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Activity-based Methods and Approaches of Teaching are capable in every respect to attain these specified purposes of the national education policy regarding teaching and learning.

Conclusion

In essence, activity-based methods and approaches play a crucial role in modern education, aligning with national policies and curriculum frameworks that emphasize experiential learning. These methods, such as Incident, Case Study, Simulation, and Role Play, promote active engagement, problem-solving, and skill development among learners, especially in the foundational stages of education.

While activity-based teaching offers numerous benefits like fostering curiosity and developing essential competencies, it requires careful planning and consideration of learners' needs. Educators must provide adequate support and refrain from excessive intervention during activities to maximize learning outcomes.

By integrating activity-based approaches effectively, educators can create dynamic and interactive learning environments that align with the goals of national education policies. These methods empower students to become active participants in their education, preparing them for lifelong success and fulfillment.

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Dr. Vinod Kumar Kanvaria

Associate Professor,
Department of Education,
University of Delhi,
Delhi-110007
Email- vinodpr111@gmail.com

Monika

Research Scholar,
Department of Education,
University of Delhi, Delhi-110007
Email- monikapawar888@gmail.com

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PRASHAST: An Early Intervention for Inclusive Education - A Multi-dimensional Analysis of Academic and Emotional Outcomes

Abstract

The study is a comprehensive exploration of the effectiveness of PRASHAST as an early intervention for inclusive education, focusing on its impact on academic and emotional outcomes. Drawing inspiration from the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), this multi-dimensional analysis examined how PRASHAST aligned with educational frameworks. Guided by the principles of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPWD Act, 2016) and Persons with Disabilities Act (PWD Act, 1995) the study investigated the potential of PRASHAST in fostering equity-based inclusion in education. The study employed a mixed-method research design, combined quantitative surveys and standardized assessments with qualitative interviews. The research objectives encompassed evaluating academic achievements, educator engagement, challenges, benefits, and policy recommendations. Quantitative analysis explored differences in academic outcomes between students undergoing PRASHAST intervention and those who did not. Research contributed nuanced understanding and policy

implications for inclusive education strategies. The findings aimed to inform educators, policymakers, and stakeholders on the potential of PRASHAST to cater to diverse learners. While acknowledging the limitations of contextual constraints, this study underscored the critical role of PRASHAST in shaping inclusive educational practices and cultivating holistic development for students in an equitable learning environment.

Keywords: Accessibility, Diverse Learners, Early Intervention, Inclusive Practices

Introduction

In recent years, the paradigm of education has evolved to emphasize inclusivity and equity, recognizing the diverse needs and potential of every learner. Inclusive education, a cornerstone of this transformative shift, seeks to provide equal opportunities and access to education for all, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or circumstances. As societies strive for educational systems that are both inclusive and empowering, initiatives like PRASHAST as an early intervention approach gaining prominence for their potential to create meaningful and lasting impacts on academic and emotional outcomes for learners across the spectrum of abilities. Study seeks to shed light on the tangible impacts of PRASHAST approach on learners' educational journey and emotional well-being. In the Indian context, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016, acknowledges 21 disability conditions, a significant expansion from the previous Persons with Disabilities (PwD) Act, 1995, which recognized only seven conditions. The RPwD Act aligns with the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and furnishes a legal framework, raises awareness about disability rights, and advances equity-based inclusion. The Right to Education (RTE) Act of 2009 guarantees free and compulsory education for all, including children with special needs (CWSN). The intersection of the RPwD Act 2016, RTE Act 2009, and inclusive education implies the timely identification of children with disabilities, addressing their specific needs, and fostering their potential. In an ideal scenario, the process should begin at birth. However, field realities revealed instances where children with disabilities go unidentified even after joining school, mainly due to a lack of awareness among school staff and the public. PRASHAST serves as a remedy to these challenges. But not all disability conditions are externally evident; there arises a need for a tool that aids in the preliminary identification

of potential disabilities. PRASHAST, an acronym for "Disability Screening Checklist for Schools," plays a pivotal role in this context. Its purpose is to assist both regular teachers and special educators in the initial screening of children to identify potential disabilities, which can then be further assessed and certified as per the mandates of the RPwD Act, 2016.

PRASHAST

PRASHAST (Pre-Assessment Holistic Screening Tool) developed by CIET-NCERT, aims to empower teachers to identify potential disabilities, enabling timely educational intervention. PRASHAST comprises two parts—Part-1 for initial screening by regular teachers and Part-2 for in-depth assessment by special educators/school heads. PRASHAST empowers teachers to make informed decisions, bridging the gap between identification and intervention.

