PERCEIVED STATUS OF ADVOCACY AND VOLUNTEERISM AMONG SPECIAL EDUCATORS FOR SERVICE DELIVERY TO PERSONS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
This study investigated perceived special educators’ advocacy and volunteerism status for service delivery to persons with special needs in Nigeria. The study adopted descriptive survey. Two research questions guided the study. The researcher constructed a structured questionnaire named Perceived special educators Advocacy and Voluntarism status for services to persons with special needs (PSEAVSFSPWSN). It has two sections (one for Advocacy and the other for Volunteerism). The instrument was face and content validated by three experts (one each from special education, measurement and evaluation and guidance and counselling). Test re-test reliability estimate were .81 and .83. The sample was drawn by using purposive sampling techniques. In each University, purposive sampling techniques were used to draw eight most senior core special educators that have higher degrees. This made the sample to be 32. The data collected were statistically analyzed by using mean and standard deviation. The findings among others showed that perceived advocacy status of special educators was slightly high though perceived volunteerism status was low. The implication of findings was deduced and it was recommended among others that special educators should plug advocacy and volunteerism into action the development and education of person with special needs in Nigeria.

Key Words: Advocacy, Volunteerism, Special Educators, perception, Status, Services.

The education and development of persons with Special Needs remain a long lasting challenge to stakeholders. It is for this special population that special education has been set aside. Federal Republic of Nigeria (F.R.N, 2013) conceived special education as a customized educational programme designed to meet the unique needs of persons with special needs that general education programme cannot cater for. According to Ozoji, Kolo and Ajobiewe (2012), special education refers to specifically designed instructional interventions to address the unique needs and abilities of persons.
with disabilities as well as those with gifts and talents. Special needs include persons with visual impairments, intellectual disability, emotional and behavioural disorder, speech and language impairment, learning disability, multiple disability, Gifted and Talented and Albinos (F.R.N, 2013).

The persons with needs afore mentioned were derecognized in olden days. Eke (2000) disclosed there was an era when they were exterminated. Abang (2005) uncovered how different cultures devised ways of destroying those who were abnormal (disable ones). Winter in Abang (2005) reported that in Sparta, new born babies were brought before the elders to be examined for their fitness for citizenship; the ancient Greek left their defective babies on hillsides or cliffs to die while early Chinese threw theirs in the river to drawn. The difference in the foregoing came during period of renaissance which according to Abang (2005) was a period when people began to search for reasons and truths. This period favoured persons with special needs.

In the beginning persons with special needs were not captured in general education development. Abang (2005) asserted that special education developed as an answer for the search for ways to cater for the child who on account of his or her disability was unable to profit from the general educational services. Services to persons with special needs are indispensible. Services (Encarta, 2009) mean skills that someone has and can offer to others. In a bid to ensure and assure education of persons with special needs there should be services for them from individuals, groups of individuals, Non-Governmental organizations, philanthropic special educators, government among others.

The services due for persons with special needs come from those who advocate their course and those willing to volunteer to assist them. According to Encarta (2005), advocacy is public support for a cause or position. Advocacy here is active verbal support for cause of persons with special needs’ services. Volunteerism (Encarta, 2009) is helping other persons willingly without being forced or paid to do so. Volunteerism is therefore willingly or voluntarily helping persons with special needs in their needed services without asking for or getting payment.

There are traces of advocacy and volunteerism in history of persons with special needs. Path-Hotep and Owen Hertasherbut of Egypt (Abang, 2005) championed the cause of blind persons in Egypt in their care and ensuring gainful employment for them even at the time when all seemed sceptical of their productivity. Their actions made Egypt to be known as the country of the blind (Abang, 2005).

In another development, Valentine Hay of France became moved (Eke, 2000) when he saw a group of blind men being made caricature of by people. Abang (2005) recalled that Hang stated “…… I will substitute the truth for mockery, I will make the
blind read, I will put into their hands volumes printed by themselves’. Valentine is known as the father of the blind and one who started first school for the blind. Jearn-Mark Gaspard Itard who hailed from Paris worked on a boy (Eke, 2000) allegedly thrown into the forest to the eaten up by wild animals. The boy who was then eleven years was found by hunters and was welcome by Itard. The boy was later named Victor the wild boy of Averon- the incurable idiot. Itard saw him as mentally retarded (intellectually disabled).

One Michael Charles de L’Epee (Abang, 2005) worked on the education of the deaf after discovering two daughters of his parishioners were deaf. Abang (2005) disclosed that one Philip Pinel of France identified as father of Psychiatry due to his interest to work on behaviour disorder.

Anne Sullivan lived all her life assisting Helen Keller that was blind and deaf mute (Abang, 2005). In Nigeria, Theresa Abang (personal communication; Obi, F., 20th Nov., 2014) was identified as one that was ready to work and die for persons with special needs and indeed the mother of Special Education. Abang served as educational counsellor and itinerant teacher for Blind students in secondary schools in Lagos. She founded two schools: Good Shepherd Institute, Ogoja, Cross River State and the Ganaka School for Inclusive Education, Jos.

