Typically Developing children in Indian mainstream classrooms: Buddies or Bullies of Children with Special Needs

Kadambari Naniwadekar M.Sc. (Clinical Psychology) Ph.D. Special Educator, Department of Special Education, AIISH, Mysore
kadambarinc@gmail.com
9620004490

Dr. G. Malar, Ph.D.(Speech and Hearing), Reader, Department of Special Education, AIISH, Mysore
malar@aiishmysore.in

Mr. Harish Kumar, M.Ed (MR), Ph.D. Special Educator, Department of Special Education, AIISH, Mysore
harish117@gmail.com
9620008227

Ms. Asha Suresh E. G. M.S (Counselling and Psychotherapy), Special Educator, Department of Special Education, AIISH, Mysore
surasha_kgl@yahoo.com
9886860592

Abstract: Education is a powerful instrument of social change, and often initiates upward movement in the social structure. There by, helping to bridge the gap between the different sections of society. The educational scene in the country has undergone major change over the years, resulting in better provision of education and better educational practices. The Kothari Commission 196466), the first education commission of independent India, observed: "the education of the handicapped children should be an inseparable part of the education system." This would allow for community participation in education at the elementary level and would introduce radical change, leading to the empowerment of Children with Special Needs.

Children with Special Needs represent an especially vulnerable class of citizens, and special laws and policies have been in place for over 40 years promoting full participation and integration of these children into society—particularly that aspect of society in which they are so deeply immersed. Children with Special Needs often have difficulties with peer relationships.
Since not much had been studied about the attitudes and awareness of the so called "normal" children studying in inclusive setup, this study was undertaken to find out the same. For this purpose an attitudinal scale had been constructed with 10 statements. A pilot study was carried out, involving 10 typically developing children attending regular schools.

The overall attitudes were encouraging, with children exhibiting 61% positive attitudes. Among the sample group girls were better disposed with 76.65% positive attitude compared to boys with 54.3%. The entire sample covered children between 6-15 years of age. Older children were found to be more positive towards their peers with special needs. (with 70% scores), compared to younger children in lower primary grades (with 58% scores). As credibility of attitudinal scales is less reliable, the actual study will incorporate and awareness measure also.

Keywords: Inclusion, Indian Mainstream Classrooms, Typically Developing Children, Buddies, Bullies

I.   Introduction

Education is a powerful instrument of social change, and often initiates upward movement in the social structure. There by, helping to bridge the gap between the different sections of society. The educational scene in the country has undergone major change over the years, resulting in better provision of education and better educational practices. In 1944, the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE, India) published a comprehensive report called the Sergeant Report on the post-war educational development of the country. As per the report, provisions for the education of the differently-abled were to form an essential part of the national system of education, which was to be administered by the Education Department. The Kothari Commission (1964–66), the first education commission of independent India, observed: "the education of the handicapped children should be an inseparable part of the mainstream education system." The commission recommended experimentation with integrated programmes in order to bring as many children as possible into the mainstreams of education (Alur, 2002). More recently, inclusion has been advocated for children with disabilities (Bunch & Valeo, 1997[4]; Helmstetter, Peck & Giangreco, 1994[9]; Hunt & Goetz, 1997[8]) where students with disabilities learn alongside their age-appropriate peers in general education classrooms with appropriate aids and services (Gilhool, 1989)[12]. Along with these developments more recently, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments outline the possibility of entrusting basic education to the local elected bodies in towns and villages. This would allow for community participation in education at the elementary level and would introduce radical change, leading to the empowerment of children with special needs (CABE, India). [3]

Children with Special Needs represent an especially vulnerable class of citizens, and special laws and policies have been in place for over 25 years promoting full participation and integration of these children into society—particularly that aspect of society in which they are so deeply immersed (i.e., educational settings). Children with Special Needs often have difficulties with peer relationships. The classroom and the school need to keep this in mind and be watchful for difficulties when and if they emerge. Successful peer interaction depends on the openness and attitude of children towards their peers who may be physically, cognitively or emotionally different. A classroom environment in which mutual respect is given and received by all makes it more likely that all will get on well together. Children with emotional or behavioural difficulties need to be perceived as children with social problems, not as bad children.

