

ATTITUDE OF TEACHER TRAINEES TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Arun K. Gupta and Bharti Tandon

Globally schools are becoming more inclusive in practice to provide meaningful learning experiences to students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. Research has documented that teachers with positive attitudes toward inclusion are more likely to modify their instruction and curriculum to meet individual needs of students and have a more positive approach to inclusion. It is the responsibility of teacher training programmes to prepare teachers who can meet expectations of implementing inclusive education programme effectively. The present study was aimed to explore the views of teacher trainees undergoing two-year Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) programme about inclusion and their readiness to teach in inclusive classrooms. In this study, the Scale of Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusive Classrooms (STATIC) was used to collect data and 300 teacher trainees studying in their second year of the teacher training programme in two colleges of education in Jammu city were included in the study. The results indicated that generally, teacher trainees had a positive attitude toward inclusion in schools. The findings highlight that there was a significant difference in attitude towards inclusion between urban and rural teacher trainees. However, there was no significant difference in the attitude towards inclusion among the sub-groups of teacher trainees on the basis of qualification, previous awareness about inclusion or familiarity with the disability in the family. Some suggestions and recommendations for improvement of teacher education programmes vis-à-vis inclusion have also been given.

KEYWORDS: Inclusive Education, Attitude, Pre-Service Teachers, Teacher Training Programmes

Arun K Gupta ✉
Chairman, Model Institute of Education & Research, Jammu
Email: arun@mier.in

Bharti Tandon
Assistant Professor, PG Department,
MIER College of Education (Autonomous), Jammu
Email: bharti.tandon@miercollege.in

INTRODUCTION

The inclusion of students with exceptionalities is now a global practice (Leyser & Romi, 2008; Brownlee & Carrington, 2000; Hegarty, 1998; and, Sebba & Ainscow, 1996). Teachers set the tone of classrooms, and as such, the success of inclusion may well depend upon the prevailing attitudes of teachers as they interact with students with disabilities in their classrooms (Carroll, Forlin & Jobling, 2003). Inclusion in education is considered as acceptance of all students, including students with special needs, in the general education curriculum and considering them to be a part of the school. It embraces the philosophy that children with disabilities have a right to learn with their non-disabled peers regardless of their grade level achievement. There is no universal definition of either inclusion or inclusive education. It has been defined differently by professionals and proponents in the field. UNESCO Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994) proclaimed as under:

Every child has a fundamental right to education and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning. Every child has unique characteristics, interest, abilities and learning needs. Educational system should be designed and educational programs implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs. Those with special educated needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child-centered pedagogy, capable of meeting these needs.

Inclusion encourages bringing all students together under one roof without lowering the academic standards. Supporters of inclusion believe that it is a civil right as it desegregates children with special needs who are otherwise marginalized (Stainback & Stainback, 1996; Kauffman, 1995).

In India, recommendations to send children with disabilities to mainstream schools were first made in the Sargent Report in 1944, and again in 1964 by the Kothari Commission (Julka, 2005). Even though the National Policy of Education (1986) emphasized the integration of children with special needs in the regular curriculum, a clear roadmap to implement such plans were not mentioned in the policy. A major landmark in the history of special education and rehabilitation in India reached with the enactment of the Persons with Disabilities (PWD) Act in 1995. The major emphasis of this act was the inclusion and full participation of students with disabilities in regular schools. Another important legislative breakthrough was reached when, a comprehensive Plan of Action for Children and Youth with Disabilities (2005) advocated inclusive education and envisaged making all school "disabled-friendly" by 2020. Despite this, the change from segregating educational practices for students with special needs to inclusive education has been slow.

