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## **Counselling Approaches and Educational Support for Business Education in Students with Visual and Hearing Impairments: Enhancing Accessibility and Learning Outcomes**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This qualitative study delves into the counselling and educational support for Nigerian business education students with visual and hearing impairments through interviews with 15 professionals, including educators, counsellors, and administrators. It reveals a critical lack of accessible educational resources and assistive technologies, highlighting the suboptimal effectiveness of existing support due to insufficient trained staff. Professionals suggest a comprehensive approach to improvement, advocating for the creation of accessible materials, enhanced training, investment in technologies, and policy reforms to overcome these barriers. The study calls for immediate systemic changes to facilitate better accessibility and proposes future research to encompass longitudinal studies, the impact of socio-economic factors, and broader inclusion of student and family perspectives to foster a genuinely inclusive educational environment.*

**KEYWORDS:** counselling approaches, educational support, visual and hearing impairments, business education, students

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The global challenge of educational inclusion persists, with students with disabilities frequently encountering substantial obstacles when seeking access to high-quality education. In Nigeria, the problem is made worse by systemic, infrastructural, and socio-economic limitations, which

particularly affect students who have visual and hearing disabilities. These students face numerous obstacles, ranging from the absence of easily accessible educational resources to inadequate support within the learning environment, especially in specialised subjects like business education.

Business education necessitates a flexible and inclusive learning environment that caters to the various requirements of all students, including those with sensory impairments. This is due to its focus on current market trends, data analysis, and the practical application of theoretical principles. Nevertheless, the educational environment in Nigeria frequently falls short of achieving this ideal. An inherent difficulty arises from the limited availability of educational resources specifically designed to meet the requirements of children with visual and hearing impairments. Textbooks, course materials, and tools necessary for understanding intricate business concepts are seldom accessible in forms like Braille, large print, or sign language (Ajuwon, 2008).

Furthermore, the educational infrastructure in numerous Nigerian institutions requires appropriate modifications to facilitate the education of children with disabilities. This encompasses not just the tangible structures, including classroom designs that are easy to access, but also the presence of assistive technologies that enable efficient learning and communication (Omiegbe, 2016). Adding to these difficulties is the insufficient preparation of teachers in inclusive instructional methods. Teachers in Nigeria's business education sector require more expertise and understanding to properly instruct students with vision and hearing impairments, consequently impeding these students' capacity to fully participate in the curriculum (Eskay et al., 2012). The socio-economic obstacles worsen the educational exclusion of students with sensory impairments. Families in Nigeria who are already facing financial challenges in accessing education are further burdened by the expensive assistive gadgets and educational materials (Nwokolo et al., 2010).

As we strive for a more inclusive educational environment, counselling and educational support play a crucial role in ensuring fair learning opportunities for all students, including those with visual and hearing disabilities. The distinct obstacles encountered by these students in accessing and participating in the curriculum require a customised approach that includes not only the provision of accessible educational materials and facilities but also the emotional and psychological assistance that can cultivate a favourable learning environment. Counselling services are crucial in addressing the psychological and emotional obstacles that students with disabilities frequently face. These programmes offer a helpful structure, allowing students to better handle the challenges of their educational path with increased resilience and self-confidence. Counselling can provide crucial coping techniques for students who have visual and hearing

impairments, hence improving their motivation and involvement in their academic pursuits (Hadley & Nenga, 2019).

Moreover, providing educational support, which includes offering academic aid and adjusting teaching techniques and resources, is essential for enhancing the accessibility and inclusivity of business education for students with sensory impairments. Customised teaching methodologies that take into account the unique requirements of these students can greatly improve their learning experience, enabling a more profound comprehension of business concepts and processes. The incorporation of assistive technologies, in conjunction with inclusive teaching methods that accommodate various learning styles, has significantly enhanced academic achievements for students with disabilities (Pettersson-Bloom & Holmqvist, 2022).

