

Developing a Disability Friendly Curriculum in Teacher Training Colleges

Primary Reader: Ministry of Education

Message: Problems encountered by teachers of blind and hearing impaired children in mainstream schools.

Introduction

Disability is an unwelcome guest, who knocks at the doors of individuals of all ages. It is a nuisance which prevents or limits one's capabilities to live normal lives. It creates barriers to quality education, employment, health and social life. Thus, persons with disabilities and in this context the blind and hearing impaired children continue to live with low self esteem and no quality education to compete favourably with their sighted and hearing counterparts in studies and job markets.

To compound this problem, mainstreaming did not start in primary or elementary schools but from the secondary school, which meant that no curriculum was developed to train teachers for special needs education in teacher training colleges. As a result, teachers do not have the skills to ensure that the visually and hearing impaired students learn at the same pace with their non disabled peers in the same learning environment.

The learning situation for the blind and hearing impaired children in mainstream schools is such that they lag behind in class because teachers do not know how to teach these children in the same environment as the non disabled peers. Further, the infrastructure is not disability friendly, for instance, there are long and winding stairs and open drainage. Teachers use the blackboard a lot and fail to read out loud notes on the blackboard for blind children to take notes.

The problems of low performance of blind and hearing impaired children will be adequately solved when the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology approves to design and develop a disability friendly curriculum in the teacher training colleges to suit the needs of the blind and hearing impaired children. Teachers in training should learn Braille reading and writing and how to work with computers fitted with sound (Job Access Windows System) for the blind. They should also learn sign language for the hearing impaired children who can see what is written on the blackboard but cannot hear the teachers in class; teachers should be able to interpret subjects taught for better understanding of hearing impaired children or write notes in Braille for blind children who in turn would write answers in Braille when they do not have an ordinary typewriter. Teachers could also teach computing in schools instead of neglecting blind children in class during computer classes; this indeed would bring about a reduction in lethargy truancy when they do not participate in classes.

Diagrams and maps can be drawn on blackboards or flipcharts for subjects like social studies, English language and so forth. This is a way of getting the blind children to have a clear understanding; therefore it must be employed in the classroom teaching. Therefore, felt boards which are boards covered in soft fabrics with words and sentences written in both Braille and print to enhance participation of blind children by removing and putting on other sentences as their sighted colleagues

point out to words and sentences on the blackboard. To promote effective teaching and quality learning.

It is also recommended that sports for blind children, field events such as short relays, step jump and football with bell balls specially made for the blind. Physical and health education teachers should be specially trained to work with blind children.

Written by:

Emma Remilekun Parker
Director
Sierra Leone Association of the Blind
+232 (0)78-926812