Counselling for Social Inclusion of Disadvantaged Students towards Sustainable National Development

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Abstract   The study addressed counselling value from the perspective of social inclusion for the disadvantaged students and its impact on national development. Two research objectives and hypotheses were drawn for this study. There were to determine the effect of special needs and formative strategies on disadvantaged students towards national development. The descriptive statistics was applied with population and sample size determined. Findings revealed a significant positive effect of special needs and formative counselling strategies affect national development through counselling. Recommendations were made on sustaining social inclusion for challenged students and the continued application of formative strategies in collaboration with relevant institutions in the society.

***Keywords:** social inclusion, disadvantaged students, special needs, formative counselling, national development*

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1. Introduction

Inclusive education is based on the right of all learners to acquire quality education no matter their differences, by cooperatively doing things in unison. This assists learners to meet their basic learning needs that enrich their lives despite their differences. Inclusive education gives rise to social presence as it brings all students together into a classroom and community regardless of their strengths and weakness thereby improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society and giving rise to improved abilities, opportunities and dignity of those disadvantaged based on their identity. Social inclusion requires that all individuals be able to secure a job, access services, connect with family and friends, deal with personal crises and have their voices heard within the concept of social inclusion.

Social inclusion contextually can be further defined as the right of everyone to have the same opportunities as any 'equal citizen' [1]. Social inclusion is the process of improving society's ability to integrate disadvantaged people, to ensure them the opportunity to participate in social life, a process in which aspects such as social acceptance, caring and ensuring involvement. It is about having the opportunity to be involved, be valued and be respected alongside other members of a community [2]. The World Bank Group [3] defines social inclusion as the process of improving the terms for individuals and groups to take part in society and the process of improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged based on their identity to take part in

society. Competences in social skills are therefore needed for successful daily living to enable children to interact successfully with peers, teachers, and others; accurately recognize and sensitively respond to emotions expressed by others; or express desires and preferences in socially acceptable ways. So, Social competencies enable students to identify and solve a social problem in a socially acceptable manner. For example, disagreement about who can play with a toy or invitations to sneak out of school with a group of peers. Social inclusion is an intrinsic part of the recovery process because it can promote hope for people diagnosed with mental illness by nurturing a positive view of the future- particularly when people achieve their potential [4]. Some authors boil it down to somewhere to live, someone to love and something to do [5]. However, achieving 'social inclusion' can be an incredibly complex process [4]. Communities play an integral role in involving people in meaningful activity and providing hope for the future [6]. Barriers to achieving social inclusiveness include disabilities associated with a diagnosis of mental illness, stigma, poverty and social disadvantage. Of these barriers, poverty and social disadvantage perpetuate exclusion from social activities. This process can then lead people to be viewed as the lowest division of society by their communities, further serving to stigmatize and alienate people diagnosed with mental illness [7]. There has therefore been a huge emphasis on enabling people to be 'socially included' due to the potential benefits to the person in terms of finances, well-being, and quality of life [8]. From a political standpoint, the Government has undertaken many projects to try and tackle social exclusion in many forms [9]. Some of the evidence suggests that having good

social support and the provision of community interventions can have a greater impact than traditional medication [10].

However, despite all efforts being made, the perception, opinion, and attitudes of society towards this type of education are inhuman, negative, and worrisome, particularly towards children with disabilities. For persons with disability to acquire knowledge like others, they are mostly rejected, discriminated against, and frustrated because of their physical, emotional, and psychological disadvantages which makes the problem of social inclusion a typical challenge in the lives of persons with disabilities and the world at large [1].

1.1. Research Objectives

1. To determine the effect of social inclusion of special needs students on national development
2. To determine the effect of formative counselling strategies of disadvantaged students on national development.

1.2. Research Hypotheses

Ho$_1$: There is no significant difference between the social inclusion of students with special need and national development.

Ho$_2$: There is no significant difference between formative counselling strategies for disadvantaged students and national development.

1.3. Related Literature Underpinnings

1.3.1. Social Inclusion and National Development

Many disadvantaged children become fatigued when concentrating on schoolwork for sustained periods and so often need to rest regularly. Also, another continuing support, around issues of inclusion in school for those with a disability has been centered on special educational needs, but little on the promotion of social inclusion in mainstream schools and of perspectives/experiences of those concerned. Morris [4] acknowledged that while education policy, both in terms of school-age children and further higher education, is now more motivated by a philosophy of inclusion, there is very little recognition of the steps necessary to enable children with disabilities and young people to genuinely mix with their peer group. When Morris [4] asked young persons with disabilities in their teens and early twenties to describe what social exclusion meant to them they talked about:

1. Not being listened to,
2. Having no friends,
3. Finding it difficult to do the kinds of things that non-disabled people of their age.
4. do,
5. Being made to feel they have no contribution to make,
6. Feeling unsafe, being harassed, and being bullied.

