**AIU Exam –** **Individuals with Visual Impairments**

**Subject of Courses**: Special Education

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**Exam Starts Here.**

**Introduction: In the following space, write 4 to 8 paragraphs to introduce the topics covered in the exam.**

Answer: Welcome to the world of visual impairment and its impact on students' education. As a teacher of the visually impaired, I am excited to introduce you to this fascinating field. Visual impairment refers to a range of conditions that affect a person's ability to see, ranging from partial sight to total blindness. In the realm of education, visual impairment can pose unique challenges for students, affecting their access to information, classroom activities, and social interactions.

Accommodations play a vital role in supporting students with visual impairments. By providing materials in accessible formats, using assistive technologies, and creating an inclusive learning environment, we can ensure that our students have equal opportunities to learn and thrive academically.

Visual impairment and blindness are distinct categories within this spectrum. Visual impairment refers to decreased vision, while blindness refers to little or no functional vision. Understanding the differences between these conditions is crucial in tailoring appropriate educational plans for our students.

The Snellen chart is a familiar tool used to assess visual acuity. It consists of rows of letters or symbols of varying sizes and is commonly used to measure a person's ability to see at a distance

Transitioning to secondary education and the workforce is a significant milestone for students with visual impairments. As educators, we play a pivotal role in preparing them for this transition. By imparting essential skills for independent living, collaborating with vocational rehabilitation services, and advocating for inclusive employment opportunities, we empower our students to achieve their potential in both education and future career endeavors.

I hope this introduction has piqued your interest in the world of visual impairment and its impact on education. Together, we will explore strategies to support our students with visual challenges and create a learning environment that fosters their growth and success. Let's embark on this journey of making a positive difference in the lives of our students with visual impairments.

**Questions:**

Answer each question below with complete paragraphs. Give examples from your own experience to illustrate the ideas. As well, give examples on how you would apply the knowledge in your work or life. How would you successfully apply the concepts in your community?

**1. What is the legal definition of *blindness*? How does it differ from the IDEA definition?**

Answer: The legal definition of blindness can vary depending on the jurisdiction and the specific context in which it is being used. However, a commonly accepted definition of blindness is the condition of having a visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye, even with the use of corrective lenses, or having a visual field limited to 20 degrees or less.

In the context of special education, the legal definition of blindness differs slightly from the general legal definition. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which is a federal law in the United States, blindness is defined as an impairment that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance. It includes both partial sight and blindness.

The IDEA definition takes a broader approach by considering the impact of the visual impairment on the child's educational performance rather than solely focusing on specific visual acuity or visual field measurements. It recognizes that even individuals with partial sight or those who may have some functional vision can still experience educational challenges and require specialized support and services.

**2. What does the Snellen chart assess? What does 20/200 mean?**

Answer: The Snellen chart is a commonly used tool in ophthalmology to assess visual acuity, which measures the sharpness and clarity of a person's vision. The chart consists of multiple rows of letters or symbols, with each row progressively decreasing in size.

The Snellen chart assesses a person's ability to read the letters or symbols at a standard testing distance of 20 feet (6 meters). The person being tested stands or sits at the designated distance and reads the smallest line of letters or symbols they can see clearly. The results are recorded as a fraction, with the numerator representing the testing distance (20 feet) and the denominator representing the distance at which a person with normal vision can read the line accurately.

For example, if a person can read the line that is typically visible to individuals with normal vision at 20 feet but needs to stand at 200 feet to see it clearly, their visual acuity would be recorded as 20/200. This means that they can only see at 20 feet what someone with normal vision can see at 200 feet. In other words, their visual acuity is significantly impaired.

 Picture of a Snellen chart copied from https://psychology.fandom.com/wiki/Snellen\_chart

In education this chart helps us determine the level of visual impairment and informs our approach to supporting our students' specific needs.

**3. Describe how the eye functions.**

Answer: The human eye is a remarkable organ that allows us to perceive and interpret visual information from the surrounding environment. Here is a brief description of how the eye functions:

**Light enters the eye**: The process of vision begins when light enters the eye through the cornea, the transparent front part of the eye. The cornea helps focus the incoming light onto the next structure called the lens.

