

CHAPTER 9

TRENDING SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION INTO THE FUTURE

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Introduction

Trending connotes a continuous event, programme or activity that leads in a particular direction. It also refers to an inclination that determines a particular order of things, fashion, and direction and in this case, contemporary issues that affect persons with special needs. Special needs education should be at the vanguard of contemporary issues globally, it should also be a priority at all levels of government, thus setting a pace for others to follow. For this to be possible, several factors need to be considered and modified in order to reflect current trends and make special needs education the center of focus internationally.

Special needs education is a unique type of education that focuses on the adjustment of persons with diverse forms of special needs. Every society is made better and more efficient when its members are seen to contribute to the growth and development of themselves and the society in which they belong. The preceding statement implies that there are several members of the society that cannot function properly due to the presence of impairment and/or disabilities, and will require special needs education to help them adjust, attain usefulness and satisfaction in life. Many people agree that persons with special needs have potentials that can be harnessed and channeled constructively.

On the other hand, the neglect of persons with special needs is by far costlier than their rehabilitation (Milaham, 1991). When persons with special needs are neglected, the ramifications are terrible. They become easy prey in the hands of terrorist and violent gangs; they may indulge in derogatory things such as street begging, prostitution, and other sins of the blackest types. In addition, they may become targets for human trafficking, indulging in drug peddling to make ends meet. Human resource is the most valuable resource and no society can progress when the majority of its populace is unproductive. It is therefore vital for persons with special needs to be helped into competencies that will make them useful and contributing members of society.

Special needs education covers individuals with diverse types of impairment and disability that constitute significant problems to their development. Traditionally, they were categorized into three: visual impairment, hearing impairment and learning disability, however, the National policy on education expanded it to cover other types such as physical /health impairment, intellectual impairment, emotional/behavioural impairment, speech/language



impairment, multiple impairment, albinism, gifted and talented. In addition, the National policy on education (2013) made considerations for persons with special need to include; To give concrete meaning to the idea of equalizing educational opportunities for all children; their physical and emotional disabilities notwithstanding; to provide adequate education for all handicapped children and adults in order that they may play their roles fully in contributing to the development of the nation; to provide special education for children; to integrate children with handicap into the mainstream of regular schools to mention a few.

The thesis statement of this chapter therefore, is hinged on the fact that special needs education is not prioritized amongst contemporary issues affecting human dynamics. Special needs education should be at the front burner because everybody is a potential impaired/disabled person, as a result of constant interactions with the environment and with other people of diverse kinds of motives, intentions and character. Therefore, for special needs education to trend, nomenclature and its implications on key concepts will be considered, then a brief projection into the future of special needs education as it relates with children with special needs will also be considered, with a view of giving newer perspectives to the new normal. Conclusion and suggestions will end the discussion.

Nomenclature and its implications in special needs education

a. Special needs education

Special needs Education has evolved to reflect the demands of changing times. Special needs education, formally known as Special education, was aimed at taking care of children with special needs in a segregated setting or institution. The intention was to care for people considered useless by society. This line of thinking was present especially in medieval times where persons with special needs were denied certain rights and privileges in society, even losing out on inheritance, precluded from religious activities and condemned to the fires of hell. The development of special education can be traced primarily to missionaries who brought it to Nigeria in the form of evangelism, from that point, several factors such as religion, society, human rights etc. have continued to shape and modify the concept into what it is today. Andzayi (2003) advanced that special education is an area within a framework of general education which provides the right facilities, specialized materials and teachers with adequate training for all types of children with unusual needs. Obviously, the world has moved away from this generalization of children with special needs and now places emphasis on their individual unique and diverse needs. Special needs education in the light of contemporary realities refers to a unique type of education that concentrates, focuses and manages the unique needs of individual children or persons with all forms of impairment and/or disabilities through adequate materials, facilities, teachers and services tailored to meet those unique needs. It is an education that seeks to level or modify mainstream education so that persons with different unique features and needs can obtain a sense of usefulness and satisfaction in life.



This change in narrative should give special needs education buoyed hopes of positive implications in the nearest future.

b. Children with Special needs

Children with special needs are amongst the most misunderstood group of individuals in Nigeria. This may be because of the issues of nomenclature which had led to several misconceptions. Children with special needs are traditionally referred to as individuals that have impairment or disabilities to the extent that it affects their daily activities, so that they need special needs education in order to adjust and develop. Ozoji (2005) noted that a special needs child is a client of special needs education which also includes children with other special exceptions. The phrase of emphasis is '*special needs*', connoting that these categories of children have diverse needs that are unique. These needs are either overt- obvious, or covert-hidden. The Nomenclature and definition of children with special needs have undergone several modifications over the years in Nigeria. In the past derogatory terms were used to refer to children with special needs. Such terms include: idiot, imbecile, deaf and dumb, blind, moron etc. The term, after careful consideration by authorities in the field of special needs education, modified it to reflect the condition of the individual. This term again created problems because it laid emphasis on the condition rather than the person or individual.

