

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT: THE ROLE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION RESOURCE TEACHER

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Introduction

Education of children and youths with special needs over the years has experienced different transformational stages with the sole aim of achieving best practices and results. It has also witnessed great attention from individuals, government and non-governmental agencies most especially in the areas of infrastructural developments and policy formulations. In formulating and articulating the educational policies, the Nigerian government recognised the need for the education of children with special needs as special education has continued to feature prominently in the National Policy on Education (1997, 1981, 1998, and 2004). The major objective is to give equal and concrete educational opportunity to children with special needs just like their counterparts with disabilities to enable them contribute their quota to the development of the nation and their immediate environment precisely.

Apart from the formulation and implementation of educational policies in Nigeria, greater attention has been also given to infrastructural development such as reconstruction and construction of more classroom blocks for students, provision of typewriters, white-canes, slates and stylus, Braille machines and textbooks but there is much less attention towards the personnel to whom the management and utilisation of all the aforementioned equipment and materials are entrusted. Research conducted by Ojile (2013) has shown that, lack of well trained special education teachers to teach children with special needs in regular schools has been a problem. It is therefore, unarguably accepted that, inclusion of students with visual impairment in our various regular schools cannot be completed without the commitment and participation of specially trained special education resource teachers hence the Roles of Special Education Resource teacher in Inclusive Education for students with Visual Impairment.

Inclusive Education – Initially, education was meant to be provided for children and youths without any form of visible disabilities but as part of the globalization and industrialization, different professional bodies in the world of education have deemed it fit to educate the learners with special needs in a less restrictive learning environment which is known as inclusive education. The Salamanca Declaration of 1994 provided the needed international and theoretical framework for inclusive education. In the report, the point made was that “the task of the future is to identify ways in which the school, as part of the social environment can create better learning opportunities for all children and by this means, address the challenge that the most pervasive source of learning difficulties is the school system itself (UNESCO, 1994). The report further described inclusion as “the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitude, of creating welcoming

communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education for the majority of children.“(UNESCO,1994). According to Jumang, Jatau and Jikukka (2012), inclusive education deals with the development of both persons with disabilities and those without, and it is an expanded avenue for community development.

Furthermore, this paper views inclusive education as a means by which all school-aged children and youths with special needs education are educated alongside their peers without any visible forms of disabilities in order to create conducive co-existence among the citizenry. It is also a means of bridging “disability divides”. The term “disability divides” implies the gap between those without any form of visible disability and those with visible disability. In other words, those persons without visible disability will realise that in one way or the other, they exhibit a form of disability which is not seen by others. Inclusive education will help them to learn to appreciate the uniqueness of each individual learner without discriminating based on the ability or disability of a student.

Nigerian government is yet to adopt and practice inclusive education holistically. The practice of holistic education in practical terms is not an easy task to embark on. Currently in our various regular schools, it seems difficult if not impossible for government to provide adequate conducive learning environment and instructional materials, training and recruiting of qualified subject teachers and monitoring the educational output, that is the quality of our graduates in order to maintain good and quality standard in the education of regular students let alone students with special needs education. According to Garuba (2003), one has reservations whether the general educational system designed and implemented in its present form, has the adequate ability to cater for the special learning needs of exceptional children in Nigeria today.

However, proper implementation of inclusive education can never be achieved in a hurry and if at all inclusive education will receive the right place and succeed in Nigeria, in including students with visual impairments who presents diverse learning styles and abilities, special education professional must be adequately involved in the process of actualizing education for all school-age children and youth irrespective of their learning diversities hence the ultimate need of special education resource teacher in the present inclusive education settings for students with visual impairment.

Students with Special Needs Education

Students with special needs are learners with one form of disabilities or the other, capable of limiting their involvement and participation in the regular educational programmes, and subsequently affect their academic performance and functionality in the society (Oladejo & Oladejo, 2011). There are many categories of children with special needs education but this paper considers those with visual impairment.

Students with Visual Impairment- Visual impairment according to Ajobiewe (2012), refers to any defect in the eye(s) which causes difficulty in reading, seeing and

necessitates the use of special educational methods or adaptation of materials or equipments. These are children with visual disabilities that are so serious as to impair significantly their capacity to see, thus interfering with their capacity to perceive visually presented materials such as pictures, diagrams and the written word. Some will have been diagnosed as suffering from conditions such as congenital blindness, Cataracts, albinism and retinitis pigmentosa. Most require the use of low-vision aids and are availing of the services of a resource teacher.

