



CHAPTER 25

INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS (IEPs) FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

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Introduction

Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) are special education programs developed in writing by an educational institution specifically for students with disabilities, intending to meet the special needs and requirements of the students, teachers, and parents (Akçin, 2022). They can be referred to as Personalized Education Plan or Programs (PEPs). They are customized learning activities tailored towards persons with special needs (PWDs) for them to maximize their potentials in inclusive settings.

The plan is a written document predicting the benefit of PWDs at the highest level from appropriate educational environments including school, special education, occupational education center and support services in line with the development of the individual with special needs and the program applied (Baysen & Dakwo, 2018). It is a requirement for every child receiving special education and related services in the public school system. It outlines the special education experience for all eligible students and it describes present levels of performance, strengths, and needs, and creates measurable goals based on information gathered. It provides accommodations, modifications, related services, and specialized academic instruction to ensure that every eligible child receives a "Free Appropriate Education" (FAPE) in the "Least Restrictive Environment" (National Education Association, 2019). The Program describes how the student learns and best demonstrates that learning, and what teachers and service providers will do to help the student learn more effectively.

Developing an IEP requires the team to evaluate the student in all areas of suspected disability, consider the student's ability to access the general education curriculum, consider how the disability affects the student's learning, and choose a placement for the student with special educational needs (Tamika, Roach & Dawn, 2013).

Special Educational Needs (SEN) is the capacity of a person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health, learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition (National Council for Special



Education, 2006). The objective of education for students with SNE is to enable all children in line with their abilities, to live full and independent lives so that they can contribute to their communities, cooperate with other people and continue to learn throughout their lives. Therefore, education for students with special educational needs should be all about supporting them to develop in all aspects of life be it spiritual, cognitive, emotional, aesthetic, social and physical (Tohara, Shuhidan, Bahry, & Nordin, 2021).

Students with special needs (SSN) on the other hand refers to students who have received certification from a doctor, optician, audiologist or psychologist in the government or in private sector as proof of the students' visual impairments, audition disabilities, speech impairments, physical incapacity, learning impairments or any combination of disabilities and need to be trained with students without disabilities (Tohara, et al, 2021). This therefore means that students with special needs should be educated with students without disabilities in a general education setting that will be able to offer opportunities for a range of working methods and individualized learning for all students so that no child is obliged to stand out-side the fellowship of and participation in the school (United Nation Education, Scientific, & Cultural Organization, 2017). It should be vividly clear that educational programs and instructional content need to be adapted and regulated by experts to meet the needs of students with special educational needs through IEPs.

Special education is one of the branches of education practiced in many parts of the world with Nigeria inclusive. Special education is an educational service provided specifically to people with disabilities or referred to as students with special educational needs in the context of schooling. SNE involves the specific placement of students with special needs in various categories such as children with visually impairment, children with hearing impairment, and children with learning impairment. All these children with special educational needs are placed in three special education programs, namely special education schools, integration special education programs, and inclusive education programs. These three programs have certain characteristics in providing services to students with special educational needs (Hifzan, Mohamad, Nurulakla, Mahat & Norazmi, 2021). On the other hand, Merriam-Webster dictionary (2004) defined special education as instruction designed for students with special education needs because of their physical or learning problems. Special education schools, pre-school institutions, primary and secondary schools, vocational training centers are primary educational settings for students with special needs for free and in a least restrictive environment (Dragoo, 2020).

The thesis statement of this chapter centers around the eligibility of students with special educational needs and the team to benefit from IEP, the various stages of an IEP which will consist of the present level of academic achievement and performance level, measurable annual goals, special education services, related services, and supplementary aids and services, progress reporting, participation



and assessment, implementing and revising IEPs, placement considerations and decision for the second part. It will also include the problem in the preparation and implementation of the IEP for special educational needs as well as implications for students with special educational needs or disabilities and end with conclusion and suggestions.

