

**NEARLY TWO DECADES AFTER THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES ACT:
CONCERNS OF INDIAN TEACHERS TO IMPLEMENT INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

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This study examined the concerns of regular secondary school teachers in Delhi, India in order to work with students with disabilities in inclusive education settings. A total of 470 teachers responded to a two-part questionnaire. Part-one of the questionnaire collected information related to personal and professional characteristics of the teachers. Part-two was a Likert scale which required the teachers to indicate their concerns on a list of statements related to inclusion. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and t-tests. The data indicated that the teachers in Delhi, overall, had a moderate level of concerns to implement inclusive education in their schools. These teachers were however not concerned about their increased workload due to inclusion. In addition, an overwhelming majority (95%) of the teachers indicated that they had not received training in special education. The implications for teacher training in India are discussed in terms of the different models that can improve teacher quality for inclusive education.

The demand to educate students with disabilities in inclusive education setting continues to grow worldwide. It has become a major policy focus in the last three decades in India as well. The passage of the Persons with Disabilities (PWD) Act in 1995 was a significant step by the Indian government in this regard. The law emphasized that schools should ensure that whenever possible the education of students with disabilities should take place with their peers without disabilities. A natural corollary of this Act was the expectation that regular classroom teachers would be required to possess the appropriate attitudes, knowledge and skills in order to fulfill their new roles and responsibilities.

Research conducted in western countries regarding teacher perceptions towards inclusive education indicate that many teachers hesitate about including students with disabilities in their classrooms (Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Hemmings & Woodcock, 2011). One of their most primary concerns is that they believe that they lack specialized skills needed in instructing these students. A number of researchers assert that a teacher's willingness to include specific students is strongly influenced by factors such as their attributes (Sachs, 2004), the nature and severity of the disabling conditions of the learners (Elkins & Porter, 2005), availability of physical and human resources (Bradshaw and Mundia, 2006), and their pre-service and in-service training (Chong, Forlin & Au, 2007).

The available research on teacher attitudes indicates that while many general education teachers philosophically support inclusion, most have strong concerns about their ability to implement these programs successfully (Das, Gichuru & Singh, 2013). For instance, studies have shown that most general education teachers do not agree that they have or will be provided with sufficient planning and instructional time necessary to support inclusion (Barton, 1996). Other studies have shown that even after receiving professional development training, many teachers still question their ability to teach students with disabilities, and some doubt they will be provided with the necessary support and resources (Vaughn, Schumm, Jallad, Slusher & Saumell, 1996). In addition, a few studies found that secondary school teachers are often less positive than their elementary counterparts, and in some cases, more resistant to additional responsibilities that inclusion brings with it (Bender, Vail & Scott, 1995).

Inclusive Education in India

The origin of government's effort to promote inclusive education in India can be traced back to 1974 when for the first time the scheme of Integrated Education of Disabled Children (IEDC) was implemented by the central government in select blocks of the country. This scheme broke new ground by stressing the need for educating children with mild to moderate disabilities in regular school settings. Since then a number of policies, programs and legislations have been implemented that strengthened the government's commitment to this imperative. In 1986, The National Policy on Education (NPE) brought the fundamental issue of equality for students with special needs to the forefront. It stated that the *objective should be to integrate physically and mentally disabled people with the general community as equal partners, to prepare them for normal growth and to enable them to face life with courage and confidence.* While the NPE (1986) helped set the stage for further inclusive education, it was the adoption of the Plan of Action (POA) in 1992 paved a solid ground for this initiative. The POA strengthened the initiatives of the National Policy by demanding that children with special needs be educated only in regular schools and not in special schools as had been allowed earlier. All of these efforts got a boost by a shot in the arm when the Government of India passed The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act in 1995. This law required that all states and Union Territories must ensure that persons with disabilities have access to the same educational opportunities and basic human rights as their peers without disabilities. The Act further emphasized that, whenever possible, students with disabilities should be educated in regular school settings.

