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2030 AGENDA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION ONE Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and the 2030 Agenda

CHAPTER ONE

Dissecting Education 2030 Agenda: Implications for Building a Knowledge Based Society in Nigeria

Michael Omolewa

Emeritus Professor, Faculty of Education,
University of Ibadan

1-12

CHAPTER TWO

Security Challenges and Implications for Achieving Education 2030 Agenda in Northern Nigeria

Kazeem Ajasa BADARU & Emmanuel O. ADU

University of Fort Hare, South Africa

13-26

CHAPTER THREE

Achieving Gender Equity and Equality through Inclusive Women Education in Nigeria

Martins Ojo ERINSAKIN,¹ Maureen. N. ALUMONA,¹

Francisca O. AWOGOKE,¹ Omobayo Gbadebo BOKUN²

¹ *Department of Continuing Education/Adult and Non-Formal Education, Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, Ondo State, Nigeria*

² *Department of Adult Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan*

27-40

CHAPTER FOUR

Teaching Children with Visual Impairment in an Inclusive Setting: The Nigerian perspective

A. F. KOMOLAFE¹ & E. E. EJIMANYA²

University of Ibadan

41-52

CHAPTER FIVE

Justification for Teaching Specialised Subjects and Different Languages to Persons with Special Needs in the School Setting

Ayo OSISANYA

Department of Special Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan

53-66

CHAPTER SIX

Roles of Stakeholders in the Provision of Inclusive Education for Secondary School Students with Hearing Impairment in Nigeria

O.O. ISAIAH

Department of Special Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

67-79

CHAPTER SEVEN

Teaching Strategies for Diverse Learners with Special Educational Needs and the Attainment of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals

Adebomi M. OYEWUMI and Edward Gift CHINWENDU

Department of Special Education, Faculty of Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.

80-93

CHAPTER EIGHT

Cerebral Palsy Management in Ibadan: An analysis of variants in information source and its relevance

Morufat Mojisola OLAKOJO

Department of Special Education, Faculty of Education, University of Ibadan

94-107

SECTION TWO

Teacher Preparation / Professionalism and the 2030 Agenda

CHAPTER NINE

Higher Education in the United States: A Case Study, Comparison, and Implications for the Africa and Education 2030 Agenda

Robin Magruder

Chair of the Undergraduate Program, Associate Professor Campbellsville University, Campbellsville, KY 42718, United States

108-145

CHAPTER TEN

Building Bridges with Early Childhood Education

Sharon L. Hundley

Campbellsville University

146-155

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Perspectives on Continuing Professional Teacher
Development Towards Education 2030 Agenda in Africa:
Implication for policy and institutional reforms

Emmanuel O. ADU¹, O.A. OJO² & Kemi O. ADU³

Faculty of Education, University of Fort Hare, South Africa

156-169

CHAPTER TWELVE

Mentoring As Value-added for Improving Trainees' Quality in
Colleges of Education in Nigeria: Implications for 2030 Agenda

Bolaji Gabriel POPOOLA

*Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Emmanuel Alayande
College of Education, Oyo, Oyo State, Nigeria*

170-185

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Teachers' Perception of Community Resources for Promoting
Cultural and Entrepreneurial Diversity in South-west Nigeria for
Education Agenda 2030

Olamide O. AJOGBEJE¹ & Abiodun A. OLADITI²

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Osun State College of Education, Ila-Orangun, Osun State, Nigeria*

*²Department of Social Studies, School of Arts and Social Sciences,
Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Oyo, Oyo State,
Nigeria*

186-203

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Language and Quality Education as Key to Implementation of
Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria

F.O. EZEKOLI

*Department of Arts and Social Sciences Education,
University of Ibadan*

204-217

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Existential Philosophical Idea of Choice in Education:
Implications for educational practices in Nigeria

S. I. MEROYI

*Department of Early Childhood and Educational Foundations,
University of Ibadan*

218-225

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Social Studies Students' Awareness and Knowledge of
Sexuality Education in Abeokuta: Implications for 2030
Education Agenda

Tolulope V. GBADAMOSI & Blessing ARIKPO

*Department of Arts and Social Sciences,
University of Ibadan, Ibadan*

226-239

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Student-related Variables and Environmental Literacy
in Social Studies among Junior Secondary School
Students in Ibadan Metropolis, Nigeria: Implications
for Education Agenda 2030

