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Research Paper

An Empirical Study on the Levels of Situational Motivation in Special Educators

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ABSTRACT

Special educators face unique psychological and systemic challenges that significantly impact their professional longevity and instructional quality. This study investigates the motivational drive of special educators at the Aakanksha Lions Institute of Learning and Empowerment, Raipur, Chhattisgarh, a premier special school for intellectual and developmental disabilities. Utilizing a quantitative approach, data was collected from 30 special educators through a survey across five distinct situational environments: Classroom, Playground, Lunch Time, Travel Time, and Physical Education. The results of the study successfully proved that motivation is highly situational and has a directly proportional effect on the special children.

Keywords: *Situational Motivation, Special Educators, Intellectually disabled, Motivation, Special School*

The realm of special education is characterized by a distinct array of challenges that extend beyond conventional teaching. Special educators assume the roles of instructors, caregivers, and behavioural therapists, often dealing with intricate emotional and physical settings. At the Aakanksha Lions Institute of learning and Empowerment in Raipur, Chhattisgarh, a premier centre for intellectual and developmental disabilities, educators provide specialized support to children with diverse needs, including Intellectual Disability (ID), characterized by limitations in cognitive functioning and adaptive behaviour; Cerebral Palsy (CP), which affects movement, muscle tone, and posture; deaf-blindness, involving concurrent hearing and visual impairments; and autism, which impacts social communication and behaviour. Although the inherent motivation to assist children with disabilities is a strong driving force, the everyday tasks of handling behavioural issues, providing physical care, and meeting administrative demands can greatly affect an educator's "motivational stamina.". An educator might feel highly motivated when leading a successful team-building activity on the playground but experience a significant drop in motivation when confronted with rule-breaking or physical fatigue during a trip. This study used a quantitative survey approach to explore these variations.

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REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Billingsley (2004) emphasises that the role of a special educator is significantly more complex than that of a general education teacher as the special educator has to simultaneously act as instructional experts, behavioural therapists, and physical caregivers. This "role overload" directly impacts their motivational stamina.

According to Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory, professional motivation is sustained when individuals feel a sense of *competence* and *autonomy*. In this context special educators often start with high intrinsic motivation, a personal desire to help.

Hansen and Jensen (2019) argue that the "Emotional Labour" required to support students with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) and Autism can lead to emotional exhaustion if the environment is too demanding. The special educators may remain dedicated to the cause while feeling personally drained by daily tasks.

Vallerand (1997) focussed that motivation was viewed as a stable personality trait—one was either a "motivated teacher" or an "unmotivated" one. The Hierarchical Model of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation by Vallerland identifies "Situational Motivation" as a distinct level. Vallerand argues that an individual's drive can fluctuate significantly depending on the immediate environment and the specific task at hand. This theory is central to our study, as it provides the scientific framework for why a special educator might feel a "peak" in motivation during Physical Education but a "dip" during Classroom hours. The situation dictates the motivation, meaning the same teacher can have different energy levels throughout the school day based on their physical and social surroundings. Research consistently shows that the physical setting of an activity determines the stress level of the educator.

Lortie (1975) described the "egg-crate" isolation of the classroom as a place where teachers feel the most pressure to perform and document progress and hence the special children classroom is the primary site for managing complex behaviours related to Cerebral Palsy (CP) and Deaf-Blindness, which requires intense, constant focus.

In contrast, researchers like Pellegrini and Bohn (2005) have found that outdoor or informal settings, such as the Playground or PE, allow for more "pro-social" interactions. These environments reduce the "power struggle" between teacher and student, leading to higher levels of educator satisfaction. This supports our finding that the Classroom ranked 5th in motivation while Physical Education ranked 1st; the informal structure of PE acts as a psychological "buffer" against the stress found in formal instructional spaces.

Statement of Hypotheses

The first hypothesis states that the motivational level of the special educators will be low in their performance.

The second hypothesis states that if the situations of motivation are positive then there will be good response of the special educators. For this a rank order of the situational motivation is predicted in the various environments with the following ranks.

- Rank 1 for Classroom
- Rank 2 for Physical Education
- Rank 3 for Play ground

- Rank 4 for During Lunch Time
- Rank 5 for during Travel time in School Bus.