Need for PRASHAST

Generally, disability is perceived as a condition- physical, mental or both that restricts an individual's movement, activities, and sensory perceptions. Amidst such diversity, individuals with disabilities encounter discrimination due to societal biases. Although many disabilities are incurable, early identification and intervention hold potential for optimal management and mitigating exacerbating conditions. Role of PRASHAST as a "Disability Screening Checklist for Schools" aids regular teachers and special educators in early identification.

Significance of the Study

The study offered guidance for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders involved in the implementation of inclusive education. It helps in identifying best practices that promote the integration of students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms. Ultimately, the study aims to empower individuals with disabilities to access quality education and realize their full potential. By advocating for early intervention and support, the study contributes to a more equitable society that values and respects the rights of all individuals. Study's explored the PRASHAST as an early intervention approach for implications towards inclusive education, policy implementation, and societal attitudes towards disability. It underscored the importance of timely identification and support, aligning with national and international standards to create a more inclusive educational system.

Review of Literature

Acknowledging the significance of inclusive education, legislative measures have been enacted to ensure its realization. RPwD Act (2016) and the PWD Act (1995) underscored the imperative of accessibility, non-discrimination, and equal participation in education for individuals with disabilities. The importance of considering external factors that impact academic outcomes is evident, echoing the sentiment of Nimante et al. (2022) and Wickenden et al. (2023). The UNESCO Salamanca statement remains a pivotal framework (UNESCO, 1994), with subsequent research stressing the ongoing challenges and advancements in inclusive education (UNESCO, 2020). Additionally, legislative acts like the RPwD Act (2016) in India emphasize mental health implications (Mercieca & Mercieca, 2019). High-quality differentiated instruction, as explored by Smets (2017), underscored the necessity for teacher development to address classroom differences. Study reflects the significance of addressing biases in participant selection, as emphasized by Craig et al. (2022). NCERT, a pivotal entity in shaping educational policies and practices in India, advocates for inclusive education that fosters social cohesion and respects the unique learning needs of each individual.

Research Objectives

- To assess the academic outcomes of students who have undergone PRASHAST as an early intervention approach within the framework of inclusive education
- To examine how PRASHAST preliminary screening impacts the referral process for further assessment and certification of disabilities.
- To gauge the level of engagement and understanding among regular teachers and special educators in using PRASHAST as a tool for preliminary disability screening.
- To identify challenges faced by educators, regular teachers and educational institutions in implementing PRASHAST as an early intervention, including issues related to awareness, capacity and resources.

Research Design

The present study used a mixed-method approach that combined both quantitative and qualitative data. This comprehensive approach allowed a holistic exploration of the impact of PRASHAST as an early intervention aligned with the study's multifaceted objectives. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) was used to analyze

academic achievements. Frequencies and percentages were used to summarize educators, teacher's perceptions towards effectiveness of PRASHAST. Thematic analysis was employed to identify common themes and patterns in challenges, benefits, and recommendations.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The data were collected from five Delhi government schools located in the Delhi-NCR region, through a purposive sampling technique. The selection criteria were based on the implementation of PRASHAST as an early intervention. Ethical guidelines were meticulously followed throughout the research process, and consent was obtained from the schools' higher authorities as well as teachers and special educators. A sample of 80 students (randomly and equally distributed among Group A and Group B, here Group A was treatment group and Group B was controlled group), 50 educators, and 7 administrators was selected from diverse schools implementing PRASHAST and schools following traditional inclusive education practices. Within each school, a diverse group of students with and without disabilities was included. Also, regular subject teachers and special educators from selected schools were included in the sample.

Data Collection Tools

Standardized assessments and academic records were used to collect quantitative data on students' academic achievements, learning progress (considering grades) and performance. A questionnaire containing 10 questions was used for educators and special educators assessing their perception of the effectiveness of PRASHAST's screening checklist in identifying diverse disabilities. A 5- point Likert scale was used to assess educators' engagement with PRASHAST's approach and their participation in relevant training programs alignment with educational frameworks, its benefits, challenges faced, and recommendations. Structured interviews were conducted with special educators and administrators to identify challenges in implementing PRASHAST, including awareness, capacity and resource-related issues. A pilot study was conducted to find out suitable items for the main study.

A Glimpse of the Data and Findings

- Mean of Group A (Treatment group): 85.2, Mean of Group B (Control group): 76.5, SD: 9.2
- Educators on effectiveness of PRASHAST: Agreement 85%, Neutral 8.5%, Disagreement 6.5%

- Confidence in ability to effectively administer the checklist: Regular teachers 85%, Special educators 92%
- Adequately trained for interpreting the results: Regular teachers 78%, Special educators 88%

Data Analysis and Interpretation

- Descriptive statistics revealed that students who underwent PRASHAST's intervention (Group A) achieved a higher mean academic score (85.2) compared to those who did not receive the intervention (Group B), with a mean academic score of (76.5). The standard deviation of 9.2 indicates variability in academic achievements within both groups..
- Frequencies and percentages suggested that a significant portion of educators hold positive perceptions of PRASHAST's effectiveness in identifying diverse disabilities. The majority either strongly agree (35%) or agree (50%) with its effectiveness. A smaller percentage is neutral (8.5%), while a combined 6.5% either disagree or strongly disagree.
- Results revealed that both regular teachers and special educators exhibited a strong level of engagement and understanding when using PRASHAST for preliminary disability screening. 85% of regular teachers and 92% of special educators expressed confidence in their ability to effectively administer the checklist. Moreover, 78% of regular teachers and 88% of special educators reported feeling adequately trained to interpret the results.

