
**Assessment of the Exceptionalities: Emphasizing on the Gifted Children and the
Challenges of the Exceptional Children**

BY

Raymond M. KINGSLEY, *Ph.D*
Department of Early Childhood Education
Faculty of Education
Heriot-Watt University
United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

This study sought to examine the exceptionalities with emphasis on the gifted children and the challenges of the exceptional children. A child with an exceptionality means a child evaluated as having: Intellectual, Communicative, Sensory, Behavioral, Multiple and Physical disability. Globally, one way children with disabilities are often denied their right to education, while some cases. Children with disabilities are the direct beneficiaries of an inclusive education program. They benefit by being provided with a quality education that suits their needs and abilities. The study concluded that there are various factors affecting aspect of special education attainment such as lack of basic amenities, adequate infrastructure and lack of adequate special education personnel. Higher percentage of children with disabilities are denied and deprived the access to school. One of the recommendations was that children with disabilities should be given friendly approach, the government should make provision for adequate infrastructure to inspire their learning abilities.

KEYWORDS: Challenges, Opportunities, Exceptional and Children

Background

It is very obvious that special education (also known as special-needs education, aided education, exceptional education, special ed. or SPED) is the practice of educating students in a way that addresses their individual differences and needs. Ideally, this process involves the individually planned and systematically monitored arrangement of teaching procedures, adapted equipment and materials, and accessible settings. These interventions are designed to help individuals with special needs achieve a higher level of personal self-sufficiency and success in school and in their community which may not be available if the students were only given access to a typical classroom education. One of the first special schools in the world was the Institute National des Jeunes Aveugles in Paris, which was founded in 1784. It was the first school in the world to teach blind students. The first school in U.K, for the Deaf was established 1760 in Edinburgh by Thomas Braidwood, with education for visually impaired people beginning in the Edinburgh and Bristol in 1765. In the 19th century, people with disabilities and the inhumane conditions where they were supposed to be housed and educated were addressed in the literature of Charles Dickens. Dickens characterized people with severe disabilities as having the same, if not more, compassion and insight in Bleak House and Little Dorrit. Such attention to the

downtrodden conditions of people with disabilities resulted in reforms in Europe including the re-evaluation of special schools. In the United States, reform came rather more slowly.

It is interesting to note that throughout the mid half of the 20th century, special schools, termed institutions, were not only accepted, but encouraged. Students with disabilities were housed with people with mental illnesses, and they were not educated much, if at all (SWIFT, 2018).

Types of Exceptionalities

Educators at all levels refer to special needs students as those with exceptionalities. A child with an exceptionality means a child evaluated as having: Intellectual, Communicative, Sensory, Behavioral, Multiple and/or Physical disability. Types of exceptionalities include Autism, Deafness-Blindness, Developmental disability, Giftedness, hearing impairment including deafness, Intellectual disability, Mental retardation, down syndrome, Orthopedic impairment, Other health impairments, Serious emotional disturbance, Specific learning disabilities, Speech or language impairment, Traumatic brain injury, and/or Visual impairment including blindness. Most educators prefer not to use the term handicapped because of its negative implications but refer to special needs students as those with exceptionality and/or challenged - both of which have more positive implications. In general, exceptionalities fall in six broad categories:

- **Intellectual:** This includes students who have superior intelligence as well as those who are slow to learn. The group could be expanded to include (giftedness, Mental retardation, Down syndrome, intellectual disability and developmental disability).
- **Communicative:** These students have special learning disabilities or speech or language impairments. The expanded group includes: autism, language impairment, speech impairment and specific learning disability.
- **Sensory:** Sensory-grouped students have auditory or visual disabilities (deaf or hard-of-hearing, deaf-blindness, blind and low vision).
- **Behavioural:** These students are emotionally disturbed or socially maladjusted with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.
- **Physical:** This includes students with orthopedic, or mobility disabilities.
- **Multiple:** These students have a combination of conditions, such as orthopedically challenged and visually impaired.

Although statistics are difficult to obtain, it has been estimated that between 10 and 13 percent of the school-age population has exceptionalities. Thus, in an average-size classroom of 25 students, it is conceivable that 3 or 4 individuals will exhibit one or more exceptionalities.

Giftedness

Giftedness is a special kind of exceptionality that attracts the attention of all. Averred by Cicerchia and Freeman (2020), giftedness is defined as an intellectual ability linked to an IQ

score of 130 or over. However, not all gifted children excel in an academic area. Some may display high creative, artistic, musical and/or leadership abilities relative to their peers. Giftedness can be focused in one skill, or it may be more general. It's also important for parents and educators to understand that it can sometimes come with specific learning differences that impact on performance at school. In these situations, it's important to help a child develop their talents while also overcoming any challenges posed by the specific Learning Difficulty (SpLDs) (Aniefiok 2008).