Since the passage of this landmark legislation in 1995, a number of other significant initiatives have taken place as well. Those include *Sarva Siksha Abhiyan* [Education for All movement] launched in 2001 that included a policy of 'zero reject'. It suggested that no child that has special needs could be neglected or denied enrolment on the basis of a disability. In 2005, the Ministry of Human Resource Development implemented a National Action Plan for inclusion in education of children and youth with disabilities. The main objectives of this plan were to ensure that: (a) no child is denied admission in mainstream education, (b) no child would be turned back on the grounds of disability, and (c) mainstream and specialist training institutions serving persons with disabilities, in the government or in the non-government sector, facilitate the growth of a cadre of teachers trained to work within the principles of inclusion

Policies, programs and legislation initiatives discussed thus far shows unequivocal commitment of the government for the inclusive education of children with disabilities in India. The policy shift that took place in 1974, away from segregated setting to a more inclusive setting, has been strengthened by a number of initiatives of the government of India and support structure and financial assistance provided by outside agencies such as the World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF to name a few.

A natural corollary of these developments was the expectation that regular school teachers in India would be required to possess the appropriate attitudes, knowledge and skills to fulfill their new roles and responsibilities. A number of researchers have conducted empirical research that does not however paint an optimistic picture. For example, Das (2001) conducted a needs assessment of primary and secondary regular school teachers in Delhi and reported that the teachers did not consider themselves to be competent in majority of the skills needed in teaching students with disabilities. These teachers indicated that they did not have adequate knowledge of: various disabling conditions, procedures required in developing and implementing Individual Education Programs (IEPs) and government policies and programs for children with disabilities. Sharma (2001) found that both principals and teachers in Delhi were concerned about lack of resources (e.g. special education teachers and paraprofessional staff), the non-availability of instructional materials, the lack of funding, and the lack of training to implement inclusive education.

Teacher Concerns for Inclusive Education

The inclusion of students with disabilities into regular classrooms is viewed by some educators as extra workload and increased responsibilities (Danne, Beirne-Smith, & Latham, 2000; Menlove, Hudson & Suter, 2001). Teachers face another major issue which is non- acceptance of special needs students by their peers without disabilities (Danne et al., 2000). The teachers also expressed apprehensions that the dynamics within the inclusive setting may impact the academic progress of students without disabilities (Forlin, 1998). Some regular education teachers view the inclusive setting as difficult and stressful especially when they need to collaborate with related service professionals such as psychologists or speech, physical or occupational therapists (Friend & Cook, 2012).

In a study conducted by Vaughn et al. (1996), teachers expressed that they were deeply concerned about the implications of inclusion programs to their profession. They feared dilution of academic success of students in

general, their inability to handle extra workload involved in implementing inclusion, innate fear of failure to teach students with disabilities and subsequent law suits, as well as apprehension regarding the redefinition of their roles as an educator.

The findings of an investigation conducted by McLeskey, Waldron, So, Swanson and Loveland (2001) regarding the perspectives of teachers toward inclusive education, concur with the contention that while most teachers support the concept of inclusion, and believe it as the basic right of children with disabilities, they have justifiable concerns about including such students in regular classrooms. They maintain that if successful inclusive education programs are to be developed, these concerns must be addressed and ameliorated to ensure that inclusion programs are successfully implemented, teachers have professional roles that are satisfying and reasonably demanding, and students benefit from these programs.

Welch (1989) expressed the need for addressing teacher concerns in inclusive education in very strong words by stating that: *teachers' concerns about implementation of innovative change seem to be the threshold that must be crossed before change can occur; otherwise agents and advocates of change are likely to shoot themselves in the foot* (p.539).

