

Every Child Can Learn Podcast
Episode 24: Mr. Lajul on running an inclusive school

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Glades: Welcome to our 24th episode of every child can learn. My name is Lanyero Glades, I work at Backup Uganda as the lead trainer. Today we are very grateful to have our new guest who is going to tell us his names, where he's coming from and also tell us the name of the school that he heads. Thank you so much.

Mr. Lajul: Glades, thank you so much for welcoming me to be part of the program. I am called Mr. Newman Lajul, and I'm married to one wife, I have three children who are boys. And where I come from it is one of the village called Panchwara, is at Koro. And I'm working with this school called Jesus is the Truth Primary, but it has both the nursery and the primary section. Thank you.

Glades: Thank you so much somewhere you said your school is a Christian school. Could you tell us a little bit about it?

Mr. Lajul: So this school was founded under Action International Ministry, which is a Christian based ministry school. So Jesus is the truth is a Christian based school.

Glades: Thank you so much head teacher, Mr. Newman, and also it's a private school. Now, just to go ahead, what subjects do you teach? And maybe, also tell us how does your daily job as the head teacher look like?

Mr. Lajul: Thank you so much. I'm a teacher by profession. I've been trained to teach all the subjects. But now days what I teach is religious education. And of course, I've taught so many of these subjects like science like maths like English, but now I'm concentrating on religious education. What I can say how I run the school, normally my day is, first of all have to be early. Always the time 7:30 should find me at school. And that is how the day begins. Because I have to be there. Make sure that all the staff members are also present. By that time every staff member should be at school, because the children will be reporting they will be entering their class. And on a Monday we have general assembly before they can go to class. And it takes about 30

minutes, we talk to the children we make them have a parade and then we make the day begin. And on such a day also on a Monday we have devotional time. Staff, they come together in the staff room they pray before the day's work also begin. And on Wednesday, we have children come together we meet with the staff we pray also together. It is also a devotional time, so it makes the day very busy. Classroom hours is from 8:30 to 1:00 and then that time we have lunch. Lunch is at 1:00, breakfast is at 10:30 and then the children go back to class at 2pm. From that time they go on until 4:30 then they come out for a break, that break time they would play, have games, maybe play football, play volleyball, play whatever games they would like to play. And then at the end, we shall have another time when they have extra time lessons, the teachers first get them back in the class until 5:30. That's when we shall release them. Those who are coming from home, they go home, those who are in the boarding section, they also relax and begin to do their other things. Thank you.

Glades: Wow, that looks a busy, kind of schedule. But thank you very much for sharing that. And also the fact that you come to school at 7:30. That means you're being exemplarily to other teachers. Of course, if you're the head of the school, trust me, for other teachers to follow coming early to school, it has to start with the head teacher. So thank you so very much, and thanks for that great work you're doing. Could you please let the listeners understand more about your school? And its uniqueness? I believe, there is that uniqueness you have with your school or Jesus is the truth, Could you let the listeners know. And something that I want to find out is the categories of learners you have there, and the groups of learners with which difficulties you admit in your school. That is if you have learners with disabilities as well,

Mr. Lajul: Yeah, thank you so much. Our school is unique. First of all, it is a Christian based school, that means it is already a Godly school, they love Jesus Christ, they want to practice the things that Jesus Christ teaches. So that makes one thing which is different. Another thing is, our school is an inclusive school. It has both special needs children, and then the other children who are said to be the normal children. So we have them together, they learn in the same class, they play in the same compound. They love one another and they stay together. That's what makes it unique. And we have categories of people with special needs. Some of them are epileptic. Some of them could be having hydrocephalus. Some of them have physical impairment. Some of them, they are slow learners. So some of them are so intelligent also, I think that one also is under special needs. When you have a child who is so bright, it's also another thing. So those are the categories, or the few that I can mention. Thank you.

Glades: Thank you very much. And also thank you that Your school is inclusive in nature. Now, do you have a unit within your school? The fact that you have learners with disabilities? Do you have a unit? Or let's say a classroom that is specifically for those learners with disabilities? Or you mix them together? I don't know. Maybe could you let us know?

Mr. Lajul: Yeah, before COVID. Actually, we had some practice whereby special needs children they have to be first put differently at some point, then they join the rest of the children to learn together. But now, that practice has faded, we are now learning all together. Actually, we have not created anything unique. We want them to be all the time inclusive, we want them to learn together. Thank you.

Glades: Okay, thank you so much. That is amazing. Because I was wondering already, the mere fact that if you have learners with disabilities, put differently. I mean, that means there is no inclusion there. But thank you so much that you have now mixed them together. And I think I am a witness. We also work with this school. And something that I've been able to see in classroom is that they have learners with disabilities as well. I've seen learners with epilepsy, I've seen learners with physical impairment, I've seen learners with Down syndrome, and even the kind of treatment teachers give them are very, very good actually they treat them just like any other learner who does not have any disability. Thank you so very much. I wanted to ask you a lot of questions in line with the unit section. But you've already told me that, that system of creating a unit has already faded. Meaning that is a very, very beautiful thing. Do you understand about inclusive education? If yes, could you tell us what inclusive education means to you?

