

# The Ideal Special Education Teacher in Nigeria

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**Abstract** - *This paper focused on an ideal special education teacher in Nigeria. Concept of an ideal special education teacher was discussed. The works and roles of an ideal special education teacher were examined. Different types of disabilities that qualify an individual with special needs for special education programme were spelt out. Similarly, qualities of an ideal special education teacher were discussed. Also activities and skills expected of an ideal special education teacher were examined. The characteristics required of a special education teacher to help persons with special needs maximise their potentials were also stated. Consequently, fruitful and useful recommendations that will aid special education teachers work with persons with special needs successfully were also discussed.*

**Keywords:** *Audiologist, ideal, ophthalmologist, referral, special education*

## INTRODUCTION

The goal of special education is to have an ideal special teacher to provide for persons with special needs the kind of the educational programmes and services, which adequately serve their various needs. It is assumed that teachers who handle individuals with special needs are themselves specially trained, skilled and ideally should be vital resources which should enable special education meet the needs of all special learners. In order to achieve the above goal, the ideal special teacher should equip himself with new ideas, effective strategic approaches including the ability to adapt curriculum to enhance special educational needs of persons with special needs. This explains why Swanson and Willis [1] stressed that special education teachers should equip himself with different forms of skills and competence to meet the needs of handicapped children. Adeniyi [2] also emphasised the need for constant review of curriculum to accommodate new trends in education especially vocational and technical aspects so that

persons with special needs could learn one trade or the other and be gainfully employed.

Okuyibo [3] observes that if there is any group of learners that need trained teachers it is the person with special needs. This is because of nature of handicapping condition of these children which demands an ideal special education teacher. This shows that no matter the enrichment and provision of teaching or instructional materials, without special education teachers the education of the children with special needs cannot be perfect and effective. An ideal special education teacher is the major determinant and indicator of quality education for his pupils or students. Supporting this view Abang [4] stressed that the teaching of the children with special needs is not a professional to be taken by just any one as a last resort for lack of employment. The author further explained that, it is a profession that must be taken deliberately and by those who have interest of the special need children at heart since it is a very tasking job and hence requires those who are committed to the cause of the disabled. In this paper, the roles of special education teachers has been examined, activities and qualities of an ideal special education teachers were pointed out, recommendations for educational improvement were also proffered.

## CONCEPTS OF AN IDEAL SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER

The term ideal according to the writer, is something perfect or most suitable activity carried out by an individual to attain a set goal. The concept 'ideal' has been in use for centuries by different discipline in determining suitable strategy or methods to direct their purposes. Ideal is being applied in this paper, to bring out the way the special education teacher will adapt his teaching strategies to make teaching/learning experiences more effective, perfect, efficient and meaningful to persons with special

needs. An ideal special education teacher is the machinery on which special teacher education operates as such special teachers bear the burdens of actualizing the goals and objective of special education in educating the children and adult with special needs. Smith [5] defined special education teacher as a unique special teacher who is also known as inclusion teacher, self-contained special teacher and special education resource teacher.

Therefore, special education teacher is a specialised teacher who uses various special techniques to promote learning, depending on the nature and type of the disability. He uses special tools for instruction, to ensure that education to children with special needs is appropriate. In conjunction with the ophthalmologist and audiologist he perform dual roles, such as referral, diagnosis, assessment of visual acuity for the visually impaired and audiological assessment for those who are hearing impaired. He also collaborates with other related professionals such as Ear Nose and Throat Specialists, psychotherapists, behavioural therapists, psychologists, doctors, nurses, psychiatrists, speech pathologists, ophthalmologists and regular teachers to serve the needs of persons with special needs.

An ideal special education teacher is more knowledgeable about the problems of each affected pupil /student and understands how to help such a pupil /student than ordinary regular classroom teacher. He uses specialized mode of instructions, and specialized instructional materials in teaching children with special needs. He also used special curriculum, special equipments and instruments in making learning more effective and meaningful for that pupils / students with special needs. An ideal special education teacher do personalizes his teaching. Knowing that each child is unique, he treats special needs children as individual child and not as a group varying degrees of their needs and abilities.

Furthermore, special teacher is someone who is sensitive to the needs of his pupils/students. He is aware that no two special learners are exactly the same, he therefore provides for individual differences. An Ideal special education teacher do adjusts the pace of his instruction to the needs of the special need children by doing this, the fast learners are not held back and slow learners are carried along.

Therefore, special education teacher is a teacher of all teachers. In addition to regular teacher training, he obtained specialized training to enable him teach pupils of students with special needs. The objectives

and aims of special education in Nigeria cannot be achieved without the effort of special education teacher.

