

# **Introduction to Special Education**



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## **Introduction**

We inhabit a diverse world with every individual being unique and special by virtue of difference in physical structure, psychological make-up, social tendencies and behavioural, emotional competencies, educational and socio-economic background. As a result, a child comes to this earth with its own unique abilities and capacities of body and mind. Some are fortunate enough to have extraordinary abilities or capacities, while others are averages or even suffer from so many deficits and deficiencies since their birth. This gap between the abilities and capacities of the children related to their learning, adjustment and development found at the time of their birth, may further be widened by the nature of the environmental differences encountered by them in their nourishment and education. It results in labelling them as exceptionally superior or inferior, capable or incapable in one or the other aspects of their personality development.

## **Concept of Special Education**

People of the society consider those persons as exceptional who significantly deviate from the normal people mentally, physically, socially or emotionally and to the extent that they may become problematic to the family and society in all social situations.

Special Education in its simple meaning stands for a type of education that is quite specific and special in nature. It includes all aspects of education which are applied to exceptional children like physical, mental, disadvantaged, and gifted children.

Special Education refers to a range of educational and social services provided by the public-school system and other educational institutions to individuals with disabilities who are between three and 21 years of age. It is 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 special needs.

Special Education refers to the education of children who differ socially, mentally, or physically from the average to such an extent that they require modifications of usual school practices. It serves children with emotional, behavioural, or cognitive impairments or with intellectual, hearing, vision, speech, or learning disabilities, gifted children with advanced academic abilities, and children with orthopaedic or neurological impairments, deafness, blindness, speech disorder, mental disorder, gifted child, childhood disease and disorder and learning disabilities.

Special Education includes learning disabilities (such as dyslexia), communication disorders, emotional and behavioural disorders (such as ADHD), physical disabilities (such as osteogenesis imperfecta, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, spina bifida, and Friedreich's ataxia), and developmental disabilities (such as autistic spectrum disorders including Autism and Asperger Syndrome and Intellectual Disability) and many other disabilities.

## Definitions

Special Education has been conceptualised and defined by various Special Education experts, some important definitions are given below:

**Kirk and Gallagher (1986):** "When youngsters in the same class room are remarkably different, it is difficult for the teacher to help them reach their educational potential without some kind of assistance. The help that the schools devise for children who differ significantly from the norm is called Special Education".

**Bob Algozzine (1990):** "Special Education is the instruction designed for students with disabilities or gifts and talents who also have special learning needs. Some of these students have learning difficulties in regular classroom. They need Special Education to function properly in school".

**Heward (2000):** "Special Education is an individually planned, specialized, intensive, goal directed instruction. When practiced most effectively and ethically, Special Education is also characterized by the use of research-based teaching methods, the application of which is guided by direct and frequent measures of student performance".

Thus, Special Education is an individually planned, systematically implemented and carefully evaluated instruction to help Special Children achieve the greatest possible personal, self-sufficiency and success in present and further environment.

## Nature and Characteristics of Special Education

On the basis of above-mentioned definitions, the major characteristics of Special Education are as follow:

- Special Education is always meant for meeting the special needs and requirements of the exceptional or special children.
- Special Education is diagnostic in nature, i.e. it helps in diagnosing and identifying the nature and degree of the deviations of the children from their normal peers.
- It is intervention based, means it always aims to provide an intervention for the problems faced by the special children for example in the field of learning and adjustment.
- Special Education is developmental in nature, which means that it focuses on the overall development of a child from womb to tomb.
- Special Education is specific and specialized in nature for example, it needs special teachers, special students, special methods, special aids and special learning environment for making the special students learn and progress.
- Special Education is highly individualized, for example, it takes care of the special needs or disability of an individual child and helps him to develop his potentiality to the maximum.
- Special Education is continuous i.e. it is provided to the special child from the very beginning till the end or at least up to the time it is needed for the welfare, progress and adjustment of the child.
- Special Education is intensive in nature i.e. it is based on all-round efforts from the educators as well as the child in order to address the individualized specific needs of the exceptional children.

