
ATTITUDES OF NIGERIAN STUDENTS IN THE UNITED STATES TOWARDS DISABLED PERSONS

By

Ekpedeme T. Ekpro

*Department of Educational Foundations,
College of Education,
Afaha Nsit.*

Abstract

This study investigates attitudes of Nigerian students in the United States towards disabled persons using a descriptive survey. Data were obtained from 265 subjects in five universities. Each subject received a questionnaire sheet and attitudes towards the persons with disabilities scale developed by Yuker, R. J. and Young, J. E. The instrument has split half reliability ranging from .73 to .89 and validity was tested on Nigerian students and certified. Means and standard deviations were used to answer research questions while t-test and ANOVA were used respectively to test some null hypotheses. The findings include that attitudes of Nigerian students towards people disabled persons were positive. Recommendations were made, which includes more emphases on special education programmes at different levels and not only in Colleges of Education but some universities in Nigeria.

The study of attitudes towards the disabled people is not a new phenomenon. Literature have recorded that treatment of disabled persons had been a part of history for the past three thousand years (Zilboorg and Henry (1941), Hewett, and Forness, (1977), Sato and Lazar (1981) Schreenberger (1983), Smith (2007). Fleming (1980) stated that the search for roots and beginnings is really the quest for continuation. He believed that human beings cannot know where they are going unless they know where they had been; they cannot understand the present until they know the past; and the past is never really discarded, only expanded, and eventually transcended. History, Fleming (1980) continued holds up the mirror for humanity, reflecting the present and future as well as the past.

The history of attitudes towards the disabled people shows the plights of the disabled people over the centuries. The first period was the threat to survival due to harsh treatment by the physical and social environments. The second period was that of superstition; the third period was of science and the fourth was of service, the direct opposite to threat to survival. Service (Hewett and Forness, 1977) encompasses care, human treatment and social acceptance afforded to disabled persons. Each of the four periods corresponds with different treatments and levels of social acceptance to the disabled persons.

Attitude consists of beliefs, emotion, behaviours and whenever human beings interact with one another; these elements are bound to surface (Ozaji, 1991). In spite of National Policy on Education which stipulates free and appropriate education for disabled people, some people still show negative attitude and superstition towards disabled people (Haladu, 1991) People perceive persons with disabilities from different perspectives. Some people view them as normal people except with disability, which is not their fault while others view people with disabilities with disgust and likely to discriminate against them at every opportunity.

Statement of the Problem

A review of the history of special education reveals that the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria has awarded scholarships to many Nigerian students to study special education in the United States of America in which this author is one of the beneficiaries, trained special education personnel, given Universal Basic Education (UBE) and encourage education for all the people with disabilities to live a meaningful life which would enable them to contribute to themselves and the society, therefore, the problem posed in this study is to investigate the attitudes of the Nigerian Students in the United States towards the disabled persons, to see if they would show positive or negative attitude which could in turn influence their contributions to the positive or negative support to the welfare of the disabled people when they return to Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine if the Nigerians studying in the United States have positive or negative attitudes towards the disabled persons. The attitudes of these Nigerian students were associated with some demographic variables such as Gender, Years spent in the United States and the major area of study in the United States of America.

Research Questions

Three research questions were generated for this study.

1. What attitude would male and female students in the United States hold towards the disabled people?
2. What influence would major area of study play in determining the attitudes of Nigerian students in the United States towards the disabled people?
3. What influence would the number of years spent in the United States have on Nigerian students towards the disabled people?

Null Hypotheses

From the research questions, three null hypotheses were generated for this study.

1. Male and female Nigerian students studying in the United States will not differ significantly in the attitudes towards the disabled persons.
2. Major area of study of the Nigerian students in the United States will not make a significant difference in their attitudes towards the disabled persons.

3. Number of years spent by the Nigerian students in the United States will not make a significant difference in their attitudes towards disabled persons.

Methodology

A descriptive survey was adopted through stratified sampling technique. This technique was chosen because it guarantees the desired representation of the relevant variables (academic major, sex and years spent in the United States of America (Gay, 1981). Four Research Universities as approved by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education were selected for this study.

S/No.	Research Universities	Number of Nigerian Students
1	Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio	120
2	Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma	91
3	University of Wisconsin	69
4	University of Madison, St. Paul, Minneapolis	100
	Total Number of Students	380

Instrument

The Attitudes Towards Disabled Persons (ATDP) scale, Form A which was originally designed by Yucker, Block and Young in 1970 was used. ATDP is a Likert type scale. A lower score indicates a negative attitude towards the disabled people while a higher score indicates positive attitude. Sato and Lazar (1981) had suggested that 70 be used as indicating positive attitude.

The reliability of ATDP had been reported in several studies (Yucker, *et al.*, 1970). Data concerning the split half reliability ranged from .73 to .89.

Validity is concerned with what the test measures. Yucker *et al* (1970) had stated that incidence for the validity of the ATDP is based largely on construct validity.

Data Collection Procedure

The responding sample for this study consisted of two hundred and sixty-five (265) Nigerian students who enrolled in each of the Research Universities at the time of this study. The Research Universities were Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma (OSU); University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, (UW); Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio and University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota. The total population from which the subjects were drawn was three hundred and eighty (380) students.

Out of 120 questionnaires mailed to Ohio State University, the overall useable return rate was 83 (69.16%). Out of 69 questionnaires mailed to University of Wisconsin, Madison, the total useable return rate was 46 (66.67%). In the university of Minnesota, St. Paul Minneapolis 59 (59%) out of 100 questionnaires were used for this study. Finally, Oklahoma State University (OSU) returned 77 (84.61%) of the 91 questionnaires. The total number of subjects finally used for the study was 265 out of 380 (70%).

