A STUDY OF SOCIAL INCLUSION OF LEARNING DISABLED CHILDREN WITH THEIR SOCIAL PROFICIENCY, POSITION AND ISOLATION

Dr Vinita M Chaudhary
NECST Ghaziabad

ABSTRACT

The issue investigated in the present work was the Social Inclusion of Learning Disabled Children with their social proficiency, position and isolation in sixth-grade Inclusive Education settings. Inclusive Education would have a positive effect on the social functioning of students with learning disabilities and that thus they would be as accepted as their peers without disabilities. Consequently, between the groups' perceived loneliness and social competence. Students participating in the study were from 4 sixth-grade classrooms in three elementary schools (DLF Public School, Greenfield School and Gyanodaya Public School) in the district. The MCL Scale was administered orally to each class by the researchers. The items on the Peer Nomination Inventory formed two scales: "liked most" (popularity scale) and "liked least" (unpopularity scale) that were used to generate social impact and social preference scores. The study employed a single factorial design with the independent variable being whether or not a child had a diagnosed learning disability. The dependent variables were the socio metric status (popular, rejected, neglected, or controversial), the perceived social proficiency, and perceived lonesomeness. The results indicated that sixth-grade students with learning disabilities reported more feelings of isolation than their classroom peers who did not have disabilities. Furthermore, these same students with learning disabilities were less popular and more controversial in their social position than their classmates without disabilities. In the present study, it appears that the isolation of the students with learning disabilities was realistic and related to their diminished social position. The findings suggest that the students with learning disabilities were less likely to be popular than their peers without disabilities and thus less likely to be nominated for social activities by peers.

Key Words: Social Inclusion, Learning Disabled, Social proficiency, Social Position and Social Isolation

INTRODUCTION

According to MHRD, 2003,"Inclusive Education means all learners, young people –with or without disabilities being able to learn together in ordinary preschool provisions, school and community educational settings with appropriate network of support service (Draft of Inclusive Education scheme, MHRD2003)."

The National Curriculum Framework for school Education (NCFSE)2000, by NCERT ,recommended Inclusive Schools for all without specific reference to students with special needs as a way of providing quality education to all learners .According to National Curriculum Framework for school

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Education,2000,"Segregation or isolation is neither good for learners with disabilities nor general learners without disabilities. Societal requirement is that learners with special needs should be educated along with other learners in Inclusive Schools, which are cost effective and have sound pedagogical practice, (NCERT, 2000)."

Inclusive Education is a system of Education in which students with disabilities are educated in mainstream classrooms with their non-disabled peers. In the most ideal setting, students with special needs are to be provided with support and instruction based on their individual needs. . Research shows that when a child with disabilities attends classes alongside peers who do not have disabilities, good things happen.

For a long time, children with disabilities were educated in separate classes or in separate schools. People got used to the idea that special education meant separate education. But we now know that when children are educated together, positive academic and social outcomes occur for all the children involved. We also know that simply placing children with and without disabilities together does not produce positive outcomes. Inclusive Education occurs when there is ongoing advocacy, planning, support and commitment.

The goal behind Inclusive Education is to move toward community ownership of all students, severely disabled to mainstream. Suzanne Majhanovich and Marie-Christine Deyrich (2017) Having completed their work on the project, INCLUDE researchers expressed their hope that the principles outlined can be converted into concrete actions which will result in a common approach to promote social inclusion through language learning (ibid., p. 21). The articles included in this special issue reflect the principles set out in the INCLUDE project, and review its accomplishments and its potential for further change. The last four articles illustrate promising practices in the spirit of the INCLUDE aspirations for examples of language teaching for inclusion. It is to be hoped that this important work, initiated by this project and its network, will continue, thus supporting active social inclusion.

Based on J.Autism Dev Disord (2007) review, the empirical support for this approach is incomplete, but promising intervention strategies were identified. Recommendations for the design of future treatment trials to guide clinical practice are offered.

Laci Watkins and Mark O'Reilly (2015) suggested that peer-mediated interventions (PMI)   is a promising treatment for increasing social interaction in children, adolescents, and young adults with ASD in inclusive settings, with positive generalization, maintenance, and social validity outcomes. Findings also suggest that participant characteristics and the type of social deficit an individual exhibits are important considerations when choosing the optimal configuration of PMI strategies.

