

Effectiveness of Role Play and Bibliotherapy in Attitude Change of Primary School Pupils towards Learners with Special Needs in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: *The research addressed two major problems, namely, the persistent negative attitude towards learners with special needs; and the effectiveness of role play and bibliotherapy in changing the attitude of primary school pupils towards their differently-abled fellow students.*

Method: *Two null hypotheses guided the conduct of the study. Albert Bandura's Theory of Social Learning (1977) provided the theoretical framework for the study and the Solomon four-group design was followed in practice. The study population consisted of all the Primary Six school pupils in the 502 primary schools in Owerri educational zone. From a total of 76,481 Primary Six pupils, a sample of 80 students from two schools was selected for the study. One instrument -Attitude Towards the Disabled Rating Scale (ATDRS) -and two programmes -Nwachukwu's Role Play Exercise Programme (NRPEP) and Nwachukwu's Bibliotherapy Programme (NBP) - were used for the successful implementation of the study, which was validated by experts. The hypotheses were tested using t-test for correlated and independent samples.*

Results: *The findings indicated that the pupils' attitudes towards learners with special needs in Owerri educational zone improved significantly after they were exposed to the NRPEP and NBP respectively, indicating the effectiveness of the two programmes.*

Conclusion: *Education policy makers, the Ministry of Education and State Universal Basic Education Boards should recommend the use of inclusion books and encourage the practice of role play in schools for the success of inclusive education in Nigeria.*

Key words: *Role play, bibliotherapy, attitude, learners with special needs.*

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INTRODUCTION

Persons with special needs have been subjected to different forms of maltreatment from time immemorial. Evidence of this social injustice has often been documented. According to Kisanji (2000), history is replete with instances of persons with special needs worldwide who were ridiculed, killed, and abandoned to die or condemned to permanent exclusion in asylums. The Greeks abandoned persons with special needs to drown in rivers. In Europe, Nero Commodious is said to have shot arrows at persons with physical disabilities and, in the fifteenth century, the Church sanctioned the extermination of people with special needs. Coleridge (2002) traces the killing of people with special needs throughout history, beginning with the Spartans who killed persons with special needs as a matter of law; the endorsement by Martin Luther to kill babies with special needs because they were incarnations of the devil; the English Eugenicists who eliminated persons with special needs under the Darwinian evolution theory of survival of the fittest; and the Nazi euthanasia programme under Hitler which targeted persons with special needs on the pretext that they could not contribute to society. Nigeria was no different, as persons with special needs were thrown into the evil forest to die, and some were even killed because they were perceived to be evil children (Abang, 1992; Kisanji, 2000).

In a typical Nigerian primary school, comprised of children between 5 – 12 years of age, hailing from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, and irrespective of gender and the school location, studies have shown that both teachers and pupils express negative, minimally positive or neutral attitudes towards persons with special needs and their inclusion into regular classrooms (Chukwu, 1991; Ejiasi, 1992; Dada, 2007; Kolawole, 2008). These attitudes are manifested in different ways: name-calling (the use of various derogatory labels, both in vernacular and in English language such as deaf, dumb, idiot, moron, and crippled), marginalisation, bullying, and acceptance or rejection.

Since attitudes are learned and are predicable, psychologists believe that one's beliefs and behaviour can be altered using techniques found in theory and research. Attitudes towards persons with special needs can be changed either incongruently (i.e., from positive to negative, or negative to positive) or congruently (i.e., increasing the negativity/positivity of an existing attitude) (Ozaji and Mugu, 1999). Attitude change means the acquisition, reversal or intensification of an attitude (Johnson and Matros, 1975; Ozaji, 1991). Formation of an attitude is also integral to change in attitudes. As individuals have new

experiences and acquire fresh information, attitudes undergo change. This has necessitated employing changed theories and techniques for planned attitude change towards persons with special needs.

Bibliotherapy is the use of books as strategies of attitude change (Nwazuo, 1996). It consists primarily of providing well-chosen books to pupils in order to increase self-esteem and self-knowledge, and to find relief from personal conflicts. In order to meet the global demand for an all-embracing inclusive school climate in Nigerian primary schools, role play and bibliotherapy become relevant tools for attitude change towards persons with special needs.

Many pupils are frightened when persons with special needs and/ or differences are mainstreamed into their class. They have heard others describe them in negative terms such as “the afflicted”, “burden”, “crippled”, “blind”, “deaf”, “idiot”, “unfortunate” and “victims”. Psychological and school-based attempts have been made to modify and/ or change these negative attitudes to facilitate the inclusion of persons with special needs into the global community. Despite attempts such as persuasive communication, behaviour modification, experiential approach and cognitive theories, there are still marked indicators, parameters and incidences of negative attitudes towards persons with special needs in the local communities, necessitating the present attempt to use role play and bibliotherapy for attitude change. The elimination of this persistent, generally negative attitude towards pupils with special needs, and the creation of a learning environment that enhances the potential for positive social interaction of all learners in an inclusive classroom, formed the basis for this study.