The common concerns that are recurrently expressed by school teachers regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities into their regular classrooms include: negative attitudes, safety issues, physical accessibility, behaviour problems, large class size, meeting the educational needs of students with and without disabilities, social needs, designing and implementing curriculum and instructional adaptations, evaluation, grades and diplomas, additional work and responsibility, teacher stress, collaborative problem-solving relationships, lack of financial support, inadequate teaching materials and equipment, lack of specialized personnel, lack of support from school administrator, time and scheduling issues and lack of training in special education (Avramidis et al., 2000; Das, 2001; Das et al., 2013; Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Hemmings & Woodcock, 2011; Rose, 2001; Sharma, Moore & Sonawane, 2009)

While statistics show that the issue of disability is huge in India, approximately 30 million children with disabilities (Chief Commissioner of Persons with Disabilities, 2007), there has been a dearth of research on teacher concerns regarding inclusive education. A review of literature yielded only three studies (Shah, 2006; Sharma, 2001, Sharma et al., 2009) that were done on this topic in India. This study, therefore, was an attempt to gain further understanding of teacher concerns especially in the light of implementation of policies and programs relating to inclusion since the passage of the Persons with Disabilities Act in 1995. Specifically, the aims of the study were to investigate the concerns of secondary school teachers in Delhi, India about implementing inclusive education and the effects of the selected background variables on their concerns.

Method

Instrumentation

A two-part survey instrument was used in this study. Part-one gathered information about personal and professional characteristics of the respondents. Part-two employed the Concerns about Inclusive Education Scale (Sharma & Desai, 2002).

Personal and Professional Characteristics. Part-one of the survey instrument collected information relating to personal and professional characteristics of the teachers. The respondents were requested to provide information regarding the following aspects: gender, age, highest level of education, years of teaching experience, contact with a person with a disability, training in special education/inclusion, perceived knowledge of the PWD Act, 1995 and perceived level of confidence in teaching students with disabilities.

Concerns about Inclusive Education Scale. Part-two of the questionnaire was the Concerns about Inclusive Education Scale (CIES). This scale was developed by Sharma and Desai in 2002. This is a 21 item Likert scale. The CIES is designed to measure the concerns of school principals and teachers regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities. The scale consists of a four point Likert-type classification with responses labelled extremely concerned (4), very concerned (3), a little concerned (2) not concerned at all (1) to measure the level of educators' concerns. The validity of the CIES was addressed by Sharma and Desai (2002) through a panel of experts. The reliability coefficient for the scale was found to be 0.91.

The concern score for an individual is calculated by adding all of the responses on each item. The CIES yields a total-scale score that is obtained by adding the value of responses on each item. An educator's concern score on CIES may range from 21 to 84; with a high score on CIES indicating that the respondent is highly concerned about including the students with disabilities in the classrooms compared with those respondents with lower

scores. The respondent who marks 'not concerned at all' in all the 21 questions gets a score of 21; while a respondent who marks 'very concerned' in all the 21 items obtains a score of 84. Sharma and Desai (2002) indicated that the CIES has four factors that include:

1. Teachers' concerns for resources (Factor I),
2. Teachers' concerns for acceptance of special students (Factor II),
3. Teachers' concerns for academic standard of the classrooms (Factor III), and
4. Teachers' concerns for the workload in inclusive settings (Factor IV).

Participants

Participants in this study were regular classroom teachers working in secondary schools under Vidya Bharti Management in Delhi. Although it is a privately run organization, it adheres to government rules and regulations for many key aspects including grade level promotion or retention and high school graduation. It operates 35 secondary schools in four zones of Delhi. The east zone, the west zone and the south zones each have 9 secondary schools while the north zone has 8 secondary schools. Out of these 35 schools, there are some where children with special needs are educated alongside their non-disabled peers. Three schools in each zone were selected based on where inclusive education program for special needs children was currently being implemented.

It is important to mention here that India has two parallel systems of schooling (government and private) that provide educational opportunities to its pupils. According to India Human Development Survey (2005), about 68% children in 6-14 years of age group are enrolled in government schools with 42% and 76% of the urban and rural students in government schools respectively. Private school enrollment stands at 58% in urban areas to 24% in rural areas. This shows a strong establishment of private school system in India. It is therefore important that the concerns of the teachers working in private schools be identified as previous studies focused on the measurement of concerns of the teachers working in government run schools.

Sampling and Data Collection

A simple cluster sampling method was employed to select the sample for this study. A total of 500 teachers from 12 schools were invited to participate in the study. Of these, 470 responded yielding a response rate of 94%.

