

Exploring the Teachers' Attitudes Towards Inclusive Education System: A Study of Indian Teachers

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Abstract

This article explores the attitudes of university and school teachers towards inclusive education system. One hundred teachers having equal number of male and female population was included in the study. Participants were administered an attitude scale namely- Attitudes toward Inclusive Education Scale (ATIE), developed by Wilczenski (1992) to determine teachers' attitude about the inclusion of students with special needs into mainstream settings. The study has achieved the objective-to assess the attitudes of teachers towards the inclusion of students with special need into regular classrooms. The data were analyzed by using Means and Standard Deviations. However t-test was also applied to compare the groups. Result of the present study indicates that there is a significant difference in the attitude of teachers in relation to teaching level, gender, residence and their experience. The findings suggest that the university and female teachers appeared to hold more positive attitude as compared to school and male teachers.

Keywords: Teachers' Attitude, Inclusive Education System

Introduction

The World Declaration on Education for All adopted in 1990 gave further boost to the various processes already set in motion in the country. The Rehabilitation Council of India Act 1992 initiated a training program for the development of professionals to respond to the needs of students with disabilities. The enactment of the People with Disability Act in 1996 provided legislative support. This act makes it mandatory to provide free education to children with disabilities in an appropriate environment until the age of 18 years. In 1999, the government passed the National Trust for Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act for the economic rehabilitation of people with disabilities. These acts have been instrumental in bringing about a perceptible change/ improvement in the attitude of government, NGOs and people with disabilities. In recent years, two major initiatives have been launched by the government for achieving the goals of universalization of elementary education (UEE): the District Primary Education Program (DPEP) in 1994 and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in 2002. RTE 2009 Act also makes the present education as a strong system for the elementary children. In spite of the launching the various programs and schemes in past years, only a limited impact in terms of increasing the participation of children with disabilities in formal education can be observed. This situation needs to change; a focused effort is required. Keeping in view recent initiatives on inclusive education, a comprehensive review is necessary to help in better understanding the present status of education of children with disabilities, and how inclusive education can be promoted.

What is inclusive education?

Until recently, most conceptual literature on inclusive education was Northern (European and North American) in origin, taking a 'whole-school' approach to institutional change (Peters, 2004), and influenced by the social model of disability. Children in special schools were seen as geographically and socially segregated from their peers, and the initial movement to integrate these students in mainstream schools ('integration') shifted to one where the whole school was encouraged to become more adaptable and inclusive in its day-to-day educational practices for all students ('inclusive education'). Pedagogy in particular was highlighted as the key to meeting all students' educational needs by making the curriculum flexible, and so more accessible. By recognizing that teaching methods which can make curriculum accessible to children with disabilities can also make learning accessible to all students (Ainscow, 2005; Ainscow, 1991), a teacher or school principal is well on the way to improving the overall quality of their school. In this way, inclusive education is not a disability-only issue, but an educational quality issue.

There is a growing, although not comprehensive, literature in the south, which focuses more on external factors with its 'community approach' (Peters, 2004). In developing contexts with large numbers of out-of-school children, inclusive education tends to be more broadly concerned with school access and education deprivations for marginalized groups such as girls, ethnic minorities, poor families and disabled children, who have never attended or dropped out of school (Subrahmanian, 2003).

If a previously excluded child is given access to a mainstream classroom, what happens within that space can be anything but inclusive if the school quality is poor, they cannot access an inflexible curriculum, or they are overlooked or bullied by the teacher or their peers. Tomasevski (2003: 15) highlights how "...education is widely – albeit wrongly – perceived as inherently good. Getting all children to school is thus mistaken for their right to

education.” It is worth noting that the concept of inclusive education in the mainstream as opposed to specialist ghettoized provision is a matter of frenzied, indecisive debate in the north, and yet it is seemingly being transferred unhesitatingly as the panacea to the exclusion of children with disabilities in the south.

While in northern contexts, the discourse around inclusive education is primarily concerned with segregation as opposed to inclusion in the mainstream, in the south the coverage of special schools is so limited that the discourse is concerned with inclusion being potentially the most cost and time-efficient way of improving access to educational institutions.

The genesis of special needs education in India can be traced back to pre-independent India. There are examples in Indian history that show that people with disabilities had educational opportunities, and that disability did not come in the way of learning. However, during the colonial period, India gradually looked at educational models existing outside the country. Parents of children with disabilities, mainly from urban areas and with exposure to approaches rampant in western countries, started schools for their children. Since the government had no policy on the education of children with disabilities, it extended grants to these private schools. This approach of setting up separate schools, mostly residential, spread across the country, although it was concentrated in urban areas. However, for a country the size of India, their numbers were small.

For over a century, these special schools offered the only education available to children with disabilities because of the widespread belief that children with special needs could not be educated alongside others. This allowed a small number of children to have access to education but did not help these children to enter the mainstream community after completing their education. There is evidence to suggest that many teachers do not feel equipped to teach children with disabilities and complain that they need more time to instruct these students (Mukhopadhyay,2007). An effective teacher must have a positive attitude towards all types of children. A teacher with the right attitude makes a lasting impact on the students’ enrolment and their learning. A single inspired teacher, whether school, college or university leaves a lasting impression on the minds of students, not only in terms of the knowledge and training imparted but also the values of teaching-learning and professional pride, and inspires a few students to emulate their teacher and take teaching as a profession. Keeping in mind to assess the attitude of the teachers in regards of inclusion of special children into mainstream, a study has been conducted on school and university teachers.

