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Asha SC
Research Scholar,
Department of Human
Development and Research
Centre, Smt. V.H.D. Central
Institute of Home Science,
(Autonomous), Seshadri Road,
Bangalore 560001

Dr. Venkat Lakshmi H
Associate Professor
Department of Human
Development and Research
Centre, Smt. V.H.D. Central
Institute of Home Science,
(Autonomous), Seshadri Road,
Bangalore 560 001

Correspondence
Asha SC
Research Scholar,
Department of Human
Development and Research
Centre, Smt. V.H.D. Central
Institute of Home Science,
(Autonomous), Seshadri Road,
Bangalore 560001

Social Skills and Social Behaviour of Sensory Challenged and Non-Disabled Children in an Inclusive Education Environment

Asha SC, Dr. Venkat Lakshmi H

Abstract

Sensory Challenged Children are referred to as those “who are deaf-blind, deaf, hearing impaired and visually impaired”. Education is the fundamental right of every child and sensory challenged children cannot be deprived of the same. School is a socializing agency that helps both sensory challenged and non-disabled children to learn and understand the patterns of social behaviour and also the norms of social relationship. Social skills and social behaviour is regarded as one of the important aspects in school for the success and wellbeing of children in academics, interpersonal relationships and personality development. The perception of non-disabled children have about sensory challenged children prevents them from being accepted which hinders their social interaction. This in turn will obstruct their classroom participation and also in their school activities. An attempt has been made to study the social skills and social behaviour of both sensory challenged children and non-disabled children in an inclusive school environment. Hundred sensory challenged children and hundred non-disabled children in the age bracket of 10-15 years studying in an inclusive school in Bangalore city were selected. Self-structured scales was formulated and standardized to assess the social skills and social behaviour of sensory challenged and non-disabled children. The design for the study included a pre and post method with an intervention programme. Data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The study highlights the need both sensory challenged and non-disabled learn to develop, refine and mould their social skills as well as their social behaviour which is crucial and lays the foundation for inclusive education.

Keywords: Sensory Challenged (SC), Non Disabled Children (NDC), Inclusive Education Environment (IEE), Social Skills (SS), Social Behaviour (SB).

1. Introduction

An individual with sensory impairment such as blindness, deafness, deaf-blind, visually impaired and hearing impaired are referred to as sensory challenged children. Because of their impairment they cannot be deprived of their education as education is a fundamental right of every child and there is no child who ‘cannot learn’. Education is a powerful instrument for social change which initiates upward trend in the social structure by bridging the gap under the umbrella of ‘inclusive education’ between sensory challenged and non-disabled children. Loreman, Deppler and Harvey (2006) ^[7] define inclusion of children with different abilities in all aspects of schooling that other children are able to access and enjoy. School is a socializing agency where in children learns particular social pattern and norms that is required for social interaction in the society. For achieving this goal, inclusive schools have to adapt certain teaching strategies, social and instructional needs and demands of all children in classroom and must prepare sensory challenged children to handle the diversity. Access to education should be the first stage in overcoming the exclusion of persons with disabilities from mainstreaming (Booth, 2000) ^[1]. A successful education is one that is loaded with fun and motivated by emphasizing the values that a child must possess. A positive learning environment helps both the sensory challenged and non-disabled children to learn and progress.

Sensory challenged children in a special school develops the traits such as withdrawal, isolation, lack of ability to communicate, difficulty in establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships. Whereas, these traits are concentrated in an inclusive school by providing an opportunity to develop team work, interpersonal relationship and co-operative

learning. They are provided with an arena for observation where the sensory challenged children engage, reflect and discuss the process of learning which in turn helps in the development of social skills. According to Gresham (1998) [5] social skills refers to “socially acceptable learned behaviors enabling individuals to interact effectively with others and avoid or escape socially unacceptable behavior exhibited by others”. These skills are acquired primarily through learning that involves observation, modeling, rehearsal and feedback (Michelson *et al.*, 1983, cited in Gresham and Elliott, 1990) [8]. Sensory challenged children often face difficulties in interacting, playing, communicating, behaving in ways that are socially and culturally acceptable. Rose & Asher (2000) [13] found that many social skills programs follow a focal child model, where children are taught social skills individually by an adult coach and then practice with a peer.