The overall ethos of the school for special needs children should therefore be a valuable support from many teachers and attempts to fully include these children in all aspects of school life. School development plans, staff development and the role of the head teacher are important in nurturing and promoting an atmosphere where social inclusion is seen as important enough to be discussed in formal as well as informal arenas. These children's perception of their immediate environment, and their perceptions of interactions with peers means that they can miss out on what is going on around them [1]. The social development of a child can be viewed as essential for the ongoing development of his or her participation and learning in school. Hence, learning presupposes a specific social nature and the process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them. Indeed, a belief in socially constructed knowledge makes it difficult to separate the idea of a child's social inclusion in the learning process from their development [11].

The teacher-pupil relationship is an important one and thought should be given to how that might be nurtured and developed when most of the contact with the pupil in class may be mediated through a support teacher [12]. Schools in Scotland are encouraged to address these issues for all persons throughout the curriculum. In primary and secondary schools, social competence is directly addressed through classes on personal and social development or as linked programmes with other subjects [13]. It is recognised that for a whole variety of reasons some pupils may have 'special needs' in this area and need enhanced support to achieve levels of competence. To this end, Eke [14] noted that if the social and environmental barriers were eliminated, people with disabilities would have a more realistic opportunity of living equally alongside persons without disabilities.

1.3.2. Special Needs Counselling Implications

The number of students in general education classes is increasing while the number of resource rooms are decreasing hence the growing responsibility for the disability teacher and for general education teachers as well as special needs counselling practitioner is the need for a collaborative effort in the following:

a. Counselling for Parent and Child – The First Social Interaction
b. Counselling for Widening the Social Circle
c. Counselling for Learning Social Skills in the Classroom
d. Counselling for Developing an Appropriate Self-Awareness
e. Counselling for Self-Advocacy as a Social Skill

1.3.3. Formative Counselling Strategies and National Development

Exploring and exploiting new strategies for educational counselling and communication of disadvantaged students requires generating a mix of measures, practices and techniques which can better fit this context. Here are some of them: supporting students and parents in overcoming their prejudices about seeking and using counselling services;―forming/encouraging help-seeking behavior ‖ [15]; guiding students towards acquiring/consolidating a so-called ―sense of hope ‖ [15] to give them energy and direction for their future actions; improving communication with and counselling of the students 'families [16]; combining pre-disadvantaged approaches

with newer, online approaches (lectures with parents, studies to analyze the needs of parents, online counsellors/meetings for parents and home visits); diversifying techniques by attracting ―artistic media as an additional resource ‖ [17] and making greater use of art therapies (drawing, sand therapy, theatre, music therapy-STAMP, 2018-a very interesting and creative guide to achieving social inclusion for disadvantaged students using art techniques); combining face-to-face and digital techniques [18]: (individual counselling (online/face-to-face), form filling (online), interview (online, face-to-face, phone), group counseling (online/face-to-face), peer counselling, vocational guidance, preventive counselling, and social assistance. Hence, the approaches will be ones which could lead in the medium and long term to the maintenance/recovery/initiation of well-being [17] of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

2. Methodology

A descriptive survey design was adopted. The population for the study consists of eight (16) schools and parents from these schools across Delta State. A proportional apportionment approach was also adopted to determine the total number to be chosen from each school They comprised of public and private secondary schools drawn randomly from Asaba and Agbor. From the drawn population, a total of 321 was statistically determined that formed the sample size for further analysis. The structured and standardized questionnaire was designed and used for the study. Questions were scaled on a five (5) point-adjusted Likert scale. To answer the survey questions, the respondents choose an answer using the following scales: ranging from 1- Undecided, 2 - Strongly Disagree, 3 – Disagree, 4 – Agree, and 5- Strongly Agree. The statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 21 was employed to test the hypotheses. Reliability assessment was carried out using Cronbach's A6lpha (CA) index tests with the aid of a pilot study, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin **(KMO) Battlete** test for sampling adequacy. The table below shows after a pilot test that the variables are reliable with a Cronbach Alpha value of 0.7746 approximated at 0.8 greater than 0.7 being the minimum threshold for reliability, [19].

3. Results

Table 1. Cronbach Alpha Pilot Test

Target Variables	Nature of Variables	Item	Alpha
Social Inclusion of special needs students	Independent	4	0.8110
Formative counselling approach	Independent	4	0.8316
National development	Dependent	4	0.7746

Table 2. Correlation matrix between studied variables

Correlations

		1	2	3	4	5	6
Social Inclusion of Special needs students	Pearson Correlation	1	.234**	.249**	.134*	.104*	.255**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.002	.000	.003	.001	.002
	N	285	285	285	285	285	285
Formative Counselling approach	Pearson Correlation	.234**	1	.129*	.100*	.228**	.267**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002		.002	.002	.004	.002
	N	285	285	285	285	285	285
National development	Pearson Correlation	.255**	.267**	.159*	.223**	.241**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.002	.001	.000	.002	
	N	285	285	285	285	285	285

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

From the above Table 2, it indicated positive correlation coefficients of the indicators of national development, an indication that they are good measures of the social inclusion system. The findings indicated that social inclusion of special needs students positively affects national development (r= .255**, 0.01). The second variable being the formative counselling strategies positively affects national development (r= .267**, 0.01).