Mr. Lajul: Inclusive Education means bringing all the learners together irrespective of what kind of problem they may face, maybe it is a kind of impairment, or a kind of maybe, you know, a child who is so bright is also a special needs child, let me tell you sometimes people think when you have a bright child, bright children, those are now okay. Sometimes it is a problem also because our experience show when we are there in class with them, you give them work, they finish very fast, maybe if they are stubborn, they begin to disturb others. So you need to give them extra work so that you contain the situation.

Glades: Okay, thank you so much for explaining that very clearly, that inclusive education is having all learners regardless of their disabilities. Thank you so much again. Could you also share with us some examples of how inclusive you and your teachers have been teaching and what you learned about inclusive education? Thank you.

Mr. Lajul: So with inclusive, actually, the first thing, this children who have impairment who have disabilities, they really need love from the teachers. That is how we include them; actually, they feel so good when they are in the school environment. Because we have even taught fellow learners to be their friends, you find most of the time when they are moving, even one on wheelchair you find it is the learners just trying to push. And this one shows the love for them. And they feel so great. Even if you smile to them alone, they feel comforted. They feel they're part of the community. And that's what we do. Actually, even me I had some of them in P.1. Whenever I pass to their class, I go to their class, I just make a smile. And they feel so good. I touch their body, they feel so good. So that's what we do. We want them to learn together with the other children.

Glades: Thank you so much. And I believe the kind of love you give them. It's also been shown in the classroom in the process of teaching, like you involve them, maybe could you tell me a little bit of how inclusive teaching looks like I mean, when you enter a classroom, how do you teach inclusively,

Mr. Lajul: You give them the same work that the other children who are said to be normal are also doing you give them and they should write well, maybe if the other one is failing, finding difficulties in writing, maybe you can support using holding the hands and writing what the other children are also writing. So they learn also something from that, you hold their hands and make sure they coordinate writing using their hands. Meanwhile, the others are also doing the same.

Glades: Thank you very much for sharing that. I am also going to add on what the head teacher said. Just like I said, we also work with the school. And I've been able to enter classrooms and observe teachers teach trust me, they involve every child in classroom, even the child that has a disability, whenever they are teaching, this is something that I've seen. They involve them. When they ask questions, they also engage the learner with disability. Can you also tell us and this is something that is so beautiful, looking at children with disabilities, I also wanted you to share with us what do you think is the biggest myth people say about disability?

Mr. Lajul: Many times I've learned from communities around sometimes they say she's a curse from God. But let me tell you, God doesn't curse us by bringing these kinds of children. I want to tell you these children are a blessing to us. Actually, I've learned from some culture, they used to throw these children who are maybe having hydrocephalus, they just throw them in the river so that the child just dies. Or maybe they find a way of leaving that child and they move away from where they were staying. So that thing must stop. Because that is evil, that is human being that we need to take care of like any other human being, they are equally important. They have all the rights and privileges that we should give them.

Glades: And this is very common that a lot of times our community or parents, even teachers out there have that common say that this child is a curse maybe your stepmother has done ABCD and which is not the case or which is not true. So thank you so much for sharing that. Could you also share a success story of working with children with different disabilities that you know?

Mr. Lajul: I want to share, it is a recent thing. From last year when we had two of them who were candidates, they were able to sit for PLE, these children, they had this problem. One had epilepsy another one was physical impairment. And they had a problem of being slow in trying to learn together with others, they are slow learners. And many times when they are sick, they may not attend classes, those were some of the challenges that we had with them. And many times, they were always on treatment. So that means, there should be someone engaged to make sure that this child is ever taking the treatment, the drug that is given so that they are always well in

school. And we have always engaged the matron at school, and the teachers to make sure that these children are catered for because we have the boarding section, that is also they were staying from the boarding. So we had to involve the UNEB. By the time they were about to sit for their PLE, we wrote to them that we had this student with disability that needs to be supported. And they came during the PLE time; they were able to guide these children. And they did their exams successfully, they passed, they got second grade, now they're in secondary school, they are enjoying studying there. And they are doing well. And we don't regret helping them. We don't regret why we recruited them in our school, this student can be helped just like any other child.

