



## Peer Acceptance of Sensory Challenged in an Inclusive Education Environment

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### ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted to assess the peer acceptance of sensory challenged in an inclusive education environment. The tool was developed and standardized by the investigator, to assess peer acceptance of sensory challenged and non-disabled children for the study. Inclusive schools in Bangalore city, catering to the educational needs of both sensory challenged and non-disabled children was selected using purposive sampling technique. One hundred sensory challenged and one non-disabled children were selected, the samples were further subdivided into experimental group (50 sensory challenged and 50 non-disabled children) and control group (50 sensory challenged and 50 non-disabled children). Children from experimental group received a comprehensive intervention programme. Mean, standard deviation and t-test analysis was used to assess and compare the peer acceptance of both sensory challenged and non-disabled children. The data revealed that comprehensive intervention programme helped both sensory challenged and non-disabled children to accept and understand one another. The study highlights the need for sensitizing non-disabled children to the subject of impairment, the challenges the impaired children face, their needs, potentials and limitations. Further, the study also highlighted the need for creating awareness about sensory impairment.

**Keywords:** Sensory Challenged Children (SCC), Inclusive Education Environment (IEE), Peer Acceptance (PA).

### INTRODUCTION

Sensory Challenged Children (SSC) are defined as those “who are Blind or Visually Impaired, Deaf or Hearing Impaired and Deaf-Blind” (Carrie Renea, 2010). An individual/child/ person receive knowledge and information through his/her senses. These senses provide an opportunity to learn the necessary skills. The senses such as vision and hearing play a very important role in interaction, learning academic, social, and communication skills and to develop appropriate interpersonal relationship. But, for the sensory challenged children lack of vision and hearing acts as a barrier, and posts many challenges to them in the area of social relationship and academics in an inclusive education environment.

According to Donna Lene (2012), inclusive education is a process wherein the school system, strategic plans, and policies are adapted and changed to include teaching strategies for a wider and more diverse range of children and their families. Though the system of inclusive education is been implemented all over the world, the advantages of inclusion especially social inclusion is not being accepted. Further the inclusive education system is not fully equipped to handle the challenges of the disabled due to, poor physical access of school, need for modifications in school curriculum; access to information; lack of aids, appliances and appropriate educational materials, teacher training, specialist assistance, policies and programmes; lack of awareness and knowledge among school authorities; poor access to school enrollment; and the poor attitude of the parents, teachers and non-disabled children. Lack of opportunities, indifferent attitude and behaviour of the peers also acts as a major barrier in accepting the sensory challenged children as peers in an inclusive education environment. Peers are strength, role models, guiding force, effective tutors, mentors and friends who can be trusted. Further they also influence the personality of an individual. Being accepted by the peers/ peer group is very important and plays a crucial role during school years.

Peer acceptance is often defined as “the degree to which a child or adolescent is socially accepted by peers. It includes the level of peer popularity and the ease with which the child or adolescent can initiate and maintain satisfactory peer relationships” (Wells, 2011). Peer acceptance plays a very important role among children and can have a lasting impact during later years, more so for with a child/individual with impairment. Therefore, inclusive education as an educational platform should help both sensory challenged children as well as non-disabled children to learn and facilitate in accepting and being accepted as peers. Since, children with sensory impairment are always looked down, ridiculed, ignored and very often questioned about their credentials. But, they too want to be recognized and identified as any other normal individual. Studies have also shown that children with disabilities want to be seen as ‘normal’ (Priestly, et. al., 1999), to stay healthily, to have friends and pursue interests, be part of the local community, to acquire social and self-care skills and be independent, to feel confident, to be respected and to experience success and achievement (Beresford, et. al., 2007). Thus, this can be made possible through constant exposure, encouragement, motivation, reinforcement and practice through which both sensory challenged and non-disabled children learn to accept each other better. This in turn helps to pave way for a better understanding of one another and adjust to each other in an inclusive education environment. Hence, an attempt has been made in the present study to assess peer acceptance of both sensory challenged and non-disabled children in inclusive education environment.

### OBJECTIVE

To assess peer acceptance of sensory challenged and non-disabled children in an inclusive education environment.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for the present study was pre-test, post-test method with an intervention program. The goal of intervention was to enhance peer acceptance of both sensory challenged and non-disabled children and help them have a cordial relationship in an inclusive education environment.