While social behavior involves more than one individual with the primary function of establishing, maintaining, or changing a relationship between individuals, or in a group (society). Children are not born with learned skills and behaviours they learn skills and behaviours through their parental figure at home and when they enter into the school they learn through their peers and teachers. It is here where both sensory challenged and non-disabled children’s learning styles and behaviours can be adapted to ensure high quality learning outcomes. It provides an arena to understand, interact and play alongside with their peers through sharing, cooperating, empathy, and taking turns while interacting. According to the article on “Effects of Inclusion on Children with Special Needs and their Peers” (n.d.) suggest that disabled students learn important social skills, appropriate communication and their peers learn valuable life skills such as accepting others, patience, and respect only with awareness and exposure. Therefore, through comprehensive intervention programme both sensory challenged and non-disabled children can be helped to develop a cordial relationship through successful friendship, adjustment, learning effective conflict management strategies and fostering friendship. Intervention programme on social skills and social behaviour in inclusive schools sensitizes non-disabled children to be a better peer tutor, develop tolerance, to understand the individual differences and exceptionality through interaction. It also helps sensory challenged children in orientating social interaction, to observe and imitate the socially acceptable behaviour and to develop higher standards of performance. Hence, emphasis was made in the present study to study the social skills and social behaviour of sensory challenged and non-disabled children in an inclusive education.

Methodology

The present study aimed to assess the social skills and social behaviour of sensory challenged and non-disabled children in an inclusive education environment. A total of 200 samples, consisting of 100 sensory challenged children and 100 non-disabled children aged between 10-15 years were selected for the present study. They were further subdivided into experimental group comprising of 50 sensory challenged children and 50 non-disabled children, and control group comprising of 50 sensory challenged children and 50 non-disabled children. Samples were selected from BEL School, Bangalore city, catering to inclusive educational needs of both sensory challenged and non-disabled children. The samples were identified as sensory challenged based on the medical records certified by the ophthalmologist and audiologist. Sensory challenged children were selected through purposive sampling technique and further non-disabled children were selected through systematic random sampling.

A self -structured rating scale formulated and standardized by the investigator was used for the present study. The scale consisted of basic profile and information related to social skills and social behaviour. A five point ratings of Always, Frequently, Sometimes, Rarely and Never was used. The positive items were given a score of 5 -1and a score of 1-5 was given for negative items.

The pre and post-test method with an intervention programme was used. Personal rapport was established with the children so as to create a comfort zone and to elicit required information. Sensory challenged and non-disabled children identified for the study were interviewed with the help of the developed scales.

The intervention programme was planned to develop appropriate strategies so as to enhance the social skills and social behaviour of both sensory challenged and non-disabled children. The samples were introduced to concepts such as brain storming, sharing, group games and physical activity to suit the needs of both sensory challenged and non-disabled so as to improve their social skills as well as their behaviour. The concept was introduced with the time duration of one hour a day and was given for 3 days a week. Both sensory challenged as well as non-disabled children were given incentives such as school supplies and were praised wherever they performed well so as to provide encouragement and motivation.

Post-test was conducted for both sensory challenged and non-disabled children from control and experimental group to assess social skills and social behaviour and to study the effectiveness of the intervention program after a gap of one month. The data obtained was subjected to analysis. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to analyze the data on the objective formulated.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Social skills of sensory challenged and non-disabled children of experimental group and control group in an inclusive education environment

Social skills	Experimental group						Control group					
	Sensory challenged children			Non-disabled children			Sensory challenged children			Non-disabled children		
	Pre-test	Post-test	Significance of ‘t’ value	Pre-test	Post-test	Significance of ‘t’ value	Pre-test	Post-test	Significance of ‘t’ value	Pre-test	Post-test	Significance of ‘t’ value
	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD		Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD		Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD		Mean ± SD		
Social skills in classroom	14.80± 2.63	22.02± 2.08	15.2256**	16.14± 1.69	23.26± 1.75	20.6976**	15.68± 2.68	14.12± 3.18	2.6526**	13.02± 3.18	13.56± 2.57	0.9339 ^{NS}

Social skills in play	14.84±2.41	22.32±2.32	15.8139**	15.42±3.41	22.86±1.88	13.5125**	15.16±3.50	14.40±3.47	1.0903 ^{NS}	13.00±2.98	13.44±3.51	0.6757 ^{NS}
Social skills in peer pleasing skills	16.18±3.82	32.22±1.54	27.5412**	17.46±5.36	34.02±3.59	18.1519**	17.16±5.53	16.00±5.98	1.0071 ^{NS}	13.36±3.25	15.34±4.37	2.5710*
Social skills in teacher pleasing skills	14.18±5.16	28.80±2.64	17.8379**	14.00±3.63	28.12±2.16	23.6397**	13.38±3.43	13.66±4.79	0.3360 ^{NS}	13.40±4.85	13.46±5.33	0.0588 ^{NS}