In theory, there are three ways of educating children who are intellectually and academically more advanced than their peers: (1) acceleration, whereby the gifted child is allowed to learn material at a more rapid pace or is promoted more rapidly through grades; (2) enrichment, whereby the gifted child works through the usual grades at the usual pace but with a curriculum supplemented by a variety of cultural activities; and (3) differentiation, whereby gifted children are accelerated or enriched within the regular classroom (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020). In some cases, it may be appropriate for the child to attend a special program or a school specifically for gifted children, so they have ample opportunities for advancement in a classroom environment that is sensitive to their needs and provides adequate stimulation. With access to the right resources and emotional and academic support, every gifted child can achieve their full potential at school. There are a number of ways to determine giftedness and often a combination of ability and achievement tests are used, including observation and/or a review of the student's portfolio of work (Cicerchia & Freeman, 2020). A child's activities both in and outside of school may be considered, along with cognitive abilities, creativity, and affective and behavioural habits.

According to Cicerchia & Freeman (2020), there are also cases in which gifted children stand out because of poor academic achievement. This is often surprising for parents to learn as many people assume that giftedness is always associated with high performance. Yet it is possible for a learning disability to overshadow giftedness. This is especially true when a child has ADD/ADHD or dyslexia. There can be giftedness in one subject, such as Math, but a learning disability that affects performance in other areas of the curriculum. Lastly, it can be the case that kids who are gifted become easily bored when they don't find schoolwork challenging and are misdiagnosed as having ADD/ADHD because they stop paying attention in class. Learn more about ADD and ADHD in these posts.

Global issues of Special Education

Globally, children with disabilities are often denied their right to education. Though little is known about their school attendance patterns; the collection of data on children with disabilities is not straightforward, but data are vital to ensure that policies are in place to address the constraints these children face (UNESCO, 2016). According to the World Health Survey, in 14 of 15 low and middle income countries, people of working age with disabilities were about one-third less likely to have completed primary school. For instance, in Bangladesh, 30% of people with disabilities had completed primary school, compared with 48% of those with no disabilities. The corresponding shares were 43% and 57% in Zambia; 56% and 72% in Paraguay. It has been shown that children with a higher risk of disability are far more likely to be denied a chance to go to school. In Bangladesh, Bhutan and Iraq, children with mental impairments were most

likely to be denied this right. In Iraq, for instance, 10% of 6- to 9-year-olds with no risk of disability had never been to school in 2006, but 19% of those at risk of having a hearing impairment and 51% of those who were at higher risk of mental disability had never been to school. In Thailand, almost all 6- to 9-year-olds who had no disability had been to school in 2005/06, yet 34% of those with walking or moving impairments had never been to school (UNESCO, 2016).

Inclusive Learning

Unfortunately, in the past many people assumed that the best place for children with disabilities was in a special school or classroom, separated from their 'normal' peers. Today, however, international experts and people with disabilities themselves are united in the belief that inclusive education in the child's local community school, together with their non-disabled peers, offers the best opportunity for social integration and self-sufficiency (Randiki, 2002). Inclusive education models are particularly well suited for developing countries that cannot afford duplication or separation of essential educational services.

Achieving education for all also requires that communities work together to better understand the needs and abilities of people with disabilities, removing barriers in the environment and in prevailing social attitudes. Achieving education for all also requires that communities work together to better understand the needs and abilities of people with disabilities, removing barriers in the environment and in prevailing social attitudes (UNESCO, 2009). Inclusive education for children with disabilities, the subject of this guide, is best understood as a subset of the broader definition of inclusion as education for all. Children with disabilities are one of the most prominent groups traditionally excluded from education. Any plan for education for all must be especially in tune with the needs and abilities of children with disabilities, and fully involve them in education systems. Because inclusive education by nature includes the participation of all children and focuses specifically on the inclusion of marginalized children, it is the best way to ensure education for all children.

Bayat (2014) notes that when analyzing education for children with disabilities, key concepts like 'integration' and 'inclusive' are often used interchangeably although they are not the same. Integration is largely associated with mainstreaming children with disabilities into regular classrooms but inclusive is about accommodating all children. This lack of clarity has a profound impact on the understanding and practice of inclusive education which is contributing to a lack of overall progress on improving education for children with disabilities (Sharma & Das, 2015). Children with disabilities are the direct beneficiaries of an inclusive education program. They benefit by being provided with a quality education that suits their needs and abilities. Children with disabilities furthermore benefit from the increased acceptance they feel in their classes, communities, and households. The skills children learn in the classroom can be used in everyday life. After participating in inclusive education, children are often more active in household activities, community activities, and have more friends. Opportunities for educated children with

disabilities post-school are greatly increased by having obtained an inclusive education, preparing a child for work or a higher education degree (Ajuwon, 2008).