Results

Personal and Professional Characteristics

Information about the teachers' personal and professional characteristics is presented in Table 1. It is clear from the demographic descriptions of responding teachers (n= 470) that the majority of the participants were females, younger teachers (<40 years) with a postgraduate degree and had less than ten years of teaching experience. The vast majority of teachers (90%) had not received training in special education, did not have adequate knowledge of the PWD Act, 1995 and possessed an average level of confidence for teaching special needs students. In addition, the majority of teachers did not have any contact with a person with a disability.

Teachers' Concerns for Inclusive Education

In order to determine the teachers' concerns regarding inclusive education, their responses on CIES were examined. The means for each of the items of the CIES were computed. A mean score of 2.0 or above would indicate teachers' concern for an item; while a mean below 2.0 would indicate that the teachers are not concerned about that item. The concerns mean score of the teachers in this study was 2.37. As stated earlier that the concerns of the teachers on the CIES can range from 4 (extremely concerned), 3 (very concerned), 2 (little concerned) to 1 (not at all concerned). As the concern mean score of 2.37 falls between 2 and 3, it can be concluded that the teachers in Delhi had a moderate level of concerns about implementing inclusive education practices in their classrooms.

In addition to determining the overall concerns of the teachers in this study, further analysis was conducted to determine their relative concerns on each of the four factors of the CIES. The data analysis indicated that the teachers in Delhi were most concerned about the lack of resources (2.76) followed by decline in academic standard of the classrooms (2.33), lack of acceptance of students with special needs (2.32). Factor 4 (concerns about increased workload in inclusive settings, mean = 1.99) failed to meet the minimum requirement for it to be considered as a concern. As mentioned earlier, a minimum score of 2.0 was required in this study for an item or a factor to qualify as a concern. Teachers in Delhi therefore are not concerned about their increased workload in inclusive setting.

Table 1. Teachers' Demographic Information

Characteristics	n	%
1. Gender		
Male	154	33
Female	316	67
2. Age		
20-30 years	100	21
31-40 years	173	38
41-50 years	129	27
Above 50 years	68	14
3. Highest level of education		
Intermediate	2	<1
Graduate	172	37
Post Graduate	296	63
4. Teaching experience		
1-5 years	116	25
6-10 years	98	21
Above 10 years	256	54
5. Training in special education		
Yes	23	5
No	447	95
6. Perceived knowledge of <i>The Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995</i>		
Very Good	7	1
Good	14	3
Average	93	20
Poor	93	20
Nil	263	56
7. Confidence in teaching students with disabilities		
Very High	49	10
High	58	12
Average	237	51
Low	75	16
Very Low	51	11
8. Contact with a person with a disability		
Yes	50	10
No	420	90

Research Question 1. What is the rank order of importance attached to each concern by the teachers regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities?

Table 2 indicates that the teachers were not concerned about lack of incentives (Mean = 1.72), increasing workload (Mean = 1.84) or decline of their performance (Mean = 1.95). These three items also received the lowest mean scores of all the items included in the questionnaire. The data indicated that the teachers in Delhi were most concerned about inadequate availability of paraprofessional staff (Mean = 2.93) followed by inadequate availability of instructional materials (Mean = 2.85) and then difficulties with including students lacking self-help skills (Mean = (2.78).

Research Question 2. Is there a significant relationship between the teachers' concerns about inclusive education and the following personal and professional characteristics: gender, age, highest level of education, years of teaching, training in special education, contact with a person with a disability, knowledge of the PWD Act, 1995 and level of confidence in teaching students with disabilities?

Table 2. Rank Order of Teachers' Concerns for Inclusive Education

Item of concern (Abbreviated)*	Mean of	concernFactor
Inadequate Para-professional staff	2.93	I
Inadequate instructional materials	2.85	I
integrating students lacking self-help skills	2.78	III
Inadequate resources/Special Education Staff	2.76	I
Inadequate administrative support	2.75	I
Inappropriate infrastructure	2.71	I
Lack of knowledge and skills	2.70	II
Difficult to divide attention	2.56	III
Not enough funds	2.56	I
Non- acceptance by non-disabled students	2.26	II
Not enough time	2.22	II
Decline of academic achievement of non-disabled students	2.22	IV
Difficult to maintain discipline	2.21	II
Non-acceptance by parents	2.20	II
Decline of school academic standard	2.19	III
High anxiety and stress in teachers	2.16	III
Additional paper work	2.15	IV
Increased stress level in other staff	2.03	IV
Decline of educators' performance	1.95	III
Increased workloads	1.84	IV
Lack of incentives	1.72	IV