One of the support personnel in inclusive education is a special education research teacher who has many obligations or responsibilities to perform in order to ensure the actualization of the aims and objectives of inclusive education for students with special needs education especially students with visual impairment. A special education research teacher is a certified special education teacher who possesses a Special Education Certificate, and as a matter of necessity must have taken additional coursework in the area of inclusion, assessment and planning for students with special needs. The special education resource teacher must be an experienced and knowledgeable teacher who can provide leadership to help build teacher capacity for utilizing differentiated pedagogical strategies in the classroom. To be resourceful, such an individual must possess an outstanding quality in providing alternative teaching and learning materials both for the students and the subject teachers such as using termaphone paper to sketch or plot graphs and pictures in the absence of Tiger Embosser Machine which has the capacity of drawing any kind of pictures for students with visual impairment.

Students with visual impairment often require some kind of modified education in order to keep up with the work load of a specific subject, for example, Mathematics or spoken language (phonetic symbols). The special education research teacher for students with visual impairment will be with the students primarily to ensure that each student receives the necessary help when the need arises. The Resource Teacher works with students, parents, teachers and clinicians. A large part of the Resource Teacher's job is to collaborate with other teachers to ensure the success of all students. She/he may work with individuals or groups that may need more focused instruction on a specific concept or curriculum outcome. This may occur within the classroom or outside the classroom and to plan for individuals who have very specific needs.

The roles for special education research teacher for students with visual impairment in inclusive education will be broadly grouped into-

- a. The general roles
- b. The specific role

Some of the general roles include:

- ❖ Development of individualized educational plan for identified students with visual impairment.
- ❖ Consultation and collaboration with subject teachers concerning the students with visual impairment.

- ❖ Ongoing assessment of academic performance of students with visual impairment.
- ❖ Implementation of IEP through ongoing direct and indirect service.
- ❖ Coordination of Vision Consultant, and other in-school supports for students with visual impairment.
- ❖ Coordinating IEP conferences.
- ❖ Writing performance profile at least twice a year.
- ❖ Referring students to low enrolment programs where necessary.
- ❖ Assist with volunteer programs and cross-age and peer-tutoring programs.

The specific roles include:

- ❖ A regular visit to the classrooms during lessons to ensure each student is being carried along.
- ❖ Providing mobility and orientation training especially in the first year of admission into the school.
- ❖ Ensuring that the students get the current or updated Braille textbooks in different subject areas as the case may be.
- ❖ Reading and taping some of the literature textbooks that are not available in the Braille form.
- ❖ Guiding the students of how to make use of Information Communication Technology gadgets such as computers with jaws.
- ❖ Brailing notes and examination question papers for the students.
- ❖ Encouraging them to explore more useful and possible avenues of becoming independent in life.
- ❖ Building more confidence in them to always share their opinions with people by visiting the school counsellor regularly.
- ❖ Collaborating with the regular teacher during lesson planning to ensure adequate preparation of the lesson.

Conclusion

Inclusive education for students with visual impairment so far has been on the theoretical level. The main practical aspect of inclusion is yet to have its rightful place in our present world of education. For students with visual impairment in an inclusive setting to benefit maximally, there must be the presence of a special education research teacher who is ready to sacrifice his or her time in ensuring that the students are being carried along in all aspects of learning.

The way forward

1. Training and retraining of special education resource teachers basically for students with visual impairment.

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2. Workshops and conferences should be organized by professional bodies in the field of education for students with visual impairment to improve on already acquired skills of special education teachers especially in the areas of information and communication technology application.
 3. Inclusive education policy implementer should endeavour to deploy special education resource teachers for students with visual impairment to various regular schools where there are students with visual impairment, the location notwithstanding.
 4. Special education resource teachers for students with visual impairment must be specially trained for inclusive education and certified before he or she should practice.
 5. Teachers from other fields of knowledge who want to work with students with visual impairment in regular schools should undergo training in the area of special education for students with visual impairment in order to be acquainted with the learning and behavioural characteristics of students with visual impairment.
 6. Government should endeavour to establish more colleges of education (SPECIAL) with adequate teaching and learning equipment for students with visual impairment.
 7. Professional bodies in the field of special education should ensure that there are adequate numbers of dedicated resource teachers in regular schools.

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