

chapter 22

Disability Studies in Inclusive Education

Overview: Physical impairment and classroom adaptation

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Section learning outcomes

After completing this section, you will be able to:

- ✓ Describe physical conditions that may lead to impairment and how they present.
- ✓ Have working knowledge of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF).
- ✓ Identify causes of physical impairment.
- ✓ Demonstrate a deeper level of insight into cerebral palsy.
- ✓ Discuss the impact of different types of impairment on children in the classroom, with a focus on physical impairment.
- ✓ Examine the effect or impact of physical impairment on children in the classroom.
- ✓ Identify barriers to learning experienced by learners with physical impairment.
- ✓ Apply teaching strategies for inclusive learning in their own educational context for learners with physical impairments using the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL).
- ✓ Implement classroom adjustments and adaptations that will promote the active participation of children with physical impairments in the class.

Introduction

In this section, we continue to discuss the impact of different types of impairment, with a focus on physical impairment. We discuss the ICF and provide insight into cerebral palsy (CP) and the identification of barriers to learning experienced by learners with physical impairment. Also, we describe teaching strategies for inclusive learning using UDL. Furthermore, we demonstrate how to implement classroom adjustments and adaptations to promote active participation of children with physical impairments in the class.

Learners with physical impairments have experienced narrow chances to enjoy school environments or practices due to fewer priorities given by educational providers to issues that may support the disabled especially in low-and-middle income countries in areas such as curriculum adaptations, teaching and learning materials, infrastructure, and special programs



such as sports and games. A learner with physical impairment may have difficulty with managing the distance between different learning activities, with carrying materials, notetaking, practical activity and may take a longer time to ask or answer questions. Learners with physical impairments have often not had their human rights fully respected, as they were always seen as “less than” and “othered”. Basic human rights were not provided, such as the right to education at any institution they choose, being excluded from spaces and activities, and not being accommodated for in the classroom and society.

In the following reflection, I share my personal experiences from school as a person with physical impairment.

Insider view: Perspectives on education

To create an inclusive society, we need to talk about the disabled experience in an empathetic way, as this is best to rid the world of the stigma and discrimination it has for disabled people. We need to empathise with their challenges in order to decrease the barriers they face and create a more inclusive society.

Family figures such as parents, grandparents and siblings are often the disabled student’s first and greatest support system. They often have to advocate for inclusion for the child in school and other spaces where parents are the ones who discuss with the educators the needs of their child and how best to support them. By doing this, the parents also educate and raise awareness of disability at the school.

When schools cannot or refuse to include a disabled child, it is often the parent who has to fight for inclusion and provide the additional support for the child. Family members become this pillar of support and keep the child motivated and dedicated to stay in school and become successful. Disabled students are often othered and are the target for bullies. Disabled children can be discriminated against and stigmatised due to their differences and this often leads to low levels of social inclusion at school. Thus, families have to be a great means of social support when disabled students lack other social support means when they do not have many friends or are socially excluded.

Disabled students need far more financial support than non-disabled students for their additional needs, such as assistive devices and health care. Disabled students also find that being employed is far more challenging than their non-disabled peers. These all lead to families of disabled persons having a greater financial burden and needing to financially support the disabled student more than they may for non-disabled youth.



Learners with physical impairments often find themselves in inaccessible school environments and have to make their way in spaces that favour able-bodied people. Many schools are not accessible for wheelchairs and there are many barriers for those who are physically impaired. Desks do not fit wheelchairs or mobility devices, hallways are too narrow, classes are spaced far apart, lockers are inaccessible, cafeterias and lunch tables are inaccessible, and bathrooms have no accessible stalls.

Disabled students thus have to exert themselves to be included and accomplish tasks by walking far distances, maneuvering in cramped spaces and being in unsafe environments. These barriers result in many painful experiences, exerting a lot of physical effort, risking injury and being in a state of discomfort. If they cannot make their way in an inaccessible environment, they risk being left out and excluded from spaces and activities.

Inaccessibility, such as stairs without an elevator to a wheelchair user, symbolises and acts as a reminder that they are not welcome or considered in that space. Disabled students frequently face this in classrooms and playgrounds.

Disability is often met with much discrimination and stigma, as many are afraid of differences and are ignorant of disability. This discrimination often leads to social exclusion, where the disabled student is alienated and othered. Bullying is a leading cause of social exclusion for disabled students, as disabled students are often mocked and teased for their differences and additional needs.



REFLECTION

Estimated time: 15 minutes

Reflect on some of your personal life experiences in school and how you overcame the challenges you faced.

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