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BENEFITS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED STUDENTS IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN UGANDA

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to investigate the benefits of inclusive education on visually impaired students, in Ugandan public Universities.

Methodology: The study adopted cross-sectional design involving 50 visually impaired students, 50 lecturers, 50 university administrators and 50 non-visually impaired students. Data was collected using questionnaires, and interview schedule.

Results: The findings revealed that the visually impaired have benefits such as bursaries, disability allowance and tuition payment from government and non-government organizations, meals, accommodation, scholastic materials from universities, extra time given during examinations, oral examinations from lecturers and aiding in movement around campus from non-visually impaired students and their guides.

Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy: The study recommends creating relevant government policies and regulations regarding the education of the visually impaired students; and proper and adequate training of academic and administrative staff from lower education to higher education level on issues that affect the teaching and learning of the disabled students as to help in the education of the visually impaired students.

Keywords: *inclusive education, visual impairment, academic achievement, special needs education*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

There is an increasing number of visually impaired students in public Universities in Uganda. These students attend mainstream lectures (inclusive education) and are examined on the same subject content with all other students. Inclusion of blind and low vision children in mainstream education is beneficial not only to the blind/low vision child but to all other students in schools because it enhances social integration (Anne, 2004).

It helps change the negative attitude and misconceptions people have of the blind and low vision and is an opportunity to prepare them for their future roles in society. Blind and low vision children will interact with other children in regular school settings; they will play and share ideas and things together. It will further help them appreciate each other's strengths and limitations. They will learn the norms and values of the community in which they are and this will prepare them for the world outside of school. Students who have been with them in schools will know their potential and will give them chance to participate in social functions and other programmes.

Furthermore, inclusion will promote healthy competition amongst students who are blind or low vision and regular students. If blind/ low vision children perform well in class, this will motivate the regular students to strive to work harder for they will think that if the blind/ low vision child can do well they can do the same. This will help raise the profile of the blind/low vision child.

1.2 Problem Statement

The education policy of different countries of the world outlines the inclusion and provision of services for special needs children in regular schools to ensure access to services, quality and relevant education. In Uganda, issues concerning children with special needs are considered by Ministry of Education and Sports as cross-cutting and as such, it is the development funding that is attached to the different departments that is expected to cater for children with special needs. There is no special curriculum designed for children with special needs and no trained teachers.

Every year, government provides sponsorship at university level to 4,000 students under the merit government sponsorship scheme, of which 64 are students with special needs who include sportsmen/women, physically handicapped and visually impaired. These special students are distributed through all the government aided universities which include Makerere, Kyambogo, Mbarara, Gulu and Busitema Universities. However, according to the report, the visually impaired students are mainly admitted in only Makerere and Kyambogo Universities who have the facilities which aid in the learning and teaching of these students. These students face a lot of challenges. Apart from this consideration given to these few; many visually impaired students are admitted on private scheme in these two public universities. For instance at Kyambogo University report reveals that only one faculty (Faculty of Special Need Education), has a ramp and can be accessed by persons using crutches or wheelchairs. Most buildings in these universities are inaccessible including the Senate building despite these attempts, many children who are visually impaired lack access to appropriate resources to cater for their needs. The study attempted to highlight the benefits, challenges of inclusive education on academic achievement of the visually impaired students as well as suggesting interventions towards combating these challenges.

1.3 Study Objective

The study attempted to highlight the benefits, challenges of inclusive education on academic achievement of the visually impaired students as well as suggesting interventions towards combating these challenges.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Mike and Steve (2002), assert that, there is firm evidence that blind and partially sighted people can equal their non-disabled peers in education achievement and successfully study a wide range of subjects up to and including higher education. They further argue that given appropriate support, blind and partially sighted can work in wide range of occupational areas and in managerial and professional roles.

