

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: DOES THE REGULAR TEACHER EDUCATION
PROGRAMME MAKE DIFFERENCE IN KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES?**

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Context

Since Salamanca inclusion has become a global descriptor. However, this does not mean that there is a formally fixed global consensus on its meaning and implications (Singal, 2005). Peters (2003) observes in this regard that inclusive education being implemented at different levels embraces different goals and is based on a range of varied motives. This observation holds true even after half a decade. Inclusive education operates on the principle that almost all children start in a general classroom. Moreover, the concept places emphasis on changing the system as a whole than the child. It needs a shift in our educational system, a shift in structure and practice to a more flexible, more collaborative and more inclusive setup to accommodate all children.

At the root of a system that embraces full inclusion is well and appropriately trained teachers. Inclusion is found to fail partly due to the inability of teachers to meet the demands of the modified system. Literature emphasizes high responsibility placed on teachers in building an inclusive classroom. Inclusion is just good teaching practices, meeting the needs of children with challenges (Advani & Chadha, 2002). Coming to India the concept of inclusive education is still in nascent stage (Singal, 2005). Mani (2000), the first proponent of inclusive education in India suggested an approach in 1980s which is referred to as 'dual teaching model' with 'a multi skilled teacher plan'. Here, regular class room teachers with support of instructional material and limited competency oriented training look after disabled children, in addition to their regular class room responsibility.

Need and significance

Teacher development is at the heart of initiatives for inclusive practices in the schools (Ainscow, 2003). Though regular classroom teachers are willing to take responsibility of all children, including those with special needs, they will not be confident if they are not equipped with necessary skills. Aggarwal (2001) observed that even in an over crowded classroom, learning can take place if the teacher assumes the role of facilitator and makes learning happen through peer tutoring and co-operative learning practices. Further, inclusion requires the ability to deal with diversities and make

use of them for the welfare of all using a variety of instructional strategies. Building up the competencies of regular teachers for the requirements of an inclusive system, facilitates learning of all students. Regular teachers have to build up and practice the pedagogical strategies supported by awareness, knowledge and attitude.

The success of inclusive education is dependent in part on the mainstream teachers' perceptions of special need children and educability of these students and on the extent of their willingness to make adaptations to accommodate individual differences. If teachers responsible for inclusive teacher practices have unclear perceptions of their role, it may seriously undermine the efforts in maintenance and restructuring of the programmes towards inclusion (Jelas, 2000). Inclusion is an attitude of acceptance of diversities, and attitude toward alternative expectations, to value all types of skills, an attitude of flexibility and tolerance.

National Curriculum for teacher education (1988) has articulated the essence of teacher education in its call for teacher education to be responsive to the vital concerns of regional, social, gender, class and locale disparities in education. It wanted the teacher education to provide training in specific competencies like designing local specific curriculum and learning experiences, and compensatory education for disadvantaged children. Curriculum Framework for Quality Teacher Education (1998) also wanted teacher education to equip teachers with competencies needed to deal with discrimination, disparities and inequalities. However, in teacher education emphasis remains largely on developing teachers' awareness of special children and its diagnostic aspects (Sadhu, 2001). There is a paradox in talking of inclusion in school classrooms and teacher preparation is categorized as either general or special education. At the most, special education is an optional paper and the content is too theoretical with no provision or arrangement for practical experiences (Swarup, 2001). Hence, investigating whether the regular teacher preparation courses are building up the competency of student teachers with necessary knowledge, understanding and attitudes regarding inclusive education, will help to improve teacher education. This study is an attempt to find out whether the regular B.Ed programme creates significant difference in the knowledge and understanding, and attitudes regarding inclusive education of student teachers.

Methodology

This is a comparative study, using survey method. This study compares two groups selected based on their teacher education status, 1) Before B.Ed group (BB) and After B.Ed Group (AB) on two dimensions of inclusive education competency namely 1) Knowledge and Understanding of inclusive education and 2) Attitude towards inclusive education.