- Special Education is goal directed i.e. it is always based upon purposeful instructions, well thought and planned learning experiences to the children.
- Special Education is research oriented and experimental in nature i.e. it follows evidence-based practices.
- Special Education is measurable and testable in nature i.e. it can be tested with the help of various scientific tools and techniques.
- Special Education is universal in nature i.e. it covers all the individuals without any discrimination on the basis of age, caste, colour, gender, ethnicity etc.

### **Historical Background of Special Education**

In the ancient periods, the disabled children were considered as a curse to the family and society and they were treated as useless in the society. With the advancement in time, we get the evidence of concept of Special Education primarily started from Europe and America.

- In the mid 1555 Spanish monk *Pedro Ponce de Leon* successfully taught hearing impaired children.
- In 1620 *Juan Pablo Ronet* wrote the first book on Education of Deaf children.
- *John Bulwer* in 1644, published book on Education of Deaf Children in England.
- In 1680, *George Dalgarno* discovered instructional methods for deaf and dumb men.
- Education for children with Mental retardation was started by French physician *Itard* (1755-1832).
- In 1767, the first school for Deaf child was established by *Thomas Braidwood* in England.
- In 1775, *Michel del' Epee* and *Ambroise Sicard* established the first school for sign language in Paris (France).
- *Samuel Heinicke* (1778) developed oral method for lip reading and speaking skills in Germany at Leipzig.
- In 1784, *Valentin Hany*, a French philanthropist founded the National Institute for the Blind in Paris.
- *Louise Braille* (1809-1852) developed the system of Braille Language using raised dots to represent the letter or alphabets, manually prepared for visually impaired.
- *Samuel Graindley Howe* in 1829 established the first school for Blind in Watertown, Massachusset.
- *Frank Hall* (1843-1911) developed Braille typewriter.
- In 1847, the first School for Deaf children (today known as American School for the Deaf) was established by *Gallandet* using the French method.
- *Grahma Bell* (1847-1992) and *Helen Keller* (1880-1957) worked tirelessly for the Deaf and Disabled children.
- *Binet* (1857-1911) made an immense contribution with the invention of Intelligence testing.
- *Edward Seguin* published a classic textbook "Idiocy and it's Treatment by the physiological Method" in 1866.
- *Decroly* (1871-1932) developed a curriculum for mentally retarded children in Belgium.
- In 1932, Braille printing system was standardised internationally.

### **Major contributors: (Europe)**

**J.M.G. Itard** (1774 - 1838): A French physician, commonly known as father of Special Education for the mentally retarded and physically handicapped children. In 1801–05 Itard worked with a 11-12-year-old wild boy Victor who looked like animal in appearance and behaviour. He was naked, dirty, scarred, and unable to speak, and he selected food by smell.

Itard could not only make him normal, but he did dramatically improve his behaviour through proper training, nurturing and systematic educative procedure.

Itard was the originator of instructional devices, the inventor of behaviour modification techniques, the first speech specialist, creator of oral education of the deaf.

**Edouard Seguin** (1812-1880): Being influenced by the achievements of Itard he established the first public school for the feeble-minded in Paris in 1837. In 1866 he published his classic textbook *Idiocy and Its Treatment by the Physiological Method*. His concept of education was the promotion of the harmonious physical, intellectual, and moral developments of the child. His techniques and materials later become the basis for the so-called Montessori Method.

### **Major contributors: (America)**

**Louis Braille** (1809-1852): He developed the system of Braille Language using raised dots to represent the letter or alphabets. Braille was the most important figure in the history of education of the blind. Braille, who became blind due to an accident during his early childhood, developed a revolutionary system of reading and writing for the blind. The Braille method is still recognised as the most appropriate method of reading and writing for the blind.

**Samuel Gridley Howe** (1801-1876): He was a physician in the United States and had a keen interest in the education of blind and deaf children. His phenomenal success with one of his pupils, Laura Bridgman, a deaf-blind-mute, earned him international fame.

