

DIFFICULTIES FACED BY DIFFERENTLY ABLED CHILDREN IN THEIR CLASSROOMS AT SECONDARY LEVEL

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Abstract

The entire process of education is worthless if it is not as per the consideration of the learner as an individual and as a part of a big society. The constitution of India guarantees free and compulsory education to children of every section. It guarantees every child the right to education of comparable quality. The differently abled children are facing many difficulties in their classrooms. The objective of the study was to study the difficulties faced by differently abled children in the classrooms. Observation of the classes and semi-structured interviews with resource teachers were used as the major techniques in this study. The differently abled children were always struggling with the regular teachers' classes when the resource teacher is absent from the class. It is observed that the differently abled children faced many difficulties to attend the classes. Most of them were not interested in attending the classes. But the resource teachers in the class helped them in many ways. The differently abled children faced difficulties in following the contents of the curriculum. But they enjoyed using various types of technology in their classrooms. Group activities were more beneficial and interesting to such children and they enabled them to reduce the difficulties in the classroom. Insufficient adapted facilities in the classroom, lack of support from various stakeholders, improper learning strategies, lack of training for the teachers, the problem of curriculum transaction, and nonavailability of resource teachers all affected adversely the differently abled children in their classroom. It needs time to reconstruct the curriculum according to the needs and interests of the differently abled children.

Keywords: Differently abled children, Inclusive Education

Introduction

The entire process of education is worthless if it is not as per the consideration of the learner as an individual and as a part of a big society, so classrooms should be designed to welcome diverse learners and address their individual needs. The constitution of India guarantees free and compulsory education to children of every section. It guarantees every child the right to education of comparable quality. The Supreme Court of India says, the right to education flows directly from the right to life and is related to the dignity of the individual. More than 500 million people around the world are disabled as a consequence of mental or physical or sensory impairment. In developing countries, more than 90% of differently abled children are without any form of rehabilitation and education.

Education of Children With Special Needs (CWSN) has witnessed several changes, shifting from segregation to inclusion into the mainstream. Earlier, most educators believed that children with physical, sensory, or intellectual disabilities were so different that they could not participate in the activities of a common school (Advani, 2002). Though at a larger level in society, the philosophy of inclusion was always promoted in India, there was no formal or specialized assistance to children with special needs in schools.

Education is not only a fundamental right but also a basic necessity to be able to participate in one's community and flourish in life. The key aim of the progressive nature of educational change is to benefit all learners including those with special educational needs. Though there is greater awareness about inclusive education in the state, we have to travel a long way. To strengthen their activities, there is a need for providing orientation to the administrators, teacher educators, and other functionaries about inclusive education.

Need and significance of the Study

Inclusive education is sometimes seen as a political strategy based on human rights and democratic principles that confront all forms of discrimination, as part of a concern to develop an inclusive society. The important point is that inclusive education allows children with disabilities to stay with

their families and to go to the nearest school just like all other children. But in practice, it is not up to the level. Inclusive education is a programme that is gaining wide attention and has been described as a social movement against exclusion in education. It has focused on the restructuring of mainstream schools and being able to respond to the diversity of all students (UNESCO, 2005). In short, inclusive education emphasized that differently abled children should be fully included in school programmes and activities. Inclusion finally leads to the empowerment of all children.

The differently abled children are facing many difficulties in their classrooms. Studying the difficulties of such children is an area in this study. Children with disabilities or the disabled like cerebral palsy, mental retardation, physical disabilities, autism, visually challenged, and hearing impaired are admitted to the regular classes. These children form a minority group in the class. So the success of inclusive education depends upon the awareness, competence, and attitude of the teachers and resource teachers.

Objective of the Study

The objective of the study is as follows,

To study the difficulties faced by differently abled children in their classroom.

Methodology of the Study

The present study adopted with descriptive survey method. Qualitative data include open-ended information that the researcher gathers through interviews with resource teachers and observation of the classes related to the fulfillment of the concept of inclusive education.

Techniques used for the study

The observation was used as the major technique to realize the objective. Semi-structured interview with resource teachers was also used. Here the researcher used observation as the technique because it was very difficult to collect data from the differently abled children through questionnaire or interview.

