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# Education of Children with Disability and their Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Rivers State, Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

The study examined the Education of Children with Disability and their Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Rivers state. This is as a result of the negative attitude we attach to these children in this part of the world. Again, the disabled children need special education which is technical and complex compared to ordinary formal education, A sample of 160 care givers/teachers drawn from four public secondary schools and the staff of Ministry of Education Special Unit in Rivers state was used. The main instrument for data collection was the questionnaire. A 23 item questionnaire was developed based on a modified 4- point Liken type scale duly validated by research experts. The reliability index was 0.86. The mean score was used to analyze the research questions while the chi-square ($X^2$) statistical tools was used for the hypotheses. The study revealed the relevance of education to the children with disability; that it is only with education that disabled people can contribute positively towards national development. And also, the efforts made by government towards them. Findings of this study revealed that when the necessary facilities and the right environment are provided, disabled children will exhibit ci stellar academic performance. As a result, the study concluded that parents, government and organizations should have a change of heart towards the education of children with disability as to boost their contributions towards national development.

**Keywords**: Disability, Child Rights, Academic Performance, Inclusive Education, Children

## INTRODUCTION

Africans are generally noted for having positive attitude towards childbearing and parenthood (Ansah-Yamoah, 1986). Prior to this good gesture is jubilation and merriment by members of the immediate families, Usually, every pregnant woman anticipates delivering a healthy and sound baby, but this hope and expectation is disrupted if the child is born disabled. Disability at any stage in one's life either

through birth, by accident sickness of both mental and physical health, etc results to some feelings- of dismay, anxiety, discouragement, horror, concerns and disappointments to the parents and members of the immediate family. The way the society regard people with disability most times affect their social lives as this makes them feel humiliated, rejected and assaulted, and as a result often induce them to commit suicide.

In the Nigerian traditional society, people view the presence of a disabled person in a family as an indication that someone has seriously sinned against the gods, deities and ancestral spirits (Obot & Mbipom, 1992). Disability was regarded as a way to punish the family that has committed sacrilege against their gods, deities or their ancestors (Nwanna-Nzewenwa, 1994). So many myths are attached to disability hence their families try to fast track their transition to the great beyond rather than evolving their potentialities. For instance, in Southern Nigeria, it is asserted that certain tribes indiscriminately exterminated their congenitally disabled children, by suffocating them to death at birth or sacrificing them to the gods or spirits of the ancestors to appease them (Tete, 2004). Even in this 21st Century, most children with disability still live under difficult circumstances, with negative attitudes, beliefs, labels and stigma which fights against their existence. Rivers State (Nigeria) is no exception to this aversive attitude towards the disabled.

The disabled children themselves face challenges which normal or able bodied children do not experience. Besides, most of them are denied intimacy and educational opportunities. Though legislations, declarations and policies have recognized their existence and awarded them some special rights and privileges, but most states and local governments often pay a lip service to their plights. Disability, special education and inclusive education have well been captured in the National Policy on Education (NPE 2004, 2013), Millennium Development Goals (MDG), 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Child Rights Act etc. However, the domestication and implementation of these policies/legislations remained as a quadratic equation, without a single answer.

This study tends to elicit interests in the education of the disabled so as to be encouraged towards effective contribution of their quota to national development, and this can be achieved through establishment of special schools.

**Statement of The Problem**

Efforts have been made in Rivers state in rehabilitating and improving a lot of children with disability in terms of welfare and their education through the establishment of one government special school for the handicap, the different Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) and some individuals. Yet there is still yearning for more, so as to completely eradicate the sight of disabled persons on the streets begging for alms. As the population increases rapidly, so does the population of the disabled also increase. Therefore, as schools are being established for regular children, considerations should also be made for the disabled ones.