**Anne Sullivan** (1866-1936): She was a student of Howe and was greatly influenced by her teacher's training methods. Although she was visually handicapped, she served as Helen Keller's tutor. *Helen Keller* was deaf-blind-mute. Sullivan's dedicated efforts could bring astonishing results. Helen quickly learned the names of objects and events in her environment. By the age of ten, she learned to say aloud "*I-am-not-dumb-now*". Later she became a graduate and wrote a number of books.

**Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet** (1787-1851): He had keen interest in the education of the deaf. He established the first American residential school for the deaf in 1817 in Hartford. The Gallaudet College in Washington D.C., which is the only college for the deaf was named in his honour.

### **Development of Special Education in India**

**i) Kothari Commission (1964-1966):** The Kothari Commission was the first Education Commission which brought up the issue of children with special needs. The major recommendations:

- To promote the universalisation of elementary education.
- Integration of handicapped children in the regular school programme.
- Promoting mutual understanding between handicapped and non-handicapped children.

**ii) Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) (1982-1983):** It was the centrally sponsored scheme for training of disabled children.

- Preschool training for disabled children and counselling for parents.
- 100% financial assistance for education of disabled children for example books, stationary, uniform, transport allowance, escort allowance, readers allowance, lodging and boarding facilities in hostels.
- Survey for identification and assessment of disabled children.

**iii) National Policy on Education (1986):** Specifies about training of handicapped and non-handicapped children.

- This policy instructs that wherever possible education of children with locomotor handicaps and other mild handicaps will be common with that of others.
- The children with severe handicaps are proposed to be enrolled in special schools with hostels at district headquarters.
- This policy also talks about the universalisation of primary education for the handicapped children along with other children by 1995.

**iv) Project on Integrated Education for Disabled (PIED) 1987:** To strengthen the IEDC, *Project on Integrated Education for Disabled (PIED)* was started with assistance from UNICEF in 1987.

- Under this project all the schools were converted into integrated schools and teachers were trained to handle the needs of special/disabled children in classrooms.

**v) The Programme of Action (POA) 1992:** The commission postulates that:

- A child with disability who can be educated in a general school should be educated in general school only and not in a special school.
- Those children who are initially admitted to special school for training (that is required in addition to their regular school curriculum) should be transferred to general schools once they acquire daily living skills, communication skills and basic academic skills.
- For achieving equalisation of educational opportunities, POA (1992) also envisages that children with disability should have access to quality education comparable to other children.
- Reorienting pre-service and in-service teacher education-programme to meet the special need in the classroom.
- Reorienting adult and non-formal education programmes to meet educational and vocational training needs of persons with disability.
- Reduction of drop-out rates at par with other children.

**vi) Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) Act 1992:** The National Policy on Education 1986, recommended to establish the Rehabilitation Council of India. The Rehabilitation Council of India Act was passed in 1992 which gave the legal authority.

Major features of RCI Act are:

- To mandate minimum standards of education for professionals working with individuals with disabilities viz. special teachers and educators.
- This Act makes it mandatory for every special teacher/educator to be registered with the Council.
- This Act also states that every child with Disability has right to be taught by qualified teacher.

- The Act also lays down provision for punishment for the teachers who are engaged in teaching children with special needs without a license.

**vii) The Persons with Disability Act (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation), 1995 (PWD Act, 1995):** This PWD Act is a significant landmark in the history of special/disability education in India. It is a composite act covering all aspects of education and economic rehabilitation of the disabled.

- Every child with a disability has access to free education in an appropriate environment till he attains the age of 18 years.
- For this purpose, it recommends making changes in assessment and curriculum, and removing architectural barriers, to support inclusion.
- It also recommends providing free books and uniform to children with disabilities.

**viii) District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) 1995:** This programme worked on universalization of education and was based on assumption that universalisation of education is only possible when it includes children with disability.

