

How to Help Special Education Students?

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“Good behavior is the last refuge of mediocrity.”

—Henry S. Haskins

ACCORDING to UNICEF’s report, there are approximately 240 million disabled children in the world. They are typically in a disadvantaged position in terms of health, education, and safety, compared with their normal peers (UNICEF, 2021). By the end of 2018, there were 1045038 registered disabled kids aged 0-14 in China, accounting for roughly 3% of the total population with impairments (Chen, 2020). Such a huge number involves millions of families, who deserve the concern and support of the whole society.

Globally, due to a lack of complete nursing system, disabled children have become chronic burdens, both financially and mentally, to their families, especially to their parents. The long-term, strenuous nursing exhausts parents’ energy to the extent that the whole family cannot operate properly, which profoundly affects other family members and increases conflicts among them. Social discriminations against disabled children and their families have intensified their sense of exclusion from the community. Consequently, helplessness and fear of the unpredictable future further worsen the stress and anxiety of this special cohort. Therefore, schools and communities should provide them with professional support and attendance service to relieve their pressure.

Education and nursing for disabled children are not only a social issue,

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but also entail the protection of their right to education. Considering the crucial role of early basic education in the whole education system and its exceptional significance to the growth of disabled children, improving basic special education should be attached more importance in order to enhance the well-being of disabled children and maintain the harmony and stability of society. For example, the United States, one of the countries with highly-developed education, has been pushing for early education service for disabled children over the past few decades by enacting a series of pertinent laws such as Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975), the Public Law 99-457 (1986), and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1990) (He, 2012).

Unquestionably, disabled children are the most vulnerable among all disadvantaged groups. Their right to education is one of the key indicators to measure the overall education equity of the country. The government intervention in the early education of disabled children can drive the education departments at all levels to contribute more to the development of special education. After years of experiment and practice, China has established a special education system encompassing special education schools, special education classes in regular schools, and inclusive education. Special education schools, including schools for the visually impaired, hearing-impaired, and mentally handicapped, have created curricula with their own characteristics based on the nation's uniform curriculum plan, course standards, and textbooks such that every disabled child can receive an education matching their ability and interest, get the most suitable school placement and attain essential skills to integrate into society (Shi, 2011).

There is a considerable proportion of visually impaired kids among all disabled children. As a result of their isolation from the outside world and their negative impact on their families, most of them have a strong sense of inferiority and low expectations of academic attainments. Books and written language are the major media in the traditional education. It is difficult for visually impaired students with limited reading ability to conduct long-time learning using paper media. Digital technologies have inspired the education community to seek for more effective educational strategies for this special group. For example, online audio books can serve as an ideal alternative with their advantages of being mobile and convenient in reading, since visually impaired children have no difficulty in acquiring information through hearing; it converts written texts into audio ones, which allow students with visual impairment to learn at any time and in any places. This can significantly enhance their interest in and devotion to learning (Zhang, 2011).

Besides, visually impaired students can utilize their sense of touch to augment learning results. *Barrier-Free Science Education for Visually Impaired Students: An Activity for Life Cycle in Plants* in this issue (Keleş et al., 2023) is a study on how to support visually impaired students in the Science course by using tactile materials and technical tools. In the research, a lesson plan was designed and implemented to help visually impaired 3rd grade students in an inclusive class with their study on the subject of life cycle of

plants; Depending on touchable materials, teachers objectified abstract scientific concepts to offer these disadvantaged students equal opportunities to succeed in science learning. We hope that this study will spark more discussion on teaching strategies to facilitate special education for disabled children.

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