



Teachers' Perception on Influence of Social Adjustment on Academic Performance of Students with Mild Mental Retardation in Gombe State Special School

¹Shehu, Ruqaiya, Gombe, S. Yakubu, & ³Yahaya Z. Ahmed

¹Pantami Nursery and Primary School, New Bye Pass Road, Gombe
07065917158 shehuruqaiya86@gmail.com

²Department of Vocational Education, Federal College of Education (Tech.), Gombe
08036298053 sanigombe925@gmail.com

³National Examinations Council, Gombe, Gombe State Office,
08065523152 zainabayahaya@gmail.com

Abstract

This study focused on determining the perception of teachers on influence of social adjustment on academic performance in West African Examinations Council/National Examinations Council (WAEC/NECO) of students with mild mental retardation in Gombe state, with emphasis on special secondary school. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. A total population of 37 teachers were used as respondents. Using drop and pick method, data was collected using adapted social adjustment (questionnaire) from Mei- Yin, Huei – Shyong & Cheng-Jung (2000) in Taiwan with 22 items. The instrument was reduced to 18 items. The instrument was validated by 2 experts and reliability was of 0.82 was obtained through Chronbach's Alfa coefficient determination formula and the original reported reliability is 0.85. Data was analysed using descriptive (frequency, percentage, mean and SD) statistics. The study found that level of academic performance WAEC/NECO of mentally retarded students is moderate in Gombe state special school, while the level of social adjustment on academic performance WAEC/NECO of mentally retarded students was found to be high as perceived by the teachers. The study concludes that the teachers in Gombe state special school are heterogeneous and social adjustment has great influence on academic performance of mentally retarded students. The study recommends that government should make it a policy that, all mentally retarded persons between the ages of 5-7 are subjected to social adjustment programmes which will transit them into formal school system and parents of mentally retarded children should improve their closeness with their children and also build in hope of their rehabilitation.

Keywords: Academic performance, mild mental retardation, social adjustment, teachers,

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Introduction

The transition between secondary school and tertiary institution has been of great importance to both parents and students in the final year class. Some see it as a bridge through which young adults in the final year secondary schools pass to a more rigorous and demanding field of endeavor. Some, perceived it as a starting ground for career building. However, with all the excitement and anxiety that encompasses the transitional examinations of WAEC and NECO, other students who are on the other side of the mental divide, the mentally retarded

students, and their parents have little or no hope about such examinations because they do not feel capable of coming out with something good after all.

Many students face the challenging experience of transitioning from secondary school to the university, including at-risk children such as those who come from economically disadvantaged families, having learning disabilities, and behavioral concerns (Crosnoe et al., 2015; Goux et al., 2016). The academic requirements in the tertiary institution are more demanding compared to secondary school,



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underscoring the importance of having sufficient skills to meet the demands for educational success (Crosnoe et al., 2015). Many underperforming students who wrestle with mental and academic challenges may drop out shortly after finishing secondary school (Goux et al., 2016).

Researchers have regarded students' level of adjustment as important to their success in academia (Lawson & Lawson, 2013; Lester, 2013; Wang & Peck, 2013). Students' adjustment includes three dimensions that are interrelated: (a) emotional/ social adjustment, (b) cognitive adjustment and (c) behavioral adjustment (Lee, 2014; Li & Lerner, 2013). The emotional or social dimension of students' adjustment pertains to their interaction with teachers, school staff, other students, and the school as an institution (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). The behavioral dimension of students' adjustment pertains to the involvement of students in both academic and non-academic activities (Fredricks et al., 2004). The cognitive dimension of students' adjustment involves the psychological and cognitive thinking of students (Fredrick et al., 2004). Researchers have suggested a relationship exists between social adjustment of students with mental retardation and their academic success (Lee, 2014; Weiss & García, 2015). Fostering these students' adjustment is often regarded as a precursor to learning and academic success among students (Lee, 2014). For example, certain aspects of their social and emotional adjustment may be predictive of good academic performance (Lee, 2014). Additionally, Weiss and García (2015) found that students who are more adjusted with their schools are more likely to have higher achievement in both social science, pure/applied sciences and vocational sciences. Moreover, children with mild mental retardation do not adjust well in school, especially in subjects that require individual skills acquisition. WAEC/NECO register from 2017-2020 show that less than 0.5% of students with mild mental retardation sit for their examinations annually in all subjects. In this era of inclusive education to bridge gaps of educational exclusion, studying mentally retarded students' academic performance in

relation to social adjustment mechanisms employed by teachers in standard examination is very necessary.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to examine teachers' perception on influence of social adjustment on academic performance in WAEC/NECO of students with mild mental retardation in Gombe State Special School, while the specific objectives of the study are:

1. To describe the demographic characteristics (age, gender, marital status and educational level) of the respondents (Teachers) in Gombe State Special School.
2. To identify the level of academic performance of mild mentally retarded students in WAEC/NECO in Gombe State Special School as perceived by the teachers.
3. To determine level of influence of social adjustment on academic performance of mild mentally retarded students in WAEC/NECO as perceived by teachers.