DPEP aimed at:

- To address the issues of drop-outs, out of school children and early marriage by starting primary school in every village.
- Alternate schooling with flexible curriculum would be promoted with informal evaluation criteria, flexible timings for education of children with mild to moderate disabilities.

**ix) The National Trust for Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act (National Trust Act) 1999:** The focus of this Act has been to protect and promote the rights of persons with autism, cerebral palsy, mental retardation and multiple disabilities on a national level.

**x) The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) 2000:** An ambitious programme seeking education for all by 2010.

- The thrust of SSA is on providing inclusive education to all the children with special needs in regular classrooms.
- The SSA will ensure that every child with special needs, irrespective of the kind category and degree of disability, is provided education in an appropriate environment.
- It has a target of eight years of elementary schooling for all children including children with disabilities in the age: group of 6-14 years by 2010.

**xi) The National Policy for Persons with Disabilities 2006:** has also highlighted this need by saying that *"there is a need for mainstreaming of the persons with disabilities in the general education system through inclusive education"*.

It has emphasized:

- The development of training modules for teachers for inclusive education.
- Making schools barrier free and accessible for all types of disabilities.
- Establishing model schools of inclusive education in each state.

- Identifying children with disabilities up to the age of 6 years and providing necessary instructions for making them join inclusive education.
- Taking steps for the schools not discouraging enrolment of students on account of their disability.

**xii) The Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009:** Through its 86th amendment of the Constitution passed in 2002 the Government of India introduced a new article 21A: Right to Education, a quite significant and major landmark in the history of education of the country.

- This provides "the state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of 6 to 14 years (covering children with disabilities) in such a manner as the state may, by law, determine.
- The 86<sup>th</sup> Amendment also modified Article 45, which now reads as "The state shall provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of 6 years.

**xiii) Rights of Persons with Disability Act (RPWD), 2016:** The Government of India in order to comply with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Person with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2007) undertook the amendment of Persons with Disability Act, 1995 (PWD Act, 1995) and replaced it with the RPWD Act, 2016.

This new act was fine-tuned considering the socio-cultural and local needs of the society, and the available resources.

- The Act clearly states that it aims to uphold the dignity of every Person with Disability (PwD) in the society and prevent any form of discrimination.
- The act also facilitates full acceptance of people with disability and ensures full participation and inclusion of such persons in the society.
- The act contains 17 chapters with 102 sections. It defines PwD as any person with long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which on interacting with barriers hinder effective and equal growth in the society.

## **Objectives of Special Education**

Objectives of Special Education can be narrated as per the following:

- i) Early identification and assessment of special needs of handicapped children/differently abled children.
- ii) Early intervention to prevent a condition from becoming a condition that might impose functional limitations of severe nature.
- iii) Psychoeducation of parents about prevention and remediation of defects, care, and training of handicapped children in daily living skills, self-help skills, pre-academic skills and communication skills.
- iv) Facilitate the all-round development of special children by need based educational, personal and vocational guidance.
- v) Actualise their (special children) abilities and capacities to their maximum extent.
- vi) Community mobilization and awareness of problems of special children and their education.
- vii) Rehabilitation of the special children.
- viii) Facilitate effective living through development of realistic self-concept.

## Principles of Special Education

Special Education is based on following principles:

- i) Individual differences:** Every individual is unique in its own way i.e. every child has its own capabilities, problems and needs, thus differentiating one child from another.
- ii) Zero rejection:** All children with disabilities must be provided a free and appropriate education without any discrimination.
- iii) Non-discriminatory evaluation:** Every child with special needs should receive a full individualised examination before being placed in a Special Education programme. Regular tests are also needed to assess his progress and difficulties in learning abilities.
- iv) Individualized Education Programme:** Student with special needs require individualized education programme either in a resource room or a special class in the regular school for some part of the day.
- v) Least restrictive environment:** It should be encouraged to teach and train children with special needs along with the other children in the regular classroom with least restrictions.
- vi) Parental participation:** The process of Special Education can be made effective by active participation of parents in the educational programme designed for special children.

