

AVAILABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY OF LEISURE ACTIVITIES AMONG SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN NSUKKA CENTRAL LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY

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Abstract

This study investigated issues concerning leisure activities among special needs children (SNC). Leisure activities are identified as activities which individuals freely choose to participate in during their spare time because they find them enjoyable. Descriptive research design was adopted for the study. Two research questions and two hypotheses in line with the specific purposes guided the study. Questionnaire titled "Availability and accessibility of leisure activities among special educational needs children" (AALASNC) was developed by the researchers from literature materials reviewed. Two experts from Measurement and Evaluation and Childhood Education units validated the instrument. Data were collected from 120 primary school teachers who had special needs children in their classrooms in the area using purposive random sampling technique and were analyzed using mean and standard deviation for the research questions. T-test was also used to test the formulated hypotheses. Findings reveal that most leisure activities are lacking in schools and especially among special educational needs pupils. On the basis of the findings, recommendations were made. Among others, it was recommended that government should make leisure activities available and accessible especially for special needs pupils and organize capacity building workshops for teachers on the importance of leisure activities for young people.

Keywords: Availability, Accessibility, Leisure Activities, Special Needs Children, Primary Education.

Introduction

Leisure is a central theme in the daily life of man and consequently a phenomenon that is explored on a daily basis. Leisure activities have effects on learning process. According to Majnemer, Shevell, Law, Birnbaum, Chilingarvan, Rosenbaum and Poulin (2008), leisure activities are typically activities in which individuals freely choose to participate during their spare time because they find them enjoyable. They are activities that offer relaxation, rest, positive development, socialization and humanization. Leisure activities are important for pupils' content, but even more so because they are an arena for developing peer relations and social inclusion (Kambert and Goreczny, 2007). In other words, leisure activities prepare children for future life in the society. Leisure activities may be physical or otherwise and can help the special needs child to develop cognitively, socially and health-wise among others. The following leisure activities are considered very important for pupils' upbringing and education: dancing, football, watching television, playing video games and riding bicycles, among others. Highlighting the importance of physical form of leisure activities, Hutzler and Korsensky (2010) stated that they contribute to wellbeing, improved physical fitness and an increased perception of self-efficacy and social competence. They satisfy pupils' educational needs and help them develop many competencies. Depending on the aspects of participation in leisure activities, Badia, Orgaz, Verdugo, Ullán, and Martinez (2013) agree that they can contribute to enhancing the quality of life of special needs children, especially people with disabilities. Involvement of pupils in leisure activities is extremely significant in the development of health education, processes of maturity, socialization, and takeover of culture and values. Children require leisure activities for their all-round development.

The right of children to leisure is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child (UNCRC). The UNCRC (2006) recognizes the child's right to rest and leisure, participation in games and entertainment events appropriate for his or her age, cultural life and its benefits. This is true because activities in which children and young people participate during their free time are important from the perspective of identity formation and the quality of their future life. Furthermore, the convention highlights the importance of leisure activities to persons with disabilities by stating that they should be able to participate in the same capacity as others, in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sports. The National Policy on Education (FGN, 2013) in its elaborate provisions for the educational needs further maintains that all necessary sports and recreational facilities, equipment, materials and other assistive devices that ensure easy access to quality educational experience should be provided. The policy argues that the aim, among others, is to equalize educational opportunities for all persons, irrespective of their genetic composition, social, physical, sensory, mental, psychological or emotional disabilities.

In addition, children with special educational needs especially those with disabilities, tend to participate predominantly in informal activities within the home and the school environment, and therefore experience less diversity of activities and social engagement. They spend more time in isolated activities such as watching television and using the computer (Kavale and Mostert, 2004; Morris, McGuire, & Walker, 2017). Special needs pupils refer to children who have learning problems or disabilities that make it harder for them to learn than most children of the same age (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/what-are-special-educational-needs>). In other words, a child or young person has special educational needs if he or she has a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her.

However, talented and gifted children can be classified as pupils with special needs because they can be disruptive in the classroom since their learning abilities are above those of children of their age group.