Investigator identified the inclusive schools catering to the educational needs of sensory challenged and non-disabled children in Bangalore city. The Heads of the institution/Principals of inclusive schools were approached with letter of permission for conducting the study. Purposive sampling procedure was used to select the inclusive schools in Bangalore city. A total of 200 samples, consisting of 100 sensory challenged children and 100 non-disabled children aged between 10-15 years were selected for the present study. They were further subdivided into experimental group comprising of 50 sensory challenged children and 50 non-disabled children, and control group comprising of 50 sensory challenged children and 50 non-disabled children.

Rating scale developed and standardized by the investigator to assess the peer acceptance of both sensory challenged and non-disabled children was used. The scale consisted of information related to the socio demographic profile of the samples and specific information related to peer acceptance. The scale was translated into regional language (Kannada) to evoke a better response. The items were rated on 5 point scale, always, frequently, sometimes, rarely and never with a scoring pattern of 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 respectively.

Pre-test was conducted to both experimental and control group to assess the existing knowledge about impairment and peers among both sensory challenged and non-disabled children. The investigator developed a personal rapport with both sensory challenged and non-disabled children in order to get accurate information. Both sensory challenged and non-disabled children were interviewed one at a time to obtain their views and opinions about accepting their peers in an inclusive education environment.

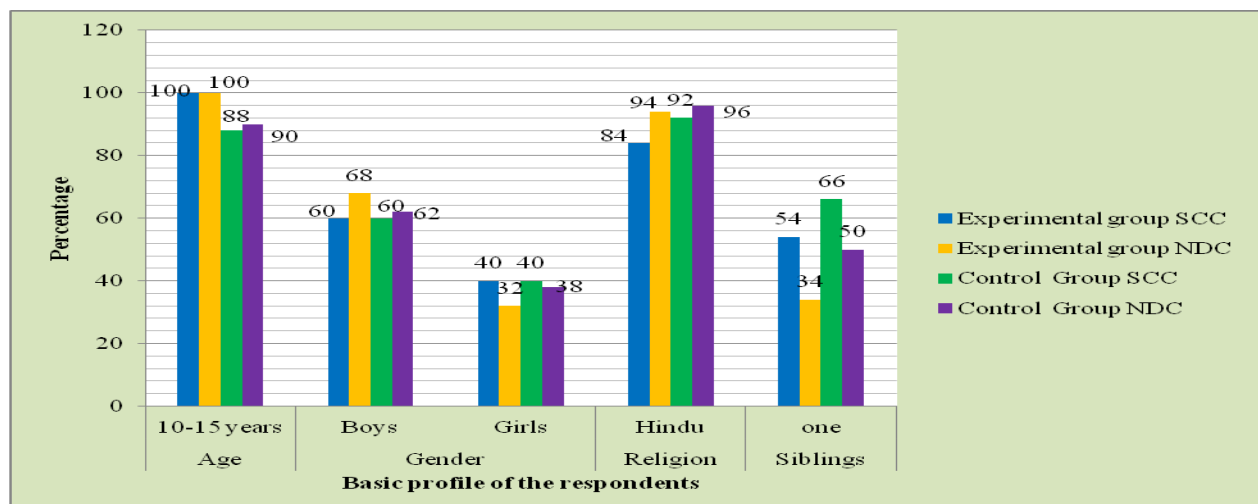
Comprehensive intervention programme was conducted for 50 sensory challenged and 50 non-disabled children of experimental group for duration of four weeks. Each session of the intervention programme was conducted for 3 days a week for duration of 2 hours. The samples were introduced to concepts like sharing, group games, group activities, group discussion and physical activity to improve the peer acceptance. Both sensory challenged as well as non-disabled children were given incentives such as school supplies and were praised wherever they performed well so as to provide encouragement, motivation and in turn to enhance their peer acceptance.

Post-test was conducted for both sensory challenged children and non-disabled children from control group and experimental group to assess peer acceptance and to study the effectiveness of the intervention program after a gap of one month. The data obtained was subjected to analysis. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to analyze the data on the objective formulated.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*Table 1: Basic profile of the respondents*

Basic profile of the samples		Experimental group		Control Group	
		SCC Number	NDC Number	SCC Number	NDC Number
Age	10-15 years	100	100	88	90
	12-13 years	0	0	12	10
Gender	Boys	60	68	60	62
	Girls	40	32	40	38
Religion	Hindu	84	94	92	96
	Muslim	12	02	4	0
	Christian	04	04	04	04
Siblings	One	54	34	66	50
	Two	38	52	26	48
	Three	06	12	08	02
	Four	02	02	0	0

