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Behavioral Assessment and Support Strategies for Special Education Classrooms

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Abstract

This qualitative research explores the implementation and outcomes of Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) and Positive Behavior Support (PBS) in special education settings, focusing on Nepal's context. It employs the qualitative methodology based on interpretative phenomenology. Six special education teachers were purposively selected from the Makawanpur and Kathmandu districts of Bagmati Provence. The data were collected from the open-ended questionnaire. The views of participants were coded, categorized, and made themes. The thematic analysis of the study examines how diverse societies address the needs of students with special educational needs and the role of behavioural support initiatives in capacity building. The research highlights Nepal's early-stage practices integrating PBS principles from the USA, emphasizing learning reforms, vocational training, and practitioner development. The thematic analysis identifies patterns in reward systems, reinforcement strategies, and environmental modifications. Findings shed light on barriers to sustainability, such as resource limitations and policy constraints, offering insights to inform future strategies for special needs education in Nepal.

Keywords: Functional Behavioral, Assessment, Positive Behavioral, Support

Introduction

Special needs education has become an essential aspect of education in all countries, including Nepal. Darrow and Adamek (2017) mentioned that several recent and continuing initiatives in special education have been delegated by amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in an international context. It focuses on the initiatives that music educators with a basic understanding of special education practices contribute to creative interdisciplinary communication among school professionals working with students with disabilities.

There is gradual inclusion of new education policies in special needs education in the education system of all the countries in the world. Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) and Positive Behavioral Support (PBS) have emerged as critical methodologies in special education to address challenging behaviours and foster positive student outcomes. FBA is a systematic process of identifying challenging behaviours' underlying causes or functions to design individualized interventions (Gage et al., 2016). It emphasizes understanding environmental triggers, maintaining consequences, and the communicative intent of

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behaviours (Scott et al., 2010). Complementing this, PBS integrates evidence-based practices to promote desirable and enhance students' quality of life, particularly those with disabilities (Carr et al., 2002).

These approaches align with the principles of inclusive education as they shift from punitive measures to proactive and constructive strategies (Dunlap et al., 2008). Research has shown that FBA-based interventions significantly reduce problem behaviours and improve academic engagement (Lane et al., 2007). PBS further extends this by fostering a school-wide culture of support and collaboration, benefiting individual students and the broader classroom environment (Horner et al., 2010).

In special education settings, where diverse student needs require tailored solutions, FBA and PBS provide frameworks to address behavioural challenges effectively. Their integration into Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) ensures that data-driven interventions are personalized (Sugai et al., 2000). As policies increasingly mandate evidence-based practices, adopting FBA and PBS continues to grow, highlighting their importance in creating equitable and supportive learning environments.

Functional Behaviour Assessment

The Functional Behavioural Assessment (FBA) is a process that analyzes the context of challenging behaviours in the classroom. It helps develop a behaviour intervention plan to address these behaviours and teach acceptable alternatives. Traditionally, the FBA has been used mainly for students with disabilities, particularly those with emotional/behavioural disorders, often as a last resort before removal from general education settings. However, there is increasing recognition of the FBA as a valuable tool for supporting non-disabled students and for early intervention with those at risk for emotional/behavioural disorders. This paper discusses the FBA as a positive behaviour support practice in general education to help students with challenging behaviours before considering special education assessments (Moreno and Bullock, 2017).

Ennis et al. (2017) wrote that functional behaviour assessment (FBA)-indicated interventions are designed to support students by determining the function (i.e., what they are trying to access or avoid) of their problem behaviour and then teaching and strengthening appropriate extra behaviours that serve the same function (O'Neill et al., 1997). Reinforcement is generally divided into three categories: positive or negative reinforcement for/from (a) attention (adult or peer), (b) tangibles/activities, or (c) sensory stimulation (Scott et al., 2010; Umbreit et al., 2007). The intent of a behavioural intervention plan (BIP) is to link assessment data with functionally indicated interventions. Thus, the two are essential to one another. A BIP focuses on individualized interventions matched to the problem behaviour and function it serves. Researchers have demonstrated that involvements based on function are more effective than those not functionally indicated (Ingram et al., 2005; McIntosh et al., 2008). Within the positive behavioural interventions and supports (PBIS) framework, FBA-indicated interventions often are provided as Tier 3 support to the 1% to 5% of students with the most significant and chronic behaviour problems who have been unresponsive to Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports (Pp. 141).

