



CHAPTER 12

PEDAGOGICAL SKILLS, STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES OF 21ST CENTURY SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION TEACHER

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Introduction

Pedagogical skills for teachers are paramount in teaching and handling challenges associated with special needs education learners. These pedagogical skills for special needs teachers describe the practices and approaches to learning that content facilitators use within their classrooms to guide their assessments that are cognizant of various learning theories. The teacher's pedagogical skills typically narrate how a teacher carries out curriculum contents in the classroom. (Waring and Evans 2014) also, assert that “pedagogical skills of teaching covers not only teaching approaches but also embraces learning styles and relationships within and outside the classroom”. Similarly, (Teo 2019) contends that pedagogical skills for teaching learners have to focus on “questioning and in-depth reflection of knowledge which equips students with holistic life skills”. In the same vein, (Miller, Sellnow and Strawser 2021) suggest pedagogical skills for teaching “manifest in a dynamic, responsive environment which can be face-to-face and supplemented with digital and virtual classrooms and resources”. Thus, pedagogical skills for teaching special learners are being interwoven into the major behaviorist, cognitivist, constructivist, and humanist learning theories.

Teachers' strategies opted for Special Education learners to allow them to excel in reading, writing and arithmetic, which constitute vital life skills for them in real life. (Smith and Hu 2013) accentuate that, “the changing world and social changes entail adopting adequate and worthwhile strategies capable of enabling Special Education learners to navigate efficiently different aspects of their lives”. Special Education aims at providing strategies along with interventions that benefit special needs learners by reducing the condition of their disabilities and equipping them with the requisite aids to function independently. This causes special needs education teachers to develop strategies that are digital, and communicative, skills that tolerate civic competencies, critical thinking and problem-solving.

Micah (2022) postulates the required strategies of a Special Needs Education teacher should “enable him/her to adapt, collaborate with colleagues, communicate effectively with learners, provide convenient assessment, and have ideal work professional ethic”. Strategies depict a more complex dynamic method,



techniques, and procedures used by content facilitators during instruction. (Otum, and Atah 2021) sturdily buttress that strategies are “openings for linking contents and goals to ensure expected outcomes are met”, these strategies can be alternative assessments, behavioral intervention plans (BIPs), differentiated instruction, use of visual aids instructional scaffolding, and individual education plans (IEPs) among other available strategies. Strategies for special needs education teachers are not generic however, the attitudes, commitment and personalities of a teacher serve as positive predictors for strategies and skills they make use of in facilitating tactile curriculum content and instructions within their classrooms, The ability of teachers to adapt manipulate, develop essential skill sets and integrate various strategies with concepts helps special learners actualize the desired expected outcomes.

Special Education teachers are faced with the challenge of passing across learning contents to special needs learners. This barricade can be social, physiological and physical even when physical and social barriers are handled properly by Special Education teachers utilizing effective gadgets, devices and technologies to teach special needs learners without professionalism and digital skills learning contents and resources may not be effective in the classroom. More so, Chukwuemeka and Samaila's (2020) study findings revealed that teachers do not use high-tech assistive devices regularly to teach students with physical disabilities even though they recognize its benefits within the learning processes" challenges of teachers in Special Education also manifest in form of inadequate funding, teacher's professional development, socio-cultural barricades, cost of acquiring gadgets and devices for SPE learners and workload and additional time required to teach Special Education teachers.

Special Needs learners are so intuitive they feel everything and are aware of things happening in their environment. The goal and objectives of classroom contents associated with special needs learners should focus on empowering special learners to thrive and flourish through reaching their optimal potential rather than surviving within their immediate environment. The societal perceptions attached to Special Needs Learners idealize them to crave pity and low expectations because of the umbrella term referred to as ‘disability’. Special learners are segregated from their neurotypical counterparts and cannot be part of the mainstream education system which makes up an inclusive learning environment. Special Education teachers' pedagogical skills and strategies impact special learners' progress and achievements which also, is symbiotic to their well-being. (Avramidis and Kalyva 2007) in their study maintained that “teachers who are faced with the challenge of meeting the needs and demands of diverse special needs students". Thus, using pedagogical skills is essential to mitigate and respond effectively to challenges affecting special needs teachers, especially in areas of communicating clear learning contents in the classroom environment.

