

An assessment of educational provisions for the deafblind children in the southwestern Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

Children with deafblindness do present some unusualness. This is because they are often faced with more challenges than faced by other children who have single disabilities of either blindness or deafness. There is perhaps no other condition as disabling as deafblindness characterized by partial or total loss of vision and hearing. A single disability involving either sense of hearing or that of sight could be very devastating how much more the loss of both, (Mba, 1995).

Deafblindness is defined as a combination of both auditory and visual disabilities which results into some severe disorders of communication, developmental and learning skills to the extent that concerned individuals may not be appropriately educated by a particular special education designed for children having either hearing or visual impairment except some supplementary provisions are offered to meet their additional educational needs resulting from their twin disabilities (IDEA, 1990). Similarly, deafblind children could be considered as those with some significant hearing loss and some visual impairments which needs could be better met by some special provisions in addition to ones provided for hearing impaired children (Bond, 2000). Furthermore, such children could be having some significant visual disability and some hearing impairment that warrant special considerations as visually impaired persons.

Miles (2003) observed that person who are deafblind has a unique experience of the world different from that of individuals who can see and hear. For the latter, the world extends as far as their sight and hearing could reach, but for the former, the world is much narrower. For instance, if they are profoundly deaf and totally blind, their

experience of the world extends only as far as the fingertips can reach. Miles added that he is completely alone except someone touches him. Therefore, their concept of the world is largely determined by what or whom they have previously had opportunity to contact physically. However, if a deafblind person has some residual sight and hearing his experience of the world could be enlarged.

It is not always easy for the sighted and normally hearing persons to identify which of the dual disabilities of deafness and blindness is worse than the other. However, individuals having deafblindness could more easily determine that. For instance, Hellen Keller, the famous deafblind genius identified that the problems of deafness are more complex, if not more important than those of blindness. According to her, deafness is a much worse misfortune due to the loss of the most vital stimulus for perceiving words and sounds. Mba (1981) also agreed with this view since becoming blind merely implies losing some opportunities for perceiving things visually. Such loss is not as delimiting as losing the ability to auditorily perceive voice and sounds. Ability to hear voice and sounds facilitates some vital developmental skills such as required for developing speech and language, fostering reasoning and promoting intellectual growth.

Indeed, such children do encounter more problems to contend with than children having single disability of hearing or sight. Heward, (2000) listed such problems as difficulties in (i) acquiring communication, (ii) motor skills, (iii) mobility and (iv) developing appropriate social behaviour. More importantly, the difficulties these children encounter might have in no small measure contribute to the fact that their states of helplessness do compel them into resigning to their fate rather than striving for attainments. Mba, (1995) noted that beside communication difficulties, deaf blind children have a basic need for adjustment. In other word, they need to meaningfully interact with their environment physically and socially. But their disabilities do adversely impede the development of necessary communication and social skills in such individuals. Such difficulties could be more aggravated if such children do have some degrees of mental retardation (Heward, 2000).

More than often, the crushing blows of these disabilities as well as individuals who receive them are usually far less thought of or cared for than for individuals with single disabilities. This, as Miles (2003) observed may be as a result of the fact that individuals with deafblindness are usually very few in number.

PREVALENCE OF DEAFBLIND CHILDREN

Bond (2000) approximated deaf blind as 1/10, 000 school aged children. There are over 10,000 children in United States diagnosed with deaf blindness (Baldwin, 1999). Adults with deaf blindness were estimated to be between 35, 000 and 40, 000 (Watson & Taff-Watson, 1993). Baldwin (1992), also noted that 94% of individual's labeled deaf blind

have some functional hearing and / or vision. In Nigeria, Mba (1995) estimated 3/10, 000 children to be deaf blind.

EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF DEAFBLIND CHILDREN

Being a unique phenomenon, deafblindness has its specific concept, terminology and assessment procedures distinct from that of blindness or deafness. Consequently, Miles (2003) opined that deaf blindness implies a disability resulting in severe communication and other developmental needs that cannot be accommodated in special education programme solely for children with deafness or children with blindness. In addition, Pollack (1997) stressed that the occurrence of other disabilities will significantly add to the complexity of educating such children.

This is because the senses of sight and hearing are unquestionably the two primary avenues by which information and knowledge are absorbed by an individual, thereby providing a direct access to the world in which he lives (Smithdas, 1981). The loss of these senses therefore drastically reduces the opportunities for one to learn meaningfully.

Consequently, education for such children is usually far more complicated than the education of the deaf or that of the blind (Mba, 1995). This is because while the education of the deaf is visually oriented, that of the blind is auditorilly oriented. Consequently, education of the deaf blind children cannot be effective if it relies entirely on either of the two approaches. As Miles (2003), put it, children with deafblindness need to be singled out educationally to ensure that the concerned children have opportunities to develop fully their potentials.