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Darrow and Adamek (2017) emphasize Continuing Initiatives and Practices in Special Education Differentiated Instruction. They write:

Students come to the music classroom with different educational willingness, learning styles, abilities, and favourites. In addition to these learner differences, classrooms in the United States are more linguistically and culturally diverse each year. Different instruction (DI) is an approach to teaching and learning that allows for these other differences. Education authors Jacqueline S. Thousand, Richard A. Villa, and Ann Nevin26 define differentiated instruction as "a process where educators differ the learning activities, content demands, modes of valuation, and the classroom setting to meet the needs and to support the growth of each child."

Katsiyannis, Balluch, and Losinski (2016) write in detail about Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBAs), which are as follows:

Functional behavioural assessments (FBAs) can also be carried out more proactively. This procedure may take place with "consideration of special factors" as outlined in IDEA (2004) during the creation of an individualized education program (IEP) for a student who has a disability. Specifically, the IEP team must consider the use of positive behavioural interventions and supports (PBIS) to address behaviours interfering with the child's learning or the learning of others (Section 614 (d) (3) (B)). Indeed, there is a relatively ample research base suggesting that interventions based on FBA procedures are effective in reducing the challenging behaviours of students with disabilities (Gage, Lewis, & Stichter, 2012; Losinski, Maag, Katsiyannis, & Ennis, 2014) and are recommended as an individualized intervention within a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) framework (PBIS; Lane et al., 2007. P. 35).

Positive Behavioural Support

As mentioned, Sugai and Horner (2006) focused on the understanding of positive behaviour support in the learning mechanism:

Description of SWPBS Positive behaviour support (PBS) has been considered as the integration of valued outcomes, behavioural and biomedical science, empirically validated procedures, and systems change to enhance the excellence of life and minimize or prevent problem behaviours (Carr et al., 2002; Sugai et al., 2000). "The foundation for school-wide PBS lies in applying these features to the whole school context to prevent, as well as change, patterns of problem behaviour" (Horner & Sugai, 2005, p. 360). SWPBS is firmly rooted in an applied behaviour analytic tradition and in a solid body of research focusing on the individual's behaviour and the contexts or environments in which the individual's behaviours are observed (Sugai & Horner, 2002). SWPBS emphasizes the submission of evidence-based behavioural skills in the larger context of the classroom, school, and region (Sugai et al., 2000) and is guided by three central views: (a) prevention, (b) academically sound and evidence-based practice, and (c) systems implementation. (P. 246).

Darrow and Adamek (2017) highlighted the positive Behavioral Support (PSB). Positive behavioural support (PBS) aims to create a supportive and successful environment for all students, particularly those with the most challenging behaviours. It refers to various

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preventive and positive interventions designed to eliminate problematic behaviours and replace them with behaviours conducive to academic and social success. PBS is also a comprehensive research-based approach that addresses all aspects of problem behaviour. It involves a proactive, collaborative, assessment-based process to develop effective, individualized interventions to discourage challenging behaviours. 20 PBS professionals are equally committed to teaching and reinforcing prosocial behaviours.21 Prosocial behaviours are positive behaviours that promote social acceptance and friendship (Darrow & Adamek, 2017). Response to Intervention (RtI) is a multi-tiered, school-wide approach for the early identification and support of students with learning and behavioural needs. This systematic, data-based approach provides a structure to assess the needs of students and implement additional support to improve understanding and behavioural outcomes. With RtI, all students are screened to determine their progress on specific benchmarks, and students who are not meeting standards are identified for additional support to remediate learning and behaviour deficiencies (Darrow & Adamek, 2017).