Research Questions

The following questions were formulated and answered in the conduct of the study.

1. What are the demographic characteristics of teachers in Gombe state special school?
2. What is the level of academic performance of mild mentally retarded students of Gombe State Special School in WAEC/NECO as perceived by the teachers?
3. What is the level of influence of social adjustment on academic performance of students with mild mental retardation in WAEC/NECO as perceived by their teachers?

Literature Review

Thematic literature review approach was adopted, because it allows for locating, defining and presenting only previous literatures that can add value to the present study. In special schools, where special treatment is given to students because of their peculiarities (life challenges), special attention is also given to support their learning styles and also facilitate their level of achievement in standard



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examinations in both conventional and specialized subjects (Nicholas, 2014). Mental retardation is just one of many challenges special students are found with, social maladjustment, hearing impairment, short and long sightedness, and many more are common in our special schools. However, mild mentally retarded students that have scaled through a therapy, which allow them to sit for examinations are linked to coping with the social adjustment that expose them to easily adopt changes (Cassidy & Lynn, 2019). According to Boulton, Smith and Cowie, (2010) social adjustment is one of the most influential factors that facilitate high level academic performance among mentally retarded students, while Cassidy and Lynn, (2019) observed that social adjustment of mentally retarded students has no link with their academic performance. Educational psychologist regarded mild, average and severe mental retardation as abnormality resulting from mental illness, physical injury and other factors such as broken home, drugs, peer influence and societal neglect (Adediwora & Taiwo, 2017).

Academic Performance

Academic performance refers to level of attainment of students as a result of instruction, hard work and other environmental as well as hereditary factors. According to Coulson, (2018) it really means three things; the ability to study and remember facts, being able to study effectively and see how facts fit together and form larger patterns of knowledge and being able to think for yourself in relation to facts and thirdly, to be able to communicate. It is the level of achievement attained via the combination of inputs from student motivation and conduct (Pruett, 2010). In view of Adediwora and Tayo (2017) academic performance is generally referred to how well a student is accomplishing his or her tasks and studies, but there are quite a number of factors that determine the level and quality of students' academic performance. This no doubt supports the view of Nicholas (2014) that the most current information on improving academic performance shows that there are three environmental influences linked to levels of

academic performance among school students. These influences according to the information includes high quality parenting (the degree to which a young star is provided with an enriched, warm and responsive learning environment which includes appropriate control and discipline over children, and are closely associated with both higher grade reading and mathematics skills); high quality child-care environments (stimulating activity and nurturing as reflected in high quality parenting) and high quality first grade classrooms (with a focus on literacy instruction, evaluative feedback, instructional conversation, and encouraging child responsibilities).

Academic performance differs in special students because of their varying challenges, however between mild mentally retarded students that received social adjustment as a therapy or intervention, it manifests uniformly. Similarly, in standard examinations (WAEC/NECO), the grading is the same and also the level of achievement depends on the students' ability to perform task assigned by the test through cognition and psychomotor (Karamera, 2013). Although, teachers handling mentally retarded students reported both positive and negative influence of social adjustment on the performance of mentally retarded students, is not enough to justify the level attained as a result of social adjustment only, because there are other factors within or outside the environment that have interacted with the social adjustment.

Social Adjustment

Social adjustment is an effort made by an individual to cope with standards, values and needs of a society in order to be accepted. It can be defined as a psychological process which involves coping with new standards and values. In the technical language of psychology "getting along with the members of society as best as one can, is called social adjustment, (Bouman, 2012). Adjustment and more familiar terms like flexibility and adaptability are currently presented as essential attributes in contemporary society, western ones at any rate. Brinkmann (2008) points out that, these societies also require you to be yourself, an



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obvious contradiction and tension that nonetheless is not apparent to those who expound these ideas, whether in workplaces and schools, in the media on the street and even in the home. In addition, the following are identified as indicators of social adjustment Adaptability; Flexibility; Stability; Relatedness and Self-Concept Brinkmann (2008). There are some school-related factors which influence students' adjustment in school. Boulton, Smith, & Cowie, (2010) identified Proper training to teachers; Adequate curriculum; Adequate recreational facilities; Classroom climate; Proper relationships between administrations; Evaluation system of the school; and Group Relationship in the Class (Lereya et al., 2015) as the most important factors affecting social adjustment.

