



Children with Specific Learning Disabilities and Peer Buddy Systems: An Effective Educational Intervention to Promote Learning Opportunities and Social Relationships in an Inclusive Classroom

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Abstract

The very essence of an inclusive learning is to cater to the educational needs of all students regardless of their varying learning styles and patterns, this not only helps in ensuring holistic developments for our students but also promotes strong relationship building opportunities among both neurotypical and neurodivergent students. After all, in its simplest terms inclusion does mean equal opportunity and participation for all & with all. With regards to children with Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Dysgraphia or any other learning disability, it gets very hard for them to gel up with their peers in the class, this could be due to many factors like feeling of incompetency, lack of self esteem, poor social interaction skills, etc. which hinders their social participation inside and outside the classroom. The objective of this paper is to explore the effectiveness of buddy systems as an educational approach to promote social inclusion and academic assistance via peer support in an inclusive classroom set up. For this study, the author reviewed numerous journals, research articles, blogs, research papers, newspapers, along with their own observations and understanding regarding the merits of buddy system for a child with specific learning disability. Buddy system is an excellent strategy to promote learning and social interaction among students not only inside the classroom or school premises but also during other important events that do not significantly involve the academic area, it is recommended that such a strategy should be put into use more often since it also sensitizes and creates awareness among neurotypical students to assist and respect students with special needs.

Keywords: *Specific learning disability, peer buddy systems, inclusive education, teaching strategies, educational intervention, inclusive classroom, etc.*

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum Transaction for Children with Special Needs: "Children with special needs" is a broad term that encompasses a diverse group of individuals who require additional support or



accommodations due to physical, developmental, behavioural, or emotional challenges. Support for children with special needs often involves a multidisciplinary approach that may include educators, therapists, medical professionals, and family members working together to address the child's individual needs and promote their overall well-being and development.

This may include specialized instruction, therapy (such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, or physical therapy), assistive technologies, behavioural interventions, and accommodations in educational settings.

It's important for society to foster inclusivity and provide access to resources and services that support the full participation and integration of children with special needs in various aspects of life, including education, recreation, and community activities. Emphasizing empathy, understanding, and acceptance can help create a more supportive environment for children with special needs and their families.

Children with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD)

Children with specific learning disabilities (SLD) experience difficulties in one or more academic areas despite having average or above-average intelligence. These disabilities affect how they receive, process, or express information.

It's important for children with specific learning disabilities to receive early intervention and appropriate support to help them succeed academically and develop coping strategies to overcome their challenges.

This may include specialized instruction, accommodations, and assistive technologies tailored to their individual needs. Additionally, fostering a supportive and understanding environment at home and at school can greatly benefit children with SLDs.

Buddy System to support Inclusive Education

The "buddy system" is a strategy or approach often used in various contexts to pair individuals together for mutual support, assistance, or companionship. It's commonly employed in educational settings, outdoor activities, workplace environments, and social groups.

The basic idea behind the buddy system is to ensure that individuals have someone looking out for them and vice versa, fostering a sense of safety, accountability, and camaraderie.

Here are some potential advantages:

Academic Support: Buddies can provide peer assistance with academic tasks, such as reading together, practicing spelling, or solving math problems. This one-on-one support can be particularly beneficial for children with SLD who may benefit from alternative explanations or additional practice.

Increased Confidence: Having a buddy who offers encouragement and support can boost the confidence of children with SLD. Knowing they have someone to turn to for help can alleviate anxiety about academic challenges and foster a positive attitude toward learning.

Enhanced Social Skills: The buddy system promotes social interaction and cooperation between children with SLD and their peers. Working collaboratively on academic tasks can improve communication skills, cooperation, and the ability to work effectively in a team.



Peer-Modelling: Buddies can serve as positive role models for children with SLD, demonstrating effective learning strategies, problem-solving techniques, and study habits. Observing their peers' approach to learning can help children with SLD develop their own strategies for success.

Emotional Support: Buddies can provide emotional support and understanding to children with SLD, helping them navigate challenges and cope with frustrations. Building a supportive relationship with a peer can contribute to a sense of belonging and reduce feelings of isolation or inadequacy.

Increased Engagement: Working with a buddy can make learning more engaging and enjoyable for children with SLD. Activities that might feel daunting or overwhelming when approached alone can become more manageable and enjoyable when shared with a supportive peer.