Table 3 indicates the concerns of secondary school teachers in Delhi according to their background variables. While female teachers were more concerned (2.40 ± 0.12) about the inclusion of students with disabilities in their classrooms than male teachers (2.30 ± 0.18), the difference between their response was statistically non-significant ($p > .05$). Those teachers who were over 40 years of age were more concerned (2.39 ± 0.17) than the teachers who were under 40 years of age (2.35 ± 0.12) and the difference between their concerns was non-significant ($p > .05$). There was not a significant difference between the teachers' concerns based on their educational qualifications ($p > .05$). Those teachers who had a graduate degree however indicated a greater level of concerns (2.41 ± 0.16) than those who had a postgraduate degree (2.35 ± 0.12). Those teachers who had more experience (over 10 years) were more concerned (2.38 ± 0.13) than the teachers who had less experience (less than 10 years) (2.34 ± 0.14) and the difference between their concerns was non-significant ($p > .05$). Concerns of the teachers whether they had a contact with a person with a disability (2.36 ± 0.30) or not (2.37 ± 0.10) were almost identical. The difference between their concerns was also statistically non-significant ($p > .05$). Those teachers who had not received training in special education expressed a greater level of concerns (2.39 ± 0.10) for inclusive education than those who had received such training (2.03 ± 0.52). The difference between their concerns was statistically significant ($p < .05$). The teachers that had the knowledge of the PWD Act expressed a little higher level of concern (2.39 ± 0.11) than those who did not have the knowledge of the Act (2.31 ± 0.54) and the difference between their concerns was not significant ($p > .05$). Those teachers who were not confident in teaching special needs children had a greater degree of concern (2.46 ± 0.55) than those who were confident in teaching such children (2.24 ± 0.53). The difference between their concerns was statistically significant ($p < .01$).

Discussion

Including students with disabilities into regular classrooms is a complex issue and its implementation is a topic of great controversy globally. A major purpose of the present study was to identify the concerns of the secondary school teachers in New Delhi regarding the inclusion of special needs students. Using the Concerns about Integrated Education Scale (CIES), it was found that the participants in this study were moderately concerned (Mean= 2.37) about implementing inclusive education in their classrooms. The results of this study are similar to the findings of research conducted on this topic in other countries using the CIES. For example, Sharma et al. (2006) identified the concerns of the pre-service teachers in four countries. They reported concern mean scores of 2.21, 2.25, 2.62 and 2.68 for the teachers from Canada, Australia, Singapore and Hong Kong respectively. In another study, Bradshaw and Mundia (2006) found the concern mean score of 2.70 among 166 pre-service teachers in Brunei.

Table 3. Teachers' Concerns according to their Background Variables

Background Variables	\bar{x} (SD)	\bar{x} (SD)	t	Sig. (2-tailed)	CI
Gender	Male	Female			
	2.30 (0.55)	2.40 (0.51)	-1.76	p< .079	0.18, 0.12
Age	<40 years	>40 years			
	2.35 (0.51)	2.39(0.55)	-0.749	p<0.454	0.12, 0.17
Educational Qualifications	Graduate	Post-graduate			
	2.41 (0.52)	2.35 (0.53)	1.345	p< 0.179	0.16, 0.12
Length of Teaching Experience	<10 years	>10 years			
	2.34 (0.52)	2.38 (0.53)	-0.793	p< 0.428	0.14, 0.13
Contact with a Person with a Disability	Yes	No			
	2.36 (0.53)	2.37 (0.53)	-0.141	p< 0.888	0.30, 0.10
Training in Special Education	Yes	No			
	2.03 (0.63)	2.39 (0.51)	-2.664 *	P< 0.014	0.52, 0.10
Knowledge of PWD Act, 1995	Yes	No			
	2.39 (0.54)	2.31 (0.48)	1.395	p< 0.165	0.11, 0.54
Level of Confidence in Teaching Special Needs Children	High	Low			
	2.24 (0.53)	2.46 (0.55)	3.088 **	p< 0.002	0.21, 0.19