The interaction between counselling and educational support is crucial in establishing an educational setting that effectively solves the practical obstacles encountered by students with visual and hearing impairments, while also promoting their psychological well-being and academic growth. Employing this two-pronged strategy is crucial to guaranteeing that these students actively participate in and derive advantages from their business education, so enhancing their total achievement and self-empowerment. This study aims to examine the efficacy of counselling methods and educational support systems in improving accessibility and academic achievements of visually and hearing impaired students who are enrolled in business education programmes in Nigeria. This study aims to identify and analyse the obstacles encountered by these students and suggest targeted measures that promote a more inclusive and supportive educational setting, thereby enhancing their academic achievement and general welfare. Specifically, the study will:

1. To identify the challenges faced by students with visual and hearing impairments in accessing business education in Nigeria.
2. To evaluate the current counselling approaches and educational support services available for students with visual and hearing impairments in Nigerian business education settings.
3. To develop and propose evidence-based strategies aimed at enhancing the accessibility of business education and improving learning outcomes for students with visual and hearing impairments.

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions would guide the study:

1. What challenges do students with visual and hearing impairments face in accessing business education in Nigeria?
2. How effective are the current counselling approaches and educational support services in addressing the needs of students with visual and hearing impairments within Nigerian business education settings?
3. What evidence-based strategies can be developed and proposed to enhance the accessibility of business education and improve learning outcomes for students with visual and hearing impairments?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *An overview of existing research on the educational challenges and support mechanisms for students with sensory impairments.*

There has been significant academic interest in the educational landscape for students with sensory impairments. This reflects a growing realisation of the various problems these students encounter and the crucial need of providing effective support systems. This research covers a wide range of sensory impairments, such as vision and hearing problems. This resource provides valuable perspectives on the obstacles to education and the approaches that can promote a learning environment that is more inclusive and accessible.

An issue that has been widely recognised in the literature is the challenge of accessibility. Students who have sensory impairments frequently face substantial obstacles when it comes to accessing educational resources, technologies, and surroundings. A study conducted by Amin et al. (2021) emphasises that the absence of easily obtainable instructional materials and assistive technologies poses significant challenges for students with visual impairments in effectively managing their academic courses. Petersson-Bloom and Holmqvist (2022) observed that there is a need for greater consistency in the application of inclusive teaching approaches. Insufficient training and resources for educators hinder their ability to adequately support children with sensory impairments, resulting in exclusionary and marginalising educational experiences. In addition to academic obstacles, students with sensory impairments have social and emotional impediments. Lee's (2020) research highlights the significance of emotional support and social involvement in the educational journey of these kids, emphasising the potential dangers of isolation and mental health difficulties.

An increasing amount of research has concentrated on the potential of assistive technologies to revolutionise the educational experience for students with sensory impairments. The utilisation of

technological advancements, such as screen readers, braille displays, and hearing aids integrated with FM systems, has demonstrated a substantial enhancement in the accessibility of educational resources (Khan & Ahmed, 2021). Customised educational solutions that adjust teaching methods and resources to accommodate the requirements of students with sensory impairments have been recognised as successful in improving learning results. Examples of essential components for inclusive education include providing tactile and auditory learning materials for students with visual impairments, as well as utilising sign language interpreters and captioning for students with hearing impairments (Martinez & Clark, 2022). Recent studies have highlighted the importance of counselling and psycho-social support in assisting students with sensory impairments. This support provides assistance in the academic domain as well as addressing the emotional and social difficulties, hence promoting a feeling of inclusion and the ability to bounce back among these students (Nguyen, 2021).

### ***Theories and models related to counselling approaches that support students with disabilities.***

Counselling approaches that support students with disabilities have evolved to encompass a variety of theories and models, each offering unique perspectives and strategies to address these students' psychological, emotional, and educational needs. Among the multitude of approaches, two principal theories have been particularly influential: the Person-Centred Theory and the Social Model of Disability. These models serve as foundational frameworks for understanding and implementing effective counselling interventions for students with disabilities, including those with sensory impairments.

