

TEACHERS, PEERS AND PARENTAL ACCEPTANCE AS CORRELATES OF SOCIAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT OF PUPILS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES IN UYO SENATORIAL DISTRICT, AKWA IBOM STATE

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Abstract

Teachers, parents and peers are very significant in the life of every child. The level of acceptance, care and affection with which children are handled account for the level of development of social skills children experience and exhibit. The development of social skills of pupils with learning disability depends to a large extent on the amount of acceptance that is accorded them by their parents, teacher and peers. This study therefore examined the relationship of teachers', peers' and parental acceptance on social skills of pupils with learning disabilities. This study adopted the descriptive survey research design of the co-relational type. The population of the study comprised all primary five pupils with learning disabilities in Uyo senatorial district of akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. The sample size consisted of 126 pupils with learning disabilities. Among the three instruments used the first two were for screening while the last one was for data collection. They are; learning disability checklist (LDC), social skills development Questionnaire (SSDQ) and teacher, peer and parental acceptance inventory (TPPAI) with reliability coefficient of .76, .87 and .85 respectively, indicating that the instruments were reliable for the study. Data collected were analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment correlation (PPMC) statistics. The result showed that there is a significant relationship among teachers' peers and parental acceptance and social skills development. Based on the finding of the study recommendations were made, that teachers, peers and parents should always accept all children for who they are and not on the basis of their abilities or disabilities.

Keywords: Teachers, peers, parental, acceptance, social skills, development, gender

Introduction

Social skills are important for preparing young people to mature and succeed in their adult role with the family, workplace and community. Learning is ultimately a social process, hence Lynch and Simpson (2010) opined that all children need to learn, appropriate social skills that promote positive interaction with others and the environment such as showing empathy, participating in group activity, generosity, helpfulness, communicating with others, negotiating and problem solving. This implies that while pupils may initially learn something independently, eventually such learning will be modified in interaction with others. School pupils who have learning disabilities have been found to be lagging behind in the development of these social skills.

Children with learning disabilities tend to have trouble getting along with others. Such children are unable to understand social cues, misinterpret the feeling of other people, unaware of the effect of their behaviour on other people, and unable to take cognizance of other people's feeling or put themselves in someone else's shoes. When engaged in verbal communication they normally have difficulty choosing appropriate words because the right word will not come to them. Their difficulty in understanding complex sentence structure makes them respond inappropriately to questions. These and several other characteristics of learning disabilities do create difficulties in social relationships for pupils, with learning disabilities.

Children with learning disabilities have difficulties connecting with peers, establishing close friendship and getting along with their teachers. Chaban (2015) observed that these children often appear to misread social cues, fail to control their impulsive desires and have difficulty anticipating the consequences of their actions on other people. School plays a vital role in the social development of pupils, as they spend most part of their day attending school, engaging in extra-curricular activities, even at home they engage in scholastic work. In school pupils struggle to establish and maintain relationships with teachers, peers and others within the school community.

Social development is the acquisition and use of interpersonal skills such as friendship, play and leisure, independence and self-help skills and behaving, in a socially acceptable manner in a given context or situation. Social development of school pupils is fundamentally important to the well-being of the individual since the ability to socialize, to make friend and to take care of one's self affects all aspects of daily life. The ability to communicate effectively with others is essential in a child's daily interactions and building of social relationships. These skills which include the ability to produce and interpret conversations in real time become the cornerstone for good social development. Social development refers to the process by which a child learns to interact with people around him. As children develop and perceive their own individuality within their community, they also gain skills to communicate with other people and process their own actions and to handle conflict with peers (Bavolek, 2016).

These often make children feel rejected, isolated and lonely at home, school and community where they belong. When children feel rejected it can lead to a number of adverse psychological and social consequences like loneliness, low self-esteem, aggression and depression. Especially for school pupils it can lead to feelings of insecurity and high sensitivity to school failure and future rejection. Research by Forness and Kavale (2015) indicated that the rate of depression among children with learning disabilities was 75% and 30% in those with attention deficit, hyperactivity disorders. On the surface, these children look like every other child but in behavior they are socially immature. Their inappropriate social behaviours are often seen by parents, teacher and peers as intentional, care-givers and significant others take them as mischievous, oppositional and deliberately stubborn. As a result, they may be left out in any important family discussion, given less attention, love and care. Teachers seem to ignore them, concentrate on other children who are better socialized.

