

Perceptions of Teachers and Sustainable Development Strategies to be taken on Children with Special Needs (CWSN) in Schools

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ABSTRACT

Hearing is the ability to detect the mechanical vibrations referred to as sound. *Hearing* impairment is commonly known as 'deafness'. It is a hidden disability; it is difficult to identify a child with hearing impairment until interacting with him/her or noticing hearing aids. Aids may not be conspicuous as some hearing aids are very tiny and placed in or behind the ear or have surgically implanted cochlear implants and not all individuals with hearing impairments wear hearing aids. The most prominent feature of this impairment is the difficulty in hearing, understanding and using spoken language. Those who are born with this impairment or acquire it at a very young age may not have heard any language at all, even their mother tongue. Hence they do not learn and use spoken language automatically. Those who have acquired this impairment later in life may have a better understanding of language, but may still experience difficulties in using spoken language to communicate. Helen Keller quotes, "Blindness separates people from things; while deafness separates people from people". It is vital to note that hearing impairment does not create insurmountable barriers. Due to technological developments the impact of impairment on the child can be reduced dramatically. The philosophy of Education and policies promoting inclusive education lead to improved access and participation in schools. If teachers and parents work together cohesively and systematically, children with hearing impairment can acquire language and achieve their academic goals.

Keywords: Assessment, Attitude, Awareness, Classroom, Hearing, Inclusive Education

INTRODUCTION

The scheme of Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) is being followed in mainstream schools, since no detention policy has been adopted till grade 8 under the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act, 2009). The primary purpose of assessment and evaluation is to improve children's learning to help them progress leading to their overall development. Assessment during teaching-learning process (i.e., continuous assessment) gives clues about children, which the teacher can act upon to enhance holistic learning, especially where children are facing difficulties and special help is needed. The same CCE is applicable to the students with hearing loss too.

Effective assessment of children with hearing impairment is challenging as many have significant language and communication difficulties. Adapting the style of assessment to meet a child's specific needs is therefore critical. While assessing the child with hearing loss, the assessor/ teacher should face the child as he/she speaks and should speak slowly and clearly. Instructions should be simple and repeated, if required by the child. To the extent possible, the assessor/ teacher should first demonstrate the expected response, and then ask the child to perform.

Oral and written tests are typical evaluation tools. However, oral recitations or answers and written assessment material such as a question paper may present barriers of language and communication, especially for children with disabilities. A child may indeed know the answer, but may not be able to respond correctly. Oral tests such as evaluating through reciting a poem, narrating a story, elocution, and viva are challenging for children with hearing impairment as they face difficulties in comprehending the oral questions, framing answers in correct grammatical structures, speaking intelligibility and answering within the given time span. Hence, the manner and content of assessment needs careful planning. Oral tests could be modified using parallel techniques such as action songs, role playing or enacting stories, and distributing written text of the speech to the child with hearing loss. Designed to evaluate performance/knowledge in subjects like science, language, and maths, written tests generally consist of an objective, and short answer and essay type questions. Achievement is measured in terms of students' abilities in expressing the knowledge gained through correct written language. Inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms has become the focus of extensive research in education. It has both academic and social benefits for all students, such as providing opportunities for communication and social interaction. The evaluation of

teachers' attitudes towards inclusion appears to be a good method to determine the success of the programme. Although this has been widely researched in many countries, the available evidence is not consistent. This study was undertaken in the state of Andhra Pradesh in India, to measure and compare teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with hearing impairment in schools.

An attitude is a person's point of view about an idea or object in his /her everyday life, and it can be either positive or negative. It is necessary to have a positive attitude towards a given task in order to do it effectively, and it is true that an individual will invest more effort in a programme that is perceived to be positive and functional. Teachers' attitudes have been regarded as one of the major factors guaranteeing the success of inclusive education for students with special needs. It is important to examine the attitudes of mainstream educators as their perceptions may influence their behaviour towards, and acceptance of, such students (Sideridis & Chandler, 1996; Van Reusen et al, 2001; Hammond & Ingalls, 2003). The success of an inclusionary programme may be at risk if regular classroom teachers have negative perceptions regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities (Horne, 1983; Van Reusen et al, 2001). Negative perceptions of inclusive education may become obstacles as general education teachers attempt to include students with disabilities (Cawley et al, 2002). Although the attitude of teachers towards inclusion is a widely researched topic in many countries, the available evidence is not consistent and evidence from the state of Andhra Pradesh in India is scarce. Hence there is a need for a study on the attitude of teachers in this region towards inclusive education.

a) Attitude: Teachers working in Government institutions displayed significantly more positive attitudes towards inclusive education. This could be due to the availability of support services like teaching materials, special education teachers, speech therapists, etc. This result was in agreement with the study done by Myles and Simpson (1989). Working conditions in Government schools are more liberal when compared to non-Government organisations, and teachers are more functional because they have the freedom to change any modalities in the work structure as per need and demand. This could be another reason for higher scores among them.

