

Mainstreaming children with exceptionalities



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Introduction

Today in a variety of places such as homes and early childhood settings a large number of infants and young children with and without disabilities play and learn together. In our society early education and Early Intervention professionals are widely recognizing the value of promoting development and belonging for every child. Classroom brings educators face to face with diverse student populations. In this diverse group we come across to a considerable number of children with exceptionalities. This demographic data shows that 3-4 % of children aged 0-4 years having a disability (ABS, 1998; ABS, 1999; Disability Services Queensland, 1999). Researchers view the inclusion of special students or students with disabilities in the general classroom as advantageous since they can develop better social development and interaction and more normalized functioning (Burnette, 1996).

Background and problem statement

Teachers might find the differences among their students in a diversified class. These differences depend on teachers' communication skills and understanding. The differences appear in a child in early age make him/her exceptional amongst others. Such differences have implications on children fundamental abilities and well being. To focus more on the exceptional children for inclusion in the mainstream different educational institutions have established a kind of setting. Some researchers vehemently argue that specialized learning environment is essential for children with exceptionalities to provide them with separate instruction for maximum benefits (Kaffman & Hallahan, 2005). On the other hand some researchers

argue that specialized learning environment represents a kind of ‘colonization’ that limits access to a wide learning environment (McPhail, & Freeman, 2005). Changing worldview on issues of inclusion and diversity focus less on whether or not the use of mainstreaming can bring different effects on the future of these children.

Research objectives

Educators and parents both have concern about the potential impact of children with exceptionalities on other children’ performance. In a regular classroom children with exceptionalities does not have any negative impact on other children’ performance and achievements (Kalambouka, Farrell, Dyson, & Kaplan, 2007). Therefore, the study has twofold objectives. Firstly, to recognize the presence of mainstreaming in the preschool setting. The second objective of the study is to identify the different effects of mainstreaming upon children with exceptionalities.

Research questions

In inclusive setting children with exceptionalities make better progress than those in segregated settings (Holahan & Costenbader, 2000). These findings make the study more important for which several questions can be used in the proposed method in the study.

1. What are the different categories for exceptionalities amongst children?
2. What is mainstreaming?
3. What are the common abilities possessing by the children with exceptionalities?

4. What are the common prevailing misconceptions amongst the people concerning an exceptional child?
5. What are the core purposes of mainstreaming for children with exceptionalities?
6. How parents perceive the mainstreaming practices in the preschool setting?
7. Are there noticeable changes in the children under the mainstreaming?
8. What are those noticeable changes?
9. Are there some common drawbacks or negative effects of mainstreaming on development of children with exceptionalities?
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Literature review

Often, the term inclusion correlates with normalization, mainstreaming and integration. Certainly, inclusion is a wonderful idea. However it does not happen by itself instead teachers have to play a vital and active role in making inclusion work in the classroom. Evidence clearly indicates that the school setting environment and culture has a direct impact on the recognition of students with exceptionalities (Frederickson, Simmonds, Evans, & Soulsby, 2007). For realizing full human potential, children with exceptionalities need special education and related services. They need special attention because they are distinctly different from other children in

different ways. They may be mentally retarded having learning disabilities. They may pose emotional or behavioral disorders and physical disabilities. They may be having disorders of communication, autism, and traumatic brain injury. They may have impaired hearing and/or night sights or special gifts or talents. Two concepts are important for educational definition of children with exceptionalities – one is the personality traits or characteristics diversity and the other is the necessity for special education (exceptional children, 2010).

The definition of exceptionality inherent the concept of diversity while educational definition inherent the need for special education. The initiative of mainstreaming and integration or the practice of keeping the children in segregated environment of special school is concentrated on fulfilling their needs (Yulianti, 2008). And for achieving this objective of fulfilling their needs the education and educational setting needs certain adjustments. Exceptional students and their peers both demonstrated positive orientation to inclusion (Bunch & Valeo, 2004). The included exceptional students do not experience serious social difficulties in regular classroom setting beyond those of any other settings (Brahm & Kelly, 2004).

Research plan / methodological approach

1) Sampling (participants) Framework

The intended approach for the study is the use of interview method. This study through the use of proposed method can build an empirical ground concerning the state of education. Depending on the level of exceptional children' situation and the level of their understanding, the state of education varies for them. In interview method participants have freedom of

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opinion relating to the problems that have not been discussed yet in any context. The parents and teachers' observation about the effects of mainstreaming among children can be elaborated from different perspective.

The criterion based selection technique will be employed for homogeneous sample selection of participants volunteered to participate in the study.

Efforts will be made that the target teachers, parents and children should be diverse in race, culture, and language proficiency.

2) Validity and Reliability

Validity is considered an important criterion whereby the research question is being addressed appropriately. Carefully semi-structured interviews would be planned for ensuring the validity of the research. Prior, it will be studied that really teachers face any obstacles when attempting to mainstream exceptional children in preschool room and what impact it has on their learning ability.

Reliability should provide for the possibility to replicate the results. The four common threats to reliability for instance subject of participation error, subject of participant bias, observer error and observer bias will be avoided. For ensuring reliability, interviews will be planned with the highest degree of structure possible to reduce participant bias and observer error; analyze without personal bias and have blinded researcher for an independent analysis to lessen observer bias.

3) Research Perspective

An interpretivist approach will be used in this study since the research is exploratory in nature. Different aspects presented in the questions section

will be explored. I will be exploring the different effects of mainstreaming on mild exceptional children' engagement, behavior, and their retention in the preschool room. Additional, it will be investigated that whether mainstreaming has any drawbacks on development of children with exceptionalities.

