

The Implementation of Early Childhood Special Education Curriculum in the Actual Classroom: A Qualitative Investigation

Dr. Ghulam Fatima

Assistant Professor, Department of Special Education,
University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan)
Email: fatima.dse@pu.edu.pk

Dr. Misbah Malik

Assistant Professor, University of Education, Township Campus, Lahore, Pakistan)
Email: misbahmalik@ue.edu.pk

Mrs. Sadia Suleman Khan

(Assistant Professor, Sardar Bahadur Khan University, Quetta)
Email: ssuleman_khan786@yahoo.com

Abstract

The main purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the implementation of Early Childhood Special Education curriculum in the real classrooms of young children with deafness. The population of study included all sixty eight (68) classes (K.G.1= 34, K.G.2= 34) in thirty four (34) Government Deaf & Defective Hearing Schools located in thirty one districts in Punjab province of Pakistan. Punjab was divided into four zones for the selection of a representative sample of classrooms. One school from each zone was randomly selected. Two classrooms from each school were selected as sample of study. Three observations in each classroom (3x2=6 observations) were made. The total number of observations was twenty four (24). A self-developed and validated observation checklist consisting of curriculum components of speech, speech reading, reading, writing, mathematics, and evaluation, was used for observing instructional practices of teachers regarding implementation of ECSE curriculum in the classroom. Tellies were marked on observation checklists to record the instructional practices of teachers against each component. Data were analysed on SPSS. Mean scores

and standard deviations were reported. ANOVA was run to find the statistically significant difference among instructional practices of teachers of four district level schools located in four zones of the Punjab province. It was observed that sufficient time was not being given on teaching speech and speech reading. Instructional material was being used on a very limited scale. Major aspects of observations were reported in tabular and narrative form. Conclusions were drawn and recommendations to the teachers, and school principals for the better implementation of curriculum weremade.

Key words: Early Childhood Special Education, curriculum, young children with deafness

Introduction

The early years of a child's life lay foundations for his subsequent acquisition of information about the world, communication with family and society, and development of cognition and linguistics (Abidi, 2015). If a child acquires spoken language skills at the age of three years, he will be able to get prepared for taking part in all activities offered in a pre-school setting, and involve in important social interactions with his peers and teachers. It has been reported that children who are not exposed to enough amounts and quality of language during their early years are in the hazard for unsatisfactory performance in both language and educational accomplishments later in childhood (Hart & Risley, 1995; Nathan, Goulandris, & Snowling, 2004; Rescorla, 2002).

Developmental procedure for the acquisition of language is impeded by deafness in young children. The profound and permanent nature of deafness results in an early stoppage in speech, language, and communication. As a consequence, cognitive and social development and subsequent educational progress including literacy are all affected (Hart & Risley, 1995).

So the early childhood education refers to a group setting deliberately intended to affect developmental changes from birth to eight years. The early years of child's life are the prime time for parents, teachers, administrators and caregivers to provide positive experience that will affect the rest of child's life. Children develop faster during these early years than any other time of their lives (Gordon and Browne, 2000).

Early Childhood Special Education refers to free, appropriate, specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of preschool children with disabilities whose age range is between three to five years. They are

provided with instruction in any of the following settings: Home, hospitals, institutions, special schools, classrooms, and community child care or preschool settings, or both (IDEIA, 2006; Oregon Administrative Rules for Special Education, 2013).

It is a recurrently reported truth that students with and without deafness exhibit a significant academic achievement gap (Meadow-Orleans, 2001; Marschark, 2006). The median reading comprehension score as calculated by the SAT-9 for 17 and 18 year old students with deafness and hard of hearing is about same to that of hearing students of grade fourth (Gallaudet Research Institute, 2005). This point is higher a little than achievement scores in reading reported a quarter of a century ago. Experts in the deaf field have related this failure to the scarcity of research and uselessness of instructional strategies used with deaf or hard of hearing children (Marschark, 2006). Generally speaking, the program administrators, parents, and teachers decide on the basis of their philosophical commitments what is better for the educational progress of children with deafness. Research focusing on instructional strategies, curricula, teachers, and program distinctiveness is not in abundance (Meadow-Orleans, 2001).

Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) programs are of extreme importance. Excellence in programs is dependent on concentrating on classroom activities and interactions, classroom environment, staffing qualities, professional development, management and support services, and parental engagement (Buysee & Hollingsworth, 2009). Ideal ECSE programs should be incorporated, all-inclusive, standardized, flexible, peer and family related, and outcome-oriented. In addition to this, these programs should convey the best services and provide help to children and their families. Stress should also be paid on the teaching learning process, development of a globally acknowledged curriculum framework that is adaptable and broad, including families in the main stream, and holding the exercise of mixed grouping that meets diversified levels of competence and individual needs (Sandall, Hemmeter, Smith, & McLean, 2005).

Keeping into consideration the linkage between early years experiences and subsequent results, age- appropriate practices are supported for young children with disabilities within the framework of ECSE programs (Sandall, Hemmeter, Smith, & McLean, 2005). These instructional practices should eventually develop a close link between the program, the family

members, and the child with disability to meet the special requirements of all. An age-appropriate curriculum would pay emphasis on the learning process of children in the classroom; implementation of its different components through instructional practices adopted by teachers; developing activities suitable for both age and individual, and forming groups of children considering a wide variety of abilities (Council for Exceptional Children, 2001; Trivette & Dunst, 2000).

Much research has proved that educated persons with deafness are not performing well in reading recognition, writing, and mathematical skills (Akhtar & Inam, 2005 ;Galaudet Research Institute, 2005; Wahid & Ishfaq, 2000;Stinson & Walter, 1997). Their speech and speech reading skills are not developed to the extent to communicate with hearing community (Parveen, 2007; Latif & Watto, 2005; Hart & Risley, 1995). This condition of persons with deafness strengthened the notion that some gaps would have got left in their early years education, particularly, in the implementation of curriculum through instructional practices of special education teachers.

Objectives of the Study

The present study was conducted to achieve the following objectives:
To identify gaps in the implementation of ECSE curriculum in an actual classroom of young children with deafness.

To observe the instructional practices adopted by special education teachers in the classrooms of young children with deafness.

To give recommendations for abridging gaps in the implementation of ECSE curriculum in the classrooms of young children with deafness.

Methodology

This was a qualitative study. Processes and procedures adopted to explore the implementation of Early Childhood Special Education curriculum in the real classrooms of young children with deafness are being discussed in this section. The population of study included all sixty eight (68) classes (K.G.1= 34, K.G.2= 34) in thirty four (34) Government Deaf & Defective Hearing Schools located in thirty one districts in Punjab province of Pakistan. Punjab was divided into four zones for the selection of a representative sample of classrooms. Four schools from each zone were selected through simple random sampling. Two classrooms from each school were selected as

sample of study. Three observations in each classroom ($3 \times 2 = 6$ observations) were made. The total number of observations was twenty four (24). A self-developed and validated observation checklist consisting of curriculum components of speech, speech reading, reading recognition, writing, mathematics, and evaluation was used for data collection. Data were analyzed through SPSS.

Data Collection Procedure

Conducting observations in an actual classroom acquires keen observation skills, consumption of time, and biasness free attitude of an observer. Keeping in view the sensitivity of the issue, the researchers personally conducted observations. Initially, the permission from the concerned schools was sought after explaining the purpose and importance of the study. In a meeting with the school heads and coordinators, a unanimous schedule of observations for each school was prepared. On the scheduled date, day, and time, the selected classes were observed for the duration of thirty minutes in each class. It is important to explain that each class was observed during mathematics period. Two classes (K.G.I and K.G.II) in two periods of maths were observed for a duration of thirty minutes each in one day. It took twelve days for conducting twenty four observations. Tellies were marked on observation checklists to record the instructional practices of teachers against each component.

Results

In the following section results of the study are being presented.

Table 1.

Demographic variables (number of children in one class?)