The Ministry of education in its strategic plan of 2006-2011 states that successful inclusion will require additional efforts particularly, pre-service training and in-servicing of teachers to prepare for specialized demands of teaching the physically challenged learners in particular. Inclusive education also requires concerned efforts to prepare parents and communities for the changes in their schools for effective inclusion. More so, a strategy is needed for the development of materials, adaptive resources and new teaching approaches that are appropriate for use in inclusive classrooms (Government of Kenya, 2005). The key issue with inclusive education is to make the regular schools welcoming for all learners regardless of differences the learners (Kirk, Gallagher and Anastasiow, 2003).

Other Risk Factors:

There are several contributing risk factors why over 200,000 children with disabilities in Akwa Ibom State are out of school. The obvious cause will be the very exclusive and inaccessible regular primary and secondary schools. This makes it impossible for children with disabilities to attend schools within their locality as other nondisabled children. It imposes the avoidable hardship of having to travel long distances to special schools; the agony of early childhood separation from parents and loved ones and the pain of confinement into segregation.

Further compacting the exclusion of, and inaccessibility of those children with disabilities to basic education in Akwa Ibom State is the absence of appropriate legal and policy framework on inclusive education for children with disabilities. While Akwa Ibom State seems to be making efforts in this direction through its integrated education programme, there is little or no attempt at the implementation of inclusive basic education. Legal and policy frameworks are necessary to serve as implementation guide especially with regard to statutory planning and budgeting, as well as standard regulation, especially with regard to enforcement of compliance, monitoring and evaluation.

Another key causal factor is the low public awareness in Akwa Ibom State on issues of inclusive education especially among public officials and policy makers, professionals, parents, and other stakeholders which have made it difficult to increase their interest and commitment to inclusive and accessible basic education for children with disabilities. This is also responsible for the inability of stakeholders to collaborate effectively on how to make all public and private primary and secondary schools inclusive and accessible for children with disabilities.

Finally, the low level of institutional and human capacity especially among relevant educational agencies of government in Akwa Ibom State, educational professionals like teachers, caregivers, social workers, medical practitioners, etc and the low capacity building opportunities through relevant academic and professional training programmes administered by tertiary institutions have made it difficult to effectively implement inclusive basic education for children with disabilities in Akwa Ibom State. At the moment, there are no tertiary

institutions (Universities and Colleges of Education) in Akwa Ibom State which provide comprehensive academic and professional course programmes on special/inclusive education.

This has greatly limited the availability of needed manpower for the implementation of inclusive education for children with disabilities. Similarly, there are little or no incentives to retain trained special educationists as over 70% of them are either working in other non-education sectors and/or are currently unemployed.

Conclusion

The study therefore concluded that there are various factors affecting aspect of special education attainment such as lack of basic amenities, adequate infrastructure and lack of adequate special education personnel. Higher percentage of children with disabilities are denied and deprived the access to school. It was also concluded that most of the special education centres lack basic infrastructure like good roads, conducive environment, and electricity, and location.

Recommendations

1. While the children with disabilities are expected to be given friendly approach, the government should make provision for adequate infrastructure to inspire their learning abilities.
2. More special education centres should be established in the rural areas of the state to accommodate the less privileged children with disabilities.
3. Children with disabilities should be given access to services that can support them throughout their time in school, such as more individual attention from instructors.

REFERENCES

- Ajuwon, P. M. (2008): Inclusive Education for Students with Disabilities in Nigeria: Benefits, Challenges and Policy Implications. *International Journal of Education* 23 (1) 11- 16
- Aniefiok U. (2008). The Place of Computer Technology in Facilitating the Education of Gifted Children. *The Exceptional Child: Journal of the National Council for Exceptional Children*. 10(1): 187-193.
- Bayat M. (2014). Understanding views of disability in the Cote d'Ivoire. *Disability & Society*, 29(1), 30-43.
- Cicerchia M. and Freeman C. (2020). *7 Signs of a gifted child*. Available at <https://www.readandspell.com/signs-of-a-gifted-child>
- Encyclopaedia Britannica (2020). *Gifted child, Psychology*. The editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/science/gifted-child>
- Government of Kenya (2005). *A report of the task force on special needs education*. appraisal exercise; Nairobi.
- Kirk S.A; Gallagher J.J & Anastasiow N.J (2003) *Educating exceptional children* (10th ed) Houghton Mifflin Company. New York.
- Randiki, F. (2002). Historical development of special needs education. Nairobi: KISE
- Sharma, U., and Das, A. (2015) Inclusive education in India: past, present and future. *Support for Learning*, 30(1), p. 55-68.
- SWIFT CENTER (2018). *Education center*. The history of special education: From isolation to integration. MA Winzer.
- UNESCO (2009). Rational for the focus on children with disabilities". *Towards Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities: A guideline*. UNESCO, Bangkok, pp. 7-8.
- UNESCO-IBE (2016). *Reaching out to all learners: A resource pack for supporting inclusive education*. Geneva: UNESCO-IBE