

ENHANCING GROUP COHESION IN THE INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM THROUGH GROUP ACTIVITIES– A CASE STUDY

DR. P. B. Beulahbel Bency,

Assistant Professor, Department of Education

Mother Teresa Women's University, Kodaikanal, Tamil Nadu, India

Mobile : 7904860114 e mail: beulabency@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Inclusive Education (IE) is an approach of educating the children with special needs (differently able children) with that of the other students within same root. The main objective of inclusive education is to identify and enroll children with disabilities in regular schools and to provide them with effective academic support. Inclusive classroom is an educational space where all types of students work and learn together. Group cohesiveness prompts students to help other classmates, characterized by increased communication, concern for their group members, and an enhanced feeling of belongingness. The mission of this case study was to analyze whether the inclusive classroom environment with regular group activities enhances group cohesiveness among students. The sample consisted of a single inclusive classroom with 30 students. The analysis was done using sociogram. The sociometric analysis has shown that the group cohesiveness of students has improved while regularly participating in the group activities. The findings of the study indicate that the regular group activities increase group cohesion among the students of a classroom irrespective of their abilities.

Key Words: Inclusive Education, Inclusive Classroom, Group Cohesiveness, Sociometry & Sociogram

Introduction

Inclusive Education (IE) is an approach of educating the children with special needs (differently abled children) with that of the other students within same root. It looks for the address the learning needs of all children with an explicit focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion. It suggests – with or without disabilities being able to learn together through access to common school provision with a suitable network of support services (Sanjeev & Kumar, 2007).

Inclusive classroom is an educational space where all types of students work and learn together. Students of all learning levels, types and abilities are in one classroom. The principle of inclusive education was adopted at the World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality (Salamanca, Spain 1994) and was restated at the World Education Forum (Dakar Senegal 2000).

The Government of India launched the Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) scheme in December 1974. This was a Centrally Sponsored Scheme for providing educational opportunities to children with special needs (CWSN) in regular schools. Amar Jyoti Charitable Trust (AJCT), Delhi was the first institution in India to implement the Inclusive Education Scheme in 1981 (Tuli, 2019).

Need of Inclusive Classrooms

The main objective of inclusive education is to identify and enrol children with disabilities in regular schools and to provide them with effective academic support. All children should give an equal chance to learn to the best (NCTE). Through inclusive education, all community members - teachers, students, and other functionaries – build a sense of belonging.

Human beings, by nature, have considerable misgiving about others who appear to diverge significantly from them in one or more personally characteristics regardless of whether these differences are bad or favourable. From the ancient times, the different abled children have a long history of being intimidated, harassed, isolated, and segregated from the mainstream society.

Inclusive education stimulates – enrolment of all children of society without any kind of discrimination in the same school. Hence the objective of inclusive education is that all children are enriched by the opportunity in which they learn and care for each other and hence gain the right attitude skill and values needed for community living. Inclusive classrooms try to bring about enhanced group dynamics, so that every child may accept others in a positive way and together make a conducive environment. This is possible through improving group cohesiveness among the peers.

Group cohesion is the extent to which groups members are attracted to the group and its goals. Cohesion can consist of feelings of interpersonal liking task commitment and group pride. This is possible in a psychologically safe environment, where group members have positive feelings about one another. In such a group, the performance will be enhanced since each member is motivated to achieve their own goals as well as the groups. In such group, members are not inhibited in sharing their perspectives to come up with a novel solution. Cohesion may take some time to develop, and the effect of cohesion will be evident over a length of time (Paulus, Kohn, Dzindolet, 2011).

Group Cohesiveness or group cohesion is the key to sustain the success of the group task. Group performance is linked and influenced by the group's success to build the cohesion of all the interests and contributions of group members, which inturn can result in leg achievement in the group task (Anwar, 2016).

According to, Karimova et al (2019), developing a group cohesiveness is an essential part of learning and teaching. The findings of their study also indicated that there is acomplex interaction between group development and educational results.

The studies on group cohesiveness found that group cohesiveness has certain advantages, such as:

- Improvement of communicative skills.
- Strengthening the bond among the peer group.
- Enhancement of achievement.
- Providing a feeling of belongingness and security.
- Improving the coordination etc.

Need & Significance of the Study

Making education accessible to all children with and without disability – is the responsibility of everyone. In addition to optimal learning and achievement development, social participation is one of the main goals of inclusive education.

Group Cohesion, keep members of a social group connected. It is one of the most important characteristics of a group which in turn linked to the group performance, intergroup conflicts, and therapeutic change.

Inclusive classrooms many lack such cohesiveness. Most of the students with special needs feel 'alone, isolated and left out' in classrooms (Jayne Clare). Study in 2001 found that students with disabilities are often deliberately excluded by their peers in academic and extracurricular settings. Group dynamics play a major role in keeping group cohesiveness and there by success of a class.

Since the group cohesiveness increases the group interactions, interpersonal communication achievement and a group belongingness so that no student is left with an isolation in any respect. Hence, enhancing group cohesiveness in classrooms especially an inclusive classroom is significant in the educational scenario.