Presentation and Analysis of Data

The t-test and ANOVA were used in the data analyses with the significant level set at $p < .05$. The data for each hypothesis tested are shown in summary tables.

H₀1: Male and female Nigerians studying in the United States will not differ significantly in their attitudes towards the persons with disabilities.

Table 1: Summary Table showing t-test: Attitudes of Nigerian Students towards People with Disabilities Based on Gender

	N	0	SD	t-value	df	critical t
Group I (Males)	228	110.52	18.74	0.20		
Group II (Females)	37	109.86	13.43		263	0.83

N = 265

P > .05

The above presentation shows a t-calculated value at 0.23 with 263 degrees of freedom with a table value of 0.83 at probability level of .05. Hence, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

This showed that gender did not influence the Nigerian students' attitudes towards disabled persons. This finding supports Foley (1978) study of teachers' attitudes towards handicapped persons based on gender.

H₀2: Major area of study of the Nigerian students in the United States will not make a significant difference in their attitudes towards the persons with disabilities.

TABLE 2: Summary Table for the ANOVA: Attitudes of Nigerian Students towards Persons with Disabilities Based on the Academic major

	Group	N	0	SD
1	Business	53	108.49	22.30
2	Science	113	113.22	16.12
3	Education	48	107.72	15.23
4	Arts	47	109.17	13.71
5	Law	3	131.66	24.44

Source	df	Ss	MS	F	critical t
Between Group	4	2828.46	707.11	2.41	2.37
Within Groups	259	75755.49	292.49		
Total	263				

* $p > .05$

The above ANOVA shows calculated F of 2.41 with 263 degrees of freedom with a table F value of 2.37 at a probability level of .05. This shows that the major area

of study was a significant variable. Hence, the null hypothesis was retained. This means that law and Science students had more positive attitudes than Business and Education.

This confirms Petrangelo (1977) study which found that Education students showed less positive attitudes towards disabled persons more than other major areas of study.

Ho 3: Number of years spent in the United States by Nigerian students will not make a significant difference in their attitudes towards persons with disabilities.

Table 3: Summary Table for ANOVA: Attitudes of Nigerian Students Towards Persons With Disabilities Based on Years of Stay in the United States

S/ No.	Group	N	0	SD
1	Less than 1 year	32	103.22	11.22
2	1 year	37	103.78	25.59
3	2 years	65	111.61	115.28
4	3 years	49	106.79	13.8
5	4 years	26	115.19	15.97
6	5 years	21	124.42	20.66
7	Over 5 years	35	114.57	17.58

Source	df	Ss	MS	F	critical t
Between Group	6	9132.71	1552.11	5.192	2.37
Within Groups	258	77124.24	292.93		
Total	264				

*p > .05

The above Analysis of Variance shows calculated F value of 5.192 with 264 degrees of freedom with F critical value of 0.0001 at a significant level of .05. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that the number of years spent in the United States was a major factor in the Nigerian students' attitudes towards the disabled persons. Nigerian students who spent up to five years showed a more positive attitude than those who spent less than one year.

Discussion

Overall, the Nigerian students in the United States had positive attitudes towards persons with disabilities. On the hypothesis which tested Gender as a factor in Nigerians' attitudes, data analysis indicated no significant difference. This confirms Ukwije (1981) which found no significant difference on attitudes of Nigerians in the United States based on Gender. On the hypothesis which examined the Nigerian Students' attitude based on major area of study, there was no significant difference among Law and Science Students. This confirms Harth (1971) which found no significant difference among the students on attitudes based on academic major except that special education students showed a highly positive attitude.

On the attitudes of students towards persons with disabilities based on the number of years spent in the United States of America, the data analysis showed a high score for those who had spent up to five years in the United States of America.

This hypothesis needs to be tested by another researcher since no earlier research had been found in this area.

Implication for Research and Practice

1. The general attitudes of Nigerian students in the United States towards persons with disabilities are positive.
2. Their attitudes could be influenced by some factors
 - (i) The legislation (PL. 94-142) in support of the people with disabilities
 - (ii) The educational rights and the way American Society provides facilities for the people with disabilities which makes life more comfortable for them.
 - (iii) The self-concept which persons with disabilities hold about themselves because they do not sit down and expect people to do everything for them. They pursue a wide variety of educational and social activities. This is the direction which this study is of benefit to Nigeria.

Conclusion

This study examined the attitudes of Nigerian students in the United States towards disabled persons based on three variables of Gender, Major Areas of study and Number of years spent in the United States, to determine whether these Nigerian students had positive or negative attitudes towards the disabled persons.

In general, the results of this study had suggested that the attitudes of Nigerian students in the United States towards disabled persons are positive. Considering the fact that other researchers in Nigeria had found the Nigerians' attitude towards disabled persons to be neither positive nor negative, the present findings are very encouraging to the disabled persons in Nigeria because when they return to Nigeria and occupy a position of authority which might have to do with the disabled persons, it therefore, means the future of the disabled persons is bright.

Recommendations

1. Since there is no legislation that gives support to the education of the disabled persons in Nigeria, it becomes very necessary to originate a bill and pass a law to protect the rights of these disabled persons, just as the public law 94 – 142 protects the disabled persons in the United States of America.
2. All the disabled persons should be given an opportunity to express themselves by contributing meaningfully to themselves and society, instead of begging on the streets.
3. In-service programmes should be available for teachers both at elementary and secondary schools levels to acquaint them with issues in disabilities.

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