Glades: Thank you so much. This is very amazing. And I believe the parents who are out there, please, this is a live example. This is a head teacher who is sharing his experience about learners with disabilities who have been successful. And also to parents out there I know there are many parents who are very ignorant, just because they don't know what to do. They don't know which school can admit my child with this disability. But here is the head teacher from Jesus is the truth, who is telling us his success story about two of his learners who had disabilities, and were able to make it in PLE. And you also had what he said the UNEB or the ministry sends people who are going to help with guiding these learners on how they can write their papers. So please, let's make sure that we follow this, go to schools, tell schools, let the schools go to UNEB and share with them about what they have, or the categories of learners they have with different disabilities so that they are helped. And something that I also wanted to hint on is when the head teacher was saying they are slow learners. Now slow learners does not mean they are stupid, please, a lot of times, teachers, parents out there, whenever they say a child is slow, please, the child is just slow, but he's bright. So what we need is just a little bit of patience with this kids, a little bit of time, let's give them time, even from home, when you task them to do activities. Can you give them time? Can you be patient with them? So thank you very much head teacher for sharing the success story that you experienced with your kids in school

Mr. Lajul: Maybe I can add something little, there is another thing very important. We have our teachers who are trained how to have games with these children. And you see the joy of having games with these children whenever some of them want to play football, some of them can play with the colleagues, maybe some games like Ludo and so on. And it is very interesting. Whenever you come to our school, you find them playing together with the rest of the other children. And that is the beauty of having this inclusive education. The children learn much more when they are in our school. Then there was a girl that is hyper active. This girl was now having challenges. So at some point, we were like, can we manage this? We had to invite the parents and we talked together then there was a conclusion we came up with. And we found that the best place for this child is the school not just going to stay at home. So the child is still continuing. And that's how we are managing and where we are unable we consult. There are people who can help parents and organizations like Backup Uganda is here.

Glades: You have already hinted on parents and what you've done with parents. Now another bit of what you just said is also engaging parents to come to school to see what their kids are capable of doing. This is something we always tell parents, we always tell listeners that it is very important to do follow up, follow up your child, go and find out how is my child performing, especially this child that has a disability, there are a lot of things you are able to learn from teachers, and also share with teachers, how they can be able to help your child while at home or while at school. Now something that I want to also find out from you is what advice do you give a parent or a teacher who is listening to this program, if they suspect their child has a disability?

Mr. Lajul: Thank you so much. When now you are a parent, you are a teacher, you have seen a child that could be having a problem somewhere is a special needs child. There are ways we can support these children connect to our school, Jesus is the truth is ready to even give a guide. Together with the NGOs like Backup Uganda, AVSI, they have a lot that they can do to support of late our children were having problem of having no wheelchair, so we consulted now one of the organization that is AVSI has supported as by giving us another wheelchair, and the school was able to repair even the one that was at school. So those who are having physical impairment, the wheelchairs are there in school, they can be taken for place of convenience using the wheelchair and brought back and taken to class. So it's not a big problem when they are here at school, they are at a better place than when they're at home. Thank you.

Glades: I also wanted you to help us advise the teachers, what advice do you give to teachers who are listening to this program? If they suspect that there is a learner, they've identified in classroom, what can they do? Thank you.

Mr. Lajul: The teachers need to first have love for these children, that's the great thing a teacher should do, these children needs love. And they need care from the teachers. So when they come to school, the teachers are their everything they should, at some point, even the teachers have to carry them and take them where they should go. If they are supposed to be going for some activity to play with them. Teachers have to play with these children and make them feel at school feel loved, feel they're part of the community. So teaching them is one. But we need also to love them, we need to play with them. Thank you.

Glades: Thank you so much. And thanks for the great message that you've given to us, or you've given to our listeners, I believe they will take up whatever that you have said and also to the teachers, I believe they are going to do that. Now what you said is very, very true. When you have love for these kids, even other things will automatically come in, you will always engage them in different activities. And just like you said that you have the different games that caters for all the learners in your school. Now, lastly, I believe the people who have been listening to this program or the people who are even going to listen to this program later are going to be asking themselves where can I get Jesus is the truth? How do I reach Jesus is the truth. Maybe they've already gotten some interest of knowing more about your school and also the fact that you help or you admit

learners with different disabilities, they could be interested Could you also share your contact information please to the listeners.

Mr. Lajul: Thank you so much. Now, in order to contact us at Jesus is the truth. In any case, you are moving from town to Kampala highway, then the New logistic road which has been recently constructed can lead you to our school actually we are neighbors to these two schools, there is Charlton which is on the western side, then there is also the new school that has started is our neighbor also. So, if you try to move there next to Charlton you will not get lost then you can also contact us on this number. My number is as a head teacher is 0782040691 and also email address is jittschool@gmail.com. So if you try to connect through this, you will always reach us thank you so much.

Glades: Thank you so much JITT' he mentioned is in abbreviation but it's JITT' thank you so much Head teacher for sharing all these experiences to us, I believe you do the right thing. And also if there are people who are interested Some would also want to just come and consult you. I know there are schools that will also come and also ask you, how do you do it? How are you doing it, so that they are also able to do the same things that you are doing the fact that the government is looking at all the schools to be inclusive, not only Jesus is the truth, but all the schools to be inclusive. Thank you so very much. There was one thing that I also wanted to add that even the district looks at how they can be able to help these children with disabilities. I believe in the district there is the district inspector of schools in charge of special needs. So whenever you identify a child or children with disabilities, it's also very helpful that the district gets to know so that in case there is any kind of support that comes for children with disabilities, those are the categories of learners that they are catered for, or even the schools that already have this category of learners will be looked for. So thank you so very much as Backup Uganda we always say every child can learn.

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