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# **Educating the Physically Challenged in the Nigerian Society: A Preliminary Discourse**

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By

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## **Abstract**

*In any given society, the existence of physically challenged individuals and how best to promote their well being has always been acknowledged by individuals, corporate bodies and the government. This paper attempts an exploration of education as means of achieving the above objectives. It first examined the meaning of physically challenged, their various kinds and guides for educating them. It concludes that educating them would not only help in their upliftment but also in their effective integration as members of the society.*

## **Introduction**

The very existence and astronomical increase in the number of handicapped individuals in the Nigeria society today calls for urgent attention from all and sundry. Okeke (1995) observed that due to technological advancement and related factors, the number of handicapped persons in the society has almost doubled in the last two decades. He further advised that every society should try to integrate the handicapped persons in almost all its programme of events. The mainstreaming of the handicapped individuals in socio-political activities has a lot of far reaching positive effects on the lives of the handicapped.

Eze (1996) observed that apart from psychologically freeing their minds from thinking that they are a rejected group of people in the society, it helps in their physical, social, emotional and mental developments. It is important to stress that one of the greatest mistakes many people make is to underestimate the capabilities of the physically challenged. Researches have shown that if the education of the physically

challenged are planned; there is every likely-hood that the handicapped will perform very well.

Nnadi (1989) regretted that the physically challenged are most of the time, not considered during planning of educational programmes. He advised that the physically challenged form a reasonable segment of the human society and should not in any way be ignored during the planning of anything that is beneficial to the society. Considering the importance of education to the physically challenged, every effort should be made to ensure that they are educated.

### **Meaning of Physically Challenged**

The word “physically challenged” has been defined by many authors from different disciplines. Iyi (1979) defined it as anything likely to lessen one’s chances of success; for instance, poor eyesight is a physical challenge to a student. Similarly, in the field of Physical Education, the meaning remains the same. A physically challenged person is one who because of certain physical, mental, social or cultural disability cannot benefit from the types of education or exercises provided for the “normal” person. The severity of physical challenge cases differs from one individual and also from one type of physical challenge to the other.

### **Kinds of Physical Challenge**

There are many forms of physical disability but the major ones that mostly constitute the physically challenging conditions are:

- The blind and partially sighted;
- The deaf and hard-of-hearing; and
- The motor disabled.

Physical challenge can be categorized into

- i. **Physical Handicap:** One can be physically challenged as a result of disease, accident or heredity. Such a person finds it difficult to use the affected part of the body.
- ii. **Emotional Challenge:** An individual who suffers from this handicap is emotionally unstable. He or she finds it hard to control his/her emotions.
- iii. **Mental Challenge:** This has to do with defects in one’s brain. Many things can make one to have this problem. In some people, it may be due to birth injury while in some others, it might be attributed to heredity, accident, illness, taking drugs and other related factors. Iyi (1979) warned that anything that has negative impact on the brain cells can lead to mental challenge.
- iv. **Social/Cultural Challenge:** This can occur when one changes his/her residence or is isolated. When one does not have knowledge of the social/cultural norms, he is regarded as having been socially/culturally challenged.

### **Causes of Physical Challenge**

The physically challenged child may have a permanent or temporary disability. Physically challenging conditions may be as a result of disease, accident or heredity. For example, a man who had his right hand amputated during an accident has become physically challenged. Such a person may never in his life perform those activities that need two hands for its performance. Similarly, an individual who because of the disease of the eye lost his sight has become physically challenged. He or she may not be able to read or write again in his or life. These physically challenged people's lives can be improved upon through proper education and planning.

#### 4) **Recommended Activities for the differently challenged**

##### **The mentally and emotionally disabled**

Activities suitable for this group are as follows:

- Relaxation exercises such as sleeping on the ground and keeping still.
- Balanced exercises such as climbing, walking on beams, creeping under boxes.
- Weight lifting, long distance races, hitting a ball against the wall to displace aggression.
- Activities of low organization like hopping, catching, track and field, boxing, soccer and tumbling.

##### **The Visually Impaired (The Blind and Partially Sighted)**

People who fall into this group always tend to withdraw from the society for them it is recommended that:

More of feeling with their hands should be made. Games and activities that would make them touch and describe shapes of things should be introduced.

**Dancing and rhythmic activities Gymnastics, Distance running:** This is very good for them. Vodola (1976) reported that Harry Cordellos, a sightless distance runner ran the Boston Marathon with a sighted partner in 1975 in 2 hours, 57 minutes, 42 seconds.

**The Deaf and Hard-Of-Hearing:** People in this group have special needs that can be met with extra planning. Due to their hearing defects, they must have to depend maximally on their visual apparatus. The recommended activities are games like ludo and snake and ladder that would make them use their sight rather than ear.

**The Motor Disabled:** People in this group are with orthopedic deviations. This may be permanent impairment of joints, bones, and amputations and spinal problems.

