MANAGING COMMUNICATION DISORDERS FOR QUALITY TEACHING IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study is focused on managing communication disorders for quality teaching in public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria. The study x-rayed different management styles as a way forward for addressing the numerous challenges confronting educational administrators and teaching staff in managing children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and Learning Disabilities (LD). Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised all the -1 federal and 2 state universities in Rivers State, with a teaching staff population of 2,600 from where a sample of (100) – federal university and 160-teaching staff from 2 state universities as respondents which were selected using the stratified random sampling technique. Managing Communication Disorders for Quality Teaching in Public Universities Questionnaire (MCDQTPUQ) was the main instrument used to gather data with a reliability index of 0.88. Mean scores and rank order statistics were used in answering the research questions and z-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 (2-tailed) level of significance. Major findings emerged from the study: educational administrators and the teaching staff in public universities (federal and state) using contemporary management styles are managing children with Autism and Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and Learning Disabilities (LD) fairly well and school leaders are faced with a lot of challenges affecting quality teaching in Rivers State public universities. Based on the findings, conclusion was drawn and it was recommended that educators should bring their skills, knowledge, experiences to bear as they use the various management styles to manage autism and spectrum disorders and learning disabilities in public universities in Rivers State.

Keywords: Management, Communication Disorders, Quality Teaching, Public Universities.
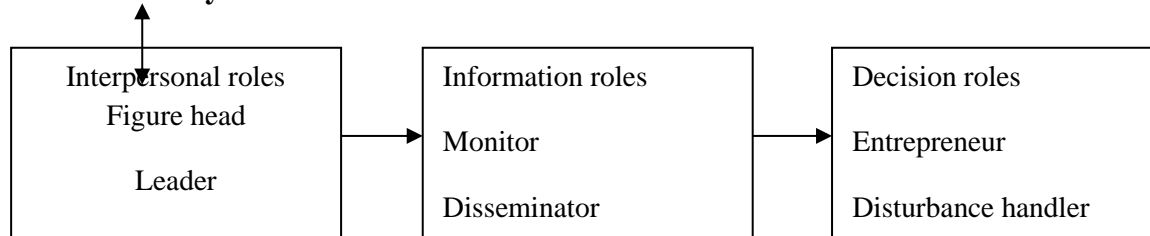
INTRODUCTION

The educational administrator is the chief executive of the university who performs a lot of duties mainly administrative, supervisory, managerial and instructional with the teaching staff and the other members of staff and students to achieve goals. This means that he/she ensures that processes, procedures, and material resources (including human resources) are used efficiently and effectively. Steinitz (2009) emphasized that a well-managed institution is characterised by three core components: a supportive work climate, effective management systems, and skills in change-management. This implies that educational administrators pay special attention to fostering good working relationships among staff, students from diverse backgrounds, students with different educational needs and so on. Effective management systems involve good teamwork, creativity, clear communication, participatory decision-making, planning, organizing, implementing and monitoring and evaluating. As an educational leader of the ivory tower, it is his job to form, support and inspire his team, so that together they can achieve more than they ever thought possible.

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Infact Mullins (2007) in Mintzberg (1990) captured this vividly that as a result of formal authority and status, managerial activities can be seen as a set of ten managerial roles which may be divided into three groups: (i) interpersonal roles, (ii) informational roles and (iii) decisional roles. The managerial roles are:

Formal authority and status

Interpersonal roles Figure head Leader	Information roles Monitor Disseminator	Decision roles Entrepreneur Disturbance handler

Source: Mintzberg, H. "The manager's job. Folklore and fact." Harvard Business Review Classic, March – April, 1990, P. 168.