Social Adjustment in Relation to Academic Performance of Mentally Retarded Students.

There are no basic social traits which may differentiate the young mild mentally retarded from the average child, however, there are distinguishing features between mild, average and severe mentally retarded students. The difference lies between the expectancies of society and the abilities of the young retarded to meet the requirements. Social competence for both the young normal child and the young retardate is susceptible to growth. It is always related to the demands of the particular environment in which the individual functions (Stormont, 2009). The young mentally retarded child, however, will be less able to cope with the many unfavorable conditions than to manage himself in favorable living conditions. Any limitation on his ability to cope regardless of the degree, may affect his total socialization. Consequently, he is more prone to have emotional problems because of limited intellectual abilities. This leads to a less clear understanding of his own problems (Ellis, 2015; Corey & Elliott, 2006). Given the above, the mentally retarded student is much likely to perform less averagely than the normal students do, given the high intellectual and social demands and expectations of the academic setting. Nonetheless, many studies like have identified that the mentally retarded can also

perform a little bit higher than how they do if provided with a relatively more favorable social and learning environment where they feel accepted, worthy and of course, unique.

Furthermore, a study by Corey and Stephen (2006) titled "Social Adjustment and Academic Achievement: A Predictive Model for Students with Diverse Academic and Behavior Competencies," examined the hypothesized relationship between social adjustment, as measured by perceived social support, self-concept, and social skills, and performance on academic achievement tests. Participants included 27 teachers and 77 fourth- and eighth-grade students with diverse academic and behavior competencies. Teachers were asked to select one student for each of the three participant nomination categories: undeveloped academic competence, undeveloped behavior competence, and proficient academic and behavior competence. Multivariate analysis of variance results indicated that each participant group differed significantly on social skills, and students with proficient academic and behavior competence demonstrated significantly greater levels of self-concept than did those with an undeveloped behavior competence. None of the groups differed significantly on perceived social support. Structural equation modeling analyses revealed that the model predicting academic achievement from self-concept, social skills, and academic competence adequately fit the data. Indicators of social adjustment were discussed as intervention targets for programs intended to improve students' social competence and academic achievement.

Mental retardation

Mentally retarded children are those children that have low intelligence in comparison with normal children and these are categorized into various degrees. Binet, (1908) introduced the concept of 'mental age'. He is on the idea that majority of children of a particular age are of normal intelligence and have an approximately mental level age. If a child is lower in his performance of certain tasks, from the majority of children of his age, then he is said to have a lower mental age. Therefore, mentally retarded individuals are those deficient in general



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intellectual ability. They are unable to take care for themselves with disruptive behavior.

Mental retardation in general is directly associated with many genetic conditions as well as psycho-social factors. Scott (1994) recognized three kinds of influences, they are: Organic risk factor such as Genetic disorders e.g. down syndrome, prenatal and perinatal factors, postnatal factors, etc. Polygenic inheritance which occurs when one characteristics controlled by two or more genes; and Psycho-social factors are child rearing practices, the home environment and family Luftig (1988) classified them into 3 groups: Pre-natal causes which includes genetic and chromosomal disorder; Infection during the first three months of pregnancy and Maternal diseases such as (diabetes, malnutrition, congenital defects of the central nervous system and exposure of the mother to x-rays during pregnancy); perinatal causes which includes: low birth weight and premature birth of the baby; Lack of oxygen immediately after birth; Excessive coiling of the umbilical cord around the neck of the newborn and prolonged labor and severe jaundice; and Postnatal causes they includes: Insufficient diet (malnutrition); Diseases (whooping cough, chickenpox, meningitis, German measles and pediatric AIDS); Seizure, brain tumors.

