

**The role of the resource room in educating persons with visual impairments:  
A case study of the Kumbo educational programme in Cameroon**

**NSAGHA Sarah Mboshi**

Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Education, University of Buea, Box 63, Buea, Cameroon. Tel: +23775541658 Email: [mboshisarah@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:mboshisarah@yahoo.co.uk)

**ABSTRACT**

This study was focused on the role of a resource room in the education of persons with visual impairments by highlighting the various areas that promote education and making learning and teaching much more meaningful to the visually impaired. The study determined the availability of necessary materials, the personnel strength and the utilization of the various materials for the education of the visually impaired, the staff awareness of the programmes of educational services and needs of the visually impaired. A descriptive survey design was used and data was collected using a structured questionnaires and an observational checklist. Data was analyzed using simple percentages and the responses presented in tables. The results showed that there was no Braille machine (Perkins Brailler) for the trainees; only the slate and stylus and hand frame were available. Nevertheless, there were good activities in the resource room that helped the visually impaired to improve their skills in Braille reading and writing and other academic achievements. Among the ten staff working in the Kumbo School, half agreed that the educational programmes were not sufficient and most agreed that many Cameroonians were not aware of the educational programmes of persons with visual impairments. Majority of the staff believed that the government was not investing enough on the education of persons with visual impairments. There was a consensus of opinion among all the staff for the government to provide for the educational needs of persons with visual impairments. The visually impaired need a lot of services not only from the government and philanthropic organizations but from everyone who is in position to help. Psychologically, the resource room granted development of positive self concept to the visually impaired as they related well with their peers and the society at large.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Disability is a condition that cuts across all human races in diverse forms. Whatever condition one finds him/her self in, there should be a way out either to remedy, compensate or an intervening process that will help the individual live a normal life within his/her environment. (Beatrice & Janet, 2003). Vision problem is one of the dreaded conditions many people are scared of. Individuals who have lost their vision either completely or partially do have problems in teaching/learning process and other aspects of life. In order to overcome these difficulties of teaching/learning process, the individuals concerned should have guidance and training in the resource room (Ozaji, Kigbu and Okeke, 1993).

The resource room is the key to development and acquisition of skills in all aspects of life for persons with visual impairments. The purpose of a resource room is to provide a peerless convenience in the special school or regular school where the special needs child would conveniently return to for assistance whenever the regular classroom situation proved unhelpful or problematic. It is easy to see the self-defeat that would have become the lot of the special needs learner if the resource room facility is absent in the school. (Ozaji, Kigbu and Okeke, 1993). Lily (1979) considers the resource room as an opportunity for receiving special help usually on tutorial basis while spending the major part of the day in the regular class. Similarly, Smith and Neisworth (1979) explained that the resource room is designed to provide needed specialized help in specific areas to individual persons, while at the same time permitting them to function for the most part in the regular classroom. Any educational plan for the visually impaired is indispensable of the resource room (Abang, 1992). There exist resource rooms in some schools and institutions in theory and not practice. If there is no practical work, the visually impaired can not learn what he/she is supposed to learn or know in the course of being in an institution or school (Sykes and Ozaji, 1992).

The resource room should provide near optimum conditions for learning the general and unique contents of the school curriculum (Ozaji, Kigbu and Okeke, 1993). The study was aimed at finding out the availability of materials, the personal strength and the utilization of the various materials for the education of the visually impaired. Also, the aim was to see how far the general public is aware of the provision of educational services and needs of the visually impaired.

## **STUDY AREA**

Kumbo is a town located in Bui Division of the North West Region of Cameroon. Kumbo is surrounded by many educational institutions including the Integrated School for the Blind. The Kumbo Educational Programme for the visually impaired was established in 1982 to cater for the needs of persons with visual impairments. In Bui Division, the programme covers Government High School Oku, Government High School, Kumbo, C.B.C Jakiri, C.B.C Kumbo and Saint Augustine College, Kumbo. This programme extends to the neighbouring Donga-Mantung Division

covering the Baptist Theological Seminary and Cameroon Baptist Convention Primary School (C.B.C) all in Ndu.

