

## Changing Roles of Social Work Educators in Schools for Students with Special Needs in Osun State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

School social workers are trained health professionals who provide important services directly to students and sometimes to teachers in their institutions. They act as the connection for schools, homes and community services to help students' educational, emotional, and developmental needs. Many of them practice in private and public schools. Not many school social educators could discharge their duties to their maximum capacity, their roles are changing in schools due to lack of necessary equipment for learners, as a result of changes in economic situation in Nigeria. The study investigated the extent the required equipment for the teaching of learners with special needs are available in their schools; the changing roles of social workers in schools; and the effects of the changing roles of social work educators on students with special needs and members of the society. The study was carried out using qualitative research approach. Structured questionnaire guided the focus group discussion. Interaction was done with social work educators in their randomly selected schools for students with special needs in Osun State, Nigeria. Findings revealed that social workers trained people with special needs to make good use of their skills to prepare materials and goods for self-development; schools used different methods to communicate and sensitise parents, and the entire community to take their children to these schools. Also, the roles of social work educators are changing as they have to source for ways of getting equipment for learners, by pleading to philanthropists or religious bodies for the provision of these equipment, as the learners' needs could not be met either by the government or their parents. This study is contributing to the knowledge of everyone that teaching people with special needs cannot be effective without the use of instructional materials. Observations revealed apart from lack of equipment, educators' services also faced suspicion, criticisms and neglect by some members of the society. Based on these findings, it was recommended that social work educators be not discouraged due to lack of instructional materials or equipment for the use of their students with special needs, or comments from members of the society, but take the work as a call to serve humanities in their society.

**Keywords:** Changing roles, social work educators, special needs.

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### INTRODUCTION

Social work is an academic and professional discipline that seeks to facilitate the welfare of individuals, societies and communities. As a profession, social workers see that positive changes occur in the life of an individual or the society at large. People could be advised and assisted in terms of living in a clean environment; the diet and family relationship. It could be on economy which is how the person's source of income could improve, like making them use the resources around them to empower themselves. Social work services could be extended to people at correctional centres for adults and juvenile in the society. Those with special needs like the blind,

mentally and physically challenged could feel the impact of social work professionals, the helpless in hospitals, or the vulnerable in the society are expected to feel the impact of social work professionals for better living.

Social work facilitate social change, development, cohesion, and empowerment. School social workers are expected to provide comprehensive supports that look into the needs that limit the learning of out- of- school students (Carr & Shaia, 2018). School social educators act as student and parent advocate, case manager, counselor, student mediator, distributor of resources, serve unique roles within their schools, advocacy, checking bullying, need for community

resources, coordinating homebound education, homelessness, do home visits to students with disabilities, and other services that can promote academic performance of students with special needs (Ministry of Social Work Guide.org 2019).

Workers are expected to visit homes to find out when pupils or students do not show up in school. In most cases, social workers are the ones to attend conferences, sporting activities, and field trips. School social workers adhere to federal and state standards for educators. Special educational professionals have various roles and responsibilities to discharge in schools (University of Southern California, 2019). Their roles involve every aspect of educational processes like being responsible for complying with lots of federal regulations and local laws pertaining to the treatment and well-being of people with disabilities. As a special educator professional, he or she is to act as traditional classroom teacher and support provision of services expected to meet the needs of children with special needs in all ramifications. Ensure these students with special needs like the physically challenged, speaking impediment, the blind, those with down-syndrome and many others have access to equal necessities of life like other children, in terms of education and other needs of students with special needs. The skills and knowledge of school social workers make them suitable to improve school climate and promote social-emotional learning, they promote social justice, children's rights and help families resolve difficult situations (Mutulayova & Pesatova, 2013).

Formal system of education is necessary for children and adults with special needs in order to function and be useful to their society, not minding their areas of defect. Their requirement for effective learning is different from other students, likewise their instructors that are specially trained to meet their demands (Education for Children with Special Needs, 2021). Each child has to be studied in order to know their needs and the type of instructional materials to provide, especially those who are not having physical challenges (Terri, 2020). With the current high standard of living being caused by bad economic situation in the country, it could be deduced that getting appropriate teaching equipment for learners with special needs might not be convenient. The condition may be difficult in a situation where the government in power both at the federal and state levels are not able to meet the needs of schools and the students in the provision of essential instructional materials, while Disability.gov (2020) observed students with special needs now have access to good accommodation and quality education either inside or outside the school to make them learn and be successful in life. Parents are also expected to provide learning equipment for their children, but this may not be possible for them. At the same time, Kevin, (2021) opined some parents may result to seeking for

grants from the government or philanthropists to get equipment for their children.