Elizabeth Ikeola WAHAB¹ & Sunday Olukayode AJITONI²

*¹School of Arts and Social Sciences, Department of Social Studies,
Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Oyo*

²Department of Arts and Social Sciences Education,

Social Studies Unit, Faculty of Education, University of Ibadan

240-258

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Literature as an Instructional Strategy to Teach Social Studies
in Primary Schools in Ibadan, Nigeria

Dorcias Oluwakemi JIMOH¹ & Esther ODUOLOWU²

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University of Ibadan. Kemmike0176@yahoo.com*

*²Early childhood/Care Unit, Department of Early Childhood
and Educational Foundations, University of Ibadan*

259-272

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Exploring Reflective Inquiry Instructional Strategy through
E-journaling in Boosting In-Service Teachers' Pedagogical
Reasoning and Students' Achievement in Basic Science
Towards 2030 Agenda in Education

**Olubukola Abidemi OKE, Tunde Seinde DUROWOJU &
Temisan Angela IGE**

*Department of Science and Technology Education,
University of Ibadan, Ibadan*

273-287

SECTION THREE
Educational Management
and the 2030 Agenda

CHAPTER TWENTY

Facility Management, Utilization and Quality of Technical
Education in Oyo State, Nigeria

Adelani Kayode Ayanyemi¹, Toyin Aishat Rasaq²

*Department of Educational Management, University of Ibadan,
Ibadan, Nigeria¹*

Institute of Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria²

288-301

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Role of Educational Management in the Attainment of the
Education 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

**Jerry Irmiya BONET,¹ Stephen Awamim LEDAWO²,
Esther Jummai GANA³**

*Department of Educational Foundations and Curriculum,
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria.*

302-316

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Impact Assessment of Primary Education Project II on
Physical Structures in South-west Nigeria: Implication for
the African and Education 2030 Agenda

Margaret Adewunmi ADEBANJO

*Department of Curriculum & Instruction,
Tai Solarin College of Education*

317-326

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Repositioning Human Capital towards Increased Productivity
for Global Competitiveness

A.O. ALAO

*Department of Curriculum Studies and Instruction,
School of Education, Tai Solarin College of Education
Omu-Ijebu, Ogun State, Nigeria*

327-340

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Toward 2030 Education Agenda: Teacher Training and Productivity in Private Secondary Schools in Oyo State
Oluwatoyin Isaiah AWOLOLA

*Department of Curriculum & Instruction,
Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Oyo*

341-352

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Analysis of Funding and Enrolment in Nigerian Polytechnics

DAIRO Grace Oluwakemi

*Department of Educational Management, Faculty of Education,
University of Ibadan, Ibadan*

353-363

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Home and Teacher Factors as Determinants of Students' Academic Achievement toward 2030 Education Agenda in Public Secondary Schools in Oyo State

Christianah Oluwakemi ALABI

*Department of Curriculum & Instruction,
Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Oyo*

364-376

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Principals' Communication Patterns and Effective School Administration: Implications for the achievement of Vision 2030

Olayemi Jumoke ABIODUN-OYEBANJI

Department of Education Management, University of Ibadan

377-391

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Re-visioning Assessment Practices that Impact Indigenous Students through Appropriate Educational Administrative and Management Strategies for the 2030 Agenda

Terhemba Godwin ATSUA¹ & Halima Sule ALHASSAN²

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Institute of Education, University of Ibadan, Nigeria*

*²Department of Educational Administration and Planning
Nassarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria.*

392-408

SECTION FOUR
Information, Communication Technology
Management and the 2030 Agenda

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Attitude of Secondary School Teachers to Technology Usage
and the Way Forward for the Education 2030 Agenda

Adetunmbi L. AKINYEMI & A. O. ABIMBADE

*Educational Technology Unit, Department of Science and
Technology Education,*

University of Ibadan, Ibadan

409-420

CHAPTER THIRTY

Prospects of E-learning in Schools: Costs and benefits
for the development of schools

Olayinka S. ISHOLA

*Department of Educational Management, Faculty of Education,
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria*

421-433

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Stakeholders Perception on Information and Communication
Technology Management in Secondary Schools in Ibadan
Metropolis, Oyo State, Nigeria