Promotion of Inclusion: The buddy system promotes inclusivity by fostering relationships between children with SLD and their peers without disabilities. This can help reduce stigma and promote acceptance and understanding among all students.

Improved Problem-Solving Skills: Collaborating with a buddy encourages children with SLD to engage in discussions, share ideas, and explore different approaches to problem-solving. This can help them develop critical thinking skills and become more adept at finding solutions to academic challenges.

Activities to incorporate Buddy System as an Intervention Strategy

Incorporating the buddy system for children with specific learning disabilities (SLD) can offer a range of benefits that support their academic, social, and emotional development.

Here are some common examples of the buddy system in different contexts:

Outdoor Activities: In outdoor recreation and adventure programs such as hiking, camping, or scuba diving, participants are often paired up as buddies. Each person is responsible for their buddy's well-being and safety, including checking equipment, staying together on trails, and providing assistance if needed.

Swimming: In swimming lessons or water-based activities, especially for young children, the buddy system pairs swimmers together to ensure that no one is left unsupervised in the water. Buddies can help each other stay safe and provide support while practicing swimming skills.

School: The buddy system is sometimes used in schools to pair older students with younger ones, particularly during transitions such as starting kindergarten or moving to a new school. The older student acts as a mentor or guide, helping the younger student adjust to the new environment and providing support as needed.

Workplace Safety: In industrial or hazardous work environments, the buddy system is used to ensure that workers have someone to assist them in case of emergencies. Buddies may conduct safety checks, monitor each other's work, and provide assistance in case of accidents or injuries.

Fitness: In fitness programs or gym settings, individuals may use the buddy system to motivate each other, set fitness goals together, and provide accountability for sticking to exercise routines. Having a workout buddy can increase motivation and make exercising more enjoyable.



Overall, the buddy system is a practical and effective way to promote teamwork, safety, and social connection in various settings. It encourages individuals to look out for each other, fosters a sense of responsibility, and can enhance the overall experience of participating in activities or achieving goals together.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Mukherjee (2024) in her article on the significance of buddy system for children with special needs in the inclusive setup mentioned about the duties of a buddy, which is to help the student with special needs in their academic, social & recreational domains and even during other events or playtime. This also instils values such as team work, conflict resolution, etc apart from textbooks and curriculums which in turn helps the teacher to nurture the child's emotional self. The article also mentioned that buddy system facilitates cognitive learning and also develops emotional bonding and attachment with their peers in the classroom. The author concluded that buddy systems is a great opportunity for both students with and without special needs and is a great tool for teacher as well to teach out of the box.

Qandle (2024) in their online article describes how buddy system promotes safety, skill development, collaboration and social integration of students with special needs in various contexts while sharing experiences, knowledge and experiences to achieve common goals. The buddies, in this context the students with special needs and without special needs, work closely together while working in pairs either in a temporary or long term practice depending on the specific context.

Hawkins (2023) conducted a review based study on the effective inclusive strategies for students with disabilities as guides for general education teachers. The study aimed at providing new effective and strategic ways to reach each student which is the most significant challenge in making of a inclusive classroom. From the literary review the authors concluded that the buddy system is indeed a supportive method for not only the special needs students but also the general education students and teachers, since it helps in lowering the burden for the classroom teacher while the general education students take on the role of assistant teacher or mentor for their respective peers in the classroom activities and assignments. The authors also suggested that with guided implementation and collaboration between administrators, teachers, students and parents this system will ensure quality education for children with special needs.

Jain (2023) maintained an article on the use of buddy systems in inclusive education to promote social inclusion and academic success through per support for students with disabilities. The article mentioned that buddy system is a supportive practice wherein pairing of students with special needs and typically developing peers takes place in an inclusive classroom setup. The author suggested that implementation of the buddy system calls for careful training, planning and ongoing support from both special and general educators along with other professionals and the school administration. This also fosters the need to set clear expectations and monitor the dynamics between the buddies/peers with the opportunities for feedback and reflection for the successful implementation of inclusive education.



Singh (2023) in her article on the buddy system as a supportive solution for new students explained about the various benefits of this strategy that turned out to be a game changer in effectively enhancing social and emotional support network for students within the school. Few of the aforementioned benefits are support & guidance from their buddies to make classroom transitions smoother and less overwhelming, enhanced social connections thereby promoting a positive and inclusive learning environment, reduced isolation as students finally have someone to rely on and confide in, conflict resolution since buddies address and resolve conflicts and create a harmonious atmosphere and improved emotional wellbeing as they feel cared and valued by their peers.

