

MAINSTREAM EDUCATION OF THE HEARING IMPAIRED IN MYSORE CITY : A REPORT

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Mainstreaming Education is a system of education where the hearing impaired children are educated in normal schools. The main objective is to prepare these children to adjust to socio-cultural environment, to derive satisfaction and to experience success academically. This report gives the analysis of a survey of 70 children in the integrated school education system. The survey aimed to analyze the practice of integration of hearing impaired children and the shortcomings in the implementation of this system. Several recommendations have been made to streamline the system-

Mainstreaming or Integrated education is a system of Education where hearing impaired children are educated in regular schools. It is based on the philosophy of equal educational opportunity that is implemented through individual planning to promote appropriate learning situation. This system refers to both social and academic integration.

The main objective of integration is to prepare the hearing impaired children to adjust to socio-cultural environment which is now designed to meet the needs of the normals only. It promotes a natural contact and meaningful communication between the hearing impaired and normals of appropriate age groups. Besides, it offers the reciprocal exchange of experiences, which can increase tolerance and acceptance of the hearing impaired on the part of normal children. It increases auditory and language skills among hearing impaired children and also their self-confidence. Succinctly the primary goal of any type of mainstreaming education is to make the hearing impaired children feel comfortable, derive satisfaction and to experience success both socially and academically.

In the City of Mysore, there are 70 children integrated in 37 normal schools studying at different levels—>12 children at secondary level, 48 children at primary level and 10 children at Kindergarten. Among these, 56 children have severe sensorineural loss or profound deafness whereas 14 children have moderate to severe sensorineural hearing loss with good discrimination. Complete Integration system

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is being followed by these schools where in, all children spend the whole day in regular class-rooms along with normal children. Additional assistance is provided only by parents at home. About 40-45 children daily attend therapy for about 30 minutes before the school hours or after the school hours at the All India Institute of Speech and Hearing. Some children attend therapy only during vacations. There are no resource teachers. The Itinerant Speech Therapist of All India Institute of Speech and Hearing helps the teachers and parents by visiting the schools and through parent meetings. Parents have taken up the major responsibility in providing additional help, and they have their own limitations such as inadequate education, time, etc. Some parents depend on sending their children to private tutors who are not specially trained to handle hearing impaired children.

The Government of Karnataka has given language exemption for deaf children whereby they are permitted to study only one language instead of three languages with other major subjects. Some children have not made use of this facility because they are interested in studying other languages also-

An evaluation of the academic performance as well as social adjustment of these children was done by collecting information from the teachers concerned. A proforma was used to collect the following information :

- (a) Placement— sitting place of the child in the class-room : to know about
 - (i) the distance between the teacher and the student,
 - (ii) the comfortable level in terms of neck position and
 - (iii) the size of the classroom
- (b) Strength per class—teacher-student ratio,
- (c) Number of teachers handling the section in which the child is enrolled.
- (d) Number of subjects of study and medium of instruction—to know whether the child has taken language exemption.
- (e) Regularity in wearing hearing aid.
- (f) Awareness among the teachers and classmates of the hearing impaired child's handicap.
- (g) Mode of communication by the child, teachers and classmates.
- (h) Answering the roll call -saying 'yes' when the child's name is called out.
- (i) Oral and written expression as well as comprehension.
- (j) Performances on dictation, recitation and craft skill?.
- (k) Social Interaction—Mixing with classmates, participation in extra-curricular activities, etc.

The data show that, though most of the children wear hearing aids regularly, the maximum benefit is not gained in the class-room situations, except for a few children with moderate hearing loss but with good speech discrimination. In this group some children are at average level and some are above average with respect to their classmates. They are able to follow class-room teaching, follow dictation, to recite poems and communicate orally all with minimum additional help. Sometimes they use both gestures and speech for communication. The children with severe or profound sensorineural loss have major difficulties in following class-room teaching, in which case they mostly use gestures or avoid speaking situations. They have poor oral expression and even the answers they write tests and examinations are inadequate, incomplete, lack continuity and do not convey meaning.

There are some exceptional cases numbering 2-3 who are average or above average in this group, which is mainly due to the effort of parents as well as high intelligence of the child.

The performance on craft skills such as drawing and painting appears to be good.

Social Interaction is not satisfactory with regard to communication.

Overall the data indicate that the mainstreaming is not satisfactory and that there are many variables affecting the education of these children. Lack of adequate requirements in schools is the major drawback apart from the child's capacity to cope with the education.

Some of the other drawbacks are :—

1. Criteria for admission into a normal school with regard to degree of hearing loss and readiness of the child are not strictly followed.
2. Improper location of the school.
3. Inadequate class-rooms—in terms of student strength and exposure to noise.
4. Lack of proper student-teacher ratio.
5. Lack of additional help by resource teachers (parents who are able to cope with the syllabus help their children at home).
6. Lack of training on the part of teachers of normal schools in handling hearing impaired children. At present teachers are made aware of the child's problem and guidance on handling such children is given by Itinerant Speech Therapist during periodical visits. This is not sufficient.

Recommendations!

For successful integrated education system : —

1. Criteria for normal school admission with regard to (i) degree and type of hearing loss, (ii) age of the child, (iii) usefulness of hearing aid, (iv) speech discrimination, (v) readiness of the child in speech and language development, and (vi) education of the parents and their attitude towards management need to be streamlined,
2. Intensive auditory, speech and language training should be given during pre-school years of the children
3. Admission of the child to a normal school should be made on a trial basis for two years in the initial stages, and followed by periodical academic evaluation for further promotions.
4. Selection of schools—one or two schools in each locality should be selected and adequate facilities should be provided.
5. Training teachers—one or two teachers from these selected schools should be given short-term training to deal with these children and incentives given to them.
6. Additional help if possible by resource teachers or by trained teachers should be given to these children in difficult subjects.
7. Periodical parent-teacher -clinician meetings should be conducted for mutual help and understanding of management.