E.A. ISAH & F.O. AMOO

*Department of Educational Management,
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Oyo State*

434-447

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

Multidimensional Utilization of Social Media in Enhancing
the Core Competence of Secondary School Teachers in
Oyo State, Nigeria

Funmilola E. OJO¹ & Ibrahim Ojo RASHEED²

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University of Ibadan, Ibadan*

*²Department of Counselling and Human Development Studies,
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria*

448-468

SECTION FIVE
Science, Technology, Engineering and
Mathematics and the 2030 Agenda

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

Technical/Vocational Education and Training:

Entrepreneurship education and the 2030 Agenda

Temitayo Abosedo AKINYELE¹ & Adebimpe Adunni ODUNAYE²

¹*Federal College of Education, Abeokuta*

²*Lead City University, Ibadan*

469-483

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

Employing Active Learning Strategies to Remediate

Performance Deficiencies in and Negative Attitude of Pre-service

Biology Teachers to Population Education

Olayemi Aderokun ASAAJU¹ & Alice Morenike OLAGUNJU²

¹*Department of Special Education and Curriculum Studies,*

Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, Nigeria

²*Department of Science and Technology Education,*

University of Ibadan, Nigeria

484-498

SECTION SIX

Life - Long Learning Opportunities and the 2030 Agenda

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

Environmental Adult Education Programmes as Strategies

for Climate Change Adaptation for Crop Farmers in

River State

Ganiyu ADEKOLA & Ezechinnah Chukwuma ALEXANDER

Department of Adult and Non-formal Education,

University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

499-511

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

Roadmap of the Key Variables and Action Framework for

Attaining SDG 4-Education 2030 Agenda in Nigeria

K.O. OJOKHETA & Abiola Adiat OMOKHABI

Department of Adult Education,

University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

512-527

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

Lifelong Learning Opportunities and the 2030 Agenda

**Peluola Oladehinde TITILOYE¹,
Adenike Adetola AGBONLAHOR² & Victor Akinsanya IDOWU¹**

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Federal College of Education, Abeokuta, Nigeria*

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Federal College of Education, Abeokuta, Nigeria*

528-538

SECTION SEVEN

Counselling Psychology and the 2030 Agenda

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

Influence of Teachers' Performance, Perceived Academic
Performance and School Environment on Interest in
Schooling among Adolescents in Selected Secondary Schools
in Oyo State

**Abu, J. Peter¹ and Obisanya, Funmilayo R.²,
Ekpeyong Violet Oyo Ph.D³**

Department of Adult Education, University of Ibadan¹

*Department of Counselling and Human Development Studies,
University of Ibadan²*

*Department of Continuity Education and Development Studies,
University of Calabar³*

539-554

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

Psycho-sociological Factors Predisposing Attitude towards
Learning among Secondary School Adolescents in Ibadan,
Oyo State, Nigeria

Adetola O. ADEYEMI

*Department of Guidance and Counselling,
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria*

555-571

CHAPTER FORTY

Gifted and Talented Students and the 2030 Agenda:
Meeting their Counselling Needs

G. A. ADELODUN

*Department of Special Education, Faculty of Education,
University of Ibadan, Ibadan.*

572-582

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

Revalidation of Indigenous Standardized Scale Using Ibadan
Creativity Assessment Scale (ICAS)

Taiwo Adebukola KABIR and Chimezie JUDAH

*Department of Counselling and Human Development Studies,
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria*

583-613

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

Effective Classroom Management Skills among Serving
Teachers in Oyo State: Implications for teacher preparations
and professionalism in 2030 Education Agenda

Ndidi Mercy OFOLE

*Department of Guidance and Counselling,
Faculty of Education, University of Ibadan, Nigeria*

614-632

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

Use and Effects of Radio Frequency Identification Technology
(RFID) in Theft Detection for Library Management in
Two Private Universities in Abuja Metropolis

Shehu Amanyi YUSUFU¹, Usman Akor PHILIP², Evarest MADU³

*Department of Library & Information Technology,
Federal University of Technology, Minna, Niger State, Nigeria*

633-648

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

Guidance and Counselling as a Veritable Ingredient in
Building a Balanced Society

Bolanle Idayat OLAGUNJU

*Guidance and Counselling Department
Emmanuel Alayande College of Education Oyo*

649-657

SECTION EIGHT
Human Kinetics, Health and Sports Education
and the 2030 Agenda

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

Physical Education And Sport: Panacea for educating the mind towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's)

Ademola ABASS¹ & Tessy Onogimesike ANGBA²

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658-675

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

Impact of Education on Awareness and Attitude towards the Use of Genotype Test Service Among Undergraduates of University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

Adetoun Tayewo AKINWUSI

Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.

