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Individualised Education Plan (IEP) in Special Education

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Abstract

This study explores the significance of Individualized Education Plans (IEP) as a foundational component in special education designed to meet the unique academic, behavioral, and developmental needs of special children. How IEP's are conceptualized, evolved, and implemented at both national and international levels. Drawing from a range of studies, this narrative review highlights the role of parental involvement, influence of socio-demographic factors on awareness and the systematic challenges in executing effective IEPs. While also addressing gaps in awareness, implementation, resources availability, and collaboration.

Keywords: Individualized Education plan, special children, inclusive education

Introduction

An individualized education plan (IEP) is a legally binding document that outlines the specialized educational program and services customized to meet the unique needs of a particular student. The IEP includes the student's current level of academic and functional performance, accommodations, modifications, and the specialized instruction and related services required to support their learning and development. The IEP function as a detailed framework outlining the accommodations, supports, and interventions necessary to assist the students in meeting their educational goals, assessing the strengths and identified areas of need. Most importantly the development of an IEP is a collaborative and family-centered approach involving educators, professionals, and the student's parents or guardians. It is carefully tailored to reflect each student's unique strength and area that require attention. The plan source as a valuable guide for teachers and related service providers including mental health professionals, offering them a comprehensive understanding of the students learning profile and the necessary strategies to enhance their educational progress.

Background of the study

The concept of the IEP originated in the United States in 1970. During that time, educational reforms created access to formal learning for children with special needs who were earlier excluded from regular schooling. Before this period, many such children were either kept at home, placed in segregated institutions or denied access to formal schooling. This began to change with the enactment of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA)(Public Law 94-142) in 1975 by the U.S. government. This law ensured the right to free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for all children with special learning requirements. This legislation emerged during a time when public awareness of civil rights and social justice was growing and pressure was mounting to address the longstanding exclusion of physically challenged children's education system. One of the most important features of this act was the introduction of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) which was the fundamental component of special education services. That binding document tailored educational goals and services specific to each child's unique needs, designed in consultation with parents and a multidisciplinary team. This legal recognition of individual rights in education marked the beginning of a new era in inclusive learning. The 1975 law also laid the foundation several key principles of no child can be denied to access the education, personalized instruction tailored to individual needs, and meaningful involvement of parents in the education process.

Furthermore the passage of Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) was influenced by two landmark legal cases-Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (1971) and Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia (1972) both of which asserted that special children could not be denied access to public education. These cases established the constitutional foundation for educational equity and directly influenced the drafting of the 1975 legislation. Over the year amended in 1997 and 2004 an answer to the effectiveness of the IEP by focusing on measurable outcomes, active family involvement and planning for life skills and vocational training. Internationally the idea of personalized education gained further support through frameworks such as United Nation Convention on the Right of Person with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2006 which emphasize inclusive and equitable learning for all. Today, the IEP is seen not only as a legal document in many countries, but also as a best practice model in special education. It highlights the shift from a one-size-fits-all approach to a more child-centered and holistic educational approach. The ongoing evaluation of IEP reflects growing awareness that each child learn differently and their educational journey should be shaped accordingly.

In India the practice of developing individualized plan began to emerge through inclusive education initiative. Though there is no separate law specifically for IEP's, a landmark shift occurred with the introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which formally endorsed the principle of inclusive education as a national priority. Significantly, NEP highlights the necessity of creating Individualized Education Plans. Especially for learners requiring sustained academic and functional support. The policy states that children with complex learning needs should have access to customized learning materials flexible and continuous academic support to enable their full participation in school activities. The policy also affirms that such students should be included in all schooling processes from curriculum to assessment with provisions made for specialized instructors, assistive technologies, and learning aids.

While NEP (2020) were formally adapted the IEP under the guidelines of Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) which states about the inclusive education component. The preparation of IEP is a mandated requirement for every child identified as needing sustained academic and functional support. The guidelines provide detailed instruction on developing, implementing and reviewing IEP through a collaborative process that includes

educators, special educators, parents, and in some cases the learner themselves. India's commitment to individualized education is also reflected in its ratification of international treaties such as the UNCRPD, which aligns with the border. National agenda of educational equity under social inclusion by mandating IEP's under SSA and recognizing them in NEP (2020). And strengthening the country's commitment to inclusive education encouraging schools to adopt flexible and child-centered teaching approach.

Methodology

This study follows a narrative review approach, which involves collecting and analyzing secondary information from previous academic sources related to IEP. Relative studies, Books, journals, articles, government reports and conceptual papers were used to understand how IEPs are developed, implemented, role of parents, special educators, professionals and challenges in the process. The focus on both National and International studies were considered to explore the IEPs practice. Articles published between 2009 and 2024 were selected for this review. As this is a narrative review, no primary data was collected. The findings was based entirely on information from secondary sources, and the review aims to explain the comprehensive understanding of the existing knowledge and gaps in the IEP process.

