

SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN ACQUISITION OF KNOWLEDGE

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Abstract

There is a fast growing prevalence of children with special needs in the world today. Brief introduction of the topic was given. The concepts of special needs children, Indigenous knowledge were discussed. Different types of special needs found in children were looked at , many types were discovered and they are different for different individuals. Need for early interventions were discussed. Types of special education for special needs children were discussed, to include: segregation, Integration/mainstreaming and inclusion education. Strategies for teaching special needs students were discussed. The paper also looked at some challenges faced by special needs children at school and ways forwards. Ways families with special needs children could cope were discussed. Finally recommendations for improvement and conclusions were made

Introduction

Over the past 20 years the number of students with special needs has been steadily increasing at a fast rate (office of special education programme 2000). Recent world Health organization estimates indicate that at least 642 million individuals in the world are affected by some degree of hearing loss of this sizable population, 278 millions have hearing loss that is defined as disabling, 80% of those with a disabling hearing loss come from low and middle income countries. Low income communities have the least access to infant and child health services that could otherwise prevent many types of hearing loss (Audra and Stephen 2012). The provision of hearing aids in childhood can have remarkable effects on the social and intellectual development of a child, as well as the child's ability to benefit from regular education, but only 1 in 40 special needs children has access to a hearing aid (Audra and Stephen 2012). More than 15% of school age kids about 10 million children had a developmental disability in 2006-2008, three or four children in a typical elementary school classroom have development disabilities (Liz. 2012). Some

of these increases may be as a result of the rise in premature birth, which leaves some babies with lasting impairments (Chioma 2011).

The term children with special needs or disabilities refers to exceptional children who have physical, mental, behavioral or sensory characteristics that differ from majority of children such that they require special education and related services to develop their full potential (Burden 2000). Today, approximately one of six students in schools across the world cannot benefit fully from the traditional educational program because they have a disability that impairs their ability to participate in classroom activities (Audra and Stephen 2012).

Over the past 2 or 3 decades some Christian missionaries took up the challenge and began to educate the special needs children, though with a lot of difficulties since the disabilities are different with individuals. The missionaries built centers for special needs children and youths. People from the localities were employed and indigenous knowledge came into play and the challenges were reduced since the environment language, material etc. were familiar to the children

Special Needs Children

Children with special needs are those who need modification in curriculum and instruction in order to help them maximize their potential (Salvin 1997). According to him, modification of curriculum and instruction are necessary as a result of their disabilities. Stainback (2006) view children with special needs as those exceptional children differently challenged who may be physically, socially, or intellectually different, either below or above average who require individual planned and systematically monitored arrangements of physical setting. The term children with special needs or disabilities refers to exceptional children who have physical, mental, behavioural or sensory characteristics that differ from majority of children such that they require special education and related services to develop their full potential. According to Burden (2000) these are children with impairments e.g. visual, hearing or physical which restrict them from full and equal participation in society.

In traditional African society the birth of a child with any form of disability brings a lot of emotional stress to family member as a result of the stigma attached to such a condition. Traditionally, disability was regarded to be work of mythical gods or presence of the evil and witchcraft (Sello, Levitz and Camper 1997). Some parents believed that disability is a punishment

from the ancestors for having transgressed the spiritual or moral values of society. The assumption of traditional African philosophies is that the birth of a child with disability is a bad omen or an act bewitchment (Salvin 1997).

According to Chioma(2011) special needs children include, but are not limited to, those with medical/health issues, Autism spectrum, disorders, developmental, delays, speech/feeding issues, blind/visually impaired, deaf/hearing impaired, physical disabilities, chronic diseases, behavioral or mental health issues, premature birth, sensory issues and learning disabilities.

Indigenous knowledge

Indigenous knowledge (I K) emanate from local experience of a community, it is generated over a period of time. I K is cultural in nature because it is embedded in the practice of a community; it has contributed immensely to the harmonious living of indigenous people in their environment. I K is tied to historic reality and is special to a particular culture or society (Bates, Chiba, Juba and Nakashima 2009), the skills and innovations of a particular indigenous people are represented by that and also encapsulates the collective wisdom and resourcefulness of that community.

There are other terms used to describe I K like local knowledge, folk knowledge, ethnoecology and traditional environmental knowledge (TEK). I K whether natural or cultural. Is the knowledge of a particular environment as expressed or used by a community. I K is rooted in a particular place, it is empirical in nature because it is essentially derived from people of the community, some are gender based others hereditary. I K is a set rules that guide local members of a particular community to meet their needs for Health, Food, Shelter, Savings, Education, Spirituality, infact their general wellbeing (Chioma 2011).