Eligibility for students with special educational needs and IEP planning team

Before an IEP is written for a student with disability, the school must first determine whether the student qualifies for special education services. The first step in the determination of performance level is the collection of information about the student. First, to get to know the student, all existing records must be collected, filed, and reviewed. Documents suggested for this review are medical and health information, school reports or development reports indicating the school's success, student personal file etc. In addition, interviews are held with the student's parents, present teacher or previous teachers, school counselor, and other school personnel who may have student information, or with the student himself/herself to learn his/her prioritized needs. Observation of the student at different times of day and in different environments also provides significant information about the student. Furthermore, review of standardized test results such as intelligence tests, communication, and language skills assessment tests, applied in the previous years, and criterion-referenced tests applied in the previous instruction period, and if any, student's portfolio and portfolio development reports are also helpful and useful for getting to know the student (Dragoo, 2020).

IEP team consists of the educational institution's directors, school counselor, psychological counselor, the teacher assigned for preparation of education program, educators who play some roles in the education of the student outside the educational institution, and teachers, classroom teachers and/or branch teachers who have taught the student in previous years, support service professionals who provide the support needed by the student such as physiotherapists, speech-language therapists, occupational therapists, student's parents, and the student himself/herself (MoNE, 2018). IEP meetings are repeated several times during the year for exchange of information among team members and/or for assessment of the development of the student prior to preparation of IEP (Akçin, 2022).

Content of Individualized Education Program

Once a student has been found eligible for special education services, an IEP must be developed. The IEP must address the unique needs of the student and, must be tailored to the individual student needs as determined through the evaluation process. Good IEPs will be responsive to parents concerns and the student's vision and will assist the student as much as possible to move towards independence. The components of an IEP include; present level of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP), annual goals, special



education services, related services, and supplementary aids and services, progress reporting, participation and assessment.

Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP)

Present level of academic achievement and functional performance are the foundations of the student's IEP. The present level must be consistent with the evaluation and reevaluation results. The present level identifies and prioritizes the specific needs of the student and establishes baseline performance in the general education curriculum. In other words, the present level provides a description of the degree of match between the student's current skill levels and the expectations of the student's learning environment. Present level of performance gives clear, objective information about a student's abilities and limitations. Present level should change every year and if it describes a problem with the child's learning or behavior problems, it should be addressed under both goals and specific special education and related services (Harmon, Street, Bateman & Yell, 2020).

Measurable Annual Goals

IEP goals address skills or behavior for which specifically designed instruction is required for students to access and make progress in the general education curriculum with non-disabled peers as appropriate. Goals should contain the qualities of being "SMART". It should be specific, measurable, agreed, relevant, and time limited. The SMART goals should be described in a manner that includes observable actions, a reasonable timeframe for accomplishing them and criteria that make it possible to measure the extent of the student's progress (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2009). Specific; what is it exactly that you want to achieve? Measurable; how will you know when you have achieved the goal? Agreed; does the team, including student and family, agree on this goal? Relevant; is this goal relevant to the needs of the student? Time limited; when will this goal be achieved? How often will it be reviewed?

Special Education Services, Related Services, and Supplementary Aids and Services

The third major component of the IEP is the development of services that will be provided to assist a student in meeting his or her goals. This includes special education, related services, and supplementary aids and services required to assist students in attaining their IEP goals, to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum, to participate in other nonacademic activities, and to be educated and participate with other students with disabilities and nondisabled students (Mitchell, Yell, Antonis & Conroy, 2016).

Every IEP has a section that describes the services a student receives. This includes specially designed instruction and related services, such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, and social work services. It equally states how often and where the services will take place. It lists the school staff responsible for each



service. There is also information about any services outside the regular school year, as well as transition planning for after high school.

Sometimes, special education and related services take place in the general education classroom. That means the special educator and other school staff will need to plan and work together to provide instruction for the student. The IEP may list “consultation services” to account for this planning time. It is also helpful to know how often a student may be pulled out of the classroom for services. The special educator can then work with the service provider on scheduling to help the student get as much instructional time in the classroom as possible.