Methodology

This is a descriptive study conducted through quantitative analysis aiming at determining the attitudes of school and university teachers towards inclusive education system. The study was conducted on 100 teachers teaching in university and school levels. Data was collected from two rural and two urban schools affiliated to CBSE, Delhi. Similarly the teachers from a private university and one central university located at Delhi were also included in the study. During the selection of the teachers it has been kept in mind that the one half of the total sample is of male and other half of the sample is of female teachers. A differential analysis was carried out to study the difference between the attitudes towards inclusive education of the two groups measured on one variable like gender, residence, teaching level and experience.

Objectives

The study has achieved the objective: To assess the attitudes of teachers towards the inclusion of students with special needs into regular classrooms.

Instrument

To measure the attitude of teachers a tool-Attitudes toward Inclusive Education Scale (ATIES), developed by Wilczenski (1992), was used. It contains 16 items. Each item of the scale measures the attitude of teachers at 7 point scale. Respondents had to rate all the sixteen statements on a 7 point scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Higher the score, higher the positive attitude of teacher towards the inclusive education system.

Results and discussions

Table 1 showing the mean standard deviation and t ratio of rural and urban teachers’ attitude towards Inclusive Education

Compared Groups	N	M	SD	t value	Significance
Rural Group	46	2.50	2.08	2.54	**
Urban Group	54	3.80	3.01		

NOTE: * p < .01, ** p < .05 Level of significance.

It may be seen from the table 1 that the mean score of the rural teachers and urban teachers is 2.50 and 3.80 respectively. Whereas the SD of rural teacher is 2.08 and the SD of urban teacher is 3.01. Higher the mean score higher the positive attitude of teachers towards inclusive education system. The calculated t value is more than the table value. Hence, it may be concluded that there is significant difference in the attitude of rural and urban teachers.

Table 2 showing the mean standard deviation and t ratio of university and school teachers' attitude towards Inclusive Education

Compared Groups	N	M	SD	t value	Significance
University Teachers	40	4.00	1.08	2.818	*
School Teachers	60	3.10	2.09		

NOTE: * $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$ Level of significance.

Table 2 indicates that the mean score of the university and school teachers is 4.00 and 3.10 respectively. Whereas the SD of university teacher is 1.08 and the SD of school teacher is 2.09. Higher the mean score higher the positive attitude of teachers towards inclusive education system. The calculated t value is more than the table value. Therefore, it may be concluded that there is significant difference in the attitude of the university and school teachers

Table 3 showing the mean standard deviation and t ratio of male and female teachers' attitude towards Inclusive Education

Compared Groups	N	M	SD	t value	Significance
Male Teachers	50	2.80	2.12	2.66	*
Female Teachers	50	3.90	2.02		

NOTE: * $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$ Level of significance.

It may be seen from the table 3 that the mean score of male and female teachers is 2.80 and 3.90 respectively. Whereas the SD of male teacher is 2.12 and the SD of female teacher is 2.02. Higher the mean score higher the positive attitude of teachers towards inclusive education system. The calculated t value is more than the table value. Hence, it may be concluded that there is significant difference in the attitude of male and female teachers.

Table 4 Showing the mean standard deviation and t ratio of high experienced and less experienced teachers' attitude towards Inclusive Education

Compared Groups	N	M	SD	t value	Significance
Experience less than 5 years	45	2.60	2.67	2.24	**
Experience more than 5 years	55	3.70	2.12		

NOTE: * $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$ Level of significance.

Table 4 reveals that the mean score of less experienced and high experienced teachers is 2.60 and 3.70 respectively. Whereas the SD of less experienced teacher is 2.67 and the SD of high experienced teacher is 2.12. Higher the mean score higher the positive attitude of teachers towards inclusive education system. The calculated t value is more than the table value. Hence, it may be concluded that there is significant difference in the attitude of less experienced and high experienced teachers

Conclusion

The findings of the study suggest that while the teachers appear accepting and positive of inclusionary programs, there remains some concern about implementing Inclusive Education in the mainstream classroom. While attitudes which are deep-rooted in cultural assumptions are probably the most difficult aspect of change, they have influence across the board, ranging from community, to school, to government. This suggests that attitudinal change should be considered an integral part of any inclusive education programme or plan, ranging from DPOs raising awareness at grass-roots level (including for parents), to teacher education (including sensitizing teachers to listen to the children's perspectives (Mukhopadhyay,) to managerial capacity-building, to policy-making. As attitudes are based on beliefs, they can be changed when presented with new information such as inclusion success stories of children with disabilities. Therefore teacher training institutions should also make scrupulous efforts to equip the future teachers not only with teaching skills but also promotion of positive attitude towards the children with special needs, no matter these teachers are going to be posted in university or in rural areas.

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