Objectives

The major objective of the study is to find out whether the regular B.Ed programme creates significant difference in the knowledge and understanding, and attitudes regarding inclusive education of student teachers and to see the broad implications of the findings for the improvement of regular teacher education programmes in relation to inclusive education practice. The specific objectives are:

1. to find out the extent of two dimensions of inclusive education competency namely 1) Knowledge and Understanding of inclusive education and 2) Attitude towards inclusive education of the two groups viz., 1) Before B.Ed group (BB) and After B.Ed Group (AB).
2. to find out whether there exists significant difference between the two groups 1) Before B.Ed group (BB) and After B.Ed Group (AB) regarding 1) Knowledge and Understanding of inclusive education and 2) Attitude towards inclusive education; in the total sample and sub samples based on gender.

Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that there will be significant difference between the two groups 1) Before B.Ed group (BB) and After B.Ed Group (AB) regarding 1) Knowledge and Understanding of inclusive education and 2) Attitude towards inclusive education in the total sample and sub samples based on gender.

Sample

The sample for the study is comprised of two groups viz; Before B.Ed group (BB) and After B.Ed Group (AB). The BB group is drawn, from an aided college of education of student strength 300 affiliated to University of Calicut, using simple random sampling (N= 55) with 48 female and 7 male students, at the beginning of B.Ed course. The AB group (N=36) is drawn using simple random technique, from among a population of

students who have passed the B.Ed degree examination of the same university with above 60% marks, who consists of 22 females and 11 males.

Measures

The two tools used for data collection were 1) Test of Achievement in Inclusive Education Concepts and, 2) Scale of Attitude towards Inclusive Education (Jelas, et. al. 2000). The test of achievement is an abridged version of Test of Achievement in Inclusive Education Concepts (Gafoor and Subha, 2008). The new version has 10 multiple choice items, covering the concept of inclusion, curriculum, strategies and special children, ensuring content validity. The scores on the test have very high correlation with the scores on full test, reassuring its validity. Scale of Attitude towards Inclusive Education has eighteen statements on inclusive education practice, to be responded on a three point likert type scale.

Results and Interpretations

1. Extent of knowledge and attitude regarding inclusive education

The details of the scores obtained on knowledge of inclusive education and attitude towards inclusive education are summarized in table 1.

Table 1: details of the scores obtained on knowledge of inclusive education and attitude towards inclusive education in the groups BB and AB

Variable	Group	Minimum	maximum	Mean	Mean %	S.D
knowledge of inclusive education	BB	0.0	6.0	3.15	31.5	1.52
	AB	0.0	8.0	4.30	43.0	1.77
attitude towards inclusive education	BB	27.0	50.0	41.36	76.59	4.75
	AB	37.0	54.0	43.78	81.07	4.03

Table 1 shows that the minimum scores obtained on knowledge of inclusive education in both the groups BB and AB is zero, indicating that even after successful completion of B.Ed programme, there are some student teachers who lack in essential knowledge regarding inclusive education. The maximum scores, and the mean scores obtained on knowledge of inclusive education, by the two groups, suggest that there is an increase in the knowledge level of student teachers regarding inclusive education owing to the B.Ed programme. But the maximum (80%) and mean scores (43%) obtained by the AB group indicate that increase in the knowledge level of student teachers regarding inclusive education owing to the B.Ed programme is not optimal. The maximum scores,

and the mean scores obtained on attitude towards inclusive education, by the two groups, suggest that attitude towards inclusion, among both the groups, is fairly high. Even among those without the B.Ed degree the minimum score is 50%, indicating a neutral attitude; while the minimum score obtained in those who completed the B.Ed programme is 68.5%, indicating fairly favourable position. The mean scores obtained on attitude towards inclusion in those without B.Ed degree (76.59%) and those who had underwent the teacher education programme (81.7%) indicates that both the groups in general have fairly favourable attitudes towards inclusion.

2. Comparison between BB and AB groups on knowledge of and attitude towards inclusion, in the total, male and female samples

In order to find out whether regular teacher education programme creates any significant difference in the knowledge and attitude of student teachers regarding inclusive education practice, the scores of BB and AB groups on the two variables were compared in the total sample and sub samples based on gender and the results are given in table 2.