Bandura’s Theory of Social Learning

Bandura, (1977) opined that apart from classical or and operant conditioning, human beings and some animals also learn through social means. He demonstrated that observations of filmed or life models engaging in fear provoking interactions (such as snake phobias) is effective in eliminating or reducing fears or phobias. He conducted experiments on nursery school children who were exposed to film of aggressive adults (models) hitting a plastic doll (victim) for a few minutes. The result was that children who watched the aggression towards the doll behaved in a similar way while those children who did not see the film were not aggressive to the doll.

Bandura’s view of human nature has implications for the study as it forms one of the theoretical bases for the study. The most important aspects of our behaviour

are learned from other persons in the society such as our family, friends and culture. Furthermore, observational learning is a key aspect of how we learn and that behaviour, environment and person/cognitive factors are important in understanding development. Thus, beliefs, plans and thinking can interact in a reciprocal manner to form likes and dislikes towards persons and objects. Bandura further opined that persons can act to change the environment and that the information we glean from observing others influences our behaviour.

Bandura's emphasis on models fit into the present research framework. He stated that the real life and symbolic models influences the observer and have implication for the study. Since role play deals with acting out real life issues and symbolic models with non-living models that represent the real life models, Bandura's principle of modelling has implications for the study.

Objectives

The specific objectives of this study were:

1. To determine the effectiveness of role play in changing attitudes of primary school pupils in Owerri educational zone towards learners with special needs, and
2. To determine the effectiveness of bibliotherapy in changing attitudes of primary school pupils in Owerri educational zone towards learners with special needs.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are postulated, to be tested at 0.05 significance level:

1. There will be no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of experimental group 1 on the Attitude Towards the Disabled Rating Scale of primary school pupils towards learners with special needs as a result of exposure to the role play treatment programme.
2. There will be no significant difference between the post-test mean scores of control group 2 and experimental group 2 on the Attitude Towards the Disabled Rating Scale of primary school pupils towards learners with special needs after exposure to bibliotherapy treatment programme.

METHOD

Study Design

The Solomon four-group experimental design (Krathwohl, 1993), was used in order to establish the effectiveness of role play and bibliotherapy as techniques to change attitudes of primary school pupils towards learners with special needs. According to Krathwohl (1993), the Solomon four-group design makes use of two experimental groups and two control groups. One experimental group and one control group are pre-tested, while the remaining experimental group and control group are not. The two experimental groups receive further treatment while the control groups do not receive any treatment. Solomon four-group design proposes that all the four groups are given a post-test at the end of treatment. This was carried out in the current study.

Population and Sample

The population for the study consisted of all the Primary Six school pupils in the 502 primary schools in Owerri educational zone of Imo State, a total of about 76,481 students (Imo State Universal Basic Education Board - IMSUBEB, 2010). Primary school pupils were chosen on the basis that, at this level, their feelings, emotions and behaviour could be better shaped and given the right attitudinal direction for the success of the inclusive education programme of the Federal Government of Nigeria.

A sample size of 80 was used in the research. Two primary schools were randomly selected from Owerri educational zone of Imo state. The schools chosen were one urban and one rural school as experimental and control groups. The choice of a sample of 80 pupils for the experimental aspect of the study was considered adequate because it is in line with the views of Gay (1976), Anderson (1990), Akinboye and Akinboye (1998) and Sidhu (2002), that for causal comparative and experimental studies, a minimum sample of 15 per group would give some confidence that conclusions reached concerning differences between groups is valid. Furthermore, the sample size represented about 10% of the accessible population of Primary Six pupils that was selected from the sampled schools. This was also in line with the recommended size of 10% for a population of few thousands by Eze (2005).

Sampling Technique

The quota sampling technique and the proportionate stratified sampling technique were used. Stratified sampling according to Awotunde et al (1997) is a method of obtaining a sample by dividing the population of sampling units into non-overlapping groups or categories (called strata) and then selecting a simple random sample from each group or category. Krathwohl (1993) sees it as the process of classifying the units in a sampling frame into strata on the basis of a characteristic that, if not properly represented in the sample, might bias the inferences.

The researcher's choice of the stratified random sampling technique was based on the fact that the research sorts for data from the urban and rural male and female respondents. The choice is also meant to reduce the variability of the characteristics in each stratum, to allow the same representations and to reduce sample size (or using the sample size, allows for more exact estimation of the population characteristic and surer estimate). It further facilitates the analysis of strata and hence of subgroups of the population, thereby easing comparison of subgroups as the pupils are stratified according to gender and locality.