The thesis statement of this chapter pivots on the fact that special needs education learners in contemporary Nigerian society are perceived not to be intuitive by requiring special interventions, aids with support to cope and survive



consequently, teachers do not have adequate pedagogical skills with strategies to teach special needs learners therefore, Special Education programs are ineffective because teachers are not in cognizance with the essential knowledge, pedagogical skills with strategies that constitute a rich and quality learning environment for special needs learners. So, in this work, we will look at how teachers can overcome these challenges and be acquainted with the requisite strategies to teach effectively through which special learners can thrive and excel. However, to realize this paradigm and target special needs learners this study discussion will begin by identifying pedagogical skills for special needs teachers, teaching strategies for special needs learners will be discussed thereafter, and a lucid detail on the challenges affecting Special Needs Learners will be discussed with the implications to the special learner's community, followed by a conclusion and suggestion that will give credence to the study will be provided at the end the discussion.

Pedagogical skills

Pedagogical skills are part and parcel of the teaching processes, Benson et al. (2020) accentuates that “pedagogical skills are aimed at helping the teacher to make the classroom instruction effective, efficacious, rational and sequential”. As a result, pedagogical skills arouse curiosity in students about a topic, engage them in learning, develop their skills, sustain students on task and are useful in classroom interaction. The goal of using pedagogical skills in Special Education classrooms is to facilitate learning, motivate learners to learn and be focused during teaching and learning processes in the classroom. Thus, the pedagogical skills for special learners include the use of rewarding efforts and positive behavior, motivating interest and attitudes in students, setting a high expectation for students, providing spaced routine repetition of learned contents, using questioning and other assessment technique to evaluate prior knowledge and entry behavior before and after classroom lesson, developing tolerance and professional strategies for unexpected tantrum behaviors is essential for Special Needs Education Teachers. However, vital skills for Special Education teachers should emphasize clear communication to explain and elaborate learning tasks and maintain positive engagement and evaluation of special learners.

(Montero 2021) further asserted that pedagogical skills include special needs teacher's use of "lesson planning, time management, promotion of students' critical thinking, promotion of students participation, provision of oral feedback, establishing quality rapport between teachers and special needs learners and managing effectively special needs learners' behavior". Hence pedagogical skills typically describe how special needs teachers can manipulate, customize and modify their teaching environments, learning resources and materials to accommodate the needs of various learners.

In present-day Nigeria society, Special Needs Learners often are “ridiculed for their physical, cognitive and physiological well-being.” (Oladokun, Ololajulo and Oladele 2014) SNE learners within the Nigerian context fall into two major

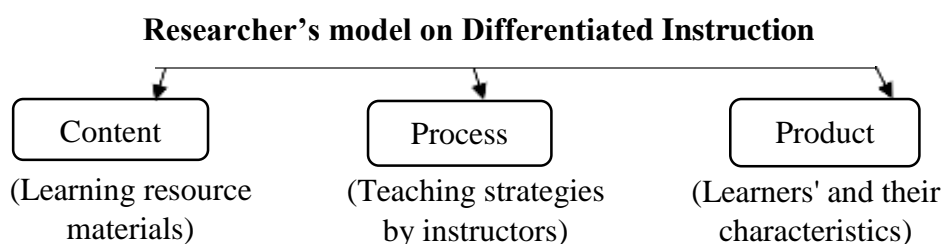


categories; “Persons with disability and gifted and talented” (National Policy on Special Education, 2015). Though, the peculiar nature of Nigerian societies still holds discrepancies in labeling who is a special needs learner. Special Education learners within the context of this study primarily refer to the students with learning disabilities such as, “blindness, partial-sightedness, deafness, hardness of hearing, mental retardation, social maladjustment, limb deformation or malformation etcetera, due to circumstances of birth, inheritance, social position, mental and physical health patterns or accidents later on in their lifetime”. (Adebisi, Jerry and Rasaki 2014). Okoye (2010) succinctly discussed the various categories of disabled persons and asserts that “the ability to cope with a disability varies from person to person as each individual possesses individual differences’.