According to Macbeath, Galton, Steward, Bacbeath and Page (2005), “while there are many examples of social benefits both for children with special needs and their regular peers, there is much less positive evidence that the learning needs are being met across the whole spectrum of ability”. In the same vein, Upchurch (2007) is of the view that inclusion has a negative relationship with satisfactory learning and a positive relationship with unsatisfactory acting-out behaviors. He further stated that teachers may be unable to meet the variety of needs presented by both regular and special needs students in inclusive classrooms; as students who do not understand what is being taught or who need to be challenged more, could become bored and frustrated. In line with the foregoing discourse, Campbell (2009), was of the view that students with special needs may affect the academic achievement of their regular classmates as demands on teachers’ attention made by students needing extra help might have a negative impact on the regular students. Again, it is anticipated that the academic achievement of students with special needs may be undermined if more emphasis is placed on academic curriculum as against life coping skills for them to be able to effectively function well in the society.

While there is some evidence of positive effects of inclusion of students with disabilities, opponents of this idea maintain that there is less evidence of the overall benefit of inclusion on the classmates of the students with disabilities (Fletcher, 2010). In the light of the above arguments, one may be tempted to ask the question: who gains more academically in an inclusive classroom; the special needs learners or the regular (normal) ones? The need to provide answers to this question led to the conduct of this research.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design used was cross sectional survey since the participants in the study are quite different. Cross sectional design was effective in collecting data for short term and at a single point in time (Mertens, 2005). In the current study, the researcher selected visually impaired students, their lecturers and administrators and non-visually impaired students from Makerere and Kyambogo universities in Uganda. We specifically used qualitative methods for data collection and analysis. We employed self-administered questionnaires to lecturers, university administrators and non-visually impaired students. Interview schedules were given to the visually impaired students.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

In the study, the sample size was 200 comprised of 50 visually impaired students, 50 lecturers, 50 University administrators and 50 non-visually impaired students. The visually impaired students were identified using snow ball method while the lecturers, university. Administrators and non -visually impaired students were identified using purposive random sampling.

Data Analysis

The processed data was summarized in tables according to the objectives of the study. Data was afterwards edited to remove errors and omissions. Data was finally analysed using descriptive analysis after getting tallies from which frequencies and their respective percentages were calculated. These were presented into tables and explained. The researcher ahead went to interpret the results and drawing conclusions on the available findings.

4.0 RESULTS

The study focused on investigating benefits of inclusion on academic achievement of the visually impaired students in Makerere and Kyambogo Universities. The responses were collected from visually impaired students, lecturers, University administrators and Non-visually impaired students. The benefits that visually impaired students receive in these universities were categorized according to those got from Government, university administration, lecturers, fellow students (Non-visually), Non-government organization and guides.

According to table 1, there are several benefits that government gives to the visually impaired students at the University, 28% receive faculty and internship allowance, 24% use of Affirmative action, 20% Bursaries, 16% tuition and 12% receive disability allowances. Through the affirmative action programme in Uganda, the state sponsored students are required to be highly favored in terms of special group admissions to government programmes and facilitated with allowances such as faculty internship and disability, and bursaries.

Table 1: Benefits from Government

Benefits	Frequency	Percentage
Faculty and internship allowance	14	28.0
Disability allowance	6	12.0
Payment of tuition	8	16.0
Affirmative Action	12	24.0
Bursaries	10	20.0
Total	50	100

Table 2 shows that 20% Affirmative action, 14% of University administration provide medical treatment to the visually impaired, 12% accommodation and modification of the environment, 10% special rooms for reading and doing exams, 8% provision of Braille machines, 6% provision of Braille papers and 4% of scholastic and payment of guides. Apart from university administration implementing government policies on affirmative action it also provides some benefits in form of accommodation in specific halls of residence for the male and female admitted visually impaired students. They also provide medical facilities in their sick bays, meals and scholastic materials for the blind students. This is in line with university policies on disability and special students. These students are made to stay in special halls of residence in these universities which have been modified for the visually impaired students.

For example in Makerere University you find male students staying in Nsibirwa hall while female students live in complex hall. In Kyambogo University they live in North end hall where they easily access their meals and residence.

Table 2: Benefits from University Administration

Benefits	Frequency	Percentage
Provision of Braille machine	4	8.0
Provision of Braille papers	3	6.0
Accommodation	6	12.0
Scholastic materials	2	4.0
Meals	5	10.0
Payment of guides	2	4.0
Provision of special rooms for reading and doing exams	5	10.0
Medical treatment	7	14.0
Modification of the environment for the blind	6	12.0
Affirmative Action	10	20.0
Total	50	100

Table 3 shows that there are several benefits the visually impaired students get from their lecturers; 30% provision of guides, 14% extra time given during exams, 10% oral examination, provision of type writers and large print examinations, 8% dictate notes to the visually impaired, sitting in front of their lecture room and issue of free photocopied notes, 2% help in teaching Braille communication.