The third hypothesis focuses on the comparison of two situational motivation of special educators to find out the t values and level of significance.

a. Classroom situation will be more appropriate than Playground.
b. Playground situation will be more appropriate than Lunch time.
c. Lunch time situation will be more appropriate than Travel time.
d. Travel time situation will be more appropriate than Physical Education.
e. Physical Education will be more appropriate than Class room.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

A total of 30 special educators from the Aakanksha Lions Institute of Learning and Empowerment, Raipur Chhattisgarh were selected for the study**.**

Tools

The primary instrument used for this study was a Situation-Based Motivation Questionnaire developed by the authors. The questionnaire was divided into five distinct situation /environments where the motivation level could be tested, the situations are —Classroom, Playground, Lunch Time, Travel Time, and Physical Education. A total of 25 questions, representing u5 questions in each situation was developed. The tool was presented in a bilingual format both in Hindi and English.

Procedure

The special educations were briefed about the questionnaire and about the rating on the Likert scale of the questionnaire. The special educators were asked to fill in each situation and their responses shall be kept confidential and utilised appropriately.

Data Collection

The questionnaire sheets were distributed to the 30 special educators at the institute, and a 48-hour window was provided for completion. Upon collection a brief follow-up was held to address any procedural doubts.

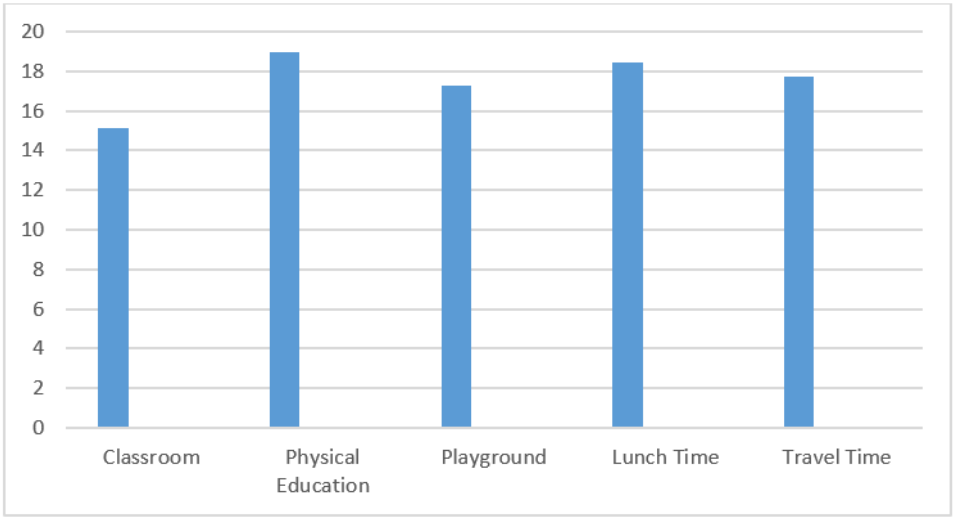
Data Analysis

The raw scores were calculated for all the 5 situations and for all the 30 special educators. The Mean of each situation / environment was calculated.

Table 1: Mean of the various situation /environments

Rank Assumed	Situation / Environment	Mean	Rank Achieved
1st	Class room	15.10	5th
2nd	Physical Education	18.93	1st
3rd	Playground	17.30	4th
4th	Lunch Time	18.47	2nd
5th	Travel Time	17.73	3rd
Total Mean		87.53	

Figure 1: Mean of the various situations



Comparison of two situational motivation to find out the t values and level of significance.

Table 2. Mean, SD, t value of Situations Classroom vs Playground

Situations	Mean	SD	T-value	Significance
Classroom	15.10	2.62	3.5753	Significant
Playground	17.30	2.12		

Figure 2: Mean, SD, t value of Situations Classroom vs Playground

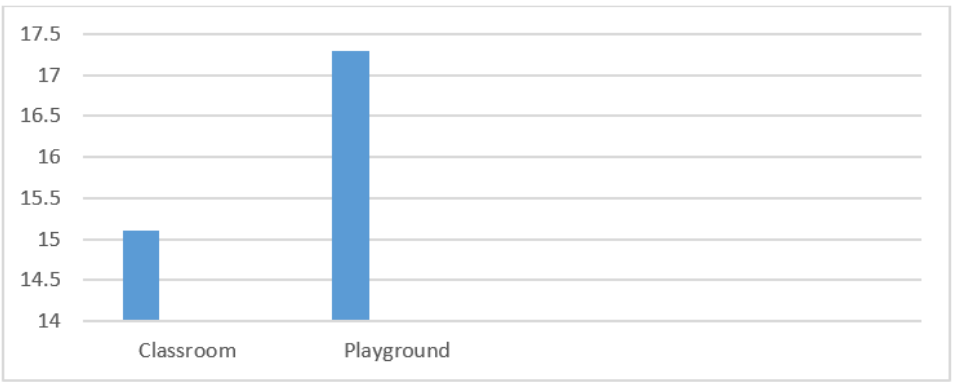


Table 3. Mean, SD, t value of Situations Playground vs Lunch time

Situations	Mean	SD	T-value	Significance
Playground	17.30	2.12	1.8824	Not significant
Lunch time	18.37	2.28		