The in thing now in the education of persons with special needs is inclusive education. That is why F.R.N (2013:65) stated “Persons with Special Needs should be provided with inclusive education services in schools which normal persons attend in age appropriate general education classes directly supervised by general teachers”. General teachers are not special educators. Special educators are not only trained teachers but specially trained on how to educate persons with special needs. The special educators are equipped with knowhow of teaching persons with special needs, and are very much aware of desired services for persons with special needs. They are due to numbered among individuals who advocate for persons with special needs and ought to volunteer to serve persons with special needs (PWSN) voluntarily.

It is imperative to investigate perceived status of advocacy and volunteerism among special educators in Nigeria. Perception (Encarta, 2009) is opinion as belief held by people. Perception is therefore impression, attitude and understanding of special educators on advocating and volunteering for the persons with special needs. Status (Encarta, 2009) is the rank, the relative position or standing of somebody or something. Status here means the rank or related position of special educators on advocacy and volunteering for delivering services to persons with special needs.

Special educators here are those with higher degree in special education and also special education lecturers in universities. Special education is like a call for
service such that which inspires one to find out status of each special educator on advocacy and volunteerism ensuring service delivery to persons with special needs in Nigeria. The researcher has been inspired to carry out study in the foregoing.

Statement of the Problem

Services of persons with special needs should be available and accessible. This goes a long way to compliment and supplement special needs that are inherent in individuals. There should be services for realistic education and development of persons with special needs. These services could be championed by special educators.

The services for persons with special needs in schools seem to be lacking in Nigeria. The special educators seem not to put into action supposed advocacy and volunteerism that can guarantee services for education and development of persons with special needs. There is scepticism on the perceived status of advocacy and volunteerism of special educators in Nigeria.

The above developments do not favour education and development of persons with special needs. Worse still, no work available to the researcher has addressed this all important area. This has therefore inspired the researcher to carry out this present study: Perceived status of advocacy and volunteerism among special educators for services to persons with special needs in Nigeria.

This is considered worthwhile study because if services are not availed persons with special needs, their education shall be marred, their development shall be frustrated. Issue of equality and quality of education shall remain lip services. Persons with special needs shall be subjected to helpless and hopeless life where a greater majority of them shall go into beggardedom. The special educator would be best identified as hypocrites and pretenders that have refused to toe the line of predecessors whose advocacy and volunteerism brought special education to the fore today.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate perceived status of advocacy and volunteerism among special educators for services delivery to persons with special needs in Nigeria.

Specifically, the study wished to:

i. Deduce status of special educators perceived as advocating for services to persons with special needs.

ii. Ascertain status of special educators perceived as volunteering for services to persons with special needs.
Research Questions

Two research questions guided the study:
1. What status of special educators are perceived as advocating for services to persons with special needs?
2. What status of special educators are perceived as volunteering for services to persons with special needs?

Methods

The study adopted descriptive survey design carried out in selected universities in Nigeria. These are university of Ibadan, University of Jos, University of Calabar and University of Nigeria Nsukka. Special Education Academic Staff lists in the Departments of Special Education from the above Institutions guided in sample selection. In each University, purposive sampling techniques was used University to draw eight most senior core special educators that have higher degrees. The foregoing process of sampling produced total of 32 core special educators with higher degrees that served as the sample for the study. The researcher constructed a structured questionnaire for the study which was named Perceived special educators Advocacy and Voluntarism Status for services to Persons with special Needs (PSEAVSFSPWSN). The instrument has 10-item statement with four point scale: Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD). The instrument has two parts with 5 items statements each. This instrument was face and content validated by three experts in special education, measurement and evaluation and Guidance and Counselling. Their objective criticisms and corrections were utilized which brought the instruments to its final state. In a bid to determine the reliability of the instrument, there was test-retest on those who were not part of the sample. Finally, an internal correlation co-efficient estimate of .81 and .83 were obtained from the respective parts.

Research assistants were used in assisting the researcher in data collection. The 32 copies of questionnaire administered on the respondents by the researcher and research assistants were completely retrieved from them. The data collected was analysed by using descriptive statistical tools: means and standard deviation. Any item with mean score of 2.50 and above was considered high status while anyone with less is considered low status of either advocacy and/or volunteerism.

Results

Research Question 1
1. What status of special educators are perceived as advocating for services to persons with special needs?

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In Table 1, items 1, 2 and 3 obtained mean scores of 2.51, 2.53 and 2.52 respectively. The result showed that the special educators accepted writing on advocacy for the services to PWSN, talking to stakeholders on the need to render services and persuading NCEC and/or NISEP to influence the government to serve PWSN. Items 4 and 5 obtained mean scores of 1.54 and 1.79 respectively. This means that the respondents did not accede to joining PWSN nor form group of colleagues to initiate advocacy for services to PWSN.

