



E-ISSN: 2706-8927
P-ISSN: 2706-8919
IJAAS 2019; 1(2): 74-76
Received: 07-08-2019
Accepted: 09-09-2019

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The role of integrated education for blind children

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Abstract

The history of integrated education or special education for the blind children dates back to the second half of the eighteenth century, Paris, which is also known as 'residential education.' The word integration has been derived from the root word 'integer' which refers to an indivisible whole number. It also implies the unification of a separated part with the substance or entity it originally belongs to. In that sense, integrated education for the blind children means to impart education to blind or sightless students within the normal education system. The main aim of this type of education is to overcome limitations imposed upon by blind children due to which they fail to participate in the mainstream of the society. It is because lack of sight imposes all these limitations on a person and consequently, he fails behind other sighted people.

Keywords: blind, education, limitations, objectives, inclusive education

Introduction

There is no doubt in denying the fact that during the last few years, studies in child development, sociology, and special education have led enlightened educators to the conclusion that the flourishing and growing of blind children have achieved greater self and social fulfillment by being nurtured in the least restrictive environment. Through local education, supported by well prepared specialists in education of the blind, these children may enjoy everyday common experiences essential to the development of a keen awareness of the realities of the world surrounded them. Undoubtedly, these blind children are capable of showing their true worth with proper technical assistance and consultation given to them by the regular class-room teachers and the broad environment provide to them. In that situation, they are more readily accepted socially by their sighted counterparts. At present, statistics reveal that not even 10% of blind children in most of the developing countries are receiving any kind of education. That is why, integrated education is considered to be the only practical approach. It is the economically important, psychologically superior, and socially acceptable model to bring all those unreached blind children into the mainstream of education.

Main objects of integrated education

The true objectives of integrated education are as follow

1. Provide the same opportunities and educational experiences for blind children as those provided for sighted children
2. Allow blind children—and their families, neighbours, and friends—to interact socially in normal situations
3. Change the typical public response to blindness by demonstrating that blind children are children first and blind children next
4. Provide a natural basis for adult life experiences so that blind students may take their proper places as contributing members in all sectors of society.

Integrated education does not mean simply placing a child in a regular classroom. The child needs assistance. Blind children can easily assimilate more than 80% of teaching and experience in the regular classroom if they are provided with the correct material in the correct form at the correct time. Therefore, development of the right educational environment will make integration of blind children a reality.

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Important factors leading to the success of Integration
The following significant means of attaining successful integration are to be taken in to consideration

1. There should be Provision of specialised teachers who can serve as resource persons, to prepare special materials, as required, and to provide special instruction in those skills peculiar to blindness such as Braille reading and writing, use of reader services, auditory perceptual training and orientation and mobility.
2. One should follow the Provision of all appropriate educational texts and selected aids and appliances. If textbooks are not available in Braille, substantial quantities of individually transcribed Braille materials may be required.
3. Provision of consultation for regular classroom teachers, school administrators, families, local health authorities and the general public on matters dealing with education of blind children, specialised training techniques and selection of appropriate materials.
4. Full use of local consultants, specialists and volunteers with special skills or those who are willing to be trained to assist in specialized ways, such as through reading services, or materials preparation including Braille transcription.

Curriculum in Integrated Schools

It should be kept in mind that the curriculum for blind children is never less than the curriculum prescribed for sighted children. Besides it, for every skill expectation of sighted, blind children must do more. In addition academic subjects, the integration for the blind children is more effective when they are well trained in compensatory skills such as use of slate and use of audio aids, development of visual perceptual activities, Braille reading methods, accuracy in the use of abacus and mobility. If we wish them to follow the general curriculum without any difficulty and to enable them to follow each and everything, the resource teacher can make some changes in his or her presentation of materials with the consent of regular teacher. He can follow four important principles in this regard which are as follow:

1. He can use the technique of duplication which is the most encouraged method of material preparation.
2. He or she can make sometimes modifications in terms of content, method of display and the type of material used.
3. In the absence of any suitable way to modify material, an experienced man has to be substituted who resemble to sighted counterpart.
4. Under unavoidable circumstances, he can omit a lesson or content.

Appropriate model of integrated education

As far as the selection of appropriate model in the most of the developing countries is concerned, one can come across the fact that there is awareness of integrated education among certain organizations working for blind persons. It is believed that integrated education should focus on normalizing the life and education of the blind child, but things also vary according to the goal of integration. In developing countries, generally, ten models of integration are followed.

It is commonly seen that resource models with residential facilities are found in many integrated programmes in developing countries but these are costly. In this regard, we

can witness claims and counter-claims about the superiority of one model over the other. In this professional debate on models, the real impact of integrated education should not be lost.

The following factors are to be taken in to account in deciding the cost-effective models of integrated education.

- Total Number of blind children in a locality
- What type of services are required by blind children
- Expertise needed by a special teacher and general classroom teachers

Without any shadow of doubt, Different kinds as well as different levels of service are required by the blind children. Children who are at the primary level will prefer the direct assistance of a specialist teacher whereas children at higher levels depend more on regular classroom teachers provided they are given the necessary materials for learning in the regular classroom. Therefore, selection of a model depends upon the nature of services needed by the blind children.

It goes without saying that the success of integration also depends upon the extent of assistance provided by the general classroom teachers. In integration, the general classroom teacher and the specialist teacher are 'two sides of the same coin' and, therefore, the general education system itself should equip the regular classroom teachers in pre-service programmes to cope with the needs of disabled children in general and blind children in particular. Hence, by a good combination of specialists and general classroom teachers, blind children can be served effectively.

Integration emerges as the only alternative to reach the unreached in the countries like India where one can come across numbers of blind children staggering. Services for blind children in the country are more than 100 years old but the coverage of blind children in education is not even 10%. We hope in that in the time to come in future, this scenario is supposed to change with the implementation of integrated education at a rapid rate.

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