

Social Skills Development and Educational Outcome of Special Need Students in Special and Inclusive Settings

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Abstract

Lack of development of adequate social skills of special need students results in many disruptive behavior and poor academic gains. School setting is also an indicator of rise in academics and learning of social skills. The purpose of the current study was to investigate the social skills development and educational outcomes of special need students attending special and inclusive settings. Only 110 visually impaired students (60 from special and 50 from inclusive school setting) represent as special need children who participated as sample of the study. Data were collected from 5 Special Schools for Visually Impaired and 5 Inclusive Schools located in Delhi and NCR. Hindi Version of the Matson Evaluation of Social Skills with Youngsters: Self-rating form (MESSY) by Sharma (2000) was used to assess social skills development and to measure the educational outcome, aggregate percentage marks obtained by the students in their previous year's annual examination were collected from the records of the schools. Hypotheses formulated for this study were verified by applying appropriate statistical techniques- Mean, Standard Deviation and t-test. Significant differences found in the development of social skills and educational gains of the special need children in special vs. inclusive settings. Inclusive setting, to a great extent provides conducive learning environment and platform to develop social skills. Results of the study recommend implications for special and normal children, teachers and administrators.

Keywords: Social Skills, Educational Outcome, Special Need Students, Visually Impaired, Special School, Inclusive School.

Introduction

Education as a continuous process cultivates the skills, attitudes and knowledge necessary for successful integration into society and hence, develops the whole child. Schools should provide students with opportunities to discover, model, experience and learn from consequences. This is true for all learners; but it is especially true for children with special needs because they often face difficulties in social, emotional, communication, motor, and behavioural development, in addition to academic learning (Alpper & Ryndak, 1992). In preventing disabilities, in caring for those suffering from the disabilities and in helping the disabled ones to return to an independent and active life, education plays a decisive role.

Over the last few decades there is an international interest in the integration at the beginning, and then, in the inclusion of children considered as having special needs in regular schools (Thomas & Loxley, 2001). The perception that education should be provided to all children regardless of their singularities and needs has led to the philosophy of inclusive education. This philosophy opposes the practice of separation and it is based on the notion of equity. The inclusion philosophy does not simply refer to the placement of children categorized as having special needs into normal schools, but it also considers under which conditions we can educate effectively all children in such a way as to serve their needs, whichever these are (Barton, 1997). Inclusive education results in improved social development and academic outcomes for all learners. It leads to the development of social skills, better social interactions because learners

are exposed to real environment in which they have to interact with other learners each one having unique characteristics, interests and abilities. It is therefore, felt need of the time to assess the efficacy of the two systems.

Rationale of the Study

Education is a process of developing an individual into a responsible, purposeful, innovative, creative and useful human being (Ekeh, & Oladayo, 2013). Children with special needs occupy an important position and deserve more care and attention for their upbringing, unique needs, and abilities and accordingly learning environment should be modified to ensure their healthy development. Article 21A of the Constitution of India guarantees education as fundamental right and Section 26 of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995, and Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 also ensures free and compulsory education to all children with disabilities up to the age of 18 years.

Future of a society depends on its citizens who are physically sound, mentally & emotionally balanced and socially alert. Therefore, there is a need to create an atmosphere that takes care of proper physical, mental and social development of children so as to grow into an integrated personality (Hockenberry, & Wong's, 2013). Acquisition of social skills is considered as a fundamental part of mental health (Teodoro et al., 2005). Social skills are learned behaviors based on social rules that enable individuals to interact appropriately with others (Takahashi, et al., 2015), enable individuals to develop and maintain social relationships, enable social adaptation, and have enduring effects on life (Aksoy, & Baran; 2010). Social development is differentiated through individual education plans in which students build upon skills in class, or in the wider school community, that are later applied in their life. Social development of students with special needs can improve in a conducive environment both physical and cultural, primarily through increased social interaction with their peers (King, & Ryan, 2019).

Importance of social and behaviour skills, seeking cooperation, self-control, and other social skills are recognized as critical to achievement in academics and behavioral success (Lane, Pierson, & Giver, 2003). Research underscores that children with special educational needs manage to learn some academic skills in inclusive education, the rate of learning may increase if barriers of inclusion can be eliminated (Suleymanov, 2014). Children with disabilities who take part in general education classes show more academic, behavioural and social progress (Cole and Meyer, 1991) and experience an increase in acquisition and learning appropriate social and emotional skills, strategies, and techniques (Mac Suga Gage et al., 2012). Significant difference existed in the academic achievement and social growth of special needs pupils in inclusive and non-inclusive classrooms (Ekeh, & Oladayo, 2013; Lemmons, 2015). Conversely, inclusion found to limit the child's performance because the child, being a social rejectee, has problems in discussing and sharing

ideas with others (Mushoriwa, 2001). Sharma & Dilbag (2015) and Sharma & Das (2017) also provided with evidences with regard to aspiration and training of behavioral skills.