##### **Guides for Teaching the Handicapped**

The success of any educator in teaching lies on his ability to meet the unique needs and interests of each learner. According to Galahue (1976), demonstrations and pictures, verbal stimulation, use of concrete objects are some of the various sensory

approaches to teaching the physically challenged. It is also important that the teacher for the physically challenged establishes a very conducive and attractive learning environment. The environment should be the one, which makes the learners want to learn, to produce and to explore (Daniels and Davies, 1975). The teacher should be able to start with the child at whatever level he is, and take him forward as far as he can. Below are suggested approaches to teaching the physically challenged.

- a. Activities that help the child overcome his lack of confidence and a sense of failure should be selected.
- b. Select activities that contribute to the needs and interests of the child.
- c. Activities should be selected or designed, so that the child is seen competing with himself and his previous performances, rather than against others.
- d. Select activities that each child can do easily in order to assure, at least, a minimum of success. This is because, when there is no sign of success coming his way, he gets frustrated and may decide to stop participating in such activities.
- e. Select activities that are at an appropriate functional level for each child to avoid frustration.

### **The Integration of Special Classes with the Rest of the School**

It is essential that special classes be integrated with the rest of the school community. The gravest danger to a special class is isolation from the rest of the school. This may arise from various sources: Its independence of programme and timetable, the fact that its teacher is a 'specialist' working on his own, and that children remain for sometime in the same class. Much depends on the attitudes created among other children towards the slow-learners or handicapped and the attitude of head teacher and staff to the class and its teacher. It is still possible to encounter a lack of understanding of the purposes of a special class if it has been established by the education authority without fully discussing the issue with staff and head teacher. There may even be hidden resentment at the small number in the special class its apparent privileges and degree of independence. There are many ways in which the school community can help integration: Children from the special class or unit can share in assembly and social activities; they can join others for activities such as physical education or music. Although the major part of the time and special skill of the teacher of the special class should be devoted to his children, opportunities can be made for him to contribute at times to general life and teaching of the school, whilst colleagues in turn get to know his handicapped children.

### **The Age-Range of the Special Class**

One of the criticisms made of special classes is that their facilities and the quality of teaching have been poor and they readily become a 'sink' for the problems of school, with children spending perhaps four years in the same group, experiencing little progress. We do not believe that this should be true of the assess which have a correct approach to learning. Even so, no child should and more than two years in a class for slow-learners, if this can be avoided. This implies that there should be two

special classes within the junior school, junior (8 – 10) and senior (10 – 12), so that children may experience a sense of progress.

### **Handicap and Remedial Teaching**

Children within the normal range of ability but with general retardation, or specific learning difficulties, who are failing to make progress in an ordinary way, may need different treatment. There is some evidence that there are proportions of these. They may be helped by becoming full or part-time members of a special class for slow-learning children, with the aim of proving sufficiently to return to their ordinary class, but the different needs of the slow-learners of limited mental ability who will follow their own pace of those requiring remedial attention in order to catch up, may make organization of the class difficult. It is usually better to arrange some remedial teaching in groups meeting part-time. Educationally children may have a variety of problems, including emotional over learning, and require a range of facilities. Financially able authority could provide remedial teachers who regularly visit schools, usually for an hour a day, to give individual attention to small groups of children, usually four to six in number.

One of the cardinal objectives of education in general is to equip the child to face challenges he/she would meet in future whether the participant is physically challenged or not. Educational activities can bring about the following challenges in the lives of the physically challenged.

- a. **Postural Correction:** Exercises help greatly to correct postural defects by helping the affected individual to maintain body balance and alignment. This aids in the improvement of self-image.
  - b. **Organic Development:** Through exercises, organs have better working efficiency. Example, exercises increase the heart volume, stroke volume etc.
  - c. **Increase Body Coordination:** The physically challenged child by participating in programmed activities improves on his body coordination...
2. **Social and Emotional Development:** According to Crowe (1977), the social and emotional development implied, making personal adjustment, group adjustments and adjustments as a member of a society. Physically challenged, if not helped to have a sense of belonging to the society, will get frustrated. He sees himself as an odd person who is not qualified to associate or do what other “normal” people do. It is only educational programmes that can bridge this gap. Winnick (1979) wrote that giving the physically challenged a chance for successful learning might change the concept of individual inadequacy and result in an improved social outlook. He maintained that once a skill is learnt and the performance is acceptable by the group, the desire for group activity increases. This will lead to an improved total social and emotional well-being of the person.
  3. **Mental Development:** Education has the potential to help the participants develop mentally. It is obvious that every activity to be performed by the physically challenged has its underlying principles, which must be learnt and

mastered by them before they can really perform such activities well. When they are involved in learning these principles and how to apply them correctly, they improve their mental capacity for such activities and in turn, their general intelligence.

### **Conclusion**

The need of the physically challenged people in any society should be given serious attention with a view to minimizing the problems they pass through in their lives. This paper has shown that education is one of the surest ways to help the physically challenged to live a normal life and do so happily with other members of the society. The government corporate bodies and rich individuals should do all within their power to assist make their lives comfortable.

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