** Significant at 1% level, *Significant at 5% level, NS Not significant

Table 1 reflects a desirable change in the experimental group with respect to social skills of both sensory challenged and non-disabled children. In the dimensions of ‘social skills in classroom’, ‘social skills in play’, ‘social skills in peer pleasing skills’ and ‘social skills in teacher pleasing skills’, sensory challenged children from experimental group had a higher mean score (22.02±2.08, 22.32±2.32, 32.22±1.54, and 28.80±2.64) than their pre-test scores (14.80±2.63, 14.84±2.41, 16.18±3.82 and 14.18±5.16) and with the ‘t’ value being strongly significant (15.2256, 15.8139, 27.5412 and 17.8379). Whereas, non-disabled children from experimental group also had a higher mean score (23.26±1.75, 22.86±1.88, 34.02±3.59 and 28.12±2.16) when compared to their pre-test score (16.14±1.69, 15.42±3.41, 17.46±5.36 and 14.00±3.63) under the dimension of ‘social skills in classroom’, ‘social skills in play’, ‘social skills in peer pleasing skills’ and ‘social skills in teacher pleasing skills’ with the ‘t’ value being strongly significant (20.6976, 13.5125, 18.1519, 23.6397). The increase in the mean values of both sensory challenged and non-disabled children from experimental group could be attributed to the activities such as picture completion, project, origami, suggestions to resolve conflict situations, etc. at the time of intervention programme that helped them to understand each other’s potentials, strengths and weakness.

While in the case of control group, sensory challenged children during post-test showed decline in their ‘social skills in classroom’ (14.12±3.18) when compared to their pre-test score (15.68±2.68) and the ‘t’ value being strongly significant (2.6526). Whereas, decline in the dimension of ‘social skills in play’ and ‘social skills in peer pleasing skills’ was also observed with the mean value being (14.40±3.47 and 16.00±5.98) when compared to the pre-test score (15.16±3.50 and 17.16±5.53) and the ‘t’ value being non significant (1.0903 and 1.0071). Further in case of social skills in teacher pleasing skills there was a slight improvement in the mean score (13.66±4.79) when compared to the pretest score (13.38±3.43) and the ‘t’ value being non-significant. In the case of non-disabled children from control group no change was observed in the dimension of ‘social skills in classroom’, ‘social skills in play’ and ‘social skills in teacher pleasing skills’, whereas in the dimension of ‘social skills in peer pleasing skills’ slight improvement was observed with the mean score being

15.34±4.37 when compared to their pre-test scores and the ‘t’ value being moderately significant (2.5710). Though sensory challenged and non-disabled children from control group did not receive intervention programme but, still a slight improvement was observed in the dimension of ‘social skills in classroom’ and decline in the dimension of ‘social skills in play’ and ‘social skills in peer pleasing skills’ among sensory challenged children. With regard to non-disabled children, slight improvement was observed in all the dimensions of social skills. The improvement in the mean score could be attributed to the fact that after pre-test both sensory challenged and non-disabled children from the control group may have thought of refining their social skills. Decline in the dimension of ‘social skills in play’ and ‘social skills in peer pleasing skills’ among SCC can be ascribed to the fact that sensory challenged children may be less competent in identifying the social skills due to lack of visual and auditory access. Lack of access to visual and auditory information hindered sensory challenged children’s ‘social skills in play’ and ‘social skills in peer pleasing skills’. The findings of the study is in line with the study carried out by Sacks, Lueck, Com, and Erin (1996) [14] whose observations highlighted that blind and visually impaired learners lacked social skills to start and carry on conversation, play games effectively, and to join and feel part of the group. They also highlighted that social skills cannot be easily learnt, it must be learnt gradually and be fine-tuned throughout one’s life.

During the course of the intervention programme, children from the experimental group were provided with activities which involved pairing of one sensory challenged and one non-disabled child to enhance interaction and communication between them. Further, group activities in the form of ‘project’, ‘Tom say’s’ game and ‘origami’ were also provided to ensure co-operation and bring unity among their peers. The investigator also provided individual activities to develop healthy competition and social competence. The finding of the study is in line with the findings by Landsberg (2005) [6] who has highlighted that classroom should be managed according to the needs of learners with visual impairments. Hence, it can be concluded that through interaction and effective means of communication, various activities both inside and outside the classroom, both sensory challenged and non-disabled children can learn, refine and hone appropriate social skills.

Table 2: Social behaviour of sensory challenged and non-disabled children of experimental group and control group in an inclusive education environment

Social behaviour	Experimental group						Control group					
	Sensory challenged children			Non-disabled children			Sensory challenged children			Non-disabled children		
	Pre-test	Post-test	Significance of ‘t’ value	Pre-test	Post-test	Significance of ‘t’ value	Pre-test	Post-test	Significance of ‘t’ value	Pre-test	Post-test	Significance of ‘t’ value