Basically, the programme takes care of intensive practical work for three years in the resource room together with regular work along side with non-handicapped persons, after which, the client is integrated into the community. There is no age limit because some of them are adventitious and need basic skills in the resource room.

This programme came into existence through the establishment of the Integrated School for the Blind in Kumbo, which was established by the Cameroon Baptist Convention in 1982. The initial aim was to bring Christ to the visually impaired because before God, we are all equal and there is no handicapped condition in heaven Secondly, it was to educate them on all aspects of education along side with the non-handicapped. Thirdly, to integrate them into the society and make them feel independent and contribute to the growth of humanity. With this in mind, the school which started with 14 pupils and 4 staff grew up in strength and many of them were integrated into higher institutions in other communities. This study was carried out from March to April 2000.

## **METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY**

### **Sampling procedures**

A purposive sampling of ten respondents made up all staff working in the programme were given a structured questionnaire based on the Likert-type scale of five alternatives to tick or indicate their opinion by either strongly agreeing, agreeing, disagreeing, strongly disagreeing and undecided.

### **Observational checklist**

Observations were also used to get first hand information on the various equipments and facilities being offered in the resource room under the educational programme for persons with visual impairments.

### **Administrative Procedures and Informed Consent**

Administrative clearance for this study was obtained from the Department of Special Education, University of Jos, Nigeria and the Director of the education programme at the Integrated School for the Blind in Kumbo, Cameroon. After a preliminary introduction of the study to authorities of the school and all the staff, the purpose of the study and its advantages to persons with visual impairments were explained and questions raised were answered. The self-administered questionnaire was distributed to all the staff and retrieved two days after.

Information on the procedures used for the study, risks and discomforts, benefits, the right to refuse or withdraw from the study and who to contact in case of any problem or question were presented to all staff before the investigations were conducted. No monetary incentives were given to the staff. Confidentiality of all the information collected was assured by keeping it in a folder without names on it, but assigned numbers instead and safely stored

### **Data Management and Analyses**

The author reviewed and collected completed forms. Information from the structured forms were checked each time they were brought from the field for unfilled and unanswered questions and edited for the use of correct codes by the lead author. Data was analysed on SPSS and frequency tables were generated. At the initial stage of analyses, frequency distribution of each variable was produced. Further analysis included data summary such as percentages.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results and discussions were based on the questions asked to the staff and observations made about the resource room as described below.

### **Perceptions on the functionality of the resource room of the Kumbo programme for persons with visual impairment.**

This section deals with the results and discussions are based on the questions asked to the staff. The responses to the statement whether there are many visually impaired children and adults in the Kumbo programme are shown in Table 1. Table 2 reveals that some of the staff agreed that there were many educational programmes for the visually impaired in the Kumbo programme, while some were undecided and others disagreed. This shows that only 20 percent of the respondents were aware of schools for the visually impaired in Kumbo. Fifty percent completely disagreed, possibly because they did not know or they felt there were too few. Thirty percent expressed ignorant of any educational programme for the visually impaired in the programme. Table 3 shows that few respondents strongly agreed that many Cameroonians were aware of the educational programmes for the visually impaired in the Kumbo programme. It therefore shows that 60% of the respondents were of the opinion that many Cameroonians were not aware of educational programmes for the visually impaired in the Kumbo programme.

The results in Table 4 reveal that few respondents strongly agreed that, the government does not spend enough finances to educate the visually impaired in Cameroon. The findings showed that 70% of the respondents disagreed that the government dose not spend enough finances to educate the visually impaired in the country. The results in Table 5 show that 8(80%) of the respondents strongly agreed that there is need for more educational programmes for the visually impaired in Cameroon. All respondents were yearning for more educational programmes for the visually impaired in Cameroon.

