

# 4 Assessment in Programme Intervention of Special Needs Children (SNC).

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## Abstract

*This paper discussed assessment as a prerequisite in programme intervention for special needs children. In doing so, issues such as the special needs children; concept of assessment; approaches to assessment of special needs children; assessment procedures of special needs children; and the importance of assessment of special needs children were highlighted.*

## Introduction

Every child comes to school different from the other in terms of strength, weakness, abilities, disabilities, levels of readiness or preparedness to learn, moods, temperaments, home background and/or level of motivation. This is more so with special needs children who are emotionally, intellectually, physiologically and/or psychologically challenged. This makes it difficult for a teacher to manage placement and instructional programme development for them. Faced with this difficulty, he now has to look for ways of gathering relevant information about these children in order to appropriately place and plan instructional programme for them. This informs why assessment is necessary.

Cross and Coin (1997) as cited in Chukwu (2004), defined assessment as a systematic process of collecting information both on a child's level of functioning in specific areas of development and on his learning characteristics and carefully interpreting the information for the purpose of planning intervention and educational programme. Through assessment it is possible to determine students that require special education services and which educational techniques and approaches are most appropriate for

intervention as well as for referrals, diagnosis, placement, vocational planning etc. (Alfredo & Zamora-Duran, 1997).

It could therefore be adduced that assessment begins and end with special education because; assessment has always been the most crucial aspect of special education (Gbegbin and Ajobiewe, 2004). It is a necessary tool for decision-making regarding appropriate educational placement and programme intervention for the special needs children. This paper highlights issues related to assessment in programme intervention of special needs children, concept of assessment, approaches to assessment of special needs children, assessment procedures of special needs children, and the importance of assessment of special needs children.

## The Special Needs Children

A special needs child is a child who has special learning needs either because of significant sensory deficit or unusual high intellectual ability that is not properly addressed in the regular school programme (Ozaji and Musa 1999). Okuoyibo and Dada (2004) view the special needs child as one who deviates from the ordinary child; such that he/she requires special attention, special services and other areas that could make life meaningful and worth living.

Special Needs Children have been categorized into 3, viz disabled, disadvantaged and gifted (Nigerian National Policy on Education, 2004). In these categories, the disabled may include:

- a) visually impaired (blind and the partially sighted);
- (b) hearing impaired (deaf and the partially



- hearing);
- c) physically and health impaired (deformed limbs, asthmatic);
- d) mentally retarded (educable, trainable, bedridden);
- e) emotionally disturbed (hyperactive, hypoaactive/the socially maladjusted/behaviour disorder);
- f) speech impaired (stammerers, stutterers);
- g) learning disabled (have psychological/neurological educational phobia or challenges);
- h) multiply handicapped.

They are children whose learning difficulties or disabilities compel them to require additional help in order to achieve their full educational potentials. Such difficulties, according to Russell (2004), may arise from physical difficulties, problems with sight, hearing or speech, a learning disability, emotional or behavioural difficulties or a medical or health problem.

The disadvantaged are the children of nomadic pastorals, migrant fisher folks, migrant farmers, hunters, etc. who, due to their lifestyles and means of livelihood, are unable to have access to the conventional educational provision and therefore require special education to cater for their particular/peculiar needs and circumstances.

The gifted and talented are children/adults who have/possess very high intelligent quotient and are naturally endowed with special traits (in arts, creativity, music, leadership, intellectual precocity, etc.) and therefore find themselves insufficiently challenged by the regular school/college/university programmes.

### **Concept of Assessment**

Abang, Adingi, Awanbor, Ladipo, and Cybue (1988) views assessment as a multifaceted procedure of gathering information about a referred person in order to be able to determine the needs of that person and thus make professional decisions about programme development, implementation and evaluation. Similarly, Salvia & Ysseldyke (1991) conceptualized

assessment as a multi-faceted collection of information for purposes of specifying and verifying problems and making decisions about students.

Assessment in education is the process of collecting information based on a child's level of functioning in specific areas of development and on his learning characteristics as well as carefully interpreting the information, which is collected (Andzayi, 1992). It is for the purpose of planning early intervention and educational programme. In this respect, it is a guide to an appropriate education and a central part to the teaching and learning process. Sharing similar view, Liman (2004) points out that assessment rightly includes detection of disability or ability and when appropriate, diagnose of the cause of the condition.

The foregoing informs assessment as fundamentally aimed at describing the special needs person's ability to perform certain tasks and determining his special learning, social and physical needs. Consequently, Okeke (2001) argues that meaningful service can only commence when special needs children have been assessed educationally, behaviourally and originally.

### **Approaches to Assessment of Special Needs Children**

Okyere and Adams (2003) quoted Ysseldyke and Algozzine (1995) as identifying three main areas to assess in order to collect adequate information on student's behaviour. These areas of assessment include the learner, the instruction and the classroom environment.