It is true that the educational administrator is in charge of all staff and students put under his care in public universities but the attention of this author is on children with disabilities (sometimes called children with special needs). Precisely, in this write up, attention is on children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and Learning Disabilities (LD). These group of children suffer from different kinds of communication disorders (handicaps) resulting from visual, auditory, emotional or other physical disabilities and mental retardation due to circumstances of birth, inheritance, mental or physical health pattern or accident early or later in life (Adima, Ladipo & Abosi, 1988). The implication of this is that this group of children should be treated as individuals. These children with physical problems which affect their education be provided with a programme to take care of the situation so that they would enjoy and benefit from the education which they receive. Managing them means making allowance for the use of special equipment and methods for teaching depending on individual needs.

Conceptually, quality teaching involves using all available teaching/learning materials to help the young ones to learn, to bring about changes in behaviour, accommodating, sustaining the educational needs of all children whether in the clinic (classroom) or outside the clinic to achieve goals (Kaegon, 2008). Communication disorders encompasses a wide variety of problems in language, speech and hearing, the inability to understand and use language properly, a condition that partially or totally prevents human communication (Wikipedia, 2014). Communication disorders could be developmental or acquired. This condition in children affect learning in every aspect of life.

Similarly, Steinitz (2009) explains that disabilities vary in the degree to which they impede a child's normal functioning. They may be physical, developmental, psychological, or a combination thereof. In the developing world, especially in Nigeria, children with autism, with learning disabilities and children who are slow learners or live with other more subtle forms of disability often get overlooked, given the prevalence of poverty, overcrowded classrooms, health constraints, shortages of experienced teachers, lack of teaching materials, and low school expectations among others.

In this context,, university education is the education received after secondary education (NPE, 2014). Public universities are government owned. These schools are established and financed by the government. All matters relating to these schools are channelled to the appropriate government quarters (Federal and State Ministries of Education – National Universities

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Commission (NUC)) for immediate action. The three universities in the state with its attendant challenges and also many personnels working in them (Kaegon, 2008).

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) is a broad term that includes five conditions characterized by limitations in three areas of development: communication, social interaction, and repetitive behaviour or interests. It is a developmental disability that significantly affects verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, and also adversely affects a child's educational performance (Smith, 2007). Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences. Wing (1996) explained that autistic disorders affect all the activities of daily living and they are usually lifelong, though tending to slow improvement. The children can be helped through education to develop to their full potential and in that case, many of the general principles underlying methods of teaching and caring can be applied. Programmes for teaching or caring are successful only if these difficulties are understood and taken into account. These children need someone to whom they can always turn for help and who understand the reasons for their confusion.

On the other hand, much literature have been recorded on learning disabilities. Smith (2007) defined learning disability as a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. Similarly, Adima, Ladipo and Abosi (1988) explained learning disability to mean a disorder or delayed development in one or more of the processes of speech, language, reading, spelling, writing or arithmetic resulting from a possible cerebral dysfunction and/or emotional or behavioural disturbance and not from mental retardation. As Arrowsmith - Young (2012) puts it, learning disabilities are lifelong. All of these definitions have major implications for education and learning. Since our Nigerian university educational system is about pouring content into a fixed system - the brain, caution, patience, calm approach is essential to help these children, for learning disabilities are vast. Of all the learning disabilities addressed by the above scholars, difficulties with the mechanical aspect of reading take the longest to deal with. Reading takes more time than other academic subjects.

Characteristics of learning disabilities are learned helplessness (academic) social and exhibited behavioural style. The challenges associated with learning disability are: writing challenges, discrepancy between the child's learning capacity (as indicated by aptitude tests) and his actual achievement, inability to read, arithmetic difficulty, inability to recognize sensory impressions visually, auditorily or in the application of tactile sense (Adima, Ladipo and Abosi, 1988). It is important to say here that the missions, NGOs are trying but their inputs are not enough to help these children. More and more efforts are needed to provide modern equipments, conducive environment, proper legal means to protect the rights of these children and to provide them employment after training.