Although education policies have been progressively moving towards inclusive education from last several years; but tremendous difference has been observed in the implementation of inclusive education across nations. The available studies address the training of the social skills of pupils with special needs, but do not link their social skills to their position in inclusive classrooms. This issue is the focus of the study undertaken i.e., to compare the effect of special and inclusive school settings on the social development and educational outcome of children with special needs.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the present study were:

1. To find out the difference in the social skills development (along with five dimensions) of the visually impaired students attending special and inclusive school settings.
2. To find out the difference in the educational outcome of the visually impaired students attending special and inclusive school settings.

Hypotheses of the Study

1. There exists significant difference in the social skills development (along with five dimensions) of the visually impaired students attending special and inclusive school settings.
2. There exists significant difference in the educational outcome of the visually impaired students attending special and inclusive school settings.

Method and Materials

Descriptive survey method was employed for conducting the present study. The population of the present study was the visually impaired students who represent the special need students. The sample of the present study consisted of 110 visually impaired students studying in the 9th- 12th grade. Out of total 110 participants; 60 were drawn from 5 special schools and 50 from 5 inclusive schools situated in Delhi and NCR. Purposive sampling technique was applied to select the schools whereas respondents were selected randomly from special schools and from inclusive schools, all the visually impaired students included in the sample.

The data gathering instruments used in this study were: Hindi Version of the Matson Evaluation of Social Skills with Youngsters: Self-rating form (MESSY) by Sharma (2000). To measure the educational outcome, marks obtained by the students in their last qualifying annual examination were collected from the records of the schools. Data collected through using these tools were analyzed by applying appropriate statistical techniques- Mean, Standard Deviation and t-test.

Results and Discussion

Results related to development of social skills of special need students attending special and inclusive settings

Social skills development of visually impaired students attending special and inclusive settings was

measured across five dimensions namely: Appropriate Social Skills, Inappropriate Assertiveness, Overconfidence, Aggressive/Impulsive and

Loneliness. The results of the same is presented in table 1 along with its graphical representation vide figure 1.

Table 1 Significance of Difference between Mean Social Skills Development (Dimension Wise) Scores of Visually Impaired Students Attending Special and Inclusive Settings

Variables	Special Schools (N=60)		Inclusive Schools (N=50)		t-ratio
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
Appropriate Social Skills	59.88	12.37	52.67	11.04	3.23**
Inappropriate Assertiveness	27.67	10.57	21.48	11.32	2.95**
Overconfidence	21.28	7.43	19.23	5.85	1.61 ^{NS}
Impulsiveness	26.76	9.17	22.73	8.21	2.43*
Loneliness	6.87	2.65	4.82	2.18	4.46**
Total Social Skills Development	142.46	16.74	120.93	14.53	7.29**

Table Value of 't' ratio, at .05 level= 1.96, at .01 level= 2.58

*Significant at .05 level, **Significant at .01 level, NS: Not Significant

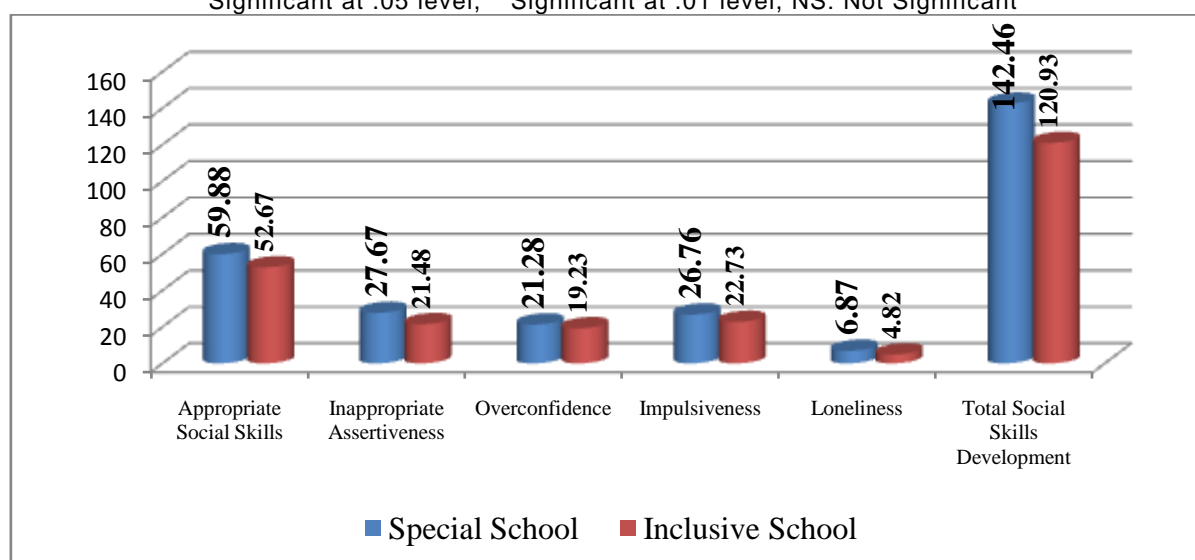


Figure 1: Mean Social Skills Development Scores of Visually Impaired Students Attending Special and Inclusive Settings