Table 3. Model Summary

Model Summary

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R2	Std. The error in the Estimate
1	0.978a	0.956	0.914	0.478

a. Predictors: (Constant), social inclusion of disadvantaged students, formative counselling strategies.
Source: SPSS output of field survey data, 2023.

Table 3 reveals that 91.4% (.914) of variance in competitive advantage is accounted for by the joint predictive power of social inclusion of disadvantaged students, the formative counselling strategies while the remaining percentage is explained by exogenous factors.

Table 4. Multiple Regressions

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.386	1.313		1.818	.071
	Social inclusion of disadvantaged students	.280	.062	.292	4.494	.000
	Formative counselling strategies	.267	.059	.277	3.757	.000

a. Dependent Variable: competitive advantage.

The B-values of social inclusion; special needs (β= .292, p<.001), and formative counselling strategies (β= .277, p<.001), had exhibited positive effects on national development.

The p-value calculated of special needs (.000<.0.05), and formative counselling strategies (.000<0.05), had predicted that social inclusion a statistically significant at 0.05.

4. Hypotheses Testing

4.1. The Decision Rule

If the probability value calculated is greater than (>) the critical level of significance, then the null hypothesis will be accepted while the alternate hypothesis is rejected and vice versa.

4.2. Hypothesis One

Ho$_1$: There is no significant difference between the social inclusion of students with special need and national development.

From the regression coefficient in Table 4, special needs student has a positive effect on national development advantage. (β = 0.292, P < 0.01). Since the P value calculated in Table 4 is lesser than the critical level of significance (.000<0.05), we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis implying that counselling of special needs students has a significant effect on national development.

4.3. Hypothesis Two

HO$_2$: There is no significant difference between the formative counselling strategies of the disadvantaged students and national development.

Based on the findings, formative counselling strategies have a positive effect which is insignificant on national development (β = 0.277, P < 0.01). However, based on the decision rule, the p-value of .000 is lesser than the .05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternate hypothesis is accepted. By implication, formative counselling strategies have a significant impact on national development.

5. Discussion of Results

5.1. Special Needs Students and National Development

The beta value in Table 4 corroborated the positive effect given the beta value (ß=.292<0.01). The test of the

hypothesis indicated in Table 4 reveals that there is a significant effect of special needs counselling on national development (.000<0.05). The overwhelmingly positive result provided is support by Eke (2013) who stated that if the social and environmental barriers were eliminated, people with disabilities would have a more realistic opportunity of living equally alongside persons without disabilities towards national development.

5.2. Formative Counselling Strategies and National Development

The beta value in Table 4 corroborated the positive effect given the beta value (ß=.277, P<0.01). This is in line with Loscalso (2021) who asserted that peer counselling, vocational guidance, preventive counselling, and social assistance are approaches that could lead in the medium and long term plans towards the maintenance/recovery/initiation of the well-being of these disadvantaged students whose meaningful contribution will boost national development

6. Conclusion

The study concluded that social inclusion is a ''must'' task for the developmental process of disadvantaged persons. There is, therefore, the need to improve the counselling for self-advocacy, self-adjustment, and social skill satisfaction for disadvantaged students and this depends on parents, family, relatives, teachers, friends, community, and institutional support in a collaborative effort. It has further become necessary given the numerous challenges encountered. by persons with visual impairment to invest in training and retraining of counselling practitioners and special needs educators.

The study concluded that both for secondary school and pre-secondary school practices to increase/expand towards sustained national development, there is a need for counselling activities with students from disadvantaged backgrounds to investigate more systematically and specifically these and the results generated, to obtain feedback for improvement and generation/exchange of good practices.

7. Recommendations

1. Special needs educators and Guidance counsellors as a matter of urgency must develop a social etiquette for interaction with disadvantaged people. While Special Education should be made compulsory for all teacher's trainees. This will

ensure that the disadvantaged ones are helped at the nearest school which makes it cheaper and more meaningfully integrative.

2. The need for a systemic approach, in which specialized counsellors in educational institutions /schools team up with different training/activity institutions in various fields: tourism, economics, managerial nursing and, generally, medical, that will enable disadvantaged high school students to gain additional knowledge specific to career counselling, due to both the financial restrictions which aggravate their entire educational path and perhaps to the lack of authentic career models in the socio-cultural environment in which they live.

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