Vandeh, Gbaa, and Awambe (2014) agreed the situation could be challenging to the extent that the school social educators need to find ways by which the needs of their learners are met. There are cases where the educators cannot teach effectively without the use of equipment which may not be at their disposal, thus, students have to suffer. If it is possible to improvise the equipment, the school social workers will go ahead either by improvising himself or herself or with the learners. Provision could also be made by approaching few philanthropists for the assistance of the students in their areas of need. Thus, the changing roles of school social educators are being experienced gradually, compared with the past when proper provisions were made to schools to impact knowledge on students with special needs, so as to be useful to themselves and their society. In view of the above, this study explored the changing roles of social work educators in schools for students with special needs in Osun State, Nigeria.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Social work educators are able to provide aids and instruction based on the students' skill level, interest and ability, instead of considering their biological age. Learning equipment will be needed based on the different disabilities of the learners. This could be in terms of disorder affecting communication which could be verbal and nonverbal and also social interaction. The provision of education for children with special needs is to prepare them for the future, but the practical situation in their schools have always been lack of facilities and equipment that could assist children with special needs, learner's equipment will be needed based on different disability of the learner (Dariana & Balli, 20180).

Mutulayova and Pesatova (2013) opined that school social educators are committed to promoting social justice, helping families resolve difficult life situations and protecting children's rights. The skills and knowledge of social workers enable them to meet the challenges in the society to improve social climate and promote social emotional learning. School social workers assist people with special needs in comprehending their diagnosis, support in making them adjust to lifestyle to accommodate their inefficiency, assist with transportation and may help them find employment, and also connect their client with support to make life convenient for them. School social workers assist learners in managing activities, as students with special needs are tailored towards their educational needs. www.psychologyschoolguide.org. (2018).

As mental health professionals, school social workers provide services that are important directly to students, they use different strategies to meet the needs of their students. Any out-of-school need that could

limit the learning of their students are being provided. The skill and knowledge of school social workers makes them improve school climate and promote social emotional learning. Many schools are not safe in recent times due to invasions by terrorists and bandits, this has made many schools creating harsh educational environments by not tolerating what could affect the safety of students in the school environment, thereby introducing tough disciplinary practices (Carr & Shaia 2018).

Issurdatt, (2013), observed as a school social worker, with the reduction in the school budget, more and more responsibilities have been placed on the school social workers. Licensed school social workers are being highly utilised to evaluate the most at risk students, these are students who are likely to harm others or themselves, their roles in crisis intervention work is highly valued by principals, teachers and administrators. A school social worker could be trained in programme that teaches students how to build healthy relationship, increase effective communication, and engage in effective conflict-resolution. Social workers are being trained in different programmes with the hope of coming back to provide the training themselves to the employees of the community, therefore, instead of providing services directly to students and their families, they will just become trainers of only the school personnel (Social School Work Practice, 2021).

School social workers became members of multidisciplinary teams addressing the critical needs of individual student by providing case management for families facing challenges such as bullying, academic barriers, homelessness, and guiding against poor attendance in schools. McCarter (2017). There are more cases of mental health needs being addressed in schools compared with the past, but the more emotionally secured, the more successful students will be in academics, among their peers and family relationships, making them to have positive feelings about themselves. McCarter (2017) further reiterated that school social workers can serve as a link between a community and educators so as to help educators acquire resources in order to meet the needs of the classroom and that of the students. Since teachers wants to meet academic standard, little time or no time at all is spent on developing emotional Intelligent Quotient and life skills like communication, conflict resolution, healthy relationships and boundaries. School educators as emphasising culturally sensitive practices by designing programmes that are appropriate to their learning, by this they are able to serve many of their clients.

Chuiko, Kuntsevskaya, Holotenko and Dong (2021), viewed parents are supported by social workers to facilitate the adjustment of children with special needs to school after being absent for a long time from

school as a result of illness, assist students who are experiencing difficulties in schools or support their parents and families before these difficulties have negative effects on children, especially by addressing stressful situations. Similarly, Shaia and Crowder (2017) opined school social workers work with parents that are poor, who are finding it difficult to meet the needs of their children, they could be assisted in dealing with issues relating to caring for them. School social worker can meet classroom and students' needs by contacting members of the community for necessary resources, so also coordinating community resources to meet family needs.