Table 1 depicts that the t-values for 'Appropriate Social Skills', 'Inappropriate Assertiveness', 'Impulsiveness' and 'Loneliness' dimensions of social skills development of visually impaired students in special and inclusive school settings came out to be 3.23, 2.95, 2.43 and 4.46 respectively. All these t-values are greater than table value and therefore, significant. Therefore, the hypotheses that 'there exists significant difference in the social skills development of the visually impaired students attending special and inclusive school settings' with regard to these dimension are retained. The table 1 also reveals that the t-value for 'Overconfidence' dimension of social skill development is found to be 1.61, which is less than table value at .05 level of significance and hence, not significant. Therefore, the hypothesis that 'there exists significant difference in the social skills development of the visually impaired students attending special and inclusive school settings' with regard to 'Overconfidence' dimension is rejected. Further, it can also be observed that t-value for 'Total

Social Skills Development' came out as 7.22, which is greater than table value at .01 level of significance and hence significant. Therefore, the hypothesis, that "there exists significant difference in the social skills development of the visually impaired students attending special and inclusive school settings" is accepted.

From the analysis and interpretation of the data reflected in table 1, it can be noted that visually impaired children studying in special and inclusive school settings are differ significantly in their total social development along with in the 'Appropriate Social Skills', 'Inappropriate Assertiveness', 'Impulsiveness' and 'Loneliness' dimensions of social development. But, no significant difference has been found between visually impaired children studying in special and inclusive school settings so far as 'Overconfidence' dimension of social development is concerned. It is also evident from table1 that the visually impaired children studying in inclusive schools have lower mean scores than the children studying in special schools except in the dimension

'Overconfidence'. It implies that the students of inclusive schools are socially more developed in all dimensions (as the lower scores in the test dimension indicates more social development) except the 'Overconfidence' dimension of social development as compared to the students attended special schools.

The result of the present study validates the findings of previous studies, which reported that all special need pupils are not at risk of being isolated or rejected in general education classrooms (Frostad, Mjaavatn, & Pijl, 2011; Avramidis, 2013; Grütter et al., 2015; Schwab, 2015). These studies documented those children with special needs in inclusive are socially more developed than the children of special schools. Bunch and Valeo (2004), David and Lise (2007) also strongly supports that socialization in the integrated schools allows the students to learn communication and interaction skills from each other, which eventually lead to develop web of friendship. Classroom composition and group norms also play a crucial role in the social participation of children in inclusive classrooms (Garrote et al., 2017; & Feldman et al., 2015). Garrote (2017) indicates that majority of pupils with intellectual disabilities were socially accepted and had friends in inclusive classroom.

Table 2 Significance of Difference between Mean Educational Outcome Scores of Visually Impaired Students Attending Special and Inclusive Settings

Variable	Group	N	Mean	S.D.	t-ratio
Educational Outcome	Special School	60	62.46	8.22	2.63**
	Inclusive School	50	66.32	7.14	

Table Value of 't' ratio, at .05 level= 1.96, at .01 level= 2.58

**Significant at .01 level

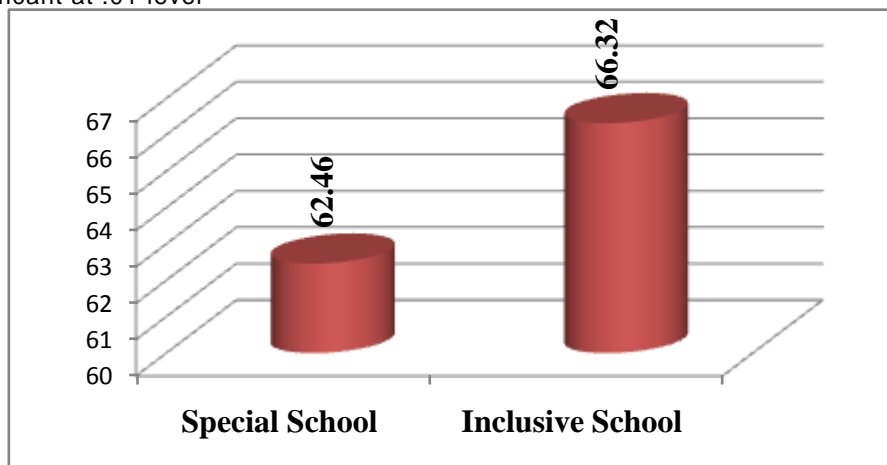


Figure 2: Mean Educational Outcome Scores of Visually Impaired Students Attending Special and Inclusive Settings