Figure 3. Mean, SD, t value of Situations Playground vs Lunch time

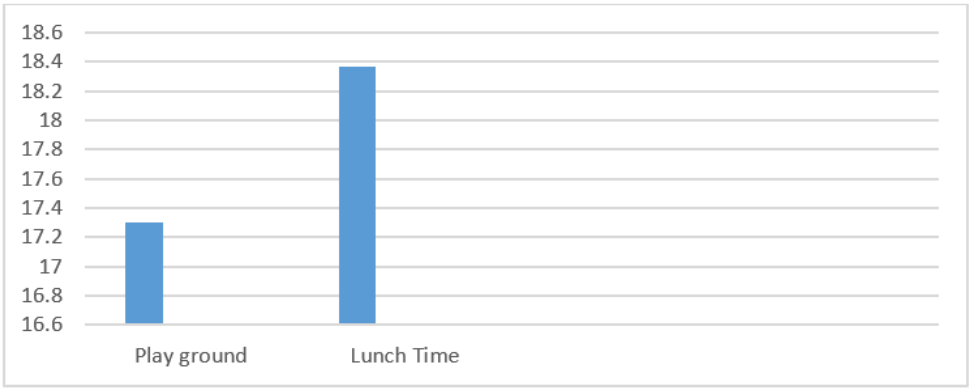


Table 4. Mean, SD, t value of Situations Lunch Time vs Travel Time

Situations	Mean	SD	T-value	Significance
Lunch time	18.37	2.28	1.0049	Not significant
Travel time	17.73	2.64		

Figure 4. Mean, SD, t value of Situations Lunch Time vs Travel Time

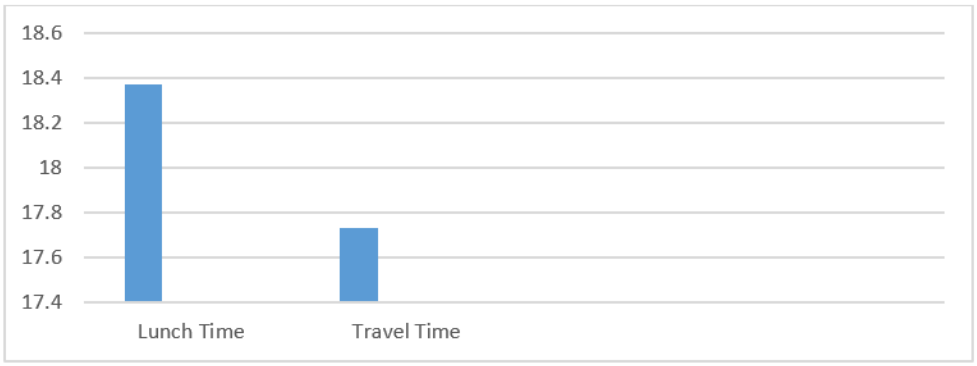


Table 5. Mean, SD, t value of Situations Travel Time vs Physical Education

Situations	Mean	SD	T-value	Significance
Travel time	17.73	2.64	1.9090	Not significant
Physical Education	18.93	2.21		