Through social work services, these educators can deliver, advocate leadership role, and provide effective programmes of good quality that will see the needs of families and children are met. Carr and Shaia (2018) observed through social work practice, school social workers provide effective and quality programmes that ensure the needs of families and children are met. Odongo (2018) reiterated many parents feel embarrassed on their children with special needs, and resulted into keeping them at home, thus, preventing them from having social experiences, valuable education and intervention programmes being organised for families of children with special needs through social services and training. Kottha (2015) opined religious body collaborate to provide strong supportive relationship in their promising programmes for children and families of students with special needs in their communities, the community became a partner in making school a safe and effective place for students to learn. School social educators also educate the academic community about how to utilise social workers.

### **Statement of the Problem**

School social workers dealing with students with special needs are finding it difficult to get appropriate teaching equipment to teach these students. On many occasions, they resulted to improvising teaching tools for their learners, or look around for philanthropists for assistance. Thus making teaching and learning difficult. Parents of these students and the government in power are expected to be providing these tool or equipment for learners and teachers in schools, but nothing is forth coming, hence the need for this study.

### **Purpose of the Study is to:**

- a) Examine the availability of required equipment for students with special needs and social workers.
- b) Identify the changing role of social work educators in schools for learners with special needs.
- c) Enumerate the effects of changing roles of social work educators in schools on learners and members of the society.

### Research Questions

1. To what extent are the required equipment for the teaching of learners with special needs available in their schools?
2. What are the changing roles of school social educators in schools for children with special needs in Osun State?
3. What are the effects of the changing roles of school social educators on students with special needs and members of the society?

### METHODOLOGY

The study adopted qualitative research which always deal with information, in-depth interview, discussion, projection methods, focus group case studies or pilot studies. Thus, the study was based on the changing roles of special education professionals dealing with people or learners with special needs at different levels. Therefore, some professionals in special educational sectors/schools were interviewed in order to obtain their views on the changing roles of their services in teaching people with special needs in Nigeria. Their views are presented under the analysis of result.

### Analysis of Results

Answers to the research questions generated under introduction are presented in this section.

**Research Question 1:** To what extent are the required equipment for teaching learners with special needs are available in their schools?

In order to answer this question, some special educational professionals were interviewed.

#### Interviewee No. 1:

**Name:** Miss Omoware Alabi Ogundepo.

**Town:** Omoleye Special School, Osogbo, Osun State

**Type of Vocation:** Social worker for special people.

**Academic Qualification:** University of Ilorin, Graduated in Special Education.

#### She says as follows:

Some proprietors/proprietresses go into the establishment of schools for special education because of the gain from it. The required equipment for teaching were not available. The expected equipment needed to be used for each learner depending on their ailment were not available.

#### Interview No.2:

**Name:** Mrs. Olajumoke Ojetola

**Town:** Secondary school for students with special needs. Osogbo, Osun State

**Type of Vocation:** Social-worker for special people.

**Academic qualification:** University Graduate in Special Education.

#### My interaction with her is recorded as follow:

Equipment for teaching learners with special needs like deaf, dumb, blind and physical challenged are not available. There is over population in classes with about 40 learners in a class but it should be at least between 10 to15 students in a class teachers are finding it difficult to cope. Some deaf students are not totally deaf if there are hearing aids for them, but we teach with signs languages generally instead off inserting machine in their brain. The blind can use magnifiers but we are using brail. There should be test to know the specific need of each learners so as to know their needs.

#### Interview No.3:

**Name:** Mrs. Bola Kehinde

**Town:** Secondary school for students with special needs. Osogbo, Osun State

**Type of Vocation:** Social-worker for special people.

**Academic qualification:** University Graduate in Special Education

#### Her narration are as follows;

The school does not have sufficient teaching materials for the mentally retarded, hearing impaired and the physically challenged students.

#### Interview No.4:

**Name:** Reverend Sister Elizabeth Kehinde

**Town:** St Mary's Rehabilitation Centre, Ipetumodu, Osun State, Nigeria

**Type of Vocation:** Head at the Rehabilitation Centre

**Academic qualification:** Congregation of daughters of the Holy Spirit.

#### She speaks as follows:

The centre is having a desired level of equipment to a large extent. We have the materials to take care of the physically challenged, like the Cerebral Pea chair for children between the age of 4 to 8; Capes for student from 4, 5, 7 10 and above; Wheel chairs, Bicycle metre, Flexible handle box, Handle collator health impairment and other materials for exercises. We identify their abilities and disabilities, examine them to know what each can do, place them were they can function well to be useful to the society.

