



## Coping Strategies of Educating Students with Special Needs in Gombe State

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### Abstract

*Students with special needs are facing a number of problems which they are finding difficult to cope with. In the light of this, this study examined the coping strategies of students with special needs in Gombe State. The demographic variables of gender and type of disability were tested on the respondents' view. The research design adopted for this study was a descriptive survey. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to select 257 participants in the study. However, 216 questionnaire forms were valid for data analysis. The instrument used was entitled "Coping Strategies of Students with Special Needs Questionnaire (CSSNQ)". Test re-test method was used to establish the reliability of the instrument as co-efficient of 0.73 was obtained. Mean and rank order was used to answer the research questions raised, while t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were employed to test the hypotheses formulated at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that some of the coping strategies employed by these students are working hard to solve their own problems individually, accepting special needs condition as God wishes and avoiding thinking about special needs situation. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that parents of children with special needs should provide for their personal and educational needs so that they can be able to benefit from teaching/learning process; the society should give strong financial, emotional and medical supports to students with special needs to enable them to adjust effectively to school environment; the school counsellors should, on regular basis, help students with special needs with emotional support and anxiety alleviation techniques so that they can become less apprehensive about their future and be able to achieve success in their educational endeavors.*

**Keywords:** Coping strategies, students with special needs, special education

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### Introduction

The provision of education for all citizens irrespective of their physical or social status is one of the requirements for a nation's attainment of sustainable growth and development. This implies that education is a fundamental human right for both normal and disabled individuals. The United Nations Convention (2006) on the Rights of the child, declared that all children (with or without special needs) have fundamental rights to education, and to experience full involvement within society. That is, all children with special needs have equal rights and freedom as any other child. However, children with special

needs are in most cases disadvantaged owing to their level of disability and this thus prevents equal participation in educational programmes as it is required.

There are different categories of children with special needs. For the purpose of this study, students with special needs or disability are categorized into three major classes, viz; visually impaired, hearing impaired and physically challenges students. These categories of children are to be educated, hence, their presence in the secondary school system in order to equip them with skills and knowledge that will enable them to be useful to

themselves, their parents and to the society at large. This suggests that a special type of education is organized by the government to make these students fit and adjust effectively to their environment. The two major approaches are inclusion and mainstreaming or integration. Inclusion means the combination of regular classes with special education services. Children with special needs are educated with their typically developing peers for at least half of a day. It is based on the universal design or best practices where the curriculum and the teaching-learning process consider the diversity of all learners rather than in their homogeneity (Obi, 2013). Mainstreaming on the other hand, is a process by which children with special needs are placed in a regular school environment to receive instruction with regular students.

Nangosi (2014) found that the enrolment rate of children with special needs in pre-primary, primary and secondary schools is very low. The study reported that 9% of children with disability attend school and only 6% of these children complete primary schools and go to study in secondary schools. The United State Bureau of Labour Statistics (2014) stated that disability is one of the major factors for children not attending school and according to the figures, 30% of the children aged 7 gave disability as one of the reasons for not going to school. Provision of insufficient institutional materials like braille papers, perkinsbrailers and braille text books to special units to suit the special learning of children with special needs. Such has directly discriminated against children with special needs and prejudice their education.

Bryant, Smith and Bryant (2008) stated that there is an association between physical health and academic performance of students with special needs. Some children who have special needs resulting from chronic illness, intellectual disability, or behavioural or developmental difficulties might be more at risk of developing academic problems or difficulties with relationships at school. Children with attention problems, high levels of anxiety, or impulsive or aggressive behaviour



are at greater risk of difficulties at school. This is because they might find it harder to adapt to the demands of the classroom setting, or they might find it difficult to concentrate during tasks and teacher instructions.

In the school system, many of these students find it difficult to cope with some of the above discussed challenges. Studies (Folkman, 2010; Yura, 2012) have reported that majority of students with specials could not adapt with the situations; which as such have resulted in school dropout. However, those who are able to cope are employing different coping strategies. For example, offering prayers, watching television and chatting with friends on the telephone are some common coping strategies adopted by children with intellectual disability. Utilising religious or spiritual resources or beliefs could also be helpful. Morris and Maisto (2001) cited religion as coping strategies when they observed that children with special needs who attended religious services regularly enjoy better health and have markedly lower rates of depression than those who do not.

Uchino, Cacioppo and Kiecolt-Glaser (2006) identified a strong network of friends and family as social support to good health of children with special needs. Being hopeful or optimistic is another means by which the children cope. Folkman (2010) mentioned that the relationship between hope and coping is dynamic and reciprocal. Each in turn supports and is supported by the other, particularly in managing uncertainty and coping with a changing reality. One way for a person to have hope during challenging times is to have goals. With goals, these children would be able to focus on their achievements.