#### **Assessment of the Learner:**

This deals with the approach through which the present status of the learner in relation to learning tasks (i.e. what the learner knows and does not know) is revealed. There is no doubt that teachers are very familiar with this form of assessment and do it always.

#### **Assessment of Instruction:**

Assessment of instruction gives information about the teachers' teaching



activities. Information such as the teachers' types of instructional strategies used over a period of time and their effect on children's learning are collected. The appropriateness of teacher's teaching tasks at the level of their children as well as how these tasks are presented, is noted. What is assessed is determined by the instruction the child receives. In this regard, if a child is not achieving, it might be due to several reasons including the teachers' teaching strategies.

### **Assessment of the Classroom Environment:**

Assessment of the classroom environment yields information on classroom interactions, that is, interaction between teachers and children and children with other children. The assessment question usually asked is "What is wrong with the classroom climate for learning?" This forms the premise on which the following probing questions could be asked: Are children given the opportunity to respond to task presented to them in the learning process? Do teachers give enough time for children to respond after posing questions? Do teachers give enough examples and opportunities for children to practice new tasks introduced to them?

The foregoing questions drives home the point that assessment in all the three areas gives teachers enough information on which appropriate and effective intervention for special needs children could be based.

### **Assessment Procedures of Special Needs Children**

The assessment procedures of special needs children could be formal or informal or both as the case may be. However, the two procedures are complementary such that in informal assessment, information is usually supplied from observation of parents, peer group, teachers and other professionals and self-performance whereas different tests are employed in formal assessment. These tests include individual intelligence tests, group intelligence tests, achievement tests and creativity tests (Uyanwa & Aikomo, 2004). Nevertheless, in assessing special needs

children the following procedures are necessary:

**a) Screening:** This involves case finding and selection of those children who need thorough and costlier examination. The assessor/teacher is enabled, at this stage to ascertain the children's current instructional level; examine the learning environment and initiate alternative approaches to accommodate their academic and behavioural needs.

**b) Diagnosis:** This involves the discovering of the nature/type of exceptionality that the special needs child has. It entails in-depth analyses of the child's intellectual, academic, sensory and other abilities to establish eligibility for special education. A diagnostic process usually requires a multi-disciplinary team's attention.

**c) Instructional Planning:** This involves the use of the diagnostic information to design an Individualized Education Programme (IEP), long and short-terms objectives based on the child's needs. The plan spells out the duties of special and regular educators and support personnel.

**d) Child Evaluation:** This involves administering tests to determine whether a particular child is indeed making expected progress and/or meeting the objectives that were originally set out for him/her. A variety of procedure can be used to modify the child's performance where he/she is not progressing or otherwise responding at a faster rate to stated goals and objectives.

**E) Programme Evaluation:** This involves determining the effectiveness of a special programme through tests and observation. Teachers, parents and inter-disciplinary professionals examine the resultant outcome of the programme over the past one-year to decide whether or not the special services can be continued, modified or discontinued out-Rightly.



### **The Importance of Assessment Of Special Needs Children**

- Assessment is of paramount importance in meeting the educational needs of special needs children. In fact there would not be any effective treatment of the children in question, even with the so-called “normal” children if proper assessment is not conducted. In this respect, assessment is used to determine proper information about the special needs children in order to tailor-make educational programmes to suit their individual needs.
- It gives information to parents, government and others concerned with the welfare of special needs children on the progress and problems encountered by this category of children in the school system.
- Assessment is used to promote children into the next class and for setting educational programmes that suit individual children and groups with identical needs.
- Assessment of special need children is carried out in order to determine their academic performance in terms of what they can and/or cannot do.
- Assessment helps in the placement of children with special needs into appropriate education services, vocational training and job placement.
- Assessment is used for screening and determining who needs special education; preparing the individualized educational programmes, planning instruction, monitoring progress and evaluating the intervention programmes.
- It provides children, parents, teachers, psychologists and other professionals with information that assists them to make decisions that will enhance the standard of education.

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● It provides the teacher with a vehicle for planning series of specific curriculum experiences that are based on specific goals and objectives related to the information derived from assessment (Osuorji, 2005).

● Assessment provides the special educator/teacher with the looking glass through which the special needs child's specific areas of strength and weakness could be seen. By this, it facilitates the teacher's effective instruction and provides feedback to both the teacher and the child.

Invariably, it is obvious from the foregoing that assessment is an indispensable aspect of special education. Proper assessment of special needs children would eliminate haphazard placement and misplacement of these children in the school system. Sharing this view, Ogwu and Omede (2004) posit that when children are properly diagnosed of their specific problems through assessment, right Individualized Education Plan (IEP) would be designed to suit their problems. Assessment is therefore, an important aspect of the education of special needs children.

### **Conclusion**

Assessment is necessary for identification and initial programme intervention and placement decisions as well as determining the appropriateness of an ongoing programme for special needs children. In this respect, no initiation of educational programmes and placement for the special need child could be successfully executed without assessment of the child and/or the programme. This, therefore, informs that assessment is a prerequisite in programme intervention for special needs children.



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