

Impact of Caregiver Attributes on Education of Young Children with Hearing Impairment

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Abstract: Education and training of young children with special needs is a challenging task. In a country of limited rehabilitation resources like India, the onus of this Himalayan task rests primarily on the shoulders of the primary caregivers of these children. Researchers have proved beyond doubt that early identification, timely intervention accompanied by diligent, motivated and perseverant partaking of caregivers in the rehabilitation process result in successful outcomes. This study attempted to investigate the impact of caregiver attributes like motivation, perseverance & diligent involvement in special preschool programmes for children with hearing impairment on their meaningful contribution to the training process, as well learning outcomes in their wards. For this purpose, caregiver characteristics and their contributions to the training programmes were rated using teacher-made rubrics on regular monthly intervals across an academic year. The same had been correlated with their wards' developmental and academic progress appraised periodically through monthly performance tests. The results indicate that positive traits in parents like high levels of motivation, perseverance and diligence had resulted in their concrete contributions towards their wards' education and training in the form of parallel teaching and preparation of material resources. Positive caregiver characteristics and contributions, in turn had brought about positive developments in their children with hearing impairment.

Key words: Parents, Caregivers, Children, Hearing Impairment, Preschool, Special ECE

I. INTRODUCTION

Parents, the primary caregivers of young children are the fulcrum on which their lives hang on move about. Evidences suggest that healthy development of young children – whether infants, toddlers or preschoolers, are highly influenced by the positive, nurturing relationship with their primary caregivers (Bronson, 2000 [13]; Thompson & Goodvin, 2005 [15]). And such positive influences of parenting are found to go a long way promoting not only healthy development, but also bringing about better academic performances during the learning years (Zero to Three, 2004 [20]). Nurturing parents or any other primary caregiver are more than often found to maintain an inspiring and assiduous approach in upbringing their children (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000 [14]). In other words, parents who are motivated, stable and diligent in their child rearing practices are found to increase the likelihood of constructive development in their wards (Shonkoff, 2004 [10]).

The above propositions are more true in the lives of exceptional children, who require nurturing care in the early years to help them in overcoming the adverse impact of presence of disabilities. The role of caregivers of children with special needs begins with early identification, and continues through timely and sustained intervention until

their wards attain skills independent, community living. Evidences suggest that children with communication disorders who underwent early intervention and special preparatory training programmes demonstrated better academic learning and social integration later in life (Malar, Sreedevi & Suresh, 2014 [8]; Mahendru, 2001 [2]). Primary caregivers have a very vital role in such special early childhood care and educational programmes. There are also evidences to suggest that such special preparatory programmes for children with communication disorders like hearing impairment may not be a success without the active involvement of parents / caregivers (Girolametto & Weitzman, 2006 [12]; Chatterjee & Mishra, 2004 [1]; Tanock & Girolametto, 1992 [17]; Shonkoff & Hauser-Cram, 1987 [11]).

At present most of the early intervention and preschool / preparatory programmes for children with special needs make it mandatory for their primary caregivers to play an integral role in their education and training programmes. Otis-Wilborn (1992) [3] implies that apart from concerned professionals like clinicians and teachers, parents also have a significant role to play in promoting oral communication skills in children with hearing impairment. Studies from around the world (Fan & Chen, 2005 [19]; Stephens & Slavin,

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1992[16]) imply that positive attitudes lead to empowered participation of caregivers and in the rehabilitative education and training of their children with special needs. Kumar and Rao (2009) [18] have reiterated these findings with recent evidences in India.

In the background of such vital information, the present study was carried out with the specific purpose of investigating the impact of caregiver personal traits on their participation in the early preparatory training of young children with hearing impairment, and the resultant effect on the learning and development of their children.

II. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the research were to investigate –

- The influence of caregiver/parental traits like motivation, perseverance and diligence on their participation and contributions to special preschool training of their children with hearing impairment
- The influence of caregiver/parental traits, as well as contributions on the early development and progress in their children with hearing impairment.
- The influence of duration of exposure to rehabilitative intervention on caregiver attributes, as well learning in their children with hearing impairment.

III. METHOD

Details of the method involved in carrying out the study have been elaborated herein after.