Objectives

- To explore the structure, process, and the core components of the IEP
- To review the findings from national and international studies.
- To identify the challenges and gaps to implement the IEP

The Core Component of IEP

1. Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP): This session provides a comprehensive overview of the students' current performance in academic areas like (reading, writing, and math) and functional skills (such as communication, social interaction, behavior and self-care. it includes observation, assessment and data input from teachers, parents and sometimes the student. The PLAAFP serves as a baseline from which annual goals are developed. From the PLAAFP initial stage, the goals should be initiated. Here identifies all the student's strength and needs affect their involvement and progress in the general education curriculum.

2. Measurable Annual Goals: These are specific individualized goals that the student is expected to achieve within a year. Goals must be SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time bound. They should address the area of need identified in the PLAAFP. Goals can describe academic behavioral, social-emotional, communication and functional domains. That goals should be in long-term and short-term. They must be clear enough for all team members including parents to understand what is expected and flexible enough to adjust if the student is progressing faster or slower than anticipated. The goals should be aligned with the student's unique learning needs and be measurable to track progress.

3. Special Education and related services: This outlines the specific services that student will receive to support their learnings. This may include special education instruction, speech therapy, occupational therapy, behavioral intervention, counselling, communication building, Psychomotor skills development and more. According to their individual goals, the related services are provides support the students educational process.

4. Accommodations and Modifications: These refers to adjustment in instruction and assessment to help the student access the curriculum and learnings. Here for accommodation, changes in how a student learns (e.g., extended test time, potential seating, large-print books) and modification, changes in what a student is expected to learn (e.g., reduce assignments,

simplified content).

5. Evaluation and Progress Monitoring: Outlines of the student's progress towards their goals will be measured and reported, including how often updates will be shared with parents or guardians. It may include progress check-ins, updates during report cards or data collected through ongoing assessment. Evaluating their improvements and areas to give more attention and clear tracking helps determine the effectiveness of the IEP and whether revisions are needed.

Review of Literature

Kamlesh Yadav and Priyanka Chauhan, A study on the level of awareness about individualised education programme among the parents of children with mental retardation: A descriptive study conducted at TEPSE & HEPSN Centre, Jai Narain University, Jodhpur, Rajasthan. The study used purposive sampling and include a total of 80 parents of children with intellectual impairments from pre primary to occasional levels. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire and semi structured interviews. The findings revealed that male parents (mean 16.30) had significantly more awareness about IEP's than female parents (Mean 14.00). Also educated parents (mean 16.41) were moreover than uneducated parents (mean 13.20). Urban and rural difference were also observed. With urban parents (mean 16.38) having an awareness level, than rural parents (mean 13.70), the study highlights a clear knowledge gap, especially among the rural and uneducated parents. Strategies like workshops, resources and information sessions for parents to explain the IEP process and roles. And policy outcomes to improve IEP awareness and involvement.

Rakesh Yadav, The Role of Parental Involvement in Special Education Programme: A conceptual paper published in Global International Research Thoughts (GIRT) Journal (Volume 1, issue 1) 2013 Based on insights from Indian special education system, the paper emphasise that active parental involvement is essential in the Individualised Education Plan (IEP) process to enhance children's educational and social development. Also describes about providing the technology such as virtual platforms, digital communication, assistive tools for parents to actively engage with educators and specialists. The study concludes by recommending greater inclusion of parents as partners in educational planning, along with awareness programs to bridge the gap between home and school environments.

Dr. Manvi and Ms. Babita, The Impact of Parental Involvement and Awareness on the Academic Progress of Students with learning Disabilities (ID): A Case study based qualitative research conducted in across five government and private schools in Ranchi District, Jharkhand. The study included a four student s of class third, fifth and eighth are selected using purposive sampling. Data collected through semi-structured interview, school observation, document analysis and academic records of the students and parental. The findings revealed that only 16-18% of parents were aware of Individualised Education Plan and their functions. Teachers highlighted the lack of parental participation in IEP reviews and planning meetings. The study concluded the limited of awareness and minimal engagement among parents.

Nora, M., et al. (2011), Parents Understanding on the Implementation of Individualised Education Programme: A descriptive study at University Technology Malaysia, Skudai, used a mixed method design. Sample of 26 parents using a structured questionnaire and 10 parents through semi structured interview to assess the level of understanding and involvement in IEP implementation. The quantitative data showed a mean score of 3.85, indicating a high level of parental awareness regarding IEP. Interview findings revealed that parents viewed the IEP as a valuable tool for tailoring education and believed their participation was

essential. However, several parents expressed difficulty maintaining consistent involvement due to time and work-related challenges. The study concluded that while most parents understood the IEP process and valued their role. Stronger support systems and improved communication with educators are needed to ensure sustained parental participation in special education planning.