676-685

CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

Influence of Stress, Self-Confidence, Self-Worth and Self-Perception on the Performance of Private Senior Secondary School Athletes in Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo State

Oluwatoyin Mercy JAIYEoba

Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.

686-698

CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

Health Education: A Major empowerment tool for achieving Agenda 2030 in Nigeria

Happiness Opeyemi AGBOOLA¹, Ayodeji Amos OLADIMEJI² & Oluwaseyi O. OLOFINTUYI²

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699-711

SECTION NINE
Gender and the 2030 Agenda

CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

Informed Aspirations: A pathway to female access and effective participation in higher education in the South West Region of Cameroon

Etta Mercy AKI

University of Buea, Cameroon.

712-722

CHAPTER FIFTY

Women Education in Nigeria: Defining the challenges and way forward

Abidoeye A. SARUMI¹ & Ronke Christiana OJO²

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²*Department of Adult Education, University of Lagos, Akoka-Yaba, Lagos*

723-735

CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE

Socio-economic Status and Gender Inequality in Public Secondary Schools in Oyo State: 2030 Agenda as a tool of intervention

Kemi Victoria AWO FIRANYE

*Department of Educational Management,
University of Ibadan, Ibadan*

736-751

CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO

Education 2030 Agenda: Prospects and challenges of girl-child education in Nigeria

Olasunmbo SAVAGE

*Department of Adult Education,
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria*

752-762

CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE

Contemporary Discourse on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Challenges and policy options for girls' education and women empowerment in Nigeria

Chinwe Patience IHUOMA

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National Open University of Nigeria, Abuja*

763-777

5

Justification for Teaching Specialised Subjects and Different Languages to Persons with Special Needs in the School Setting

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Introduction

Educational intervention for persons with special needs requires a high-structured teaching arrangement and strategies, as well as a good or conducive learning environment, where individuals with different exceptionalities would be privileged to learn and acquire different skills and languages necessary for developing an appropriate connection between a word and its value, and also for smooth educational progress. Teaching specialised subjects (such as Arts, Home Economics, Agricultural Science, Physical and Health Education) and different (various) languages regularly used within the child's immediate environment would help towards developing an appropriate communication behaviour and needed skills to become independent and self-relevant. Thus, provision of educational opportunities for children and youth with different kinds of exceptionalities (disabilities) must be holistic in nature, and must also be designed in such a way to cater for the unique needs of such categories of persons with special needs in our school setting. This kind of educational provision and consideration would motivate and help persons with special needs in a school setting to develop interest, co-operate with, and cope maximally in various school activities. It will also make the teaching-learning process become interesting and fun, while at the same time reinforce, stimulate and allow for inclusive participation of persons with special needs in any given assignment.

To educate persons with special needs appropriately in a school setting, and build in them the spirit of survival as well as self-reliance, several mechanisms must be put in place to attend to their unique needs maximally. The educational intervention programmes must be incorporated through specialised training and acquisition of specialized skills, competencies, and knowledge as well as values and procedures for individualizing educational programmes for children, regardless of their special needs (CEC, 1999). This

must be achieved based on the principle of Individualized Educational Programming (IEP) and Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), despite the nature and specific attributes of the special needs children. It is also noteworthy to say here that teaching of specialised subjects and different languages to persons with special needs would pave way for the realisation of the objectives of sustainable development goal of ensuring that all learners (with or without disabilities) acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote appropriate sustainable development.

Teaching of specialised subjects and different languages to persons with special needs remains a must in this present era in order to comply with the rights of children with disabilities Act, culled from Articles 23, 28 and 29 of the Convention on the rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Act 49 of 2016. The Article 23 of the Year 2006, states the right of disabled children to enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance, and facilitate the child's active participation in the community. This Article 23 also states the rights of the disabled child to special care, education, health care, training, rehabilitation, employment preparation, and recreation opportunities. Article 28 states the right of the individuals with special needs to education on the basis of equal opportunity. While, Article 29 stresses it clearly that the kind of education to be given to persons with special needs must be directed towards developing their personality, talents, mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.