Parental acceptance is therefore very important in the development of social skills in primary school pupils. Rohner (2004) used the term parental acceptance to convey a parent's contribution to the quality of affectionate relationship between parent and child, the physical, verbal and symbolic behaviours parents use or are perceived to use, to express these feelings.

According to Rohner, there are two ends on the continuum of parental acceptance. One end is marked by the expression of warmth, affection, care, comfort, concern, nurturance, support, or simply, love toward the child. The other end is marked by parental rejection, characterized by the absence of parental warmth and by the presence of a variety of physical or psychological hurtful behaviours and affect (Suchman, Rounsaville & Luthar, 2017).

Teacher acceptance is another very important factor in the social skills development of school aged children. In school-aged children, factors such as physical attractiveness, cultural traits, and disabilities greatly affect the level of acceptance accorded them by the teachers. Thomas and Scoth (2017) stated that a child's degree of social competence is the best predictor of teachers' acceptance. While the peer groups interactions especially teens, are often based on athletics, games, sports and other play activities, teacher acceptance is normally based on social, academic interests and abilities. Joseph (2012) opined that children who are able to secure teacher acceptance and are popular in class have fewer problems in middle and high school. Pupils who are teacher-accepted have fewer emotional and social adjustment problems as adults. Teacher-accepted children may be shy or assertive, but they often have well-developed communication skills.

Another very important factor that may account for the social skills development of school pupils with learning disabilities is peer acceptance. Peer acceptance is the degree to which a child or adolescent is socially accepted by peers. It includes the level of peer popularity and the ease with which a child or adolescent can initiate and maintain satisfactory friendship and peer relationships (Loren, 2014). Peer acceptance and relationships are important to children's social and emotional development. Peer acceptance and friendship provide a wide range of learning and development opportunities for children. These include companionship, recreation, building social skills, participating in group problems solving, and managing competition and conflict. They also allow for self-exploration, emotional growth, moral and ethical development. It is among other children that pupils learn how to interact with each other.

Gender may also play a role on social skills development of pupils with learning disabilities. Anke, wendy & Alexander (2012) on social relationships of boys and girls clearly points out the same-sex preference of children when building friendships. Maccoby (2009) stated that boys and girls particularly segregate into same-sex groups in social situations. When observing playground behaviours of primary school children, there are clear differences between boys and girls.

Many researchers have focused on social development among school aged children but it is still a matter of concern that only a few dares to be concerned about children with learning disabilities, as their inappropriate social skills still remain worrisome. This study therefore deemed it necessary to examine the parents', teachers' and peers' acceptance as correlates of pupils' social skills development.

Statement of the Problem

Inappropriate social behavior among primary school pupils with learning disabilities is becoming alarming by the day. Many of them do not know how to handle interpersonal social situations that involve following direction (rules), holding proper conversation (communication),

listening, giving compliment, proper behavior during transition time, teasing, bullying or just hanging out with friends. Learning disabilities impose on children, social skills deficits to such extent that parents get perplexed, teachers get frustrated and peers get brutal with such children, ultimately rejection begins to trail those pupils and bring upon them depression, social isolation and consequently school failure.

Despite all the efforts that researchers, schools and classroom teachers have made to create positive and enabling environment, provide opportunities to develop social skills within academic setting and teach these skills directly to all pupils, there still seem to be a large number of pupils who need additional learning opportunities to develop these skills. Most of these pupils are those with challenging emotional issues and behavioural disorders that stem from learning disabilities. It was on this premise that this researcher considered it necessary to examine teachers, peers and parental acceptance as correlates of social skills development among pupils with learning disabilities in Uyo Senatorial District

Null Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at, 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant relationship between parental acceptance and social skills development among pupils with learning disabilities.
2. There is no significant relationship between teachers' acceptance and social skills development among pupils with learning disabilities.
3. There is no significant relationship between peers acceptance and social skills development among pupils with learning disabilities.
4. There is no significant relationship between gender and social skills development among pupils with learning disabilities