It could be observed from the foregoing that students with special needs are group of exceptional children, particularly in secondary schools, who depend on people and other relevant aids to cope with their conditions. Coping in this context refers to all responses made by an individual who encounters a potentially harmful outcome including overt behaviors, cognition, psychological responses and emotional responses. Coping strategies can be generally defined as the cognitive and



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behavioral efforts made to ameliorate demands that overwhelm a person's resources. It can be viewed as the role played by an individual or social system in utilizing physical, social and psychological resources to manage a stressful situation or condition in the environment (Trute & Hiebert-Murphy, 2002). In regards to students with special needs, coping strategies are different methods, ways or approaches adopted to adapt to their disability conditions.

### Statement of the Problem

A number of studies have been conducted on children with special needs. For instance, Bolu-Steve, Olawuyi and Gbolade (2017) worked on the challenges encountered by students in the school for special needs in Kwara State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that the major challenge of these students was their difficulty to relate with unimpaired persons and no significant difference was found in the challenges of students of special needs school in Kwara State on the basis of gender, age, religious affiliation and their type of disability. Okonkwo, Fajonyomi, Omotosho, Esere and Olawuyi (2017) carried out a study on challenges, counselling needs, and coping strategies of students with visual impairment in regular secondary schools in Nigeria. The findings of the study revealed that the challenges of students with visual impairment in regular secondary schools include inability to access modern technologies, inappropriate teaching methods and non-availability of special curriculum. The studies by Bolu-Steve, Olawuyi and Gbolade (2017); Okonkwo, Fajonyomi, Omotosho, Esere and Olawuyi (2017) were conducted in Nigeria but not in Gombe State. Although, the previous studies focused on challenges of the children with special needs and specifically on visually impaired but few have examined the coping strategies adopted by these category of students. This follows that a research gap still exists on problems and coping strategies of children with special needs. It is in the light of this that this study deems it imperative to investigate problems and coping strategies of

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students with special needs in special education Center in Gombe State.

### Research Questions

The following are the research questions raised for the purpose of this study:

1. What are the coping strategies employed by students with special needs in special education Center in Gombe State?
2. Is there difference between the coping strategies of male and female students with special needs in special education Center in Gombe State?
3. Is there difference in the coping strategies employed by students with special needs in special education Center in Gombe State based on type of disability?

### Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses are formulated to guide the conduct of the study:

1. There is no significant difference between the coping strategies of male and female students with special needs in special education Center in Gombe State.
2. There is no significant difference in the coping strategies of students with special needs in special education Center in Gombe State based on type of disability.

### Purpose of the Study

The study investigated the coping strategies of students with special needs in special education Center in Gombe State. The study also examined the influence of moderating variables of gender and type of disability on participants' coping strategies.

### Methodology

Descriptive research design was adopted for this study. Since the study investigated the coping strategies of students with special needs in secondary schools in Gombe State, through the selection of representative sample and use of questionnaire, the descriptive survey type was considered appropriate for the study.

The population for this study comprises all students with special needs in Special



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Education Center in Gombe State, totalling 543 (Gombe State Ministry of Education, 2017). The Research Advisor (2006) suggested a sample size of 234 for a population within 600, under 95% confidence level and at 0.5% error margin. However, the suggested sample size was increased by 5% to make up to 257 in order to cater for attrition. In selecting the sample, a multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted. At stage 1, purposive sampling technique was used to select Special Education Centers in Gombe State. They are: Govt. Day Secondary School, Talasse Balanga LGA, Gombe South (12 students with special needs); Government Secondary School, Mallam Sidi, Gombe North (16 children with special needs); Govt. Day Secondary School, Deba, Yamaltu LGA, Gombe Central (13 students with special needs); and Govt. Special Secondary School, Tudun Wada, Gombe LGA, Gombe North (502 students with special needs).

Proportionate sampling technique was used to select the participants based on the population of students with special needs in each school. Therefore, the students were selected thus: 6, 8, 6 and 237 respectively from the above listed schools. At stage 3, the researcher used purposive sampling to select different categories of students with special needs in their various classes.