Sample for the Study

Purposive random sampling technique was used for the collection of data for the study. The sample was selected from Pathanamthitta, Palakkad, and Kasargod districts from South, Middle, and North of Kerala State respectively. Representative samples were selected for the study. Due representation was given to almost all areas. The sample for the study primarily comprised differently-abled children in selected districts such as Pathanamthitta, Palakkad, and Kasargod districts.

Analysis of the Study

The analysis of the present study has been conducted qualitatively by finding the difficulties faced by differently abled children in their classrooms. This is analyzed from two perspectives; (i) Perceived by Resource Teachers (ii) Classroom Observation by the investigator

Difficulties faced by the differently abled children in their classroom: as Perceived by Resource Teachers

The researcher made a semi-structured interview with resource teachers to express the perceived difficulties of differently-abled children. A total of 6 resource teachers from three districts participated in the interview. Details of this selection are given in the table below.

Table 1
Distribution of Schools

Teachers	School
Teacher1	Govt. HS. Pathanamthitta
Teacher2	Netaji HSS, pramadom
Teacher3	Govt. HS. Koonathara
Teacher4	NSS KPT VHSS Ottapalam
Teacher5	Govt. HSS, Nellikkunnu
Teacher6	Govt HSS Chemmad.

The interview with resource teachers included questions from different areas such as their perceptions of curriculum, method of teaching, involvement, involvement of regular teachers, use of adaptive technology in the classroom, and perception of the approach of peers. Analysis of the qualitative data and discussions are given as extracts.

Extract 1: Perception of Curriculum

The curriculum for secondary education is the same for differently abled and other children in the existing inclusive system. However, the structure of the curriculum is designed according to the skills and abilities of normal children. Hence it is important to get the perception of resource teachers in this area.

All the resource teachers suggested modifications in the curriculum to meet the needs of differently-abled children. Two out of the six resource teachers explained the necessity of community-based learning programmes for the effective education of differently-abled children. All six resource teachers opined that more life-oriented areas should be included in the curriculum. Curriculum adaptation is the principle behind inclusive education and the design of the curriculum is based on such principles. Resource teachers and parents of disabled children should be included in the panel for the framework of curriculum design. All the resource teachers who were interviewed expressed the same opinion that if the curriculum is suitable for the differently abled that will be helpful to reduce the dropout of such children.

All the resource teachers admitted that there are positive changes in curriculum to meet the needs of the differently abled. But the differently abled children face many difficulties due to the inadequacy of the curriculum. Adaptation of the curriculum for the differently abled is not up to the mark. The inadequacy of training programs is also a major reason behind the slow progress of the adaptation of the curriculum of teachers as well as resource teachers. Exclusive skill training programmes in the curriculum can be included.

Extract II: Resource Teachers' Perception of Method of Teaching

The method of teaching should be according to the age, attitude, and abilities of the differently abled children. The different teaching methods provide the necessary support that maximizes the academic and social development of such children. Different teaching methods like team teaching, peer teaching, brainstorming, etc. can be adopted in the classroom to scaffold the differently abled children. Different still and working models related to the topics are helpful for such students. The preparation of daily schedules by the teachers helps them to plan the method.

All six resource teachers suggested that the method of teaching should be following the age and abilities of the child. When designing the method, the prime focus is on the social development of the differently abled child. ICT-enabled and online education helps a differently abled child to improve his/her learning. Peer tutoring and cooperative learning will benefit these children. Two out of six resource teachers supported group activity as the best method for differently abled children. All of them suggested reframing the lessons and using simple language for the differently abled children. The resource teachers should give equal priority to the bright student as well as children with special needs and encourage the students to find out their difficulties in the area of learning by providing different kinds of textbooks and materials. Preparation of daily schedules in advance is the major step to reduce the difficulties of differently abled students. Resource teachers should also be provided with opportunities to reflect on their own experiences and their influence on these students.

Scaffolding is an apt technique that will help differently-abled children in their learning. Individual attention is the major factor that shows the effectiveness of a method of teaching. Simple language and using of technology are essential to grab the attention of the differently abled. Grouping students into small groups and assigning work help them a lot. Peer tutoring, cooperative learning, and Role-playing also help to show their skills in a better manner.

Extract III: Perception of the involvement of Resource Teachers and secondary school Teachers

This dimension intended to find out the perception of resource teachers on their contribution to minimizing the difficulties of the differently abled and the involvement of school teachers in this aspect. Responses of all six teachers on this dimension were more or less similar.