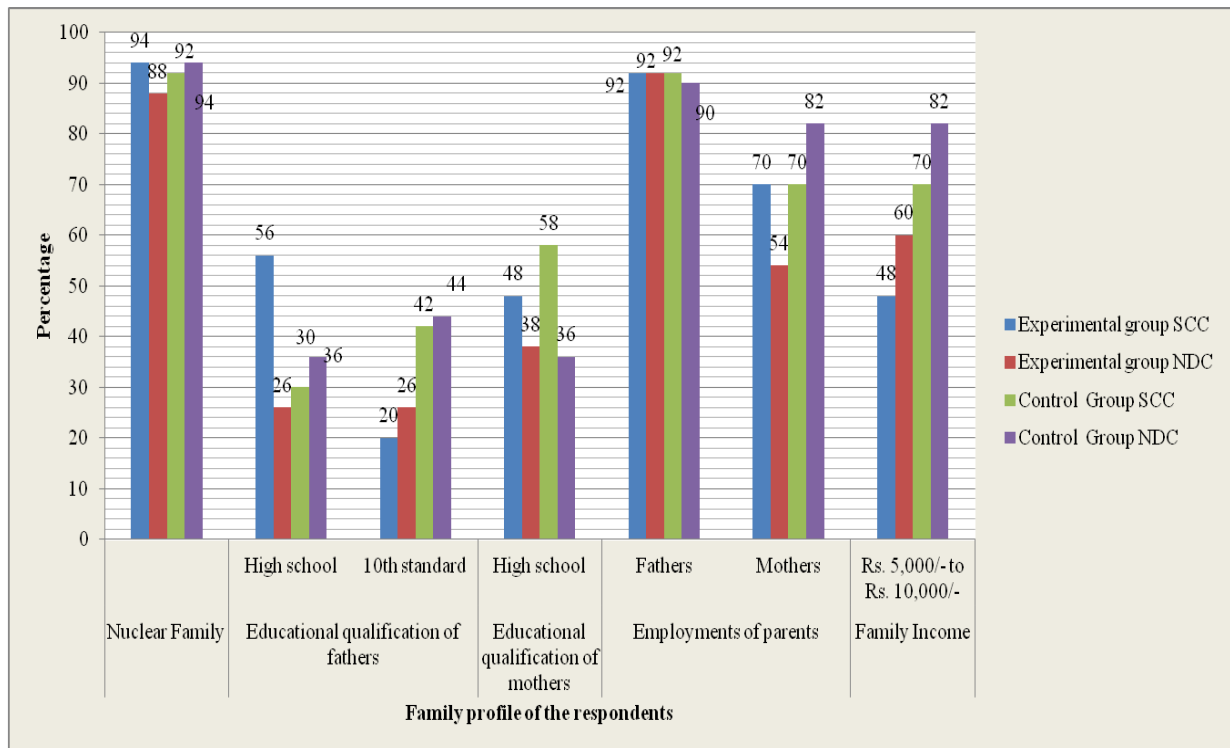


*Figure 1: Basic profile of the respondents*

Table – 1 and figure 1 depicts the basic profile of the respondents. Majority of sensory challenged children from both experimental group (100%) and control group (88%) and majority of non-disabled children from both experimental group (100%) and control group (90%) were in the age bracket of 14-15 years. 60% of sensory challenged children and 68% of non-disabled children were boys; and 40% of sensory challenged children and 32% of non-disabled children were girls from the experimental group. Majority of sensory challenged children from both experimental group (84%) and control group (92%) and a majority of non-disabled children from both experimental group and control group belong to the Hindu religion. With regard to number of siblings, sensory challenged children from both experimental group (54%) and control group (66%), and non-disabled children from experimental group (34%) and control group (50%) have one sibling.

**Table 2: Family profile of the respondents**

Family profile of the respondents		Experimental group		Control Group	
		SCC	NDC	SCC	NDC
		Number	Number	Number	Number
Type of family	Nuclear	94	88	92	94
	Joint	06	12	08	06
Educational qualification of fathers	Up to 7 <sup>th</sup> Standard	08	26	12	02
	High School	56	26	30	36
	10 <sup>th</sup> Standard	20	26	42	44
	PUC	16	22	12	18
Educational qualification of mothers	Up to 7 <sup>th</sup> Standard	10	46	14	4
	High School	48	38	58	36
	10 <sup>th</sup> Standard	30	14	26	54
	PUC	12	2	2	6
Employments of parents	Fathers employed	92	92	92	90
	Mothers employed	70	54	70	82
Family Income ( in Rupees)	< 5,000	0	16	04	08
	5,000-10,000	48	60	70	82
	10,000-15,000	42	24	26	10
	15,000- 20,000	10	0	0	0



