

Strategies for Identification and Assessment of Nomadic Children with Visual Impairment in Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper attempts to examine strategies that can be used for the identification and assessment of nomadic children with visual impairment in Nigeria. In this respect, the paper identified some of the reasons for identification and assessment of visual impairment for such children providing the procedure that can be used as well as identifying some of the personnel that can be actively involved in such a programme. Impediments to the successful identification and assessment of nomadic children with visual impairment were identified. The paper concludes that if the issues addressed are effectively tackled by all the stakeholders, the identification and assessment of nomadic children with visual impairment in Nigeria will enjoy huge success.

Introduction

Vision is a person's primary method of gaining information about the environment. Vision also acts as a countercheck for all other sensory information. This therefore means that vision is indeed very important for any individual. People of all age groups all over the world need vision in order to carry out their daily life activities safely and satisfactorily.

Lack of sight or inadequate vision, according to Yakwal (2004) is a great impediment to successful mobility for the visually impaired. Stressing the necessity for independent travel by an individual, Hallahan and Kauffman (1978) argued that how well any particular individual copes with his or her visual disability depends on how well such a person is able to accommodate his or her visual loss. And yet, nothing positive can be done to assist the visually impaired individual unless proper identification and assessment of visual loss is carried out. This is more pronounced when it comes to the case involving nomadic children who are known to be continuously on the move from one geographical area to another.

In view of this, one can appreciate the need for the adequate identification and assessment of nomadic children with visual impairment for possible inclusion in the regular school system in Nigeria. This, among others, provides the basis for this paper.

The Concept of Visual Impairment

According to Sykes and Ozoji (1992), visual impairment is the reduced function of the eye which is measured by specific visual tests such as those for visual acuity, visual field, colour vision and near vision. Visual impairment results in visual disability which Sykes and Ozoji view as the reduced abilities of an individual in tasks such as reading, mobility and daily living skills. It occurs when there is a disease attack on the eye or when there is accident affecting the eye. A visual handicap, according to Sykes and Ozoji, is experienced by an individual as he strives to cope in his society and to overcome attitudes and obstacles that prevent him from being fully integrated into the society.

Visual impairment in its broadest sense includes those that are regarded as totally blind or whose degree of remaining vision is so marginal that it is of little or no use to them in their daily functioning. It also includes those children with moderate, severe or profound levels of visual impairment but who have sufficient residual vision to function primarily in a sighted way. There is now a category of the visually impaired known as those with low vision, a term that gives recognition to their visual potential and is more easily understood than the older terms of “partially sighted” and “legally blind”.

Nomadic Population

Ezeomah (in press) posits that nomadism is a world-wide phenomenon. According to him, nomads are referred to as ethnic or socio-professional groups who travel and migrate in large or small clan groups in search of means of livelihood within a community.

Nigeria’s nomadic population, according to Anyanwu (1998) comprises pastoralists’, migrant fishermen and farmers who can be found in several states of the federation. The pastoralists are predominantly the Fulbe (Fulani) who are said to be found in nearly 25 states of Nigeria and that other pastoral groups like the Shuwa Arabs, the Koyam and the Badawi are found mainly in Borno states while the Dark Buzzu can be found in the Lake Chad region of Nigeria.

Migrant Fishermen, on the other hand, are found on the Atlantic coastline of Rivers, Delta, Akwa Ibom and Cross River States as well as in the riverine and river basin areas of the country (Anyanwu, 1998).

According to him (Anyanwu), nomadic communities are mobile groups whose pattern of activity is set by the needs imposed on them by the requirements of the animals, or the crops they tend to cultivate. Butts (1973) argues that pastoralist societies are ideally intimate groups of people organized either in roving bands or in small settlements, relatively isolated from contact with other groups and displaying unspecialized and undifferentiated social institutions based largely upon the pervasive web of tribal, clan, family and kinship relationships. This, according to Anyanwu (1998), gives a clue to an understanding of the socio economic and educational problems encountered by nomadic communities in Nigeria. Just like in other communities across Nigeria, the nomadic populations also contain visually impaired individuals who also require educational services. As Andzayi and Yakwal (2004) categorically stated, in an inclusive educational setting, one can best imagine the limitations that a visually impaired individual face every day, least of all nomadic children with vision disorders. Inclusive education emanated from a new programme concept and vision on special needs education introduced through the Salamanca statement and framework for action adopted in 1994. As pointed out by Yakwal, Dala and Milaham (2003), inclusive education is an equal right approach to the provision of education, rehabilitative and therapeutic services to special needs children within the mainstream of society.