In essence, teaching specialised subjects to persons with special needs in school would enhance and promote a kind of self-reliance, and stimulate them to become actively involved in community development. Similarly, Act 49 of 2016 emphasises the empowerment of persons with disabilities (PWD). It also encourages non-discrimination, full and effective participation, and inclusion in society, respect for difference and acceptance of disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity, equality of opportunity, accessibility, equality between men and women, respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities, and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities.

Exposure to specialised subjects, different linguistic knowledge and skills would make persons with special needs become vocationally equipped, mentally alert, as well as physically fit for employment opportunities. It will

prepare and make them employable and socially conscious towards contributing their quota to societal growth. For instance, Physical and Health Education teaching, as well as practices, will go a long way in making them become physically and mentally alert, as the recreation opportunities would help to wear – off their state of despair, loneliness and withdrawal syndrome. It will also help them develop a positive mental attitude and personality in utilising their potentials to the maximum. While the acquisition of different (many) languages would make them understand different linguistic codes, needs as well as clues for survival and interpersonal (mutual) relationship. In addition, it would help them to understand the diversity in culture and cultural values. It would also make them become relevant and fit into any society and culture they find themselves. In fact, once a child with special needs is exposed to specialised subjects and different languages dominant in his or her immediate environment, or those that are globally accepted for communication and inter-cultural relationship, such a child would become privileged to enjoy a full and decent life, that is devoid of total dependence on others for means of livelihood and survival, but encourage self-reliance.

In line with the recommendations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004), a child with any of the above disabilities must be exposed to a specially designed instruction and learning environment to meet the unique needs of such a child. These instructional strategies and services must be based on the principles of special education programme and provisions. The specially modified instruction includes specialised classroom setting with adequate resources and materials, both at home and institutions of learning. The education and training must be organized in the least restrictive environment, with the support of aids and specialized services required to make the ultimate goals achievable.

Categories of Persons with Special Needs

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004; 2011), there are 13 categories of persons with special needs; these are:

- 1. Persons with Autism.** These are the categories of children with repetitive and stereotyped behaviour, social problems and communication difficulties, due to deficits in social – information processing and executive functioning.

2. **Persons with Blindness.** Individuals with bad sight, even with the use of corrective lenses. These are the categories of people who use alternative methods to engage in any activity that persons with normal vision would do using their eyes.
3. **Persons with Deafness.** Those individuals with profound hearing loss to the extent that they depend largely on the use of sign language for communication.
4. **Persons with Emotional Disturbances.** These are the categories of children who have a wide range of specific conditions, such as anxiety disorders, conduct disorders, bipolar disorders, eating disorders, psychotic disorders, and/or obsessive-compulsive disorder.
5. **Persons with Hearing Impairment.** These are the categories of individuals with a kind of complete loss of hearing or partial loss of hearing (hard of hearing).
6. **Persons with Intellectual Disability.** These are the categories of individuals with a set of conditions involving a deficiency in cognitive functioning and adaptive skills (CARE, 2002).
7. **Persons with Multiple Disabilities.** Individuals with several kinds of disabilities having combinations of disabilities and combined impact of the health, educational and socio-emotional development.
8. **Persons with Orthopaedic Impairment.** These are the categories of children with impairments including genetic abnormality, diseases (poliomyelitis, bore-tuberculosis) injury, birth trauma, amputation, burns, fractures and other challenges such as cerebral palsy.
9. **Persons with other Health Impairment.** These are the children with difficulties and limited strength, vitality or alertness, which includes heightened alertness to environmental stimuli. Other conditions include attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), epilepsy, asthma, and Tourette syndrome.
10. **Persons with Learning Disabilities.** Individuals who demonstrate a significant discrepancy, which is not the result of some other handicaps between academic achievement and intellectual abilities in one or more of the areas of oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skills, reading comprehension, mathematical calculation, mathematics reasoning or spelling (CEC, 1999).