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design of the correlation type. This design is appropriate because it investigates relationships among independent variables and the dependent variables. It does not require the researcher to manipulate any variable but study existing phenomenon and their correlations from a representative sample. The result can then be generalized to the entire population (Mclean and McCormick, 1993). The population of this study consisted of all primary school pupils with learning disabilities in Uyo Senatorial district of AkwaIbom State. The sample of this study consisted of 126 pupils with learning disabilities in Uyo Senatorial district. The sample was drawn through simple random sampling technique. Thus: two schools were randomly selected from each of the nine (9) Local Government Areas that make up Uyo Senatorial District, giving a total of 18 schools. Children with learning disabilities were first selected through: teacher nomination, peers' nomination and the use of standardized screening instrument for learning disabilities. After the screening, 7 pupils with learning disabilities were randomly drawn from each of the 18 schools earlier selected, giving a total of 126 pupils who will participate in the study. Three instruments were used in this study. There are: Learning disabilities checklist - adapted from NCLD (2007). It was used to screen pupils for learning disabilities. This helped the researcher to identify pupils who have learning disabilities. Through test retest method, a reliability coefficient of 0.76 was obtained, indicating that the instrument was reliable for use in this study.

Social Skills Development Scale (SSDS) was developed to assess pupils social skills. This instrument was in two parts. Part 1 collected the bio-data of the respondents while part 2 contains 30 items of Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD) on five basic skills of social development. The respondents were expected to respond by ticking (✓) whichever corresponds with their objective opinion. It has a reliability coefficient of 0.87. Teachers', peers' and parental acceptance inventory (TPPAI) was used to measure the acceptance level among teachers, peers and parents of children with learning disabilities. The respondents were required to indicate their opinion by ticking (✓) SA, A, D or SD. It has a reliability coefficient of .85 which means the instrument was reliable for data collection. Data collected and collated were analyzed using the Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). The null hypotheses were tested at 0.05. level of significance

Results

Null Hypothesis I: There is no significant relationship between parental acceptance and social skills development of pupils with learning disabilities

Table 1: Relationship between parental acceptance and social skills development

Variable	$\sum x$ $\sum y$	$\sum x^2$ $\sum y^2$	$\sum xy$	r-cal	r-crit
Parental acceptance	106	972			
Social skills development	67	862	100631	.41	.28

Table 1 shows, that the calculated r-value .41 is greater that the critical (table) r-value .28. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected indicating that there is a significant relationship between parental acceptance and social skills development of pupils with learning disabilities.

Null Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between teachers' acceptance and social skill's development among pupils with learning disabilities.

Table 2: Relationship between teachers' acceptance and social skills development

Variable	$\sum x$ $\sum y$	$\sum x^2$ $\sum y^2$	$\sum xy$	r-cal	r-crit
Teacher's acceptance	75	1722			
Social skills development	97	3746	2288	.36	.28

Table 2 shows the relationship between the teachers' acceptance and social skills development. The result reveals that the calculated r-value .36 is greater than the critical r-value .28. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. This indicates that there is a significant relationship between teachers' acceptance and social skills development of pupils with learning disabilities.

Null Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between pupils' acceptance and social skills development among pupils with learning disabilities.

Table 3:Relationship between pupils’ acceptance and social skills development

Variable	$\frac{\sum x}{\sum y}$	$\frac{\sum x^2}{\sum y^3}$	$\sum xy$	r-cal	r-crit
Pupils acceptance	95	1134	7371	.48	.28
Social skills development	69	854			

Table 3 reveals that the calculated r-value .48 is greater than the critical (table) r-value .28. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected, meaning that there is a significant relationship between pupils’ acceptance and social skills development of pupils with learning disabilities.

Null Hypothesis 4: There is no significant relationship between gender and social skills development of pupils with learning disabilities.

Table 4: Gender and Social Skills development of pupils with learning disabilities

Variable	$\frac{\sum x}{\sum y}$	$\frac{\sum x^2}{\sum y^2}$	$\sum xy$	r-cal	r-crit
Gender	51	1721	2448	.26	.28
Social skills development	111	2746			

Table 4 shows the relationship between gender and social skills development. It reveals that the calculated r-value .26 is less than the critical r-value .28 indicating no significance. The null hypothesis is therefore accepted. Hence there is no significant relationship between gender and social skills development of pupils with learning disabilities.