#### **Person-Centred Theory**

Developed by Carl Rogers in the mid-20th century, the Person-Centred Theory (also known as Client-Centred Therapy) posits that individuals have the innate ability to move towards personal growth and healing, provided they are in an environment characterised by genuineness, acceptance, and empathy from the counsellor (Rogers, 1951). This approach emphasises the importance of viewing the client as their life and experiences expert. It promotes a non-directive counselling relationship where the client's sense of self-worth and self-understanding can flourish. In supporting students with disabilities, the Person-Centred Approach underscores the significance of acknowledging the student's personal experiences and feelings about their disability rather than focusing solely on the disability itself. This empowers students to articulate their needs, aspirations, and challenges, fostering a sense of autonomy and resilience. Recent research by Thompson and Cuthbert (2019) highlights the effectiveness of person-centred counselling in

enhancing the psychological well-being and academic engagement of students with disabilities, advocating for its broader adoption in educational settings.

### **Social Model of Disability**

The Social Model of Disability represents a paradigm shift from traditional medical perspectives on disability, which view disability as an individual medical problem, to a focus on societal barriers and attitudes as the primary factors contributing to disability (Oliver, 1996). This model asserts that it is not the individual's impairment that disables them but the social and environmental obstacles that hinder their full participation in society. Applying the Social Model of Disability in counselling practices involves working with students to identify and challenge the external barriers they face, including inaccessible educational environments, societal stigma, and discrimination. It also involves advocating for systemic changes within educational institutions to remove these barriers and promote inclusivity. A study by Martin and Marsh (2021) demonstrates how counselling interventions grounded in the Social Model can empower students with disabilities, encouraging self-advocacy and a positive disability identity.

Both the Person-Centred Theory and the Social Model of Disability offer valuable insights for counselling practices that support students with disabilities. Focusing on the individual's experiences and promoting a more inclusive society contribute to the holistic well-being and academic success of students with disabilities. Continued research and practice within these frameworks are essential to advancing inclusive and effective counselling services.

### ***Previous studies on accessibility and accommodation strategies in business education for students with visual and hearing impairments.***

In business education for students with visual and hearing impairments, accessibility and accommodation strategies play a pivotal role in ensuring these students can participate fully and effectively in their educational journey. Previous studies have highlighted the challenges faced by these students and the importance of tailored support mechanisms to enhance their academic performance and overall educational experiences. Here, we discuss significant contributions to this field, focusing on the role of guidance and counselling and the challenges and motivations behind using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in teaching students with special needs.

Mchuchury & Gwajekera (2023) study on Access to Guidance and Counselling as a Determinant for Academic Performance among Students with Hearing Impairment in Tanzania examined the impact of guidance and counselling services on the academic performance of students with hearing

impairments. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research highlighted that access to these services significantly influences academic outcomes among these students, underscoring the need for school administrators to support and promote such programs actively. Kanwal et al. (2023) study the Educational Experiences of Students with Hearing Impairment Studying in Special Education Institutions across Punjab. The study provides an in-depth look into the educational experiences of students with hearing impairment within special education institutions in Punjab, revealing a reliance on traditional teaching methods and limited use of technology. The findings advocate for a more inclusive, technology-enriched educational framework to support these students' needs better. Puspawati and Juharoh's (2020) study on Motivations and Challenges in the Use of ICT for Teaching Special Needs Students explores teachers' motivations and challenges in using ICT to teach students with hearing impairments.

Despite the potential of ICT to enhance educational access, issues such as limited facilities and the need for teacher training present significant hurdles. Yuwono et al. (2013) study on The Effect of Guidance and Counselling Programs on the Learning Processes of Visually Impaired High School Students investigates the role of guidance and counselling programs in supporting the learning processes of visually impaired students in inclusive settings, highlighting the positive impact of these programs in aiding students' educational journeys and developing self-confidence. El-Zraigat's (2013) study on Assessing Special Needs of Students with Hearing Impairment in Jordan and Its Relation to Some Variables assesses the special needs of students with hearing impairment in Jordan, exploring the impact of variables such as hearing loss level and communication method on their educational needs, emphasising the importance of tailored programs to meet these needs effectively. Utilising a custom-developed special needs scale with confirmed reliability and validity, the research applied t-tests and ANOVA for analysis. Results showed no significant differences between male and female participants. However, students with 55-69 dB hearing loss exhibited more significant needs in communication, audiological Rehabilitation, and learning styles than those with more severe hearing loss. Students in grades 2-8 displayed more significant needs across various areas than those in grades 9-11, particularly in learning style needs for the 6-8 grade group. Furthermore, students who used total communication methods had better outcomes in several areas than those relying on sign language. The study suggests implementing targeted programs to address these identified needs effectively.