From all indications, it does appear that accessible venues and facilities for leisure are lacking for special needs children. For example, the Sport and Recreation Alliance (2013) observes that 64% of UK sports clubs lack appropriate equipment for people with a disability. The Sport and Recreation Alliance further observes that there is a lack of accessible or easy-read information about leisure activities and social events, including information about the availability and accessibility of facilities. There is also a lack of available support to help special needs children take part in leisure activities. The activities exist but they are not accessible (Melbøe & Ytterhus, 2014). For them, it is not possible to gain access to the context without practical support, and this does not only refer to providing transport, but to the performance of the activity itself. The special educational needs in this study need people who can prompt their 'doing' of the activities, a facilitator. Therefore, whether leisure activities are available and accessible to special educational needs requires to be empirically established. Succinctly put, the question which this study addresses is: what is the extent of availability and accessibility of leisure activities among special needs children in Nsukka Central Local Education Authority? The relevance of the study is that, without the availability and accessibility of the required leisure activities for the special needs children, the desired goal of meeting the unique needs of pupils with special needs may not be achieved. This is so because the goal of special needs education according to the Policy as earlier stated is to equalize educational opportunities for all persons. Therefore, the fact that children and young people, especially children with special educational needs, have significantly more free time than adults, the availability and accessibility of leisure activities will determine the way such persons spend their leisure.

Literature review

Promoting physical activities especially leisure activities is an important public health priority (Lagerros, Hsieh, and Hsieh 2004). Besides daily activities of moderate intensity, Ortega, Ruiz, and Castillo (2008) recommend intensive leisure activities for all people, especially for children and adolescents. Leisure activities are beneficial for pleasure, health, quality of life and social integration during adolescence, as well as later in life. Children's leisure is conditioned by available and accessible facilities and activities. Their leisure usually depends on their nearest environment - the family, educational institutions and other organizations. Therefore, it is of great importance that families and schools plan and make arrangements for leisure activities that are helpful and of interest to children. Preferably, they should be activities that contribute to their physical and overall well-being. This gives credence to the fact that the need for rich, available and accessible leisure activities for children is not in doubt. Limited availability or low proximity to leisure activities may discourage their usage. This is particularly the case for children with special needs because they are more dependent on their parents and teachers than other people that are expected to organize their leisure-time by themselves. Leisure activities according to Majnemer et al (2008) are typically activities which individuals freely choose to participate in during their spare time because they find them enjoyable. The availability and accessibility of such activities are issues of interest for any person that has some level of concern for special needs pupils.

Availability is a term used to describe a percentage measure of the degree to which person or thing is in an operable and committable state at the point in time when it is needed. It is a characteristic of a resource that is committable, operable, or usable upon demand to perform its designated or required function. It is the aggregate of a resource's accessibility, reliability, maintainability and serviceability. Simply put, it refers to the ability of an item to perform its designated function whenever required. In the context of this study, availability refers to the handiness of leisure activities for the use of special needs children in primary schools in Nsukka Central Local Educational Authority. Availability is closely related to accessibility which refers to the extent to which a consumer or user can obtain a good or service at the time it is needed. Precisely, accessibility refers to the ease with which a facility, a person, an organization or location can be reached from other locations. In the context of this study, accessibility refers to the extent to which leisure activities are reached by special educational needs for their pleasure. It could be said that normal as well as special needs children enjoy leisure activities.

The importance of leisure activities for all children cannot be over-emphasized. Evidently, Solish, Perry and Minnes, (2010) observe that children with special educational needs seem to participate less in leisure activities with peers than typical developing children, and Wendelborg and Paulsen (2014) add that their degree of participation decreases with age. Children and Families Act (2014) states that a child or young person has special educational needs if he or she has a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her. Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2004) understands the term special educational needs as a restriction in the capacity of a person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition.

The following leisure activities are considered very important for pupils and especially for children with special educational needs upbringing and education: dancing, football, watching television, playing video games and riding bicycles, among others. They provide opportunities for social interaction and promotion of friendships (Kampert and Goreczny 2007) and for learning and development. Furthermore, involvement in leisure activities provides opportunities to express oneself in different ways (Kolstad 2011) and to challenge one's existing identity (Devine 2004). For example, participating in cultural activities as leisure opens for presenting oneself as an artist instead of an intellectually disabled person. Leisure activities, especially physical activities, offer people the opportunity to contribute to well-being, improved physical fitness and an increased perception of self-efficacy and social competence (Hutzler and Korsensky 2010). Noble and lofty as the benefits of leisure activities may be, their availability and accessibility among children with special educational needs is an issue of interest for any person that has some level of concern for these children. This buttresses the need for the study on availability and accessibility of leisure activities.

