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## ATTITUDE OF REGULAR STUDENTS AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN INTEGRATED SETTING

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### Abstract

The study investigated the attitude of regular students to students with special needs and also compared the academic performance of both categories of students. It adopted descriptive design. One research question and three research hypotheses were answered in the study. The population for the study comprised 53,789 regular students and 1,371 students with special needs in the 35 public secondary schools where mainstreaming of students with special needs is being implemented in Southwestern Nigeria. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 10 out of the 35 mainstreamed public secondary schools based on the number of students with special needs in the schools. From the selected schools, 1000 regular students and the 910 students with special needs were involved in the study. The students with special needs were purposely selected, while 1000 regular students were selected by stratified sampling technique. Two research instruments were used for data collection. The data were analyzed using simple percentages, and t-test analysis. The results showed 52.9% regular students had positive attitude to students with special needs, 34.3% regular students had negative attitude to students with special needs while 12.8% regular students had neutral attitude to students with special needs. Also, there was no significant difference between the attitude of male and female regular students to students with special needs ( $t=0.0660$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). There was no significant difference between the academic performance of male and female students with special needs ( $t=1.19$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). However, there was a significant difference between academic performances of regular students and students with special needs ( $t=6.38$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). The study concluded that positive attitude of regular students could positively influence the academic performance of students with special needs.

**Key Words:** Integrated Setting, Mainstreaming, Students with Special Needs, Regular Students, and Academic Performance.

### Introduction

Attitude as a concept is concerned with an individual way of thinking, acting and behaving. It has very serious implications for the learners, the teacher, the immediate social group with which the individual learner relates and the entire school system. Our evaluations of attitude objects can be favourable, neutral or unfavourable, attitudes are said to have a positive, neutral or negative direction.

Children with special needs encountered difficulty in social interactions with regular class peers and teachers. Many people had little information about students with special needs and this lack of knowledge could create fear and prejudice. Children with special needs were often laughed at, or devalued in many ways during interaction. One attitude that influenced teachers' attitude was labeling, when students were identified by a negatively perceived label, for examples; mentally retarded. Campbell, Dodson, and Bost (1985) opined that teachers were less able to objectively observe, rate and plan appropriate intervention for their behaviours. Another factor that could contribute to the rejection of children with special needs by regular teachers and administrators was lack of special training. Many teachers were afraid that they did not have skills necessary for teaching special needs children. Others felt that working with these children was not gratifying as working with normal individuals.

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Parents of regular class students could also influence the acceptance of students with special needs. They might discourage their children from interacting with the students with special needs in the class. These attitudes were often based on limited information about special needs students. The facts that children with special needs encountered all those problems were indications that peers and teachers in the regular classroom did not socially accept them.

Researchers had observed that the hardest burden to bear by special needs children was not their exceptionality, but the attitudes of people toward them (Marsh and Friedman, 1972). Attitude was one of affective areas which had been very much studied. An investigation by Ikpaya (1988) into the teachers' attitude toward special needs children varied significantly. He also found that some teachers had more positive attitude toward gifted children than their normal counterparts. Findings in Nigeria and Zimbabwe reported positive attitude of teachers to students with special needs in mainstreamed public schools (e.g Maunganidze and Kasayira (2002), and Hungwe (2005). However, Barnatt and Kabzema (1992), and Bevan-Brown (2002) reported negative attitude of teachers to students with special needs.

Neely (1982) reviewing the work of Horne (1979) discovered that most regular teachers preferred having special needs children removed from their classes. His study further revealed that the reactions of sixty percent (60%) of the teachers were negative towards having the special needs children. Handler (1981) also found that there existed a considerable residue of fear, hostility and aversion toward the special needs students, thus making teacher's attitude to be an obstacle to achieving full academic potential of the children. However, further studies have shown that attitude of teachers toward working with special needs children in regular schools are mixed.

Guerin and Szatlocky (1974) found that sixty two percent (62%) of the teaching staff had positive attitudes towards special needs children; nineteen percent (19%) had negative attitudes, while nineteen percent (19%) were neutral. It is as a result of this that the researchers would like to identify the attitude of teachers to students with special needs, investigate the difference between the attitude of male and female teachers to students with special needs; and also examine the difference between the attitude of special teachers and regular teachers teaching in integrated schools.

### **Research Question**

What is the attitude of regular students to students with special needs?

### **Research Hypotheses**

1. There is no significant difference in the attitude of male and female regular students to students with special needs in mainstreamed public secondary schools.
2. There is no significant difference between the academic performance of male and female students with special needs.
3. There is no significant difference between the academic performance of regular students and students with special needs.