## Scope of Special Education

Special Education is a profession, a service with tools and techniques to meet the special needs of special children. It is individually planned, systematically implemented, and carefully evaluated instruction to help special learners achieve the greatest possible personal self-sufficiency and success in present and future environments.

The scope of Special Education is changing and widening with the new research findings coming up at international level. It includes identification, classification and management of children based on:

### i) Intellectual Deviance

Mentally Retarded children

Gifted children

Creative children

### ii) Sensory Deviance

Visual impairment

Hearing impairment

### iii) Motor Deviance

Orthopaedic impairment

Speech impairment

#### iv) Personality/Behavioural Deviance

Learning disabilities (*Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, Dyscalculia*)

Neuropsychological Deviances like *Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD)*

#### v) Educational Deviance

Educationally bright children

Educationally backward children

#### vi) Social Deviance

Maladjusted children

Deprived children

Juvenile delinquents

#### vii) Multiple Deviance

Condition characterised by presence of more than one type of deviance *Example: deaf and dumb child with ADHD.*

### Individuals who need Special Education

On the basis of various standards that define normality and abnormality, the educators have concluded that some students require more time whereas some students require less instruction to master the content mastered by their peers. Often the child with special needs may require different set of instructions than their non-disabled peers. Moreover, sometimes they need instruction in environments that are different from general classroom set ups.

In today's scenario, Special Education is generally provided to students within each of the following groups:

**a) Visually impaired children:** The Rehabilitation Council of India, 1992 defines visually impaired as individual who suffers from any of the following conditions:

- Total absence of light
- Visual acuity not exceeding 20/200 (Snellen chart)

**b) Hearing Impaired children:** *The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1990 (IDEA)* defines hearing impairment as “an impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects a child's educational performance but is not included under the definition of ‘deafness.’”

**Deafness:** A hearing loss above 90 decibels is generally considered deafness, which means that a hearing loss below 90 decibels is classified as a hearing impairment.

**c) Deaf and Blind children:** The students having special learning needs in areas requiring functional use of hearing and vision.

**d) Locomotor/Orthopaedically Impaired children:** The Rehabilitation Council of India, 1992 defines this condition as a person's inability to execute distinctive activities associated

with moving, both himself and objects, from place to place, and such inability resulting from affliction of either bones, joints, muscles or nerves.

**e) Mentally Retarded (Intellectually Disabled) children:** *American Association on Mental Retardation 1983 (AAMR)* refers mental retardation (now known as Intellectual Disability) as significantly sub-average general intellectual functioning existing concurrently with deficit in adaptive behaviour, and manifested during the developmental period.

**f) Gifted and Talented children:** *The Gifted and Talented Children's Act, 1978 of USA*, defines “children possessing demonstrated or potential abilities that gives evidence of high-performance capability in areas viz. intellectual, creative, specific academic or leadership ability or in the performing of visual arts and who do not ordinarily require the services provided in school.”

**g) Learning Disabled children:** These students have special learning needs in areas requiring functional use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, and arithmetic skills.

**h) Speech and Language Impaired children:** These students have special learning needs in areas requiring functional use of language and communication skills.

Often, the many varieties of speech and language disabilities are called communication disorders.

**i) Children with Multiple Disabilities:** IDEA, 1990 defines multiple disabilities as “concomitant impairment (example mental retardation-blindness, mental retardation-orthopaedic impairment) the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in the Special Educational programmes solely for the one of the impairments.

**j) Children with Traumatic Brain Injury:** These children have brain injury caused by an external physical force or by an internal occurrence such as stroke. It does not include children born with brain injuries or who suffer brain injury as a result of birth trauma.

## Questions:

1. Explain the concept of Special Education.
2. What are the major characteristics of Special Education.
3. Give the historical background of Special Education.
4. Discuss the objectives and principles of Special Education
5. Classify the children on the basis of their special needs.
6. Write short notes on:
  - i) RPWD Act, 2016
  - ii) National Trust Act, 1999
  - iii) Scope of Special Education

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