The instrument used to collect data for the study was a researcher’s designed questionnaire entitled “Coping Strategies of Students with Special Needs Questionnaire (PCSSSNQ)”. The instrument consisted of three (3) sections. Section “A” elicits bio-data information from the participants such as gender and type of

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disability. Section “B” which has 20 items which elicits information on the “Problems of Students with Special Needs”. Section “C” also has 20 items and it covers “Coping Strategies of Students with Special Needs”. Both Sections B and C were rated using a Four-Point Likert Type scale. Respondents indicated degree of agreement and disagreement to the items. Thus: SA - Strongly Agree; A – Agree; D – Disagree and SA - Strongly Disagree.

The instrument was validated using test re-test method of reliability which was adopted to determine the consistency of the instrument in the interval of four weeks among 20 students who were not involved in the study. Scores from the two tests were correlated using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation formulae, and 0.73 co-efficient (r) was obtained. This was considered high enough to make the instrument reliable.

In sections B and C of the instrument, the cut-off mean score is 2.50. Any item with a mean score of 2.50 and above was considered significant problem and coping strategy of students with special needs in sections B and C respectively. However, mean score lower than 2.50 was considered not significant problems and coping strategies of students with special needs. Frequency and percentage, statistical method of means, standard deviation, t-test and ANOVA were used to analyze the data collected.

### Results

The respondents’ demographic characteristics are presented in percentage.

**Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Respondents’ Demographic Characteristics**

N	Variable		Frequency	Percentage %
1	Gender	Male	143	66.2
		Female	73	33.8
		<b>Total</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>100.0</b>
2	Type of Disability	Hearing Impaired	128	59.3
		Visually impaired	49	22.7
		Physically Impaired	23	10.6
		Combined Impairment	16	7.4
		<b>Total</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>100.0</b>



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Table 1 shows that 216 students participated in the study, out of which, 143 (66.2%) were male, while 73 (33.8%) were female. With respect to type of disability, 128 (59.3%) of the

students were hearing impaired individuals, 49 (22.7%) were visually impaired, 23 (10.6%) were physically challenged, while 16 (7.4%) have combined impairment.

**Table 2: Mean and Rank Order on Coping Strategies Employed by Students with Special Needs in Special Education Center in Gombe State**

Items	Coping strategies	Mean	Rank
1	Working hard to solve my problems	3.00	1 <sup>st</sup>
2	Accepting my situation as God wishes	2.95	2 <sup>nd</sup>
3	Avoiding thinking about my situation	2.94	3 <sup>rd</sup>
4	Participating in religious activities	2.93	4 <sup>th</sup>
5	Trusting in God for better future	2.93	4 <sup>th</sup>
6	Planning my school work and following it up	2.92	6 <sup>th</sup>
7	Relying on support from family members	2.92	6 <sup>th</sup>
8	Depending on assistance from government agencies	2.91	8 <sup>th</sup>
9	Praying to God to better my condition	2.87	9 <sup>th</sup>
10	Using computer and other gadgets to facilitate my study	2.84	10 <sup>th</sup>
11	Ignoring negative attitude towards me	2.82	11 <sup>th</sup>
12	Learning to do my daily activities myself	2.80	12 <sup>th</sup>
13	Relying on support from parents	2.79	13 <sup>th</sup>
14	Aspiring to be independent	2.79	13 <sup>th</sup>
15	Talking to myself that I am not alone in my condition	2.75	15 <sup>th</sup>
16	Going for counselling	2.74	16 <sup>th</sup>
17	Adjusting to the facilities available for my studies	2.72	17 <sup>th</sup>
18	Engaging in academic discussion	2.68	18 <sup>th</sup>
19	Avoiding other students	2.61	19 <sup>th</sup>
20	Taking drugs such as alcohol to forget my problems	2.34	20 <sup>th</sup>

Table 2 presents the mean and rank order on coping strategies employed by students with special needs in special education Center in Gombe State. The table shows that 19 out of the twenty (20) items were identified as the coping strategies employed by students with special needs in Gombe State. This is because the items have mean scores that are above the average (benchmark) mean value of 2.50 adopted for determining the coping strategies employed by students with special needs. However, items 20, 5, 15, 16 and 6 with mean values of 3.00, 2.95, 2.94, 2.93 and 2.93 are the topmost ranked 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> respectively. The items indicated that coping strategies facing students with special needs employed are “working hard to solve my problems”, “accepting my situation as God wishes”, “and avoiding thinking about my situation”, “participating in religious activities” and “trusting in God for better

future”. It can be inferred therefore that the coping strategies employed by students with special needs in Gombe State are many just as the problems.

### Hypotheses Testing

In this study, three null hypotheses were formulated in line with the research questions. The hypotheses were tested using inferential statistics of t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) at 0.05 level of significance. In view of this, the results of tested hypotheses are presented as follows.

#### Hypothesis One:

There is no significant difference between the coping strategies of male and female students with special needs in special education Center in Gombe State.