### **THE WORKS OF AN IDEAL SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER**

An ideal special education teacher is someone who works with persons who have various types of disabilities. The various types of disabilities that qualify individuals for special education programs include specific learning disabilities, hearing impairments, visual impairment, autism, orthopaedic impairment, total deafness and blindness, traumatic brain injury, and other health impairments, students or pupils are classified under one of these categories, and special education teachers are prepared to work with these specific groups. This is because, Johnson [6] explained that children with special needs require special and unique instructions by specially trained teacher to help them achieve their potentials and strive to progress beyond their limitations. Michael [7] stressed that because of those special requirements, the needs of the disabled cannot be met by ordinary teacher within the traditional education environment except by special teacher and special education programme. This programme according to IDEA [8] is an appropriate education programme designed to meet the needs of persons with disability which placed them behind their peers. Thus, acquisition of appropriate skills to suit the various abilities and other special needs of these children are expected of the special teacher. This is because the type and nature of teachers employed to teach or handle these specific groups determines the professional status of such teacher. If the special teachers are not well prepared with appropriate skills and effective pedagogy, the end result as observed by Adima [9] will be handicap teachers employed to teach handicap children thereby handicapping the handicap.

Early intervention is essential in educating children with special needs and early identification of a child with special needs is an important part of a special education teacher's job. An ideal special education teacher uses various techniques to promote learning. Depending on the nature of disability, teaching methods also include individualized or group instruction. He helps to develop an individualized educational program (IEP) for each student/pupil with special needs. The IEP sets personalized goals for each student and it's tailored to the students' individual needs and ability. Special education

teachers designed, teach appropriate curricula, assign work geared towards each student's needs and abilities. The special teachers are involved in the student's behavioural, social, and academic development, helping the students develop better attitude, feel comfortable in social situations, and be aware of socially acceptable behaviour. The ideal special teacher also prepares student /pupils with special needs for daily life skills and after graduation for economic empowerment.

In the same vein, an ideal special teacher provides students with career counselling and helps them learn routine skills. An ideal special education teacher work in a variety of settings. Some have their own classrooms and teach only children with special needs, others work as special education resource teachers and offer individualized help to students in general education classrooms, still others teach together with normal regular education teachers in classes comprised both normal and students with special needs (inclusive education). Some teachers work with special education, students for some hours a day in a resource room, separate from their general education classroom. Considerably some special education teachers work in residential schools.

Special education teacher who work with children with severe special needs usually travel to the child's home, to work with the child and his parent. They show parent techniques and activities designed to stimulate the child, encourage the growth and development of the child's skills. Special education teacher enjoyed challenges of working with children with special needs and have opportunity to establish meaningful relationships with them.

#### **THE ROLES OF AN IDEAL SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER**

The special education teachers have certain roles to play while with children with special needs. The importance of special teachers and the role they played in the educational process of special of children with special needs are central to their basic education, particularly in the developing countries like Nigeria. According to Biehler [10] special education teachers are knowledgeable about the child's instructional goals and objectives, specific strategies and objectives that will accomplish them and the day to day progress of the child. Consequently, special teachers for the blind played the role of Braille transcribers and translators of normal book prints. The author further explained that Special education

teachers played the roles of advocates in legislative matters championing the course of disabled children, initiating societal awareness, initiating workshop, seminars and conferences on behalf of children with special needs.

Furthermore, special education teachers have the role of carrying out identification and assessment of the disabled children for educational placement. They play a role of educational therapists and seek diagnostic causes for failures or problems whether organic or environmental and tailor course contents to suit individuals understanding. For instance, the special teachers for the hearing impaired can work as audiologist in the audiological units to measure the level of hearing loss appropriate for each child. They work as news announcers and as sign language interpreters to the hearing impaired in government ministries, television studios, factories, conferences and classrooms. They play the role of observing, analyzing, selecting sequencing learning tasks so that the child overcome his delays rather than falling behind.

Special education teachers act as resource or intenerant teachers in regular schools, they motivate and reinforce the disabled children; they often participate in developing curriculum for persons with special needs. They also serve as consultants that provide support or assistant to regular school teachers. Similarly, they do play the role of guidance and counsellors to the parents of disabled and also train the parents to take primary responsibility of teaching their children at home.

#### **QUALITIES OF AN IDEAL SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER**

Experience and research Biehler [10], has shown that special education teachers are the same as for leaders of successful social groups because special education teachers are group leaders in the classroom. They are the key factors in the classroom whether students learn well or not. The point is that, one may be a teacher and or have higher qualifications (doctors, engineers, lecturers,) without having the qualities of an ideal special education teacher one cannot teach persons with special needs. The fact is that, it's not everybody or anybody that can teach persons with special needs effectively and efficiently except the special teacher. Paul [11] also explained that special education teachers are patient understanding educators, dedicated to giving each

individual student with special needs tools and guidance needed to help him maximise success.