The IEP will have a section on supplementary aids and services. It may list accommodations, modifications, and assistive technology, along with when and where they will be used. These supports will help the student access learning in the classroom, as well as throughout all school activities.

This is one of the most important parts of the IEP for a general education teacher. Chances that a special educator will need to manage the student’s accommodations in the classroom. He may need specific training to do what the IEP requires. The classroom teacher also finds information about how the student will take part in state tests. Most students who learn and think differently will take the same tests as the rest of the students. But they may use accommodations such as extra time, a scribe, or a quiet setting for those tests. Sometimes, the IEP team may determine that a certain test is not appropriate for the student. The IEP will explain why and give information about other ways to assess the student.

Progress reporting, participation and assessment.

Regular reports to parents provide a mechanism for monitoring a student’s progress toward the annual goals and to evaluate the effectiveness of the student’s special education services. The process of assessing, evaluating, and reporting student progress enables the school and the parents to monitor student learning and identify what action, if any, is needed to help a student succeed. Progress towards annual goals will be measured through classwork, observation, tests and quizzes, and written reports.

The IEP must include an explanation of the extent to which a student with disabilities will not participate with nondisabled students in general education classes. The purpose of including this requirement in all IEPs is to ensure that IEP teams carefully consider the extent to which a student will be educated with his or her nondisabled peers. If team members decide that the student cannot participate full time with nondisabled students, the IEP must include a statement that explains the extent to which the student will not participate with nondisabled students in the general education classroom.

IEP team must determine if a student will participate in the same assessment as his or her nondisabled peers or if he or she will participate in the same assessment but with accommodations. Accommodations refer to changes in testing materials or procedures to ensure that the assessment actually measures a student’s



knowledge and skills rather than a student's disability. If the team decides that a student needs accommodations to validly measure his or her academic and functional performance, the IEP must include a statement of these accommodations (Galevska & Pesic, 2018).

Implementing and revising IEPs

With a student IEP fully developed, it is the responsibility of the school district to ensure the implementation. An IEP is similar to a contract in that the school district is promising, in writing, to provide specific educational services to a particular student to ensure that the student receives a free appropriate education (FAPE). An IEP is not a guarantee of performance but rather a guarantee of resources and services.

Every IEP is entitled to a revision and when a student's IEP is revised, changes can be made at an IEP meeting by the entire team or amending by the IEP, rather than redrafting the entire IEP. Parents and district personnel may agree not to convene a full team meeting for purposes of making changes but rather modify the current IEP as well as notify the team of the changes.

Placement Considerations and Decision

The placement consideration is not actually part of the IEP process and student's placement must be based on his or her IEP. The placement team consist of knowledgeable school personnel and students' parents to determine the setting in which students will receive their special education services. The two primary requirements regarding placement decisions for students with disabilities are: firstly the placement decision can be made only after the IEP is developed, and secondly the student's placement must be in accordance with the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA's) principle of least restrictive environment (LRE).

IEP placement considerations are based on whether education in the general education classroom with the use of supplementary aids and services can be achieved satisfactorily. In other words, can the student function in the general education classroom with the proper program supports and modifications? The IEP Team must always consider the general education classroom first, when determining the appropriate placements. The placement decisions are determined annually and must be made according to the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Placement decisions should never be based on the category or severity of a student's disability. Rather, placement such as educational services, should be determined based on the student's individual needs.

Problems encountered in the preparation and implementation of IEP

When preparing IEP, most teachers use the unified samples formulated by special education schools, the samples formulated by teachers themselves, and the internationally renowned standard tables, which can be formulated based on



standardized samples, but the sample sources are not uniform. There are inconsistencies in standards during the preparation and implementation process of IEP. At the same time, there are also a small number of teachers who rely on past teaching observations or interviews with teachers and their parents to formulate IEP, which will inevitably be influenced by teachers' subjective factors.