**Table 1: Are there many visually impaired children and adults in the Kumbo educational programme for the visually impaired?**

<b>There are many visually impaired children and adults in the Kumbo programme?</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Strongly Agreed	2	20
Agreed	5	50
Disagreed	3	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 2: Are there many educational programmes for the visually impaired persons in the Kumbo programme?**

<b>There are many educational programmes for the visually impaired persons in the Kumbo programme?</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Agreed	2	20
Undecided	3	30
Disagreed	4	40
Strongly Disagreed	1	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 3: Are many Cameroonians are aware of educational programmes for the visually impaired in the Kumbo programme?**

<b>Many Cameroonians are aware of educational programmes for the visually impaired in the Kumbo programme</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Strongly Agreed	1	10
Agreed	2	20
Undecided	1	10
Disagreed	5	50
Strongly Disagreed	1	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 4: Do you believe that the government is spending enough finances to educate the visually impaired in Cameroon?**

<b>Do you believe that the government is spending enough finances to educate the visually impaired in Cameroon?</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Strongly agreed	2	20
Agreed	1	10
Disagreed	3	30
Strong disagreed	4	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 5: Is there need for more educational programmes for the visually impaired in Cameroon?**

<b>There is need for more educational programmes for the visually impaired in Cameroon?</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Strongly agreed	8	80
Agreed	2	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100</b>

The results revealed that, there were not many children and adults in the Kumbo educational programme. Despite their lost vision, the visually impaired still have the right to education as affirmed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Person with Disability which states that, “the importance of accessibility to the physical, social, economic and cultural environment, health and education and to information and communication, in enabling persons with disabilities to fully enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms” (United Nations, 1996 available at <http://ap.ohchr.org/search/main.htm>). It is clear that the Kumbo educational programme had great vision for the persons with visual impairments which were not far from that of the UN by bringing education closer to them. But it is unfortunate that only few were found in the programme. In fact, across the globe, attitudes and practices of integration or mainstreaming or inclusion are a challenge that remains largely unanswered, especially in many African countries and cultural settings. Many African children with disabilities are still left without proper are or education and are marginalized within families, education systems themselves and the society at large, especially as the ideas of integration, mainstreaming or inclusion do not yet have full understanding in African’s families, education systems policy development, programme design, and system management (Nsamenang, 2008). Also, majority of children and youths with disabilities are still not enrolled in schools because family members believe there is a cure somewhere. They continuously seek advice from witch doctors, herbalist, new age pastors and fetish shrines (Director of Special Education in Ghana, 1998). Access to educational opportunities is limited and restricted few.

The results show that there were not many educational programmes in the Kumbo programme. Education is a basic right of every human being and most be given it proper position in our life. One of the reasons for this could be lack of professionals in that field of special education who design programmes suitable for the visually impaired. The Guidelines for Education in Cameroon of 1998 states that every Cameroonian has the right to education and section 16 and 17 says teachers of both systems that is, English and French teachers should be trained for two or three years but no provision for special teachers (Law No98/004 of 14 April 1998 to lay down Guidelines

for Education in Cameroon). When teachers are trained in their field of specialty, more educational provision will be available.

Further more, the results revealed that many Cameroonians were not aware of the educational provision for the visually impaired in Kumbo educational programme. Education of the visually impaired does not exist in space. There are legislations backing the establishment of educational institutions for persons with disabilities in Cameroon. For Cameroonians not to be aware of the programme is not a surprised as it is the general phenomenon in many African countries as stated by Mawutor and Selete (2004) that “throughout history, there has existed a belief that individuals with disabilities could “pollute” the society. Stereotyping and prejudice have become the tools utilized to marginalize individuals with disabilities which affected their lives in all aspects.

The government does not spend enough finances in the education of the visually impaired. Section 12 of the Guideline on Education in Cameroon says that “Education shall be financed from: budgetary allocations from the State, budgetary appropriations from regional and local authorities and contributions from education partners”. Cameroon has signed international laws, policies and millennium development goals on rights and education of the disabled and should be backed up financially by the government (Law No98/004 of 14 April 1998 to lay down Guidelines for Education in Cameroon).

Education of the visually impaired can be fully achieved with the provision of the necessary educational materials and services. The results showed that there is still greater need for the educational provision in the Kumbo educational programme. The educational provision could come in the form of materials and equipments, financial assistance, in-service programmes for those already working in the field, medical and welfare services. This view was supported by Jatau, Uzo and Lere (2002), that education of the visually impaired bothers on the provision of enough time for them; special materials and systematically well planned programmes for this will go a long way to improve the education of persons with visual impairments.