Most children with disabilities in some parts of Rivers state are yet to be accepted as members of their communities. They are considered as people living on a sub-human level, incapable of self-support, education and socialization. It is noticed that this rejection behavior stemmed from cultural beliefs that are transmitted to its people from one generation to another and this led to the reception of the disabled from a negative perspective (Tete, 2004). Also uninformed parents in some parts of Rivers state are still affected with feelings of shock, denial, guilt, anger, shame, sorrows, rejection of the child and overprotectiveness in attitude and behavioral pattern, and in this case tend to hide or even allow the children out making them beggars on the road. By the time they realize that education could be useful for the child, he/she must have grown to adolescent age (Olubaniyi, 1980). Meanwhile, it is true that in a democratic society every citizen has an inherent or fundamental right of the opportunity to earn a living and contribute meaningfully towards the development of the society. The fulfilment of this inherent right is through education which has multiple effects of enhancing an individual ability, knowledge, skills, talent, etc towards earning a living (Mundi, 2008). This is further affirmed by the National Policy on Education (NPE, 2013) which states that special education is a formal educational training given to people with sl3ecial needs.

The problem which this study intends to resolve is how education can be a veritable tool in bringing out the potentials of the disabled, as to remove them from the street. It would investigate societal perceptions, effects and governmental/societal efforts towards alleviating this phenomenon through education.

**Objectives of The Study**

The study aims at examining the role of children with disability in Rivers state. In specific terns, the study is set out to;

1. Examine the importance of educating children with disability in Rivers State.
2. Examine the effects of disability on the children's education in Rivers State.
3. Examine the educational provisions for children with disability in Rivers State.
4. Proper solution to address the problems of the education of children with disability in Rivers State.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions were formulated to guide this study;

1. What is the importance of educating the children with disability in Rivers state?
2. What are the effects of disability on the children's education in Rivers state?
3. What provisions has the government and other agencies made for the education of children with disability in Rivers state?
4. How can the educational problems of children with disability be addressed in Rivers state?

**Research Hypothesis**

The hypotheses were stated in null form;

**$Ho_1$:** There is no significant difference between the mean score of children with disability and their access to education.

**$Ho_2$:** There is no significant difference between the mean score of children with disability and their academic performance.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### The Issue of Disability

Disability is described as impairment, activity limitations and participation restrictions. An impairment is a problem in body function or structure, while an activity limitation is difficulty encountered by any individual in executing a task or action (Wikipedia, 2019). The World Health Organization (WHO, 2996), in attempt to sort out issues concerning persons with disability defined it as any restriction or lack of ability to perform an activity in a manner or within a range considered normal for a human being.

The Oxford Learner's Dictionary (2007) refers to disability as a physical, mental condition or function judged to be significantly impaired relative to the usual standard of an individual or group. This means the inability of one to function as a normal person either as a result of physical, mental or emotional retardation.

Thus, disability is a complex phenomenon reflecting integration between features of a person's body and features of the society in which he or she lives.

Then, the Disability Act of Zimbabwe defines a disabled person as a physical, mental or sensory disability including a visual, hearing or speech functional disability which gives rise to physical, cultural or social barriers inhibiting him or her from participating at an equallevel with other members of society in activities, undertakings or fields of employment that are open to other members of the society (Disabled Persons Act, 1996).

Children with disability in Rivers state, Nigeria are often ignored and denied the opportunity of acquiring good education for their livelihood and national development.

Disability is included in the national agenda through the National Policy on Education (2004, 2013), yet it has not received the required publicity and implementation it deserves. It is only regarded as a charity or social welfare matter. The most impact of physical disability is felt in the individual mobility and motor skills (Ladipo, 2006). And the severity of physical involvement can be described in functional terms, according to the impact disability has on mobility, not on skills (Kirk and Gallagher, 1939).