b) Gender: Female teachers working in regular schools showed a positive attitude towards inclusive education for children with hearing impairment, when compared to male teachers. This could be due to better emotional intelligence of women, with better adaptation ability and empathy (Baron-Cohen, 2003). Several studies support the view that there is no correlation between a teacher's gender and the attitude towards inclusive education (Cornoldi et al, 1998; Avramidis et al, 2000; Kuester, 2000; Van Reusen et al, 2001). Harvey (1985), in a similar study, concluded that gender was not a significant factor in determining teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. However, other studies found that female teachers were inclined to have more favourable attitudes (Pearman et al, 1992; Leyser & Tappendorf, 2001) and appeared to have higher expectations of students with disabilities, than their male counterparts (Hodge & Jansma, 2000). In contrast, some studies found that male teachers were either significantly more confident than their female counterparts regarding their ability to teach students with disabilities (Jobe et al, 1996), or they held more positive views about inclusive education (Lampropoulou & Padellidu, 1997).

c) Level of teaching: The teachers at primary level agreed more strongly with the concept of inclusive education, compared to secondary level teachers. This result was in congruence with the work done by Cough & Lindsay (1991), where they reported that primary level teachers showed more positive attitudes as they were less concerned with subject-matter. To elaborate, teaching at primary school level involves the 'play way' method, so all the students can be equal participants and children with disabilities can cope easily through observation and learning, whereas at secondary level formal teaching is involved and not much consideration is given to the presence of children with disability.

d) Experience of the teachers: Teachers with more than 10 years experience showed a more positive attitude towards inclusive education when compared to teachers with less work experience. This could be due to the fact that as their experience increases, teachers become more aware about disabilities and the influencing factors, and this could create a positive attitude towards inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classrooms.

e) Qualifications of the teachers: Teachers with higher qualifications were more favourably inclined towards inclusive education when compared to those with lower qualifications. It is possible that those who graduated recently and are highly qualified could have greater exposure to ideas on educational reforms, and would consequently be more open to concepts such as inclusive education. This was in congruence with studies done by Florin (1995), LeRoy and Simpson (1996), and Villa et al (1996). However, others have found that individuals with higher educational qualifications were more negatively disposed towards integration (Stoler, 1992; Antonak et al, 1995).

To foster sustainable development and inclusivity for Children with Special Needs (CWSN) in schools, teachers need to be equipped with positive perceptions and strategies, including inclusive education practices, individualized support, and access to assistive technologies.

Teacher Perceptions And Challenges:

- a) **Positive Perceptions:** Many teachers recognize the benefits of inclusive education for the social and emotional development of CWSN.
- b) **Challenges:** Teachers face barriers and challenges in educating CWSN in regular classrooms, including a lack of training, resources, and understanding of diverse needs.
- c) **Attitudinal Barriers:** Some teachers may hold preconceived notions or biases towards CWSN, which can hinder their inclusion and progress.
- d) **Need for Training and Support:** Teachers require ongoing professional development and support to effectively implement inclusive practices and address the diverse needs of CWSN.

Sustainable Development Strategies For Cwsn In Schools:

- a. **Admit without Discrimination:** Schools should admit CWSN without discrimination and provide equal opportunities for education, sports, and recreation.
- b. **Accessible Environment:** Ensure that buildings, campuses, and facilities are accessible to all students, including those with disabilities.
- c. **Reasonable Accommodations:** Provide individualized support and accommodations based on the needs of each student.

Curriculum Adaptations:

- a) **Adapt National Curriculum:** Modify or adapt the national curriculum to promote individualized instruction and ensure access for all students.
- b) **Diverse Teaching Strategies:** Utilize various teaching strategies, including verbal, visual, kinesthetic, and written approaches.
- c) **Multisensory Learning:** Employ multisensory learning techniques to cater to different learning styles and needs.

Assistive Technology:

- a. **Provide Assistive Devices:** Ensure access to assistive devices and technologies that can help CWSN overcome barriers and participate fully in learning.
- b. **Teacher Training on AT:** Equip teachers with the knowledge and skills to effectively integrate assistive technology into the classroom.

Collaboration And Support:

- a) **Parent Involvement:** Encourage and involve parents in the education of their children with special needs.
- b) **Collaboration with Specialists:** Establish strong collaboration between general and special education teachers, therapists, and other professionals.
- c) **Peer Support:** Facilitate peer tutoring and cooperative learning opportunities to promote social inclusion and academic support.

Promote Positive Attitudes:

- a. **Raise Awareness:** Conduct awareness campaigns to promote positive attitudes towards inclusion and reduce stigma.
- b. **Foster Inclusive Culture:** Create a school culture that values diversity and celebrates the unique strengths of all students.

Sustainability Focus:

- a) **Integrate Sustainability:** Integrate sustainability themes into the curriculum to promote environmental awareness and responsibility.
- b) **Hands-on Learning:** Provide opportunities for hands-on learning and real-world experiences to enhance engagement and understanding.

CONCLUSION

This study attempted to investigate the attitudes of mainstream teachers toward inclusive education. The findings suggest that attitudes of teachers working in regular schools in East & West Godavari districts of Andhra Pradesh varied with respect to qualification, gender, experience, levels of teaching and management. This paper indicates a need for intervention to bring about more positive attitudes among teachers for the successful implementation of inclusive education. These findings can benefit all educators and professionals in related fields, and could help create more awareness among those who work with students with special needs. Individuals can reflect on their attitude towards inclusion and students with special needs, and observe how it affects the development and growth of the students. They can ensure they have the right training to teach students with special needs, and to make improvements so that a diverse classroom is a success. The present study also has implications for the administrators or policy-makers to frame laws and policies so that hearing-impaired children have more opportunities. While the government should allocate more funds, support from the administration would also help teachers gain the necessary expertise to educate diverse populations of students.

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