**Table 3: t-test Result Showing Difference in the Coping Strategies Employed by Students with Special Needs on the Basis of Gender**

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t	Crit. t	p-value
Male	143	52.87	12.63	214	0.50	1.96	0.617
Female	73	53.79	13.08				

Table 3 shows that for a degree of freedom (df) of 214, the calculated t-value of 0.50 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96 ( $p = 0.617 > 0.05$ ). This indicates that there is no significant difference between the coping strategies employed by male and female students with special needs in Special Education Center in Gombe State; hence, the hypothesis is retained.

**Hypothesis Two:**

There is no significant difference in the coping strategies employed by students with special needs in special education Center in Gombe State based type of disability.

**Table 4: ANOVA Result Showing Difference in Coping Strategies Employed by Students with Special Needs on the Basis of Type of Disability**

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	Cal. F	Crit. F	p-value
Between group	689.840	3	229.947	1.41	2.60	0.238
Within group	34184.718	211	162.013			
Total	34874.558	214				

Table 4 shows that for degrees of freedom (df) of 3 and 211, the calculated F-value of 1.41 is less than the critical F-value of 2.60 ( $p = 0.238 > 0.05$ ). This indicates that there is no significant difference in the coping strategies employed by students with special needs in Special Education Center in Gombe State based on type of disability; hence, the hypothesis is retained.

**Discussion on Findings**

The finding of the study shows that low level of social support is another problem faced by students with special needs in Gombe State. This finding suggests that people in the society (friends, family members and others) are not providing necessary support needed by students with disability whereas, social support helps possible service that students with special needs overcome their challenges. Auerbach and Gramling (2008) noted that social support provides one with emotional sustenance and tangible resources for students with special needs. This is because social support feel cared and valued by others, this enhances a sense of

belonging to larger social network. This finding supports the finding of Baron (2017) which reported that majority of students with special needs experience low level of social support in their environment.

On the other hand, the findings of this study revealed that the coping strategies employed by students with special needs in Special Education Center in Gombe State include; working hard to solve their own problems individually, accepting special needs condition as God wishes, avoiding thinking about special needs situation, participating in religious activities and trusting in God for better future. The findings of this study implied that students with special needs in Gombe State employ many coping strategies in adjusting to their numerous problems. The findings described the coping strategies of students with special needs as problem-focused and emotion focused strategies. Problem-focused coping strategy according to Mcleod and Media (2015), is when an individual try to deal with cause of their problems by learning new skills to manage the problem, while emotion-focused strategy



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involves releasing pent-up emotions, distracting hostile feelings, meditating through a systematic relaxation procedure. These findings support the findings of Heiman (2002) and Jacob (2011) which revealed that some of the coping strategies commonly employed by students with special needs are acceptance of the disability, trust in God, positive avoidance, minimization, independence and involvement in religious practices. Resigning to faith and involvement in religious activities could be helpful to children with special needs attending religious services regularly may assist them to enjoy better health and have markedly lower rates of depression than those who do not. This is corroborated by Folkman (2010) who stated that the relationship between religion and coping is dynamic and reciprocal.

The first hypothesis tested revealed that there was no significant difference between the coping strategies employed by male and female students with special needs in special education Center in Gombe State. This implies that the coping strategies employed by students with special needs in Gombe State are the same irrespective of gender difference. This finding agrees with the finding of Ayodele, Okon, Ibimuluyi and Adebisi (2013) which showed that no significant difference exists in respondents' coping strategies based on gender. The implication of this finding is that both male and female students with special needs are similar in their coping strategies coping strategies.

Hypothesis 2 revealed that no significant difference exists in the coping strategies employed by students with special needs in special education Center in Gombe State based on type of disability. This suggests that the coping strategies employed by students with special needs in Gombe State are the same regardless of difference in the type of disability. This finding is in harmony with the finding of Sachs and Schreuer (2011) which indicated that there was no significant difference in coping strategies employed by students with special needs on the basis of categories of disability. This suggests that students with special needs

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adopt similar coping strategies irrespective of their forms of disability.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that children with special needs are facing numerous challenges in which they find difficult to cope with; hence, they need love and care from their parents, friends, family and the society at large. It was recommended among others that:

1. Parents of children with special needs should pay adequate attention to the provision of their school needs so that they can be able to benefit from teaching/learning process; thereby, becoming useful members of the society.
2. The society, including the parents, family/relatives, helping professionals, governmental and non-governmental organizations should give strong supports (financial, emotional and medical) to students with special needs so that they can be able to adjust effectively to school environment.

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