Senay Llik, Rukiye Konuk, Evaluating Parent Participation in Individualised Education Programs by Opinions of Parents and Teachers, 2019: A descriptive study aims to evaluate the opinions of both parents and teachers regarding the participation in IEP. The study was conducted through qualitative approach and purposive sampling method includes 22 teachers and 25 parents. Total of 15 females and 7 males participated. And for parents population; 22 are a mother and 3 of them are a father. Data were collected through semi-structured interview. The finding says more than half of the parents, 76% do not know what the IEP and these parents mistake IEP for diagnostic report. Next, 23% of the teachers stated that IEP is to support academic achievement and ability development of learners with special needs. 54% of the teachers prepare IEP because students have individual differences, Another 23% of the teachers said they prepare IEP to give a planned education to the students. So the study reveals that most parents lack awareness and understanding of the IEP often confusing it with diagnostic report. In contrast teacher view the IEPs as tool to address individual learning needs and support.

Boavida, Aguiar, McWilliam and Pimentel, Quality of Individualised Education Program Goals of Preschoolers with Disabilities, 2010: A descriptive study investigated the quality of IEP goals. 83 IEPs written by special educators across 21 public preschool groups. A total of 3,158 IEP goals were analyzed using two standardized tools-Goals Functionality Scale III and the Goals and Objectives Rating Instrument (GORI). The result revealed that many goals were too broad, lacked clear functionality, and were not measurable or contextualised to daily routines. A study concluded that the effectiveness of early intervention is highly dependent on the quality of IEP goals and recommended professional development programmes. Under clear national guidelines to improve practice.

William H, Blackwell and Zachary S. Rossetti, 2014, The development of individualised education programme. Where have we been under? Where should we go now?: A narrative literature review on the development of IEP. This review covered 51 peer-reviewed between the period of 1998-2014. This paper examining various aspects of IEP development, which including the dynamics of IEP meetings, the assessment practice, the quality of IEP and the participation of students and parents. The findings revealed that educators and administrators have a great practices of IEP. While comes to parents they remains a passive participants. Also showed that many IEPs fail to fully comply with the legal and procedural requirements, particularly in the area of annual goal-setting and the transition planning. The review concluded to promoting student engagement, continued need for professional development for educators and need to build a family engagement strategies.

Deepak Kumar, 2013, The impact of Individualised Education Plan on student success: A Conceptual paper published in the (GIRT) Journal discussing the transformative role of IEP's in improving academic performance, emotional well-being and life skills. This paper is based on a theoretical approach, exploring insights from existing literature and the best practice. The author explains that the function of IEP as a comprehensive framework for teachers to plan customized educational support for students with special need by considering there thoughts, strength, weaknesses, and the learning styles. The paper emphasizes that IEPs promote collaboration among educators, parents, and the specialists. It also addressed challenges such as resource limitation, legal compliance and the need for regular review. The study concludes that recognising

and strengthening IEP implementation is essential for achieving inclusive education and equal opportunity for students with special needs.

Hughes M., et al. (2023), Individualised education programmes under transition planning for adolescents with autism: A Longitudinal population-based study in three USA states (Arkansas, Georgia, and Utah). To examine the content of IEPs for adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) focusing on postsecondary transition goals service. The study followed a quantitative approach. The sample of 322 adolescents born in 2002 and IEP records were reviewed when they were 15-16 years old. The finding shows that 92% of adolescent had a transition plan. Although 28% of adolescent with a ASD received school-based mental health services, none of these adolescent were black; additionally, 15% of those with ID received mental health services compared with 34% without ID. The study concluded that there are gaps and inequalities in transition planning.

Dr. Pramod Kumar MPM, and Khushi Bhatia, 2023, Special Education Teachers Skills and Knowledge about Individualised Education Plan India: A Experimental study in the state of Karnataka, to examine the skills and knowledge of special education teachers regarding the development and implementation of IEP. The study used quantitative approach using a pre and post-test design. A total of 60 certified special education teachers recognised by Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI), were selected using purposive sampling. The researcher used a survey tool developed from the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) standards. Teachers first completed the survey (Pre-test) then attended a four day training programme. The findings showed a significant increase in teachers knowledge and skills after the training. Statistical analysis using paired sample t-test and independent sample t-test. It's revealed a significant improvement in teachers skills and knowledge after the training (Knowledge; $t=14.2$, $p<0.001$ & skills; $t=17.3$, $p<0.001$). Concluded that continuous training and capacity building programmes are essential for special education teachers to enhance their ability to design, implement and monitor IEP effectively in Indian special schools.