	Mean± SD	Mean± SD		Mean± SD	Mean± SD		Mean± SD	Mean± SD		Mean± SD	Mean± SD	
Interpersonal behaviour	20.86 ± 6.75	46.54 ± 3.45	23.9552**	22.00 ± 7.80	46.20 ± 4.05	19.4705**	22.00 ± 6.91	19.20 ± 7.51	1.9401 ^{NS}	25.40 ± 4.03	21.02 ± 8.29	3.3601**
Communicative skills	24.20 ± 4.91	36.50 ± 2.71	15.5087**	23.58 ± 5.78	36.98 ± 3.46	14.0667**	24.88 ± 5.37	22.94 ± 6.29	1.6586 ^{NS}	26.84 ± 4.72	23.04 ± 5.40	3.7467**
Self related behaviour	25.54 ± 2.92	24.06 ± 1.55	3.1657**	28.58 ± 3.39	24.48 ± 3.03	6.3763**	29.16 ± 4.02	28.76 ± 3.90	0.5050 ^{NS}	29.20 ± 3.81	29.48 ± 2.39	0.4402 ^{NS}
Assertive behaviour	20.06 ± 6.36	40.36 ± 2.43	21.0843**	21.88 ± 8.10	38.72 ± 1.78	14.3587**	23.88 ± 3.86	20.10 ± 6.42	3.5683**	22.44 ± 6.03	24.06 ± 3.63	1.6276 ^{NS}

** Significant at 1% level, NS Not significant

A cursory glance at Table 2 clearly depict the mean scores of pre and post test in the social behaviour aspect of sensory challenged and non-disabled children in an inclusive education environment. At the time of post-test both sensory challenged and non-disabled children from experimental group showed improvement in social behaviour. In the dimension of 'interpersonal behaviour', 'communicative skills', and 'assertive behaviour' both sensory challenged and non-disabled children showed improvement in the mean scores (46.54±3.54, 46.20±4.50; 36.50±2.71, 36.98±3.46 and 40.36±2.43, 38.72±1.78) when compared to the pre-test score (20.89±6.75, 22.00±7.80; 24.20±4.91, 23.58±5.78 and 20.06±6.36, 21.88±8.10) with 't' value being strongly significant (23.9552, 19.4705; 15.5087, 14.0667; and 21.0843, 14.3587). Whereas, in the dimension of 'self-related behaviour' decline in the mean scores of both sensory challenged and non-disabled children was observed (24.06±1.55 and 24.48±3.03) when compared to their pre-test score (25.54±2.92 and 28.58±3.39) and the 't' value being strongly significant (3.1657 and 6.3763).

The increase in the mean scores in the dimensions of 'interpersonal behaviour', 'communication skills' and 'assertive behaviour' indicates the effectiveness of the intervention programme. During the course of intervention programme, both sensory challenged and non-disabled children were provided with activities that promoted problem solving, seeking co-operation, self-control, discussions in small groups, etc. Further, both SC and NDC were encouraged to participate in activities so as to widen their social horizons. The activities of the intervention programme helped both SC and NDC from the experimental group to identify and resolve conflicts; seek help and co-operation from one another; develop team spirit and leadership qualities; control their emotions, impulsive behaviour and anger and exhibit their behaviours in an appropriate manner. The activities designed for the intervention programme helped the SC and NDC to understand the need for being disciplined committed, sincere, accountable and responsible-which are some of the essential components of social behaviour. The findings of the present study is in line with the study carried out by Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin, and Schroeder (2005) [12] which highlighted that recognizing a situation like requiring assistance, understanding personal responsibility and enabling oneself to help others, will increase pro-social behaviour. According to Peavey and Leff (2002) [11] favorable social behaviour results can be achieved with structured trust-building exercises to encourage communication among visually impaired and their sighted peers.

While for the control group, there was decline in all the dimensions of social behaviour among sensory challenged children. In case of non-disabled children decline in 'interpersonal behaviour', 'communicative skills' and 'assertive behaviour' was observed and there was no change in their self-related behaviours. This could be attributed to the fact that both sensory challenged and non-disabled children had not given much thought about each other and after their pre-test both SC and NDC might have felt that holding a firm behaviour towards their peers increases their pride and status. These thoughts seem to have widened the gap between the two groups. Hence, it can be concluded that when social behaviour is refined through awareness and social interactions both sensory challenged and non-disabled children can be helped to establish a co-ordinal relationship. When children establish cordial relationships, it increases the likelihood of being accepted by their peers.

Conclusion

Acquisition of social skills and social behaviour is the key to success for both sensory and non-disabled children. Educators, teachers and parents must encourage social skills and social behaviour among both sensory challenged and non-disabled children by modeling appropriate social behaviour and creating opportunities for students to learn and practice social skills for a positive outcome. In the present study it was found that intervention programme has influenced both sensory challenged and non-disabled children to develop a healthy and positive relationship within and among the sensory challenged and non-disabled children by encouraging, fostering and facilitating children to reach their social and behavioural goal. From this it can be inferred that if intervention is given to both sensory challenged and non-disabled from early years, it will help them develop better social skills and acquire appropriate behaviour which is the essence of inclusive education.

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