Statement of the Problem

The present study is entitled “Enhancing Group Cohesion in the Inclusive Classroom through Group Activities– A Case Study”.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analysis the group cohesiveness of secondary school students.
2. To identify the individuals left out of the group.
3. To assess whether the group activity methods enhance the group cohesiveness in inclusive classrooms.

Research Questions

The present case study is based on certain research questions such as:

1. Is there any group cohesiveness in inclusive classrooms?
2. How to find out the students who lack group cohesiveness?
3. Do group activity methods enhance group cohesiveness in inclusive classrooms?

Method of the study

For the present study, the investigator used the case study method. This case study method is qualitative nature.

Population and Sampling

Population is the total individuals occupying an area or making up the whole. A sample is a representative small portion of the population that is selected for observation and analysis. For the present study, the population is the secondary school students in inclusive schools and the sample comprised of 30 secondary school students in an inclusive classroom from a Government Secondary School in Thiruvananthapuram District of Kerala State in India

Tools Used

The tools used for the present study are:

- Observation
- Sociogram

Methodology

In the present study the investigator used case study method according to the nature of the study. Case study is an in-depth study of one person, group, or event. It is related to clinical research.

Several sources are used for gathering data and for data collection, different methods are used such as observation, interviews, questionnaires etc. For the present study, the researcher has utilized observation and sociometry as the tools for data collection along with different group activity methods such as Carousel method, Round Robin strategy and the Tea Party method. During the class, the researcher observed the students in her classroom and observed that students in groups tries to help peer group members, listen to the group members, and tries their maximum to participate and encourage group members for doing the tasks assigned.

The researcher has utilized sociometry for the data collection. The researcher provided three sets of questions and asked the students to select three of their peers whom they would approach in a situation of need. Real life situations were given. By using the data of selected peers by each class member, the investigator prepared three sociograms.

Researcher again provided the selected cooperative learning strategies for further classes for a duration of two months along with regular classroom activities. The researcher again checked the group cohesiveness using a new set of situations from real life and based on the selection of each students' peers, prepared another set of sociograms.

Analysis was done on both set of sociograms.

Analysis and Interpretation

Social cohesion is the strength of relationships and the sense of solidarity among members of a community. (Kawachi & Berkman, 2000). One of the earliest mentions of this term was by Gough Whitlam. This was during the launching of the Labor Party's Election Campaign in 1972 in Australia.

Group cohesion is the extent to which groups members are attracted to the group and its goals. Cohesion can consist of feelings of interpersonal liking task commitment and group pride. This is possible in a psychologically safe environment, where group members have positive feelings about one another. In such a group, the performance will be enhanced since each member is motivated to achieve their own goals as well as the groups. In such group, members are not inhibited in sharing their perspectives to come up with a novel solution. Cohesion may take some time to develop, and the effect of cohesion will be evident over a length of time (Paulus, Kohn, Dzindolet, 2011).

The prepared sociograms were analysed by the investigator. The first set of sociograms revealed on analysis that there were two isolates and three cliques and no stars. Many mutuals were also present in the classrooms. It is interpreted that two students were not selected by any one of the peers in the given situations. One of these students were found to be differently abled student.

In the second set of sociogram, the analysis has revealed that the number of isolates were reduced to zero and the number of mutuals also increased and the number of stars was increased to one. Thus, on interpretation of the data collected, it is found that participation in group activities regularly enhances communication and interaction among peers in the classroom and because of this the number of isolates were reduced to zero. The result comparison shows that group activities enhance group cohesiveness among students of an inclusive classroom.

Conclusion

The investigator conducted a case study entitled as “Enhancing Group Cohesion in the Inclusive Classroom through Group Activities– A case study”. The investigator adopted case study method for this study. For data collection, the investigator used some tools such as sociogram and observation. The investigator has utilized qualitative data analysis. The analysis showed that through regular group activities in the inclusive classroom which encourages students’ interdependence, responsibility and communication, group cohesiveness is enhanced among the school students.

Reference

1. Kawachi, I & Berkman, L. (2000). Social cohesion social capital and health: A flashpoint for health policy. *Journal of Health and Social Behaviour*, 5 1 (Supp 1) S54-S66.
2. P.B. Paulus, N. Kohn, M. Dzindolet. In *Encyclopaedia of Creativity*, 2nd Ed. 2011, P 446-452.
3. Anwar Khoirul (2016). Working with group Tasks and Group Cohesiveness. *International Education studies*, Vol.9, No. 8. ISSN 1913-9020 EISSN 1913-9039.
4. Karimova, A. Khasanova, O., &Shemshurenko, O. (2019). The problem of raising group cohesiveness in the EFL classroom *International Forum on Teacher Education* 1025-1035.
5. Sanjeev, K., T Kumar, K. (2007). Inclusive Education in India. *Electronic Journal for Inclusive Education*, 2(2).
6. Tuli, U. (2019). Inclusive Education in India, from concept to reality. In. Azim Premji University Learning Curve, December 2019.