**Light is focused by the lens**: The lens, located behind the iris (the colored part of the eye), further focuses the incoming light onto the retina. The lens changes its shape through a process called accommodation, allowing it to adjust and focus on objects at varying distances.

**Light is captured by the retina**: The retina, a thin layer of tissue at the back of the eye, contains specialized cells called photoreceptors—specifically rods and cones. Rods are responsible for vision in low-light conditions and the perception of black and white, while cones are responsible for color vision and detail in brighter conditions.

**Photoreceptors convert light into electrical signals**: When light reaches the retina, it is absorbed by the photoreceptor cells. This triggers a chemical reaction that converts light energy into electrical signals.

**Signals are transmitted to the brain**: The electrical signals generated by the photoreceptor cells are then transmitted through a complex network of cells in the retina, including bipolar cells and ganglion cells. These signals are eventually collected by the ganglion cells, whose axons form the optic nerve.

**Brain processes visual information**: The optic nerve carries the electrical signals from the retina to the brain's visual cortex, located at the back of the brain. Here, the visual information is interpreted, allowing us to perceive and make sense of the images we see.

**Additional eye structures: The eye also contains other important structures that contribute to its functioning, such as the iris, which controls the amount of light entering the eye by adjusting the size of the pupil, and the ciliary muscles, which help regulate the shape of the lens during accommodation**.

**4. Define the terms *myopia, hyperopia*, and *astigmatism*.**

Answer: **Myopia, hyperopia, and astigmatism** are three common refractive errors that affect the clarity of vision. Here are their definitions as explained in "Special Education in Contemporary Society" by Richard Garguilo (Part 2, chapter 13):

Myopia: Myopia, commonly known as nearsightedness, is a refractive error where individuals have clear vision of objects close to them but struggle to see objects in the distance. This occurs when the eyeball is too long or the cornea is too curved, causing light rays to focus in front of the retina instead of directly on it. As a result, distant objects appear blurry while near objects remain clear.

Hyperopia: Hyperopia, also known as farsightedness, is a refractive error where individuals have clear vision of objects in the distance but experience difficulty focusing on objects up close. In hyperopia, the eyeball is shorter or the cornea is flatter, causing light rays to focus behind the retina instead of directly on it. This leads to blurry vision of nearby objects and can result in eye strain or headaches when performing close-up tasks.

Astigmatism: Astigmatism is a refractive error characterized by an irregularly shaped cornea or lens, causing multiple focal points in different meridians of the eye. As a result, individuals with astigmatism experience blurred or distorted vision at all distances. Astigmatism can occur alongside myopia or hyperopia, compounding the visual impairments associated with those conditions.

 The specific characteristics and severity of these refractive errors can vary among individuals. An optometrist or ophthalmologist should perform a comprehensive eye examination to determine the exact nature and degree of the refractive error in each case.



**5. List five eye problems common to school-age children.**

Answer: In his book Special Education in Contemporary Society: An Introduction to Exceptionality (6th ed.). R. M. Gargiulo, mentions a few eye problems that affect school aged children. Here I will list five:

1. Congenital Cataract: Cataract is a clouding of the eye's lens, leading to blurred vision. While commonly seen in older adults, it can also affect school-aged children because of genetics trauma, or underlying medical conditions.
2. Strabismus is a visual condition characterized by the misalignment of the eyes, causing them to point in different directions. This misalignment can occur constantly or intermittently and may affect one or both eyes. The condition is commonly known as "crossed eyes" or "squint."
3. Optic Nerve Atrophy: Optic nerve atrophy is a condition characterized by the deterioration or loss of nerve fibers in the optic nerve, which is responsible for transmitting visual information from the eye to the brain.
4. Eye injury: An eye injury refers to harm or damage caused to the eye or its surrounding structures. It can result from accidents, foreign objects entering the eye, chemical exposure, sports-related incidents, or medical conditions.
5. Retinopathy of prematurity (ROP): Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP) is a potentially blinding eye disorder that primarily affects premature infants. It occurs when the blood vessels in the retina, the light-sensitive tissue at the back of the eye, develop abnormally due to the premature birth and the use of oxygen therapy**. \*This eye disorder is the most frequent among the school aged visually/blind population here in St. Kitts.\***

In my work and life, I would conduct workshops for parents and teachers of students with eye problems to teach them about the different eye disorders and encourage them to advocate for their children/students as well as raise awareness about the importance of regular eye check-ups. I would advocate for policies that prioritize comprehensive eye examinations for school-age children and work towards organizing eye screening events and educational sessions in the community.