Data Collection

One instrument and two programmes were used as treatments. Attitude Towards the Disabled Rating Scale (ATDRS) adapted from Ozoji's (1988) Attitude Towards the Blind Rating Scale (ATBRS) constituted the instrument for the pre-test and post-test data collection. The treatment comprised two programmes -Nwachukwu's Bibliotherapy Programme (NBP) and Nwachukwu's Role Play Exercise Programme (NRPEP), developed by the researcher. NRPEP is based on the activities that portray the everyday life of persons with special needs in the core areas of learning, communication, and locomotion and/or movement. NRPEP is designed for the able-bodied pupils to experience the life challenges of persons with special needs with a view to changing their mind set towards them. The able-bodied pupils are made to go through the everyday life activities of persons with special needs in the core areas of learning, communication and movement. The programme contains the following features: topic, content, activities, teaching aids and evaluation guides.

The NRPEP lasted for 14 weeks. The first and last week were intended for pre- and post- tests, and the remaining 12 weeks were used for the actual treatment. The Nwachukwu's Role Play Exercise Programme (NRPEP) covers areas such

as object identification with blindfold on, sign language, Braille and mobility techniques involving use of long cane, wheelchairs and crutches to move about.

The NBP is designed in line with two story books - *The Class Bully* and *The Magic Stone* - which portray the heroic deeds of persons with special needs, and is meant to change the attitude of primary school pupils towards them. *The Class Bully* contains eight sections while *The Magic Stone* contains three sections. Each of the sections in both story books ends with some evaluation questions.

Nwachukwu's Bibliotherapy Programme (NBP) contained the following features: week, topic, content, objectives, duration, researcher and pupils' activities, instructional aids and evaluation guides. The programme lasted for 14 weeks. The first and last weeks of the programme were meant for the pre-test and the post-test using Attitude Towards the Disabled Rating Scale (ATDRS).

The sections of the two story books were merged and divided into Topic and Contents. Such topics and contents include the class bully, the class bully and the cripple, and the magic stone, the blind boy and Nze. Objectives, duration, researcher and pupils' activities are stated for each topic and content as guides to the treatment programme.

Data Analysis

After the application of the Solomon four-group design to the experimental and control groups, the pre- test and post-test scores of the samples on the ATDRS were collated according to the groups. The t-test statistical method was used to compare/determine results involving two groups after treatments.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 (H01): There will be no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean score of experimental group 1 on attitude Towards the Disabled Rating Scale of primary school pupils towards learners with special needs as a result of exposure to Role Play Treatment Programme (NRPEP).

Table 1: Result of t-test Analysis of Mean Difference between Pre-Test and Post-Test (NRPEP) Attitude Towards the Disabled Rating Scale (ATDRS)

Stage of Test	Mean	SD	dF	t – cal	t – critical	Sig. Level
Pre-test	46.9	4.70	19	5.73	1.729	0.05
Post – test	90.4	12.25				

Table 1 shows that the mean ATDRS score for pupils at the pre-intervention stage was 46.9 while at the post intervention stage the mean was 90.4. The Table also shows a calculated t- score of 5.73 and a critical table value of 1.72 at 0.05 level of significance with a degree of freedom of 19. Since the calculated t is greater than the t- table value, Hypothesis 1 is rejected. This means that there is significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test mean scores of experimental group I on ATDRS after exposure to NRPEP.

Hypothesis 2 (H02): There will be no significant difference between the post-test mean score of control group 2 and experimental group 2 on Attitude Towards the Disabled Rating Scale of primary school pupils towards learners with special needs after exposure to the bibliotherapy treatment programme (NBP).

Table2: Result of t-test Analysis of Mean Difference between Post-Test Control Group 2 and Post-Test (NBP) Experimental Group 2 Attitude Towards the Disabled Rating Scale (ATDRS)

Stage of Test Post	Mean	SD	dF	t – cal	t – critical	Sig. Level
(Cont. Grp 2) Post	43.15	8.83	38	9.87	1.68	0.05
(Expt. Grp 2)	95.95	7.05				

Table 2 shows the summated NBP mean score of the pupils at the post-intervention stage for the control group 2 and the experimental group 2 to be 43.15 and 95.95 respectively. The Table further shows a calculated t- score of 9.87 and a t- table value of 1.68 at 0.05 level of significance. The interpretation is that since the calculated t- value (9.87 is greater than the table value of t 1.68) Hypothesis 2 is hereby rejected. This implies that the treatment had a significant effect on the pupils' ATDRS scores. Hence there is a significant difference between the post-intervention mean score of the control group 2 and the experimental group 2 after their exposure to the bibliotherapy treatment.