Managing communication disorders for quality teaching in Rivers State Universities could be addressed by using Total Quality Management (TQM) style. Scholars agree that applying TQM in schools will create a need to know these groups of students discussed above the more (become student - centered). Greenwood and Gaunt (1994) aptly summed up the purpose of TQM for schools as follows: the school prepares students to make the transition to adulthood, and develop the self-confidence to accomplish goals. Onuka (2006) had observed as follows:

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"of the various management styles, management by objectives and total quality management are important and very effective because they have people at the centre of their principles and practices. TQM enables and empowers students to take control of their own learning (focus on mastery learning), and empower them to maximize their capabilities and find joy in learning (Deming, 1986). It is a management style and or approach used by educational administrators that is quality - centred, customer - focused, facts - based, team-driven, and seminar-led, aimed at providing satisfaction to the organizational clientele and the realization of organizational goals (Kaegon, 2008). TQM strives for continuous improvement in all activities and emphasizes on positive attitude, values and students' participation in groups.

Management by objectives tries to establish a team work and harmonizes individual goals with the commonwealth. Primarily, it is a joint goal-setting approach or style between the educational administrator (supervisor) and subordinates (teachers) and or students (identifying goals and objectives). Participative management style in this context encourages cooperation of all staff, students and parents through team work and the sharing of responsibilities. Team work is essential towards the achievement of goals. This is because groups of people (all stakeholders) collaborating in teams can often have more success than individuals working alone if they have a stake in the outcome. The bottom line of all these managerial styles is improved products (students) and satisfaction of the stakeholders in education (Kaegon, 2008).

It should be noted that children with autistic disorders typically have an unusual type of "learning curve". This means that instead of making steady progress, however slow, they tend to learn something, then stick at this point for a long time. Methods of teaching and ways of communicating have to be tailored to the child's level of understanding and ability to perform any skill. If the child's developmental level is too low for learning a particular task, the child is likely to react negatively if attempts to teach that skill are continued (Wing, 1996). Teachers have the task of putting all the recommendations into effect in the classroom. They need training, experience and sympathetic understanding of the children. Even with parents, and other caregivers, teachers have the most demanding roles of any who are involved with children with autistic disorders.

Also, Mbipom (1997) advocates that it is possible for the school administrator to organize a modified form of mainstreaming for the students by keeping him in the same public school with normal children but building in his drills and exercises into the regular time-table. Such teamwork and cooperation are only possible if there is mutual trust between the parents and the school. Adima, Ladipo and Abosi (1988) observed that many specialists in the area of learning disabilities believe that a learning disabled child can be assisted through remedial work, to learn. For their education and learning to be meaningful and effective, there must be a programme of diagnosis to detect the root-cause of the problem. Emphasis in the provision of remediation should also include training in the auditory memory of non-meaningful materials. Also to be looked out for are disabilities of spelling, writing and arithmetic in learning disabled children.

Steinitz (2009) adds that special attention may also be required to identify and pursue vocational opportunities so that these children can become as independent and self-supporting as possible when they are adults. To promote independence, encourage parents and caregivers to allow autistic and children with learning disabilities to learn to help themselves and srugg1e to do things, even if it would be faster for someone else to do for them. Parents, teaching staff should allow them to play and interact with other children because by so doing, they will benefit from learning about tolerance, helpfulness, and respect for others too.

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Various types of educational programmes can be designed for them. These are: special classes within ordinary schools, remedial teaching, extensive observation and data collection including the study of records and background of the children. Techniques such as adapting or modifying the school curriculum and using peer supports can help teachers encourage behaviours that will allow students to remain engaged in instruction provided in the general education classroom (Smith, 2007). The scholar outlined four critical areas that will help educate school - age learners with ASD: accessing the general education, making instructional accommodations, using validated practices and using technology.

Smith (2007) however warns that poor teaching can cause school failure and may be a factor in the identification of some students not doing well. It is part of an actual cause of learning disabilities as .both educators and students lack infrastructure and teaching/learning aids. Good teaching, on the other hand, can prevent school failure and can also help students compensate for their learning challenges. When educators target the right skills, set goals and expectations high, use validated instructional procedures, and support students as they stretch to meet their goals, education makes a real difference in the results of these students. The notion is "catch them before they fail".