Disability has several types like:

i. Physical
H. Sensory (Visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, somatosensory and balance disorder)
iii. Intellectual
iv. Mental health
v. Emotional and developmental disability

Disability is often caused by impairments to various subsystems of the body. According to the National Disability Survey carried out in Zimbabwe (1981), 17000 respondents answered that witchcraft was one major cause of disability (Department of Social Services, 1982).
The Inter Censual Demographic Survey (1997) identified the general causes of disability in Zimbabwe to include congenital birth defects, war, accidents, diabetes, and preventable diseases like polio, measles and tuberculosis.
UNICEF (2015) says its major causes of disability are disease, accidents, abnormal birth, malnutrition of a pregnant mother which leads to growth retardation of the foetus, malformations and poor brain growth of the foetus. Some causes of sight problems are cataracts and glaucoma. Other causes of disability are maternal rubella, otitis media and meningitis.
Children infected by HIV/AIDS and those who are terminally ill because of any other causes are classified as disabled (Herdmen et al, 1996). Congenital problems came in different ways including excess chromosomes in children which results in down syndrome and autism. And lack of certain minerals and vitamins can affect a child's health resulting in developmental and growth disorder.

**The Concept of Education**
Education in any society is geared towards the development of man so that he becomes useful to himself and to his entire society. With the aim of having man as a unit of development, education must not be discriminating but all inclusive. It is therefore paramount that in designing any educational programme, consideration and deep- rooted efforts must be directed to the peculiar needs of all, including those with disabilities.
Education is a discipline that is primarily concerned with the preparation of the young in the society as to become useful and functional members as they grow (Aminigo, 2009).
Education helps to prepare one to fit into the larger society to function economically, politically and socially in all areas of life. It is a systematic socialization of young by which they later learn religion and moral beliefs, feelings of nationality and collective opinions of all kinds. Education is a right for all. This is in line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 26 of 1948. And also, the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) on the achievement of Universal Primary Education, with the emphasis on ensuring that by 2015, children everywhere will be able to complete a full course of primary education.
Education is the key to the alleviation of poverty and ignorance in society. In relation to this, it is very necessary and important for every child of school age to acquire education as this helps to instill knowledge and skills in a person and bring oat the enormous creative potentials in the person.
As a result of the vitality and necessity of education, it is acceptable that none should be denied the opportunity as a result of physical or mental disorder.
This brings to fore, the dire need for special education. Special education is the education of children and adults who have learning difficulties because of different kinds of disabilities blindness, partial sightedness, deafness, hardness of hearing, mental retardation, social maladjustment and limb deformity or malformation due to circumstances of birth, inheritance, social position, mental and physical health patterns or accident in later life (National Policy on Education, 2004).
Special education is that type of education with specially designed instructions to meet the unique needs of people with disabilities (Osakwe, 2010).

**Effects of Disability on Children Education**

Disability has so many effects on the children's education depending on how severe it is and how it is managed.

Disability limits the extent of one's ability and participation. Those that need supportive facilities such as wheelchairs, brail, mobility, etc. cannot have access to education easily. Some severity of disabilities makes it difficult for the person to learn in an inclusive regular school system. It is only special education teachers that can teach them. Some intellectual disabilities bring about mental retardation, poor understanding and socialization. They are usually despised, intimidated and prejudiced by the society, which makes them feel inferior most of the time.

Lack of proximity to school is another major problem that affects education of children with disability. A lot of children with disability do not have easy access to school as a result of their condition. More especially those of them from low income families where parents cannot afford transport facilities to aid their children to school; a lot end up dropping out of school due to this frustration.

Also, as a result of disability, most parents do not know the appropriate educational placement and career for the disabled children. Such negative attitudes towards children with disabilities still persists till today.

The Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities was ratified in 2009 in the UK, with 145 signatories. Article 24 of the convention states that "persons with disabilities should not be excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary and secondary education on the basis of disability."

Persons with disability can access an inclusive, quality and free primary and secondary education on an equal basis with others. That reasonable accommodation of the individual's requirements are provided, they should receive support required within the general education system, etc.

Article 32 of the convention places an obligation on development partners to ensure that the international corporations are inclusive of and accessible to persons with disability (Education for All, Global Monitoring Report, 2007).

Inclusive education helps to reduce discrimination by enabling all children benefit from education and grow up together. Education gives children with disabilities skills to allow them play positive roles and to join the employment market thereby helping to curb the spread of poverty and ignorance.