But contrary to these utopian expectations in a study by Pivik, Mccommas and Laflamme (2002)[6] all of the students in the focus groups reported instances of isolation, physical bullying, or emotional bullying. Isolation took the form of either being ignored or having difficulty forging friendships. Physical bullying usually related to people pushing the student's wheelchair without permission, and in one instance, being purposely knocked out of the wheelchair. The most frequent attitudinal barrier mentioned was that of emotional bullying. The students indicated that this was the most hurtful and included name calling, pointing, mouths dropping open, being ridiculed, being labelled as "stupid," condescending attitudes by teaching staff, and generally being treated differently from other students. Bullying certainly isn't a new problem; it has existed for generations, "It's a case of the strong - or at least the stronger - preying on the weak. It says volumes about where we are as a culture and race." Bullying has negative effects on all its victims, but kids with special needs are especially vulnerable. According to Murphy "Since these children already struggle with self-esteem issues, bullying has a greater impact on them and they desire to fit in, and are less likely to stand up for themselves."

In a study by Norah Frederickson (2010)[2] children with special educational needs are generally less accepted, more rejected and more likely to be victims of bullying than their typically developing classmates. However, they are sometimes treated more favourably than classmates, more like friends than acquaintances and attributional processes which appear central to the establishment of peer acceptance

and supportive relationships are more likely to be triggered when a child's difficulties are severe or obvious, classmates are older and explanatory information is given to them.

Overall, many of the recent researches have concluded that children with special needs are bullied more because (Ability Path, 2012)[1]

- They may have a low frustration tolerance. When frustration increases and reaches a threshold, it can lead to a meltdown, which makes the person stand out as being different.
- Students with developmental disabilities may have difficulty paying attention to more than one piece of information, which may cause them to get "stuck" in a conversation and these actions can have adverse effects on their social skills and make it difficult for them to hold conversations and make friends.
- Children with motor difficulties have difficulty reading, writing and participating in gym class. As such, they are often made fun of on the playground and in class because they are unable to perform age-appropriate motor skills, such as kicking a ball to the right person or colouring in the lines.
- Children with communication disabilities often have assistive technology devices like a conversation board or PECS album etc. that other students do not understand and, as such, the other students view them as "weird."
- Students with physical impairments may move slower, have less stamina and an unstable gait. These conditions, as well as others, may be viewed as signs of weakness and give impetuous to physical or verbal abuse.

In a landmark study conducted in 1994, researchers found that children with visible physical conditions or disabilities, such as cerebral palsy and Down syndrome, are more likely to be called names or aggressively excluded from social activities (Olweus, 1994)[10].

II.   Objectives

The objectives of the study are as follows:
- To find out level of awareness regarding children with special needs among typically developing peers.
- To find out the attitudinal status, of the typically developing children towards children with special needs in mainstream setups.
- To study the influence of attributes of the child participants like gender and level of education, on their awareness and attitudes towards children with special needs.

III.   Method

Participants
A total of 30 typically developing children were included in the study. The child participants were selected through convenient sampling trying to include as many children as possible who were attending mainstream schools in and around Mysore, Karnataka. The only exclusion criterion was that they should not have any significant disability. The children belonged to different socio-economic status along with differing levels of schooling namely lower primary, higher primary, secondary and higher secondary.

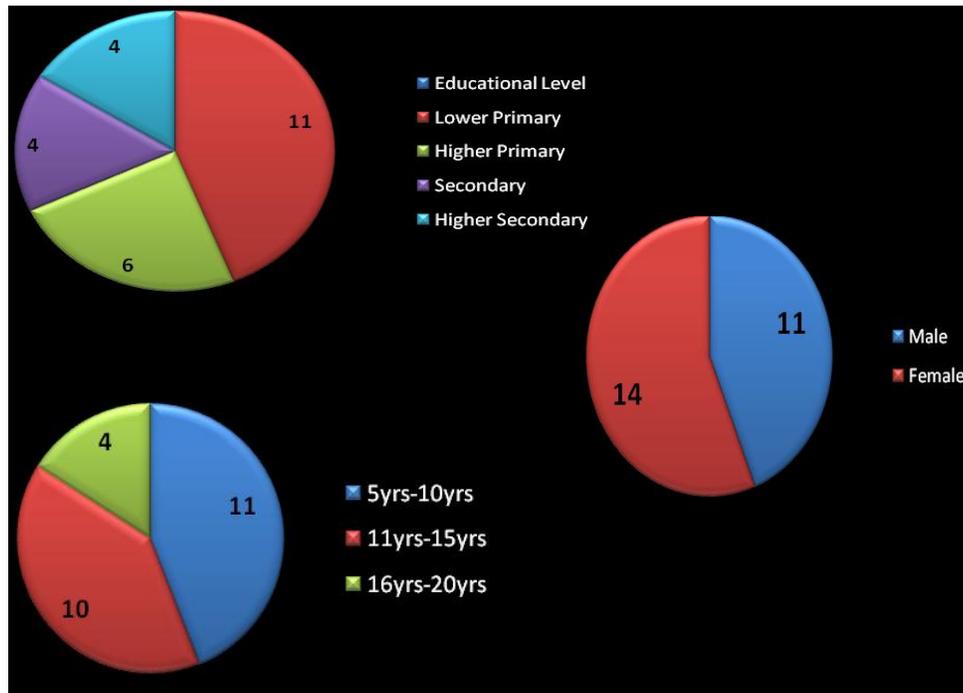Following figure depicts the composition of the participant group

