

THE NEED FOR COUNSELLING CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES FOR NATION BUILDING

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Abstract

This paper explains what learning disability is. It further discusses the difference between learning disability and learning problem. Then, the characteristics or symptoms of learning disability are presented- The roles of the counsellor, the parents, the teacher in helping the children with learning disabilities are enumerated. Finally, the need to counsel children with learning disabilities is discussed. Then , conclusion.

Introduction

No nation can develop without sound productive education for nation building. Productive education is meant to solve human problems. Learning disabilities are difficulties some children and adults are suffering in Nigeria today. Most school children and adults are experiencing problem of learning disabilities. There is increasing mass failure in English Language more than any other subject in secondary schools in Nigeria today, because many school children in Nigeria have reading difficulties and unless solution is provided for the difficulties through counselling, what kind of education could children having reading difficulties acquire to be able to contribute to nation building? Therefore, there is need to first identify the different types of specific learning disabilities or difficulties, such as dyslexia meaning reading difficulties, dysgraphia meaning writing difficulties dyscalculia meaning Mathematical calculation difficulties, problems of distractibility, dependency, listening and thinking difficulties coupled with poor self concept, there is need to provide solutions to these difficulties, so that they can become useful to themselves and to the society at large through counselling.

One question to ask at this point is what is counselling? Counselling, is a process of helping an individual to identify his problem and help him or her find possible solution by himself to it in order to develop positive self concept (Nwadinigwe and Anumonye, 1999).

On the other hand, learning disability according to Johnson and Mykeibarst (1967) is described as children having learning difficulties which may show as disorder of auditory language, disorder of reading, disorder of written language, disorder of arithmetic, and of thinking, disturbances in neurological functioning. Therefore, for the purpose of this paper, the working definition of learning disability is the A bang's (1995) definition which describes learning disability as disorder in one or more areas of the basic psychological process in the brain involved in understanding and in using language. The disorder may result into difficulty either in listening or in thinking or speaking or in reading or in writing which is not the same as learning problem.

The Difference Between Learning Problem and Learning Disability

The focus of this paper is on learning disability. But it is good to understand that learning disability is not the same as learning problem. Learning disability is more rooted than learning problem. Learning disability is a disorder in the basic psychological process involved in the brain. On the other-hand, learning problem such as sickness, lack of school materials, which may bring about irregular school attendance, which may result in poor academic performance or having frequent fever resulting in frequent missing of lectures, which may result in failure to do assignments. Lack of textbooks or writing materials. Due to all these, a child may not perform well in his academic work, not performing well is not learning disability but learning problem. Therefore, before a child can be confirmed to have learning disability, the child must exhibit the manifestations mentioned in the definition of learning disability.

Secondly, the child must meet the following three conditions before declaring the child learning disabled:

1. The child's intellectual functioning or I.Q. must be average or above average.
2. The child must have adequate sensory acuity.
3. The child must be performing academically below his intellectual capacity (Kirk, 1971).

Characteristics or Symptoms of Learning Disabilities

Below is explained the characteristics or symptoms of learning disabilities as presented by Hallahan

and Kauffman (1982):

Before a child is confirmed to be learning disabled, the child must first be above or of average intelligence. Secondly, the child must have adequate sensory clarity. Furthermore, despite that the child is above average intellectually, the child's academic performance or achievement must be below his or actual intellectual capability.

Most children, with learning disability have in attention difficulty. They cannot pay adequate attention both in the classroom or to their parents at home. Restlessness or hyperactivities is one of the symptoms whereby a child cannot settle down in one place for a long time. Another symptom is emotional instability. This is when the child is frequently distracted.

In addition, when a child spends more time than is necessary in an action, that is, if a child gets glued to an action or gets too attached, this is what is called preservation. This could make a learning disabled child to become impulsive, that is, acting without considering the consequences of his or her action or behaviour on others. Usually, children or adult with learning disability may put on withdrawn behaviour such as not taking part in a community development programme or in a group activity. Some times, learning disabled children lack confidence in themselves. Equally, they have difficulty following oral instruction and have difficulty in comprehending what is written down.

The Need For Counselling Learning Disabled children

The result of the difficulties learning disabled children experience is regular failure in academic activities and in social interaction. As a result of constant failure, poor self concept and inferior complex may develop, coupled with problems of inattention or hyperactivity. listening and thinking difficulties. The learning disabled children easily become frustrated as a result. They equally experience fear and anger and lack sensitivity coupled with problem of dependency, which is a sign of lack in self-confidence. Hence, the need to counsel the learning disabled children to overcome these problems in order to enable them change the image of themselves, and stop seeing themselves as helpless and good for nothing people and to achieve success in life for nation building.

Counselling Learning Disabled Children

To adequately meet the needs of the learning disabled children, the counsellor, the teacher and the parents should understand some of the symptoms or characteristics of learning disabilities. There are different types of learning, disabilities such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, auditory discrimination, social emotional learning disability and so on.

On the part of the teacher, there are some considerations the teacher needs to keep in mind. Hallahan and Kauffman (1982) instruct that:

1. The teacher should be careful to have the child work on a level commensurate with his abilities.
2. The teacher should be careful to provide clear instructions for the child because, learning disabled children are notorious for behaving as if they understand what is being said when in fact they may be confused;
3. the teacher should be ready to make a physical arrangement for the child to sit alone on a desk or ask the child to stay in a corner for a short time if the child proves to be highly distractible and hyperactive. The teacher should however, remember to communicate to the child that the action is not a punitive measure;
4. the teacher should not be surprised because of the emotional instability of the child, if the child displays signs of emotional disturbance. However, you must not tolerate any bizarre

behaviour from the child. That is, you must not neglect discipline. On the other hand, the counsellor should regularly remind the teacher to follow the four mentioned instructions. The child should be rewarded for every achievement by praising the child and appreciating his or her effort.

Silver in *Awake* (Feb. 1997) points out that learning disabilities interfere with reading, writing, and arithmetic and may also interfere with sports, family life, getting along with friends or interfere with other social activities. Therefore, the learning-disabled children need parental support to develop a sense of competency and positive self-esteem. The counsellor on the other hand, must see it as duty to help the parents not to blame the child's condition on themselves and should be helped to accept the child with the condition as their child. This is what would help the child to get help he needs. The child should be provided extra support in specific skills such as reading skill, listening skill, social daily living skill. the

counsellor should help teachers and parents to become familiar with programmes that may be available in the country for children who are learning disabled.

Finally, from Serfontein's (1997) experience, the counsellor should teach the parents to love their learning disabled child. In addition, the parents and their relations should not treat the child with learning disability as if not wanted or unable to make it in life. But when the learning disabled child knows that he or she is loved within the home by both parents and his other brothers and sisters, this would encourage determination in the child not to be a liability but a productive person in life. The counsellor in helping the learning disabled child, should use directive counselling approach method so as to teach or instruct the learning disabled child what to do and how to do it because of the child's difficulty in thinking logically.

Conclusion

In this paper, it has been pointed out that there are children, who have specific difficulties in learning, and this is called learning disabilities. Further, the difference between learning problem and learning disability has been explained. Twelve different symptoms or characteristics of learning disabled children were explained. And in order to be able to help all learning disabled children in school, there is need for more school counsellors for every level of education in Nigeria. Therefore, it is recommended that the Federal Government should train more guidance counsellors to work in schools in Nigeria.

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