### **Theoretical Framework**

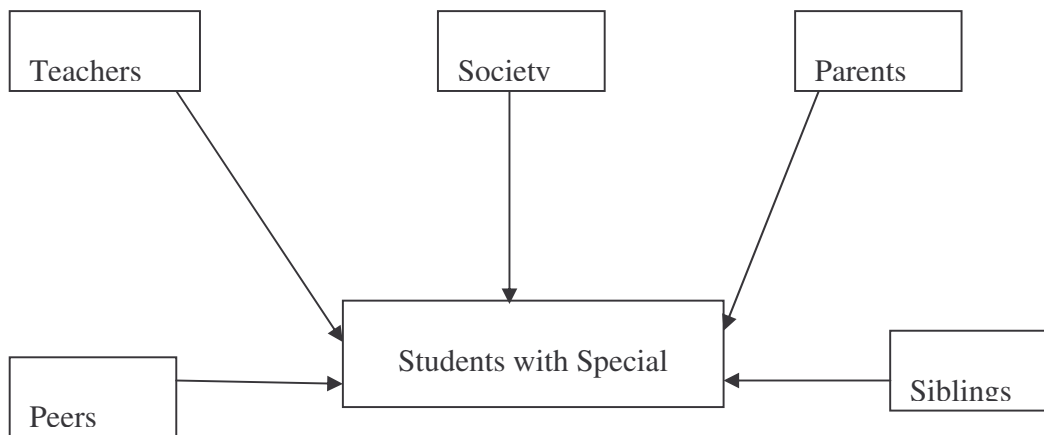
The theoretical framework for this study is derived from social learning theory propounded by Sears (1957). It is also known as learning based theory learning based theory places great emphasis on the events that takes place in the individuals environment; and regards the environment as a potentially powerful factor in the development of various behaviours and personality traits. In this sense, learning theory is sometimes considered an environmental approach because it specifies the nature of the relationships that exist between a child's evolving behaviour, and the environmental factors that facilitate or inhibit the behaviour. The history of the child's interaction with the environment is, of course, considered to be a highly important aspect of a child's current behavioural capacities and/or limitations. According to Sears, the child is born with basic drives (such as hunger, protection) that become "socialized" through interaction with parents, slowly evolving into motivational systems within the child's personality.

Sears' major research interests have been in the area of aggression and dependence on children, and yet these studies have always been part of a broader interest in the effects of social interaction between the

child and the parent on the child's developing personality. He described these interactions as the mechanics of interpersonal influence. For Sears, the study of a child development is essentially the study of the most fruitful conditions under which learning takes place, namely the consistent interactions or interpersonal influences between the child and significant others. It is these interactions, Sears concludes, that are most central in the formation and maintenance of the child's personality. Sears clearly notes two distinct stages of socialization; the learning in which the family is the initial agent of socialization, and the learning that occurs through interaction with social agents beyond the family, such as peers and teachers. Development is thus understood to be an orderly process in which the child's evolving behaviour meets with certain types of social responses, or reinforcements, so that consistent patterns of reinforcements produce consistent patterns of behaviour.

In terms of the special child, the emphasis is on the importance of all consistent pattern of interaction between the child and other people, including therapists, special education teachers and parents that are most central in the formation and maintenance of the child's personality.

Figure I: Agent of Socialization



#### Application of the Theory to this Study

Learning-based theory is applicable to students with special needs in mainstreamed public secondary schools because the main objective of mainstreaming is to socialize children with special needs with their peers, teachers and society at large, in order to facilitate a positive learning environment. Wynnee, Ulcelder and Dakof (1975) observed that normal children act as reinforcing agents to their special needs classmates within the context of child-child interaction. Students with special needs through learning-based theory should not only learn to control and regulate their behaviour so that they are able to master complex social interactions. Stainback and Stainback (1992) saw mainstreaming system as an environment, where every child belongs is accepted and supported by his or her peers and other members of the school community in the course of having his or her educational needs met.

#### Method

The study investigated the attitude of teachers to students with special needs in mainstreamed public secondary schools in Southwestern Nigeria. It adopted descriptive survey design. One research question and two research hypotheses were answered in the study. The population for this study comprised 53,789 regular students and 1,371 students with special needs in the 35 public secondary schools where mainstreaming of students with special needs is being implemented in Southwestern Nigeria. From the selected schools, the 910 students with special needs and 1000 regular students were involved in the study. One thousand regular students were selected through stratified sampling technique using sex and class as strata, while purposive sampling technique was used to administer questionnaires to all the 910 students with special needs in the ten

mainstreamed public schools selected for the study. The reason was due to the small number of students with special needs in schools.