The Salamanca convention held in Salamanca, Spain in 1994 brought a different dimension to the concept of children with special needs. Presently, the term in usage is children with special needs, modified to give emphasis to the person or individual rather than the condition, indicating that regardless of the impairment and/or disability, the child is first and foremost a human being. The term covers the following categories:

- i. Those who are currently enrolled into primary schools but for various reasons do not make progress adequately.
- ii. Those not currently enrolled into primary schools but who could be enrolled if the schools were more responsive and
- iii. The relatively smaller number of children with more severe physical, mental or multiple impairment who have complex special education needs that are not being met. (UNESCO, 1994).

In recent times, arguments have once again ensued as to whether or not stating the fact that the child or individual has a special need(s) is necessary, with some arguing that calling the child by personal name will suffice, since nobody can claim normalcy in the actual sense of the word. They also argue that labeling or stating a condition of impairment or disability should be purely for intervention purposes and nothing more.

b. Inclusion

Inclusion is a philosophy that emphasizes emancipation of individuals, in this case, children with special needs into society. It covers issues of educational opportunities, equality, school environment, infrastructure, gender, creed and race amongst others. The most commonly emphasized aspect of this philosophy is its



approach to education, which is currently considered inclusive education. Inclusive education is a form of education within special needs education that involves the placement of children with diverse needs into a shared school setting with normal children. Nimmak (2017) advanced that it refers to placement of children with diverse characteristics into a shared educational setting so that they can learn fully in a regular classroom situation. Similarly, Vande, Awambe and Gbaa (2017) posited that it entails the use of appropriate supportive facilities and services to meet the needs of children and individuals with special needs in a regular classroom school system. Inclusiveness is a philosophy that stems from the modification of mainstreaming, in which a child with special needs was placed in an educational setting with already laid down rules and regulations, and the child expected to adjust to these rules and regulations. Thus disregarding the child's unique needs and forcing him/her to conform to an environment that may not foster development and growth. UNESCO (1994) observed that regular schools with an inclusive orientation (ethos) are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an effective way of helping society see the potential and facilitate positive attitudinal change towards children with special needs. As at now, many special and regular schools in Nigeria are not inclusive in nature and practice because they lack the basic considerations that qualify them to be regarded as inclusive education.

The future of Special needs Education

The future for children with special needs will depend on a vista of factors that must be modified and enhanced. The future of children with special needs will be bright if the following are adequately considered, including the following: the family, early childhood education, adapted physical education, online and electronic learning amongst others.

a. The Family

The family is described as the basic unit of the society, this is because every aspect of society; traditions, language, dressing, attitude, character amongst others, all emanate from the day to day running and interactions within and around the family. The family consists of the father, mother, brothers and/or sisters and it plays an important role in deciding certain aspects of an individual's life, these may include marriage, career choice and dressing. It is therefore a terrible situation when a family discovers that one or more of its members have some form of impairment and/or disability. All hopes both of the present and the future immediately appear to vanish in the light of the unfortunate realization. Families can therefore descend into serious crises if not guided and managed properly. Ozoji (2005) opined that the birth of a child with impairment can be likened to the death of a loved one.

The family of children with special needs in the future should be one that constitutes an effective support system for the child. The family plays a distinctive role in the positive influence of the development and adjustment of children with



disability. The behavior of the child with disability needless to say depends on how positively or negatively the child is treated in the home and by the siblings. Families with a positive outlook usually tend to be more supportive and understanding with their child. They also try to create a conducive environment for the child to grow and thrive within his/her capability. This can be achieved through adequate preparation for all members of the family to make them ready to fit and function into their roles in the life of their children with special needs. Lambie (2000) advanced that the emphasis on the individual's behavior being understood in the context of the family, and the family's behavior being understood in the context of the social systems is the basic principle underlying the family system theory, there are several family system theories but for the purpose of this discourse, only one is attempted. Consequently, one of the models according to Turnbull et. al., (2006) comprises four interrelated components which includes *family characteristic, family interaction, family function and family life cycle*.

Family characteristics include unique features that are distinct to the family such as socio-economic status, coping styles, cultural background, and special conditions. These unique features and characteristics may determine how family members interact and cope with each other. In other words, a good understanding of how these characteristics influence important issues such as people, attitude, decision making and in this case impairment, can develop a positive or negative approach towards the child. For instance, families particularly vulnerable to the stresses of raising children with disabilities are those facing additional struggles arising from poverty, or single- parent status. Unfortunately, a higher prevalence of disabilities exists in single-parent families and families in poverty (Fujaira & Yamaki, 2000).