So Education programmes for such children should therefore include provisions of means for compensating for their gross deficits, making use of education programme for children who are deaf is not always effective for children with limited vision since such programme usually concentrate on the use of sight. Conversely, making use of educational programmes for visually- impaired children will require good hearing since much of the classroom instruction is auditorilly mediated.(Heward, 2003)

In essence, miles (2003) enumerated the major aspects which education for deaf blind children should adequately address as follows:

1. communication – improving communication skills of these children through activities such as touch uses, gesture symbols, object symbols, sign language etc.
2. orientation and mobility – providing these children with help learning that will enable them move about in the world or in their neighbourhood.
3. team teaching approach- this stresses the need for involving trainers who are very competent in providing necessary services for the combined disabilities

of deafness and blindness not for those that are trained to offer services for persons with single disabilities.

4. compensatory education- necessary for fostering the deficient intellectual process in children having deafblindness.
5. individualized education- engaging each deafblind child in a highly individualized education programmed specifically designed to meet his unique needs

SPECIAL EDUCATION IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA

Nigeria, the most populous African country has about 120, 000.000 people. It is made up of 36 states which are further compartmentalized into six regions. The southwest region is made up of six states which are Oyo, Ogun, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti and Lagos states. These are states of the Yoruba speaking Nigerians



The red bordered Area Showing the Southwestern Region of Nigeria

Much of the Nigerian population is concentrated at the southern regions which in addition to the southwest include southeast and southsouth (Bloomsbury, 2000). More importantly, states in the southwestern region are regarded as the educationally advantaged ones. This is because western education in Nigeria took off much earlier in this region than in some other regions. In addition, there are more literate people in this region than in some other regions.

Similarly, Special Education began relatively earlier in southwest than in some other regions. While some informal attempts at educating children and youths with disabilities began in 1950s, special education formally began in 1960s by missionaries. For instance, Pacelli School for the blind and Wesley school for the Deaf (both in Lagos states) were established in 1962 (Abosi, 1988). In 1963, Ibadan School for Deaf (in Ibadan, the capital city of Oyo state) was established. These stated as mission schools before government took over them.

Henceforth, more special schools were founded. It must be noted that University of Ibadan (the Nigerian premier university) initiated a full-fledge Department of Special education in 1976. This was the first tertiary institution in Nigeria to commence higher education programmes for individuals who will train disable youths and adults at primary and secondary levels. In 1977, the Federal government established the Federal College of Education (Special) at Oyo (a town of few kilometers away from Ibadan) was established. This college was rated the best of its kind (in terms of staff qualifications and the concentration of handicap students) in West, East, North and Central Africa (UNESCO, 1996). It is very interesting to note that this college as well as the University of Ibadan is located in the Southwest Nigeria.

In view of the presented status of special education in southwest Nigeria, it is therefore important to examine the state of education for deafblind children in the same region.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study sought to find answers to the following questions

1. how many deafblind school children are there in the southwest Nigeria
2. what sort of identification procedures are used to screen deafblind children?
3. are there special placement programmes for them?
4. what sort of educational programmes are available for them?

METHODS

Selected special schools for deaf and blind children in Southwest Nigeria were visited in order to provide answers to the above questions. Making use of some structured questionnaire and direct observations, the researcher and his assistants met with the necessary school personnel and the concerned school children. While the questionnaire

was administered on some necessary school administrators and classroom teachers, identified deafblind children were directly observed and interviewed.

FINDINGS

Findings of the study are presented by school by school in each state of Southwest Nigeria.

1. Oyo State

School 1: Ibadan School for the Deaf, Ibadan

Sch. Pop.	No. of Deafblind	%	Age bracket	Sex		classes	Major Disability	Minor Disability
				M	F			
147	11	7.48	8-19 years	6	5	Prep. 2 Pry. 1=4 Pry. 2 =3 Pry. 4 =1 Pry. 6=1	Deafness	Blindness

School 2: School for the Handicapped, Oyo Town.

Sch. Pop.	No. of Deafblind	%	Age bracket	Sex		classes	Major Disability	Minor Disability
				M	F			
82	5	4.1%	9-20	5	-	Pry. 4 =3 Pry. 5=2	Deafness	blindness

2. Ondo State

School 1: Ondo State School for the Deaf. Akure.

Sch. Pop.	No. of Deafblind	%	Age bracket	Sex		classes	Major Disability	Minor Disability
				M	F			
312	10	31.2	10-25	6	4	Pry. 3 = 2 Pry. 5 = 5 Pry. 6 = 3	Deafness	Blindness

School 2: Ondo State School for the Blind. Owo.

Sch. Pop.	No. of Deafblind	%	Age bracket	Sex		classes	Major Disability	Minor Disability
				M	F			
73	-		6-25	-	-	-	Deafness	Blindness

3. Ogun State

School: Ogun State School for the Handicapped. Ijebu Ode

Sch. Pop.	No. of Deafblind	%	Age	Sex		classes	Major Disability	Minor Disability
				M	F			
31	1	0.31	12	1	-	Pry. 4	Deafness	blindness

School 2: Ade Okubanjo Model School for the Blind. Ijebu Igbo

Sch. Pop.	No. of Deafblind	%	Age bracket	Sex		classes
				M	F	
59	-	-	-	-	-	-

4. Lagos State

School 1: Wesley School for the Deaf (Schools 1 & 2) Lagos

Sch. Pop.	No. of Deafblind	%	Age bracket	Sex		classes	Major Disability	Minor Disability
				M	F			
42	3	1.26	9-18	2	1	Pry. 3 = 1 Pry. 4 = 1 Pry. 6 = 1	Deafness	Blindness

Pacelli School for the Blind Lagos

Request for investigation was not granted by the school authority.