Two research instruments named Regular Students Attitude to students with Special Needs (RSASSN) and Examination Records (ER) were used for the study. The RSASSN was an instrument developed by the researcher. Section A was designed to elicit information on personal details like sex, name of school, state, class and number of students in class. Section B of the instrument consisted of 20 question items, which was designed to elicit information on attitude of regular students to students with special needs. Each of the items was on a five point Likert type scale ranging from strongly Agree to Undecided. The instrument was scored 0 for “Undecided”, 1 for “strongly Disagree”, 2 for “Disagree”, 3 for “Agree”, and 4 for strongly Agree” with this procedure the minimum and maximum score obtainable were 0 and 80 respectively in Section B.

The second instrument was “Examination Record”. The researcher collected the broadsheets which contained the 3 terms academic records for a session. The cumulative averages of eight subjects were considered both in junior and senior secondary school. The instrument was rated on a five point Likert-type scale ranging from Very Good to Very Poor. The instrument was scored 0-20 for “Very Poor”, 21-39 for “Poor”, 40-59 for “Fair”, 60-69 for “Good”, and 70-80 for “Very Good”.

## Results

### Research Question:

This research question is: What is the attitude of regular students to students with special needs? To answer this question, data on some question items were extracted from data on “Regular Students Attitude to Students with Special Needs” (RSASSN) questionnaire. The data were analyzed using percentages. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary Table of Regular Students’ Attitude to Students with Special Needs in Mainstreamed Public Secondary Schools in Southwestern Nigeria.

Types of Attitude	Number	%
Positive	529	52.9%
Negative	343	34.3%
Neutral	128	12.8%
Total	1000	100%

From Table 1, one thousand copies of the questionnaires were administered to regular students, and the researcher collected back all of them, which were all filled correctly. To determine the regular students positive attitude to students with special needs, the average percentage score of regular students positive response to positive statements, and negative response to negative statements yielded 529 (52.9%). Implying the positive attitude of regular students. To determine the regular students negative attitude to students with special needs, the average percentage score of regular students negative response to positive statements, and positive response to negative statements yielded 343 (34.3%). Implying the negative attitude of regular students. To determine the regular students neutral attitude to students with special needs, average percentage score of regular students no response to neither positive nor negative statements yielded 128 (12.8%). Implying the neutral attitude of regular students.

### Research Hypothesis 1:

This hypothesis states that there is no significant difference in the attitude of male and female regular students toward students with special needs in mainstreamed public secondary schools. To test this hypothesis, data collected on regular students’ attitude toward students with special needs were subjected to t-test analysis. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Difference between the Attitude of Male and Female Regular Students to Students with Special Needs

Regular students sex	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	df	t	P
Male	591	49.62	10.35	998	.660	>.05
Female	409	49.19	10.09			

Not significant (p >0.05)

From Table 2, five hundred and ninety one regular students were male, while four hundred and nine regular students were female. The mean of male teacher attitude to students with special needs was 49.62, while 49.19 was the mean of female regular students' attitude to students with special needs. The difference between male and female regular students' attitude was found not to be significant with a t-test value of .660 (p >0.05).

### Research Hypothesis 2:

This hypothesis states that there is no significant difference between the academic performance of male and female students with special needs. To test this hypothesis, data collected on academic performance of male and female students with spec needs were subjected to t-test analysis. The results are presented in Table 16.

Table 3: Difference between Academic Performance of Male and Female Students with Special Needs

Academic performance	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	df	t	P
Male	325	46.54	12.12	617	1.189	>.05
Female	294	45.43	10.99			

Not Significant (p >.05)

Table 3, the mean of the academic performance of male students with special needs was 46.54, while the mean of the academic performance of female students with special needs was 45.43. To determine the difference between the academic performance of male and female students with special needs, t-test analysis employed was 1.19, which was not significant at 0.05 probability level.

### Research Hypothesis 3:

This hypothesis states that there is no significant difference between the academic performance of regular students and students with special needs. To test this hypothesis, data collected on academic performance of regular students and students with special needs were subjected to t-test analysis. The results are presented in Table 15.