Variables		Zones	Observation in each category	Total observations
Classes	K.G. I		12	24
	K.G.II		12	
Districts	Bahawalpur	1	6	24
		2	6	
	D.G.Khan	3	6	
	Gujranwala	4	6	
Time duration	KG I		30 minutes	360 minutes
	KG 11		30 minutes	360 minutes

Table 02

Descriptive table for the mean scores of teachers' instructional practices in classrooms of young children with deafness

Instructional schools Practices	No. of observations	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	
Speech Reading	1	6	9.6667	8.35863	.00	21.00
	2	6	9.8333	7.65289	.00	16.00
	3	6	6.1667	5.63619	.00	13.00
	4	6	6.8333	2.13698	5.00	11.00
	Total	24	8.1250	6.21578	.00	21.00
Reading Recognition	1	6	10.8333	5.63619	6.00	19.00
	2	6	14.1667	4.95648	6.00	20.00
	3	6	10.6667	8.73308	4.00	28.00
	4	6	7.8333	1.47196	6.00	10.00
	Total	24	10.8750	5.87783	4.00	28.00
Writing	1	6	18.0000	5.21536	10.00	23.00
	2	6	22.1667	3.25064	18.00	26.00
	3	6	18.8333	1.16905	18.00	21.00
	4	6	16.8333	1.47196	15.00	19.00
	Total	24	18.9583	3.61734	10.00	26.00
Mathematics	1	6	20.3333	10.31982	8.00	33.00
	2	6	22.8333	11.26795	12.00	40.00
	3	6	22.6667	8.45380	11.00	36.00
	4	6	18.0000	2.89828	14.00	22.00
	Total	24	20.9583	8.54899	8.00	40.00
Evaluation	1	6	10.0000	9.48683	.00	23.00
	2	6	13.5000	1.87083	11.00	16.00
	3	6	15.5000	2.16795	13.00	18.00
	4	5	17.0000	2.23607	14.00	20.00
	Total	23	13.8696	5.50458	.00	23.00
Speech	1	6	13.17	5.269	6	19
	2	6	12.67	1.966	10	16
	3	6	11.67	3.266	6	15
	4	6	9.50	1.871	7	12
	Total	24	11.75	3.467	6	19

Table 02 shows the mean scores of the instructional practices adopted by special education teachers in four deaf schools located in four zones of the Punjab. Table shows that for the instructional practices related to speech reading the deaf school in district Attock (Zone two) had the highest mean score ($M = 9.83$ and $SD = 7.65$), whereas in the deaf school of district Bahawalpur (zone three) mean score ($M = 6.17$, $SD = 2.14$) for teachers'

instructional practices related to speech reading was the lowest. It is also evident that instructional practices related to the component of reading recognition in the deaf school Attock (Zone two) had the highest mean score ($M = 14.17$ and $SD. = 4.96$), whereas in the deaf school of district Gujranwala (Zone four) mean score ($M = 7.84$, $SD. = 1.47$) for teachers' instructional practices related to reading recognition was the lowest.

Results also showed that for the instructional practices related to the component of writing the deaf school in district Attock (Zone two) had the highest mean score ($M = 22.17$ and $SD. = 3.25$), whereas in the deaf school in district Gujranwala (Zone four) mean score ($M = 16.83$, $SD. = 1.47$) was the lowest. The instructional practices related to mathematics in district Attock (zone two) had the highest mean score ($M = 22.83$ and $SD. = 11.27$), whereas in district Gujranwala (Zone four) the mean score was the lowest ($M = 18$, $SD. = 2.9$).

In the district Gujranwala (Zone four) instructional practices related to the component of Evaluation had the highest mean score ($M = 17$ and $SD. = 2.24$), whereas in the district D.G.Khan (zone one) mean score ($M = 10$, $SD. = 9.47$) was the lowest. The instructional practices related to speech had the highest mean score ($M = 13.17$ and $SD. = 5.27$) in the district D.G.Khan (Zone one), and the lowest mean score ($M = 9.5$, $SD. = 1.87$) in district Gujranwala (Zone four).