Adima, Ladipo and Abosi (1988) outlined the challenges associated with learning disabilities as: learned helplessness, being non-strategic, inability to generalise, faculty information processing, poor social skills, and rejection, tendency to be victimised among others. Similarly, Wing (1996) and Smith (2007) lamented that methods of teaching and ways of communicating to these categories of children, poor teaching, lack of infrastructure, teaching aids among others are some major challenges confronting the educators in public universities.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The main thrusts of the university are; research, teaching and community service. Their goals are continuous search for truths, exploring all issues on international best practices. The educational administrators and the teaching staff are the front liners to implement all government policies. Currently, in public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria, there are increasing number of children with autism and learning disabilities. The disturbing news is that there are no teaching/learning environment, equipment, teaching aids among others to foster practical lessons for them. The stakeholders in education should take pragmatic approaches to deal with and assist, educate them through special methods to be self realised and contributing members of the society. Nigerian public universities could achieve its goals of training the youths if educational administrators and the teaching staff adopt different management styles so as to accommodate all categories of learners (children) in their care.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study was to examine the management of communication disorders for quality teaching in public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:
1.   Identify the management styles of educational administrators in managing children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD).
2.   Identify challenges of educational administrators in managing children with Learning Disabilities (LD).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were formulated to guide the research work:
1.   What are the management styles of public university administrators in managing children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) in Rivers State, Nigeria?

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2.   What are the challenges of public university administrators in managing children with Learning Disabilities (LD) in Rivers State, Nigeria?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES
The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.
1.   There is no significant difference between federal and state universities teaching staff on the management styles of educational administrators in managing children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD).
2.   There is no significant difference between federal and state universities teaching staff on the challenges of educational administrators in managing children with Learning Disabilities (LD).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY
The study has meaningful contributions to make to humanity in particular, the education industry in general, will benefit the universities, the government, serve as a boost to educational administrators and teaching staff, serve as a reference material to scholars and researchers both locally and internationally as well as the stakeholders in education.

METHODOLOGY
The design for the study was a descriptive survey. The population of the study consisted of 1 Federal (University of Port Harcourt), and 2 State Universities (Rivers State University and Rivers State University of Education, Rumuolumeni Port Harcourt, Nigeria), with a teaching staff strength of 2,600 who were the respondents of the study. A sample of 260 teaching staff (160 from State Universities and 100 from Federal University representing 10% of the population was drawn through the stratified random sampling technique. Data were gathered using a four (4) point instrument tagged: Managing Communication Disorders for Quality Teaching .in Public Universities Questionnaire (MCDQTPUQ) designed by the researcher after the modified Likert scale model. The instrument was properly validated after an extensive review of the literature and consultations with experts from educational management and measurement and evaluation departments respectively. Pilot study was conducted using test-retest strategy and Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Formular (r) used in the calculations that established the reliability of the instrument at 0.88 using 98 degree of freedom. The instrument was administered personally by the researcher with the help of research assistants. Mean scores and rank order statistics were used to answer the research questions while z-test statistics was used in testing the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What are the management styles of public university administrators in managing children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) in Rivers State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean and rank order on the ratings of teaching staff from federal and state universities on the management styles of educational administrators in managing Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) in Rivers State.

S/N	Items Management Styles Variable	Teaching Staff of Federal University N = (100)		Teaching Staff of State Universities N = (160)	
		Mean	Rank Order	Mean	Rank Order
1	TQM enables and empowers students to take control of their own learning.	3.21	3rd	3.40	2nd
2.	TQM is management style that is customer-focused.	3.34	1st	3.58	1st
3.	TQM strives for continuous improvement in all activities	3.04	4th	3.33	4th
4.	MBO establishes teamwork towards goal achievement	3.00	5th	3.08	5th
5.	Participatory management style encourages cooperation of all staff, students and parents through team work and sharing of responsibilities.	3.26	2nd	3.38	3rd
	Aggregate Mean	**3.15**		**3.35**	