Strategies for Special Education Teachers

In the course of reviewing related works of literature, and analysis of empirical studies we suggest the following strategies and skills for 21st century special needs education teachers which are differentiated instruction, functional behavior assessment, behavioral intervention plan, individual education plan, instructional scaffolding, visual metaphors and graphic organizers, alternative assessments among other available strategies for Special Education teachers

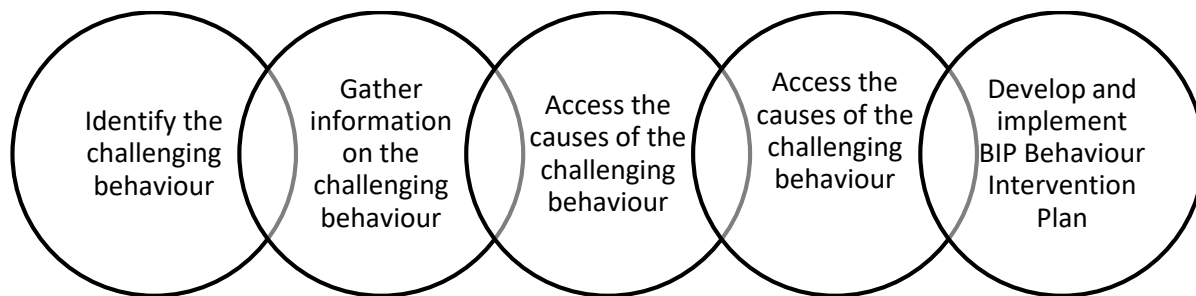
Differentiated Instruction: This builds on the idea of providing tailored content to Special Learners, a teacher can differentiate instructions and learning content into various learning levels by building curriculum content starting from simple to complex procedures which guide the learners from known to unknown concepts, differentiated instruction entails that the teacher has multiple teaching resources available and proportionally distributed amongst the different categories of learners. Special needs teachers can differentiate instruction through Learning contents, Learning Process and Product which are resource materials, teaching strategies used by teacher instructors and special learners’ individual characteristics. These differentiated instructions are in cognizance with special learner’s readiness, interest and learning profile which are aimed to increase cognitive development, motivation, perception, proficiency and efficiency.



Functional Behaviour Assessment (FBA): FBAs determine what is causing tantrum behaviors that are causing difficulties in learning. (Goh & Bambara, 2012)

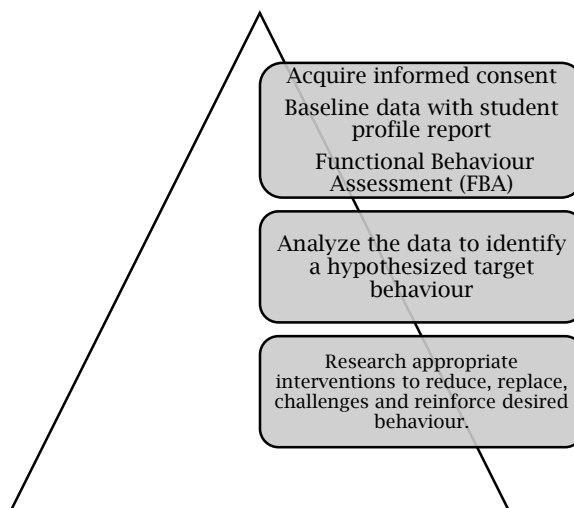


stress out that "(FBA) process has become an established approach for developing effective individualized behavior, interventions and support plans in schools for Special Education students with problem behaviors". Also, according to Lloyd et.al (2021) FBAs are inconclusive, experimental analysis methods can be used to directly test hypotheses about when or why a student engages in challenging behavior". (Aguilar 2019) noted that FBAs were effective at identifying appropriate interventions for problem behaviors such as aggression, noncompliance, disruption, and self-injury.



