

THE CAUSATIVE FACTORS IN SCHOLASTIC MALFUNCTION AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN OBIO/AKPOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, RIVER STATE

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Abstract

This study investigated the causative factors in scholastic malfunction among secondary schools' students in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State. The major objectives of the study were to find out the external causes of scholastic malfunction in basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic among secondary schools' students in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State and to find out the remedial techniques used by the secondary school teachers to help disabled students in learning. The research questions were to see that physical deficiencies, socio-economic factors, home environment, teaching skills and status of parents cause which scholastic malfunction among students? Due to time and financial constraints the study was delimited to the government secondary schools' students in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State. All the teachers teaching primary classes and all the learning-disabled students of SSS1-SSS3 (indicated by the teachers). Twenty-two secondary schools were randomly selected as sample from the Local Government Area and all the disabled students (indicated by the class teachers) studying in the selected schools were included in the sample, according to the check list prepared by the researchers. One check list and two questionnaires were developed for the study. Check list was used to indicate the learning-disabled students. One questionnaire was for the teachers and the other for the students to collect their responses about the causes of scholastic malfunction. After validation through pilot testing the questionnaires were administered to 88 teachers and 95 students of the selected schools. Responses were analyzed on the percentage basis. This study revealed that educationally weak peers, lack of facility; of media resources were the causes of reading, writing and fundamental math disabilities. Lack of teaching skills, teachers' attention, use of Audio-Visuals aids (AV-aids) in teaching and lack of opportunities of learning experiences also caused reading, writing and fundamental math disabilities in primary grade students. Teachers were using the remedial techniques like simple individualized and group techniques, affectionate and encouraging attitude, drill and practice in disable area. They were also keeping liaison with the parents. However they were not using the modern techniques due to lack of special trainings in this regard.

Keywords: Causative Factors, Scholastic Malfunction, Secondary School Students, Teachers, Remedial Skills.

INTRODUCTION

Scholars populace in secondary schools consist of students having different levels of

intelligence and vary accordingly in their level of performance. On the one hand we find children whose academic achievement is commensurate with their intelligence, i.e. there is not significance, discrepancy between their ability and achievement. On the other hand, there are others who have average or above average intelligence but they continuously fail to maintain normal progress in school subjects. In fact, in later group, there are some students who have a significant discrepancy between their ability and achievement. Since these children are apparently normal with no sign of any physical, mental and other disability, they often elude traditional categorization of exceptionality. The term 'Scholastic malfunction (LDs)' emerged from a need to identify and serve this later group of children. The term scholastic malfunction was first coined by Samuel Kirk in 1963 to describe children who have serious learning problems in schools but do not fall under other categories of handicap.

What prompted the birth of this newest area in special education was the realization that many children with learning problems were simply not receiving needed educational services. By recognizing this group as LDs, the teacher education programs in USA and Europe started the identification, diagnosis and serve these children. But the developing countries like Nigeria who might have such group of students having learning problems are not still acquainted with this concept. Who might have such group of students having learning problems are not still acquainted with this concept.

There is no universally accepted definition of learning disabilities. However, most definitions incorporate three criteria that must be met for a child to be labeled learning disabled. (a) Learning disabled children must have a significant discrepancy between his potential and or ability and actual achievement. (b) Learning disabled children must have learning problems that cannot be attributed to other handicapping condition, such as blindness or mental retardation. (c) Learning disabled children must need special educational services to succeed, service that are not needed by their non-handicapped peers. Hallahan and Kauffman in Egwu (2024) define *a learning disabled child as one who is not achieving up his potential*. Learning disabilities in mathematics has been defined as:

Children with learning Disabilities are those whose mathematics performance is below average but their intellectual functioning as measured by general mental ability test is average or above average, and they have normal hearing and visual acuity, no history of chronic disease, regular attendance in the class and there is a significant discrepancy between their potential or ability and actual achievement.

Although actual causes of learning disability can never be known, a variety of suspected causes for learning disabilities have been proposed. A brief review of the past studies reveal that etiological factors related to learning disabilities fall generally into three groups: organic and biological, genetic, and environmental.

