

The Experience of the Association for the Blind – Benghazi in Mainstreaming Visually Impaired Students

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Introductory notes

Libya :

Libya is located in North Africa , with an area of **1 759 540 km²** and a population of around five millions . Benghazi is the second largest city .It is the major city in the eastern part of the country .

1 . Establishment & Status of (ABB) :

The Association for the Blind – Benghazi (**ABB**) was established on Dec . **3 rd. 1961** as a non – governmental organization. ABB's students come from different places in the east and south of Libya . There is another association in the Tripoli serving the blind in the western region (Al – Nour Association) .

2 . Services :

- 1 . A complete educational program, from kindergarten to secondary school .
- 2 . Vocational training for adult blind . Together with effective placement and follow- up.
- 3 . A wide range of social services , social rehabilitation , sports and recreational activities .
- 4 Braille press , a library ,and a talking book studio.

3 . Local & International Contacts :

Locally , **ABB** Keeps a good reputation . It is a source of information and technical advice about all matters related to the handicapped . ABB is also member of many regional and international organizations.

Educational Services of (ABB):

ABB's Educational Division operates a residential school for **VI** children , which accepts a good number of day boarders. The school accommodates **VI** children coming from east and south of Libya .Occasionally ABB offers admissions to a few blind children from other Arab countries .

ABB's school has from first to twelve grades (elementary to secondary) . The school's educational system and curricula are in accordance with those for a sighted . It is technically supervised by the Department of Education . However , blind students are officially exempted from studying certain subjects in math and geography .

Newly - blind children attend a special introductory class , the duration of which depends on individual needs . During this period they are taught Brail and Tiller . Previously studied subjects are also revised . Through participating in the various educational and social activities , these students are taught personal living skills and undergo social rehabilitation.

However , visually impaired students sits for general certificates exams together with sighted peers . They are assisted with sighted peers of lower educational level to read and write for them.

Stages of Mainstreaming

The First Stage : Introductory efforts :

In the late sixties ABB began introductory efforts and activities aiming at enhancing integration of sighted and visually impaired students . Such activities as : exchange of visits and spending a school day every week at the school for sighted students.

The Second Stage: Isolated Incidents :

In 1985 ABB mainstreamed some **VI** students. Approximately(**15**) students were mainstreamed during the period from **1985** to **2002** . Most of those lived in other cities than Benghazi .However , in the yeas **1998 – 2001** , more and more students in Benghazi city were mainstreamed as will. This paved the road for the third stage .

The Third Stage :

This stage began in **2002** . At this date **ABB** established the Office of Mainstreaming (**OM**) . It belonged to Social Services Division (**SSD**), and headed by a social worker. However , the head of (**OM**) worked in liaison with the Educational Services Division (**ESD**) .

In **2005** the(**OM**) was shifted to (**ESD**) . Yet (**OM**) is still headed by a social worker. Selecting a social worker to head the division tells that (**ABB**) feels the need to advocate

mainstreaming and convincing others in the community more than just providing educational services .

Selection of Students for Mainstreaming :

Students are selected for mainstreaming according to the following criteria :

1. Student's or family's wish .
2. Decision of ABB's placement committee .
3. Compulsorily for some students who live far from Benghazi city That is because of lack of vacancy in the association's dormitory for students coming from outside Benghazi.

Services Provided to Mainstreamed Students by (OM) :

1. - Contacts and coordination with families .

Soon after a decision is made by the placement committee to mainstream a student , his family is being contacted . some families welcomes the idea , others need to be convinced and assured that it is for the best of the student .

2. Contacts With Schools for the Sighted Students and Placement of VI Students:

Soon after making a decision of placing a student at the nearby school , the social worker at the **(OM)** makes necessary contacts with the school . Sometimes it takes extra effort to convince the principal of the school and /or some of his assistants, especially if the school deals with a **VI** person for the first time .

Contacts could be by phone , or personal . This depends on the need to convince the person in charge , and also on the location of the school .

3. Follow up Services.

Every school is being visited from **(1)** to **(4)** times every school term . during these visits the mainstreaming coordinator meets with the director , social worker in the school , and/or teacher(s) . That depends on the type of difficulty the students or the school face , and the kind of support needed from the association .

4. Contacts with educational authorities in the municipalities

Contacts are made also with the educational authority , in the municipality where the school is located . One of the major points discussed is the exemption of VI students from subjects , such as drawing , Arabic calligraphy , and some topics of math.

5. Providing educational materials:

Educational materials are provided according to the individual needs , it includes :

- a. Supplying partially sighted students with enlarged text books , and reading glasses .
- b. Supplying totally blind students with Brail textbooks , and /or books on tapes .

Table 1
Number of Mainstreamed Students in Different Cities* and Number of Schools
(2005 – 2006).

Cities	Educational Stages						No.of VI Students	No. of Schools
	Elementary			preparatory				
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total		
BENGHAZI	9	4	13	7	4	11	24	18
AJIDABIA	1	2	3	1	-	1	4	3
AL-BEIDA	1	-	1	2	-	2	3	3
DERNA	1	-	1	1	-	1	2	2
ALMARJ	1	-	1	1	-	1	2	2
ALAGORIA	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1
Total	13	6	19	12	5	17	36	29

* The distance of these cities from Benghazi range from 80 to 200 km.

Table 2
Means of Study Used by VI Students

Impairment Mede	Blind	Partially Sighted	Total
Enlarged Print	-	25	25
Brail	2	8*	10
Tapes	1	-	1
Total	3	23	36

Note * Partially sighted students who uses Brail are those who had spent a few years studying at ABB's school before being mainstreamed.

New Strategies Suggested :

The writers suggest the following new strategies :

- 1 . The association should shift the emphasis to educational specialist of depending on a social worker . Itinerant teachers are to be provided .
- 2 . More coordination is needed for the provision of resource centers in the school . Especially where a number of students are mainstreamed .

3 . A programmed and intensified effort in orienting of families and the school communities is needed.

4 . Short training courses to be teachers in the schools for the sighted to familiarize them with visual impairment and dealing with the visual impairment , etc,