

Review Article

The influences of some variables on prospective teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education of children with disabilities



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ABSTRACT

Throughout the past decade, there has been a shift in paradigm in looking at education specifically education towards children with disabilities. No longer must the children fit in the classroom, but the school and the class must fit the children. Inclusion in education (Inclusive education) is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to diversity of needs of all learners, reducing exclusion within and from education and thus be understood as a key strategy to achieve Education for All. The present paper is based on the study of attitude of pre-service teachers towards inclusive education of children with disabilities. The sample consisted of 100 prospective teachers. Prospective teachers' attitude towards Inclusion Scale developed by Fathi-Rezk El-Ashry (2009) was been employed to collect responses from pre-service B.Ed. teachers. The study revealed that there were significant differences among the prospective teachers' attitude on the basis of gender, duration of B.Ed. training programme and interaction with children with disabilities during internship. However, the prospective teachers' educational qualifications had no significant impact on their attitude towards inclusive education.

KEYWORDS

Attitude | Inclusive Education | Prospective Teachers | Disabilities

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Introduction

Throughout the past decade, we see a shift in paradigm in education specifically in education towards children with disabilities. No longer must the children fit in the classroom, but the school and the class must fit the children. “Inclusive education is based on the right of all learners to a quality education that meets basic learning needs and enriches lives” (UNESCO, 2012). Inclusion in education (Inclusive education) involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision that covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children. Inclusive education is not only limited to mainstreaming the learners with special needs but also concerned with identifying and overcoming all barriers to effective, continuous and quality participation in education.

Article 45 of the Indian Constitution promises ‘free and compulsory education for all children upto the age of 14 years’. The National Education Policy (NPE, 1986) suggests an ‘integrated programme’ enabling handicapped children to study in regular schools. The government of India over the years initiated and implemented a number of programmes such as Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC), Project on Integrated Education for Disabled (PIED) funded by UNESCO and NCERT in the year 2000 gave special importance to inclusive schools.

The demand for inclusive education has re-emerged in India following the enforcement of three major initiatives: firstly, The Persons with Disabilities Act – 1995 that enforces equal opportunities, protection of rights and full participation; secondly, the flagship program ‘Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan’ for achievement of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) and the ratification of The Rights of Persons with Disability Act, 2016 which directs educational institutions to provide inclusive

education to children with disability with respect to admission, identification, infrastructure, teacher training, social and academic development, educational aids, curriculum and examination reforms.

Teachers’ attitudes about inclusion have been found to be a crucial factor that has an impact on the implementation of inclusion of children with disabilities (Bender and Scott 1995). Inclusive education is not only about putting children in a regular class, it is also about the way and the condition that children can learn (Angelides *et al.* 2006). Thus the role of the teacher is more than recognizing diversity (Sandoval, 2007; Cedillo *et al.* 2010). It is about the way children can participate in education. There have been changes in the development of new understandings about the interactive nature of children’s needs and a shift in focus from ‘what is wrong with the child?’ to ‘what does the child need to support their learning?’ Such developments have substantially affected the professional identity as well as the roles and responsibilities of many teachers. It also has implications for how teachers are trained and supported in their professional development. (Varcoe and Boyle 2014). revealed that overall, studying an elective unit on inclusive education had a positive influence over pre-service teachers’ attitudes. (Avarmidis *et al.* 2009; Costello and Boyle 2013). revealed that the pre-service secondary teachers held positive attitudes towards inclusive education. Given that one key factor in success of inclusive education lies in the general educator's attitude and willingness to accommodate students who have disabilities, it is important to examine general educator's attitudes towards inclusion. This is vital since attitude is a significant contributing factor in determining success with the inclusive education model. Given that minimal data exists on teacher attitudes towards inclusion in Indian education environments, this study provides needed information in the process of inclusion in such an environment.

Justification of Study

Based on the assumption that teachers' attitudes toward inclusion can have a significant impact on the success of educational policies, and the fact that inclusive studies and practices in the Indian context are almost evolving, the purpose of this study is to examine pre-service B.Ed. teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education of students with disabilities in Roorkee.

Variables

Dependent Variables: Attitude towards inclusive education of children with disabilities

Independent variables:

- (i). Gender - Male
- Female
- (ii). Educational level- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- (iii). B.Ed. training programme-
One year (Session 2014-15)
Two years (Session 2015-17)
- (iv). Interaction with children with disabilities during school internship -
Interaction - No interaction

Objectives of the study

- To know the level of attitude of prospective teachers towards inclusive education of children with disabilities.
- To study the attitude of prospective teachers' gender, educational level, duration of B.Ed. training programme and interaction with children with disabilities during school internship towards inclusive education of children with disabilities.

