

ACADEMIC AND FUNCTIONAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN INCLUSIVE SETTING

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Abstract

Special Education is one of the most recently developed and major area of study in the field of education and psychology. Special Needs is a term that is used for those individuals who have having disability, it may be mental, psychological and medical and they require assistance in performing their tasks. Types of special needs vary in severity. People with Autism, Down syndrome, Dyslexia, Blindness, ADHD, Cleft lips or missing limbs all are included in the category of Special needs. In United Kingdom, the term ‘Special Needs’ often refers to Special Needs within the educational Context. Children with special needs require some life skills and functional skills for doing their routine work effectively and efficiently. Functional skills are those skills which a child needs in order to live independently. Functional skills focus on different areas. These areas include Home and Family (Cooking and Cleaning), self Help Skills (Bathing, Brushing teeth, Combing, dressing, grooming), Employment, Community Involvement and Functional Academics. To teach Academic skills, Teachers play an important and leading role for proper inclusion. Functional Skills Provide an opportunity to students with special needs to work, play, socialize and take care of personal need to highest possible level. These skills help to live life to full potential and to exist as contributing member of community.

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of children with special needs determines the policies, research and practice in special education. The concept of children with special needs is of British Origin. Prior to 1944, provision of education was made on the basis of specific handicap i.e. hearing impairment, visual impairment, orthopedically handicap. Education was provided through charitable initiatives. But due to the non availability of relevant and productive resources, parents became aware and conscious regarding education of their children who need special provisions for meeting the educational needs. Parent's organizations were started which then exerted pressure to improve educational provisions for children with special needs.

There is no legal definition of this term in India. The PWD act (1995) defines the term disability and other different types of disabilities. The current conceptualization of children with special needs is widely considered. It is more positive in nature. It is concerned with everything about the child which includes child's abilities and disabilities as well as resources and constraints in the environment. Children with special needs are unique in themselves. Their uniqueness may be noticed in one or more of the following dimensions. These dimensions include visual and hearing impairment, problem in communication and movement and social- emotional problems. Special needs children deviate from normal behavior either in positive direction and negative direction. The children with following behavior and impairments are included in the category of special needs:

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| Hearing impairment | Superior intellectual ability |
| Visual handicap | Creativity |
| Mental retardation | |
| Learning disability | |
| Speech problems | |
| Orthopedically handicap | |
| Emotional disturbance | |
| Delinquent tendencies | |
| Children with special needs may have mild learning disability or profound cognitive impairment. He or she may have developmental delay or occasional panic attacks and serious psychiatric | |

problems. They may have an established medical disability such as Autism, Deafness and Blindness, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment or traumatic brain injury. Children with special needs are often marginalized and even exclude from school systems. Because it is assumed that Learning disabilities affect the way by which children are able to process and understand information.

These Children require some life and functional skills for doing their routine work effectively and efficiently. So when we think of basic and important skills that we use in our daily life. Then what comes to our mind? See clock in the morning? Eating breakfast? Dressing? Cross roads? Many more other skills than the said skills come to our mind. In the world of special education, these functional skills mean a lot. It is also believed that these basic functional skills can be best taught in segregated and functional life skills based classroom. But here a question arises...Is learning of these functional skills is enough for their development and survival. In fact functional skills are those skills that assist the children with special needs in managing and living a better quality life. These skills provide an opportunity to work, play, socialize and take care of personal needs to highest possible level.

Functional skills focus on different areas such as home, family, self help skills, employment, community involvement, health and functional Academics. All the students with special needs will benefit from functional skill training. It will help them in their daily life. When a student has developmental delay in addition to visual impairment or due to some other disability, he/she needs a modified curriculum. This type of curriculum ensures that multiple ways of learning will be provided to students with physical and cognitive disabilities. Students who are blind or visually impaired require curriculum adaptation because students with disability needs more time than the sighted peers to acquire developmental skills. **Collins, T.S. (2010)** conducted a study on 'Functional Communication training to increase communication skills for young children with Autism Spectrum Order'. He found that when functionally relevant consequences were delivered following an appropriate communicative response, a reduction in aberrant behavior and an increase in appropriate communicative responses were noted.

Academic skills help in becoming a good learner and helps in creating interest in studies. These skills are developed during studies and development of academic skills help in academic success. Functional academics are defined as academics areas that will be used by children in the rest of their life. It includes three areas: Reading, Mathematics and physical health. Reading means to read road signs (stop, go), washrooms signs (men, women) or read a recipe. Use of Mathematics includes appropriate and calculative use of money in buying different commodities. Physical health includes grooming, oral hygiene, planning of healthy meals.

The final goal of special education is to assist the children with special needs so that they can gain as much independence and autonomy as possible. Self Determination is the highest goal of special education for the students. **Serifie Balikci and Salih Rapap (2016)** conducted a study on ‘Using Embedded Instruction to teach functional skills to preschool child with Autism’. They concluded that Embedded Instruction offers viable and effective ways to provide Intentional, systematic, individualized instructions and interventions to young children with Autism within ongoing Activities and transition of early childhood settings.

Features of functional skills

- Provides an opportunity to work and play.
- It enables a person to take care of personal needs.
- It helps in performing routine tasks.
- It helps the child to live independently.
- It makes the child confident to work effectively.

There is no definite list of Functional skills. Because development of these skills among the students with special needs depends upon a number of environmental and external factors as culture, beliefs, age, geographical situation etc. Most important functional skills are:

- ❖ Socialization: Develop and maintain meaningful relationships.
- ❖ Cooperation: To work in collaboration with others.
- ❖ Adjustment: To adjust well with all kinds of people including individuals whose background and experiences are different?
- ❖ Time Management: To manage time and be prepared for requirements.

- ❖ Communication skills: Communicate their ideas, thoughts and feelings in the ways they understood.
- ❖ Reading Skills: Read material that is stimulating or provides opportunity to learn.
- ❖ To make important life decisions and such as career choices and motivating habits.

Most Important Academic Skills Include:

- ❖ Critical Reading Skills
- ❖ Mathematics
- ❖ Problem Solving
- ❖ Communication skills
- ❖ Writing Skills

Strategies for developing academic and functional skills in Inclusive setting:

Give Rewards: When a child performs well, he must be rewarded. A reward can be of verbal or non-verbal kind. it may be social reward, edible reward, praise or material reward. Teacher should prepare the chart of child's achievement. It will help in the recognition of the child. It will also motivate the child to perform in a better way.

Teach step by step: Step by step teaching involves two types of chaining: Forward chaining and Backward chaining. In forward chaining, first step of the task is taught and then so on. It is helpful in teaching difficult task. In backward chaining, last or final step is taught at first. It is used in teaching self help skills. It also motivates the child because they have assumed that they have learned the activity.

Repeat the procedure: when a child is not able to learn the task, the teacher should repeat the process of developing a particular skill. He should encourage the child; help the child whenever it is demanded by the child.

Grading of the skills: Grading means when we give a simple activity to start with and after that we move on complex activity. Some ideas for grading are: to work on large object skill development and then make a shift on actual objects.

Provide a congenial Environment: Teacher should keep the belongings of child near to him; it will develop a sense of independence among the child. The child will feel secured and will make efforts for his growth.

Lifelong habits of working and functional skills are developed through integrating the child with special needs in the regular classroom setting. Teaching of academic and functional skills is very important for children with special needs. These habits are promoted and developed among students through motivation and through their participation in various educational activities. Their educational experiences contribute in deciding career choices, developing and maintaining social relationships and in making educational decisions. It has also been researched that students with special needs learn more and faster when they are taught with the students without disabilities.

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