Research questions

Two research questions in line with the specific purposes guided the study:

- a. What is the extent of availability of leisure activities for children with special educational needs in primary schools?

- b. What is the extent of accessibility of leisure activities for children with special educational needs in primary schools?

Research hypotheses

HO1: There is no significant difference between public and private primary schools on the availability of leisure activities for children with special educational needs in Nsukka LGEA.

HO2: There is no significant difference between public and private primary schools on the accessibility of leisure activities for children with special educational needs in Nsukka LGEA.

Methodology

Descriptive research design was adopted for the study. Descriptive research design, according to Nworgu (2006) are those studies which aim at collecting data on and describing in a systematic manner, the characteristics, features or facts about a given population. The study was carried out in Nsukka-Central Local Government Education Authorities of Enugu State. Questionnaire titled "Availability and Accessibility of Leisure Activities among Special Needs Children" (AALASNC) was developed by the researchers from literature materials reviewed. Three experts from Measurement and Evaluation, Educational Psychology and Childhood Education units validated the instrument. Data were collected from 120 primary school teachers with special needs children in their classes in the area using purposive random sampling technique and were analyzed using mean and standard deviation for the research questions.

Results

Research Question One: To what extent are leisure activities available for children with special educational needs in primary schools?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation analysis of the extent to which leisure activities are available for children with special educational needs in primary schools?

Item Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Special needs children watch television	120	1.40	.509
Story books are available in the libraries	120	1.51	.722
Special needs children surf the Internet	120	1.39	.639
Special needs children engage in artistic activities	120	1.52	.661
Special needs children go on excursion to educative and amusement parks	120	1.62	.735
Special needs children play video games	120	2.59	.510
Special needs children engage in cultural dance	120	1.58	.856
Special needs children act drama and plays	120	1.83	.823
Special needs children play football and field track events	120	1.63	.788
Special needs children engage in sewing, knitting, needlework	120	2.57	.498
Cluster Mean	120	1.765	0.2889

Table 1 shows the mean ratings of primary school teachers on the extent of availability of leisure activities for special needs children in primary schools. It shows that the mean ratings

of the teachers to all the items except for items 6 and 10 are below 2.00 implying that there is a low extent of availability of leisure activities for special needs children in primary schools with respect to those items. On the other hand, the mean ratings to items 6 and 10 are above 2.00, meaning that there is a high extent of availability with respect to those items. However, the overall mean rating of 1.765 with standard deviation of 0.289 shows that there is a low extent of availability of leisure activities for special needs children in primary schools.

HO1: There is no significant difference between public and private primary schools on the availability of leisure activities for children with special educational needs in Nsukka LGEA.

Table 2: t-test analysis of the difference between the mean responses of public and private primary schools on the availability of leisure activities for children with special educational needs in Nsukka LGEA

School Type	N	Mean	SD	T	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Remarks
Public	67	1.7750	0.3051	.378	118	.706	NS
Private	53	1.7550	0.2740				

Result in table 2 showed the t-test analysis of the significant difference between the mean responses of public and private primary school teachers on the availability of leisure activities for children with special educational needs in Nsukka LGEA of Enugu State. Result showed that the t-value of 0.378 with a degree of freedom of 118 and a significant value of 0.706 was obtained. Since the significant value of 0.706 is greater than 0.05 set as level of significance, this means that the null hypothesis is not rejected. Inference drawn therefore is that the views of public and private primary school teachers in Nsukka LGEA did not differ significantly on the extent of the availability of leisure activities for children with special educational needs.

Research Question Two: To what extent do primary school teachers adhere to the ethics of teaching profession?

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation analysis of the extent to which primary school teachers are aware of the ethics of teaching profession?