All resource teachers responded more or less the same regarding the involvement of resource teachers and regular teachers. The workload of resource teachers was more and so it was difficult to manage the differently abled children at the expected level. Often, most of the resource teachers are

forced to work in more than one school, and hence, they are not able to attend to the students regularly. The differently abled children face many difficulties in their classroom due to the lack of continuous availability of resource teachers. Continuous support from the resource teacher is a must for differently abled children to reduce their difficulties in classrooms.

Regarding the questions on secondary school teachers, four out of six resource teachers responded that they get enough support from the regular teachers in tackling the problems faced by differently-abled students. The school teachers help the resource teachers in preparing the schedule, counseling programmes, parental awareness programmes, using adapted techniques, arranging the classes, providing basic amenities, etc. The resource teachers believe that it is the regular teachers who always interacted with the differently abled children, so the government should provide adequate training to them.

Extract IV: Perception of the use of Adaptive Technology in the Classroom

Responses to this dimension from all teachers were approximately the same. The use of technology in the classroom helps the students to follow the content easily and interestingly. Adaptive technology is largely instrumental in bridging the gap for the differently abled students in the class. Adaptive technology means technology that is user-friendly to differently-abled children. All teachers responded positively regarding the use of technology in classrooms.

Adaptive technology helps differently abled children to increase their access to the general curriculum and improve their academic performance. Any adaptive device or service that increases participation, achievement, or independence for a student with a disability may be considered an adaptive technology.

Adaptive technology is mainly used for the benefit and convenience of differently abled children. This will help the students to minimize their difficulties in the classroom. The resource teachers suggested audio and video aids to help the differently-abled children. But proper training for the teachers in using the devices is necessary. They are of the view that, when using technology in the classroom, will relieve them from the monotonous task of lecturing and extra attention can be given to the differently abled students as far as possible. But one thing to remember is that it is not possible to replace the teacher with technology.

Extract V: Perception of the approach of Peers

In this dimension, the researcher collected the perception of resource teachers on the role of peers of differently-abled children. All resource teachers are of the view that it is the peers who support the differently abled to a great extent. The students face many difficulties in the classroom, but the majority of the problems are tackled by them with the help of peers.

The positive approach of the peers helped the differently abled children to minimize their difficulties in the classroom. It helps to develop friendships, and familiarize with the general curriculum, creating more opportunities, and increasing collaboration between differently abled children and various stakeholders.

The resource teachers saw different types of support in their classrooms. Mainly peer support was a strategy by placing students in small groups to participate in various activities. It also helped the teachers as well as resource teachers to handle the differently abled children in their classrooms. Peer tutoring was the best method for grabbing the attention and interest of differently-abled children. It helps them to practice and review the learning situations. In some classes, older students are also helpful to the differently abled.

Difficulties faced by the differently abled children in their classroom: as Identified by the Researcher through Observation

As part of the data collection to realize the objective regarding the difficulties of the differently abled children in the classroom, the researcher conducted a direct observation of inclusive classrooms. The observations were conducted after collecting information from resource teachers through interview. The observation focused on the difficulties of children in the classroom as it is perceived by the resource teachers.

An observation schedule is prepared to conduct the observation. The schools selected for the observation are as it is given in the table below.

Table 2
 Selected schools for Observation

Schools	Districts	Number of classes observed	Number of observations in each class	Duration
School 1	Pathanamthitta	1	3	45 mts
School 2	Pathanamthitta	1	3	45 mts
School 3	palakkad	1	3	45 mts
School 4	Palakkad	1	3	45 mts
School 5	Kasargod	1	3	45 mts
School 5	Kasargod	1	3	45 mts

The researcher has conducted 18 observations in 6 schools and has selected one class from each school and observed the class 3 times in different sessions. This helped to eliminate certain observed difficulties because such difficulties have not been repeated in all three classes. The repeated difficulties of the differently abled children in all three observed classes are taken into account. Details of the observation in three different sessions of the same class are given together.