Thereby, using an inductive method to form a concept that mainstreaming can enhance the progress of mild exceptional children.

4) Research Design

The longitudinal research design will be functional for the purpose of this study since data will be collected on more than one case using interviews, structured observation, questionnaires and document analysis. The benefit of this is to be able to focus on the breadth and depth of the research and thereby increasing the validity and truthfulness of the research and accordingly minimize the perplexing factors.

This study will be exploratory in nature wherein an array of qualitative and quantitative data will be collected and researched upon. Findings from the interviews will be used as primary data while Internet websites; policy papers, journal articles, newspapers and magazine articles and databases will be used as secondary data.

5) Data Collection

The participants will be divided into two groups – one group will be of the teachers and the other is of the parents. The data such as age, gender, and the duration of experience in dealing with mild exceptional children will be considered amongst educators. These data may influence teachers' own

perspective about mainstreaming and also on the result of the study.

However the data on the side of parents will be based on the number of mild exceptional children they have. The parents' situational context and experience in handling their children may depict a possibility that their whole perceptions are based on those experiences.

Discussion

A notable UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) that came into force in May 2008 has given equal status to people with disabilities in the society. The CRPD entitles children and adults with disabilities for the enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. The CRPD recognizes the importance of early intervention and its inclusion from an early age in the education system (UNESCO policy brief on Early Childhood, 2009).

In inclusive settings effective instruction of functional and developmentally appropriate skills depends on how well the adults are able to implement naturalistic instruction procedures, structure the environment, and adapt methods and activities (McCormick, 2006). Educators need to play an integrated role for ensuring proper implementation of all possible intervention from an early age. In academic institution through the use of an active role of educators will enable exceptional students to meet their full potential. Therefore the educators are supposed to establish a culture and environment of understanding and acceptance to foster benefits of all children in particular of exception children. Indeed, early childhood programs that are responding appropriately the individual needs and respect diversity

will benefit all children and will contribute to establish an inclusive society (UNESCO policy brief on Early Childhood, 2009).

An educator can ensure a positive environment for all through the implementation of some of the below interventions;

- Using the strengths of exceptional children to facilitate peer connection.
- Children with learning disabilities or disorders should be motivated and encouraged to form a support.
- Providing explanation to avoid confrontations.
- To encourage independence and promote self-esteem and confidence of children with exceptionalities their positive behaviour and efforts should be praised in presence of all.
- In the weekly curriculum social skills should be incorporated.

It is worth mentioning to note that the success of exceptional children is interdependent. This means that every group of difficulties being faced has a direct impact on the others. For instance, bullying can affect the academic performance of a student which is grouped as social-emotional difficulty. This signifies that the challenges identified should be a base for intervention. The intervention strategies that are implemented should use the strengths of the exceptional children in order to make them realize that they do have learning skills which will increase their desire to improve and further develop their skills and abilities.

The formation of a friendly environment that accepts diversity encourages children with exceptionalities to function normally to the possible extent in the surrounding environment. This will prepare them for future life challenges which may involve acting and interacting more with diverse people that may or may not accept them. Preschool settings provide children a foundation which they will need to face the hard realities of life for survival. Therefore the children with exceptionalities will also be benefited from the preschool room environment.

The single most important contribution for the success of early intervention and early childhood special education programs is the ability of service providers to work cooperatively with other stakeholders and with families (McCormick, 2006 p. 27). Properly organized early intervention system can prevent and minimize the declines in cognitive development that typically occur in the absence of intervention in the early life (of five years) of a child (Guranlnick, 1998).

In early intervention the family centred practices have placed parents of disable children in a new role. Professionals need new skills and attitudes for successful implementation of family centered practices. Professionals should frame such intervention plans for parents of disable children that should support the family's daily routines. An intervention will not have any impact if it does not find a slot in the daily routines of family (Bernheimer & Weisner, 2007).

Conclusion

Exceptional children often have complex learning, behavioural and/or physical needs. Through the intervention of educators as well as families and friends the effects of disabilities on the academic achievements of children can be minimized. Children with exceptionalities can live a normal life with a little support of the people with whom they interact.

Section 2: Identification of resource for families

Since 1991 the field of family-centred practice started to develop but still professionals who educate and support children and adults with special educational needs are not familiar with it (Espe-Sherwindt, 2008). The objective of family intervention services is to increase the usefulness of parenting behaviours as well as to increase social competencies in children with exceptionalities. The provisions of consultations, counseling, skill development and educational services can contribute and support in achieving the stated objective. The nature of family intervention services is preventive that seek to reduce parental depression, anxiety and stress and further to lessen conflictual relationships between parents. The family interventions services are aimed for families of children with exceptionalities who are facing considerable parenting difficulties and/or whose children show disruptive, defiant or aggressive behaviour.

Family-centred practice emphasizes on professionals dealing with exceptional people to create a systematic way of partnership with families that “(a) treat them with dignity and respect, (b) honour their values and choices, and (c) provide support that strengthen and enhance their functioning as a family (Dunst, Trivette & Hamby, 2007, as cited in Espe-
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Sherwindt, 2008). Results of a meta-analysis of 18 studies show that the application of family-centred practice was strongly associated with self-esteem, parents' perception about their children (exceptional) and parents own behavior (Dunst, Trivette & Hamby, 2006, as cited in Espe-Sherwindt, 2008). This indicates that family-centred practices keep on the promise that such practices create desirable outcomes for children with exceptionalities and their families.