Research studies highlight that one of the most significant factors for implementing successful inclusion of students with special needs is the attitudes of the general education teachers regarding inclusion (De Boer et al., 2011). Shahazadi (2000) conducted a study on inclusive education perspective of services and found that teachers, administrators, professional and parents appear to be aware of the concept of inclusive education but were not sure about how it will be implemented in ordinary settings. So, it calls for the reconstructing of the curriculum in teacher education; one that meets this timely demand and prepares teachers to provide meaningful education to both students with and without disabilities. Researches also highlight that many school teachers do not favour inclusion because they feel unprepared to meet the demands and responsibilities of students with disabilities (Blecker & Boakes, 2010; Brackenreed, 2011; Fuchs, 2010) in addition, unfamiliarity with the special education practices, workload, lack of time and resources, etc. (Harpell & Andrews, 2010) contribute to the inability of the institutions to adopt inclusion. According to Scruggs and Mastropieri's (1996) meta-analysis of 28 studies conducted from 1958 to 1995, show that teachers overwhelmingly approve the idea of including all students in their classrooms. It is equally important to observe that one third of the teachers in these studies revealed that they felt ill prepared in requisite skills needed to meet the needs of students with disabilities and also felt that they lacked time and resources needed for successful instruction in inclusive settings. In other words, teachers like the idea of inclusion, but the ground reality of today's education is otherwise (Van Reusen, Shoho, & Baker, 2001).

Teachers who lack training in appropriate strategies for working with students with disabilities often feel negatively toward students with disabilities, thereby lessening the likelihood of success for students with disabilities. This has also been endorsed by Brownell et al. (2005) according to whom general education teachers "play a primary role in the education of students with disabilities...but often they report feeling unprepared to undertake this role." The success of inclusion can only be made a reality if both teacher educators and staff development programs share the responsibility in helping to train and continue to educate our future and current general education teachers.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It has been seen that if teacher education programs either offered no course in inclusive education or courses failed to address key aspects of inclusion, prospective teachers expressed concern regarding their ability to teach students with diverse needs in mainstream classrooms and blamed on their

preparation for inclusion (Hemmings & Weaven, 2005; Jones, 2002; Schumm & Vaughn, 1995; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Winter, 2006). For many pre-service teachers, their only exposure to the area of inclusive education is an introductory inclusive education subject included in their teacher education course (Carroll, Forlin, & Jobling, 2003). Researches have shown that these introductory inclusive education subjects can have a positive influence on the attitudes and confidence of those studying these subjects (Campbell, Gilmore, & Cuskelly, 2003; Loreman & Earle, 2007; Sharma et al., 2006; Stella, Forlin & Lan, 2007).

Inclusive education in India is still in its infancy stage with regards to conceptualization and implementation. Its success varies from one state to another depending on the disability policy of the respective state within the national policy framework. There is no need of reinforcing the fact that teacher education remains a very weak link with respect to equipping teachers to be prepared for an inclusive classroom environment. Thus, there is a need to include inclusive education as a mandatory course in the general teacher education programs not only to change the negative attitude of teachers towards inclusion but also to equip them to teach effectively in inclusive settings by implementing different models and approaches.

In J&K State, the curricula and the duration of the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) program were modified in accordance with the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) norms in the light of honorable Supreme Court of India's directions from the session 2014-15. In the revised structure of curriculum, the teacher trainees are required to study a course on Inclusive Education during their first year of their two-year training program. This prompted the researchers to conduct a survey on the trainees with regards to their attitudes towards inclusion as no empirical research has been conducted on this topic till now in the state. The present study can be described as an exploratory study. As such, no scientific hypothesis were laid with regards to attitudes of the trainees regarding inclusion. However, the researchers formulated the following questions, answers to which were elicited from the present study:

- Q1. Are the attitudes of teacher trainees enrolled in Colleges of Education in Jammu city positive with regards to Inclusion?
- Q2. Do the attitudes towards inclusion of the sub-groups of teacher trainees formed on the basis of variables namely educational qualification, background, prior awareness and familiarity with some sort of disability significantly differ from each other?