Participants

As indicated in Fig. 1 the participants involved 36 children with hearing impairment undergoing special preparatory training for mainstreaming and their primary 36 caregivers, predominantly mothers. The participant group could be again categorised into two distinct groups, namely children around 3 years and their caregivers who had just begun afresh with preschool training and children and caregivers with two or more years of exposure to the specialised training programme.

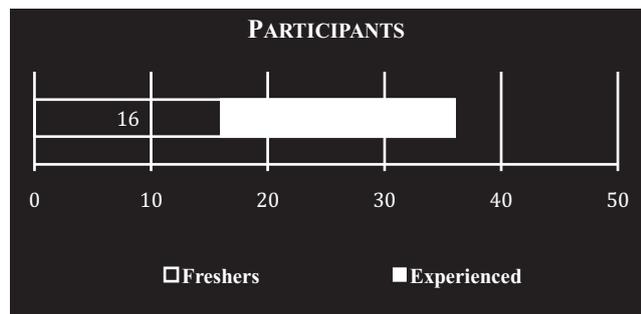


Figure 1: Details of Caregiver Participants in the Study

Materials

Data on caregiver traits like motivation, perseverance and diligent participation were recorded on a monthly basis using a teacher-made rating scale of 10-point gradient. Along with this, their contributions to the training programme were also graded periodically on a 10-point performance rating scale

focusing on their ability for parallel teaching, and their contributions to the training programme in the form of innovative materials preparation. Their progress of their wards, that is, children with hearing impairment were assessed on similar periodical basis through monthly teacher-made evaluations of their development in the areas of cognitive, language and communication, and pre-academic skills in terms of percentage scores.

Procedure for Intervention, Data Collection & Analysis

Regular monitoring of the caregivers' attributes and activities, as well as their children's progressive development was carried out by a team of two teachers and a supervisory staff for small groups of 5 children or less. Periodic recording of their standing and progress were discussed with their caregivers with immediate effect.

The data were analysed for the mutual influences among three sets of data, namely – (i) caregivers psychological traits like motivation, perseverance and diligence being the independent variables; along with dependent variables like (ii) caregiver involvement & contributions to the special preschool training process in terms of parallel teaching efforts and resource material preparation; and (ii) learning outcomes in their children in the areas of cognitive, language and communication, and pre-academic skills.

IV. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Mutual influences of the three sets of data under discussion were carried out employing appropriate correlation measures. The results have been presented and discussed herein after.

Influence of Caregivers' Psychological Traits on their Contributions to the Training of their Children with Communication Disorders

As implied in results in Table 1, positive caregiver traits like high levels of motivation, perseverant and diligent involvement in the training process are found to extend a strong positive influence on their participation in the special preschool training process in terms of efficient parallel teaching efforts, and development and/or use of innovative teaching-learning materials.

Table 1: Mutual Influences between Caregiver Characteristics & Contributions

Caregiver Attributes	Efficacy in Parallel Teaching	Innovation in Development & Use of Teaching-Learning Materials
Motivation	0.915***	0.927***
Perseverance	0.605***	0.625***
Diligence	0.961***	0.980***

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001; No* - No statistical significance

This is a time-tested finding, as even very early researchers like Abel and Gingles (1966) [9] report that constructive behaviours in parents are a definite consequent of positive parental attitudes.

Influence of Caregiver Attributes on Learning Outcomes in Children with Hearing Impairment

In order to analyse the effect of caregivers' psychological

characteristics and contributions to the training process on the learning and developmental outcomes in their wards with hearing impairment, the monthly grading of these caregiver attributes were correlated with the monthly progress assessed in their children in terms of cognitive, language and communication, and pre-academic skills. The results of which have been presented in Table 2 and Fig. 2.

Table 2: Influence of Caregiver Attributes on Learning Outcomes in Children

Caregiver Attributes	Correlation Coefficient	Performance of Children in Early Developmental Skills		
		Cognitive	Language & Communication Skills	Pre-academics
1. Motivation	0.639**	0.639**	0.805***	0.476*
2. Perseverance	0.324	0.324	0.521**	0.384
3. Diligence	0.563**	0.563**	0.497*	0.715***
4. Efficient Parallel Teaching	0.550**	0.550**	0.733***	0.610**
5. Innovative Material Support	0.409*	0.409*	0.809***	0.446*

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001; No* - No statistical significance

The results presented in the Table 2 and illustrated in the Fig.