Learning disability may be caused by slight brain damage. However, research has not shown a direct cause and effect relationship between the two. In other words, there is as yet no solid evidence to indicate that a learning-disabled child necessarily has any brain injury or malfunction. Learning-disabled children don't show medical evidence of brain damage. American Psychological Association (APA) Dictionary (2023), affirmed that learning

disabilities is any of the various condition with a neurological basis that marked by substantial deficits in acquiring certain scholastic or academic skills. Jatau, Uzor & Lere (2019) referred to learning disability as children as children who manifest educationally significant discrepancy between their estimated intellectual potential and their actual level of performance.

Experts are not certain what causes learning disabilities. However, Keller and Hallalan (2006) emphasized that biochemical factors within a child's body are the cause of learning disabilities, such as the effect of food coloring or food substances as possible causal agents. In a comprehensive review of diet related studies, Spring and Sandoval in Madu and Bisong (2018) concluded that there is an evidence in support of this cause. According to Sanjana (2024) learning disabilities can be caused by maternal illness during pregnancy, birth complications that block the flow of oxygen to the babies brain, certain genetics as well as injury or illness, such as meningitis in early childhood. Learning disabilities can also be caused by hereditary, teratogenic, factors (alcohol or cocaine use during pregnancy), medical factors (premature birth, diabetes, meningitis of mother, or offspring) and/or environmental factors (malnutrition, poor parental health care), (Grodzinsky 2025). Grodzinsky added that a leading theory among scientists is that learning disabilities stem from subtle disturbances in the way brain structures are formed. Researchers are also studying genetic links. Learning disabilities are not caused by economic disadvantage, physical environmental factors or culture and traditional differences.

Environmental causes are hard to pinpoint, although it appears that children from ghetto areas tend to exhibit more learning problems. Poor quality of teaching can be another environmental factor contributing to academic difficulties (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2006). Supporting this argument Lovitt in Egwu, Ube & Andoya, (2022) quotes "a condition that might contribute to a learning disability is poor instruction. Although many children are able to learn in spite of poor teachers and inadequate techniques, others are less fortunate. Some youngsters who have experienced poor instruction in the early grades never catch up with their peers." In the word of Engellmann in Egwu, Ube & Andoya, (2022), perhaps 90 percent or more of the children who are labeled learning disabled exhibit a disability not because of anything wrong with their Perception, synapses, or memory, but because they have been seriously mistaught. Scholastic malfunction are made, not born. Lovitt in Watson, (2015), emphasized that many children with learning problems have behavior disorders and lack of motivation is another contributing factors of Scholastic malfunction.

According to McLoughli in Dash,(2013), environmental factors might be involved in the case of Scholastic malfunction .Poor nutrition, health and safety can precipitate these problems; as can inadequate linguistic and cognitive models in the home. Further, he pointed out that socio-cultural factors that do not reinforce values for education, regular school attendance, work and study habits, and other supportive skills may create more difficulty for the LD Person. The lack of consistent, appropriate education, might also be at fault (McLonghlin in Dash 2013). The conditions mentioned above are expected to be more prevalent and affecting adversely in rural than in urban areas.

From the review of the literature it is seen that most of the studies have been conducted in USA and Europe. No study done either in Africa or in Nigeria could not been identified for review. In the light of the above consideration, this study was conducted to investigates the

causative factors in scholastic malfunction among students in secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the causative factors in scholastic malfunction among secondary schools' students in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To ascertain the impact of socio-economic factors on scholastic malfunction in basic skills among secondary schools' students in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area.
2. To examine the impact of lack of teaching skills of teacher on the learning disability among secondary schools' students in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area.
3. To determine the different techniques used by the teachers to remediate the students with scholastic malfunction in secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area.

Research Questions

The following research questions were constructed to address the objectives:

1. What is the impact of socio-economic factors on scholastic malfunction in basic skills among secondary school students in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area?
2. What is the impact of lack of teaching skills by teacher on learning disability among secondary school students in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area?
3. What are the different techniques used by the teachers to remediate the students with scholastic malfunction in secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area?

Methodology

A survey was carried out to find out the external causes of scholastic malfunction through all the teachers having learning disabled students in their classes in secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area. All the learning-disabled students of in SSSI-SSS3 (indicated by the teachers) studying in the randomly selected secondary schools were included in the study. All the teachers having two years or more experience of dealing with learning disabled students and one hundred (100) learning disabled students were selected purposively.