5. Ekiti State

School 1: Ekiti State School for the Blind, Ikere Ekiti

Sch. Pop.	No. of Deafblind	%	Age	Sex		classes	Major Disability	Minor Disability
				M	F			
35	1	0.35	25	1	-	Pry. 4	Blindness	Deafness

School 2: Ekiti State School for the Deaf, Ikere Ekiti

Sch. Pop.	No. of deafblind	%	Age	Sex		classes	Major Disability	Minor Disability
				M	F			
217	1	2.17	20	1		Pry. 5	Deafness	Blindness

6. Osun State

School: Osun State School for the Handicapped. Osogbo

Sch. Pop.	No. of Deafblind	%	Age	Sex		Classes
				M	F	
34	-	-	-	-	-	-

School 2: Ijesa School for the Handicapped. Ilesa

Sch. Pop.	No. of Deafblind	%	Age	Sex		Classes
				M	F	
25	-	-	-	-	-	-

DISCUSSIONS

Findings of this study are discussed under four major sub-headings. They are (1) Lack of specific school/ centre for the deafblind, (2) Screening/referral procedures, (3) placement and educational programmes for the deafblind and (4) personnel and instructional matter.

1. Lack of Specific Schools/ Centres for the Deafblind

The study found out that in the entire southwest of Nigeria, there is no single school, home or centre specifically established for providing education or rehabilitation for deafblind children or adults. As would have be noticed from the findings, identified deafblind school children were found in schools either meant for deaf children or blind children

2. Screening/ Referral Procedures

Morethanoften, disabled children are referred to special schools only when their hearing or visual disabilities appear obviously disturbing to parents, guardians or relations. At special schools, authorities often merely observe the presented children for admission. There are often no proper facilities to undertake formal screening. Therefore, many school children do not undergo hearing or visual tests before they are admitted into the schools. The fact their disabilities are profound enough for everyone to notice renders them eligible for admission.

Many children are without case histories or medical records. This has made it difficult for this study to record some vital issues such as the onsets, degrees, and types of deafness or blindness in the observed schoolchildren. Few children who

have the listed information in their records are those whose parents have endeavoured on their own to undertake screening tests for them. There was also a reported case of a non- governmental organization (NGO) which visited and undertook screening tests for selected children in some schools.

3. Placement/Educational Programme

Just as there are no specific schools for the deafblind in southwest Nigeria, there are also no specific placement programmes for these children in schools they attend. They are usually placed along side other children who are either profoundly deaf or blind. Consequently, there are no specific or individualized education programmes for them. Morethanoften, a deafblind child is taught by the teaching methods applicable to his major disability. For instance, if deaf blind child is attending the school for the blind, he will be taught by the education methods or materials meant for teaching the blind children. The same applies to those who attend special schools for the deaf. Needs occasioned by their minor disabilities are often unattended to.

4. Personnel/ Instructional Material Problems

It is very difficult to identify (if any) how many deafblind specialists are there in southwest Nigeria. Teachers teaching these children were either professionally trained to teach deaf children or blind children. They therefore have no required skills for teaching children with combined disabilities of deafness and blindness. Ditto for the instructional materials available in the visited schools. The implication is that some of the key education needs of deafblind children such as communication, mobility, orientation and individualized education earlier enumerated in this paper are not likely to receive the necessary attention via the education provisions for deafblind children in southwest Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study therefore recommends that each of the listed problems facing the education of the deafblind in southwest Nigeria should be promptly and adequately addressed by:

- (i) Undertaking a comprehensive census of children with deaf blindness with the required personnel and facilities. The census should be intensive involving schools and all setting where children with disabilities can be found. This should be done by using appropriate facilities required for establishing meaning biodata of the children including the onset causes, types and degrees of their deafblindness.
- (ii) Establishment of specific schools, units or classes for training children with deaf blindness. Since their type of education is distinct from that of the children with blindness or deafness, their educational programmes should therefore be unique as necessitated by their conditions. This recommendation

goes along with the need for training required specialists who will competently teach these children. In addition required teaching facilities should be adequately provided.

- (iii) Active involvement of the government and non government organization in the education for the deafblind children. Regardless of how few these children could be, the fact remains that they deserve the attention and provisions by the government and non governmental organization.

CONCLUSION

Consequent upon the findings of this study, it is indeed a very difficult assertion for one to say that there are educational programmes for deafblind children in Southwest Nigeria. Though the findings of this study appear discouraging, it may turn out to be a heart warming development if the findings result in initiating an appropriate and adequate education programmes for deafblind children in Southwestern Nigeria.

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