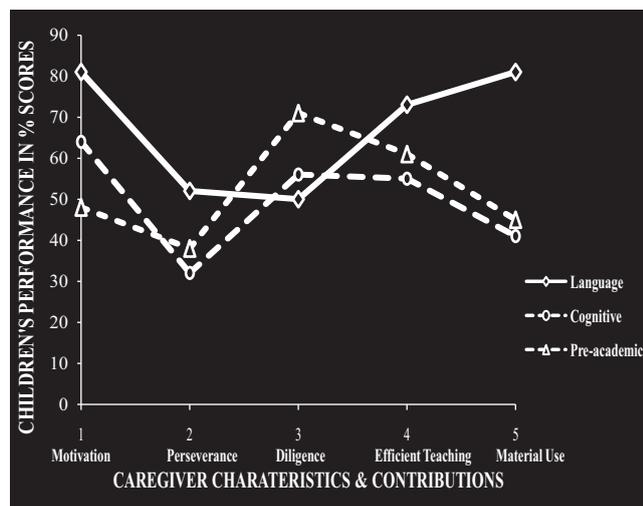


Figure 2: Influence of Caregiver Attributes on Learning Outcomes in Children

2 imply that positive psychological traits in caregivers and their meaningful contributions to the preschool training process have lead to positive learning outcomes in their wards with hearing impairment; albeit without statistical significance in certain areas. The progressive development language and communication skill development stands to benefit most. This is explicable, as psychologically sound caregivers are reported (Drews & Teahan, 2010 [6]; Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems & Doan Holbein, 2005 [4]) to sustain close relationship and constant communication with their wards which in turn might have influenced appreciable development in the area of language and communication skills which is one of the primary casualty of hearing loss in children. And Family Paediatrics Report (2003) [7] suggests that good communication and interpersonal relationship of caregivers with children in turn promotes development of other faculties like cognitive, socio-emotional, etc.

However, further analysis was carried out to find out interplay of other variables in the uneven influences affected. And it was revealed that the duration of exposure to rehabilitative training demonstrate a positive bearing on caregiver attributes, as well learning outcomes in their children with hearing impairment as corroborated by the results on Fig. 3. Other researchers like Dubow, Boxer and Huesmann (2010) [5] also confirm progressive and positive impact of long term education and training of parents on children's development.

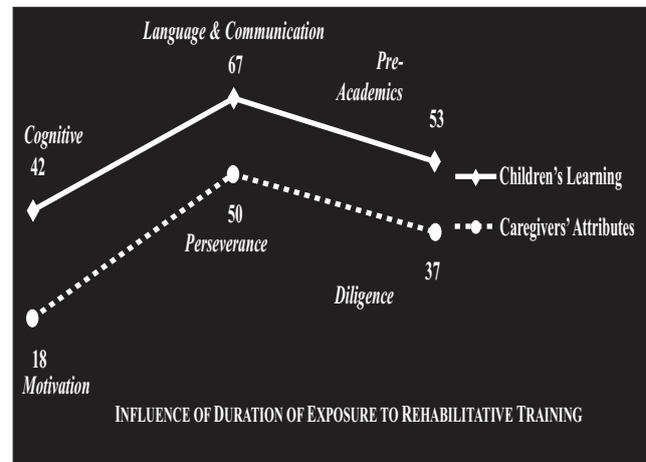


Figure 3: Influence of Duration of Exposure to Rehabilitative Training on Caregivers' Attributes & Learning Outcomes in Children with Hearing Impairment

V. SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

Summing up, conducive traits and conscientious partaking of caregivers in the education and rehabilitative training of young children with special needs is inevitable for positive outcomes. Hence, all early intervention programmes for special needs children should consider caregiver education and empowerment as mandatory component of the rehabilitative package. Concerted efforts in this direction should include a systematic approach to parent empowerment beginning with spade work counselling and guidance to overcome negative emotions, gain awareness and mould positive attitudes. This could be ensued by in-depth educational and informational measures to equip them with constructive knowledge and essential facts; along with hand-in-hand practical exposure and training to develop necessary competencies and skills. Ultimately, all efforts should culminate in their empowered participation in planning, decision-making and mobilisation of vital rehabilitative measures for their children with special needs.

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