Models of Behavioral Support

Maclean and McCracken (2007) have mentioned the models of behaviour support. They mention:

One particular model that has emerged over the past 15 years is positive behaviour support (PBS: e.g., LaVigna and Willis, 2005). As a model, it is defined by several key characteristics: (1) the use of comprehensive functional assessment for problem behaviour; (2) altering deficient environmental conditions; (3) altering deficient behavioural repertoires; and (4) achieving lifestyle change and improved value of life through multi-component treatment plans while decreasing the frequency of challenging behaviour. A substantial evidence base for PBS has developed, indicating its effectiveness as a support model for individuals with challenging behaviour (Donnellan et al., 1985; Grey and McClean, 2007; McClean et al., 2005). This base also includes a central meta-analytic review of studies conducted between 1985 and 1996, which indicated that PBS was effective in almost two-thirds of cases and that success rates nearly doubled when intervention was based upon prior functional assessment (Carr et al., 1999). Hieneman and Dunlap (2000) have proposed 12 factors potentially related to an increased likelihood of successful outcomes of PBS in community settings based on interviews with experts in the area. These include characteristics of the individual with challenging behaviour, the nature of the behaviour and its history, support workers' capability and degree of personal investment in implementing interventions, behavioural support plan design, implementation integrity, system responsiveness, and the alignment of a behaviour support plan with the values of support providers and collaboration among providers (P. 3).

Similarly, Lavigna and Willis (2012) raised several questions in recent years about Positive Behavior Support (PBS), particularly concerning the effectiveness of using a solely positive approach for individuals exhibiting seriously challenging behaviour (e.g., Foxx, 2005; Johnston et al., 2006). These inquiries have focused on five key claims: (1) that PBS proves ineffective when faced with highly severe and intense, challenging behaviour; (2) that

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PBS falls short in addressing behaviours that occur at a high frequency; (3) that PBS necessitates extensively trained specialists and requires particularly advanced expertise; (4) that PBS entails exorbitant and unaffordable costs; and (5) that PBS is impractical within institutional environments. The final claim presupposes that such settings are where the most extreme and intense behavioural issues arise (Lavigna & Willis, 2012, p. 187). This study explores the current practices of FBA and PBS under special needs education in the world's major countries, including Nepal. The purpose of this study is to highlight special considerations and approaches for best practices in designing and implementing FBA and PBS. The frame was adopted to measure and analyze the status of FBA and PBS.

Methodology

This qualitative research employs an interpretative phenomenology approach to explore the implementation and outcomes of Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) and Positive Behavior Support (PBS) in special education settings. The Bagmati provinces of Makawanpur and Kathmandu districts were selected as the research sites. Six special schools and their six teachers, one from Hetauda and five from Kathmandu district, were chosen from the purposive sampling procedures. The data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire. The data obtained from the field were coded, categorized, and made the theme. The thematic analysis is used to identify patterns in practices such as reward systems, reinforcement strategies, and environmental modifications.

Result and Discussion

Based on the thematic analysis, the result and discussion are used to identify patterns in practices such as reward systems, reinforcement strategies, and environmental modifications. Comparisons with Western practices highlight gaps and areas for improvement. The study also explores the barriers to sustainability, limited resources, and policy constraints for SNE.

Challenging Behavior as a Social Construction

The conceptual understanding of the study thing is borrowed from Hastings, Allen, Baker, Gore, Hughes, McGill, Noone, and Toogood (2017). They have developed a framework for the analysis. They write it in detail as:

The widely used definition of challenging behaviour derives from Emerson and colleagues' work from the 1980s in southeast England (Emerson et al., 1994). Emerson and Einfeld (2011) clearly emphasize that challenging behaviour is defined socially. This social definition is at two levels. First, behaviours that might meet the definition of 'challenging' are culturally inappropriate and stand outside the social norm. It is essential to bear this first level of social context in mind. However, more significant for our understanding of challenging behaviour is that these actions occur so frequently, at a high enough level of severity, or for a long enough time that they begin to have clear social consequences. These consequences have been defined as harm to the person, harm to other people (or the risk of damage in either case), or exclusion from typical community life in some way. The fact is that challenging behaviours are defined primarily in terms of their impacts. As will be seen later, focusing on the effects

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of challenging behaviour has profound implications for understanding why these behaviours tend to occur. (P. 6)

Students' challenging behaviour is defined differently, focusing on the social construction of learning. Such behaviour causes various problems in learning achievements.