Table 1 indicates in descending order of magnitude that the management styles of educational administrators on the ratings of their teaching staff are moderate on TQM enables and empowers students to take control of their own learning (mean score 3.40 and 3.21 state and federal universities respectively; TQM is a management style that is customer-focused (mean 3.58 and 3.34) for state and federal universities; TQM strives for continuous improvement in all activities (mean 3.33 and 3.04 respectively); MBO establishes teamwork towards goal achievement (mean 3.08 and 3.00) for state and federal universities; participatory management style encourages cooperation of all staff, students and parents through teamwork and sharing of responsibilities (mean 3.38 and 3.26 respectively). However, the aggregate mean scores 3.35 and 3.15 (for state and federal educational administrators respectively) show that the management styles adopted by educational administrators are slightly more pragmatic than those of federal administrators.

Research Question 2: What are the challenges of public university administrators in managing children with Learning Disabilities (LD) in Rivers State, Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean and rank order on the ratings of teaching staff from federal and state universities on the challenges of educational administrators in managing Learning Disabilities (LD) in Rivers State.

S/N	Items Challenges of Managing Learning Disabilities Variable	Teaching Staff of Federal University N = (100)		Teaching Staff of State Universities N = (160)	
		Mean	Rank Order	Mean	Rank Order
6.	Learned helplessness	1.43	1st	2.12	1st
7.	Being non-strategic	1.40	3rd	2.07	2nd
8.	Inability to generalize	1.23	4th	1.53	4th
9.	Faulty information processing	1.41	2nd	1.54	3rd
10.	Poor social skills and rejection	1.22	5th	1.48	6th
11.	Tendency to be victimized	1.18	6th	1.50	5th
	Aggregate Mean	**1.31**		**1.70**	

Table 2 shows that state educational administrators managed learning disabilities fairly well in all areas examined (see mean scores of responses in table 2). On the other hand, federal educational administrators did not manage well in inability to generalise (mean 1.23); poor social skills and rejection (mean 1.22); tendency to be victimized (mean 1.18) respectively. The aggregate mean of 1.31 for federal university and 1.70 for state universities administrators show clear evidence that state universities administrators managed fairly well than federal university administrators on the ratings of their teaching staff.

Hypotheses 1: There is no significant difference between federal and state universities teaching staff on the management styles of educational administrators in managing children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD).

Table 3:   Summary of z-test analysis on the ratings of teaching staff from federal and state universities on the management styles of educational administrators in managing children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD).

S/N	Categories	N	Mean	S.D	df	z-value	2-tailed sig.	Sig. level	Remarks
1	Teaching staff from federal universities	100	3.04	.43	258	1.343	.017	0.05	Sig.
2.	Teaching staff from state universities	160	3.17	.47					Reject Ho
		260							

Table 3 indicates that at 258 degrees of freedom and 0.05 level of significance, the calculated z-value yielded a z-value of 1.343 which was significant at .017. Since the 2-tailed significant value is lower than .05, we conclude that the difference is significant. Apparently, the null hypothesis is accepted. We therefore withhold the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of federal and state universities teaching staff on the management styles of educational administrators in managing children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD).

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between federal and state universities teaching staff on the challenges of educational administrators in managing children with Learning Disabilities (LD).

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Table 4: Summary of z-test analysis on the rating of teaching staff from federal and state universities on the challenges of educational administrators in managing children with Learning Disabilities (LD).

