

EDUCATING STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES IMPLICATION FOR COUNSELLING



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ABSTRACT

The paper dealt with concept of learning disabilities and outlined some of the signs/symptoms of students with learning disabilities couple with some of the problems associated with them Attempts were made to provide relevant strategies to be employed by special education teachers in educating students with learning disabilities. The paper highlighted the role of counseling in alleviating the learning problems of students with learning disabilities in the class room.

Introduction

It is important to note that students with learning disabilities have no apparent physical, sensory, intellectual or emotional defect, hence, the need for teachers to have adequate information about the students with the view of providing appropriate special instructions and reinforcements that may motivate them to learn.

The concept of learning disabilities is very broad; however, it affects the acquisition, retention, understanding, organization or use of verbal and non-verbal information. It also interfere with the acquisition and the use of one or more of the following important skills: oral language (e.g. listening, speaking and understanding). Reading (e.g. decoding, comprehension); written language (e.g. computation, problem solving). (Saidu and Gwarzo, 2019). Generally, learning disabilities impede on students ability to think and remember, speak, write well, spell, organize information and perform mathematical tasks.

In fact, these students have problems of receiving, perceiving, interpreting and communicating the content of materials to be learnt. It is important to understand some of the signs/symptoms of students with learning disabilities as follows:-

- i. Have trouble learning the alphabet, rhyming words, or connecting letters to their sounds.

- ii. Make many mistakes when reading aloud, and repeat and pause often.
- iii. May not understand what he or she reads.
- iv. Have real trouble with spelling
- v. May have very messy handwriting or hold a pencil awkwardly
- vi. May struggle to express ideas in writing
- vii. Learn language late and have a limited vocabulary
- viii. May mispronounce words or use a wrong word that sounds similar
- ix. May confuse mathematical symbols and misread numbers, e.t.c
- x. May not know where to begin a task or how to go on from there; e.t.c. (Akinade and Sulaiman 2010).

These characteristics are more of academic, nevertheless, Ekwutosi and Uche (2012) listed the following problems that are more of socially associated with learning disabilities such as low self-concept, poor peer relations, truancy, poor attitude towards school and school work, bullying of younger children usually out of jealousy and excessive timidity or quietness.

Strategies for Educating Students with Learning Disabilities

Special education teachers have acquired techniques and skills to give additional assistance to students with learning disabilities. First and foremost, special needs education teachers should provide the following:-

1. Note-takers who can write what the student dictates
2. Conversion of text books and learning materials into audio-recording for better grasp by L.D. students
3. Giving L.D. students extra time during examinations to enable them process the test items and provide answers accordingly
4. List of alternative test forms such as the use of scribes, computers, tape recorders, or orally administering the test
5. Locating the test site in an alternative area such as quiet room for one person
6. Lessening the course load of students with L.D. due to degree of processing required to handle the load as full time students and

7. Substitution of course with those that students can do with minimum problems (Vickers, 2010).

These are general strategies for ameliorating learning problems for students with learning disabilities with the view of facilitating the teaching/learning process in the classroom.

Students with specific learning disabilities are in most cases neglected such students may include students with dyslexia, dysgraphia and dyscalculia. However, special needs education teachers can apply the following strategies for students with dyslexia:

- a. Structure: braking lesson into small steps each one linking to the other
- b. Re-enforcement: encourage students skills and provide access to all areas of learning
- c. Meta cognition: encourage students to think and reflect on how to apply skills taught to the environment
- d. Self-efficacy: this is to break the social and emotional barriers from their learning by reducing anxiety and increasing confidence.

With regards to students with dysgraphia, the following strategies are recommended:

- i. Provision for additional time for writing tasks,
- ii. Use of oral examinations
- iii. Encourage proper positioning posture and pen/pencil grip
- iv. Do not criticize students for illegibility of hand –writing or sloppiness
- v. Use writing paper that has raised line,
- vi. When fatigue sets in, the student should be encouraged to use hand exercises (Ozaji, Unachukwu & Kolo 2010)

It is good to train dysgraphics in forming letters, and kinaesthetic writing (Closing or turning away eyes from paper) as it will help them immensely.

Counselling Implication

Students with learning disabilities have problems of basic academic skills which are necessary for academic performance/achievements as well as employment. These problems negatively affect their vocational development and adjustment that have serious implication in their socialization and daily living which consequently lead to frustration,

anxiety and fear. These problems can be handled by the school counselor and other related professionals to provide relevant instructional, psychological and counseling support to the students. School counselor can make good use of rational emotive therapy to eliminate or reduce the problems. However, it is important for the counselor to recognize and show love to students with learning disabilities or client(s) with the view of creating positive feeling and confidence to the client. It is also important for the counselor to make referral in areas that are not within his profession.

Conclusion

It is understandable that students with learning disabilities have problems with written expression, mathematical calculation, thinking, spelling, speaking and reading. These problems no doubt impede their academic performance in the classroom. The researcher believes if regular teachers, special education teachers and counsellors can put head together in identifying these students and plan special intervention for them, the problem might be reduced to the beeriest minimum or totally eliminated.

Suggestions

1. School authorities should help in identifying students with learning disabilities.
2. Parent Teachers Associations with school authorities should help in organizing extra-lessons for the students.
3. Regular teachers and school counsellors should use various strategies to help these students cope with their academic problems.

References

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