*p<.05, **p<.01 CI = confidence interval

A number of researchers have conducted concern studies in other states in India using CIES and have found similar results as well. For example, Shah (2006) conducted a study in the state of Gujarat and reported that the teachers expressed moderate level of concerns for inclusion. Sharma et al. (2009) conducted a survey of 478 pre-service teachers in the state of Maharashtra and reported a moderate degree of concerns (mean=2.25) as well among these teachers. The present study, however, shows that the educators of Vidya Bharti Management Schools in New Delhi appear to be slightly more concerned than the teachers reported in the previous two studies. This is discouraging as it indicates that the concerns of the Indian educators are increasing. Causes for these increased levels of concerns need to be explored even though the increase is very little. It may be possible that the teachers are getting increasingly concerned about inclusion and its implications as disability and human rights issues are gaining acceptance among people in India recently. Such issues are gaining momentum due to government's focus on disability issues and increased emphasis on the education of students with special needs by implementing policies and programs. Teachers on the other hand, however, are struggling with the lack of resources, lack of training in special education or perhaps even their own lack of skills to meet the needs of children with disabilities as indicated in Table 1 earlier.

This study indicates that the lowest levels of concerns of the teachers was in Factor 4 (Mean=1.99) of the CIES. In fact, this factor did not even meet the criteria to indicate a concern (a minimum mean score of 2.0 was required for a factor or an item to register as a concern). The items in this factor related to concerns for decline of academic achievement of non-disabled students, concerns about additional paper work, concern for the stress levels of teachers, increased workload of teachers and concern for the lack of incentives. This shows that the teachers in Delhi are not concerned about the issues mentioned above. Such findings are encouraging as it shows teachers' willingness to implement inclusive education in spite of personal hardships that they face in this process.

Looking at the variable of gender, it was observed that both male and female teachers were highly concerned about lack of resources in classrooms, but both the genders were least concerned about workload due to inclusion in their classrooms. As an Indian female, the first author can understand the reason for female teachers being more concerned than their male counterparts because in Indian society females mostly bear responsibility for rearing the children. The males in Indian society do not usually spend as much time with child rearing and household activities. They are mostly bread winners for the family and focus their time and energy on activities outside the day-to-day management of the household. These aspects can have impact on male teachers being less concerned about including students with special needs in their classrooms.

According to the age variable, results in this study indicated that the older teachers (who were more than 40 years old) were slightly more concerned than the younger teachers (who are less than 40 years old). Several studies (Loreman, 2002; Riley, 1997) have suggested that younger teachers hold more positive attitudes towards the inclusion of special needs students in their classrooms compared with their older colleagues. Younger teachers with positive attitudes towards integrated education are less concerned about inclusive education. The results of this study are also similar to the results of previous studies (Loreman & Deppler, 2001) which reported that younger teachers were less concerned about inclusion than their older colleagues.

The teachers who had some experience working with students with disabilities claimed to possess more knowledge about inclusive education. It shows that when younger teachers face some difficulty in understanding or teaching special needs children, they may try to overcome the challenge by seeking more information from their senior colleagues. Similarly, the teachers who have already taught special needs children in their classrooms, claimed to possess more behavior management knowledge to overcome challenges and to deal effectively with next class of special needs children.

In this study, those teachers, who were already skilled in inclusive education and had some experience working with special needs children, did not have many concerns about inclusive education. Those teachers who did not have training in special education are anxious and apprehensive as they have never undergone any training or have not seen a functioning model of inclusion. Other studies (Chong et al., 2007; Shah, 2006) reported that those teachers who had some focus on special education during their tertiary education were less concerned as compared with those teachers who never had any focus on special education for integrating special needs students in their classrooms.