Figure 5. Mean, SD, t value of Situations Travel Time vs Physical Education

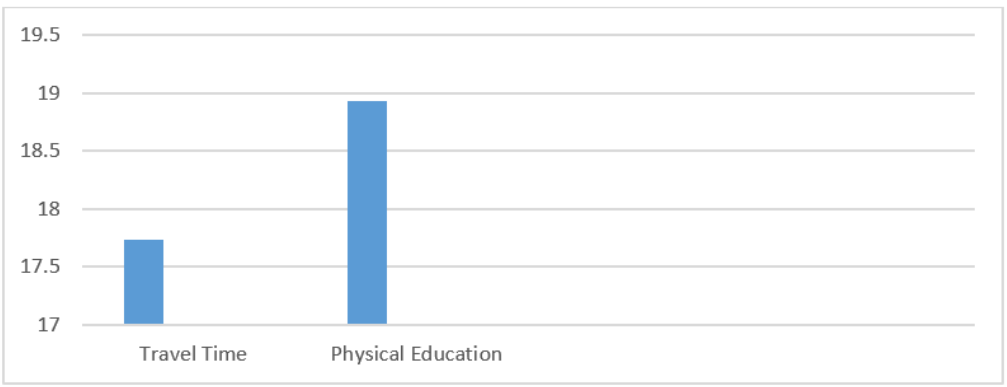
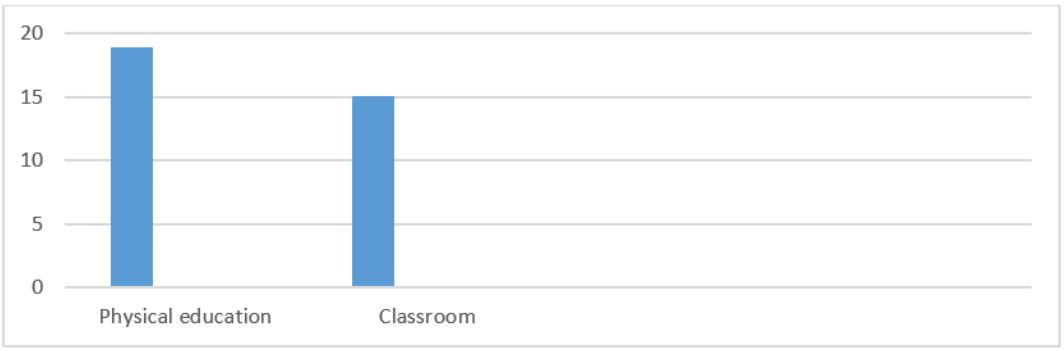


Table 6. Mean, SD, t value of Situations Physical Education vs Classroom

Situations	Mean	SD	T-value	Significance
Physical Education	18.93	2.21	6.1202	Significant
Classroom	15.10	2.62		

Figure 6. Mean, SD, t value of Situations Physical Education vs Classroom



RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results in the table 1and figure 1 revealed the means of the various situational motivation and their assumed ranks. According to the first hypothesis It was hypothesized that the motivation level of special educators would be low. But the results revealed that the total mean of the special educators in all the situations was found to be 87.43 and the neutral midpoint of the 25-item scale is 75.00, the calculated mean is significantly high. This indicates that the special educators generally possess a moderate-to-high level of professional motivation. This result indicates the rejection of the research hypothesis. Such kind of positive motivation level in special educators is due to many reasons such as, all the special educators are trained and experienced. Secondly most special educators are (22 females and 8 males) females and they have a motherly instinct in their emotions and behaviours towards the children with intellectual disability, thirdly all special educators are intrinsically motivated to teach the children with intellectual disability and lastly, they are devoted, dedicated and have positive approach towards the special children. Hence such a result is in cognisance with Billingsley, B.S. (2004) and Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000) which supports the multi-faceted" roles of special educators as caregivers and instructors and also as the role of high intrinsic motivation of special educators respectively.

The results in the table 1and figure 1 revealed the means of the various situational motivation and their assumed ranks. According to the second hypothesis situational motivation is predicted in the various environments with the following ranks.

- Rank 1 for Classroom
- Rank 2 for Physical Education
- Rank 3 for Play ground
- Rank 4 for During Lunch Time
- Rank 5 for during Travel time in School Bus

But the results revealed a different angle of responses of the special educators. The rank 1 situation, the class room achieved 5th position and Physical education achieved the 1st position. Whereas Lunch time, playground and travel attained second, third and fourth positions respectively. Such result indicates that Physical Education attained rank 1 as it is

more actively oriented with less formal environment and allows for more movement and less administrative pressure. Whereas the shift of the classroom situation from 2nd (predicted) to 5th (actual) suggests that the formal instructional environment is the most taxing or demanding for educators, educators may be pressurised to be more result oriented leading to "motivational fatigue" in that specific present setting and hence this kind of result has been observed.

The results in the table 2 to table 6 revealed the mean, standard deviation, and t values of the two situational motivations for comparing these situations whether they play any significant role for the special educators who teach children with intellectual disability.