One checklist to point out the learning-disabled students and two questionnaires were developed according to local requirements following the tests suggested by Silver (2001) and with the help of teachers having more than two years' experience of dealing with learning disabled students. The check list included the aspects of reading, learning comprehension, writing, fundamental math and memory disabilities. One questionnaire was for the teachers and the other for the students to collect the responses about the causes of scholastic malfunction. Items of the questionnaire were developed keeping in view the aspects of scholastic malfunction in basic skills i.e. reading, writing, comprehension, fundamental math and organizing etc, and memory disability with respect to physical deficiencies, socio-economic status of parents, home and school environment and educational causes for scholastic malfunction. The two questionnaires were pilot tested to the group of 15 teachers and 20 (learning disabled) students. These teachers and students were not included in the actual sample. The questionnaires were also discussed with five (5) experts (five senior teachers with M. Phil and PhD qualification) and were improved in the light of their suggestions.

To collect data, questionnaire was administered to 88 teachers and 95 learning disabled students indicated by the checklist through their teachers. Semi structured interviews were also conducted for the teachers of learning-disabled students, to identify the remedial techniques used by them for their learning-disabled students. Questionnaire were got filled through self-approach so response rate was 100%. Data were analysed using descriptive statistical tools i.e. mean and percentages according to the following abbreviations:

Reading Disability	RD
Listening Comprehension Disability	LCD
Writing Disability	WD
Fundamental Maths Disability	FMD
Memory Disability	MD
Organizing Disability	OD
Uncertain	UNC

Results and Discussion

The data collected through the Opinionenaires were analysed by calculating percentages of the responses of teachers and students.

Research Question 1:What is the impact of socio-economic factors on scholastic malfunction in basic skills among secondary schools' students in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area?

Table 1:Socio-economic factors causing scholastic malfunction among secondary school students

S. No	Causes	Respondents	Scholastic malfunction						
			RD	LCD	WD	FMD	MD	OD	UNC
1	Lack of in time treatment of physical problem	Teachers	64	28	64	62	78	38	02
		Students	22	15	23	09	20	08	18
2	Economical problems of parents	Teachers	26	14	60	12	70	12	04
		Students	26	11	13	12	57	10	27
3	Social status of parents	Teachers	26	20	20	10	18	16	16
		Students	11	09	17	10	16	10	53
4	Occupation of parents	Teachers	12	18	04	16	20	08	10
		Students	12	13	13	08	15	08	12
5	Effects of local games	Teachers	76	24	74	26	11	14	10
		Students	79	21	61	19	18	11	18

Table 1 shows that according to teachers, lack of in time treatment of physical problem is the cause for (MD) memory disability (78%), a cause for (RD) reading disability (64%), a cause for (WD) writing disability (64%), and also a cause for (FMD) fundamental math disability (62%). Whereas significant number of students did not take the 'lack of in time treatment of physical problem' as a cause for any disability. The reason may be that no students, in the sample, was

having any physical problem or disability, so they could not conceive its effect upon disabilities. The teachers (70%) and students (57%) counted economical problems of parents as a cause for memory disability (MD) and 60% teachers counted it a cause for writing disability (WD) also. The responses of teachers and students regarding social status of parents and occupation of parents as causes for any disability were very low and not considerable. The reason may be that at primary level among students, the social status and occupation of parents are not considered by the students as they are unable to feel and describe the possible effects of these variables on their scholastic malfunction. The teachers and students were of the view that local games become the cause for (RD) reading disability (76% & 79%), and (WD) writing disability (74% & 61%).

Research Question 2:What is the impact of lack of teaching skills by teacher on learning disability among secondary schools' students in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area?

Table 2:Educational factors causing scholastic malfunction among secondary school students

S. No	Causes	Respondents	Scholastic malfunction						
			RD	LCD	WD	FMD	MD	OD	UNC
1	Lack of teaching skills in teachers at primary level	Teachers	84	36	80	76	24	32	02
		Students	52	19	42	62	09	12	21
2	Lack of individual attention of teachers	Teachers	78	32	80	72	24	36	--
		Students	46	65	53	49	09	06	18
3	Less or no use of AV-aids in teaching	Teachers	28	70	36	22	68	38	04
		Students	08	65	25	07	15	13	24
4	Lack of opportunities of co-curricular activities for students	Teachers	20	36	24	24	36	66	08
		Students	19	50	13	11	16	11	30
5	Lack of support of textbooks for disabled students	Teachers	68	64	28	24	18	14	08
		Students	63	55	20	22	16	09	23
6	Discouraging attitude of class fellows	Teachers	25	70	40	60	08	11	07
		Students	09	60	51	65	11	05	13

