

A STUDY ON THE ACCOMMODATION STRATEGIES USED BY TEACHERS IN EDUCATING CHILDREN WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT IN A REGULAR CLASS ROOM

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of Inclusive Education is an emerging concept which allows children with special needs including Children with Visual Impairment (CVI) to learn together with their peers with the support from a special education teacher under the responsibility of the regular education teacher. For successful inclusion, it is important to have an effective intervention of regular education teachers and special education teachers. Hallahan and Kauffman (2006) highlighted the lack of competency and negative attitudes of regular education teachers, lack of collaborative consultation between the regular education teacher and the special education teacher and the lack of accommodation strategies used by regular education teachers as issues still persistent in the practice of inclusive education. However, even with these limitations, inclusive education is in practice in today's classrooms with CVI. Sahin and Yorek (2009) stated that different accommodation strategies should be used for CVI in order to successfully include them in the regular classroom. Price, Mayfield, Mac Fadden and Marsh (2000) highlighted that the terms such as accommodation and adaptation are being used in the literature in an interchangeable manner and the ultimate expectation of these terms are changing facilities, curriculum and teaching methods in order to facilitate learning of CVI. Therefore the main objective of this study was to examine whether teachers are using adaptation methods with CVI.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher selected the case study method for the study. Three primary classrooms from three schools coded as A, B and C as three cases from the Gampaha Educational Zone, in the Western Province were selected as the sample for the present study. A purposive sampling method was used to select the two classrooms at grade 5 and one class room at grade 2 where CVI were included. Three CVI and three regular education teachers and the special education teacher assigned to the selected schools were the respondents of this study. Data collection occurred over a period of three weeks with five visits in two consecutive periods to each of the classrooms. Observations and semi structured interviews were used as the main means of collecting data in line with the following objectives.

- To examine the extent of the use of accommodation strategies by regular education teachers with the CVI
- To investigate the nature of support provided by the special education teacher in using accommodation strategies and
- To examine the views and experiences of regular and special education teachers in facilitating CVI in regular classroom.

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LESSONS LEARNT

The study revealed that the extent of the use of accommodation strategies by regular education teachers with the CVI varied according to schools as follows.

Table 1– Accommodation strategies used by teachers

Item No.	Strategy	Class teacher of school A	Class teacher of school B	Class teacher of school C
1	Physical space of the class room (facilitate to the mobility)	Not at all	Not at all	Most of time
2	Seating arrangement (Facilitate academic and social development)	Not at all (Seated separately from the peers)	Most of times (seated with peers)	Not at all (Due to mothers' presence)
3	Appointing a buddy (Facilitate academic and social development)	Some times (one buddy)	Most of time (more buddies)	Not at all (a buddy was not appointed)
4	Clearly explain the visual based material	Not at all	Most of time	Not at all
5	Collaborative learning	Not at all	Most of time	Not at all
6	Verbal assessment method	Some times	Most of times	Not at all
7	Brailled question papers	Not at all	Not at all	Not at all
8	Tactile teaching aids	Not at all	Some times	Not at all
9	Questioning	Some times	Most of times	Not at all
10	Extra time to completion of task	Not at all	Not at all	Not at all
11	Instruction through real world experiences	Not at all	Some time	Not at all

The data in the table 1 revealed that the class teacher of school A used only three strategies (item no. 3,6 & 9) at a moderate level but the rest of the strategies (Items no. 1,2,4,5,7,8,10,11,) were not used by the teacher to facilitate the CVI. The class teacher of school C did not use any strategy except item no.1 to facilitate the CVI. However the class teacher of school B used six strategies (Items no. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 9) at a higher level and item no. 8 and 11 were at a moderate level. It can be highlighted that class teacher of school B used more strategies to accommodate the CVI than the rest. It can be interpreted that the reasons for less use of accommodation strategies were lack of professional knowledge, poor communication between the special education teacher and the regular education teacher, and practical difficulties in relation to regular education practice with negative views of teachers towards educating CVI.

The support of the special education teacher was inadequate to facilitate the CVI because of lack of special education teachers in the field and lack of a monitoring process. Even though the special education teacher was supposed to act in an advisory capacity to adapt the teaching learning process according to students' needs, the support was narrowed down to teaching Braille

only. It was found that CVI are taught Braille by tuition arranged by the special education teacher.

The views and experiences of regular class room teachers on facilitating learning of CVI were different. It can be highlighted that the support from the special education teacher to use accommodation strategies was not adequate.

Class teacher school A stated that,

“He is the only one special education teacher for this zone and therefore he is so busy. On the other hand I am also so busy with my work and I don’t have time to consult him”

But the class teacher of school C said,

“he just comes once a week and stays little while with child and just go” .

It was revealed that the support from the special education teacher was inadequate because of the busy work schedule of both parties and the lack of a monitoring system at school and the zonal level. It was found that none of the teachers had received any in-service training on inclusive education. The class teacher of school A and B used these strategies through experience by interacting with the particular child. For example the class teacher of school A stated that,

“Actually I’m not trained regarding teaching these types of children. I teach this child through experiences being with him”

But the class teacher of school C had not used any accommodation strategy to facilitate learning of CVI.

It was found that through the views of teachers, the level of commitment toward the CVI was basically based on the views of teachers and the performance of the child. Except the class teacher of school B the other teachers held negative views on accommodating CVI in the regular class room setup.

Some stated that the regular school practice; the teaching learning process and specially assessment process are not suitable for the CVI. Given these conditions, all the respondents stated that they are having some problems related to the regular education setup when using accommodation strategies for CVI such as problems in covering the syllabus, large class size, fulfilling the needs of school and parents and lack of professional support and expertise.

It was found that the main concern of the special education teacher was teaching Braille only and nothing else.

“My main responsibility is teaching Braille. If I go to consult teachers sometimes they will misunderstand me. Therefore I don’t like to give them advices”

According to the above statement, the special education teacher himself was not aware about the support that should be given to the regular education teacher to adapt the teaching learning process. However the support should be provided not only with teaching Braille but also with the use of the other accommodation strategies specially making teaching learning aids and assessment process according to the needs of CVI. It can be highlighted through the views and experiences of the special education teacher, that lack staff who have specific knowledge on accommodating children with special needs; busy work schedule and poor recognition related to children with special needs and their teachers in schools were the main barriers in accommodating CVI in regular classroom.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

It can be concluded that even though the concept of inclusive education helps to eliminate the social discrimination against children with Visual Impairment, in practice they are isolated again in the regular class room basically due to poor usage of accommodation strategies. This situation arises due to lack of professional knowledge of regular education teachers, lack of communication between regular education teachers and the special education teacher, the views of the regular education teachers towards education children with Visual Impairment and the difficulties related to regular education practice.

The final outcomes of this research would provide a basis for developing pre-service and in-service training programmes on inclusive education training special education teachers to facilitate the CVI in regular classrooms, to establish a proper monitoring system at zonal level. Finally it is important to arrange a particular time and space at the school to maintain a rapport between the special education teacher and the regular education teachers in order to provide an effective education for Children with Visual Impairment.

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