Family interactions are predicated on the fact that every family has functional and dysfunctional ways and methods of relating and interacting with one another. When parents respond adequately to a child's uniqueness, the more the child will develop adequately. In family interactions, cohesion and adaptability is the driving force that enhances a healthier and happier family in which the child with disability can grow and flourish, this child may then be able to overcome certain limitations due to the positive environment within and around him/her.

Family functions generally involve the various activities that a family engages in on a day to day basis, in other words, routines or activities that are very important to a particular family. It also involves things, events, and programmes that are traditionally accepted in a family. This is important in the adjustment process because counselors can use such activities, and emphasize it more so to facilitate bonding amongst family members and especially with the child or individual with impairment. It could also consist of the treatment programme for the child. Parents and families of children with impairment have often manifested passive roles in the care and treatment of their children, this often causes a lag in their adjustment and overall functioning due to inadequate support, consequently, several authorities have reported that some families of students with disabilities



prefer a passive, rather than an active degree of involvement in their children's education (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2006).

Family life cycle simply connotes the stage-by-stage growth of a child with impairment from infancy through adulthood. These normal growth stages may have several effects on the parents of a child with impairment, because each stage of development comes with its unique characteristics, challenges and needs. Parents may be overwhelmed by the demands of each stage of the child's life so much so that they may not adjust and provide adequate guidance necessary for the child. For instance, issues of relationship may be a challenge because children with disability may find it difficult to express feelings towards the opposite sex in atypical manner, this may cause stress and frustration on the on the part of both the child and the parents, having to watch their child rejected often because of their disability, others may include friendship formation, self-esteem and a myriad of others. The impact of such a situation may be significant to the family to the extent that several family theorists have noted that the impact of a child with disability on the family changes over time and that there is value in looking at families of children with disabilities from the family life cycle perspective.

Early childhood education

The future for children with special needs will depend on robust early warning signs and intervention strategies; this can be achieved through partnerships and collaborations with experts in the field of Early Childhood Education. Early childhood education refers to a series of guided educational programs and strategies designed towards the needs of children from birth to the age of eight in other words, infancy to late childhood. This stage is widely considered the most vulnerable and crucial stage of a person's life. Early childhood education often focuses on guiding children to learn through play. The term commonly refers to preschool or infant/child care programs. Early childhood education is based on the premise that an environment of play should be emphasized in order to help the child learn intellectually and socially, which is in line with developmental stages. Notable authorities in the field of education such as Jean Piaget, Erick Eriksson, Maria Montessori to mention a few, posited that the environment in which a child is exposed determines to a large extent how the child grows and develops, and that at these different stages of development, children learn specific tasks and behavior that border on social and mental development. This learning is designed to meet certain developmental domains; a child has a set of needs that must be met for learning to properly occur. Maslow's hierarchy of needs showcases the different levels of needs that must be met; the chart to the right showcases these needs.

- a. Physical need: the way in which a child develops biological and physical functions, including eyesight and motor skills.
- b. Social needs: the way in which a child interacts with others Children and develop an understanding of their responsibilities and rights as members of



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- families and communities, as well as an ability to relate to and work with others.
- c. Emotional needs: the way in which a child creates emotional connections and develops self-confidence. Emotional connections develop when children relate to other people and share feelings.
 - d. Language needs: the way in which a child communicates, including how they present their feelings and emotions, both to other people and to themselves. At 3 months, children employ different cries for different needs. At 6 months they can recognize and imitate the basic sounds of spoken language. In the first 3 years, children need to be exposed to communication with others in order to pick up language. "Normal" language development is measured by the rate of vocabulary acquisition over time.
 - e. Cognitive skills: the way in which a child organizes information. Cognitive skills include problem solving, creativity, imagination and memory. They embody the way in which children make sense of the world. Piaget believed that children exhibit prominent differences in their thought patterns as they move through the stages of cognitive development: sensorimotor period, the pre-operational period, and the operational period.

Children with special needs require early childhood education perhaps even more than their normal counterparts. This is because impairment and disability can negatively affect the entire well-being of a child and early detection helps in charting a model for the child, which will invariably help in speedy adjustment of the child and enhance ego identity, thus, reducing the crippling effects of impairment and/or disability at an early age. Early childhood education intervention programmes have demonstrated that early interventions can have positive long term effects on participants, including reduction in the rate of intellectual disabilities. Children with special needs would therefore require early childhood education in the areas of communications through which the mastery of sign language, braille reading and writing and pronunciations would be achieved; the area of resource assistance, the usage of machines, materials and equipment through which help that can supplement for an impairment(s) is achieved; the teaching-learning process which combines different teaching pedagogies in order to achieve comprehension.