**6****. Why is early detection of vision problems important?**

Answer: Early detection of vision problems is important for several reasons. Firstly, it enables timely intervention and appropriate treatment, which can significantly improve a child's visual functioning and academic performance. For example, identifying and addressing myopia or astigmatism early on allows for the prescription of corrective lenses that can enhance a child's ability to see clearly in the classroom and engage in learning activities effectively. Secondly, early detection helps prevent potential long-term consequences. Vision disorders, if left untreated, can lead to permanent vision loss or irreversible impairments. By detecting and treating vision problems early, the risk of long-term visual complications can be minimized. Lastly, early detection of vision problems supports a child's overall development. Vision is interconnected with motor skills, cognition, and social-emotional development. Addressing vision issues early on can positively impact a child's ability to explore their environment, interact with peers, and acquire new skills. In my work and life, I would advocate for regular vision screenings and collaborate with schools, community organizations, and healthcare providers to ensure that children have access to comprehensive eye examinations. By promoting awareness and facilitating early detection of vision problems, I would contribute to the visual health and well-being of children in my community.

**7. Describe the social and emotional characteristics of persons with visual impairments.**

Answer: Individuals with visual impairments often develop strong self-advocacy and independence skills. They exhibit adaptability, problem-solving abilities, and resilience. Social interactions may require adjustments, but they can engage effectively with others. Emotional well-being varies, with coping mechanisms playing a vital role. Overall, the impact on social and emotional development varies, depending on support and individual factors.

Working along with parents, other educators and influential persons in the community I would push for persons who are visually impaired to be invited to social events (parties, galas, etc.) so they can get experience socializing and communicating in different settings.

I would also contact different business places around the island to adapt a person who is blind/ visually impaired for about 3 days and allow them to experience the atmosphere in the workplace and also invite them to sponsor the Blind and Light Association and aide in its development.

**8. What is functional vision, and how is it evaluated?**

Answer: Functional vision refers to the ability of an individual to use their vision effectively in everyday activities and tasks. It goes beyond simply having clear eyesight and involves the integration of visual information to navigate the environment, read, recognize faces, and perform various daily functions.

Functional vision is evaluated through comprehensive vision assessments conducted by eye care professionals, such as optometrists or ophthalmologists. These assessments may include tests to measure visual acuity, visual field, eye movement, depth perception, and other aspects of visual function. Additionally, functional vision evaluations may involve observing how well the individual uses their vision in real-life situations, such as reading, writing, and completing daily tasks. The goal of evaluating functional vision is to identify any visual impairments that may impact an individual's ability to perform daily activities and to determine appropriate interventions or accommodations to support their visual needs.

**9. Define the term *learning media*. Give three examples of different forms of learning media.**

Answer: Learning media refers to materials and resources used for teaching and learning. Examples include, digital media such as **e-books and online courses, and audio materials like podcasts and recorded printed materials like textbooks lectures**. These diverse forms cater to different learning styles and preferences.

**10. In what two educational settings do the majority of students with a visual impairment receive a special education?**

Answer: The majority of students with visual impairments receive special education in two primary educational settings: resource rooms and itinerant support.

Resource Rooms: Resource rooms are specialized classrooms within mainstream schools where students with visual impairments receive special education services. These classrooms are equipped with adaptive materials and technology to support students' learning needs. Specially trained teachers, known as vision teachers or teachers of the visually impaired (TVIs), work with students in these settings. They provide individualized instruction, support, and adaptations to help students access the general curriculum and develop essential skills for academic success and independence.