Characteristics of children associated with Mild Mental Retardation

Children from birth to school age are pre-disposed to varying growth and development processes that are exposes them to personality disposition. The interaction between environment and genetic factors depict varying characteristics manifestation. These characteristics are clearly noticed as: (a) Cognitive characteristics difficulty in giving their attention properly. Researchers have posited that we can attribute many of the cognitive problem of retarded individuals to attentional problems (eg, Brooks and McCauley, 1984; Zeamon and House, 1963). They have a very poor memory. When they are asked to remember something that was taught a few second previously, they do more poorly than the non-retarded (Borkowski, Peck, Samberg, 1983; Brown, 1974; Estes 1970). The

mildly retarded progresses at slower rate while the severely retarded exhibit inadequate language development. According to Mac Millan (1982), they tend to be under achievers in relation to expectations based on their intellectual level. (b) Personality characteristics which is associated with social and emotional inadequacy (Luftig, 1988; Zetlin and Murtaugh, 1988) and have poor self-concepts (Leahy, Balla, and Zigler, 1982). They also Lack of motivation both extrinsic and intrinsic. They have adjustment problem that is they feel helpless and worthless because of depression and frustration of psychological needs.

Methodology

Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. Population of the study comprises of all teachers in special education school in Gombe state. The total population of teachers (target respondents) is twenty-seven (37). Hence, sampling was not employed in this study. Data was collected through drop and pick methods, using adapted structured instrument (questionnaire) social adjustment scale developed by Mei- Yin, L., Huei – Shyong, W & Cheng-Jung, C. (2000). The initial instrument has 22 items, but was reduced to 18 items for the purpose of this study. The instrument is 10 point likert scale type, with range of strongly disagree as 1 to strongly agree as 10. The instrument is divided into 2 sections. Section 1 covering demographic characteristics of the respondents (age, gender, marital status and educational level). Section 2 contains 15 items measuring perception of teachers on influence of social adjustment on academic performance.

The adopted instrument was given to 2 experts in educational psychology and evaluation for their inputs to ascertain the validity of the content, suitability of the items and language appropriateness. They made valid inputs and all their observations were noted and captured into the main instrument. To ascertain the reliability of the instrument, the researchers conducted a pilot study on 10 teachers outside the population, using Cronbach's Alfa, the coefficient obtained was 0.82 which indicated high reliability of internal consistency of the items within the local environment. Similarly,



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0.85 was reported by the original developers of the instrument which also indicated high reliability. Using the 2, reported and calculated coefficients, the researchers concludes the instrument is valid and reliable for usage in this study as suggested by the rule of thumb (Cresswell, 2015). Data collected was analysed using descriptive (frequency count, percentage, mean and standard deviation) statistics to answer the research questions. IBM SPSS version 23 software was used in conducting the analysis and output from the software was used also for the categorization into High, Moderate and Low levels.

Results

The results of this study were presented based on the objectives stated. The analysis was done using descriptive (Mean and Standard Deviation) statistics, with the help of IBM SPSS version 23 software.

Research Question 1: What is the demographic characteristics distribution of the respondents?

Table 1: Respondents Demographic Characteristics Distribution (N= 37)

Variables	Freq	%	X	SD
Age				
High (45-60 years)	05	13.51	2.12	.591
Moderate (30-44 years)	22	59.46		
Low (22-29years)	10	27.03		
Gender				
Male	28	75.68	1.49	.501
Female	09	24.32		
Marital status				
Single	07	18.92	2.20	.719
Married	25	67.57		
Divorce/Widow	05	13.51		
Educational level				
NCE	22	59.46	2.51	.926
Degree	12	32.43		
Postgraduate	05	13.51		
Total	37			

Table 1 contains results on distribution and description of demographic characteristics (age, gender, marital status and educational level) of the respondents (teachers) of the

Gombe state special school. From the Table, age categorization was adopted, which shows 5 teachers, that is about 14% are in high category (45-60 years), 22 teachers, about 55.5% are in moderate age category (30-44 years), while only 10, 27% are in low category of (22-29 years) old and the overall mean of the age distribution is 2.12, with SD of .591. Gender distribution of teachers in Gombe state special school indicates that, out of the total number (37), only 9 are females, constituting about 25%, while 28 are males, with about 76% and overall mean of 1.49, with SD of .501. Moreover, the marital distribution of the respondents (teachers) indicates 25 are married, 7 are single and only 5 falls into divorced/widowed with only about 14% as depicted in Table 1. Educational level of the teachers indicated that 22 has NCE constituting about 60%, 12 has degree with 33% and only 5, about 14% has postgraduate certificates.

Respondents' mean of scores was computed and categorized into three. The study used range for setting up the cutoff point, which is the maximum score minus the minimum score for each of the variables in the study, which was then divided by the number of desired categories (in this study 3). Using range of low (1.00 – 4.00), moderate (4.01 – 7.00) and high (7.01 – 10.00) the levels for all the variables was determined and described below.