S/N	Items Challenges of Managing Learning Disabilities Variable	Teaching Staff of Federal University N = (100)	Teaching Staff of State Universities N = (160)	z-value	2-tailed sig.	Remarks
1.	Learned helplessness	1.43	2.12	.508	.087	Sig.
2.	Being non-strategic	1.40	2.07	.570	.125	Sig.
3.	Inability to generalize	1.23	1.53	.858	.625	Sig.
4.	Faulty information processing	1.41	1.54	.822	.121	Sig.
5.	Poor social skills and rejection	1.22	1.48	.502	.143	Sig.
6.	Tendency to be victimized	1.18	1.50	1.153	.083	Sig.
	Aggregate Mean	**1.31**	**1.70**	**0.735**	**0.05**	

Table 4 shows that at 258 degrees of freedom and 0.05 level of significance, the calculated z-test yielded z-values of .508; .570; 858; .822; .502; 1.153 which were deemed to be significant at .087; 125; .625; .121; 143; .083 respectively. At 2-tailed level of significance above at .05, the hypothesis was rejected in respect of learned helplessness (.087); being non-strategic (.125); inability to generalise (.625); faulty information processing (.121); poor social skills and rejection (.143); tendency to be victimized (.083). In the final analyses with the overall z-value of 0.735 at 258 degrees of freedom and 0.05 2-tailed significance, we reject the hypothesis and state that there is a significant difference between the mean ratings of federal and state universities teaching staff on the challenges of educational administrators in managing children with Learning Disabilities (LD).

DISCUSSION

The study revealed that teaching staff assessment of their educational administrators from federal and state universities under study were in agreement that of the various management styles, management by objectives, participative management style and total quality management are important and very effective because they have people at the centre of their principles and practices. A possible explanation for the direction of the finding may be in the fact that school members (educational administrators, teaching staff, students and parents) are to work as a team using these management styles to achieve the goals of the school system. This position agrees with Onuka (2006) that the use of these management styles yielded good results and tremendous improved teaching and learning. Deming (2006), Kaegon (2008), Wing (1996) and Mbipom (1997) maintain that educational administrators who apply these management styles in their duties to the autistic children and those with learning disability are very likely to perform better than those who do not. The result of this research from responses of teaching staff on the management styles by educational administrators further buttresses the general performance of their universities. It revealed that the state universities leaders ranked first and the federal universities leaders came second. This is not a very comfortable situation since majority of the people send their children to the federal university for learning.

Another finding of the study is that state educational administrators managed learning disabilities fairly well in all areas examined than federal educational administrators. This finding in confirmatory of Smith (2007), Adima, Ladipo and Abosi (1988), Arrowsmith-Young

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(2012) who insisted that educational administrators and teaching staff should be cautious, patient, use calm approaches to help these children for these disabilities are vast and lifelong. The children are more demanding in terms of protection, communication, interaction and so on. The educators should try to know some of the various demanding roles parents fulfil so that at the classroom levels, lecturers will provide varieties of instructional programmes and exercises that would help the children.

It was found from the opinions of the educational administrators and teaching staff on the challenges of managing Learning Disabilities (LD) that there are many types of challenges which the educational administrators grapple with on a daily basis in university administration. This finding is in line with the observation of Adima, Lapido and Abosi (1988) that the challenges associated with learning disabilities are learned helplessness, being non-strategic, inability to generalise, faulty information processing, poor social skills and rejection, tendency to be victimized. Still in support of this finding, Wing (1996) explained that whether suffering from autism and/or learning disability, programmes for teaching or caring are successful only if these challenges are understood and taken into account. These children need someone to whom they can always turn for help and who understands the reason for their confusion. However, Smith warns that poor teaching can cause school failure for these categories of children and maybe a factor in the identification of these students not doing well.

CONCLUSION

In the light of the findings of the study, the researcher concluded that managing children (students) with autism and spectrum disorders and learning disabilities in public universities require contemporary management styles and that educational administrators and teaching staff are confronted with many learning disabilities and autism challenges on a daily basis in university administration in Rivers State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1.   The educators – (educational administrators, teaching staff, counsellors) should bring their skills, knowledge, experiences to bear as they use the various management styles to manage autism and spectrum disorders and learning disabilities in Public Universities in Rivers State.
2.   Public universities, universities of education, colleges of education and institutes of education units should broaden their curriculum to accommodate special education across Nigeria so that more specialist teaching staff will be trained and retrained and be employed in all public universities and they should liaise (have synergy) with the educational stakeholders to surmount the many challenges facing them.

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