- 11. Persons with Speech-Language Impairment.** Individuals with any form of a communication disorder, such as stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment, or a voice impairment that adversely affects educational performance (IDEA, 2001; 2011).
- 12. Persons with Visual Impairment.** These are the categories of individuals diagnosed having limitations in interacting with the environment, as they cannot see the facial expressions of parents and teachers. These individuals cannot perceive social behaviour, and sometimes are unaware of the presence of others unless a sound is made (Celeste, 2002).
- 13. Persons with Traumatic Brain Injury.** These are individuals with the inability to process and understand information, or those with difficulties in paying attention or attending to more than one thing at a time. Those who exhibit difficulty in understanding and expressing or responding appropriately to another person's request, as their executive functions are most commonly affected (Wortzel & Arciniegas, 2012).

Apart from these 13 categories of persons with special needs, there is a particular category of persons with intellectual superiority as explained below.

Persons with Intellectual Superiority

These are the individuals who are either having a gifted or talented ability. A person might be classified as being gifted if he or she possesses an average of three or more abilities. While a talented child might be classified based on the demonstration of a specific (exceptional) ability in a particular area or field of study such as mathematics, music, and other performing arts or psychomotor (Biakolo, 1993).

Education of Persons with Special Needs: A Prioritised Programme

Once a child is observed having one or comorbid of the 13 categories of special needs aforementioned and significantly impinges the educational performance, there might be a need to prioritise the educational provisions and services for such a child. In essence, such a child must be considered for a specialised educational programme (Special Education) with a specific programme of instruction, special classroom arrangement, appropriate access to specialists, and modifications of the educational programmes such as

curriculum and teaching methods, least restrictive environment, and individualized educational programming to assist the child achieve academic success and self-reliance as well as independence.

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, (2006), the educational provisions for these individuals amongst others must be structured so as to provide a platform for ensuring free and equal access to education for all children from early learning to secondary level. Quality education must be delivered in a safe and supportive child-friendly learning environment. These must be achieved with an aim to reduce barriers to learning, development, and participation in the expected activities. In essence, both the environmental and individual barriers must be reduced, in order for the children with disabilities to be able to develop to their fullest potential (Johnson & Skjorten, 2001). If these barriers are not reduced, persons with disabilities will not be able to reach their full academic, social-emotional and physical potentials. Without adequate prioritisation of the educational and other supportive services for the individuals with special needs in a school setting the school environment will not be friendly and motivating for learning. It is important, therefore, to realise that without friendly environment the individuals with special needs would develop a sense of insecurity, low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence, which might be motivated by the combination of environmental, attitudinal and individual-developed barriers to learning and socio-emotional development. Indeed, Children with special needs must be a given quality education, which is safe, child-friendly and with a broad range of life experiences, addition to learning processes to be ensured through seasoned instructors and resources. This kind of educational provision will provide them with a meaningful and relevant education as well as support services to develop to their full potential. According to Fukuchi (2008), such education would enable them to experience a range of environments that minimize the impact of disabilities and making them receive appropriate teaching and learning resources, to the extent that they can enjoy safe, supportive and inclusive learning environment.

More importantly, for children with disabilities to gain access to quality education, enjoy safe and supportive services, models for early detection, identification and intervention are essential for children with disabilities to reach their full intellectual, social, emotional and physical potential (UNESCO, 2015).

Need for Teaching Specialised Subjects to Persons with Special Needs

Understanding the need of teaching specialised subjects to persons with special needs in the school settings (regular or special/inclusive schools) remain an impetus to achieve the overall goal of promoting equal access to quality education for all children, and ensuring that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development. Teaching specialized subjects to them would provide a platform towards enabling every child with unique characteristics, abilities, interests and learning needs receiving a wide range of quality education, and training that will make them develop their mental and physical abilities, talents and personality to their full potential.