Robbles (2022) in her article on the use of buddy program to foster social emotional learning (SEL) talks about the challenge of lack of exposure to peers during their critical learning period. The article discusses that buddy program is an effective way to encourage a positive and sibling-like relationship between the respective students that harnesses social and emotional learning. The author recounted her own observations while using this strategy with the middle school students that resulted in helping bring the students closer to each other.

Dobres & Posada (2021) in their article on reverse inclusion and the use of peer buddies to teach skills in a public school setting explored the significance of peer buddy programs to help bridge the gap between young neuro-typical and neuro-diverse students by training them on how to interact with each other along with equipping them better social skills in a special educational setting. The basic fundamental of this strategy was to incorporate neuro-typical students in a special educational set up. The authors countered numerous benefits of buddy programs such as increased social confidence in students with disabilities within the presence of their neurotypical peers along with development of empathy and patience in them. This overall helps the teacher to make the classroom a more natural, encouraging and supportive teaching-learning environment.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

For children with special needs, it could be a challenge to reciprocate their feelings to others or forming friendships with their peers. For children with learning disabilities it becomes even worse, due to the hidden or invisible nature of their disability, making them more vulnerable to challenges like bullying, peer pressure, feeling unwanted or like an outcast, extreme nervousness, prone to anxiety and in some cases even depression and much more.

Thus it becomes of utmost importance to provide a safe learning environment with enriching experience in not only the scholastic areas but also with activities that promote team building exercises, collaboration between peers, utilisation of multiple intelligence and other skills, providing equal opportunities and participation that will ensure holistic learning of the students.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to explore the benefits and significance of incorporating a buddy system in an inclusive classroom, that not only assists children with special needs in their classroom activities but also help them build social relationships that are not confined to academic responsibilities.



Moreover, the paper will also emphasize how assigning neurotypical students as 'Buddies' can provide them opportunities for experiential learning also while promoting an inclusive environment.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

For the present study review of relevant literature has been mentioned. The author carried out a thorough examination of a myriad of research articles, academic journals and authoritative blogs to comprehend the existing knowledge related to subject field.

The goal of this literary review was to derive and enumerate the research objectives to ensure a well grounded foundation for the study. The review encompassed a varied range of scholarly sources, including peer-reviewed research articles, renowned academic journals, and authoritative blogs.

FINDINGS

The literary review presented many great examples and strategies for incorporating buddy system into our classrooms, however there are very few teachers who actually implement this technique in their classroom due to which the true of potential of assigning buddies to children with special needs, especially students with learning disabilities or difficulties, has not yet been explored fully. This is because of one of the many stereotypical notions that pairing neuro-typical and neuro-diverse students together may have a negative impact on the educational abilities and responsibilities of students without disabilities eventually leading to their downfall. However, this is far from the truth, because both the students learn from each other and through shared experiences which are required for any student's work readiness skills.

CONCLUSION

Overall, incorporating the buddy system for children with specific learning disabilities can create a supportive learning environment that addresses their individual needs while promoting social integration, academic growth, and emotional well-being.

The buddy system is an effective strategy for creating an inclusive classroom environment where all students feel valued, supported, and included. By fostering collaboration, peer support, and social integration, the buddy system enhances learning opportunities and promotes positive outcomes for students of all abilities.

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Cite this Article

Rakshita Karen Vincent, “Children with Specific Learning Disabilities and Peer Buddy Systems: An Effective Educational Intervention to Promote Learning Opportunities and Social Relationships in an Inclusive Classroom” *The Research Dialogue*, Open Access Peer-reviewed & Refereed Journal, Pp-570–576, Volume-05, Issue-01, April-2026, <https://theresearchdialogue.com/>



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Children with Specific Learning Disabilities and Peer Buddy Systems: An Effective Educational Intervention to Promote Learning Opportunities and Social Relationships in an Inclusive Classroom

Published in 'The Research Dialogue' Peer-Reviewed / Refereed Research Journal and E-ISSN: 2583-438X, Volume-05, Issue-01, Month April, Year-2026, Impact Factor (RPRI-4.73)

Dr. Lohans Kumar Kalyani
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