The differently abled children were always struggling with the regular teachers' classes when the resource teacher is absent from the class. It is observed that the differently abled children were facing difficulties attending the classes. But the resource teachers in the class helped them by dictating lessons in the class. The teachers and resource teachers were always working together for mainstreaming the differently abled children. In the case of curriculum, it is not possible to evaluate the curriculum by observing the class. The researcher's observation and Resource teachers' responses are congruent with most of the findings regarding the difficulties of differently-abled children.

Findings of the Study

Resource Teachers' Response: Congruence and Conflicts

The triangulate analysis of findings of perception based on resource teachers' responses has been done to identify major points of congruence and conflicts with the result. Finding out these similarities and differences in the perception of resource teachers will strengthen the analysis. But the major limitation was that through observation, the researcher couldn't evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum. Resource teachers' responses about the relevance of the curriculum were experienced by the researcher by observing the classes to some extent.

Congruence and Conflicts between Resource Teachers' Responses and Researcher's Observation

- Resource teachers believe that the curriculum should be modified according to the needs of differently abled children and it will lessen their difficulties in the classroom. But the researcher observed that even the timely involvement of the resource teachers in matters of the differently abled will be a relief to them.
- The resource teachers responded that if the curriculum is adaptive to the differently abled children, it will reduce the dropout rates of such children. But, to the researcher in addition to that, the attitude of peers and teachers towards the differently abled children is another factor that determines the attitude of the differently abled children.

- To resource teachers, various techniques can be adopted in the teaching-learning process for mainstreaming differently-abled children. The methods of teaching should be according to the needs, abilities, and interests of the differently abled children. But some of the schools adopted outdated and monotonous methods.
- Resource teachers recommended Peer tutoring, cooperative learning, and team teaching as the best methods for differently abled children in an inclusive class. The researcher observed that the differently abled children were more active in group activities.
- Resource teachers suggested that school teachers can give more contributions to the education of differently-abled children. But some teachers are not at all interested in dealing with the problems of differently-abled children.
- Integrating the curriculum with ICT help differently abled children to reduce their difficulties in various classroom activities. But there are no conscious efforts from the teachers to integrate technology with classroom practices.
- Resource teachers responded that proper coordination between peers of differently abled children and teachers is very essential in the successful implementation of inclusive education programmes. But researcher observed little cooperation between them.

Limitations of the Study

The data regarding the difficulties of differently abled children in their classroom are suggested to collect based on observation. Collecting data from differently abled children directly was avoided due to procedural difficulties. The data from such children may be available directly only with the help of scribes. It is difficult to appoint a scribe for each respondent from the group and hence it is decided to delimit the data collection through resource teachers' and researcher's observation only.

The inclusive education programme at the secondary level explained that children with Blindness, Low Vision, Leprosy Cured, Hearing Impaired, Locomotive Disabilities, Mental Retardation, Mental Illness, Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Speech impairment, and Learning disabilities as differently-abled children. All these groups are part of the inclusive system of education. However, the present research delimited the sample groups from children with mental illness, autistic features, cerebral palsy, and mental retardation.

Conclusion

The differently abled children were always struggling with the regular teachers' classes when the resource teacher is absent from the class. It is observed that the differently abled children faced difficulties attending the classes. Most of them were not interested in attending the classes. But the resource teachers in the class helped them in many ways in the class. The differently abled children faced difficulties in following the contents of the curriculum. But they enjoyed using various types of technology in their classrooms. Group activities are more beneficial and interesting to such children and it enables them to reduce the difficulties in the classroom. In the case of curriculum, it is not possible to evaluate the curriculum by observing the class.

But according to the response of the resource teachers, it is the need of the time to reconstruct the curriculum according to the needs and interests of the differently abled children. If the curriculum is adaptive to differently-abled children, it will reduce the dropout rates of such children. The attitude of a minority of students adversely affects the minds of differently-abled children. Such attitude leads to isolation of the children in the class. Due to various kinds of differential abilities, the majority of the differently abled children were not able to attend classes regularly.

The differently abled students face many difficulties in their classrooms. Some of them suffered from multiple disabilities. Insufficient adapted facilities in the classroom, lack of support from various stakeholders, improper learning strategies, lack of training for the teachers, the problem of curriculum transaction, and non-availability of resource teachers all are affected adversely by the differently abled children in their classroom. It needs time to reconstruct the curriculum according to the needs and interests of the differently abled children. If the curriculum is adaptive to differently-abled children, it will reduce the dropout rates of such children.

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