Indigenous knowledge has been defined by various people and groups. United Nations Environmental Programme (2011) has defined I K as the knowledge that an indigenous (local) community accumulates over generations of living in a particular environment. Stainback (2006) defined I K as knowledge, innovation, and practices of indigenous and local communities around the world, developed form, experiences over centuries, it is adapted to the local culture and environment transmitted through oral tradition from generation to generation.

I K is owned by the community often in the form of stories, folklore, proverbs, cultural values, norms, beliefs, rituals, local languages and agricultural practices (Chioma 2011).

Types of Special Needs/Developmental Disabilities Found In Children

Special needs manifests in different forms: the blind, lame, deaf, and dumb; there are those with speech problems and other with neurological problems. These special needs can be classified as mental retardation, learning disability, communication disorders children with emotional and behavioral disorders; sensory, physical and health impairment and students who are gifted and talented (Stephanie 2010).

❖ Children with mental retardation

Mental retardation refers to substantial limitation in present functioning. It is characterized by significantly subaverage intellectual function, existing concurrently with related limitation in two or more of the following applicable adaptive skill areas: communication, self-care, home living, social skills, community use, self-directions, health and safety, functional academics, leisure and work. Mental retardation manifests before the age of (18) (Swan1993). Among the many causes of mental retardation are genetic inheritances, chromosomal abnormalities such as Down syndrome, rubella and syphilis, fetal chemical dependency syndromes caused by a mother's abuse of alcohol or cocaine during pregnancy, birth accidents, child hood diseases, accidents and toxic contamination from the environment such as lead poisoning (Oluremi 2012).

❖ Learning Disability

Another type of special need found in the school children and also evident in Nigerian children is learning disability. These children tend to have lower self-esteem than able bodied children (Salvin 1997). According to Goodman (1990) children with learning disability may not be able to control their behavior.

❖ **Communication Disorders**

Communication disorder is one of the commonest disabilities. About 1 in every 40 students has a communication disorder that requires special education services (Slavin, 1997). The two types of communication disorder are speech and language disorder.

❖ **Emotional and Behavioral Disorder**

A student with emotional and behavioural disorder is characterized by such disorder as conduct disorder, aggressive behavior withdrawn and immature behaviour, hyperactivity and autism.

❖ **Sensory, Physical and Health Impairment**

Sensory impairments refer to problem with the ability to see or hear or other wise receive information through the body's senses, such as vision loss and hearing loss. Physical disorder includes conditions such as cerebral palsy, spinal bifida, spinal cord injury. Health disorder includes acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) seizure disorders, diabetes, cystic fibrosis, sickle cell anemia. The damage can be produced by any number of factors like oxygen deprivation, such as poisoning, cerebral bleeding or direct injury (United Cerebral Palsy Association 1993).

❖ **Gifted and Talented Children**

Children who are gifted and talented can also be described as exceptional students. These children have outstanding talents that the general education classroom teacher is unable to meet their unique needs without help. (Oluremi 2012).

Early intervention

Many children with special needs get services and therapies they need through the school system, but if a child is younger than school age, such child can still find assistance in the school or the community.

Early intervention applies to children of school age or younger who are discovered to have or be at risk of developing a handicapping condition or other special needs that may affect their development. Early interventions include the provision of service to such children and their

families for the purpose of lessening the effects of the disability condition. Early intervention can be removal or preventive in nature remedying existing developmental problems or preventing their occurrence.

Early intervention may focus on the child alone or on the child and the family together. It could be center based, home-based, hospital-based, or a combination. Services range from identification that is, hospital or school screening and referral service to diagnostic and direct intervention programs. Early intervention may begin at any time between birth and school age; however, there are many reasons for it to begin as early as possible.

There are three reasons for early intervention with an exceptional child: to enhance the child's development, to provide support and assistance to the family; and to maximize the child's / family's benefit to society. (Burden 2000).

Child development research has established that the rate of human learning and development is most rapid in the preschool years. If the most teachable moments or stages of greatest readiness are not taken advantage of a child may have difficulty learning a particular skill at a later time. Ammaarah (2010) have noted that "only through early identification and appropriate programming can children with special needs develop their potentials".