Research Question 2: What is the level of academic performance of mild mentally retarded students in Gombe State Special School in WAEC/NECO as perceived by the teachers?

Table 2: Respondents perception on level of academic performance in WAEC/NECO of mentally retarded students in Gombe state special school (N=37)

Level	Freq	Percentage
Low (1-4)	17	45.95
Moderate (4.01-7)	19	51.35
High (7.01-10)	01	2.70

Majority of Teachers in Gombe state special school perceived level of academic performance WAEC/NECO of mild mentally retarded students as moderate with 51%, while



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about 46% perceived the level as low and only about 3% perceived high as depicted in Table 1. However, going by the highest percentage of 51, we can deduce that the performance in WAEC/NECO of mild mentally retarded students falls in the moderate category.

Research Question 3: What is the perception of teachers in special education school on level of influence of social adjustment on academic performance of mild mentally retarded students in WAEC/NECO?

Table 3: Teachers perception on level of social adjustment influence on academic performance of mild mentally retarded students in WAEC/NECO (N=37)

Level	Freq	Percentage
Low (1-4)	09	24.32
Moderate (4.01-7)	12	32.43
High (7.01-10)	16	43.25

Teachers in Gombe state special school perceived the level of social adjustment on academic performance of mentally retarded students as high with 43%, about 33% perceived moderate while 24% perceived low. From the descriptions we can deduce that the majority of the teachers perceived high level of social adjustment on academic performance WAEC/NECO of mentally retarded students.

Major Findings

The following are the major findings of the study:

1. Gombe state special education school has both male and female teachers with different age categories, divergent marital status and varying educational qualification.
2. Academic performance in WAEC/NECO of mentally retarded students is in moderate level as perceived by the teachers.
3. Level of social adjustment influence on academic performance of mentally retarded students is high as perceived by the teachers.

Discussion

Available literature depicts varying findings on the perception of teachers on level of social adjustment on academic performance of mild

mentally retarded students in standardized tests. This study considers WAEC/NECO results as the standardized test, and only seek for the perception of teachers in Gombe state special school, as well as their perception on the level of social adjustment on academic performance of same students. The descriptive analysis shows that, teachers in Gombe state special school has diverse demographic characteristics. This has corroborated the earlier findings on teachers' demography in relation to performance of children in high school as reported by Karamera, (2013) were he noted that, high schools that facilitate learning requires teachers from different background and with different skills, which gives the students opportunities to learn from people with diverse culture, values, norms and interest. Although, special education schools have only students with special needs (Bouman, 2012), this study found that all teachers in the school are physically normal and are communicating with the special students in the language they understand better, this is as a result of training they received at their various teacher training institutes.

This study found level of academic performance of mild mentally retarded students at moderate level, this is in consonance with Griffins, (2016) and Brown (1974) where they reported poor memory of mentally retarded students, and also Mac Millan (1982) identified mild, severe and average mentally retarded students as under achievers in cognition, he asserts that mild category were found to be moderate in skills acquisition. Similarly, Zetling and Maustaug, (2018) noted that, severe mentally retarded students find it difficult to make friends, while the mild mentally retarded students make casual friends, they concluded that both groups are socially exclusive. The findings of this study, has further supported the previous findings, in this study, however, it may not be unconnected with how the mild mentally retarded students are handled both at home and in school, in terms of their feeding, sleeping area and other domestics compared with the normal students.

In another dimension, this study found that level of social adjustment on academic performance of mentally retarded students'



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falls between high and moderate category. This has also corroborated the earlier findings of Cassidy & Lynn, (2019) and Staunmont, (2009) who in separate reports identified social adjustment as one of the key factors that will help mild mentally retarded towards higher academic performance. Moreover, Brinkman (2008) and Ellis, (2015) noted that basic principles of adaptability, flexibility, stability and self-concept that guide the success of social adjustment, facilitate coping for mentally retarded students, and this will in the long-run help them in their academic performance.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, this study concludes that the teachers in Gombe state special school are heterogeneous and social adjustment has great influence on academic performance of mentally retarded students.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from this study, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Government should improve the condition of teachers in special education schools in terms of welfare package and training.
2. Government should make it a policy that, all mentally retarded persons between the ages of 5-7 are subjected to social adjustment programmes which will transit them into formal school system.
3. Parents of mentally retarded should improve their closeness with their children and also build in hope of their rehabilitation.
4. NGOs and other community based organizations should organize intervention programmes that mainly focus on mentally retarded students with the view of improving their academic performance.

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