Itinerant Support: In the itinerant support model, students with visual impairments attend their regular mainstream classrooms, and a TVI provides specialized support and services on a consultation basis. The TVI collaborates with the student's classroom teachers, helping them adapt materials, develop appropriate accommodations, and implement effective teaching strategies to meet the student's unique needs. The TVI may work with multiple students across different schools, traveling from one location to another as needed.

These educational settings aim to promote inclusion and provide students with visual impairments the opportunity to learn alongside their sighted peers while receiving the specialized support they require. By offering tailored interventions and adaptations, these settings help students with visual impairments succeed academically and foster their overall development.

**11. What are some common educational accommodations that a student with a visual impairment may require?**

Answer: Students with visual impairments often require various educational accommodations to access the curriculum and participate effectively in the learning environment. These accommodations are designed to address their specific needs and support their academic success. Some common educational accommodations for students with visual impairments include:

**Large Print Materials**: Providing educational materials, such as textbooks, worksheets, and handouts, in large print format to accommodate individuals with low vision.

**Braille Materials**: For students who are blind or have significant visual impairments, providing textbooks and other learning materials in Braille allows them to read and access the same content as their sighted peers.

**Audio Materials**: Offering audiobooks, recorded lectures, and auditory learning resources for students who benefit from auditory input due to visual impairments.

**Assistive Technology**: Using specialized assistive technology devices such as screen readers, screen magnifiers, Braille displays, and note-taking apps to facilitate access to digital content and classroom activities.

**Tactile Graphics**: Incorporating tactile graphics and raised images to represent visual information, making subjects like mathematics, geography, and science more accessible to students with visual impairments.

**Orientation and Mobility Training**: Providing training in orientation and mobility skills to help students navigate the school environment safely and independently.

**Preferential Seating**: Allowing students to sit in a location that best suits their visual needs, such as near the front of the classroom or closer to the board.

**Extended Time for Assignments and Tests**: Providing additional time for completing assignments and tests to accommodate potential challenges related to reading and writing.

**Verbal Descriptions**: Providing verbal descriptions of visual content, such as images, charts, or diagrams, to ensure students with visual impairments can understand and participate in class discussions.

**Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)**: Developing and implementing IEPs tailored to each student's specific needs, learning goals, and accommodations.

**Collaboration with Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVIs)**: Working with specialized teachers of the visually impaired to develop and implement appropriate instructional strategies and adaptations.

Educational accommodations for students with visual impairments are essential for fostering their academic progress and promoting inclusivity in the learning environment. Individualized approaches that consider each student's unique needs and preferences are vital to ensure their success and participation in the educational setting.

**12. List five signs of possible vision problems in children.**

Answer: Identifying possible vision problems in children is crucial for early intervention and ensuring optimal visual development. Here are five signs that may indicate a child is experiencing vision issues:

1. Squinting or Closing One Eye: If a child frequently squints or closes one eye while reading, watching television, or looking at distant objects, it could be a sign of refractive errors or other vision problems.
2. Frequent Eye Rubbing: Excessive eye rubbing may be an indicator of eye strain or discomfort, which can occur when a child is having trouble focusing or has other visual issues.
3. Holding Books or Objects Too Close or Too Far Away: If a child consistently holds books, toys, or electronic devices too close or too far from their eyes, it may suggest a problem with near or distance vision.
4. Lack of Eye Contact: Avoiding eye contact during interactions or difficulties in tracking moving objects might be signs of visual tracking or coordination issues.
5. Poor Academic Performance: Struggling with reading, writing, or copying from the board in school may be related to undetected vision problems, as clear vision is essential for learning and academic success.

\*These signs alone may not definitively confirm a vision problem, as they could also be caused by other factors, however it is a good practice to encourage parents to have the child's vision evaluated by an eye care professional or pediatrician if they are observed

**13. Identify three critical issues that must be addressed if an adolescent is to successfully transition to postsecondary education or enter the workforce.**

Answer: Successfully transitioning to postsecondary education or the workforce is crucial for blind adolescents to achieve independence and success in their adult lives. Three critical issues that must be addressed to support this transition are:

**Access to Assistive Technology and Training**: Blind adolescents require access to specialized assistive technology and training to navigate educational and work environments independently. Screen readers, Braille displays, and other adaptive devices are essential for accessing digital content. Additionally, training in using these technologies, along with orientation and mobility skills, ensures that blind individuals can fully participate in academic and workplace settings.