In the Table 2 and Figure 2, significant result reveals that classroom situation is more appropriate than the playground because of many genuine reasons such as classroom is safe and has a predictable routine that decreases anxiety. There is a clear structured seating arrangements with visual schedules and conducive environment, clear sensory stimulations to enhance attention span, successful task completion and appropriate behaviour regulation of children with intellectual disability. The special educators in the classroom are academically trained, curriculum focussed and target oriented, they appropriately utilise the teaching learning materials, reinforcement schedules and adaptive equipment to enhance the learning of children with intellectual disability.

Whereas Playgrounds are viewed as supplementary environments in comparison to classroom which reflect as a productive learning space. There is risk of control over the environment as playgrounds are over stimulating, predictably noisier with more diversions and lack of structured activity planning. Hence such a result reveals that special educators perceive classrooms as more appropriate situation than playground.

In contrary the rank order of classroom was assumed to be first but had achieved fifth rank which suggest that the present environmental scenario where the special educators were working for the institute, the building was under renovation and hence the rank was stooped down but the intrinsic motivation of the special educators was high to bring the significant result for the classroom situation irrespective of the adverse infrastructure1. The present study is in cognisance with the study of Lortie, D. C. (1975) and Vallerand, R. J. (1997).

In the table 5 and figure 5, the significant result reveal that physical education is more appropriate than classroom situation which is directly proportional to the holistic development of special children. Children with intellectual disability usually have delay development, poor motor coordination low muscle tone, and balance issues. Hence physical education directly addresses the gross and fine motor skills, body awareness and coordination along with strength and stamina of the muscles. Special Educators feel that Physical education plays a visible, measurable developmental progress in our special children. Physical Education is rendered through activities which aid in reduced hyperactivity, improving attention span and following instructions. There is increased sensory processing regulation, emotional stability and self-control. The special educators perceive physical education as a behaviour regulating strategy. The physical activities are concrete, learning becomes more experiential, enthusiastic participation of children with intellectual disability, and enhancement of social skills. The physical education has flexible curriculum, has less academic anxiety, provides immediate observable progress which influences special educators for the positive result and perception of our special children.

Whereas there are genuine reasons for not accepting classroom situation as appropriate in comparison to physical education. There are developmental readiness issues seen in children with intellectual disability such as delay in motor development, poor attention span, low stamina, improper sitting alignment, restlessness and sensory issues. Hence special educators emphasise that without motor and sensory readiness classroom learning becomes more difficult.

The present study is in cognisance with the studies of Pellegrini, A. D., & Bohn, C. M. (2005) Lortie, D. C. (1975) and Hansen, J. H., & Jensen, C. R. (2019).

The above two explanations, firstly classroom situation is rated more appropriate than playground and secondly physical education is rated more than classroom are actually not contradictory but complimentary, the results reflect a balanced professional judgement of special educators. The findings suggest that structured environments in physical education or classroom situation play a vital and valued impact on children with intellectual disability. The other situations such as Lunch time, Travel time did not have any significant role in the present study.

Limitations

- The sample size is small
- The responses are gender based as most are female special educators
- More situations could be studied
- Time duration of situations.
- Other supporting staff can also be assessed

Recommendations

- Periodic motivation assessments throughout the year for special educators.
- Classroom to be enriched with more stimulating environment.
- Active learning and Special child focussed activities to be included.
- Motivational Assessments to be conducted for inclusive settings.
- Other special educators rendering services in inclusive schools can be included
- Support to special educators to enhance motivation skills.

CONCLUSION

The present study assessed the motivational level of 30 special educators across five school situations: classroom, playground, lunch time, travel time, and physical education. The findings confirm the research hypothesis, indicating that special educators possess a high level of motivation in their professional roles.

Although the classroom was initially assumed to rank first, it received Rank 5, while physical education, assumed to rank second, emerged as Rank 1. This shift reflects situational variation in motivation rather than inconsistency in results.

The analysis further revealed that the classroom situation was perceived as more appropriate than the playground, indicating that structured and supervised environments enhance professional engagement. At the same time, physical education was rated more appropriate than the classroom, suggesting that activity-based, interactive, and developmentally oriented settings generate even higher motivation among special educators.

These findings are not contradictory but complementary. They demonstrate that special educators are highly motivated across settings, with the highest motivation observed in structured physical activity contexts, followed by classroom environments. Overall, the study highlights that motivation among special educators is strong and is influenced by the nature and developmental relevance of the educational situation.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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