The topic investigated in the present study was the Social Inclusion of Social proficiency, Social position and isolation of Learning Disable Children in sixth-grade Inclusive Education settings. In this particular study, classrooms were considered inclusive when students with learning disabilities spent 100% of the school day in the general education classroom with same-age peers. Instruments that measured the 3 above-mentioned variables were administered to students with learning disabilities and to their classmates without disabilities. It was hypothesized that Inclusive Education would have a positive effect on the social functioning of students with learning disabilities and that thus they would be as accepted as their peers without disabilities. Consequently, between the groups' perceived loneliness and social competence.

SAMPLE

Participants in the study consisted of 15 students with learning disabilities and 68 students without disabilities, all of whom were enrolled in sixth-grade classroom that had adopted a full inclusion model. All participants were from a single urban school district in Ghaziabad that had approximately 2, 08, 858 pupil. The school district policy was to educate all students with learning disabilities in the general education classroom with same-age peers for the entire school day. Students received academic assistance from the special education teacher and other support personnel in the form of co-teaching or small-group instruction within the general education classroom.
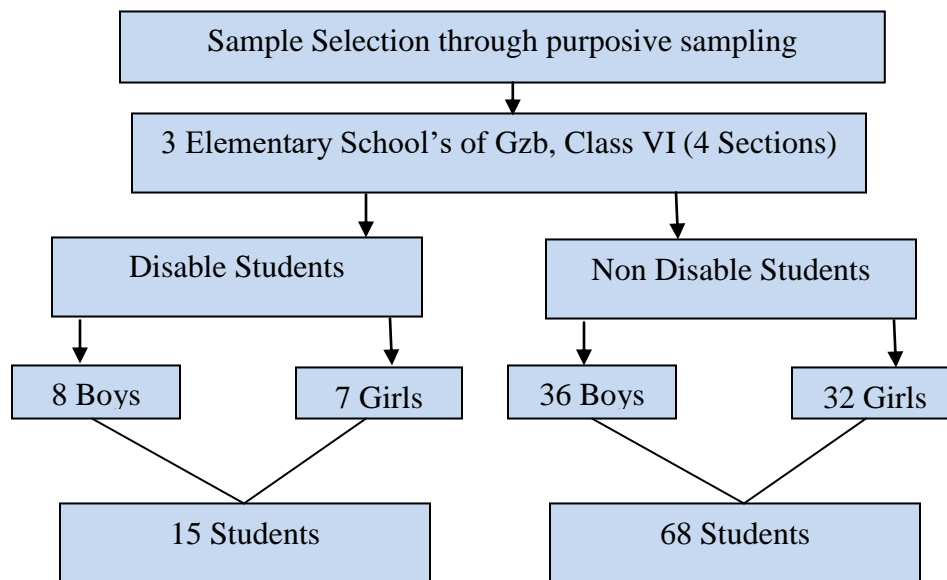
Students participating in the study were from 4 sixth-grade classrooms in three elementary schools (DLF Public School, Greenfield School and Gyanodaya Public School) in the district, each with an enrollment greater than 480 students. At least 40% of the students in each school were receiving free or reduced lunch Only students who brought back signed parental permission slips indicating consent

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to participate in the study were included. Data collected from students in the participating classrooms who had a diagnosed disability other than a learning disability were not included in the present analysis. No a priori decisions were made regarding the gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or language background of the participants. Due to issues of privacy and confidentiality, researchers did not obtain information regarding the intelligence or achievement levels of participating students, other than that which ascertained their special education status and label.

Students with learning disabilities were included in the study if they (a) met the district criteria for a learning disability and (b) were fully included in a sixth-grade general education classroom for 100% of the school day. Of the participating students with learning disabilities, 8 were boys and 7 were girls. Their ages ranged from 10 to 13 years, with a mean chronological age of 11 years. All students were native English speakers. Participants had diagnosed learning disabilities in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics. From 68 sixth graders without disabilities, 36 were boys and 32 were girls. Students without disabilities were also between 10 and 13 years of age, with a mean chronological age of approximately 11 years.