Table 2 reflects that the t-values for mean educational outcome scores of the visually impaired children studying in special and inclusive found to be 2.63, which exceeds table value at .01 level. Therefore, the hypothesis that "there exists significant difference in the educational outcome of the visually impaired students attending special and inclusive school settings" is accepted. It indicates that there exists significant difference between the two groups in their educational outcome. Table 2 also reveals that mean educational outcome score of the visually impaired children studying in inclusive school

Special need students expressed their feelings of being included in their schools and communities and the interaction with non disabled peers and teachers and their impact on them in enhancing social skills (Hergott, 2020).

The reason behind poor social skills development of special need children in special schools may be due to the fact that in residential special schools, special need children get less opportunity to come in contact with different people of the society. In these schools, they suppose to spend all the time with their own type of children only. Social aspect of the personality development of these children remains uncared. Conversely, such children in inclusive settings get optimal opportunity to come in contact with their non-disabled peers and hence expand their network of social relationship. Such factors may contribute to develop social skills.

Results Related to Educational Outcome of Special Need Children Attending Special and Inclusive Settings

Difference in the educational outcome of the visually impaired students attending special and inclusive schools has been presented in table 2 along with its graphical representation vide figure 2.

setting is higher than their counter group from special schools. It signifies that inclusive school setting offers a more conducive learning opportunity to special needs children than special school setting to perform better in academics.

This finding of the study is consistent with the studies conducted by Larry and Debra (1997), which documented integrated or inclusive schools as predictors of better academic achievement. Empirical findings By Dessemontet et al., (2012) reported that the group of included children made more progress in literacy skills than the group of

children in special schools. Students with special educational needs learn more academic skills in inclusive classroom (Suleymanov, 2014). Inclusion proved benefited the students with and without disabilities not only in academics, but also a social development as well (Majoko, 2017).

Higher academic achievement of special need children in inclusive schools may be attributing to the fact that in inclusive schools children are not taught with special methods only. Here they are treated equally along with their non-disabled peers. In such an environment, they perhaps get more exposure related to their academic activities. In inclusive settings these children enjoy the facility of regular as well as special classrooms' teaching imparted by the expert teachers. They also can discuss the academic problems with their non-disabled classmates. Even they can share their knowledge and information with their normal counterpart. All such factors immensely harness the academic achievement of the children with special need children. On the other hand, poor achievement of these children in special schools may be due to the traditional and monotonous method of teaching, inappropriate support services, dearth of well trained teachers, lack of dedication and indifferent attitude of the teachers towards their students.

Conclusion

The findings of the present study have immense educational implications especially for the special need children, able-bodied students, special and regular classroom teachers, parents, and professionals working in the concerned field, policy makers and administrators.

Due to labeling and stigma attached, disabled children in inclusive schools, may be rejected and teased by their non-disabled peers, which perhaps results in feeling of alienation. So, the teachers and parents of the normal children to teach their wards as to how to deal the disabled children and encourage them to make association with the special need children. Parents of the disabled children should provide least restrictive environment at home. All kinds of social and life skills should be taught at home and motivate them enhancing self-esteem. This in turn will lessen their behaviour problems and increase their ability to adjust in different circumstances.

Both general classroom teachers and special school teachers need to orient the special children about developing appropriate social skills. They should motivate their students to participate in co-curricular activities so as to flourish their talents and potentials keeping in mind to develop social network. Apart from it, educational achievement can be enhanced by adopting different pedagogical strategies of depending upon the nature of disability and obvious need of the children. Teachers need to be competent enough to address different learning styles and pace of learning of students by employing a range of teaching methods, including co-operative group learning, peer tutoring, team teaching and individualized instruction.

The administrators should be aware whether the special need children are getting equitable opportunity of education and other facilities or not. While framing and designing the curriculum and teaching materials for the children, utmost emphasis should be laid on the individual needs of the children. The duty of the policy makers should not be confined to frame the policies only; they should also supervise whether the policies framed by them are implemented in reality or not.

To conclude, it can be said that education is the core of equality and empowerment. Receiving good education gives way to opportunities to achieve. While education is important for all, for the disabled getting education can be a matter of survival. High quality education for all children is only possible if the system is able to provide meaningful curriculum, effective teaching by trained teachers and adequate supports for each student. Too many children with disabilities have fallen victims to an education system that is rigid and not able to meet their individual needs. If we firmly believe that all children can learn and most of them can be included into regular education, we need to create a regular class-environment that nurtures acceptance of diversity and promote friendships based on reciprocity and mutual respect.

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