The preparation and implementation of IEP in special education mainly depend on the classroom teachers. In the preparation of IEP, special education teachers spend more time preparing an IEP. It can be seen that teachers need to spend more time on experience. And in the implementation stage, IEP is affected by factors such as curriculum restrictions, students' abilities, and heavy tasks, so that teachers' teaching effectiveness has not reached the expected state, which increases the pressure on special education teachers' education and teaching, and discourages teachers' enthusiasm for teaching activities.

Special education teachers are the main force in the preparation and implementing IEP and the participation of relevant professionals outside the education system as well as parents is low. Reaching the desired level makes teachers solely responsible for the preparation and implementation of IEP which in return, make the preparation and implementation of IEP lack comprehensive, normative and scientific requirements unable to form an effective synergy, and children with special needs to receive comprehensive and effective related services with support (Cuiling, 2000). This shows that IEP preparation staff is relatively single, and its representativeness and continuity need to be strengthened.

Most special education teachers have already mastered certain knowledge and skills about IEP after undergoing pre-job and post-job training, but they do not have a deep understanding of IEP, and their practical ability needs to be improved. In addition, some teachers are not from special education majors, lack relevant post-service training, and have low personal willingness to learn IEP. Their knowledge of IEP is still relatively lacking, and knowledge learning and training in this area should be strengthened.

IEP requires the participation of school leaders, teachers, parents, rehabilitation specialists, psychologists and other personnel. However, the preparation and implementation of IEP rely on special education teachers. Taking multiple roles in the preparation and implementation makes special education teachers take on more responsibilities, and also increases the workload of special education teachers, making teachers less motivated. At the same time, the poor teaching effect, lack of relevant knowledge, and lack of relevant supervision also make teachers weak in attitude.

Implication of IEP for students with special education needs

With an IEP, students get individualized instruction that focuses on improving specific skills. But there are other types of help that can also be included in an IEP. Students might get accommodations, like extended time on tests, or



related services, like speech-language therapy. Assistive technology (AT) is another type of support that can be part of an IEP.

It provides current and historical information about students' strengths and challenges, as well as notes as to what types of instruction and accommodations have been effective in the past. Ongoing progress monitoring provides a way to assess whether the services and supports are effective in providing students access to the Please general education curriculum.

Having an IEP gives students, families, and schools certain legal protections. It lets families to be involved in decisions that affect their children education. It also gives students rights when it comes to school discipline.

Conclusion

This paper has provided a common overview of the IEPs process for students with SEN from eligibility, implementation to placement. There are many IEPs that have adequate or very good investigations and intervention. Never the less, there is also a number of IEPs where the investigations are completely absent or of questionable quality, often resulting in low quality interventions. However, IEP has a lot of challenges in the preparation and implementation process.

Suggestions

Adequate financial and administrative investment can provide effective guarantee for effective administration of IEP procedures and implementation processes. In this regard, the state and society should invest more funds for the construction of special education teaching infrastructures and other resources, and rely on the authority of the government to adopt a variety of administrative methods to ensure that the needs of students with special educational needs are achieved.

Increase post-employment training for teachers on the preparation and implementation of IEP. Teachers' professional knowledge and skills training should be advocated for this to be successful. This will enrich teachers' scientific knowledge and theoretical system of IEP content, as well improve participation, in education and teaching activities.

The professional competence of teachers is an important guarantee for the success of IEP implementation. Special education teachers actively participate in the learning or training of IEP to improve their professional quality, obtain high-quality resources and latest information through books, the internet and other channels, and strengthen experience exchange and cooperation with outstanding special education teachers, actively participate in teaching activities, and accumulate experience lessons, continuous reflection and progress in teaching practice.

The preparation and implementation of IEP is not a closed-door practice of teachers, but the joint efforts of teachers, parents and other professionals. Therefore, teachers should communicate with parents and other professionals in a timely



manner during this process, actively seek help, and solve existing problems in a timely manner.

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