These studies collectively underscore the critical importance of guidance and counselling, alongside the strategic use of ICT and inclusive teaching practices, in enhancing the educational experiences of students with visual and hearing impairments. They highlight a common theme: the

necessity of comprehensive, tailored support systems to address these students' unique challenges, paving the way for their academic success and full participation in the educational process.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Research Design*

This study adopts a qualitative research design to delve into the experiences and perspectives of professionals involved in counselling and educational support to students with visual and hearing impairments in business education settings. The goal is to explore in-depth the current approaches, challenges, and potential strategies for enhancing accessibility and learning outcomes.

### *Participants*

The study focused on a purposive sample of professionals with direct experience and involvement with students with visual and hearing impairments in business education. The sample will include:

- **Special Education Teachers:** Those who have directly worked with students with visual and hearing impairments in business education contexts.
- **Counsellors and Psychologists:** Professionals who provide counselling services specifically tailored to students with sensory impairments.
- **Assistive Technology Specialists:** Experts familiar with the latest assistive technologies that support learning for students with visual and hearing impairments.
- **School Administrators:** Individuals in leadership positions who have a role in decision-making regarding support services and accommodations for students with disabilities.

A target sample size of 15 professionals will be sought, ensuring a range of experiences and perspectives are represented.

### *Data Collection Methods*

Semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection method, allowing for the exploration of personal experiences, perceptions, and suggestions for improvement in supporting students with visual and hearing impairments in business education. The interview guide will include open-ended questions covering:

1. The specific challenges these students face in accessing business education.
2. The effectiveness and gaps in current counselling and educational support services.



3. Recommendations for evidence-based strategies to improve accessibility and learning outcomes.

Interviews were conducted via video conferencing, depending on the availability and preference of the participants. Each interview lasted for approximately 45-60 minutes.

### ***Data Analysis***

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the interview data. This involved transcribing the interviews, coding the data for recurrent themes, and interpreting these themes about the research questions. QDA Miner lite software was used to facilitate the organisation and analysis of the data.

Key themes included types of challenges faced, the effectiveness of current support systems, perceived gaps in services, and concrete suggestions for enhancing support and accessibility in business education for students with visual and hearing impairments.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board before commencing the study. Participants were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose and their role in it, and informed consent was obtained. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process, with any potentially identifying information being anonymised in the resulting publication.

This qualitative study aims to contribute valuable insights into the complex landscape of educational support for students with sensory impairments in business education, highlighting areas for improvement and potential strategies for enhancing accessibility and outcomes.

## **RESULTS**

The qualitative analysis of 15 semi-structured interviews with relevant professionals, including special education teachers, counsellors, psychologists, assistive technology specialists, and school administrators, revealed significant insights into the counselling approaches and educational support for business education among students with visual and hearing impairments in Nigeria.

### ***Challenges in Accessing Business Education***

Participants unanimously highlighted the lack of accessible educational materials as a significant barrier. Textbooks and online resources rarely conform to accessible formats like braille or sign language interpretation. Additionally, the inadequacy of assistive technology in classrooms was cited, with many institutions needing more tools to support these students effectively.

### ***Effectiveness of Current Support Services***

While some participants noted the presence of dedicated support services for students with sensory impairments, the overall effectiveness of these services was reported as suboptimal. A lack of trained personnel and resources was commonly cited, impacting the ability to provide comprehensive counselling and educational support. Furthermore, participants indicated a gap in integrating assistive technologies within the business education curriculum, limiting the engagement and participation of students with impairments.