Researcher's model on FBA

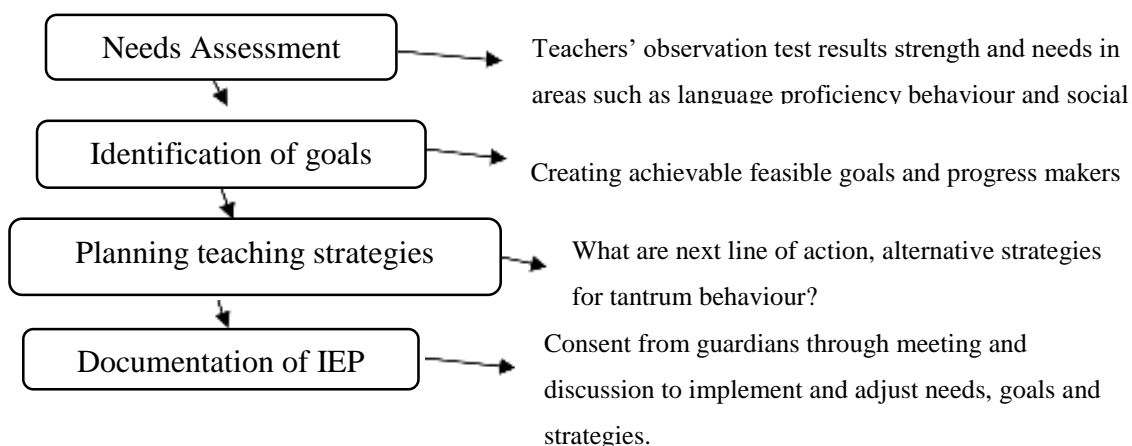
Behavioural Intervention Plan (BIPs): This relates to the Special Education Learner's next step of action to be adopted. BIPs are enhancement plans based on functional behavior assessment of the Special Needs Learner. BIPs identify specific strategies that will be used with the students to help mitigate the behavior and also, when implemented by the teacher, help in directing the learner towards the desired goals. Aguilar (2019) succinctly stated that "BIPs incorporate the data from FBAs to create a plan that includes information from multiple sources: Observation of student, Student interview, Parent/guardian interview, Student's record review, Teacher/related services provider". Hence, BIP is developed to implement interventions to address the problem behavior that interferes with the learning process.





Researcher's model on BIP

Individual Educational Plan (IEP): is a planned sequence of instructions or programs being developed in cognizance of the identified disability of the child, it includes all the goals and benchmarks that will help special learners thrive in the school. The process of implementing an IEP involves: needs assessment, identification of goals, planning and documentation. This intervention serves as a remedial remedy for creating pathways that will guide the Special Needs learner to acquire the requisite skills, knowledge and attitude necessary for their wellbeing, these individual educational plans typically streamline the behavioral objectives to the identified disability of the learner and ensures the learner benefits efficiently just as other conventional learners.