Discussion of Findings:

Parental Acceptance and Social Skills Development of Pupils with learning disabilities

The result of hypothesis three indicates that there is significant relationship between parental acceptance and social skills development of pupils with learning disabilities. This finding is corroborated by the assertion of Lerner (2005) that the home is the most important place for children to feel accepted, loved and cared for. The family remains the core of a child’s life where children desperately seek the satisfaction of their primary needs of love, warmth and assurances of cordial relationship with parents or primary caregiver. This finding agreed with the finding of Anda, Felitti, Bremner, Walker and Whitefield (2016) that children with learning disabilities are able to manage relationships with others by observing the way their parents, caregivers and other family members relate with them and other people. Parental acceptance not only provides model interaction and social competence but also reduces the trauma of neglect and rejection that pupils with learning disabilities are prone to experience as a result of their social difficulties. Trauma arising from inability to “fit in” or get along successfully with other people could make the child develop physiologically altered state of arousal and brain chemistry that makes it difficult for them to control or regulate their behavior. This finding is strongly

supported by Ladd (2015) who asserted that children learn social skills from adults particularly parents who model and explain how to behave in particular circumstances. The social skills that children learn from parents when they are young form the basis for subsequent relationships that they develop in later childhood and adulthood. Showing children with disabilities that they are just as good as other children but different in their own way creates opportunity to teach them how to share, communicate, appreciate and work together with others. It is therefore incumbent upon parents to show acceptance and teach children to share and negotiate before problem behavior occurs.

Teachers' Acceptance and Social skills Development of pupils with Learning Disabilities

Hypothesis two revealed that there is a significant relationship between teachers' acceptance and social skills development of pupils with learning disabilities. This finding is corroborated by Lynch and Simpson (2015) who found that teachers lay solid foundations for developing social skills in pupils. Hence well inform teachers of young children with learning disabilities recognize the importance of children's social development. One way to lay such foundations for social skills development is for teacher to accept each pupil as an integral part of the classroom, not just for academic purpose but for social development as well. Teachers' acceptance is such a key issue with school pupils that a number of pupils clamour to be the teacher's favourite. When teachers maintain appropriate level of acceptance that is evidence in the pupils-teacher interaction pupils automatically learn to interest with others appropriately.

This finding also agreed with the findings of Ladd (2015) that teachers can incorporate a member of techniques, including direct institution, learning from peers, prevention of problem behavior and friendliness in teaching social skills to pupils. Teachers need to show pupils that they are accepted, valued and recognized for who they are rather than what they can do academically. When teachers create that atmosphere of acceptance and friendliness any method adopted in teaching social skills produce the need results. By so doing, the teacher plans for one-on-one teacher-pupil interaction at various times throughout the school day. The teacher tries various groupings to determine the situation in which the pupil with learning disabilities is most comfortable carrying on a conversation with peers and adults. Having the pupil with learning disabilities run errands which requires interactions with teachers, administrators, staff and other pupils not only prove to the child that he/she is accepted by the teacher but also creates opportunities for the child to develop social communication skills. For example, asking the child with communication skills deficit to deliver attendance report to the officer, taking messages to other teachers, acting as class monitor etc goes a long way to develop the child social skill in initiating, maintaining and engaging in appropriate conversation or communication. Effective communication is the aspiration of every parent and teacher of pupils with learning disabilities.

Edem (2012) agreed that children with disabilities acquire and improve their communication skills by engaging in free conversation with adults and peers who have better mastery of the communication arts. Consequently, engaging pupils with learning disabilities in regular, cordial interactions involving storytelling, impromptu speech and free speech time afford the pupils the opportunity to learn, acquire and develop good, appropriate and adequate communication skill. This skill is all encompassing as it involves, making eye contact, appropriate tone and interpreting the body languages of their people.