The present study aimed to analyse the attitudes towards inclusion of students

from the third semester enrolled in B.Ed. general programme. Since, all teacher trainees selected for the study had undertaken a course of four credits on Inclusive Education; it was assumed that their attitudes towards inclusion are likely to be positive.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following were the objectives of the study:

1. To study the attitude of teacher trainees toward inclusive education.
2. To find out the differences between attitude towards inclusion among different sub-groups of teacher trainees formed on the basis of variables namely educational qualification, background, prior awareness and familiarity with some sort of disability

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

SAMPLING

Given that the purpose of the study was to determine teacher trainees' attitude towards inclusion, purposive sampling method was used. For this, two colleges of education were identified, one private and one government. A two-tiered strategy was used in order to identify the teacher trainees. For the present study, those teacher trainees were selected who had completed their second semester of the B.Ed. programme. The first tier of the process was to contact and take permission from the principal of the colleges. The second tier of the selection process was to have an informal meeting with the teacher trainees to get their willingness to participate in the study. In all, 300 teacher trainees participated in the study. Out of 300 participants, 265 were female while only 35 were male. Participants were in the age group of 21-30 years. Most of the participants were fresher in the field; however, some had the teaching experience from 1 year to 6 years. There were 149 teacher trainees with post-graduate degree in different subjects. Most of the participants were from the urban background. There were only 37 participants who were familiar with some sort of disability in their immediate or extended family. It was interesting to observe that even after going through a course-Inclusive Education in their second semester of B.Ed. program, only 109 participants confirmed that they were familiar with inclusive education.

TOOL USED

Data was collected using a standardized questionnaire "Scale of Teachers Attitudes toward Inclusive Classrooms" (STATIC) developed by Cochran

(1999). It is a twenty items, paper and pencil instrument consisting of statements regarding students with disabilities in the classroom. The questions are divided into three different constructs namely (i) teachers' perceptions, (ii) training, and (iii) support. This instrument is a six-point Likert scale with the possible range of responses as: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 1 = Disagree, 2 = Not Sure, but tend to disagree, 3 = Not sure, but tend to agree, 4 = Agree and 5 = Strongly Agree. The author revised the scoring for the test in the year 2000. Subjects whose profile indicates higher scores on the tool are considered to have a more positive attitude towards inclusion, while those subjects whose profile consists of lower scores are considered to have a negative attitude towards inclusion. Even though the study used a standardized scale to collect data, it was decided to re-establish its reliability in Indian settings. For this purpose, the scale was administered on 100 teacher trainees. Test-retest method was used to find out the reliability coefficient of the scale. The second administration of the scale was done on the same sample of 100 teacher trainees after an interval of three weeks. The value of Pearson correlation was 0.61 which was significant at the 0.01 level. In addition, Cronbach's alpha internal consistency reliability was also calculated, which came out to be 0.55.

DATA ANALYSIS

The following aspects of inclusive education were included in the questionnaire: Teachers' Perceptions and Beliefs, Availability of Resources for Inclusive Education and Feeling Comfortable while Teaching Children with Disabilities etc. It took approximately 30-35 minutes to complete the questionnaire. After receiving the responses, scoring was undertaken and the data was analysed electronically by using SPSS software. This was followed by finding significance of differences between the mean scores on the attitude scale by the subgroup of teacher trainees formed on the basis of qualification, background, awareness and familiarity with some sort of disability.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Difference between attitudes towards inclusive education among different sub-groups formed on the basis of variables namely qualification, background, awareness and familiarity with disability.

Table 1

Values of Mean, S.D. and t for Attitude of Teacher Trainees toward Inclusive Education in Relation to Their Qualification.

Variable		N	Mean	S. D.	<i>t</i>	Remarks
Qualification	Graduates	151	65.04	7.21	0.96	Not significant at 0.05 level of significance
	Post Graduates	149	64.16	8.54		

Table 1 shows the significance of difference between the mean attitude scores towards inclusion obtained by the group of graduate and post graduate teacher trainees. The value of *t* is 0.96, which is not significant at the 0.05 level. The result indicates that the attitude of the graduate and post graduate teacher trainees do not differ significantly from each other. In other words, the post-graduate and the graduate teacher trainees cannot be differentiated on the basis of their attitudes towards inclusion.

Table 2

Values of Mean, S.D. and t for Attitude of Teacher Trainees toward Inclusive Education in Relation to Their Residential Background.