**Advocacy and Self-Advocacy Skills**: Blind adolescents need to develop strong advocacy and self-advocacy skills to articulate their needs and rights effectively. They should be empowered to request appropriate accommodations, communicate their preferences, and collaborate with educators, employers, and service providers to ensure their accessibility needs are met.

**Career Preparation and Mentorship**: Blind adolescents benefit from comprehensive career preparation programs and mentorship opportunities. These programs should focus on career exploration, skill development, and job readiness training. Having access to mentors who are blind or visually impaired and successfully navigating postsecondary education or the workforce can be invaluable in providing guidance and inspiration for their future endeavors.

By addressing these critical issues, blind adolescents can build the necessary skills and confidence to pursue higher education, enter the workforce, and lead fulfilling and independent lives as active members of their communities.

**14. Besides cultural differences, what diversity issue must be addressed for parents who are also visually impaired?**

Answer: Besides cultural differences, another diversity issue that must be addressed for visually impaired parents is accessibility and accommodation. Providing accessible information, communication support, parenting training, and inclusive community activities can empower visually impaired parents to actively participate in their children's upbringing. Accessible parenting tools and resources also play a crucial role in supporting them in various parenting tasks.

**15. Identify five technology accommodations that can be provided in high school for a student who is legally blind.**

Answer: For a high school student who is legally blind, technology accommodations can significantly enhance their learning experience and overall educational success. Here are five technology accommodations that can be provided:

**Screen Readers**: Screen readers are software programs that read aloud the content displayed on a computer screen. By using a screen reader, a visually impaired student can access digital textbooks, educational websites, and other online resources, enabling them to participate fully in classroom activities and complete assignments independently.

**Braille Displays**: A Braille display is a device that converts digital text into Braille characters, allowing a student who reads Braille to access and navigate digital content, including documents, emails, and web pages. It provides a tactile representation of the information presented on the screen, facilitating effective learning and communication. Presently my students are learning to use the Braille Sense 6

**Voice-to-Text Software**: Voice-to-text software, also known as speech recognition software, enables a visually impaired student to dictate their thoughts and ideas, which are then converted into written text. This technology is beneficial for writing essays, taking notes, and completing written assignments without the need for traditional keyboard input.

**Electronic Magnifiers**: Electronic magnifiers, or video magnifiers, help visually impaired students read printed materials by magnifying text and images displayed on a screen. These devices are particularly useful for reading printed books, handouts, and other classroom materials that may not be available in digital format.

**Accessible Learning Management Systems (LMS)**: Ensuring that the school's Learning Management System (LMS) and other digital learning platforms are accessible is crucial for visually impaired students. An accessible LMS should be compatible with screen readers, have clear navigation options, and offer alternatives for visual content, such as providing audio descriptions for images and videos.

By providing these technology accommodations, high schools can create an inclusive learning environment that empowers visually impaired students to actively engage in their education, access educational materials, and participate fully in classroom activities.

**16. Discuss the shortage of orientation and mobility specialists and how a child’s educational plan is affected by a shortage of personnel.**

Answer: In the book "Independent Movement and Travel in Blind Children: A Promotion Model" by Joseph Cutter, one critical concern that is addressed is the shortage of orientation and mobility (O&M) specialists. O&M specialists play a crucial role in supporting children with visual impairments in developing the skills and strategies necessary for safe and independent travel and navigation. However, there is a shortage of these specialists, which significantly impacts a child's educational plan and overall development.

The shortage of O&M specialists limits the availability of specialized instruction and support for children with visual impairments. As a result, many children may not receive adequate training in orientation and mobility skills, which are essential for navigating their environment, accessing educational resources, and participating fully in school activities. Without proper O&M instruction, children may face difficulties in independently moving around their school, using public transportation, or accessing community resources.