According to Disability Action Council, Cambodia (2009), it is important for children with disabilities to be educated and trained to learn about the world around them, so as to become useful members of the community. This kind of comprehensive education would enable them to become independent adults as well as help to prepare them fully for work and earn a living, or being independent and self-reliant. Similarly, teaching specialized subjects such as Creative Arts, Music Home Economics, Physical and Health Education, and Agricultural science would enable persons with special needs, who could not learn to read, write and count like other children acquire basic skills and vocations that would aid their life adjustment, sense of belonging and social competence as well as self-reliance. For instance, teaching subjects like Social Studies and Civic Education to persons with special needs would equip them with values and norms towards accepting rules and taking responsibilities, maintaining friendship and giving them the feeling of belonging or conforming to the societal dictates and expectations. This subject, if taught properly would teach persons with special needs how to get along with others. How to become well in the community and even at home; and how to relate or work with other members of the family and community. Teaching and learning Social Studies would provide persons with special needs with purposeful and meaningful learning experiences that are challenging, and of high quality and tailored towards intellectual/social development. In essence, if these individuals were denied the opportunity to build social studies values, vocabulary and background knowledge, this can lead to lower literacy levels, and ironically increases the achievement gap. This act will also deny them the privilege to acquire adequate skills and knowledge, which are foundational for life long participation as citizens (Grant, 2007).

Whereas teaching subjects like Physical and Health Education or Music/Creative Arts would help identify and develop both the talents and intellectual of abilities these sets of children with special needs. It would also help channel those abilities into creative or productive relevance towards the betterment of them and the society in general. In fact, teaching Physical and Health Education to the persons with special needs would help them develop the skills knowledge and competencies to live healthy and physically active lives at home and in school, even for the rest of their life. The skills taught in Physical and Health Education would develop the whole child in every child with special needs as it will further provide a variety of services and activities which role motivate the individuals with special needs, and establish them on lifelong fitness goals. Physical and Health Education classes would provide all categories of students with the opportunities to improve fitness and be active to counter societal trends towards obesity and increased sedentary behaviours. This would be achieved in addition to achieving outcomes relating to physical activity, self-esteem, motor skills and fitness (Morgan & Hansen, 2003).

Case and Whitaer (1998) expressed the importance of teaching Agricultural science as to prepare and support individuals for careers, build awareness and develop leadership for the food, fiber, and natural resource systems. Effective teaching and learning of Agricultural science by the individuals with special needs would help provide the stimuli to enhance direct engagement or placement in agricultural business, foster the spirit of entrepreneurship and innovation towards becoming independent and earning a living through one's skills and developed abilities. In the same vein, the teaching of Music to the individuals with special needs would provide the avenue to identify and nurture those who have talent in music, towards earning a living through this skill and special talent. It will also help to facilitate and promote the overall development of the personalities of the individuals with special needs.

Music education has been observed, when taught in school having the capacity to stimulate all learning domains including the psychomotor domain (the development of skill), the cognitive domain (the acquisition of knowledge) and in particular and in significant ways the affective domain (the learner's willingness to receive, internalize and share what is learned) including music appreciation and sensitivity (Yudkin, 2008).

Put differently, teaching specialised subjects to individuals with special needs in a school setting would elicit their participation and readiness to learn as well as equipping them with skills and knowledge to become active members of the society, earning a living and becoming self-reliant.

Need for Teaching Different Languages to Persons with Special Needs

The teaching of different or many languages to persons with special needs is pivotal to their intellectual, emotional communication, social needs provided those languages and their contents, as well as the methodologies employed to teach them, are appropriate for those individuals with special needs learning needs. Research has shown that, teaching other (foreign) languages, apart from ones native language is life-enhancing, and that the very precise benefits to any specific child with disabilities may be unpredictable (Cylne, 2005).

According to European Commission in the year 2005 on the matters of all young people in the European Union, whatever their disability, whether educated in mainstream or segregated schools/ streams, have equal rights to foreign language education. This European commission explained clearly that the special educational needs in Europe, through the teaching and learning of languages, bring out from the individuals with special needs, the expected insights, and innovation. Teaching and learning of different or foreign languages by individuals with special needs enable them to learn, to accept and value people from different backgrounds from their own background. In fact, learning another language(s) apart from theirs would help them to become more aware of their own languages, and this awareness could also lead to expected improvements in literacy across the curriculum (EU, 2005). With the realization of the fact that all children are citizens of a plural-lingual world, and having equal right to learn about other cultures and languages make it mandatory for schools and teachers to teach individuals with special needs other languages apart from their own. In line with this, it has been reported by the European Commission recently that "over the last fifteen years, it has been observed that young people with all forms of difficulties and disabilities have successfully and happily learnt foreign languages". Thus, teaching other languages in schools for persons with all sorts of disabilities has become an integral part of the school curriculum, and students should be encouraged to develop interest and learn other (foreign) languages simultaneously with other subjects. Although, learning other languages might be terrific, challenging

stressful and humiliating experience for persons with disabilities, due to their low ability in learning, poor language learning ability, lack of effort and motivation towards learning, increased level of anxiety and poor concept understanding. At the same time, if a seasoned teacher(s) handles the teaching of the foreign languages, with appropriate use of adequate resource materials and models, the teaching would produce an expected outcome, and helps the persons with disabilities to record an improved phonological awareness, and ability to perceive as well as produce the learnt language for interpersonal relationship (Schwarz 1997).