**Figure 2: Family profile of the respondents**

Table – 2 and figure 2 shows the family profile of the respondents, majority (94% and 92%) of sensory challenged children from both experimental and control groups, and 88% and 94% of non-disabled children from experimental and control groups belonged to nuclear families. 56% and 26% of sensory challenged and non-disabled children’s fathers from experimental group studied till high school and 42% and 44% of sensory challenged and non-disabled children’s fathers from control group have studied up to 10<sup>th</sup> standard. With regard to mother’s qualification, 48% and 38% of sensory challenged and non-disabled children’s mothers from experimental group, and 58% and 36% of sensory challenged and non-disabled children’s mothers from control group have studied up to high school. 92% of sensory challenged children and non-disabled children’s fathers from experimental group are employed whereas, 70% and 54% of sensory challenged and non-disabled children’s mothers from the experimental group are employed. In the area of family income, 48% and 70% of the families of sensory challenged, 60% and 82% of the families of non -disabled children from the experimental and control groups family would draw a monthly income in the range of Rs. 5,000/- to Rs. 10,000/-.

**Table 3: Peer acceptance of sensory challenged and non-disabled children studying in an inclusive education environment.**

Peer acceptance	Experimental Group		Control Group	
	SCC	NDC	SCC	NDC
	Mean $\pm$ SD	Mean $\pm$ SD	Mean $\pm$ SD	Mean $\pm$ SD
Pre-test	73.98 $\pm$ 25.68	72.62 $\pm$ 19.17	67.70 $\pm$ 12.03	72.88 $\pm$ 25.49
Post-test	142.64 $\pm$ 9.34	143.12 $\pm$ 5.56	70.14 $\pm$ 18.72	74.06 $\pm$ 14.88
't' value	17.7673**	24.9760**	0.7753 <sup>NS</sup>	0.2827 <sup>NS</sup>

\*\* Significant at 1% level NS Not significant

Table 3 depicts the peer acceptance of both sensory challenged and non-disabled children. Pre-test data indicates that the respondents of both control group and experimental group have less peer acceptance. This could be attributed to the fact that both sensory challenged as well as non-disabled children experienced difficulty in understanding their peers and developing a cordial interpersonal relationship with their peers, leading to initial adjustment problems. When non-disabled peers lack information about disability or impairment they tend to behave in a very indifferent or a strange manner. The pre-test results is in line with the study carried out by Hogan, McLennan & Bauman (2000), who reported that learners with disabilities are half as likely to report a sense of belonging, feeling safe or accepted, than their learners without disabilities.

Whereas, the post-test, data revealed that both sensory challenged and non-disabled children gradually began to accept each other as their peers which is indicated with mean value being 142.64 $\pm$ 9.34 and 143.12 $\pm$ 5.56 and the 't' value being strongly significant (17.7673 and 24.9760), which could be attributed to the influence of intervention which influenced the mindset of the respondents and also in bringing about awareness among both sensory challenged and non-disabled children. The post- test data is in line with the study carried out by Ndirangu & Murungi (2012), which highlighted that visually impaired children who are integrated into the regular class were accepted by their sighted peers. Therefore, when both sensory challenged and the non- disabled children are sensitized about the need and importance of peers, importance of friendship, concept of sharing, understanding, need for respect, mutual assistance, being sportive, etc. can facilitate with better peer relation.

Further, the study also indicates that the intervention module developed by using various co-circular activities, games, one on one activities and problem solving situations and co-operative games helped both sensory challenged and non-disabled children in accepting their peers. Gartin, Barbara, Murdick, Nikki, Digby, & Annette (1992), encapsulated in their study that co-operative learning activities foster cooperation and concern for peers. They also highlighted that cooperative activities should include peer tutoring, peer partners, peer modeling, peer reinforcement, special friends, and social bids.

Thus, it can be concluded that the early intervention through a proper awareness can help both the SCC and the non-disabled children help in fostering peer acceptance and sustain positive and enduring relationship.

## CONCLUSION

Peer acceptance is crux of socio-emotional development as, peers form the wrap and weft of social relationship. It provides a foundation for both sensory challenged and non-disabled children to develop and maintain a healthy and positive relationship. Further, peer acceptance among both sensory challenged and non-disabled children in an inclusive education environment should be enhanced through constant interaction with peers, encouragement, group activities, effective communication skills and reinforcement. Results of the present study also indicated that, intervention programme will influence peer acceptance. Thus, it can be inferred that from the time of enrolment, sensory challenged children and non-disabled children should be provided with opportunity and exposure to foster peer relationships.

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