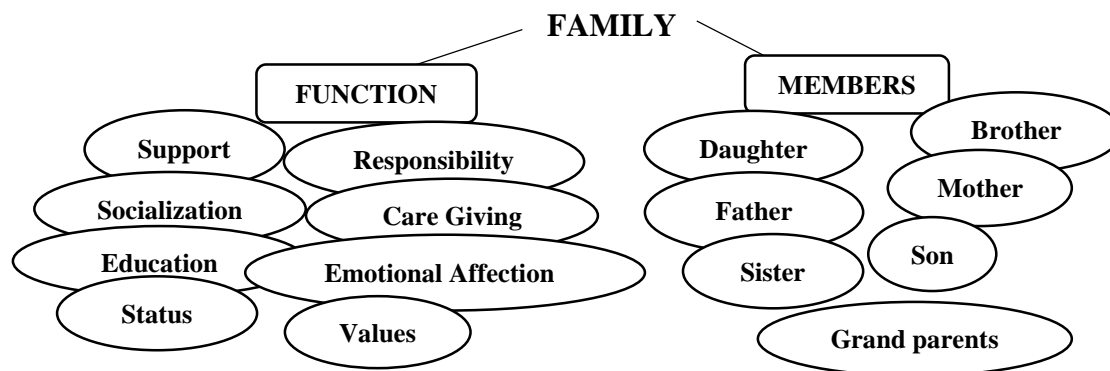
Researcher's model on IEP

Instructional Scaffolding: This strategy entails teachers to be providing routine repetition of learning content for the Special Needs Learners with minor alterations through special aids and support until the learner understands the concept and learning content independently by carrying out the task effectively. Smagorinsky (2018) in his detailed analysis of the origin of instructional scaffolding asserted that "IS" instructional scaffolding is typically linked to Vygotsky's 1962 work on Zone of Proximity Development (ZIP) which serves as a teaching method designed to assist learners at the early stages of instruction that can be removed gradually to allow independent performance.

Graphic Organizers and Concept Maps: These are visual thinking tools that give a clear pictorial representation of thought processes, relationships between facts, concepts, or ideas, and guides learners. Daboer et.al (2022) asserted that "concept mapping are enclosed knowledge concepts in circles or boxes indicated by a



connecting line linking multiple concepts." Maria (2022) also stated that "A graphic organizer can take the shape of a knowledge map, concept map, story map, cognitive organizer, advance organizer, or concept diagram". Teachers can use concept mapping along with graphic organizers in the classroom by selecting key terms for the lesson, determining where in the lesson unit the concept map will be embedded, analyzing students' language proficiency with word/phrase banks and executing the lesson activity and providing an adaptive learning environment for Special Education learners.



Researcher's model on Graphic Organizers and Concept Maps

Alternative Assessment: This is an adaptive assessment that improves the proficiency of the Special Needs Education Learner in a task, it is not primarily placed on the level of knowledge but on the learner and utilization of the concept in real life. Teachers provide an alternative assessment to Special Education learners because regular assessment may be inappropriate to measure their performance, unlike conventional assessment. According to Al-Mahrooqi and Denman (2018) "Alternative assessment is somewhat of a blanket term that is often used to describe a variety of alternatives to what is popularly considered more "standardized" forms of testing". Alternative assessment largely emerged in response to the perceived inadequacies of more conventional forms of assessment, and especially to their shortcomings when applied to learners with special needs. Differentiating assessments across learners can therefore have challenges when not used properly. Quenemoen (2008) stated that special needs education teachers should ensure "transparency, integrity, validity, and planned improvement of alternative assessments" because it reflects the standard professional ethics of Special Education teachers.

Challenges of Special Needs Education Teachers

Situational analysis through observations and research gaps identified in recent studies enables this study to generalize challenges impeding the progress and learning of students with special needs to manifest in one of the following areas



such as workload, professional development, inadequate funding, teacher's attitude, assistive technology proficiency and socio-cultural barriers as some challenges disrupting effective use of Special Education pedagogical skills and strategies.

Teachers Workload: the new paradigm shift for inclusive education demands teachers to teach neurotypical and special learners in the same classrooms; this causes extra workload for teachers because of the additional requirement, pedagogical skills and strategies required. These special needs students need more assistance and time. (Samaden 2021) the study also asserted that "time management and assessment affect the productivity of teachers in teaching education students".