**Theoretical Framework**

Several theories could be used to explain the relationship and attitudes of the society towards the education of the disabled. One of the prominent theories is the functionalist theory.

Functionalists view society as a system that is a set of interconnected parts which together form a whole. Functionalist analysis has a chequered history in sociology and is embedded in the work of Comte (1793-1857) and Spencer (1820-1903), and the theory was developed by Emile Durkhein (1858-191]). To them, an understanding of any part of the society requires an analysis of its relationship with other parts and most importantly of its contribution to the maintenance of that society. Following that perspective, Durkhein argued that education performs three major roles in society:

i. The transmission of societal norms and values.
ii. Prepares those subjected to it for corporate existence in the larger society.
iii. Equips individuals with the skills which they require for future occupation in the larger society.

On this theory, Parsons (1966) outlined that education functions as a bridge linking a family, a miniature society and a larger society. Going by the functionalist approach, the disabled children in our society especially in Rivers state need to be revisited through educational rehabilitation.

**Empirical Review**

Oladejo (2001) in his study on the problems and prospects of educating the Nigerian disabled child, pointed out the necessity of special education, and considered that individual differences must be identified. He recommended that special equipment and methods must be adopted to suit individual needs of the disabled children.

Osakwe (2010) carried out a study on educating people with special needs in Nigeria. He considered the challenge and the ways forward. He concluded that special education is usually in a classroom, with instructions involving unconventional techniques, materials, exercises, facilities and subject matters designed for children and adults who have physical deformities, behavioural disorders or learning disabilities. Other scholars have also done much work in this field of study for the benefit of people.

## METHODOLOGY

The design adopted in this study is the descriptive survey design. Data was collected from large sample drawn from the population, and the variables described in relation to the population, and against education of children with disability in Rivers state.

### Sample and Sampling Technique

The simple random sampling technique which is one of the types of probability sampling was adopted to draw a sample of one hundred and sixty (160) respondents made up of teachers, caregivers and staff of Ministry of Education. All the elements in the population were given equal and independent chances in the sample.

### Instrument for Data Collection

The main instrument for, data collection was a self-designed questionnaire titled, Children with Disability and Academic Performance (CDAPQ) designed to elicit information from teachers of the special schools and staff of the ministry. The questionnaire has 23 items based on the stated research questions and hypotheses. This was divided into two sections. Section A for the demographic data, while section B focuses on the research variables which centered on academic performance and children with disability. The instrument was designed based on the modified Likert 4-point scale as follows; Strongly Agree (SA) = 4 points; Agree (A) = 3 points; Disagree (D) = 2 points; and, Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 point.

To determine the reliability of the instrument, a test-retest method was adopted where the researcher used 20 of the pilot test. The reliability of the instrument was determined using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistics for the two tests, then the coefficient of reliability determined at 0.86. This was significantly high and the instrument considered reliable.

Both the primary and secondary data were used in this study. While the secondary data was collected from books, journals and other articles; primary data was obtained through information from questionnaire. A total of 164 questionnaires were administered, while 160 were retrieved and analyzed.

The data collected from the field were analyzed with mean score for the research hypothesis was tested with z-test statistical tool at 0.05 level of significance.

## DATA PRESENTATION

**Research Question 1:** What is the importance of educating the disabled child?

**Table 1: The Importance/Relevance of Education to Disabled Children**

| S/No. | Item - Statement | ∑fx | Sample | Mean | Criterion | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Education gives disabled children the opportunity to feel loved, for them to know that they are members of the society. | 450 | 160 | 2.81 | | Accepted |
| 2. | A disabled child can attend to his full potentials through education. | 472 | 160 | 2.95 | 2.50 | Accepted |
| 3. | Education will make disabled children to fully contribute their quota to national development | 479 | 160 | 2.99 | | Accepted |
| 4. | Through education disabled children will have a sense of belonging | 411 | 160 | 2.57 | | Accepted |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5. | Special education will give disabled children the required attention and education meant for them. | 516 | 160 | 3.23 | | Accepted |

**Source: Field Survey (2025)**

Table 1 has a mean score of item (1) 2.81; item (2) 2.95; item (3) 2.99; item (4) 2.57 and item (5) 3.23. All the items were accepted because they had a mean score of 2.50 criterion mean. This shows that education gives disabled children great opportunity and it is important for the development of the society.