Peer Acceptance and Social Skills Development of Pupils with Learning Disabilities

Hypothesis three revealed that there is a significant relationship between peers acceptance and social skills development of pupils with learning disabilities. This means that where a child with learning disability is accepted among his peers there is every tendency for that child to develop appropriate social skills. This finding is in agreement with the finding of Gleasen (2014) that children learn to relate with peers by engaging in peer relationships. Peer rejection manifest in a lack of opportunity to participate normally in peer interaction. This may constitute a huge problem to a child with learning disabilities. Pupils with learning disabilities who have problems making friends or 'fitting in' with peers develop severe social skills deficit because it is only in constant interaction with peers that children with learning disabilities learn who they are and how they fit within their social world. Only when children are able to develop their new social roles or skills successfully can they feel a sense of social competence. In addition to providing direct social skills training and counseling for the child with peer acceptance problems, it is important that parents and teachers address the issues of peer acceptance as early as possible in order to prevent loss of self confidence and self-esteem later in life. Schnelder (2014) also agreed with this finding that peer acceptance creates opportunities for non-threatening social interaction to occur among peers.

Well accepted pupils have little or no problems at all in forming groups, maintaining group membership and participating in group activities. Group membership and participating in group activities successfully at school and home prepare the pupils for future social or civic responsibilities. It is in such interaction the pupils learn to deal with other peoples' emotions thereby developing empathy, gratefulness, appreciation and apology. Pupils have to learn to show or to say "I am sorry" when he/she does something wrong.

Gender and Social Skills Development of Pupils with Learning Disabilities

The result of hypothesis four revealed no significant relationship between gender and social skills development. This showed that male and female pupils with learning disabilities could develop social skills successful under the condition or atmosphere of acceptance, love and warmth offered them by parents, teachers and peers. Once the children finds that his/her disability does not create animosity between him and his social environment, the tendency is that the development of social skills take it natural course even though it may be slower in children with learning disabilities than other children. Gender as it were does not determine in any way the level of social skills development. This finding is in contrast with the finding of Shayhitz, Fletcher and Shayeritz (2005) that girls tend to have more cognitive, language and social problems while the boys tend to exhibit more physical aggression and loss of control. The finding of this study corroborated the assertion of Sahdipoor and Ghale (2013) that gender is not a factor in social skills development enhance social compatibility of both male and females is a master of interactions. It is therefore important that both male and female pupils with learning disabilities be provided with adequate opportunity in an enabling environment to develop appropriate social skills. Social skills development is essential for emotional competence of both male and female pupils. Well accepted pupils can learn to make friends, maintain friendships, show empathy and get along with others successfully their gender differences notwithstanding.

Conclusion

This study examined teachers', peers' and parental acceptance as correlates of social skills development of pupils with learning disabilities in Uyo Senatorial district of Akwalbom State. The importance of social skills among primary school pupils cannot be overemphasized, particularly for pupils with learning disabilities. Literature showed that this group of pupils, have remarkable deficits in social skills. This study was carried out to determine the correlation among the independent variable – teachers, peers and parental acceptance in enhancing successful development of social skills among pupils with learning disabilities.

The findings of this study have therefore shown that there is a correlation between the variables tested. This therefore means that, for pupils with learning disabilities to effectively and successfully develop adequate social skills the teachers, peers and parents have to create for them the atmosphere of acceptance, love and warmth. Hence the results of the study showed that there is significant relationship between teachers, peers and parental acceptance and social skills development among pupils with learning disabilities. The responsibility of helping pupils with learning disabilities to develop appropriate social skills cannot be left to the teachers, parents or peers alone in their separate spheres of influence but must be a shared responsibility.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations were made.

1. Teachers should accept all pupils without discriminating against anyone on the basis of academic or behavioural deficits.
2. Teachers should model social skills for pupils to emulate and whenever possible teach social skills directly.
3. Teacher should ensure that peers are ready to admit pupils with learning disabilities into their play groups and/or friendship circle.
4. Parents should always express warmth parenting through physical and verbal expression by smiling to the child, hugging, saying nice things, give compliment or praise the child regularly.
5. Love and affection should be the parents watch word towards their children regardless of their disabilities. Teachers, peers and parents should take responsibility for helping pupils develop social skills and not shift the task to only one party.

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