The scarcity of O&M specialists also puts a strain on the existing professionals who may have large caseloads and limited time to dedicate to each student. This can lead to less individualized instruction and limited opportunities for students to practice and refine their O&M skills. Additionally, the shortage may result in delays in assessing and addressing the specific needs of students, potentially impeding their progress in acquiring crucial travel and mobility skills.

To address the shortage of O&M specialists and mitigate its impact on a child's educational plan, various strategies can be implemented. This includes increasing the recruitment and training of O&M specialists, providing professional development opportunities for existing educators to enhance their O&M knowledge and skills, and establishing collaborative partnerships between schools, organizations, and agencies to maximize the available resources. Telepractice and technology-assisted instruction can also be utilized to expand access to O&M services, particularly in areas with limited specialist availability.

In my country, I would work towards raising awareness about the shortage of O&M specialists and advocate for increased funding and support to address this issue. I would collaborate with educational institutions, disability organizations, and government agencies to develop initiatives aimed at attracting and retaining O&M specialists. Additionally, I would explore innovative approaches, such as utilizing virtual platforms and assistive technologies, to enhance access to O&M instruction for children with visual impairments.

By addressing the shortage of O&M specialists and ensuring that children with visual impairments receive adequate support, we can empower them to develop essential independent travel and navigation skills, enhance their educational experience, and promote their overall autonomy and inclusion in society.

Conclusion: In the following space, write 4 to 8 paragraphs to conclude this course.

* Describe the 3 most important concepts you learned in this course.
* How would you use this knowledge to improve your life and work?
* How would you use this knowledge to increase your income?
* How would you use this knowledge to promote human rights in the world?

Answer: Throughout this course on Individuals with Visual Impairments, I have gained valuable insights that have profoundly impacted my understanding of supporting and educating students with visual challenges. Three key concepts that have stood out to me are the significance of inclusive practices, the role of assistive technologies, and the crucial need for Orientation and Mobility (O&M) specialists.

Firstly, the concept of inclusive practices has emphasized the importance of creating inclusive learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of all students, including those with visual impairments. By implementing inclusive teaching strategies, I can ensure that all students in my classroom have access to the curriculum and can actively participate in class activities. This includes using alternative formats for instructional materials, providing appropriate accommodations, and fostering a supportive and respectful classroom community.

Secondly, the role of assistive technologies in enhancing the educational experience of individuals with visual impairments has been eye-opening. As a special education teacher, I can leverage various assistive technologies to support my students in accessing information, communicating effectively, and engaging in classroom activities. This may include screen readers, magnification software, and braille displays, among others. Embracing these technologies can significantly improve the learning outcomes and independence of my students.

Additionally, the course has highlighted the critical need for O&M specialists in the lives of individuals with visual impairments. These specialists play a vital role in teaching orientation skills, mobility techniques, and independent travel, empowering individuals with visual impairments to navigate the world confidently and safely. I can collaborate with O&M specialists to develop comprehensive support plans for my students, ensuring they acquire essential skills for independent living and future success.

In my work as a special education teacher, I will apply this knowledge to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment for my students with visual impairments. By utilizing assistive technologies and collaborating with O&M specialists, I can tailor individualized education plans that address the unique needs and goals of each student.

Regarding increasing income, this knowledge allows me to recognize opportunities to share my expertise with other educators, schools, or organizations. By offering workshops, training sessions, or consultations on best practices for supporting students with visual impairments, I can provide valuable insights and contribute to the professional development of educators in the field of special education.

Furthermore, I can use this knowledge to advocate for the rights and well-being of individuals with visual impairments on a broader scale. By participating in awareness campaigns, joining advocacy organizations, or engaging in policy discussions, I can actively promote accessibility, inclusivity, and equal opportunities for individuals with visual challenges in education, employment, and society at large.

In conclusion, this course has equipped me with the tools and knowledge to become a more effective and compassionate special education teacher for individuals with visual impairments. By embracing inclusive practices, leveraging assistive technologies, and recognizing the importance of O&M specialists, I can provide comprehensive support to my students and foster their independence and success. Moreover, I can utilize this knowledge to enhance my career, contribute to the professional community, and advocate for the rights of individuals with visual impairments on a global scale.

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