Item Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Special needs children watch television	120	1.62	.822
Story books are available in the libraries	120	1.67	.843
Special needs children surf the Internet	120	1.79	.943
Special needs children engage in artistic activities	120	1.85	.904
Special needs children go to excursion to educative and amusement parks	120	1.69	.807
Special needs children play video games	120	2.37	.501
Special needs children engage in cultural dance	120	1.99	.912
Special needs children act drama and plays	120	1.70	.856
Special needs children play football and field track events	120	1.76	.840
Special needs children sew, knit and do needlework	120	2.62	.505
CLUSTER MEAN	120	1.905	.361

Table 3 shows the mean ratings of primary school teachers on the extent of accessibility of leisure activities for special needs children in primary schools. It shows that the mean ratings of the teachers to all the items except for items 6 and 10 are below 2.00 implying that there is a low extent of accessibility of leisure activities for special needs children in primary schools with respect to those items. On the other hand, the mean ratings to items 6 and 10 are above 2.00, meaning that there is a high extent of accessibility with respect to those items. However, the overall mean rating of 1.905 with standard deviation of 0.361 shows that there is a low extent of accessibility of leisure activities for special needs children in primary schools.

HO2: There is no significant difference between public and private primary schools on the accessibility of leisure activities for children with special educational needs in Nsukka LGEA.

Table 4: t-test analysis of the difference between the mean responses of public and private primary schools on the accessibility of leisure activities for children with special educational needs in Nsukka LGEA

School Type	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Remarks
Public	67	1.9700	0.3833	1.996	118	.048	NS
Private	53	1.8400	0.3279				

Result in table 4 showed the t-test analysis of the significant difference between the mean responses of public and private primary school teachers on the accessibility of leisure activities for children with special educational needs in Nsukka LGEA of Enugu State. Result showed that the t-value of 1.996 with a degree of freedom of 118 and a significant value of 0.048 was obtained. Since the significant value of 0.048 is less than 0.05 set as level of significance, this means that the null hypothesis is rejected. Inference drawn therefore is that the views of public and private primary school teachers in Nsukka LGEA differed significantly on the extent of accessibility of leisure activities for children with special educational needs.

Discussion

The result of the study showed that the extent of availability of leisure activities for special needs children in primary schools in Nsukka Central Local Education Authority of Enugu State, Nigeria is low. This finding is also at variance with the study conducted by Melbøe & Ytterhus (2014) which revealed that leisure activities exist in schools. The result of this present study showing low extent of availability could be explained from two viewpoints. First, there could be lack of provision of fund by government and other stakeholders to make available these important activities. Second and more fundamental is that some of these teachers may not have knowledge on how to engage the children in some of the leisure activities. It is therefore the belief of the researchers that if the required funds are provided and teachers trained on the use of some of these leisure activities, these special needs children could be helped to develop all round.

Result of the study showed that the extent of availability of leisure activities for special needs children in primary schools in Nsukka Central Local Education Authority of Enugu State, Nigeria is low. The finding of this study corroborates that of Melbøe & Ytterhus (2014) who found that leisure activities are not accessible in schools.

Result of the study showed that the views of public and private primary school teachers did not differ significantly on the availability of leisure activities for children with special educational needs in Nsukka LGEA of Enugu State. Findings of the study also shows that the views of public and private primary school teachers in Nsukka LGEA differed significantly on the extent of accessibility of leisure activities for children with special educational needs.

Conclusion

- a. The results of the findings revealed that the major leisure activities among children with special educational needs include dancing, football, watching television and playing video games, among others.
- b. The results further showed that leisure activities are lacking among many children with special educational needs in primary schools.
- c. Findings also showed that the few available leisure activities are not accessible to children with special educational needs in primary schools.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings, the following recommendations were made:

- a. Every level of government should provide and make accessible varieties of facilities, equipment, materials and other assistive devices that encourage leisure activities among children with special educational needs.
- b. Governments should frequently organize capacity building workshops for teachers on the importance of leisure activities for young people and children with special educational needs.
- c. Leisure time should be included in school programme for leisure activities to be enjoyed by children with special educational needs.
- d. Teachers, parents and guardians should encourage special educational needs children to engage in leisure activities of their choice.

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