Figure 1: Details of age of child participants

Materials

Two-fold questionnaire was developed to check with the awareness and attitudes of the typically developing children. The questionnaire included 10 true or false statements checking with the awareness of the participants about children with special needs. The second section included 20 attitudinal statements to which the respondents had to mark whether they agreed with them or not.

The two sections of the tool were constructed so as to cover essential domains related to awareness about children with different types of special needs and their education. Following construction of the tool it was validated by eight professionals (master's and doctorate degree holders) in the field of disability, which included people specializing in special education, psychology, speech and hearing and audiology. The items which had received a minimum of 80% of agreement among the evaluators were only included in the tool. The tool was further field-tested with ten children for its relevance and readability. Necessary modifications were made ensuing the recommendations and suggestions of the professional and child evaluators.

Procedure

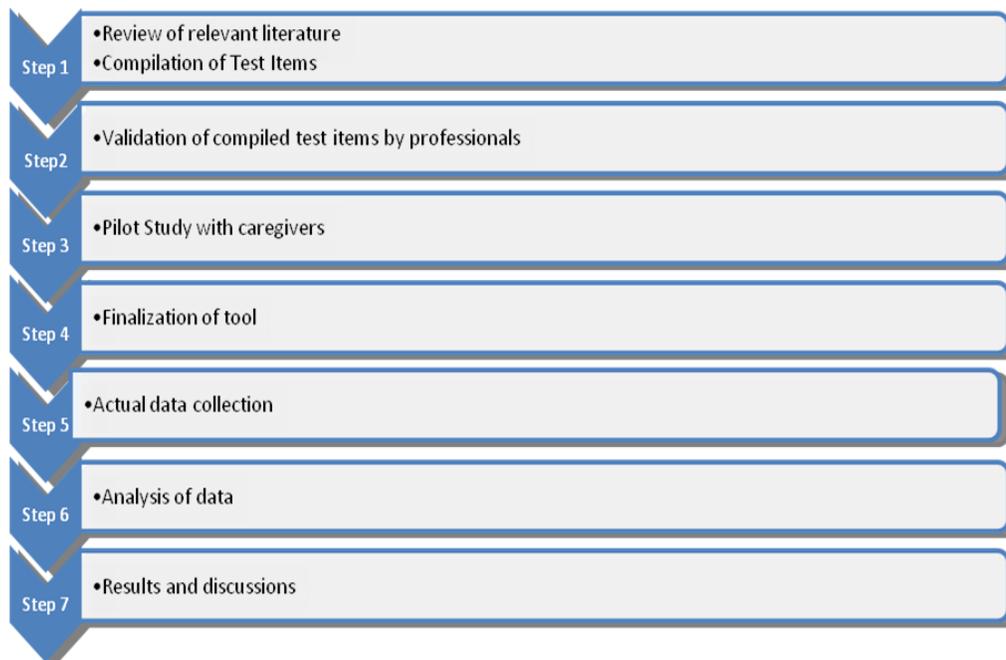The hierarchy of steps carried out in the study have been illustrated in figure 2

Figure 2: Procedure of the study

IV. Results and Discussion

Prevailing awareness & attitudes about mainstreamed children with special needs among their typically developing peers

The compiled data was analysed to perceive the general traits of awareness and attitudes about children with special needs among typically developing children. This was done by computing their mean scores as well as percentage of the same which have been presented in table 1.

Table 1
Mean scores of awareness and attitudes among typically developing children.

