

INCLUSION OF SPECIAL NEEDS LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT IN THE REGULAR SCHOOL SETTING

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Abstract

Inclusion is a philosophy that all students, regardless of the status are a vital part of the educational system. A zero rejection philosophy would be in place, that is, no student would be excluded from receiving educational services in a given general education system. The paper examines Inclusion of Special needs learners with visual impairment in the regular school setting. The main issues of concern are treated in this paper are; Inclusive education philosophy, provision of Inclusive Education, and strategies for Inclusive Education. Inclusion of learners with visual impairment is considered a right step in the right direction.

Introduction

In Nigeria, teaching and learning are continuously assuming a dynamic position. This declaration tasked schools in member states to identify ways in which the special needs children who are part of the social environment can benefit from activities of the schools. Schools are to create equal access and opportunities for all children irrespective of their abilities or disabilities to participate actively in activities of the school.

Special needs children are expected to be placed in the regular classroom/school to learn alongside the normal children. It is in realization of this that the Nigeria's National Policy on Education (NPE 2004) states that the basis of Nigeria's philosophy of education is that every child be given equal access to educational opportunities at all level of his education irrespective of his condition. This means that no child of school age will be discriminated upon on the basis of handicapping condition.

Inclusive Education Philosophy

Inclusive education allows all children with or without disabilities to learn together in ordinary pre school, primary, secondary, colleges/polytechnics and universities with appropriate network of support. In inclusive education, emphasis is on restructuring of the entire school environment and its' programmes to meet the needs of every learner. Inclusive education is based on the fact that the original place of children with special needs is in the regular classroom and so no condition should be allowed to course difficulty or remove them from such environment on the basis or otherwise of their disabilities.

Special needs children should be given inclusive education within their community using appropriate learning materials. This will enable those children with severe conditions to have access to education within their locality. To achieve this noble policy, community must be involved, the people's culture must be taken into consideration and the school system respond appropriately to the diverse learning needs of the special needs children irrespective of their conditions. This is because inclusive education is universally accepted as a means of equalizing education within the community and the education system in general where special needs children are active participants. Inclusive education is a bridge between the world of the "normal" and that of the special needs children if the community and the school are friendly and socially integrative to the special needs children (Ikpaya, 1998).

Provision of Inclusive Education

A child with visual impairment should be taught to read brailled writing through the use of his hands. The content of work to be given him should be broken into attainable and specific objectives. The teacher should have full control of the class by guarding against distractive tendencies. This made Akinola (2008) to state that for the teacher to succeed in this task, he must be proactive, plan adequately, set realistic goals and must consider the peculiar learning needs of each child in his class in the course of his teaching. He must have been exposed to the nature, and demands of the special needs children during his days in school as student or through workshops, seminars or conferences. This means that all teachers' training institutions must have a course on inclusive education at each class level where the prospective teachers are taught how to work with the special needs children in the regular classroom.

Strategies of Inclusive Education for the Special Needs Children with Visual Impairment

For effective facilitation and provision of inclusive education to the special needs children, government should give incentive to more non-governmental organizations to pursue the course of people with special needs towards providing an inclusive education.

- The curriculum and instructional techniques being used in the regular school should be modified to take care of the needs of the special needs child as well.
- As most teachers in the regular schools are ignorant of the various disabilities that could be found in their classes, they should be enlightened through constant workshops, seminars and further training in an educational institution about the learning needs of persons with disabilities.
- Special educators and other paraprofessionals should come to term for the sake of the special needs children in the regular classroom. The special education teachers should be employed by government, non-governmental organization and individual to assist the regular class teacher in implementing inclusive education in the school system.

- Parents should be informed and involved effectively in the implementation of inclusive education through awareness campaign about the abilities, capabilities and learning needs of their special needs children if the children are to be independent.
- Modern facilities/equipment should be provided by government, individuals, or non governmental organizations to help the special needs children to be fully integrated in the regular classroom. Adults with disabilities roaming the streets could also be rehabilitated using these equipment and also through a well equipped inclusive education programme for eventual employment.

Considerations

- It encourages friendship and sense of belonging among the special needs children.
- It removes negative effects, low self esteem and enhances confidence in the special needs children.
- It addresses the social, psychological and educational needs of the special needs children. This according to Muhammad and Musa (2003) is because inclusive education is a panacea to the employment, self-reliance, therapeutic and educational needs of the special needs child.
- It reduces cost effects of education
- Inferiority complex and emotional problem experience by the special needs child as a result of the disability may be reduced, because of the acceptance accorded him by his community and school.
- It encourages staff competition among contemporaries rather than peer among school children of different abilities or background.
- It encourages peer tutoring among learners and professionals cooperation among caregivers.
- It provides an avenue for the full utilization of government, community and school resources for the benefit of the special needs child.

Conclusion

The importance of Inclusive Education for learners with visual impairment can no longer be over emphasized. This is as there are no more or no fewer learners with disabilities including those with visual impairment in a single school that will be found nationwide. The philosophy of Inclusive Education is encouraging in the sense that equal recognition in terms of all learners, as well as opportunities provided them under the general education initiative remain crucial. Inclusion is regarded a singular instrument for a comprehensive accommodation of all learners including those with visual impairment for the enhancement of their potential.

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