### **Observations on the resource room**

In the midst of numerous problems facing the Cameroonian educational system, it is pertinent to determine what is required to have a functional resource room facility. Such an analysis would point to the extent it could be accommodated within the limitations of the school system (Mawutor & Selete, 2004). In the context of a developing country like Cameroon, it is not advisable to emphasize ideal requirements, for it would mean not to start at all.

A typical classroom in the school is what is needed to provide the structural setting. Perhaps, erecting a new structure detached from the building housing the classroom may be stigmatizing to the users. In choosing the room, prime consideration should be given to accessibility. It should be where the special needs person would use it, finds it easy and safe to get in and out with minimal



problems. This would mean that barriers on the way and around the room should be cleared or permanently marked as a route in the interest of persons with visual impairments (Mawutor & Selete, 2004).

Fortification of the resource room with protective gadgets is necessary. The concern for security is informed by the vandalized nature of typical classroom. The room should be fitted with steel doors, windows, ceiling and protective gadgets installed in the interest of the equipment and material to be installed (Ozaji, Kigbu and Okeke, 1993).

The basic furniture items required include: a teacher's table, small tables and chairs for about five students at a time, book shelf, steel cabinet, average illumination, ample space for navigation. The other infrastructure would depend on the type of exceptionality involved. For instance, the visually impaired person would require a type writer, talking books, Braille machine, regular text books in Braille including Braille dictionary, tape recorders, thermoform machine, hand frame or slate and stylus, arithmetic devices (abacus, taylor-frame, cubarithm), ample Braille papers/braille and mobility aids/devices, stock/workshop tools for material preparation (Ozaji, Kigbu and Okeke, 1993).

The arrangement of the materials should be flexible to provide varied settings for additional or supplementary teaching, allow the children to use the materials and apparatus in the room, to enable teachers. Perhaps, the teachers could consider setting the room for teacher work, learner work and material preparation sections (Nyagang, 2000). The teacher section could serve as office for consulting with regular teachers; the learner section could be for teaching them, their individual work/reading; and the last section could serve for a workshop section/demonstration and exploration experience.

The Kumbo resource room programme was initiated by the Cameroon Baptist Convention Medical Board and run by an experienced special educator, who traveled to other countries of the world and observed the different methods of educating the visually impaired persons and therefore returned to Cameroon and developed the programme. He works hard to impart his skills to some zealous Cameroonians who volunteer to work for the visually impaired.

The resource room needs more materials. It was observed that, there were no Braille machines (Perkins Braille) for the trainees but only hand frames. The thermoform machine which serves like the photocopy was faulty. There was no recording studio for audio tapes and no modern equipment like the Braille computers.

It was possible to observe some of the important activities and services which were being rendered in the resource room setting. Basically, the Kumbo resource room personnel are working hard to utilize the available materials to them, whether home made or foreign made.

The specialist and his staff are working seriously to meet the needs of the visually impaired as some are adventitiously visually impaired and others congenital. Various techniques were used to improve their conditions as their needs vary. Different games and activities were used in the

resource room to improve on their mobility, daily living skills, brailing and typing. For example, a game known as “sorting tray” is used to improve on the sense of feeling. With this, seeds of various kinds and shapes were put together and the trainee is asked to separate them one after the other and put them according to shapes and kinds in various small halves in the sorting tray. This helps the trainee in improving on their sense of touch which is very important in Braille reading and writing skills which is the major medium of communication for persons with visual impairments.

It was also observed that, the trainees work very hard each day because goals were set for each individual to meet up with at the end of the day. After completion of one stage, you then move unto the next stage. The obstacles they encountered at the beginning were that, they needed an interpreter for those who don't understand English well. Another obstacle was that, the adventitiously visually impaired found it difficult to move in the resource room until when intensive mobility and finger training for Braille reading and writing skills has taken place

### **Conclusion**

It was noted that the visually impaired need a lot of services not only from government and philanthropic organizations but from everyone who is in position to help. Psychologically, the resource room granted development of positive self concept to the visually impaired as they relate well with their peers and the society at large. The resource room also plays a positive role in the psycho-motor development of the visually impaired.

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