Effectiveness of Role Play in Attitude Change of Primary School Pupils as Measured by ATDRS

Table 1 shows that pupils' ATDRS scores improved significantly after their exposure to the Nwachukwu's Role Play Exercise Programme (NRPEP). The significant gain in ATDRS is of attitude change and educational significance and is also a result of the treatment. It shows that role play technique has the capacity to change attitudes towards learners with special needs and thereby enhance the practice of inclusive education.

The finding is in agreement with the findings of Adika (2006) whose study, though it was not geared towards attitude change with regard to learners with special needs, showed the effectiveness of role play as a behaviour change technique. It also agrees with the study of Makita (1995) that role play is very effective in facilitating communication, provides motivation and self-confidence, and lowers sensitivity to rejection. That study also found that it encourages empathy and creates a non-threatening or low anxiety situation among Japanese children.

The finding is equally in agreement with the view of Ozoji (1991) that one's beliefs, affect and behaviour dispositions can be altered using techniques founded in theory and research. It also agrees with the view of Pirofski (2002) that implementing a series of role play activities among groups of able-bodied pupils and pre-schoolers with special needs, where the able-bodied experiment with "alternate" ways of seeing or moving, can effect positive change in attitudes among those without disability towards persons with special needs.

Furthermore, it agrees with the report of Cohen et al (1994) that letting able-bodied pre-school children experience the world in a manner roughly equivalent to that of persons with special needs enables the former to share and bond with those with special needs. The able-bodied child becomes aware that special needs children may rely on similar problem-solving skills, thus diminishing the sense that the latter are "different or strange". Direct observation of the special needs child's unique way of moving, seeing, hearing and communicating in group-directed activities leads to greater understanding of disability and breaks down social barriers.

Effectiveness of Bibliotherapy in Attitude Change of Primary School Pupils as Measured by ATDRS

Table 2 shows that the ATDRS scores of the experimental group 2 increased significantly after their exposure to the (NBP) NwachukwuBibliotherapy

Programme. The significant gain in ATDRS score is of attitude change significance and is also a result of the treatment. This further proves the effectiveness of bibliotherapy as an attitude change strategy. The finding is of educational importance because it shows that the bibliotherapy technique has the capacity to change the attitude of pupils, thereby enhancing the practice of inclusive education.

This finding is consistent with the results of Pirofski (2002) and Trepanier-Street and Romatowski (1996) which show that when books featuring characters with disability were read to able-bodied children during story time, the able-bodied children became more accepting of their peers with disability. It is also in agreement with the finding of Kamalie (2002) which proved that bibliotherapy did contribute to quantifiable changes in personality development and interpersonal relations of the pupils. The study further confirms the views of Winser (1998), Ayala (1999) and Rohner and Rosberg (2003). Winser (1998) stated that books which can help explain disability in uncomplicated jargon-free language eases fears which are ruled by ignorance and replaces negative stereotypes with accurate information. This aids students in developing awareness and empathy by providing genuine connection to lives of individuals with disabilities. In the same vein, Ayala (1999) and Rohner and Rosberg (2003) further agree with the findings of the study that bibliotherapy encourages positive peer relations among students of differing abilities.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the effectiveness of role play and bibliotherapy in attitude change of primary school pupils towards learners with special needs. It also looked at the relative effects of gender and location on attitudes towards learners with special needs. The results of the study have revealed that role play and bibliotherapy programmes have the capacity to enhance attitude change in pupils towards learners with special needs. It can be concluded that for the success of inclusive education in Nigeria, education policy makers, the Ministry of Education and State Universal Basic Education Boards should recommend the use of inclusion books and encourage the practice of role play in schools to engender empathy and positive attitudes among fellow students towards learners with special needs. This would in no small measure enable them to understand, interact and accept persons with special needs as partners in overall national development and ensure the success of the Universal Basic Education scheme.

Recommendations

In the light of the aforementioned findings, the following recommendations are made to enhance attitude change among primary school pupils towards learners with special needs and to further the practice of inclusive education.

Since primary school pupils have a negative attitude towards learners with special needs, a more vigorous policy of advocacy and sensitisation towards disabilities and its causes is required by the Government at all levels, and its agencies such as the Ministries of Education and Universal Basic Education Boards. Attitude change activities of the government should also be targeted at males in particular, since the research revealed that negative attitude towards learners with disabilities is more pronounced among them.

As a matter of urgency, state Ministries of Education need to review books recommended for use in schools and promote books that advocate inclusion. Books that project heroic deeds and abilities of persons with special needs should be recommended in order to engender attitude change towards disabilities and persons with special needs.

Additionally, as part of the recreational activities in schools, students should be made to role play the life conditions of persons with special needs such as walking with blindfolds on, using wheelchairs, using long canes as mobility guides, and participating in Parasoccer.

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