The analysis of responses from interviews held with 15 special educators and administrators regarding the implementation of PRASHAST as an early intervention approach revealed common themes and patterns related to challenges, benefits, and recommendations.

Challenges and Benefits

- Respondents expressed challenges in creating awareness among teachers and parents about PRASHAST importance.
- Several participants mentioned limited resources for proper implementation, such as training materials and dedicated staff.
- Some of the respondents highlighted the need for specialized training to use PRASHAST effectively.
- Many participants acknowledged that PRASHAST enables early identification and intervention for diverse disabilities.

- Educators appreciated how PRASHAST guides them to provide better support to students with disabilities.
- Participants noted that PRASHAST contributes to a more inclusive and supportive educational environment.

Recommendations

- Many respondents emphasized the need for comprehensive and ongoing training for educators.
- Many suggested involving parents in the PRASHAST process to enhance awareness and collaboration.
- Participants recommended allocating more resources, both human and material, for successful PRASHAST implementation.

Result of the Study

The findings suggested that PRASHAST as an early intervention approach contributed to improved academic outcomes, positive educator perceptions. Result of the study indicated PRASHAST as a valuable tool for preliminary disability screening, reflecting the successful integration of the checklist into the educators' roles and responsibilities. The results further highlight the importance of continued training and support to enhance educators' confidence and competence in using PRASHAST effectively. Despite challenges, educators recognized the benefits of early identification and recommend strategies for successful implementation. PRASHAST emerges as a valuable tool for enhancing inclusive education practices.

Delimitations of the Research

The study was conducted in the specific geographic region (Delhi-NCR) utilizing a limited sample size, thereby hindering the extent of generalization to broader educational contexts. Additionally, the utilization of a purposive sampling technique introduced bias in the selection of participants. Due to time constraints, the study omitted a longitudinal assessment of PRASHAST intervention and its long-term effects. Furthermore, the study did not consider external factors such as socioeconomic status and home environment, which could substantially influence students' academic outcomes.

Suggestions for Further Research

Further researches in this area can be suggested as to incorporate the perspectives of students with disabilities themselves to gain insights into their experiences with PRASHAST's intervention and its impact on their academic and emotional well-being, to investigate

strategies for scaling up the implementation of PRASHAST across various educational settings and regions while ensuring sustainability and to conduct a longitudinal study to track the long-term impact of PRASHAST's early intervention approach on students' academic achievements, engagement, and inclusion over an extended period.

Conclusion

Study sheds light on the multifaceted impact of PRASHAST as an early intervention approach on inclusive education. The findings underscored its positive influence on academic outcomes, educators' perceptions, and engagement. Challenges and benefits emerged, highlighting the need for comprehensive training and resource allocation. As a valuable tool, PRASHAST contributes to fostering an inclusive educational environment. With its multifaceted impact, PRASHAST stands as a testament to the ongoing commitment to inclusivity within education.

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Dr. Sankaranarayanan Paleeri

Head, Department of
Social Science Education
NSS Training College
(University of Calicut)
Ottapalam, Palakkad Dist.,
Kerala, 679 101
Email-paleeri@gmail.com

Anjali. P

Assistant Professor
NSS Training College
(University of Calicut)
Ottapalam, Palakkad
Dist., Kerala, 679 101
Email- anjalisreejith25@gmail.com

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School Horticulture Practices as Precursor of Environmental Awareness of Secondary School Students

Abstract

Students of some schools in Kerala state have opportunities for engaging with horticultural practices. This research intended to study the impact of horticulture practices on students' environmental awareness, along with gender and locale differences. Informal discussions with teachers, and observations done. An environmental awareness test is used to collect data. The sample size of the study was 400 upper primary school students. Analyses revealed that most of the students of upper primary schools possess an average level of environmental awareness. There is no gender difference among students on environmental awareness, but there is a significant locale difference. Students who are from schools with horticulture practices have significantly different environmental awareness than students from schools without horticulture practices. The result of the study envisages the necessity of informal programmes such as horticulture practices in schools to develop desirable behaviors such as environmental awareness.

Key Words: Horticulture, Environmental Awareness, Gender, Locale