Professional development: Special needs teachers ought to be updated with modern methods and practices in their field of work which requires tremendous output such as attending refresher courses, conferences, seminars, webinars, and workshops along with other professional development programs. This requires teachers to adapt to new changes which can be difficult at times due to the novelty of the method being used. (Emery and Vandenberg 2010) also maintain that "professional development of teachers is stressful due to student-demographic characteristics and workplace manageability". Special Education teachers are not supported by school administrators, and government institutions and therefore have a low career trajectory in furthering and obtaining wider knowledge, skills and expertise within special needs educational areas.

Inadequate access to funding: The inability of all three-tier of governments in implementing policies for special needs education programs has left room for charlatans, no proper budgetary allocation to Special needs learners with proper follow-up is in place to checkmate released funds that ensure the target set objectives governing Special Education programs are achieved. This constant deliberate mismanagement and misallocation of funds and grants have left average Special Education Learners to be segregated from the conventional classroom.

Teacher's attitude: The teacher's attitude creates room for charlatans in the inclusion process. Oluremi (2015) stated sturdily, that the hardest burden to bear is not on the exceptionality of special needs learners but the attitude of people towards them. Her study also revealed that there is a significant difference between teachers' attitudes to special needs learners and neurotypical learners in the classroom. Also, in the same vein Fakolade, Adeniyi and Tella (2009) asserted that the attitude of Special Education teachers towards special needs learners is significantly different from non-Special Education teachers" this entails that most times teachers are biased towards special needs learners.

Assistive Technology proficiency: These are gadgets and Devices used for SPE learners Ahmed (2018) attested that assistive technologies benefit special learners through providing relevant resource materials with quality learning content. However, the barriers to assistive technology are myriad: the cost of purchasing gadgets and devices are expensive with maintenance and acquiring



professional skills to manipulate such devices requires time, effort and training. Al-Zoon (2022) asserted that "Inadequate training and follow-up support are major barriers to effective Assistive Technology implementation in the classroom". Most trainings are theoretical with no real-life applications and pre-service teachers do not have technical know-how in using Assistive Technology.

Conclusion

This study encumbers special needs education teachers to make use of skills and strategies that will enhance special needs learner's strengths and personal development. The goals and objective of Special Education learning contents should not only focus on coping and surviving with daily elementary tasks and activities but also, thriving and excelling in their immediate environments

Consequently, Special Education teachers and special needs learners should be resilient and adaptive to changes and modifications in learning tools, gadgets, resource materials and physical structures in their environment and communities. Thus, 21st century Special Education teachers therefore need to develop requisite pedagogical skills, lifesaving skill sets along with strategies.

Suggestion

This study suggests teaching instructors to migrate from conventional teaching to modern effective teaching pedagogical skills and strategies. More so, teachers should opt in using differentiated instructions, functional behavior assessments, behavioral intervention plans, individual education plans, and alternative assessments, instructional scaffolding with graphic organizer and concept maps to assess and evaluate special needs learners' performance along with key predictor variables that determine positive academic achievements.

Implications for Special Needs Learners

This study sturdily suggests the recognition of Special Needs Learners which implies positive teachers' attitude towards special needs learners and also using these skills and strategies within the teaching and learning process entails that, special needs education teachers should embark on professional development and cultivate strong work ethics. Special Education teacher's use of pedagogical skills and strategies implies teachers need to ensure the reliability and validity of assessment using FBAs, BIPs and IEPs along with other strategies such as differentiated learning, instructional scaffolding, alternative assessment, graphic organizers and concept maps.

Implications of this study to Special Education teachers entails that learning facilitators should work with objectives, the next step of action should be precise, rational and logical. Utilizing various pedagogical skills and strategies implies improvisation of learning resources to supplement the needs of various categories and types of special needs education learners. Furthermore, the implication of this study to Special Education teachers entails imbibing skills that enhances effective



communication of learning contents and the integration of assistive technologies to the teaching and learning processes of Special Education needs learners

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