The demographic information of the study shows that only 5% of the teachers had undergone training in special education. It is a matter of grave concern that schools are implementing inclusion programs without having trained personnel. These teachers should, therefore, be provided with adequate opportunities for professional development. Ongoing professional development opportunities should be made available to these teachers in very near future. Literature has indicated that teachers have benefited from in-service programs which form part of a long-term systemic staff development plan rather than from single-shot short-term programs (David & Kuyini, 2012). In addition, due to the large teacher population and the limited availability of fiscal resources in India, it is further proposed that the training programs for these teachers should be carried out using *train-the-trainer* model. In the first stage, one teacher from each school should be provided with intensive training. Subsequently, this teacher should be required to carry out training programs for all teachers in his/her school. This is an option for policy makers in India especially given that Article 23L(2) of the draft amended PWD Act (Center for Disability Studies, 2011), which relates to teacher training, outlines that *All educators should be trained to teach students with disabilities in an inclusive classroom* (p. 71). This would improve teacher competencies for inclusive education across India in a more sustainable way.

There is also an urgent need to re-examine the regular education teacher training curriculum in India. As increased number of students with disabilities enter mainstream classrooms, it is therefore imperative that the pre-service regular education teachers are equipped with knowledge and skills to meet the needs of these children. The teachers should be provided with increased opportunities to learn characteristics, instructional strategies, classroom management and policies and procedures for the instruction of students with disabilities. In addition, they should be provided with opportunities for increased contact with these students during pre-service teacher preparation programs.

For reasons of time, cost and practicality, the results of this study were based on a limited number of settings and providers which were focused in one educational institution, the Vidya Bharti Management schools in New Delhi. The model of inclusive education adopted by the Vidya Bharti Management school system may be different from the models of inclusive education adopted by other schools. The investigated schools followed what they called the 'full inclusion' model, in which all students with learning disabilities were placed in general education classrooms for the entire day. It would have been beneficial to determine what types of social support were available to students with disabilities to facilitate their social functioning and peer relationships in the inclusive education setting. Also, the data were collected from teachers who were from a relatively small geographic region; therefore, their responses may not be representative of teachers from other regions in India. Furthermore, only respondents from secondary schools were included in the present study. Perceptions about inclusive practices at the elementary level might be quite different and require additional investigation. The results of this study revealed that there are a lot of potential areas for further studies and activities which would provide a better understanding of inclusive education in India. While this study covered only one state (Delhi) in India, there may be different results that may emerge from other parts of India. An important need for more

extensive investigation is based on the heterogeneity of Indian education. Literacy rates in various states in India are vastly different. This is evident in the data presented by the National Sample Survey Organization (2011). For example, while Kerala has a literacy rate as high as 92%, some states such as Bihar and Rajasthan have the literacy rates as low as 53.3% and 52.7% respectively.

This study covered only school teachers' concerns towards inclusive education. In more inclusive research, other key informants such as school principals and administrators, teacher educators and policy makers should also be included. More investigation is warranted to explore whether those teachers who have undergone comprehensive pre-service training about implementing inclusive education are more successful teachers in an inclusive setting. This research may further highlight the significance and need of professional development and in-service training of teachers for successful inclusion. Only knowledge variables, contact variables and demographic variables were used in this study but there are many more variables such as class size, ongoing professional development and geographical situation that could influence teachers' concerns for inclusive education.

Conclusion

A moderate level of teacher concerns for inclusive education, as found in this study, should be a matter of 'real concern' for policy makers in India. Previous research conducted in India in this area has consistently conveyed this message (Bhatnagar & Das, 2013; Das, Sharma & Singh, 2012; Das et al., 2013; David & Kuyini, 2012). Policy initiatives coupled with fiscal support from the government of India and outside agencies such as UNESCO and the World Bank have been directed towards inclusive education to a greater degree since the passage of the PWD Act, 1995. While these initiatives have brought the notion of inclusive education to the forefront of society, much work however is needed to be done to appropriately meet the needs of about 30 million children with disabilities in India. Successful participation of regular school teachers is instrumental for this reform in India. There is an urgent need to address their concerns in order to realize inclusion imperative for such a large number of children with disabilities in India.

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