitions. These findings were in support of the findings of Al-Mahrezi, Al-Futaisi and Al-Mamari (2016) and CDC (2025) whose findings reported that withdrawal in social activities, difficulties in verbal expression, school dropout and frustrations in life were some of the profound consequences of learning disabilities.

Furthermore, the findings of this study identified the following factors as the counselling strategies for reducing learning disabilities: breaking learning materials into small steps, using visual aids, allowing extra time for assignments completion, encouragement and use of reinforcement and promoting self-advocacy skills. These findings were in support of the findings of Vidyadharan and Tharayil (2019) and Kohli, Sharma and Padhy (2018) which showed that the above factors could be helpful towards reducing learning disabilities.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers concluded that learning disabilities among secondary school students in Anambra state would be reduced drastically if Guidance Counsellors would be allowed to carry out their duties without setbacks in using the founded strategies towards reducing the problem among secondary school students.

5.3 Recommendations

From the findings of this study, the researchers made the following recommendations:

1. Guidance Counsellors should pay close attention and observation on the students' behaviour and actions towards identifying students with learning disabilities which could be detrimental to their growth and development in future if not handled.
2. Government should be funding counselling programs, conferences, workshops and seminar where the causes, consequences and strategies for reducing learning disabilities among secondary school students would be taught both to the new counsellors, teachers and staff for a collective management of the problem in secondary schools.
3. Counsellors would be using the medium of P.T.A in creating awareness to parents on the causes, consequences and strategies for reducing learning disabilities which would help them to guard against the signs and report such acts to counsellors for necessary actions on time.

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