Research Question 2

What status of special educators are perceived as volunteering for services to persons with special needs?

In Table 2, items 6, 7 and 10 had mean scores of 1.41, 1.31 and 1.31 respectively. This showed that in volunteerism the respondents declined dedicating selves voluntarily to render help to persons with special needs, plan to have school for
Discussion

From the study, it is found that under perceived special educators’ advocacy status to service delivery to persons with special needs: the respondents accepted to be writing and advocating for services to persons with special needs, talking to stakeholders on the need to render services to persons with special needs and persuade NCEC and/or NISEP to influence government to serve persons with special needs. The finding agrees with assertion of Abang (2004) where she stated that special education was developed as an answer for the search for ways to cater for child on account of his or her disability are unable to profit from general education services. Any venture by special educators to engage in the foregoing is aspect of advocacy for service delivery for persons with special needs.

Moreover, Encarta (2009) opined that services means skill that someone has and can offer to others. Advocacy is public verbal support for something. It was found further that the respondents did not accede to joining persons with special needs organizations to influence stakeholders nor form a group of colleagues to initiate advocacy for persons with special needs. The above finding seem strange for it was noted that Theresa Abang (personal communication; Obi, F., 20th Nov., 2014) who was special educator vowed in her life time her readiness to work and die for persons with special needs. This spirit seems to be lacking in the foregoing respondents that did not accede to working with persons with special needs.

The respondents not being willing to form a group of their colleagues to initiate advocacy for persons with special needs could have emanated from their belief that a group already abound that could be taken as their colleagues: NCEC and NISEP. The respondents might not have got the idea inherent in the statement which is forming firebrand action oriented colleagues to make advocacy truly effective.

Moreover, results in Table 2 revealed the perceived special educators’ volunteerism status of special educators for services delivery to persons with special needs. The respondents did not accede to dedicating selves voluntarily in rendering help to persons with special needs, having planned to start school for persons with special needs and going to remote or rural areas to enlighten persons with special needs and their parents on possibilities of persons with special needs education. The findings of study above did not align with what truly volunteerism is. Encarta (2009) saw volunteerism as helping others willingly without being forced or paid to do so.
Reviewed literature uncovered selfless services of pioneer special educators that came up due to their volunteerism. Valentine Hauy (Abang, 2005) helped the blind because he saw how they were molested. He started the first schools for the blind. Anne Sullivan was out to help Helen Keller the deaf blind mute (Eke, 2000). Michael Charles (Abang, 2005) opted to educate the deaf when he identified two daughters of a man that were both deaf. Jean Gaspard Itard (Eke, 2005) vowed to save the incurable idiot – Victor the wild boy that was later confirmed mentally retarded that is now better known as intellectually disabled. Rev. Sister Theresa Abang, founded two schools (Good Shepherd Institute, Ogoja, Cross River State and the Ganaka School for Inclusive Education, Jos.). These are individuals who were special educators that not only advocated but volunteered to serve persons with special needs. The findings of this study did not corroborate with the foregoing. Nevertheless, the respondents accepted being determined to influence or impact on life or lives of persons with special needs and readiness to outlive the principles and practice of special education as a profession regarding services to persons with special needs. The above findings agree with good of work Path-Hotep and Queen Hertasherbut of Egypt that cared and ensured gainful employment of persons with special needs. Moreover, their acceptance of the above aligns with Valentine’s vow, “…I will substitute the truth for mockery…” (Abang, 2005).

Conclusion
The conclusion that can be drawn from the study is there is slightly high perceived special educators’ advocacy status but low perceived special education volunteerism in services delivery to persons with special needs in Nigeria. This means that there seem to be spirit of advocacy in the special educators while in volunteering for PWSN they are worse off.

Recommendations
Based on the findings in the study and conclusion reached, the following recommendations are made for result oriented education and development of persons with special needs in Nigeria beyond 2020.
1. There should be courses on Advocacy and Volunteerism in Special Education Curriculum to equip prospective special educators for delivering services to persons with special needs.
2. Promotion of special educators in higher institutions should be partly based on aspect of Advocacy and volunteerism demonstrated by them regarding service delivery to persons with special needs.
3. There should be incentive or reward for any special educator that practically brings to bear advocacy and/or volunteerism targeted to delivering services to persons with special needs.
4. NCEC and or NISEP should immortalize names of special educators that excel in volunteerism and advocacy for services to persons with special needs and beyond.
that turn their vision and mission for PWSN into reality by cultivating spirit of serving among members who are mainly special educators.

5. The special educators should plug into action their calling in the profession of persons with special needs they profess to serve in practical terms.

6. The Ministry of Education, Universities especially the Faculty or institute of education should encourage/support any special educator morally and financially that articulate or create any proposal in a bid to better the lots of persons with special needs.

7. Every special educator should have at the back of their minds that the profession is a call for advocating for PWSN and volunteering to serve them too such that this shall guide prospective professional special educator.

References