**Research Question 2:** What are the effects of disability on the education of children?

**Table 2: Mean Score Analysis on the Effects of Disability on Children**

| S/No. | Item - Statement | ∑fx | Sample | Mean | Criterion Mean | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6. | Disability discourages most parents from sending their disabled children to school. | 442 | 160 | 2.76 | | Accepted |
| 7. | Learning disability, such as failing to master reading, spelling, writing skills can discourage children and cause them to drop out of school. | 432 | 160 | 2.70 | 2.50 | Accepted |
| 8. | The rural areas lack special schools, hence more disabled children cannot ;have access to proper education. | 515 | 160 | 3.22 | | Accepted |
| 9. | Some parents' attitudes towards their disabled children further hinder their chances of being educated. | 500 | 160 | 2.76 | | Accepted |
| 10. | Some disabled children in inclusive education feel ashamed in the presence of able children and this affects their performances. | 463 | 160 | 2.89 | | Accepted |

**Source: Field Survey (2025)**

Table 2 sought to answer on the effects of disability on the education of children. Item (6) 2.76; item (7) 2.70; item (8) 3.22; item (9) 2.76 and item (10) 2.89. All the items were accepted and this implies that disability discourages parents from sending their children to school, which results into dropout syndrome. Rural areas lack special schools hence proper education is also lacking for the disabled children and they have inferiority complex.

**Research Question 3:** *How has the government and other agencies provided for the education of the disabled children?*

**Table 3: Efforts of Government/Agencies Towards the Education of Disabled Children**

| S/No. | Item - Statement | ∑fx | Sample | Mean | Criterion Mean | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11. | Government has built special schools in the state to cater for the disabled children. | 351 | 160 | 2.19 | | Accepted |
| 12. | With the assistance of government and other agencies, most disabled children have been educated. | 442 | 160 | 2.77 | 2.50 | Accepted |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13. | Most government intentions concerning the disabled children have always ended up as policies not implemented. | 439 | 160 | 2.74 | Accepted |
| 14. | The special schools built by government and the facilities provided are not adequate for both rural and urban areas. | 496 | 160 | 3.10 | Accepted |
| 15. | Government and NGOs should build special schools for each of the local government areas of the state. | 520 | 160 | 3.25 | Accepted |

**Source: Field Survey (2025)**

Table 3 analyzes the efforts of government and other agencies towards the education of the disabled children. Item (ii) 2.19; item (12) 2.77; item (13) 2.74; item (14) 3.10 and item (15) 3.25. This reveals that government has not built enough special schools to cater for the disabled children. However, with the assistance of NGOs most disabled children have been educated. Special schools should be established even in rural areas.

**Research Question 4:** What are the best ways to address the problem of children with disability?

**Table 4: Solutions to the Problems of Education of Children with Disability**

| S/No. | Item - Statement | ∑fx | Sample | Mean | Criterion Mean | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 16. | Statistics of children with disability should be compiled and maintained by Ministry of Education for proper provision. | 495 | 160 | 2.50 | | Accepted |
| 17. | The education of children with special needs should be free at all levels and all necessary facilitates provided | 491 | 160 | 3.07 | 2.50 | Accepted |
| 18. | Children discovered to be having learning disability need persistent encouragement by both parents and teachers | 476 | 160 | 2.98 | | Accepted |
| 19. | Children with learning disability need special attention and service. | 500 | 160 | 3.13 | | Accepted |
| 20. | The society should accept disabled children the same way with able children | 488 | 160 | 3.05 | | Accepted |
| 21. | Disabled children will be regular in school attendance when the right environment is provided for them | 491 | 160 | 3.07 | | Accepted |
| 22. | Children with disability will perform well academically with the right condition. | 468 | 160 | 2.93 | | Accepted |
| 23. | The challenges faced by the disabled children need urgent government and private intervention | 504 | 160 | 3.15 | | Accepted |