Towards a Framework for Understanding Challenging Behavior

The framework is adopted based on the writing of Hastings et al. (2017), who highlight Just as, in definitional terms, the key to challenging behaviour is a social or contextual understanding, context is also central to building a framework that helps to describe why challenging behaviours occur in individuals with developmental disabilities. We have drawn on our understanding of the broad research literature relating to challenging behaviour/behaviour problems in individuals with developmental disabilities and brought together the influences on challenging behaviour in an economical manner. It is important to explain each part of the framework to clarify the thinking behind it (Hastings et al., 2017). These include several activities. Reno et al. (2017) stressed a physical setting that supports theoretical and social goals, establishes expectations for behaviour, interacts with students in culturally consistent ways, evolves a caring classroom setting, works with families, and uses appropriate involvements to assist students with behaviour problems.

Functional Assessment and Behavioural Support Practices in USA, Australia, and Asia

The practices of functional behavioural assessment and positive behavioural support have become worldwide today. It would be good to present the current scenario of such practices in various parts of the world. As the representative cases, the following sections include practices in the USA, Australia, and Asia-Pacific. Bryer and Beamish (2019) analyzed the practices in this region in detail. Key practices are mentioned here based on their writing. As Bryer and Beamish (2019) noted, contributing authors provided case studies on the status of behavioural support for students with special educational needs in various states and countries. They discussed policies, levels of assistance, research-supported strategies, cultural factors, enhancing staff capabilities, and prospective developments. These narratives emphasize new challenges within the PBS initiative in educational settings across Asia and Australia, emphasizing the difficulties of problem behaviour in inclusive practices. The PBS approach offers a comprehensive blueprint for implementing SWPBS, helping bridge the research-to-practice gap and enhancing teachers' competence and confidence to support diverse learners (Bryer & Beamish, 2019).

Learning and Behaviour

The discussion on learning and behaviour noted that education systems in Asia and Australia prioritize student academic achievement and standardized assessments. Nations in Asia strive to maintain their global standing, whereas multiple areas in Australia face challenges in enhancing declining literacy and numeracy rates. The Response to Intervention (RTI) model incorporates a multi-tiered instructional approach commonly utilized in countries like Singapore and Hong Kong. Similarly, Queensland's education system adopts a comprehensive school-wide approach to curriculum delivery, catering to the varied needs of

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its students. It includes differentiated and explicit teaching for all learners, focused instruction for specific individuals, and intensive teaching for small groups.

Bryer and Beamish (2019) claim that behaviour is perceived differently in Asia and Australia. Asian case studies emphasize whole-child learning and social skills through group activities, with Japan focusing on collaborative learning and Singapore employing a social-emotional framework for all student needs. In Hong Kong, peer tutoring promotes self-control and discipline. In contrast, Australia links productive behaviours to student engagement, prioritizing classroom management. Only Korea has a national policy specifically addressing behaviour as part of a support agenda for student learning. Inclusion policies in Western literature benefit students with special needs education (SNE) when problem behaviour doesn't hinder their learning. In the USA, federal legislation ties problem behaviour to learning, supporting the growth of Positive Behavioral Supports (PBS) for SNE students. Overall, national policies on student behaviour are vital for effective inclusion reforms across Australia and Asia.

SWPBS Implementation

Bryer and Beamish (2019) focused on how system change presents challenges in education across the region. Educational systems naturally concentrate on their commitment to learning and achievement and dedication to a cohesive teaching approach and inclusive education, highlighting their awareness of the importance of effective system planning. If a school emphasizes School-Wide Positive Behavioral Support (SWPBS) in its improvement strategy, the implementation stages detailed in the USA blueprint (see Chapter 3, Table 3.1 in Bryer and Beamish, Eds. (2019)) can assist in guiding the process. This guidance spans from the early stages of planning to the progressive execution of the program across various levels, ultimately culminating in a fully integrated approach within school policies and practices. In the United States, the rollout of School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) through these stages is typically anticipated to require three to five years.