Lecturers as tutors to visually impair help these students in achieving their academic success. They add them extra time during their examinations, provide oral examinations for assessment. This helps in cases where these students especially the totally blind students cannot read at all. Those who have partial vision are given large printed examinations for easily visibility.

Table 3: Benefits from Lecturers

Benefits from Lecturers	Frequency	Percentage
Extra time given during exams	7	14.0
Dictation of notes	4	8.0
Free photocopy	4	8.0
Oral examination	5	10.0
Sitting in front	4	8.0
Teaching Braille	1	2.0
Large print	5	10.0
Provision of type writers	5	10.0
Provision of guides	15	30.0
Total	50	100

Table 4 shows that non-visually impaired students read and dictate notes at 30%, 26% act as sighted guides to them, 24% share with them photocopied notes and 20% care for them. Sighted students contribute greatly academic success of the visually impaired students by acting as guides for them in case there is none. They also dictate and read notes for them to transcribe to Braille language. Since they work as guides they also come for these studies.

Table 4: Benefits from Non-visually impaired students

Benefits	Frequency	Percentage
Sighted guides	13	26.0
Reading and dictation of notes	15	30.0
Sharing photocopied notes	12	24.0
Caring	10	20.0
Total	50	100

Table 5 shows that 54% of the guides care for the visually impaired students, 40% dictate notes to them and 6% help in the mobility training. These guides are usually employed by university administration and they pay them to care for the visually impaired students in form of mobility for example to make them reach where they are expected in time. They also attend lectures with these students to copy notes for them. In case the visually impaired students do not attend; they pick photocopied notes which they dictate to them. In this way they contribute greatly in the academic achievement of these students.

Table 5: Benefits from Guides

Benefits from Guides	Frequency	Percentage
Mobility training	3	6.0
Dictating notes for them	20	40.0
Caring	22	54.0
Total	50	100

Table 6 shows that 16% provide tuition, computers, shopping money, scholarships or Bursaries is provided by Non-government organizations, 14% provide Braille machines, 8% provide Braille papers, 6% reading glasses and 4% white canes. Non-government organizations contribute a lot in the education of visually impaired students. They give scholarships to these students and also provide scholastic materials for the learning of these students. So in fact most students who are not government sponsored at these universities are all sponsored by non-government organization. Most of these students use expensive and sophisticated machines such as Braille computers, reading glasses etc. which may not easily be afforded by individual parents hence the coming in of these NGOs.

Table 6: Benefits from Non-government organizations

Benefits from Non-government organizations	Frequency	Percentage
Provision of Braille machines	7	14.0
Provision of Braille papers	4	8.0
Scholastic materials	2	4.0
Scholarships/Bursaries	8	16.0
Shopping money	8	16.0
Computers with jaws	8	16.0
Reading glasses	3	6.0
White cares	2	4.0
Tuition payment	8	16.0
Total	50	100

In summary the main benefits received by visually impaired students include provision of bursaries, tuition fees Braille materials and being admitted at the university using affirmative action.

5.0 DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that most of the visually impaired students were on government sponsorship through affirmative action and the benefits are accrued from government, university administration, lecturers, non-visually impaired students, guides and non-government organization.

Government sponsors visually impaired students through affirmative action whereby they provide tuition, faculty and internship allowances, payment of fees and disability allowance. In so doing they help these students to be comfortable with their studies which are reflected in their fair and moderate performance in academic achievement of visually impaired students. This is in line with the British journal by Ophthalmol (2006) which states that there are similar provisions concerning education to those relating goods and services which should enable visually impaired students to have access to education and associated services.

The university administration helps in admitting these students either on government or private sponsorship. They provide accommodation to these visually impaired students in specific halls of residence which are specifically designed for them. They also provide medical care through the sick bays they pay the sighted guides who help them in movement and mobility. They provide scholastic materials in form of Braille machines, Braille paper and slates that help them in making notes and writing their examinations. They also provide

free meals to them when attending lectures and writing their examinations. This is in accordance to Maryland Literacy Rights and Education Act (1992) which emphasises provision of Braille reading and writing for the blind students and there should also be anti-discrimination provisions relating to housing.