Variable		N	Mean	S. D.	<i>t</i>	Remarks
Background	Urban	218	64.04	7.25	2.00	Significant at 0.05 level of significance
	Rural	82	66.01	8.17		

Table 2 shows the significance of difference between the mean attitude scores towards inclusion obtained by urban and rural teacher trainees. The value of *t* is 2.00, which is significant at the 0.05 level. The result indicates that the attitude of the urban and rural teacher trainees significantly differ from each other. In other words, the urban and the rural teacher trainees can be differentiated on the basis of their attitudes towards inclusion and the attitude of rural teacher trainees is more positive as compared to the attitude of the urban teacher trainees.

Table 3

Values of Mean, S.D. and t for Attitude of Teacher Trainees toward Inclusive Education in Relation to Their Previous Awareness.

Variable		N	Mean	S. D.	t	Remarks
Awareness	Aware	109	64.06	6.80	0.89	Not significant at 0.05 level of significance
	Not aware	191	64.91	8.46		

Table 3 shows the significance of difference between the mean attitude scores towards inclusion of group of teacher trainees who have previous awareness and those who did not have any previous awareness about inclusion. The value of t is 0.89, which is not significant at the 0.05 level. The result indicates that the attitude of the teacher trainees who were aware of inclusion as compared to those who were not aware about inclusion do not significantly differ from each other. In other words, the attitude of teacher trainees cannot be differentiated on the basis of their previous awareness towards inclusion.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study has provided valuable information with regards to:

- The attitude towards inclusive education of B.Ed. teacher trainees ranged from positive to highly positive, which is promising stance for implementing inclusion at different school levels.
- The background of the teacher trainees has been found to influence their attitude towards inclusive education. In other words, teacher trainees from rural background are more sensitive towards the needs of children with disabilities as compared to their peers from urban background.
- The qualification of teacher trainees has not been found to influence their attitude towards inclusive education. It has been indicated in the earlier research by Hsien et al (2009) that teachers with higher educational qualifications in special education are more positive about inclusion.
- Familiarity with disability has not been found to differentiate between teacher trainees' attitude towards inclusion. In other words, teacher trainees who were familiar with disability could not be differentiated from those who were not familiar with the disability with regards to their attitude towards inclusion.

SUGGESTIONS

In the light of the results obtained in the present study, the following suggestions can be made:

- Even though the results of this study indicate positive attitude of teacher trainees towards inclusive education, it is important to explore their readiness to implement inclusive education programmes in their schools.
- It may be suggested that practical experiences and exposure are required to be added in the curriculum regarding inclusive education in order to strengthen content knowledge in the teacher training program at the B.Ed. Level. This would not only help to reduce the gap between theory and practice but would also make the program more meaningful and relevant for the teacher trainees.
- College managements need to provide necessary support to enhance the meaningful learning experiences of regular teacher trainees towards inclusive education. For this, regular visits to the inclusive school need to be scheduled in the curriculum. In addition, participation of the trainees in the teaching-learning process of children with special needs requires to be introduced as a regular feature of the instruction related to inclusive education. The teacher trainees require to be shown videos, recordings of clippings of children with special needs in inclusive settings.
- There is need for promoting educational research projects not only to further improve the curriculum of inclusive education in the teacher training programs but also develop strategies for effective implementation of inclusive education. Discussions, debates awareness programs, interaction with the children with special needs require to be made regular features in the practicum and internship programs in the Colleges of Education.
- Most of the time, teacher educators themselves do not possess positive attitude towards inclusive education either due to lack of proper training or awareness, which influences the attitude of teacher trainees towards inclusion. For this, in-service awareness and training programs need to be organized regularly for teacher educators.
- It is suggested that the National Council for Teacher Education and the Rehabilitation Council of India should join hands to take appropriate measures for ensuring adequate changes in the curriculum to include both hands-on experiences and theory in inclusive education courses in the teacher training programmes.

- Due to Article 370, many national policies and acts have neither been enacted nor implemented in the state of J&K as compared to other states in the country. This has not only slowed down the progress of special and inclusive education but has also delayed the benefits to the children with special needs and their families. It is suggested that the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) should take appropriate measure in ensuring the implementation of various policies and acts in J&K regarding disability and Inclusion.

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