



## A study to assess the peer acceptance of sensory challenged and Non-disabled children in an inclusive education environment

Asha.S.C and Venkat Lakshmi. H

Department of Human Development and Research Centre, Smt. V.H.D. Central Institute of Home Science, Seshadri Road, Bangalore 560 001, India.

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to assess the peer acceptance of sensory challenged and non-disabled children in an inclusive education environment. A self structured tool developed by the investigator was used to assess the peer acceptance of sensory challenged and non-disabled children. Purposive sampling procedure was used to select the schools catering to the educational needs of both sensory challenged and non-disabled children attending inclusive schools in Bangalore city. 100 sensory challenged and 100 non-disabled children aged between 10-15 years were selected for the study. The research design included a quasi experimental design. Data collected was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The post assessment data revealed that the intervention programme had a positive influence on peer acceptance of sensory challenged and non-disabled children in an inclusive education environment.

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### Introduction

Sensory impairments are those with diverse range of conditions affecting sight, hearing and sometimes both, affecting people of all ages including children. Those with sensory impairments are referred to as sensory impaired or sensory challenged. The degree and type of impairment varies with each individual. Patricia Carlton and Jennifer Hertzfeld (2013) define sensory challenged children (SCC) as those who are blind, visually impaired, deaf, or hearing impaired who often require the assistance of auxiliary aids and adaptive equipment in the classroom [1]. These children are categorized by noticeable significant limitations and challenges in physical, cognitive/intellectual, speech and language, social and behavioural, and sensory development when compared to that of their non-disabled peers. The limitations and challenges of SCC are at a distinctive disadvantage to learn and benefit along with other non-disabled children (NDC) as a result, they are often neglected in the field of education, communication and social development. Therefore, education should be a guiding force in building strong school communities in which both sensory challenged children and non-disabled children are accepted under the umbrella of 'Inclusive Education'. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2009 defines inclusive education as an ongoing process aiming at offering quality education for all, while respecting diversity and the different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of the students and communities, eliminating all forms of discrimination [2]. Thus, inclusive school is a socializing agency where both SC and NDC are provided with opportunities to participate fully and get access to a variety of activities, experiences and programmes in a regular classroom environment. This in turn will help both SC and NDC to accept each another.

Wells (2011) define Peer acceptance as "the degree to which a child or adolescent is socially accepted by his or her peers. It includes the level of peer popularity and the ease with which the child or adolescent can initiate and maintain satisfactory peer relationships" [3]. According to Piaget (1932) peer relationships are important for cognitive and social development. They influence performance, learning, understanding, co-operation, social behaviour and socialization, as children love to be liked by their peer group members [4]. Therefore, inclusive education should provide encouragement for both SC and NDC to accept one another through initiating and sustaining relationships through friendship. Further, it also helps in developing belongingness among peers and also in taking into account the emotional well being through care and acceptance. Studies have shown that children with disabilities want to be seen as 'normal' (Priestly et al.1999) [5], stay healthy, to have friends and interests, to be part of the local community, to acquire social and self-care skills and future independence, to feel confident and respected by others, and to experience success and achievement (Beresford et al. 2007) [6]. Therefore, both sensory challenged and non-disabled children should also be encouraged to foster and maintain positive social relationships which in turn will provide a ray of hope to understand and accept each. Hence, an attempt has been made in the present research to assess the peer acceptance of sensory challenged and non-disabled children in an inclusive education environment.

### Aim

To assess the peer acceptance of sensory challenged and non-disabled children in an inclusive education environment.

### Limitations of the study

1. The study was limited to 100 sensory challenged children and 100 non-disabled children aged between 10-15 years attending inclusive schools.

2. The study was limited to the schools catering to the inclusive educational needs of sensory challenged children in Bangalore City.

### Methodology

#### Selection of samples

A total sample of 200, consisting of 100 sensory challenged and 100 non-disabled children aged between 10-15 years were selected for the present study. Further, they were subdivided into experimental group and control group [Experimental group comprising of 50 sensory challenged and 50 non-disabled children and Control group comprising of 50 sensory challenged and 50 non-disabled children]. The samples identified as sensory challenged children were based on the medical test conducted and certified by ophthalmologists and audiologists and maintained by the school as record.

#### Sampling technique

Purposive sampling technique was used to select sensory challenged children attending inclusive schools. Whereas, simple random sampling technique was used to select non-disabled children attending inclusive schools.

#### Tools used

To assess the peer acceptance of both sensory challenged and non-disabled children, investigator developed and standardized a scale. The scale consisted of information related to the demographic profile of the samples and specific information related to peer acceptance. The scale was translated into regional language (Kannada) to evoke a better response. The items were rated on 5 point scale, always, frequently, sometimes, rarely and never with a scoring pattern of 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 respectively.

#### Pretest

During pre-test the investigator established a personal rapport with both sensory challenged and non-disabled children of both experimental group and control group in order to create a comfort zone. Further, pre-test was conducted to assess the peer acceptance of both sensory challenged and non-disabled children in an inclusive education environment.