PROCEDURE AND TOOLS

The study was conducted approximately 2 months after the start of the school year so that students had time to get to know one another and become familiar with the school and classroom environment. Two measures were administered to all participating students in their classroom. The researchers first introduced themselves and the purpose of the study, specifically to learn more about how children feel about working and playing with other children at school. Students were informed that their participation in the study was on purpose and that they could stop participating at any time. They also were assured of the secrecy of their responses and were instructed not to discuss their responses with others. In the study two measures were used the MCL Scale and the P N Inventory by Luftig, 1986.

MODIFIED CHILDREN'S LONELINESS SCALE (MCL SCALE)

Luftig (1986) demonstrated concurrent validity of the scale to be 0.81 between teacher ratings and actual student reports of loneliness. The measures were administered in a counterbalanced arrangement, with the Loneliness Scale being administered first in two of the classrooms and the Peer Nomination Inventory being administered first in the other two classrooms. It was used to determine students' perceived social competence, perceived loneliness, estimation of social status, and perceived ease of making friends. A 5-point Likert type scale used in the study. From seventeen items, 16 items determined the participant's social competence and loneliness at school (e.g., "I am good at working with other kids," "It is hard for me to make friends") and I item that determined the participant's attitude toward school (e.g., "I like school").

The MCL Scale was administered orally to each class by the researchers. Four practice items were included at the beginning of the questionnaire to ensure the participant's familiarity with responding to the items on the measure. The researchers assisted students with these practice items. They then read aloud each item on the scale and the five response options that followed, and students read along silently, marking an X in the box representing the answer that was most true for them. Response options included, "that's always true about me," "that's true about me most of the time", "that's sometimes true about me," "that's hardly ever true about me," and "that's not true at all about me." Students were allowed to ask clarifying questions of the researchers after raising their hands, and the researchers quietly assisted them. This measure took about 30 min to administer.

PEER NOMINATION INVENTORY (PN INVENTORY)

The Peer Nomination Inventory (Luftig, 1986) comprised 15 items that required students to nominate up to three peers who fit given behavioral attributes (e.g., "name up to three students in your class who have a good sense of humor," "name up to three students you would like to invite to your house after school," "name up to three students in your class who fight and argue a great deal)".

Students were seated in a semicircle so they could see all their classmates. The students were instructed to look around the class and nominate peers who best fit the given behavioral descriptions by writing their names on the inventory following each item. If a child was absent on that particular day, his or her name was written on the blackboard so students remembered to include that child in their nominations. The proctor read the items aloud to the whole class, and students were given time to respond to the item before the next item was read. If they needed to, students raised their hands to seek the assistance of the proctor in writing or spelling a peer's name or in receiving clarification about the task, and the proctor quietly assisted them.

The items on the Peer Nomination Inventory formed two scales: "liked most" (popularity scale) and "liked least" (unpopularity scale) that were used to generate social impact and social preference scores. Of the 15 items, 8 items made up the "liked-most" scale and the remaining 7 items made up the "liked-least" scale.

DATA PREPARATION AND SCORING

Two scores were obtained for the MCL Scale: An isolation score and an estimate of perceived social proficiency. For each of the two dimensions measured by this scale, individual item scores were summed to yield a total isolation and total perceived social proficiency score.

The order of some of the items was reversed so that all items were positively worded. Student responses were weighted and scored 1-5 so that a score of 5 always indicated greater lonesomeness or greater perceived social insufficiency. Means and standard deviations were computed for each score,

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which were used to conduct analyses of variance (ANOVAs) to determine whether there were differences between students with and without disabilities on these variables.

The responses on the peer nomination inventory were scored by tallying the number of nominations each student received on each item on the scale from all of his or her class peers. Then compute the student's socio metric status. Based on peer nominations, each student received a total status by approval and disapproval score. This score was determined by summing the total score the student obtained from peers on the 8 questions representing popularity and the 7 questions representing unpopularity. Standard scores (z-scores) were then computed for each child to facilitate further statistical analyses. "Liked-most" and "liked-least" items were used to generate social preference and social impact scores.