The family of the young exceptional child often feels disappointment, social isolation added stress, frustration, and helplessness. The stress may affect the family well being and interfere with the child's development. Such families experience increased instances of divorce and suicide. Early intervention can result in parents having improved attitudes about themselves and their child.(Burden 2000)

Over 50 years of research, shows evidence both quantitative and qualitative that early intervention increased developmental and educational gains for the child, improves the functioning of the family, and reaps long-term benefits for society (Carly 2010). The available data emphasize the long-term cost effectiveness of early intervention. There are significant examples of long-term cost effectiveness of early intervention. There are significant examples of long-term cost savings that result from early intervention programs.

- A 3-year follow-up in Tennessee showed that for every dollar spent on early treatment, \$7.0 in saving was realized within 36 months. This savings resulted from deferral or special class placement and institutionalization of severe behavior disordered children (Goodman 1990).
- A recent evaluation of Colorado's state-wide early intervention services reports a cost savings of \$4.00 for every dollar spent within a 3-year period (Swan, Morgan and Janet 1993).

Special education and methods of provision (knowledge Acquisition)

Mba (1995) disclosed that in Nigeria as in many developing countries of Africa, special education for the physically handicapped children began through the efforts of Christian Missionaries. In view of a great variety of individual needs education faces a wide range of cultural and social backgrounds of the groups making up the society. Sometimes cultural and social background can influence negatively and lead to marginalization and social exclusion of people from meaningful participation in life of their communities. Such exclusion in its turn, reduce people's prospects to learn, grow and develop (UNESCO, 2005).

The educational (knowledge acquisition) programme for children and youths with special needs all over the world, and Nigeria have undergone series of changes in the last three decades .according to Mba (1995) education for special needs children started with;

- Segregation:

Segregation is a system of education where special needs children were educated in special classrooms in schools away from their able-bodied counterparts (Olukotun, 2004, Stainback, 2006). As a result of the short comings of segregation, the federal government of Nigeria in the National policy on education (2004) adapted integration as replacement for segregation, since the special needs children are eventually expected to live in the same society with their able bodied counterparts. The government decided that they should be educated in an environment not only friendly and conducive, but also devoid of any kind of discrimination no matter the state of the special need.

- Integration/Mainstreaming Stephane(2010) defined mainstreaming/ integration as placement of the special needs children into a regular classroom along with students who are their actual ages. Mainstreaming calls for flexibility in the school curriculum, learning environment and equipment. Flexibility means that the society should be able to provide alternatives that will benefit a child maximally after placement in school. It also means that all built premises and buildings be adapted to suit the exceptional children. Such modification include elevators at least one entrance without stairs for wheel chair pupil's , special toilet rooms, resource rooms, easily opened doors, hearing aids, magnifying classes, and so on. (Oluremi 2012).
- Inclusive Education The term “inclusive education” is gradually replacing “Integration/Mainstreaming”. Inclusive education goes further than salient integration principles. It demands that no one is introduced into any specialized programmes. All children undergo the same programme at the same time (Oluremi 2012) .

Strategies for teaching students with special needs.

Several strategies have been shown to be effective in teaching students with special needs. Research has found that most of these strategies benefit all students (Marzano 2001) some effective instructional strategies for students with special needs include:

- Assistive Technology. Specialized keyboards, mouse alternatives, screen readers and voice recognition software can help many students with special needs use technology more effectively. Many educational software programs – such as talking dictionaries and talking word processing applications – offer opportunities for students with special needs to improve writing skills.
- Prior Knowledge: Linking new knowledge to previous understanding is particularly important with students who have special needs.
- Explicit modeling: Activities such as note taking, making connections among ideas, asking questions, project planning, and time – management may not come naturally to students with special needs. Teachers can break down these types of activities into smaller steps and think out loud to model each step.

- Feed back: Students with special needs often have difficulty monitoring their own progress. Providing effective feed back can help students develop the reflective and met cognitive thinking skill they need to evaluate their own work.
- Graphic organizers: Organizing information is often a problem for students with special needs. Students with learning disabilities are often visual learners who respond well to graphic representations of information multimedia such as pictures, charts, graphs, audio, and video can also help, as can kinesthetic activities, such as manipulative, role- playing, and dramatic performance.
- Cooperative learning. When students with special need work on projects in cooperative groups, they are exposed to the learning strategies of their peer and all students learn from each other.
- Assessments. While students, with special needs should become proficient readers and writers they should not be limited to these methods when showing what they have learned. Models, dramatic performances, drawings, and similar activities allow students to demonstrate the content they have learned in ways that address their strengths.

Some challenges faced by special needs children in school

Children, like adults can learn best when they are comfortable. Adaptive Design works to ensure that children with disabilities have comfortable seating option at school and in the home. For children with attention and focus difficulties, special education teachers say lap cozies are a low-tech way to increase classroom clam.