#### Interview No.5:

**Name:** Susan Doofan Pine

**Town:** St Mary's Rehabilitation Centre, Ipetumodu, Osun State

**Type of Vocation:** Social Worker

**Academic qualification:** B.Sc

#### She speaks as follows:

To a great extent, the centre is having a desired level of equipment to meet the needs of the client. We have physiotherapy unit, vocational centre, intellectual disabled persons and non-teachable ones. For the fact that they are not teachable does not mean they are useless. These children needs patience from the

facilitators. We need to take care of those with standing or walking disability. The centre has all that the physically challenged used like Cerebral palsy; Chairs for ages 2, and 4 to 8; Wall bar; Bicycle ego metre; Parallel bar; Shoulder wheel; Hydro collector; Infrared; Candle box; Flexes ball and Capiases shoulder.

## DISCUSSION

A number of things can be observed from responses of the respondents for instance, some instances, some centres are not having necessary materials to meet individual needs of the students, while few centres are able to provide adequate and appropriate materials for the needs of the student, which is affecting proper communication between teachers and learners. This is in agreement with Dariana *et al.*, (2018) that learner's equipment will be needed based on the different disabilities of the learners, but the practical situation in their schools was lack of facilities and equipment that could assist children with their special needs.

**Research question 2:** What are the changing roles of school social educators in schools for children with special needs?

The researcher had interaction with the following people on research question two.

### Interviewee No.1:

**Name:** Reverend Sister Elizabeth Kehinde

**Town:** St. Mary's Rehabilitation Centre, Ipetumodu, Osun State

**Type of Vocation:** Social Worker

### She reveals as follows:

We improvise by producing certain things to get what the students need. There is vocational unit where we make candles, Vaseline, tie and dye, sew clothes, made materials with carton, there are machines that assists in their production. These are done to assist the students that could not be placed in the classroom so as to make them to be independent. The centre has no source of income, we encourage outsiders to pay a little to maintain the centre, but they do not have money to pay. Thus, we source from churches and organizations. Some parents have money but refuse to pay. The centre use the school bus to take students "to and fro" without paying anything. But since 2016, stipends are demanded from parents, but some still could not pay. We now ask them to pay considering their status. Some parents have decided to keep their children at home due to financial problem, the centre has limited home visitation with the school bus. Before, we gave them free uniform and cloths for those in the boarding, we now ask them to pay for their uniform. In past, during festival we sowed clothes for them but now we buy, cut and gave the cloth to parents to go and sow for them. Parents now pay a token for excursion unlike before. Many students come to school without any writing materials, but we provide for them. On health when

they are sick, we either take them to Obafemi Awolowo University Teaching Hospital or Island, the centre pays hospital bills as many parents cannot afford the bills.

### Interview No.2:

**Name:** Mrs. Olajumoke Ojetola

She says as follow:

We advised parents that could afford getting equipment for their children to buy them or else we teach them like that. As teachers, there is nothing we can do unless the Government at different levels, Non-Governmental Organisations or parents come to their aids.

### Interviewee No.3:

**Name:** Mrs. Bola Kehinde

Her narrations are as follow:

Parents are poor, they do not have enough money for the training of this students. Teachers motivates philanthropists to assist students, especially the orphans among them. There is a twin whose NECO payments had just been made by a philanthropist, some people pay further school fees and JAMB examination. Their schooling is expensive. Teacher contributes to pay their hospital bills when they are sick. On vocational training, teacher asked them to bring palm tree leaves to produce brooms, teach them bead making, teach the hearing impaired hoe to dance, to draw and act plays. We advise parents to allow them to learn vocational training during holidays. Thus, some of the students repairs fridges, television and electrical wiring service for pay to augment their school fees, since their no sufficient teaching materials in school, no vocational room for them, so we ask them to go and learn vocational skills outside, they also contribute money for practical on baking like making chin-chin and puff-puff.