Table 03

ANOVA for difference in instructional practices of teachers						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Speech	Between Groups	47.500	3	15.833	1.383	.277
	Within Groups	229.000	20	11.450		
	Total	276.500	23			
Speech Reading	Between Groups	64.792	3	21.597	.524	.671
	Within Groups	823.833	20	41.192		
	Total	888.625	23			
Reading Recognition	Between Groups	120.792	3	40.264	1.195	.337
	Within Groups	673.833	20	33.692		
	Total	794.625	23			
Writing	Between Groups	94.458	3	31.486	3.050	.052
	Within Groups	206.500	20	10.325		
	Total	300.958	23			
Mathematics	Between Groups	93.458	3	31.153	.392	.760
	Within Groups	1587.500	20	79.375		
	Total	1680.958	23			
Evaluation	Between Groups	155.609	3	51.870	1.929	.159
	Within Groups	511.000	19	26.895		
	Total	666.609	22			

The table 03 shows the output of the ANOVA analysis to show statistical difference between group means. It is evident that the significance level for all components is above 0.05. Therefore, the difference in instructional practices of teachers, to teach all components of curriculum, in all four districts in four zones of the Punjab province is not statistically significant.

Discussion

The present study was designed to explore the implementation of ECSE curriculum for young children with deafness by observing the instructional practices of the special education teachers in the actual classroom settings. The 24 observations taken in eight classes (K.G.I=4; K.G.II= 4, 3 observations in each class) in randomly selected four district level schools from four zones of the Punjab province reflected that the mean scores of instructional practices of special education teachers of the deaf school in Attock (Zone two) for the teaching of speech reading, reading recognition, writing, and mathematics were better than those of other three district level schools of Zone one, three, and four. It means that the teachers of district level school in Zone two were paying more attention to their work and exhibiting more professional competence in the respective components.

Additionally, the special education teachers in the district level school in Zone 4 depicted better performance in the component of evaluation, and those of district level school in Zone one showed better performance in teaching speech to young children with deafness. It means that special education teachers working in district level schools in Zone one, three, and four are required to pay more attention to the major components of ECSE program for young children with deafness. This investigation finds its relevance with the studies conducted by Meadow-Orleans (2001), and Marschark (2006) who reported a significant academic achievement gap between students with and without deafness. It is surprising to note that median reading comprehension score for 17 and 18 year old students with deafness and hard of hearing was about same as that of hearing students of grade fourth (Gallaudet Research Institute, 2005). It stresses the importance of implementation of ECSE curriculum through improved instructional practices of special education teachers. It has also come to light through the results of ANOVA that difference does exist in the mean scores of the instructional practices in connection with the components of speech, speech

reading, reading recognition, writing, mathematics, and evaluation, but it is not statistically significant.

Recommendations

On the basis of data collected through classroom observations, major findings, and discussion on major aspects of the study, it is evident that there is dire need of improving instructional practices of special education teachers for the better implementation of ECSE curriculum for young children with deafness. The focal components of ECSE program for young children with deafness including speech, speech reading, reading recognition, writing, mathematics, and evaluation need to be taught using better instructional strategies for bringing about change in the academic achievement level of students with deafness.

Special education teacher should be supported by a teacher aide to maintain discipline in class during instruction and in preparing instructional material. Additionally, speech therapists should be appointed in all district level deaf schools in the four zones of the Punjab. Finally, vigilant monitoring of the classes, and provision of guidance to special education teachers by the head teachers in all schools shall prove helpful in improving the present condition of the implementation of ECSE curriculum for young children with deafness in an actual classroom.

Limitations of the Study

Due to the constraints of time and resources, the study has some limitations:

Only four out of 34 district level deaf schools located in four zones of the Punjab province were randomly selected to conduct three observations in K.G.I and K.G.II classes each. It is insufficient for deriving results for generalization. More schools should have been selected.

Each observation was conducted for a duration of 30 minutes only because of restricted schedule of the schools.

The instructional practices of teachers were observed during the period of mathematics only. Major components of ECSE program including speech, speech reading, reading recognition, writing, and evaluation are difficult to be observed during the teaching of only one subject. Exclusive observations should have been conducted for other components.

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