In line with the above, special education teacher must have personality traits and good teaching qualities. Some of the qualities expected of special education teacher include:

**FLEXIBILITY:** A good special education teacher must be flexible, and must be able to listen to his pupils/student and modify his stand with sacrificing principles. It is only the patient special teachers that can do this successfully because he can patiently look at both sides of the matter to bring out what is helpful to his students without changing the rules or condemning his pupils students,

**HONESTY:** Honesty is the best policy and truth exalts a nation. No nation can develop and progress without establishing truth and honesty in all its institutions of learning. So anybody who aspires to teach in any special school must be transparently honest and seek after truth at all times. Lying is dishonesty, punishing anybody unjustly, cheating, favouritism are all dishonesty and these should be avoided by all good citizen especially anybody who desire to teach persons with special needs.

**PATIENCE:** Special education teachers needs to patiently carry their students along always and must be patient enough to see that everybody benefits from their initiative. A learner needs to be comfortable and confident to be able to learn effectively and so the special teacher needs to be patience enough to see that good condition for effective learning is created and make use of. The patience special teacher is the answer to individual work in an inclusive classroom where there are many units, as there are students each trying to move forward at his or her own pace.

**FIRMNESS:** It is most desirable that anyone going to be in charge of students and children with special needs must be highly principled and disciplined and be very firm with them otherwise he would ruin himself and damage the careers of his students/children in no time.

**INITIATIVE:** Those to whom parents desired to entrust the training of the future leaders of a progressive nation especially special teachers must be full of initiative to understand what to do in varying circumstances without endangering the lives of their students/pupils unnecessarily or making them lose vital opportunities due to indecision on inability to react promptly and appropriately to an emergency.

**RESPECT:** A rude and unrefined special education teacher can hardly last a month in his job

for he will constantly get it back the public, from parents, his employers, colleagues and even his own students/pupils such that he will be forced to quit in frustration and shame within a very short time. In classroom situation, every student/pupils deserves respect from the brightest to dullest for each of them is a separate entity within the social system in which respect should be a polite behaviour. Again, a special teacher can hardly succeed in a classroom of learners where there are no mutual love, friendly behaviour and respect. Respect is one of the most important personality traits required of a special education teacher not only for teaching purposes but as a model for his students/pupils in the society.

Other relevant qualities expected of ideal special education teachers include: the need to be of good character, ready to apply themselves in an enthusiastic and dedicated fashion and ready to work hard. They must be able to relate well to young children and persons with special needs and enjoy working as a part of team. Special education teacher also need to be dedicated, enthusiastic, committed and innovative, willing to learn, and have a sense of humour. Similarly, they need to be confident users of computer technology, serve as a guide for student's exploring, and learning from the vast knowledgeable available not only in their local area but also worldwide.

#### **CHARACTERISTICS REQUIRED OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER**

A special education teacher must have good characteristics and knowledgeable to know how to best work with individual person with special needs. Some characteristics required of ideal special education teachers include, self-confidence, teacher's personality and understanding, tolerance and lenient to problematic students/pupils. Ability to adapt to curriculum to serve the needs of students/pupils with special need, a good and friendly attitude towards students/pupils and a zealous desire to help problematic children. Similarly, as a special education teacher, his characteristics involve working with persons with varieties of disability that other regular teachers may find difficult to accept. According to Philip [12] special education teacher must be accepting of all students no matter the disability or special needs. This means that the special teacher should imbibe attitude of teaching all affected persons with respect and dignity and every person in the classroom must feel valuable. He is to understand that persons with special needs do not have the same

disabilities and there will be a range of capabilities. Some might be blind or deaf while others may not be able to perform some skills. Gold [13] observed that designing daily lesson activities for various disabilities the special teacher will face, require a lot of creativity. Thus, special education teacher must be creative. Above all, he must have good classroom management skills providing discipline accordingly.

### CONCLUSION

This paper has tried to raise a number of points as regards “The Ideal Special Education Teachers in Nigeria.” The paper has highlighted the skills required of an ideal special education teacher which include among other things that an ideal special education teacher should be able to adapt his teaching strategies to make teaching/learning experiences more effective, perfect, efficient and meaningful to persons with special needs. The paper also enlightened the readers on the affected individual’s eligibility for special education programmes. According to the paper, all functions expected of any recognized ideal special education teacher such as assessing, identifying and finding out diagnostic causes for failures in disabled children for educational placement needs to be performed.

Similarly, it is the duty of the special education teacher to have personality traits, good teaching qualities, dedicated and friendly attitudes towards persons with special needs. All the competency qualifications and requirements of special teachers contained in this paper must be adhered to at all times by the concerned ideal special education teacher.

### RECOMMENDATION

Based on the above discussions the following recommendations need to be considered:

Government should help in the provision of the needed instructional aids and special equipment especially those that are beyond the reach of common man. The three tiers government should find a means of funding special education teachers’ in-service programmes.

Special education teacher should be able to utilize methods and materials in their area of specialization effectively. They should be curious in finding out information through the use of modern technology. Lastly, an ideal special education teacher should be able to practice classroom management efficiently. The graduated special teachers should be employed by the governments and private organisations. The

authority in charge of the employment should ensure that qualified trained special teachers are employed into the special schools instead of employing their relatives who are ordinary teachers.

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