**Source: Field Survey (2025)**

Table 4 analyzed the solutions to the problems of educating the disabled children. Item (16) 3.09; item (17) 3.07; item (18) 2.98; item (19) 3.13; item (20) 3.05; item (21) 2.75; item (22) 2.93 and item (23) 3.15. All the items on this table were accepted. This therefore reveals that a way forward is to take the statistics of children with disability in the state for proper planning and provision of education to them. ft also revealed that the challenges faced by the disabled children need urgent intervention by both government and private organizations.

**Testing of Hypotheses**

As the hypotheses are stated in null form, they are usually tested against the alternative hypothesis. In testing the hypotheses, we calculate the value of test statistics and compare it with the critical value.

**Decision:** Reject the null hypothesis if the calculated value of the test statistics is greater than the critical value, otherwise don't reject. Chi-square was used in testing the hypothesis for significant relationship between the variable of 0.05 level of significance.

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant relationship between disabled children and their access to education.

**Table 5:**

| Item | Total | $X^2$-cal | $X^1$-tab | Df | Level Sig. | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | 442 | 13.08 | | | | |
| 7 | 430 | | 7.82 | 3 | 0.05 | |
| **Total** | **872** | | | | | |

**Source: Field Survey (2025)**

Table 5 shows that the chi-square value 13.08 is greater than the critical value 7.82 at 0.05 level of significance. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative accepted that there is a significant relationship between disabled children and access to education.

**Hypothesis 6:** There is no significant relationship between disabled children and their academic performance.

**Table 6: Analysis of Relationship Between Disabled Children and their Academic Performance**

| Item | Total | $X^2$-cal | $X^1$-tab | Df | Level Sig. | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 21 | 491 | 3.57 | | | | |
| 22 | 468 | | 7.82 | 3 | 0.05 | |
| **Total** | **959** | | | | | |

**Source: Field Survey (2025)**

Table 6 shows that the chi-square value is 3.57 which is less than the critical value of 7.82 at 0.05 level of significance. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted that there is no significant relationship between disabled children and their academic performance.

**Findings**

1. It was revealed that education is very paramount to every child including the disabled. Giving them the opportunity of education makes them feel loved and accepted.
2. Several factors affect the education of the disabled children like discouragement and abandonment by parents and teachers, insufficient special schools, inferiority complex, etc.
3. That the efforts of government and other organizations through commendation is not enough to cater for all disabled children in the state.
4. It is also revealed that statistics of children with disability should be taken for proper education planning.
5. Disability in children is not a hindrance to a better academic performance.

**Conclusion**

The growth of human society depends almost entirely on the contributions of members. The disabled people are without any doubt members of the Nigerian society that can contribute meaningfully if provided with the enabling environment. Therefore, to achieve this lofty objective, all Nigerians including those with disability need to be properly and adequately educated. Special education should be provided for the disabled to train them to be useful to themselves and the society.

It is inhuman to treat the disabled discriminatorily and disdainfully as it affects their education and social integration. Rather, they should be treated with respect and given education.

Parents, NGOs and government should ensure that they provide all the needs for the education of the disabled children.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made:

1. The parents' attitudes towards the disabled children should change since it is no fault of any person to be victims. They should rather be caring, loving and supportive.
2. Government at all levels should ensure that proper statistics of all disabled children are taken in order to provide them with education.
3. Government should build more of the special schools to accommodate the teeming disabled children from all the local government areas as well as equip the existing ones.
4. There should be proper implementation of the national policy on education as regards to special education and children with disabilities.
5. Children with learning disabilities need persistent support and encouragement by teachers, parents and society at large.

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