The social preference score was the z-score (liked most) - the z-score (liked least), whereas the social impact score was the z-score (liked most) + the z-score (liked least). These social preference and social impact scores were used to define four extreme social status types. The popular group comprised those children who received a social preference z-score greater than +1.0, a liked-most z-score greater than 0, and a liked-least z-score less than 0. The rejected group comprised those children who scored a social preference z-score of less than -1.00, a liked-least z-score greater than 0, and a liked-most z-score less than 0. The neglected group included those children who received a social impact z-score of less than -1.00 and a liked-most and a liked-least z-score less than 0. The rejected children, however, received many more liked-least nominations than the neglected children did. The controversial group contained children who obtained a social impact z-score greater than +1.0 and liked-most and liked-least z-scores greater than 0. Last, the average group comprised children who received a social preference z-score greater than -1.0 and less than +1.0. Chi square statistics were used to determine whether there were differences in the socio metric status of students with learning disabilities and their peers without disabilities.

DESIGN AND DATA ANALYSIS

The study employed a single factorial design with the independent variable being whether or not a child had a diagnosed learning disability. The dependent variables were the socio metric status (popular, rejected, neglected, or controversial), the perceived social proficiency, and perceived lonesomeness.

Means and Standard Deviations for isolation Scores in Students With Learning Disabilities and Students Without Disabilities		
Scores	**Students with LD**	**Students w/o LD**
M	13.67	9.90
SD	6.21	5.50

The data collected using the MCL Scale were analyzed using a series of one-way ANOVAs to determine if there were differences between the students with learning disabilities and their peers without disabilities in perceived social proficiency and perceived isolation. Significant differences were found between the two groups in perceived isolation $F (1, 55) =4.77$, $p < .03$), but not in perceived social proficiency. Students with learning disabilities perceived themselves as being alone than their peers without disabilities. Table 1 shows the mean difference and standard deviations between the two groups on perceived isolation.

As described earlier, the children were classified as belonging to 1 of 5 social position groups, depending on their social preference and social impact scores. Thus, the 15 students with learning disabilities were assigned to different social status groups. For this reason, there were not enough students with learning disabilities in each of the social position groups to yield statistical power and assurance parametric statistical analyses. Thus, nonparametric, chi-square analyses were used.

The central question regarding the social position data was whether the students with learning disabilities would be assigned to social position groups differently than was true for their peers without disabilities. Thus, the expected frequency or norm for students with learning disabilities in each social position group was the same as the frequency of the students without disabilities in that position group. Chi-square analyses were conducted to determine whether there were differences in the number of students with learning disabilities who were assigned to the popular, average, controversial, negative, and rejected social position groups as compared with the number of students without disabilities who were nominated to each of these position groups.

A significant chi-square was found for the social position groups of popular children and controversial children. Students with learning disabilities were less likely to be included in the popular group *(df = 1, x2 = 8. 10, p < . 0 1)* and more likely to be placed in the controversial group *(df = 1, x2 = 4.86, P < .05)* than their peers without disabilities.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated whether students with learning disabilities who were educated in inclusive general education classrooms differed from their same-age peers without disabilities on the variables

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of social position and/or perceived lonesomeness. The results indicated that sixth-grade students with learning disabilities reported more feelings of isolation than their classroom peers who did not have disabilities. Furthermore, these same students with learning disabilities were less popular and more controversial in their social position than their classmates without disabilities.

Isolation is a perceived phenomenon. That is, people may feel alone if they are truly rejected by peers or if they do not adequately perceive or understand their actual popularity among peers. Thus, of importance is why these students perceive themselves to be alone. Put another way, the question may be asked as to how realistic or versed in reality are their feelings of isolation.

Two possible explanations exist. The first explanation is that students with learning disabilities are actually disliked or ignored by peers and that thus their feelings of isolation are realistic. The second explanation is that the social relationships of students with learning disabilities do not differ from those of their peers without disabilities and that thus; their feelings of increased lonesomeness are not grounded in reality and are largely a misconception on their part.

In the present study, it appears that the isolation of the students with learning disabilities was realistic and related to their diminished social position. The findings suggest that the students with learning disabilities were less likely to be popular than their peers without disabilities and thus less likely to be nominated for social activities by peers. Given such a lack of nominations for social activities, it is not surprising that the students with learning disabilities were aware of their social isolation and described themselves as lonely.