Hypotheses

On the basis of above objectives the researcher formulated following hypotheses-

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between the attitude of male and female prospective B.Ed. teachers towards inclusive education of children with disabilities.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between the attitude of graduate and post graduate prospective B.Ed. teachers towards inclusive education of children with disabilities.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference between the attitude of prospective teachers who have undergone one year B.Ed. course and two years B.Ed. course, towards inclusive education of children with disabilities.

Hypothesis 4: There is no significant difference between the attitude of prospective teachers who had interaction with children with disabilities during school internship and those who had no interaction with children with disabilities during school internship towards inclusive education.

Delimitations

1. The study was limited to the B.Ed. colleges of Roorkee.
2. The prospective teachers were selected from session 2014-15 and 2015-17.

Methodology

A descriptive survey method was utilized for this study.

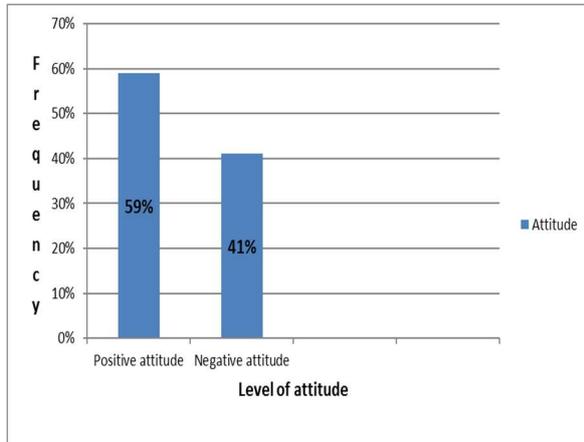
Population: The population consisted of all the pre-service teachers of session 2014-15 and 2015-17 of B.Ed. colleges in Roorkee.

Sample: The sample consisted of 100 prospective teachers selected from B.Ed. colleges situated in Roorkee city. They were selected by random sampling technique.

Tools Used: Prospective teachers' attitude towards inclusion scale developed by (Fathi Rezak El-Ashry 2009). had been employed to collect responses from prospective teachers for the present study.

Data Analysis & Interpretation The frequency and percentage mean of attitude level of prospective teachers was calculated to identify their general attitude towards inclusive education of children with disabilities. A total of 59 prospective teachers (59%) showed positive

Figure I: Distribution samples based on level of attitude towards inclusive education of children with disabilities.



while 41 prospective teachers (41%) had negative attitude towards inclusive education. Since the scale was in 5 point the mean was found to be 3.758.

Hypothesis 1: It is evident from table 1 that there was a significant mean difference between the

Variables	Groups	No. of samples	Mean	SD	t-value
Gender	Male	36	100.65	5.25	2.969*
	Female	64	105.44	7.82	
Educational level	Graduate	46	103.91	10.51	0.712
	Post Graduate	54	103.89	8.89	
Duration of B.Ed. Training Program	One year (Session 2014-15)	48	99.68	8.79	3.029*
	Two years (Session 2015-17)	52	104.67	6.66	
Interaction with Children with Disabilities During School Internship	Interaction	34	106.34	7.4	2.898*
	No Interaction	66	100.01	7.1	

Table 1: Independent Sample Test for Mean differences. *significant at 0.01 level of significance

trainees belonging to different gender identities. The t value (2.969) is greater than table value (2.58) at 0.01 level of significance. On the basis of this result hypothesis 1 is rejected. The female prospective teachers' attitudes were found to be more positive towards inclusion than that of the male prospective teachers as the mean score of female prospective teachers (105.44) were higher than that of their counterparts (100.65). The result is contrary to the existing researches that suggest that teachers, overall, are not adverse to the concept of inclusion (Barberhuff & Wheatley, 2005; Cook, 2001; Chung, 1998; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996).

Hypothesis 2: It is depicted in table 1 that no significant difference was detected in attitudes of prospective teachers who possessed a Bachelor's degree and a Master's degree. Hence, hypothesis 2 is accepted at 0.01 level of significance. The mean scores of graduate trainees were higher than their counterparts. The results are found in agreement with the findings of Parhoon, et.al. (2014) who found that educators with lower educational levels revealed higher positive attitudes for including children with disabilities than educators possessing higher levels of education. However, Hsieh & Hsieh (2012) told that educational level did not influence educators' attitudes to include children with special need.