Syar Meeze Mohad Rashid and Mei Ti Wong, 2023, Challenges of implementing the Individualised Education Plan (IEP) for special need children with learning disabilities: A systematic literature review to identify the challenges faced by teachers in implementing IEP in Malaysia. The review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta Analysis (PRISMA) guidelines, between the period of 2018-2022. These studies were analysed and grouped under three areas; knowledge, skills and attitude. The review found the teacher faced challenges in lack of understanding of criterion-reference test(42%) and for skills challenge(57%) more than half of the teachers struggle with doing the evaluation process. Finally, attitude challenges(66%), the biggest issue is lack of motivation. This paper recommended professional development, structure, and collaboration to overcome these gaps.

Yuvraj S., et al. (2024), The future of special education in India challenges, opportunities and innovation: A Conceptual paper in the International Journal of Social Impact discussing the current challenges, opportunities and the future direction of special education in India. Theoretical approach based on case studies & review of existing literature. Challenges such as lack of training educators, and lack of proper data and research. Also identified opportunities such as strengthening the existing legislative frameworks, providing inclusive teacher training and engaging communities in awareness initiatives. The paper concluded that using innovative strategies like assistive technology, new teaching methods, building partnerships between schools and communities and preparing Individualised Learning Plans (ILPs).

Discussion

The findings from the reviewed studies are discussed under five key themes such as Parental awareness and involvement, teachers knowledge and skills, Quality of IEP goals and compliance, Challenges in implementation and future directions.

1 Parental Awareness and Involvement

Most studies agree that parents involvement plays a crucial role in the IEP process, yet many lack awareness and active participation. Kamlesh Yadav and Chauhan (2024) reported significant differences in awareness based on gender, education, and location, with urban and educated parents showing higher awareness than rural and uneducated parents. This study clearly highlights a knowledge gap, especially among the rural and policy outcomes to improve IEP awareness and involvement. Manvi and Babita report highlighted the parents were unaware of the IEP process which leading to limited participation in meeting. Similarly, Senay Llik and Rukiye Konuk (2019) revealed that most of the parents did not know what an IEP is, they often confusing it with the diagnostic report. In contrast, Nora et al. (2011) Indicated higher awareness level but the challenges was in time constraints and work pressures limited their ability to attend meetings consistently. These findings suggest parental awareness programme, some of workshops, parent training sessions, flexible participation methods and environment strategies.

2 Teachers Knowledge and Skills

The studies shows that teachers knowledge and skills strongly influence the IEPs effectiveness. The study by Pramod Kumar and Bhatia (2023) showed that professional training programmes considerably improved teachers knowledge and practical skills in developing and implementing IEP. Similarly the review study by Syar Meeze and Wong (2023), pointing out challenges such as lack of understanding the assessment methods, difficulties in carrying out the evaluation process, and the low motivation among teachers. These findings indicate the teacher training should not be a one-time intervention, been in an ongoing process. Importantly continuous and structured practice.

3 Quality of IEP goals and compliance

While comes to quality of IEP goals, Boavida et al. (2010) found that many goals were broad and not linked to functional daily activities. Which made progress tracking difficult. This study raised concern about the quality of the IEP. Blackwell and Rossetti (2014) confirmed similar issue, noting that many IEP did not fully comply with the legal requirements, especially for annual goal-setting and transition planning. These gaps suggests that legal frameworks exist but the teachers need clear guidelines and practical support to ensure that IEP goals are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant. Time bounded which aligned with the students individual needs.

4 Implementation challenges and gaps

From the existing studies, the implementation gaps outcomes in both developed and developing countries. Hughes et al. (2023) found that although, while most adolescents with autism had transition plans in their IEP, but in important areas such as living arrangement and adaptive skills were missing. Additionally, racial disparities were observed while receiving the school based-mental health services, indicates the inequality. Other studies pointed to systematic challenges such as lack of sources, insufficient monitoring mechanism, limited collaboration among professionals. These findings indicates equity and inclusivity in planning, required attention even in developed education system.

5 Innovations and future directions

Here, a conceptual studies have proposed several strategies to strengthen IEP implementation. Deepak Kumar highlights the role of IEPs in emotional well-being, not only improve academic outcomes but also promote social inclusion and self-advocacy. While Yuvaraj (2024), proposed the assistive technologies and Individualised learning Plans (ILP) as innovative strategies. To improve student engagement and learning outcome. However, these practices are not widely implemented in India. Mainly due to resource constraints and lack of training. Future implementation should focus on early intervention, integration of technology, and Community of engagement.

Conclusion

This narrative review examined existing literature on Individualized Education Plan (IEP) with focus on their challenges faced in different countries, implementation process, teachers knowledge and skills, parental involvement, and the structured goals-settings. The review highlights that IEPs are an essential framework for promoting inclusive education and addressing the unique learning needs of special children. From the review, the findings reveals that while IEP have proven benefits and improving academic outcomes, emotional well-being, and social development. Overall, the IEP represent a commitment to educational equity and inclusion.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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