Teaching different languages to persons with special needs in the school setting, amongst others would enable them to learn about other people's culture, and through learning about their culture, would advance reasons for establishing mutual respect for others, and eventually leading to hope for peace. In the national statement and plan for languages education in Australian schools between 2005-2008, the need to promote language teaching across Australia was identified as a priority. The document emphasises the acquisition of second language as fundamental to supporting and promoting the benefits of language education (Clyne, 2005). Teaching and learning a second (foreign) language have been found with evidence to enhance children's (irrespective of their physical and intellectual conditions), psychological and health challenges) metalinguistic awareness and also their reading readiness (Yelland, Polland & Mercuri, 1993). Based on the findings of Bialystok (1987) and Liddicoat (2001) the bilingual children stand to be advantaged in a number of aspects of word awareness when compared to the monolingual children, and that learning a second language is, therefore, a resource for enhancing literacy, but not a problem for acquiring literacy. In essence, teaching many (different) languages to persons with special needs would promote better grasping and understanding of linguistic skills, as well as enhancing improved literacy and communication among them.

Roles of School in Enhancing Teaching and Learning of Specialised Subjects and different languages

- The school should embrace or ensure effective teaching and learning specialized subjects and different languages. This would help to stimulate persons with special needs to develop appropriate skills and

communication patterns appropriate for survival, in life, and earning a living towards being independent.

- The school should encourage the parents or caregivers of persons with special needs to complement and reinforce what their wards are learning in school.
- The school must endeavour to keep abreast with the characteristics and overall needs of persons with special needs, with the aim of ensuring appropriate gain through education.
- Teachers must work in line with the diversities, natural interests and abilities/ talents of each of the persons with special needs in school to educate or train them towards becoming useful to themselves and to the society in general. In fact, the recognition and working in line with their diversities and natural endowments are foundational to the development of individuals with special needs knowledge, skills, and dispositions as members of the society they belong.
- The school must provide a wide array of materials and resources for teaching and learning specialised subjects and different languages, as well as to explore and manipulate the acquisition of appropriate skills.
- The school must adopt effective professional development, which would serve as a model or a kind of flexibility in teaching and learning those specialized subjects, interactive learning styles and use of instructional strategies and materials that could help stimulate persons with special needs to learn.
- Effort must be made by the teachers and parents to raise advocacy and awareness on the importance of teaching and learning of specialised subjects, as well as different languages to the persons with special needs.

The teachers must endeavour to build worthwhile students or learners' instruction in persons with special needs. They must make a concerted effort to build choices into school activities whenever possible, as well as using appropriate verbal prompts (Pre-correction) before those individuals with special needs engage in a task to promote success (Koegel, Koegel & Carter, 1999).

- The teachers should also try to create extra individualized schedules for these categories of people to receive additional or alternatives services and supports towards mastering the skills. While at the same, they must be provided with structured opportunities to participate in social interaction, which can help to foster mutual relationships between special needs and typical children within the same school environment.
- The school should try to create a kind of positive learning environment and climate to stimulate persons with special needs learning specialised subjects and different languages. While the classroom subject teachers must set up structure, standard and procedures towards eliciting the interest of these individuals in participating in the task of acquiring these skills and knowledge.
- The school administrative organisation or classroom management styles must be restructured to facilitate expected outcomes and achievement in the overall educational goals of strengthening equal access to all categories of learners in school to acquire necessary skills and knowledge towards self – reliance and contributions of one’s quota towards the societal development.
- Structured accommodations modifications of concept and adaptations necessary for learning must be provided to stimulate and motivate persons with special needs to learn specialised subjects and other languages must be considered and done effectively.

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