Table 2: Data and results of test of significance of difference between mean scores of BB and AB groups on knowledge of and attitude towards inclusion, in the total, male and female samples

sample	Variable	Groups compared	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t
Total	attitude towards inclusive education	AB	36	43.78	4.03	2.51
		BB	55	41.36	4.75	
	knowledge of inclusive education	AB	36	4.31	1.77	3.33
		BB	7	2.57	1.72	
Male	attitude towards inclusive education	AB	11	42.91	3.78	2.14
		BB	7	38.29	5.41	
	knowledge of inclusive education	AB	11	4.55	1.63	2.45
		BB	7	2.57	1.72	
Female	attitude towards inclusive education	AB	22	43.86	3.48	1.89
		BB	48	41.81	4.54	
	knowledge of inclusive education	AB	22	4.50	1.68	3.18
		BB	48	3.23	1.49	

Results (table 2) of the independent samples comparison between BB and AB groups on knowledge ($t= 3.33$, $p< .01$) and attitude ($t=2.51$, $p<.05$) regarding inclusive education reveal that there is significant difference between the groups on these two dimensions of inclusive education competency. The mean scores of the two groups on the

two variables, further indicate that both the knowledge and the attitude is higher in the group which has completed the B.Ed programme. This indicates that B.Ed programme makes a significant positive impact on Knowledge and attitude of student teachers regarding inclusive educational practice. More or less same result is obtained regarding the difference between BB and AB groups in knowledge of inclusive education, if male and female sub samples are considered separately. In attitude towards inclusion, though male sample shows a significant higher score in AB group, than in BB group ($t=2.14$, $p<.05$); such significant increase is not evident in female sample ($t=1.89$, $p>.05$). Further examination of the mean scores of attitude towards inclusive education among male and female samples makes it evident that the attitude is less favourable among females than males, both before and after the teacher education course. If we take into consideration the fact that more than 80% of student teachers in Kerala are females, this result is indicating the failure of B.Ed programme in strengthening an attitude favouring inclusion, among majority of the teacher students.

The finding that teacher education programme is not strengthening attitude towards inclusion adequately, prompted the investigator to examine which dimension of the attitude measure remains weaker even after B.Ed course. It was found that in the case of statements like 'special needs children in regular classrooms will not negatively affect mainstream students' (BB mean=2.57; AB mean =2.37), 'students with special needs will be labeled stupid in regular classroom' (BB mean=2.66; AB mean =2.44), 'inclusive education can be as good in practice as in theory' (BB mean=2.22; AB mean =2.14), and 'the resources for special needs children in mainstream classroom is limited'(BB mean=2.80; AB mean=2.53) which relates to the practical aspects of inclusive classrooms the mean scores obtained is lesser for the group which as underwent the course. Though belief in theoretical possibilities of inclusion is strengthened after the B.Ed programme, it does not permit the teachers to do away with the doubts regarding the practical issues emerging from inclusion. This may be because these teachers are not receiving practical, real life experiences of inclusion

Conclusion

There is increase in the knowledge level of student teachers regarding inclusive education owing to the B.Ed programme, but is not optimal. Even after successful

completion of B.Ed programme, there are some student teachers who lack in essential knowledge regarding inclusive education. It was found that attitude towards inclusion is fairly high in the sample even before the teacher preparation course, revealing that the concept of inclusive education though in an evolving stage in India, the essence and principles are deep rooted in the society. Also, B.Ed programme does make significant positive impact on knowledge and attitude of student teachers regarding inclusive educational practice. As attitude towards inclusion is found less favourable among females who form vast majority of student teachers in Kerala, and the improvement there of is not significant due to the teacher preparation, there is need for further strengthening inclusion related experiences during teacher preparation. It is concluded that, though belief in theoretical possibilities of inclusion is strengthened after the B.Ed programme, it does not permit the teachers to do away with the doubts regarding the practical issues emerging from inclusion. This may be because these teachers are not receiving practical, real life experiences of inclusion. Close examination of thinking on inclusive education of teachers is needed as it cannot be assumed that there is a shared understanding of the global concept. The linguistic shift from integration to inclusion has not brought about corresponding changes in understanding. Inclusion remains a progressive cliché, something about which people can talk without thinking about what they mean. Hence following are the implications of the findings for improving the educational system.

- Strengthen inclusive education, content and method, at pre-service and in-service teacher preparation level.
- Provide student teachers more organized school based training in inclusion
- Attitude towards the concept is positive but may not be materialized in practice. There is pro-inclusion attitude but is not supported by factual and practical understanding. Positive attitudes are furthered by further experiences with inclusive practices. Hence teacher education institutions need to create conducive environment to meet these objectives.
- Organizational changes for promoting effective learning are needed in practice teaching schools

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