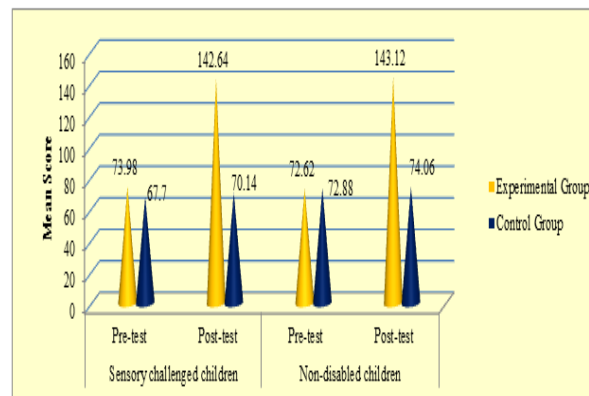
#### Intervention programme

The sensory challenged and non-disabled children of experimental group received a comprehensive interactive intervention programme spread over a period of one month. The duration of the intervention programme was 2 hours per day in the afternoons on Mondays and Wednesdays and in the mornings on Saturdays. Each concept introduced was reinforced by using different techniques so as to reinforce the concepts taught and to make learning more effective. Further the SC and NDC were given incentives and rewards in the form of school supplies in order to encourage and motivate them to perform better.

### Post-test

To study the effectiveness of the intervention programme, after a gap of one month post-test was conducted for both SC and NDC from both experimental group and control group. The data obtained was subjected to analysis. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to analyze the data on the objective formulated.

### Results and Discussion



**Figure 1. Pre-post score on peer acceptance of sensory challenged and non-disabled children of experimental group and control group in an inclusive education environment.**

It is observed from table 1 and figure 1 that during pre-test sensory challenged from the experimental group had accepted their peers a little better ( $73.98 \pm 25.68$ ) when compared to their non-disabled peers ( $72.62 \pm 19.17$ ). Whereas, in the case of control group, non-disabled children had a better peer acceptance ( $72.88 \pm 25.49$ ) when compared to their sensory challenged peers ( $67.70 \pm 12.03$ ). This could be attributed to the fact that both sensory challenged as well as non-disabled children experience difficulty in developing interpersonal relationships with their peers, because of initial adjustment problems.

At the time of post-test there was a gradual change in acceptance among both sensory challenged and non-disabled children from experimental group. Sensory challenged and non-disabled children started accepting and seeing their peers in positive light with the mean score being  $142.64 \pm 9.34$  and  $143.12 \pm 5.56$  and the 't' value for the pre-post scores being strongly significant (17.7673 and 24.9760) when compared to their pre-test scores with the mean score being  $73.98 \pm 25.68$  and  $72.62 \pm 19.17$ . No improvement was observed among both sensory challenged and non-disabled children from control group. This could be attributed to the fact that sensory challenged and non-disabled children in an inclusive education environment due to rigid behaviours and attitude, they tend to reject their peers, leading to isolation.

**Table 1. Pre-post score on peer acceptance of sensory challenged and non-disabled children of experimental group and control group in an inclusive education environment.**

Peer acceptance	Experimental group					Significance of 't' value
	Sensory challenged children	Non-disabled children	Significance of 't' value	Sensory challenged children	Non-disabled children	
	Pre-test	Post-test		Pre-test	Post-test	
	Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD		
	$73.98 \pm 25.68$	$142.64 \pm 9.34$	17.7673**	$72.62 \pm 19.17$	$143.12 \pm 5.56$	24.9760**
Control group					Significance of 't' value	
	$67.70 \pm 12.03$	$70.14 \pm 18.72$	0.7753 <sup>NS</sup>	$72.88 \pm 25.49$		$74.06 \pm 14.88$

\*\* Significant at 1% level, NS Not significant

The data of the control group is encapsulated in the study conducted by Honig and McCarron (1988) study who stated that learners with disabilities placed in regular schools, tend to be more socially rejected by peers, display more social isolation, place more demands on teacher time, are less attentive and more often the recipients of the negative behaviour from the other able-bodied learners [7]. Similarly, in a study by Hogan, et al (2000), it was reported that learners with disabilities are half as likely to report a sense of belonging, feeling safe or accepted than their learners without disabilities [8].

It was observed that children had low peer acceptance at the time of pre-test. During the course of intervention programme both SC and NDC were motivated to take part spontaneously and actively which facilitated them in overcoming their fears and inhibitions. The intervention programme also had a lasting impression on both SC and NDC to make a beginning in accepting their peers. Further, the investigator made an effort in helping both SC and NDC to overcome their inhibitions and inferiority complex; thereby helping them in accepting their peers. The findings of the present study is in line with the study carried out by Dawn (2011) who highlighted that placement of visually impaired children and sighted children in a homogenous group, promoted better understanding and awareness of the problems and needs of each other, thereby fostering better and more intimate relationships [9].

Thus, it can be concluded that through the influence of an intervention programme, both SC and NDC can be helped with gaining better peer acceptance and be more supportive and caring about their peers.

#### **Conclusion**

It is a widely accepted notion that being accepted by peers plays a very important role in social milieu which leads to children's socio-emotional development. Peer acceptance is a complex phenomenon wherein, number of situations influences the quality of social interactions among both SC and NDC. Therefore, gaining acceptance among sensory challenged and non-disabled children in an inclusive education

environment plays a important role for successful education. Results of the present study indicated that, intervention programme influenced peer acceptance. Thus, it can be inferred that both sensory challenged and non-disabled children should take a lead role in making use of the opportunities in order to have a good and cordial social relationship.

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