Bryer and Beamish (2019) discuss two case studies concerning SWPBS from Australia and Korea. The discussion regarding the implementation process at the school level is missing a clear data trail that outlines a step-by-step approach along with its results. In Australia, state educational agencies claim they are adopting the SWPBS framework. Nevertheless, the sequential fulfilment of phases remains unverified due to the scarcity of publicly accessible documentation or information regarding the SWPBS process, both in print and online. In Korea, a five-year initiative for special education has spurred some projects related to SWPBS and has ignited an increase in research publications addressing student outcomes. Countries involved in special needs education have shown significant advancement. Bryer and Beamish (2019) observed that all countries in the area are making strides in implementing Tier 3 within educational institutions, accompanied by some documented research results. This progress typically involves cooperation between special education teachers and learners who need significant assistance. Researchers in Singapore evaluated the skills and training of special education teachers in conducting Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBA) and developing Behavioral Intervention Plans (BIP), which

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are crucial for Tier 3 services designed for students with special educational needs (SEN). However, the divide between research findings and actual practice seems to be widened by a lack of comprehension, disregard, or unawareness regarding the blending of research literature and the views of evidence-based exercise. In American educational institutions, sustainability challenges are leading to a more stringent implementation approach while enhancing the understanding of the obstacles that must be addressed. In many Asian countries, the availability of research publication opportunities in local journals fosters an environment that supports research focused on behavioural support.

Capacity Building

Bryer and Beamish (2019) highlighted that capacity building in the United States has depended on in-service teacher training, supported by focused coaching and behavioural teams with specific expertise within the local district and school. Recognizing that capacity building in educational institutions is an ongoing and essential component of every implementation phase, the framework details the professional development activities intended for all staff, the leadership team, the ultimate sustainability phase, and professional development that responds to the needs of both students and staff at the school.

The preservice preparation of teachers in the USA is being examined to strengthen the behavioural foundation of widespread practices. As Bryer and Beamish (2019) noted, many case studies indicate that some level of behavioural support training is provided to special education teachers at universities in the country. They also mention that foundational courses in behaviour management are being offered to select mainstream educators at universities. However, the gap between teachers' knowledge and skills and the advanced expertise needed to promote collaboration among teachers in implementing behavioural support at any tier is recognized as a major challenge in the region. In Asia, Tier 3 assessment and intervention are still in the early phases, with individual researchers conducting case studies in Mainland China and Japanese educators working to apply FBA training to determine the intervention needs of specific students in their schools. The cost of specialized training may hinder the extensive potential for intensive training throughout Asia.

Nevertheless, some universities have proposed the development of courses and online technologies designed to improve specialized capacity (e.g., Singapore, Hong Kong, Korea). In Australia, Bryer and Beamish (2019) report that some specially trained special education teachers now serve on behavioural support teams within mainstream schools. The traditional separation of classroom teachers who manage the curriculum and exceptional educators who build relationships with individual students with special educational needs can sometimes develop into co-teaching partnerships that share instructional responsibilities in inclusive classrooms. Nevertheless, this model is still more of an exception than a standard practice for Tier 3 supports. Additionally, the competencies needed for the training and career progression of both regular and specialist teachers in all Australian states (AITSL, 2011) promote teaching practices in various areas (such as whole-child development, differentiated instruction for all students, and methods for teaching students with disabilities) within a classroom that is both safe and supportive (for example, inclusive, well-organized, based on

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effective theories of challenging behaviour, and demonstrating a genuine concern for well-being and safety). While these Australian standards align with the capacity-building framework of SWPBS, the professional guidelines for classroom effectiveness in Western education continue to face criticism for insufficient integration of evidence-based practices and interventions that tackle student misbehaviour (Gilmour et al., 2018).To enhence the PBS movement across the region, it is critical to enhance the capacity of teachers at both preservice and in-service levels and require that educational systems invest in professional development for regional administrators and school leadership teams. Therefore, functional behavioural assessment and positive behavioural support are implemented in various countries.

Functional Assessment and Behavioural Support Practices in Nepal

Nepal's education system also includes special needs education policies and programs. Under such policies and practices, various formal educational institutions have played essential roles in improving special needs education. Based on the data obtained from five selected schools, the functional behavioural assessment can be discussed as Some of the Behavioural Information, a description of the target behaviour, settings in which the behaviour occurs, frequency of the behaviour, intensity of behaviour, duration of behaviour, antecedents, and concurrent events, and consequences of behaviour. Schools also keep students' records, such as attendance, discipline, academic performance, prior assessment, and health records. There are various influencing factors, such as physiological factors, environmental factors, factors related to curriculum or instruction, response to prior events, psychological/emotional factors, and factors related to family, friends, and significant others.