Opening a locker is another developmental milestone that evades many children who straggle with fine-motor, limb differences, and visual skills. Master love offers a solution in a revolutionary love that opens using directional movements (up down, left, and right), instead of the traditional numerical dial. <http://www.adapiredesign.org>.

Electronic pens may be useful for many students working to improve their reading and comprehension skills. It is a portable “reading assurance” to children who need support sounding

out words and completing phrases. The pen spells out words, offers definitions, and recognizes a wide range of fonts and text sizes.

Play attention is a computer – based program intended to increase focus and decrease impulsivity in children and adults. Using a wired helmet and an interactive game, children can train their brain through a sense of exercises and exercises and consistent interaction with the program. Play attention is used in schools, psychologist’s offices, and homes. It benefits children with ADHD, autism, traumatic brain injuries and other special needs.

Challenges and Coping with the Special Needs of a Child in Household

Married couples who desire to have children of their own do not always get what they wished and prayed for. While some are able to have normal kids, the others are not as lucky as their child or children have special needs. The challenge for couples with special children is greater, but this is not for them to easily give up.

For parents who had normal children in the previous years, it is understandable for them to feel a little regret, anger and frustration. There can also be some sort of denial in the initial phase. The level of frustration is usually greater for couples who expect from the start of conception, a normal baby. For these people, it is initially hard to accept the fact that their child lags in development or has an illness with no immediate cure. One thing is certain about raising children with special needs. It’s an emotional roller coaster. The ups and downs are different for everyone, but the general contours of the experience are the same (Marian, 2012) it can be intense.

According to Chioma (2011) many parents and primary caregivers of children with special needs are faced with unexpected challenges and emotions such as:

- Grief, Anger, Guilt, Feeling of Isolation, Low self Esteem Fear, Feeling overwhelmed, feeling detached, discrimination and so on.
- According to Sylod and Charles(2011) an emerging issue among the problems associated with caring for special needs children is that it requires a lot of financial support for their rehabilitation. This was causing a lot of financial strain in the families. They also said that in homes where housemaids were employed, children with disabilities did not receive proper care, especially when their parents would have gone out to work. The child is

sometimes left alone without food and proper care. Children with mobility problems were the most affected and more frustrated (Sylod and Charles 2011).

Moral support and guidance are what parents in this situation needs and family therapists is one of the proper authorities that can help them handle the issue well through counseling session (Kalyan 2010). No matter how hard it is to accept the reality, married couples should open their minds and communicate their thoughts and feelings to professionals for their advice.

Couples should discuss in detail about their fears and other anxieties during counseling with family therapist. A counselor needs to know about what they are feeling in order to come up with the right steps or guidelines towards managing their situation in the best way that they can.

It is a big help for parents to have a positive attitude and not just easily be disappoint with their situation. Avoid blaming your partner or the child for the difficult situation, because it will only create further tension and cause more emotional stress to the child.

Praise is another important thing to give to a special child. By providing the positive words to your child, you are giving inspiration as well to them. Avoid focusing always and their negative acts but rather teach them the right way to act and do things. It's been proven many times in various researches that when kids are inspired, improvements in their behaviour and mental skill development are not far behind (Kalyan 2010).

So parent, be patient with your special child. Guide and raise them according to the best moral values that you know and never hesitate to seek help of a family therapist when necessary.

Recommendation

The following recommendations were made to enable children/people with special needs find a good place in the society.

- Parents of special needs children should seek for early identification and intervention, to ensure that the sensitive infancy stages of development is properly guided by experts.
- Parents should use encouragement, praise, love, positive words etc. to help the child instead of shouting and blames.

- Government, Ngo's and churches should assist in rendering care services, funding special needs programme, counseling and praying for such children and families.
- Schools, at all level should have modified programs to accommodate the special needs children through indigenous means
- Government and Ngo's should encourage the children and families by making available jobs, as soon as they leave schools.

Conclusion

Special needs children are not curses, but gifts which challenge us to respond with enormous energy and dedication. It is a big help for parents to have positive attitude and not easily feel disappointed with the situation. Avoidance of blame for your partner or the child for the difficult situation, which will early create further tension and cause more emotional stress to the child, is a way forward. Families of special needs children should embark on early intervention to help in remedying existing developmental problems or preventing their occurrence. Early intervention is very important in enhancing knowledge acquisition and treatments of the special needs child and should be adopted by families of such children.

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