

Visually Impaired Education: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

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Abstract

The actual formal education of the visually impaired persons started in Nigeria in the 40s by the Sudan Interior Mission, that was a century after their sighted counterparts had embraced Western Education. The main aim of the Missionaries was to train persons with Visual impairment to read the Bible and learn skills which would make them to be self-reliant. The establishment of the first school for the blind in Gindiri was an eye opener to the emergence of other special education institutions in Nigeria. In Nigeria, Visually impaired education has passed through different stages of educational development. despite, progresses made, obvious challenges also emerged. This paper therefore sheds light on the achievement, challenges and future of persons with Visual impairment with Recommendations to improve their tomorrow.

Introduction

Persons with disabilities are found in any society on the globe. Blindness as a disease on and condition are not new to most cultures of the world but the possibility of educating them looks more of mirage than reality. Obani (2004) avers that some cultures view people with disabilities and handicaps as having been cursed. In a developing country like Nigeria, where the literacy level is around the halfway mark, there are still widespread primitive and superstitions beliefs about handicaps. To him, people with disabilities are very likely to be wrongly perceived and therefore treated in an unfriendly manner.

It is essential at this point to shed light on the historical progression of education of persons with visual impairment from the earliest, times to the present under the following stages in Nigeria.

- The Pre-Missionary stage
- The Missionary Stage
- The Post-Missionary stage

The Pre-Missionary Stage

The Pre-Missionary stage dates back before the advent of the missionaries in Nigeria. The actual missionary impact on education in Nigeria date back to 1840. Before this time, the blind were mistreated like most primitive societies in the world then. The western education was not concerned with Special Education in Nigeria until a century later.

The Missionary Era (1940-1970)

After the 2nd World-War there was a dramatic turn around in the education for persons with visual impairment. Their story changed; the first school for the blind was established in Gindiri by Sudan United Mission in 1953. Also, in 1962, Pacelli school for the Blind was established by the Catholic Mission under Archbishop Taylor. The nation began to witness the birth of many special schools for the blind. Even though during this period, education system witnessed various educational ordinances but all were silence on Special Education.

The Post-Missionary Era (1970 to Date)

Missionaries did play major role in the establishment of special schools and in the growth of Special Education in Nigeria. Nigeria government started to involve in the education of persons with disabilities as from 1970.

Zindi (1997) opines that complete involvement in the education of the disabled by government did not take place until the 1970s when the then Head of States, Major General Yakubu Gowon declared government's interest in the education of the disabled. He directed that all the state Ministries of Education must establish Units for Special Education so as to strengthen the existing schools.

Today, elements of Special Education are being taught in our Colleges of Education, and some universities' Faculty of Education. A lot of improvements are being made in Special Education especially in the education of persons with visual impairment.

Recommendations

A lot still has to be done in order for the education of person with visual impairment to be abreast with world standard. Adebisi (1994) is of the opinion that the future of Special Education (visually impaired inclusive) is bright if policies that were formulated are properly executed Government, Non-Governmental Organisation and individuals should fund Special Education.

Added to the above recommendation, Ajaja (2006) believes that the Federal Government should take special interest in the problems facing the disabled through the creation of the ministry for the physically disadvantaged.

The schools for the blind must have modern equipment and materials for training of the visually impaired children. There must be periodic seminars, workshops for teachers and stakeholders in the education of the visually impaired. Also, teachers in regular schools need to be retained to keep abreast of inclusion.

All educational and employment decrees and policies already formulated for persons with visual impairment should be enforced.

Coupled with the above government should established a Braille Press and a well equipped mobility centre in the country for the blind.

Conclusion

The society must have positive attitude towards persons with visual impairment. The visually impaired need proper training, gainful employment in order to be self independent and self reliant so that they can contribute their quota to the development of the nation Nigeria.

References

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