### ***Strategies for Enhancing Accessibility and Learning Outcomes***

The need for a multi-faceted approach to enhance accessibility and learning outcomes was emphasised. Key strategies suggested include:

- **Development of Accessible Educational Materials:** Customising business education materials into formats accessible for students with visual and hearing impairments.
- **Training for Educators and Counsellors:** Implementing training programs to enhance educators' and counsellors' competency in addressing these students' needs.
- **Investment in Assistive Technologies:** Increasing access to and integration of assistive technologies in teaching and learning processes.
- **Policy and Infrastructure Improvements:** Advocating for policy changes and infrastructure development to create an inclusive educational environment.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings from this study underscore the significant challenges faced by students with visual and hearing impairments in accessing business education in Nigeria. The lack of accessible educational materials and assistive technologies highlights a critical gap in the educational support system, aligning with previous research indicating similar challenges in other contexts (Effiong et al., 2023).

The reported suboptimality of current counselling and educational support services calls for an immediate re-evaluation of existing support frameworks. This aligns with the recommendations of Obaka (2017), who emphasised the importance of specialised training for educators and support staff in enhancing the effectiveness of educational support for students with sensory impairments.

The strategies suggested by participants for enhancing accessibility and learning outcomes reflect a comprehensive approach that addresses both immediate and systemic barriers. This approach resonates with the recommendations of Johnson et al. (2016), who advocated for integrating assistive technologies and developing accessible learning materials as critical strategies for supporting students with disabilities in higher education.

Implementing these strategies requires concerted efforts from educational institutions, policymakers, and stakeholders to ensure that students with visual and hearing impairments can access and thrive in business education. It also highlights the importance of adopting a holistic approach to support that encompasses not only academic needs but also the socio-emotional well-being of these students, as suggested by Aderibigbe and Ogheneochuko (2021).

The insights garnered from this study illuminate the critical need for enhanced counselling approaches and educational support to improve the accessibility and learning outcomes of business education for students with visual and hearing impairments in Nigeria. By adopting the suggested strategies, there is potential for significant improvements in these students' educational experiences and outcomes, contributing to a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape.

## CONCLUSION

### *Summary of Key Findings and Their Significance*

The study "Counselling Approaches and Educational Support for Business Education in Students with Visual and Hearing Impairments" revealed several crucial insights:

1. **Accessibility Challenges:** A significant barrier to inclusive business education is the lack of accessible learning materials and assistive technologies. This aligns with global challenges but is exacerbated by specific infrastructural and policy gaps in Nigeria.
2. **Ineffectiveness of Current Support:** Current counselling and educational support services are suboptimal, mainly due to inadequate training of educators and counsellors in handling the unique needs of students with impairments.

3. **Potential for Technology and Training:** There is a strong potential for enhancing educational outcomes through assistive technology and specialised training for educators and support staff.

These findings underscore the urgency of addressing the systemic barriers that limit the educational experiences and outcomes of students with visual and hearing impairments in Nigeria's business education sector.

### ***Recommendations for Future Practice and Research***

1. Educational institutions should prioritise creating and distributing learning materials in formats accessible to students with visual and hearing impairments.
2. Implement training programs for educators and counsellors focusing on using assistive technologies and inclusive teaching practices.
3. Advocate for policies that mandate and fund the incorporation of assistive technologies and accessible materials in all educational institutions offering business courses.
4. Conduct longitudinal research to assess the long-term impact of inclusive policies and practices on students with impairments' academic success and employment outcomes.
5. Explore the potential of emerging technologies (e.g., AI, VR) in creating immersive and accessible learning experiences for students with sensory impairments.
6. Comparative studies between different regions within Nigeria and other countries could offer insights into effective inclusive education models.

### ***Reflection on the Study's Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research***

While insightful, the study's reliance on qualitative interviews with professionals presents limitations in terms of the breadth of data and the generalizability of findings. Future research could incorporate the perspectives of students with visual and hearing impairments to understand their experiences and needs better. Additionally, a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative assessments of educational outcomes with qualitative insights could provide a more comprehensive view of the effectiveness of various support strategies.

Moreover, examining the role of family and community support in the educational success of students with impairments could offer valuable directions for holistic support models. Future studies should also consider the impact of socio-economic factors on the accessibility of assistive technologies and educational resources.

By addressing these limitations and exploring suggested avenues for future research, stakeholders can continue to build on the foundation laid by this study, moving closer to the goal of genuinely inclusive business education for all students, regardless of their physical abilities.

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