Purpose of Identification and Assessment of Nomadic Children with Visual Impairment

It has been observed (Anyanwu, 1996) that nomadic communities have always provided valuable economic services to the country. According to Anyanwu (1998), Nigeria depends largely on them for the provision of meat, milk, butter, hides and skins and so on. On the other hand, migrant fishing communities provide the bulk of the fish and aquatic foods consumed in

Nigeria. Also, these mobile populations pay a good portion of the tax which affords government the revenue with which basic services are run. In spite of this, Anyanwu noted that they are among the most educationally disadvantaged communities in Nigeria. In other words, nomads have for a long time been disadvantaged in terms of the provision of education.

The main purpose for the identification and assessment of nomadic children with visual impairment could center on:

- Integrating them generally into the national life by providing them with relevant and functional basic education, and;
- Improving the survival skills of the nomads through improved methods of animal husbandry.

More especially, the purpose of identification and assessment of nomadic children with visual impairment is to ensure that such children are properly and professionally identified and assessed so that adequate educational services can be provided to them. No doubt if this is properly carried out, it would indeed ensure that based on the findings deduced from such an exercise, they can be properly placed in settings that would best provide for their needs and aspirations. Furthermore, it would enable service providers to be identified for successful integration and social inclusion of visually impaired nomadic children in Nigeria.

Identification and Assessment of nomadic children with Visual Impairment: Issues for consideration

▪ Team of Professionals

In nomadic populations, just as can be found in the regular societies, identification and assessment of children with visual impairments must be with the help of a team of professionals. Such a team must include special education teachers, ophthalmologists, medical doctors, mobility specialists, nurses, sociologists, and optometrists and so on. Pediatricians, where available, would play a very important role in the identification and assessment of visual impairments among nomadic children.

▪ Early Identification

One point to note is that identification and assessment of visual disorders among nomadic children in Nigeria must start as early as pre-school age. Dala (2003) posits that unless this is carried out early, it may be difficult to provide meaningful services including aids, teaching and learning materials, methods and so on to those identified as needing such services.

Strategies/ Tools for Identification and Assessment

There are various methods or ways that can be used in the identification and assessment of nomadic children with visual impairment. However, Ejukonemu and Sullivan (1991) argue that there are basically two methods which include the visual acuity test and the basic eye examination. The visual acuity test is done with what is known as the E test usually for children of 6 years of age and older. In order to effectively diagnosed eye problems, it is necessary to know that in the normal eye:

- The eyelids must open and close properly
- The conjunctiva of the eye must be white
- The cornea of the eye must be clear, while
- The iris must be coloured and must dilate and constrict

When the two test results are put together, an appropriate decision is made about the nomadic child with visual impairment.

Abosi and Ozoji (1985) noted that there are two types of visual impairment. They are; the congenitally blind or visually impaired before birth and the adventitiously blind which occurred after birth probably as a result of accidents, illness or diseases.

- **Parents**
- **Attitude and Attitude Change**

Impediment to the identification and Assessment of Nomadic Children with Visual Impairment.

- ▶ The most glaring impediment to the identification and assessment of nomadic children with visual impairment in Nigeria must be related to the general life style of the nomadic population.
- ▶ Considering the fact that the nomadic population in Nigeria is highly mobile, the various impediments to the identification and assessment of nomadic children with visual impairments can be duly identified as lack of adequate and unwillingness of trained personnel to follow the nomads in the interiors as they wander around.
- ▶ The mobile nature of the population under discussion does not allow for adequate organization, implementation and evaluation of such programmes for them.
- ▶ The dangerous rivalry over the use of land and other resources constitute an impediment as it serve as a major source of conflict between farmers and grazers.
- ▶ When there is increased intensity in violence and irrational behaviour, education becomes one of the major casualties.
- ▶ The issue of responsibility is another impediment to the identification and assessment of nomadic children with visual impairment. This is because no one seems to accept responsibility for the exercise which could be very expensive.
- ▶ Much needed resources like identification and assessment instruments as well as means of transportation are in many cases lacking and therefore constitute a stumbling block.
- ▶ The general attitude of the society towards the nomadic population in Nigeria leaves a lot to be desired. Equally, the attitudes of the nomads towards their own situation seem to leave the impression that they are rather contented with their own lot. This could be an impediment when issues of identification and assessment or screening for visual impairment are considered.

Conclusion

In order to provide adequate educational services for nomadic children with visual impairment in Nigeria, there is need for proper identification and assessment to be carried out generally on the nomadic population. However, this can only succeed if serious thought is directed towards issues discussed in this paper and adequate attention paid to the provision of the needed resources for the facilitation of such a programme in Nigeria. A lot therefore needs to be done and in doing the much that can be done, the full integration of the nomadic population into national life by providing them with relevant and functional basic education would be a reality.

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