Table 4: Difference between Academic Performances of Regular Students and Students with Special Needs

Academic performance	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	df	t	P
Regular students	620	50.47	13.07	1238	6.38	<.05
Students with special needs	620	46.00	11.60			

\*Significant (p <.05)

From Table 4, the mean of the academic performance of regular students was 50.47 while the mean of academic performance of students with special needs was 46.00. To determine the difference between the academic performance of regular students and students with special needs academic performance, t-test analysis was employed. The t-value 6.38 obtained was higher than 0.05 probability level. Implying that there was a significant difference between academic performance of regular students and students with special needs in mainstreamed public secondary schools.

## Discussion

The finding of this study on the attitude of regular students' to students with special needs showed 343 (34.3 %) regular students' had negative attitude, 529 (52.9 %) regular students' had positive attitude to students with special needs, while 128 (12.8%) regular students had neutral attitude to students with special needs. This finding was in line with Clerc (2005), who observed that mainstreaming had a positive effect on students in the classroom. Regular students benefited by learning to be patients with students with special needs. The research further showed that regular students who were in mainstreamed classroom accepted and valued the differences in their disabled classmates and developed a genuine capacity of friendship. However, (Lewis and Doorlay, 1987; and Oladokun, 1983) found that regular students seem to reject their special needs counter parts. The implication of the finding showed a lot of work had to be done to change the negative attitude that was almost at the same level with the positive attitude of regular students. This was necessary in order to have positive impact on the social and academic life of students with special needs.

Another major finding of this study showed there was no-significant difference between the attitudes of male and female regular students to students with special needs, although; the attitude of male and female was found to be positive to students with special needs. This study supported Ray (1974), who found that regular children interacted well with both individuals and groups with disabilities. The present result on no significant difference between the attitudes of male and female regular students to students with special needs implied that both boys and girls (regular students) demonstrated the same attitudinal behaviour to students with special needs. Effort should be made to organize programmes that would change the beliefs, labeling and neglect of male and female regular students to students with special needs. On the other hand, Gresham (1982) found that the acceptance of special needs children into regular classes led to increased peer rejection.

The result of the analysis of data on the difference between the academic performance of male and female students with special needs showed there was no significant difference. This implied that the male and female students with special needs were doing averagely well in their studies. This observation was similar to Akinpelu's (1998) finding, that there was no significant difference between the academic achievement of male and female hearing impaired students. However, this result differed from Babatola (1987), who found that male hearing-impaired performed slightly better than female hearing-impaired students.

The result of the analysis of data on difference between the academic performance of regular students and students with special needs showed there was a significant difference between the academic performance of students with special needs and regular students. What might cause the difference between the academic performance of regular students and students with special needs could be absence of special instructional materials, textbooks, and other facilities that would appeal to various senses of learning. Iboide (2004) asserted that if the desired objectives in teaching and learning must be attained, the use of instructional aids must be seen as a necessity. Eniola and Olukotun (2003) pointed out that with effective instructional materials and requirement, the special needs children will learn effectively.

Onuka (2004) defined achievement as a component of the students with special needs. This means that if a child is properly taught, the outcome would be successful. Akinbote and Ogunranti (2004) stated that the chance of a child to maximize his potentials could be affected by the type of environment to which he is exposed, and the most important of the child's environment is the school. Uwakwe (1997) asserted that helping school children achieve academically is practically and operationally possible. This finding corroborated Makinde (1970), who found that the normal hearing students performed significantly better than the impaired students. Makinde, however, concluded that the variation in ability and hearing loss were not the only reason for the poor academic performance, rather, that school environment affects achievement particularly in the instance of special needs children.

The present study found that regular students performed better than students with special needs. This implied that the challenges being faced by students with special needs as a result of their disabilities could limit their performance in class. Lack of flexibility in the school curriculum, inadequate facilities, and specialist teachers', lack of instruction materials, and supportive services for students with special needs could be factors that contributed to low academic performance of students with special needs. Okoro (1996) and Oyebola (1988) findings showed that students with special needs performed better in academic performance



than regular students. This could be as a result of extra attention that was paid to students with special needs by teachers teaching them. In addition, a good physical environment, adequate facilities and instructional materials could facilitate better academic performance of students with special needs than regular students.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concluded that positive attitude of regular students to students with special needs could positively influence the academic performance of students with special needs. Government should fund education, while mainstreaming school should be "specially funded". Adequate funding would help to overcome the problem of provision and maintenance of special equipment and materials for the use of students with special needs. Efforts should be made by government and other stakeholders of education to frequently expose teachers in mainstreamed setting to workshop and seminars on education of students with special needs. Counselling services should be provided to all the members of any integrated setting. Through integration and counselling for public awareness, the prejudices against exceptional children in school setting and in other areas would be gradually reduced.

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