Hypothesis 3: The perusal of table 1 shows that there exists a significant mean difference between the mean scores of prospective teachers' attitude who have undergone one year and 2 years B.Ed. training programme. Thus, on the basis of the above findings, hypothesis 3 is rejected at 0.01 level of significance. The mean scores of prospective teachers who have undergone two years of B.Ed. course were higher than their counterparts. So, it can be concluded that the prospective teachers who pursued two years B.Ed. training programmes were more sensitive to inclusive education than their counterparts. It may be due to the introduction of two years B.Ed. programme, where the trainees get an opportunity

to study inclusive education as a separate paper. This is corroborated by researches of Campbell, (Gilmore and Cuskelly 2003; Loreman and Earle 2007; Sharma *et al.* 2006; Stella and Lan 2007) that introductory inclusive education subjects have a positive influence on the attitudes and confidence of those studying these subjects. (Leatherman and Niemeyer 2005) indicated that, training positively influenced educators' attitudes towards inclusion and imparted them with useful methods to educate all typical and disabled students. But contrary to it, (Nagata, 2005) claimed that a single university subject on inclusion or special education cannot adequately prepare teachers to successfully implement the various aspects of inclusion and its associated practices. Their findings support the work of (Hasting and colleagues 1996) who reported that an information-based course did little to change the perceptions of pre-service teachers over a nine-week period. Two main reasons have been acknowledged for why change has not been readily forthcoming. First, some researchers claim that there is a specific body of knowledge and skills for working within inclusive classrooms and that the pre-service teacher training courses do not adequately cover these (Hodkinson, 2005; Jones, 2006).

Hypothesis 4: To verify this hypothesis the researchers used independent sample t test as in table 1. When the means were compared, it was found that the mean of prospective teachers who had interaction with children with disabilities during school internship (106.34) was greater than their counterparts (100.01). These differences are significant at 0.01 level of significance. Thus, the hypothesis 4 is rejected. It may be due to the fact that more interaction of prospective teachers with children with disabilities increases the probability of better development of the three domains of the pre-service teachers towards inclusive education. Moreover, two years B.Ed. programme provides longer periods of interaction with students (16 weeks of school internship) as compared to one

year B.Ed. programme (2 weeks of school internship). According to Eagly and Chaiken (1993), cognitive (knowledge about the disability), behavioral (intention to interact with the individual who has the disability and more specific than simply cognitive) and affective (feelings about the individual with the disability) factors influence the development of positive attitude toward disability. This result is in line with study of Bhatnagar & Das (2014) who indicated that educators who had more interactions with people with disabilities showed more positive attitudes to educate children with special needs in inclusive settings than those who did not. Hwang & Evans (2011) indicated that social interaction was one of the benefits that general educators revealed when dealing with children including those with special needs.

Major Findings

1. 59% of total prospective B.Ed. teachers had positive attitude towards inclusion of children with disabilities.
2. There was a significant difference between male and female prospective B.Ed. teachers in their attitude towards inclusive education of children with disabilities.
3. There was no significant difference between graduate and post graduate prospective B.Ed. teachers in their attitudes towards inclusive education of children with disabilities.
4. There was a significant difference between pre-service teachers who have undergone two years B.Ed. course and one year B.Ed. course in their attitudes towards inclusive education of children with disabilities.
5. There was a significant difference between attitudes of prospective B.Ed. teachers who had interaction with children with disabilities during school internship and those who did not have interaction with children with disabilities during school internship.

Conclusion

The right to education and the right to equal educational opportunities have been guaranteed to all citizens by the Constitution since India's independence. In the last few decades, there has been a paradigm shift in Indian education system to promote Education For All. That's why instead of segregating students with special needs in special classes or schools, the ideology of inclusion is to benefit schools to meet the needs of all students. Inclusive education is an ongoing process aimed at offering quality education for all while respecting diversity and the different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of the students and communities, eliminating all forms of discrimination' (UNESCO, 2008).

Teacher's competencies are an essential component to ensure the quality of students' inclusion in the school environment. Teachers have direct interaction with students and play a critical role in students' experiences in the classroom on a daily basis. Special attention must be paid to ensure that classroom teachers have the skills and support needed to provide quality education to children with diverse learning needs. Preparing teachers with essential knowledge about philosophy and skills for inclusive education sensitizes them towards the need of children with special ability and motivates them to apply their knowledge in to classroom situation.

It is concluded from the present study that there is a need of training, orientation course related to inclusive education for prospective teachers especially for male teachers to develop awareness of inclusive education. The educational qualification did not affect the attitude of the prospective teachers towards children with disabilities. The 2 years B.Ed course seems to be more beneficial for the professional development of the prospective teachers. The present study recommends that education stakeholders or

curriculum makers should frame a comprehensive CWSN-oriented (Children with Special Needs) pedagogy based curriculum for teacher-training programmes. Moreover, greater interaction of pre-service teachers with children with disabilities develops a positive attitude and acceptance in them towards inclusive education.

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