## DISCUSSION

One observes that the role of social workers in schools have changed in terms of the challenges they are facing by sourcing for money to make teaching effective through what they produce and sell, pleading for philanthropists' assistance, improvising needed equipment and sending students out to learn vocational skills that should be learnt in school due to lack of finance, also spending their money to assist students in their formal education by improvising needed materials. At the same time, their teacher struggled to impact necessary knowledge that will make them useful and leave comfortable live in future. These are in agreement with the opinions of Carr *et al.*, (2018); Psychological school guide (2018); Crowder (2017); and School Social Worker (2019) that social worker are expected to visit home, improve school climate and promote social-emotional learning, work with parents that are poor who are finding it difficult to meet the needs of their children and could be assisted in dealing with issues relating to caring for these children.

**Research Question 3:** What are the effects of the changing roles of school social educators on students with special needs and members of the society?

In answering this question, some educators of students with special needs were interviewed.

**Interviewee No. 1:**

**Name:** Olajumoke Ojetola

**She says as follows:**

Before people spend a lot on their children, they complain why God gave them this type of children. As teachers we advise them that whatever God does has a purpose as the purpose has to be fulfilled in the children. Encourage the parents to meet the needs of their children. At home parents are showing attitude of neglect to them, nobody to interpret for them, their siblings also neglect them, no solace at home. During holidays, the students do not go to their parent. They preferred staying with their classmates because they could understand one another, while parents will be calling that they do not see them at home. Some students are staying with their teachers. A student has been staying with her teacher for the past four (4) years because she is comfortable staying with her. Therefore, we encourage parents to show love to them.

**Interviewee No.2:**

**Name:** Rev. Sister Elizabeth Kehinde

**Her narrations are as follows:**

At the centre, since most of the parents do not have money, the learners produce tie and dye, candles, soap and many others to get money. Later we equip them in two (2) or three skills and send them to the society to be productive to themselves and the society by selling their products. Also, to prevent them from wandering about in the society, the centre made the Day students among them understand they should come to school from Monday to Friday. If they are allowed to go out, could be knock down by motorcycle or motor vehicles because they do not have control over themselves. The centre observed those who refused to be regular in school now joined armed robbers, they used them to rub houses. I had gone to police station to free some street beggars among them. At the same time, some of them became teachers, learn other works before ending their formal education. Some became self-advocate as they talk about themselves to encourage others, the centre calls them to come and talk when we have programmes. The government is nothing to talk about as they do not care about the centre. The centre also guide them when they want to marry.

**Interviewee No.3:**

**Name:** Mrs. Bola Kehinde

**Her narration is as follows:**

In order to make their marriage comfortable, we advised them to marry the person they can

communicate with conveniently, that is among themselves. When they want to marry, they come to us and we interpret for the family members.

## DISCUSSION

The respondents were of the view that the parents of children with special needs were not ready to admit the condition of their children nor assist them financially in their academic pursuit. Thus, their educators understood their conditions, love and provided everything that would make them to be empowered and be useful for themselves and their society later in life. Those are in agreement with the view of Odongo (2018); Kottha (2015); Shaia *et al.*, (2017) who opined that many parents feel embarrassed with their children with special needs, and resulted into keeping them at home, thus preventing them from having social experiences and valuable education, advocate for intervention programmes for families of children with special needs through social services and skill training, social workers work with parents that are poor and finding it difficult to meet the needs of their children, while the skills and knowledge impacted by social workers enable the students to meet the challenges in their society.

## CONCLUSION

- Findings revealed that adequate and relevant teaching materials are not available for learners in schools for students with special needs especially in government schools.
- The roles of teachers and social workers in these schools have changed to improvising teaching materials and seeking for funds to assist and make teaching and learning comfortable for the students.
- Many parents and guidance have neglected the education of their children to the care of school social workers and their teachers.
- Many of the children with special needs are not enjoying parental care due to segregation and negligence by their parents as a result of being children requiring special needs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Parents are implored to care for their children that requires special needs as they care for other children in the family.
- Parents are advised to understand that their children that needs special attention could make it in life if they are provided with necessary learning aids to make their teaching and learning meaningful and effective.
- Different government parastatals in charge of the provision of teaching facilities to schools with special needs are advised to do their work as expected.
- Nigerian government to realise the importance of supporting people with special needs in their formal and non-formal education through the

provision of appropriate teaching and learning materials, but rather training them to become self-reliant.

- Government and non-governmental organisations establishing schools for people with special needs are advised to make teaching convenient for their instructors/animations by providing necessary instructional materials in schools, and not turning them to beggars on behalf of their learners.

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