There are a number of benefits which the lecturers in these public universities render to the visually impaired students. They give them extra time in form of added minutes during their exams or tests, give oral examinations in cases where students are totally impaired, print their examinations in large prints for them to read well in cases where they are partially blind.

The lecturers also recommend specific guides who help these students in their movements around the university. Some lecturers provide typed notes for them and make them sit in front of their classes for easy accessibility to the lecture rooms. In Kyambogo University specifically most visually impaired students are taught Braille mode of communication which is quite important to the totally impaired students. Most of these students reach university when they know how to use the Braille instruction which is quite tremendous in their academic achievement.

Some students, who are not visually impaired help in acting as guides to the visually impaired, read for them notes after lectures which they could not take down during the lectures. They also care for these particular students and help in buying for them photocopied notes in case they don't have money. The help these non-visually impaired students assist in improving the academic performance of the visually impaired students. These sighted guides help in mobility and orientation training, help in dictating notes for them and provide all around care for them in both outside or inside their areas of accommodation.

Non-government organization provides sponsorship to visually impaired students in both Makerere and Kyambogo Universities. In so doing they provide scholastic materials and accommodation, Braille machines, computers with jaws, white canes and reading glasses. For example the majority of students at Makerere University studying community psychology are privately sponsored students by Non-government organizations such as National Union for disabled people in Uganda (NUDIPU) and sight savers. According to Anne (2004), she argues that donors and non-governmental organizations can also contribute to the education of visually impaired students by providing appropriate resources for facilitating successful inclusion.

5.2 Conclusion

The following conclusions have been drawn as a result of the research work carried out about inclusive education and academic achievement of students with visual impairment in Makerere and Kyambogo universities.

It can be concluded that there are several benefits received by these kind of students around these universities that is to say in terms of assessment they receive oral examination, are given extra time during examinations and get large printed examinations. In terms of sponsorships, they are sponsored by the government and non-government organization who give them tuition, scholastic materials, accommodation, pay sighted guides, give internship and disability allowances, meals and provide medical services to them.

5.3 Recommendations

The government through acts of parliament can enact laws and policies such as disability acts to emphasize the provision of education to disabled children from early childhood development, primary, secondary and tertiary institutions.

There should be influence in enacting disability friendly legislation in acts of parliament e.g. Local Council Act 1997; UNISE Act, Traffic and Road Safety Act. It is expected that these should gradually have a positive impact on the quality of life and education of people with disabilities, visually handicapped inclusive.

There should be establishment of more special schools at primary, secondary and at university level where inclusive education can be designed in such a ways that curricular are designed for particular forms of disability.

There should be adequate training for special teachers and in service training for current teachers in the mainstream schools to cater for the educational development of persons with disability.

There should be structural and other adaptations of all educational institutions to the needs of persons with disabilities and promotion of specialized institutions that facilitate research and development of their education.

An operational policy framework is one of the strategies in which the challenges of inclusion can be addressed. A framework will specifically outline the issues and the resources needed for effective inclusion. The framework on special needs education (supported by save the children Sweden) which is presently being developed will go a long way to address the outlined issues.

Trained teachers are a powerful resource in the achievement of quality and relevant education. To handle children who are blind and low vision, teachers must be specifically and adequately trained to handle such children. The training programme on special needs education in the Ugandan universities should be made more detailed. Such trained teachers however must be remunerated to motivate them to put more effort in their work.

More sponsorship for the Visually Impaired should be extended to other government aided universities such as Gulu, Busitema, Mbarara and Muni universities. Also private universities should begin admitting these students though their maintenance and requirements are very costly.

The researcher also recommends that since there are special primary and secondary schools for the visually impaired there should also establish higher institutions of learning for these people at both college and university level.

The government of Uganda should also set up stringent policies and laws to guide the education of the visually impaired at institutions of higher learning especially visually impaired.

There should be proper and adequate training of the staff and administrators who hand these visually impaired students in the institutions they attend.

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