Online and electronic learning

The advent of the 21st century came with a lot of changes on how things are traditionally done, especially in the school environment. This was exemplified in the scourge of the global covid-19 pandemic that had ravaged countries, and continents with biblical proportions, most of which are yet to fully recover. Schools had been shut-down for many months, sit-at-home orders had been implemented, and face-masks had been made compulsory. Most notable was the emphasis on online and electronic learning that became the primary source of interactions and



education, indicating the emergence of a new normal. These changes have occurred in all aspects of human existence, from medicine, to architecture, to technology and special needs education was no exception. Some experts will argue that these changes are peculiar to Africa in general and Nigeria in particular, stating that these changes were already in use in other parts of the developed world, long before the emergence of the covid-19 pandemic. However, there is a need to modify conventional special needs education methods in order to meet the demands of changing times, thereby creating greater and cheaper access to knowledge on matters that affect special needs education.

On-line and electronic learning is one of the '*new normal*' that provides training and development for persons with special needs through different electronic mediums like computers, audio, internet, video, phones to mention a few. The importance of online and electronic learning is highlighted in the fact that many people resort to its usage of the internet to get fast and easy information rather than taking tiring trips to the library and painstakingly looking for information. Also, many certificate and even degree programmes are now obtained through online and electronic learning. Again, meetings and conferences could be attended across the world, all within the comfort of the home. All these would make education and information dissemination easier for persons with special needs because it may help them get cheap and easy information and bridge distance barriers. It may also help them to interact with other individuals from other climes thereby helping them adjust both educationally and socially. The use of social media platforms for instance offers easy and cheap information to persons with special needs.

Benefits of on-line and Electronic learning

- a. Online and electronic learning can be modified and carefully adapted to meet the needs of persons with special needs.
- b. It ensures quick delivery of lessons and feedback.
- c. It is a cheap and easily accessible form of education because it reduces cost of transportation, and writing materials.
- d. Persons with special needs learn at their pace, without any pressure or need for competition with their classmates.
- e. It enhances inclusive education because everybody learns the same lessons from a unified curriculum, without regard to impairment, disability, race, religion or creed.
- f. It accommodates slow learners by providing a data-base from which persons with special needs can revisit previous lessons in their spare time and achieve greater understanding.
- g. It encourages learning from the comfort of the home thereby reducing stress.

Adapted physical education

Adapted physical education otherwise known as special physical education is an area of special education that modifies work or school service delivery to suit



needs, interest, and capabilities of children with special needs. Sheriril (1981) in Chukwu and Uzor (2001) advanced that adapted physical education is the art and science of analyzing movement, identifying problems within the psychomotor domain (the aspect that deals with application of concepts and knowledge in problem solving), and premeditating problems and preserving ego strength. Psychomotor refers to all integrated cognitive, affective and psychomotor behaviours related to the human body and its movements (Chukwu & Uzor, 2001). Children with special needs should not only be taught how to conceptualize objects, things and the environment, but should also be taught to channel those knowledge into problem solving techniques. Adapted physical education, which is multi-disciplinary combines regular physical education and special education, which consists of psychomotor assessment, individualized educational programmes (IEP), developmental and perspective teaching, counseling and coordination of diverse resources and related services aimed at remediating psychomotor deficiencies. Adapted physical education aims at the following:

- i. To help children with special needs correct conditions that can be improved.
- ii. To protect the conditions from aggravating by acquainting children with special needs with their capacities and limitations and arranging a programme within their physiological work capacities and tolerance.
- iii. To provide children with special needs organic power within the limits of their impairment.
- iv. To contribute to security through improved function and increased ability to meet the physical demands of daily living.
- v. To provide children with special needs the opportunity to develop skills in recreational sports and games within the limits of their impairment
- vi. To help children with special needs make social adjustments and develop a feeling of self-worth and value.

Conclusion

1. In conclusion, special needs education is approaching a new dispensation.
2. Nomenclature and its usage in special needs education require constant modifications to reflect the demands of changing times
3. The future outlook for special needs education is very promising.

Suggestions

- a. Learning environment for children with special needs should be inclusive, unrestrictive and friendly, incorporating Online and electronic learning which is in line with global best practices.



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- b. Experts in the field should encourage collaborations and partnership with other relevant disciplines.
 - c. Special needs Education programmes should be enriched to accommodate family members of children with special needs.
 - d. Early intervention should be encouraged and implemented by school authorities.
 - e. Adapted physical education should be incorporated into special education programmes for children with special needs.

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