Table 2 shows that 84% teachers and 52% students told that lack of teaching skills in teachers at primary level was the cause for reading disability (RD), 80% teachers and 42% students counted it as a cause for writing disability (WD) and 76% teachers along with 62% students took it as cause for fundamental math disability (FMD). The responses of 80% teachers and 53% students were that lack of individual attention of teachers at primary level was a cause for writing disability (WD), teachers (78%) and students (46%) also took it as a cause for reading disability (RD) whereas 72% teachers with 49% students took it as a cause for fundamental math disability (FMD). According to 70% teachers and 65% students counted less or no use of AV-aids in teaching at primary level as a cause for listening comprehension disability (LCD) while only 68% teachers counted it as a cause of memory disability (MD). These were only teachers who took lack of opportunities of co-curricular activities for students as a cause for organizing disability (OD) while no significant number of students took it as cause for any disability. The possible reason may be that students took co-curricular activities as extra work and have least interest. The teachers (68%) and students (63%) counted lack of support of textbooks for disabled students as a cause for reading disability (RD) while 64%

teachers and 55% students took it as a cause for learning comprehension disability (LCD). According to 70% teachers and 60% students discouraging attitude of class fellows was the cause of learning comprehension disability (LCD) while 60% teachers and 65% students took it as a cause for fundamental math disability (FMD).

Results from Teachers' Interview

When teachers were asked about the different external factors causing scholastic malfunction, teachers responded very clearly and disclosed their remedial techniques. These techniques were categorized in two ways i.e., techniques of addressing the factor and techniques for remediating the scholastic malfunction.

Teachers' support for addressing the external factors of scholastic malfunction

1. On asking about the effects of undue restrictions of parents, majority of the teachers claimed that they guide the parents to make the home environment flexible for children. They also use students' counselling technique to create sense of responsibility being son.
2. Separation between parents due to divorce or due to some other reason is another major factor of learning disability. Teachers' claim was that they use practice of affectionate individual attention & counselling to the students. They were not willing to say anything to the parents due to the sensitivity of such type of issues in society.
3. In case of no in time treatment of physical problems, teachers' practice is advising the parents for regular medical checkup of such students. Teachers treat such students with care and encouraging them.
4. Majority of the teachers explained that low social status of parents and parents' occupation are mostly not causing any serious learning disability. The possible reason may be that at younger age students do not care for such things.
5. Most of the teachers said that to minimize the adverse effects of home environment and unsuitable basic facilities at home they use the techniques of parents' guidance, students counselling and treat them with encouraging attitude. Few teachers indicated that they give extra time to such students for supervised reading practice.
6. Most of the teachers expressed that for lack of media facilities i.e. newspapers, TV etc they exposed the available AV-aids and educational games like card game, word games, etc.
7. Lack of individual attention of teachers is serious problem for teaching learning process; in this regard seniors help such teachers for improvement.
8. Most of the teachers claimed that in government schools, opportunities of co- curricular activities, is less however weekly tutorial periods and annual games are conducted for students. Usually, it is not permitted by the administration to frequently conduct such activities. At classroom level teachers try to give opportunity to the students as and when possible.
9. For the discouraging attitude of class fellows, teachers claimed that they counsel the students with moral tales and discourage such behaviours.

Teachers' techniques for addressing the scholastic malfunction

1. Majority of teachers expressed that for the learning comprehension disability (LCD), they use remedial techniques of supervised practice of reading and re-writing in own words starting from one sentence to onward. Many teachers use technique of literary activities like speech contest, discussion, and story making. Few teachers claimed that they use comprehension activities like missing words games and writing one life event daily.

Ormrod (2003) suggested that “Provides mnemonics to help them remember specific pieces of information”.

2. According to majority of teachers, the remedial techniques used for the fundamental math disability (FMD) are practicing math with daily life activities and peer tutoring. While Woolfolk (2004) suggested that “Provide opportunities for group projects, peer tutoring” in this regard.
3. The organizing disability (OD) is ignored by the teachers as many teachers could not tell any technique for this. Few highly qualified teachers addressed this disability, and claimed that they frequently provide the chance of being class leader to every students and lead in the activities like arranging the seats, arranging the class height wise and arranging the groups with respect to achievements and different abilities, etc.