Domain	*Mean*	*Standard Deviation*
Awareness	**5.67 (56.67%)**	**1.86**
Attitudes	**11.67 (58.35%)**	**7.75**

The above results indicate:

- Moderate awareness about children with special needs among their typically developing peers in mainstream schools, and
- Followed by moderate level of positive attitudes.

However, high degrees of standard deviation lead to further analysis to investigate the influence of respondent characteristics like gender and level of schooling. The results hence derived are as follows:
Influence of level of schooling on awareness & attitudes about mainstreamed children with special needs among their typically developing peers

The next level of investigations involved computing the Pearson's correlation coefficient of the awareness and attitude level of the participants with the level of schooling, results of which are presented in table 2.

Table 2
Pearson's coefficient correlation of awareness and attitudes among children

Pearson's correlation coefficient	*Awareness*	*Attitude*
Level of Schooling	**-0.077**	**0.290**

The mean performance of children at different levels of schooling has been presented in figure 3.
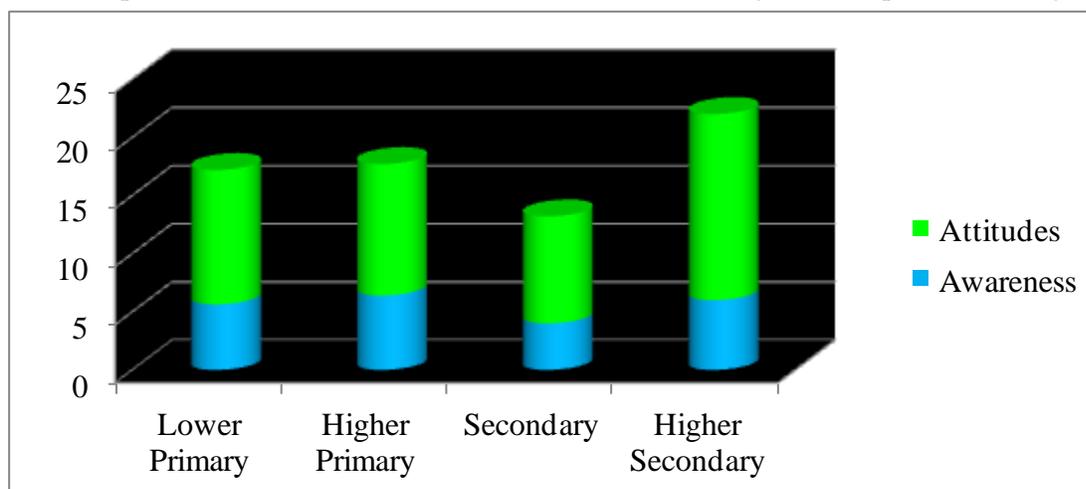

Figure 3: Details of mean performance of the child participants at different levels of schooling.

The above results indicate:
- Awareness levels correlate negatively with level of schooling. That is, as children reach higher levels of schooling, they have poor awareness as compared to those at primary levels.
- This could be due to focussed awareness creating activities that are mobilised at primary levels by Inclusive Education programmes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan.
- On the other hand, attitudes seem to be increasing with progressive levels of schooling, as indicated by the positive correlation, even though there are low levels of awareness. This could be attributed to the increasing socio- emotional maturity evident in increasing ages. In a study by Graffi & Mines (1988), the results also indicated the same results and reported that older and typically developing children showed increased positive attitudes and decreased negative attitudes towards their peers with special needs.
- The influence of level of schooling on both attitudes and awareness among typically developing children is however not statistically significant.

Influence of gender on awareness & attitudes about mainstreamed children with special needs among their typically developing peers