Functional Behavioural Assessment

Katsiyannis, Balluch, and Losinski (2016) have provided an in-depth discussion on Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBAs). They indicated that FBAs could also be performed more proactively. This proactive approach may take place under the "consideration of special factors" stipulated by IDEA (2004) when formulating an individualized education program (IEP) for a student with a disability. Specifically, the IEP team must consider There is indeed a considerable amount of research indicating that interventions grounded in FBA methods effectively reduce the challenging behaviours of students with disabilities (Gage et al., 2012; Losinski et al., 2014), and these are advised as tailored interventions within a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) framework (PBIS; Lane et al., 2007; Katsiyannis et al., 2016).

All the schools have worked on identifying students' information among the selected schools. They have also worked on target behaviour. All the schools observe students with challenging behaviour. The schools with deaf, disabled, and autistic are working with the function of interventions. All the schools have kept students' records. The field visit observation and interview with parents/guardians show that schools are gradually making the FBA.

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Positive Behavior Support

Lavigna and Willis (2012) claim that Positive Behavior Support (PBS) consists of several components (see Carr et al., 2002; LaVigna & Willis, 2005a), with one significant aspect being a thorough functional assessment that seeks to comprehend the behaviour's meaning or function from the individual's perspective. A PBS plan that is based on such an assessment incorporates (a) ecological strategies intended to eliminate the discrepancies identified between the individual's needs and characteristics and their physical, interpersonal, and service environments (for instance, by providing a visual daily schedule); (b) positive programming aimed at teaching a range of general skills (like preparing a fruit smoothie), functionally equivalent skills (such as learning to say "no" in a more socially acceptable manner when asked to undertake something undesirable), functionally related skills (for example, how to choose between two options), and coping and tolerance skills (like how to wait patiently); (c) focused support strategies aimed at achieving quick control over the behavior while minimizing the need for reactive strategies, including antecedent control (i.e., avoiding events linked to a higher likelihood of the behavior and introducing those associated with a lower likelihood) and particular reinforcement schedules (e.g., the differential reinforcement of alternative behaviors); and (d) reactive strategies (LaVigna & Willis, 2002) intended to lessen the episodic severity (LaVigna & Willis, 2005b) of the behavior. PBS encompassing all these components is frequently called "multi-element" (e.g., LaVigna & Willis, 1992; MacDonald, Hume, & McGill, 2010). (PBS also involves utilizing procedural reliability checks and various methods derived from Organizational Behavior Management (OBM) to ensure treatment integrity (LaVigna et al. 1994; LaVigna & Willis, 2005a.). Key positive behaviour support activities are conducted by schools providing special needs education.

The schools working with PBS are performing with good results. All the schools manage the rewards, reinforcement, and appreciation provisions. Most schools provide vocational training to students. All the selected schools have hostel facilities for the students. In schools for deaf students, materials are distributed to them. In child development-related schools, audiovisual data is provided. They also counsel the students and parents. They also offer therapy (speech/physio) to the students. All the schools have an ABC study. The significant steps for providing PBS (mainly related to SSDRC) are as Step 1: Building a behaviour support team, Step 2: Person-centered planning, Step 3: Functional behavioural assessment, Step 4: Hypothesis development, Step 5: Behaviour support plan development, Step 6: Monitoring outcomes. Schools are also providing vocational training. Central units for vocational training are candle production, chalk production, envelope production, tailoring, knitting and weaving for ladies, peanut butter production, and spices dust production.

Conclusions

The analysis revealed that the cultures and societies examined in the study provide various services and assistance for students with SNE. The educational systems and associated policies and practices differ significantly. Nepal participates in behavioural

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support efforts and enhances the capabilities of local staff and schools. However, it is too early to compare case studies, and there remains much work for universities, educational systems, and government policymakers in these modern economies to fully implement PBS sustainably in a global context. So far, both FBA and PBS are in their initial development stage in Nepal. The schools working with special needs education have completed the functional behavioural assessment. They also have positive behavioural support initiatives. The common areas are creating a learning environment, reward, reinforcement, appreciation, and vocational training. All the schools have FBA and PBS practices. However, the results on both FBA and PBS are in the very early stage, with less performance in teaching and learning practices.

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