Conclusion

Summarizing all the results, conclusion was drawn and presented in the following table:

Table 5 Summary of Scholastic malfunction and causative factors

S/N	Causes of Scholastic malfunction	Disabilities
<i>Domestic causes of scholastic malfunction</i>		
1	Undue restrictions of parents	LCD, FMD & MD
2	Emotional reaction due to conflict between parents	LCD & MD
3	Separation between parents (due to divorce or due to some other reason)	MD
4	Orphan	RD & MD
5	Less attention of parents	RD, WD, LCD, FMD & MD
<i>Socio-economic causes of scholastic malfunction</i>		
6	Lack of in time treatment of physical problem	RD, WD, LCD, FMD & MD
7	Economical problems of parents	WD & MD
8	Social status of parents	Not effective
9	Occupation of parents	Not effective
10	Effects of local games	RD & WD
<i>Environmental causes of scholastic malfunction</i>		
11	Interruption of home environment in academic affairs	RD & LCD
12	Unsuitable basic facilities at home	RD & WD
13	Effects of educationally weak peers	RD & WD
14	Lack of facility of media resources i.e. news papers, TV etc.	RD & LCD
<i>Educational causes of scholastic malfunction</i>		
15	Lack of teaching skills in teachers at primary level	RD, WD & FMD
16	Lack of individual attention of teachers	RD, LCD, WD & FMD
17	Less or no use of AV-aids in teaching	LCD & FMD
18	Lack of opportunities of co-curricular activities for students	OD
19	Lack of support of textbooks for disabled students	RD & LCD
20	Discouraging attitude of class fellows	LCD & FMD

Note: RD = Reading disability, LCD = Learning comprehension disability, WD = Writing disability, FMD = Fundamental Maths disability, OD = Organizing disability & MD = Memory disability

Table 6 Scholastic malfunction and teachers' remedial techniques

S#	Learning disability	Teachers' remedial techniques
1	Reading disability (RD)	i. Supervised practice using alternate books like story books with encouraging attitude.
2	Learning comprehension disability (LCD)	i. supervised practice of reading and re-writing in ownwords ii. literary activities like speech contest, discussion, and story making ii. comprehension activities like missing words games and writing one life event daily
3	Writing disability (WD)	i. writing practice and ignoring writing while assessing the class work ii. sentence making using given words iii. sentence completion iv. story building from the outline or form a sentence
4	Fundamental math disability (FMD)	i. practicing math with daily life activities ii. peer tutoring
5	Memory disability (MD)	i. affectionate individual attention & counselling ii. education games like show, hide and write words, re-write the read paragraph
6	Organizing disability (OD)	provide the chance of being class leader to every student and lead in the activities like arranging the seats, arranging the class height wise and arranging the groups with respect to achievements and different abilities etc

In remediating the scholastic malfunction, primary teachers are using some simple individualized and group techniques. They are also keeping liaison with the parents. They are not using the modern techniques like individual educational program (IEP), use of AV-aids, and information communication technology (ICT), visual imagery, Mnemonic Devices, Advance Unit Organizer, self-management or self-regulation strategies, brain-compatible instruction, self-advocacy skills and memory strategies (Westwood, 2004). They have no support of experts / professionals in this regard.

Recommendations

Children are not only the future of their parents but also the future of the nation so that children may get protected from all sorts of scholastic malfunction. It is recommended that

1. Teachers may be careful in teaching especially at primary level and may give full individual attention to the students to protect them from scholastic malfunction, use AV-aids to support their teaching and use especial learning strategies i.e. mastery learning etc for learning disabled students and slow learners and may not be harsh with such students.

2. Head teacher may supervise teachers to be careful for such students having learning disability or tendency to be learning disabled i.e. slow learners and may arrange teachers' parents meetings to solve the problems of learning disabled students and may also arrange medical and psychological treatment for such students.
3. District Education department especially Executive District Officer (Education) may launch a survey to find out about learning disabled students and may arrange especial courses and workshop for teachers and especially primary teachers to solve the problems of learning disabled students.
4. Special content should be available by the content writer to match the needs of these students.

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