Table 3
Comparison of awareness and attitudes among male and female participants

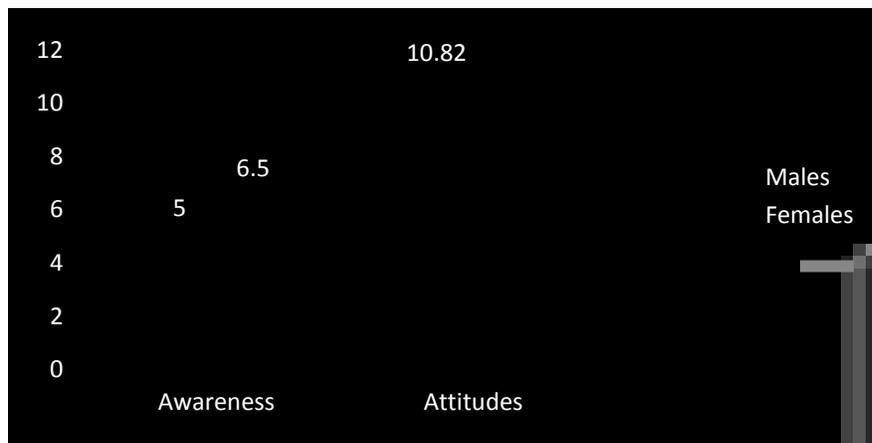| Gender			Mean Difference	df	t	Significance(2 tailed)
Awareness						
Male	**Mean**	**5.00**	**-1.50**	**25**	**-2.764**	**0.011**
	SD	**1.00**				
Female	**Mean**	**6.50**				
	SD	**1.55**				
Attitudes						
Male	**Mean**	**10.82**	-2.87	25	-1.423	0.156
	SD	**5.44**				
Female	**Mean**	**13.69**				
	SD	**4.70**				

Figure 4: Awareness and attitudes among male and female participants.

Results on the above table and figure indicate that girls/ female participants have better awareness as well as attitudes about the needs and abilities of children with special needs and their inclusion in the society. The above results could be due to the level of maturity in girls at an early age, and their ability to empathise with people around and their problems. The Indian society grooms the girls in such a manner they are able to relate to their peers and understand their problems more efficiently, and helping them in every possible way at the same time. Some researches also indicate that girls either have more positive attitudes or less negative attitudes towards their peers with special needs. A hypothesis for this can be that in all cultures, girls are socialized to be more nurturant and responsible towards dependent individuals than boys (Fishbein, 1984)[11].

V.   Summary and Conclusions

From the findings we conclude that there is a need for improvement in awareness and attitudes about mainstreamed children with special needs among their typically developing peers.

Some of the means of doing this are:

- Every mainstream school can have inductor peer orientation about special needs in children preferably through edutainment.
- Even if the enrolment of special needs children might be minimal or nill in any of the schools, special programs for interaction with them could be organised.
- Textbooks could become special needs sensitive as well as a tool for creating awareness and moulding attitudes about different abilities.
- Media on a larger scale could work on this.

VI.   References

- Walk a mile in their shoes retrieved from http://www.abilitypath.org/areas-of-development/learning--schools/bullying/articles/walk-a-mile-in-their-shoes.pdf   on 26.06.2013
- Frederickson, N. (2010), THE GULLIFORD LECTURE: Bullying or befriending? Children's responses to classmates with special needs. British Journal of Special Education, 37: 4–12. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8578.2009.00452.x
- Raffalli M.D., P. (n.d.). Walk a Mile in Their Shoes. (M. Villano, Interviewer)
- NCERT. (2006). Education of children with special needs. New Delhi: NCERT
- Bunch*, G., & Valeo, A. (2004). Student attitudes toward peers with disabilities in inclusive and special education schools. Disability & Society, 19(1), 61-76.
- Rao.et.al. , (2003). Awareness of & Attitudes to Disability in Rural and Urban Communities of Andhra Pradesh, India -- A Comparative Study. International Journal of Disability, Community & Rehabilitation
  Volume 2, No. 1 Canada
- Pivik, J., McComas, J., & LaFlamme, M. (2002). Barriers and facilitators to inclusion, education. Exceptional Children, 97-107.
- Alur, M. (2002). "Special Needs Policy in India", in S. Hegarty and M. Alue (eds), Education and Children with Special Needs: From Segregation to Inclusion. New Delhi: Sage.
- Hunt, P., & Goetz, L. (1997). Research on inclusive educational programs, practices, and outcomes for students with severe disabilities. The Journal of Special Education, 31(1), 3-29.
- Helmstetter, E., Peck, C. A., & Giangreco, M. F. (1994). Outcomes of interactions with peers with moderate or severe disabilities: A statewide survey of high school students. Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps
- Olweus, D. (1993). Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do. Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Fishbein, M., & Manfredo, M. J. (1992). A theory of behavior change.Influencing human behavior, 29-50
- Gilhool, T. K. (1989). The right to an effective education: From Brown to P.L. 94-142 and beyond. In D.Lipsky & A. Gartner (Eds.), Beyond separate education:Quality education for all (pp. 243-253). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.