Another new finding from the present study was the increased likelihood of students with learning disabilities to achieve the controversial social position, a situation where a student achieves a significant number of both positive and negative nominations. Past studies have shown the controversial category to be relatively small among students with the total percentage of students falling in this category being about 5%. In the present study, about 7% of the students without disabilities fell into this category, whereas more than 13% of the students with learning disabilities were classified as having controversial social status.

Why did a higher percentage of students with learning disabilities fall into the controversial category? By definition, these students were engaging in certain behaviors that caused them to be unpopular and popular at the same time or, conversely, to be popular with some students but unpopular with others. A number of researchers have found that students with learning disabilities show decreased social acceptance by their peers without disabilities and that these students often are rejected by peers due to aggressive or inappropriate social skills. Yet the present investigators found no studies that reveal significant differences in the rate at which students with disabilities are nominated for the controversial category.

Additional investigation is required regarding the specific behaviors that contribute to the inclusion of students with learning disabilities into the controversial category. One interesting finding of the present study was that although students with learning disabilities were less popular and more alone than their classmates without disabilities, they did not label themselves as being less socially competent. This finding is consistent with earlier studies that found that although students with learning disabilities were in reality less socially competent than their peers without disabilities, they were also less accurate than their peers in assessing their own social status and competence (Greca L and Stone, 1990). However, Vaughn (1990) found that even students as young as first grade or Nursery and kindergarten could begin to accurately assess their own social competence.

The students in the present study were enrolled in sixth grade and were presumably mature enough to accurately assess their social proficiency. Nevertheless, the students with learning disabilities assessed themselves to be as socially competent as their peers without disabilities even though they were decidedly less popular. Students with learning disabilities may demonstrate a cognitive social deficit (or social meta cognitive deficit) that affects their social perceptions much as their cognitive learning deficits affect their ability to learn academic material (Bruck, 1986; Luftig, 1987). Such a meta cognitive deficit would hinder their ability to adequately interpret feedback from others.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the current findings as to the decreased popularity and increased controversial status of the students with learning disabilities occurred within the Inclusive Education setting. A variety of studies have found that students often do not accept their peers who have disabilities and that they are more likely to reject or to be critical of the behaviors of such students. Thus, it is important to note that merely placing students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms is not sufficient to allow for their social inclusion and that other supports need to be in place to facilitate their acceptance and belonging in the peer group.

In summary, it appears that students with learning disabilities were seemed to be alone than students without disabilities and that their isolation appeared to be versed in reality inasmuch as they were less popular and more controversial than their peers. Although further research on the specific behaviors that give rise to such isolation seems appropriate, it may be wise for classroom teachers to deal with student feelings of isolation and sadness while also teaching them required social skills.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There were two limitations to the present study. The first was the relatively small number of students with learning disabilities participating in this study. These results must be duplicated with similar students in other schools and with students at different developmental levels before they can be generalized. The second limitation was the model of Inclusive Education adopted by the school system in which the current students were enrolled, which may be different from the models of Inclusive Education adopted by other schools. The school followed what they called the "full inclusion" model,

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in which all students with learning disabilities were served in the general education classroom for the entire day. It would have been beneficial to determine what types of social support were available to students with disabilities to facilitate their social functioning and peer's relationships in the Inclusive Education setting.

IMPLICATIONS

As it appears that simply placing students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms is not sufficient to allow for their social inclusion, and other supports need to be in place to facilitate their acceptance by and belonging to the peer group. One type of support needed for acceptance of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms is teacher support. There is a clear need for teacher preparation programs to address the social acceptance of students with disabilities in the general education classroom and to provide teachers with strategies needed to facilitate the social functioning of all their students., It is said that the responsibility for the social approval of students with disabilities is entirely on the teacher. Regular classroom teachers and classmates without disabilities should not and cannot accept total responsibility for the social approval of peers with learning disabilities. That is, social approval is not automatic and is usually based on the student's set of social behaviors that he/she demonstrates with peers. For this reason, it is important that the student with learning disabilities receive intentional and active coaching in learning the social behaviors that lead to acceptance. It would be strongly advised to become competent and willing to provide such instruction.

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