

Exploring Attitude of Teachers towards Inclusive Education at Elementary School Level

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Abstract

Inclusive education may be understood in the way that allows students with special needs to be placed to receive instruction in the mainstream classes and to be taught by mainstream teachers. Novice teachers or teachers with differential levels of teaching experience, belonging to urban-rural background may have a differential attitude towards inclusive education set up. Keeping this in mind, the present study was conducted to study the attitudinal dispositions of elementary school teachers towards inclusive education with reference to gender, teaching experience and locality. Descriptive research design was followed for carrying out the study. The data was collected from the 120 elementary school teachers of Choudwar block and Cuttack city of Odisha. The sample was selected through stratified random sampling technique. A self-developed five-point attitude scale was used for collection of data. The findings of the study revealed that, gender, teaching experience and locality were the factors for developing differential attitudes among the teachers as there were significant differences in the mean attitude scores of elementary school teachers towards various aspects of inclusive education with reference to gender, teaching experience and locality.

Keywords: Attitude of Teachers, Inclusive Education, Elementary School.

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INTRODUCTION

Inclusion is thus seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all children, youth and adults through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing and eliminating exclusion [1]. Inclusive education is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners and can thus be understood as a key strategy to achieve EFA (World Declaration on Education for All, 1990). Inclusive education has been at the forefront of education system in the 21st century. The UNESCO Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action [2] announced that, "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, education system should be designed and educational programmes to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs. Those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within child centered pedagogy, capable of meeting these needs". RtE-Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (RTE-SSA) and

Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) implement the system with reference to the above. Inclusive education is an accepted concept that happens when children with and without disabilities participate and learn together in the same classes. Research shows that when a child with disabilities attends classes alongside peers who do not have disabilities, learning is enhanced. The hallmark of inclusive education is the teachers' willingness to accept children with special needs. Their attitudes and knowledge about inclusive education are important as these are indicators of such willingness [3]. Over the past few years special education service delivery models move towards eliminating segregated classrooms and accepting inclusive services [4]. With this shift however novice teachers may feel unprepared with regard to their attitudes towards a new role in inclusive classes [5].

Inclusive education is a system in which all children from a given community learn together in the same local school including children with learning difficulties, special needs or disability. It involves all children learning together with the peers in the same environment and enables all to participate together in

the society from the very beginning. Inclusive education means a philosophy of education that promotes the educational of all pupils of education in regular schools. The principles of this philosophy are based on the following assumptions:

- All children have the right to learn and play together
- Children should not be devalued or discriminated against by being excluded or sent away because of their disability.
- There should not be any legitimate reason to separate children during their schooling.
- They belong together rather than need to be protected from one together.

The National Curriculum Framework on School Education provides guidelines for making the curriculum flexible and appropriate to accommodate the diversity of school children including those with disability in both cognitive and non-cognitive areas; reviewing barriers created by admission procedures (screening, identification, parental interaction, selection and evaluation), this should include private schools [6]. Teachers who are ill prepared or uncomfortable with the concept of inclusion may pass that discontent on to the students, which in turn can undermine the confidence and success of those students. Conversely, teachers who support and believe in the concept of inclusion can provide special education students with confidence and a comfortable learning environment. Lack of awareness is the result of the development of conservative and ill attitude towards the education of children with special needs in a regular classroom [7].

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

One of the most significant stipulations that allows for successful inclusion of special education students is the attitude of the general education teacher regarding the inclusion of special education students into their classroom. Classrooms, now, have become more diverse than earlier, in terms of students' abilities and diverse requirements. A sensitive teacher having knowledge and awareness on inclusive education can make the teaching-learning process for successful. Empirically, in a study of Patrica [8] focused on the attitudes of primary school teachers towards inclusive education. The results concluded that the primary school teachers demonstrated mostly negative attitudes towards inclusion. Bhatnagar and Das [9] determined the attitudes of secondary regular school teachers toward the inclusion of students with disabilities that teachers in Delhi had positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with special needs. This study also indicated that the teachers who were more positive about inclusive education were male, younger teachers (less than 40 years of age), less experienced (less than ten years) and had post-graduate qualifications. Meng [10] the results indicated that Teachers' attitudes were not essentially influenced by resources, teaching years or relevant special education training. According to Mastropieri and Scruggs [11] teachers play a pivotal role in mainstreaming inclusive education. The

literature on inclusive education is undisputed about no matter how excellent the educational infrastructure might be, how well articulated educational policy might be, how well resourced a program might be, effective inclusion does not take place until regular classroom teachers deliver relevant and meaningful instruction to students with disabilities. In a study of Wu-Ying and Chang-Ming [12] it was observed teachers having a positive past experience with children with disabilities predicted a positive attitude. Thaver *et al.*, [13] determined the attitudes of mainstream pre-service teachers towards disability and inclusive education and found that pre-service teachers had little or no knowledge and experience with disability, and generally possessed negative attitudes towards people with disabilities.

In the Beh-Pajoo [14] and Leyser *et al.*, [15] found that female teachers expressed more positive attitudes towards the idea of integrating children with behavior problems than male teachers. However, Hannah [16] did not mention that gender was related to attitudes. Smitha and Acharya [17] found that teachers had unfavourable attitude towards inclusive education. They studied the attitude of teachers towards inclusive education with reference to different variables as male/female teachers having above 10 years experience/ below 10 years of experience and found that overall attitude of the teachers towards inclusive education for the disabled was unfavorable. Significant difference in the attitude of teachers towards inclusive education in term of gender was found. Male possessed more unfavorable attitude than the female teachers towards inclusive education for the disabled. No significant difference in the attitude of teachers towards inclusive education having different years of professional experience (below 10 years and above 10) was found. From a study of Al-Zyoudi [18] the results showed that teachers' attitudes were found to be strongly influenced by the nature and severity of the disabling condition presented to them, the length of teaching experience, and training. Parasuram [19] reported teachers had favourable attitudes towards inclusive education. Clough and Lindsay [20] found that younger teachers and those with fewer years of experience have been found to be more supportive of inclusion. Florin's [21] study, showed that acceptance of a child with a physical disability was less than six years of teaching for those with sex to ten years of teaching. The most experienced teachers more than 11 years of teaching were the least accepting. Similar results found by Leyser *et al.*, [15] also found that teachers with 14 years or less teaching experience had a significantly higher positive score in their attitudes to inclusive than those with more than 14 years. Kumar [22] established a significant difference between rural and urban teachers towards inclusive Education. This study also concluded that there is significant difference between male & female teachers and low experience & high experience teachers towards inclusive Education. Prasad and Rao [23] determined

that locality had high influence in development of attitude of teachers towards inclusive education so also gender.

Rationale of the Study

Julka [24] stated that the attitude of the teachers, teacher educators and educational administrators is very important. Attitudes are considered to have three components: cognitive, affective and behavioural [25, 26]. The cognitive component consists of the individual's beliefs or knowledge about the attitude object. Teachers' beliefs or knowledge about educating children with special needs in inclusive settings can represent this component. Feelings about the attitude object refer to the affective component. Regarding inclusive education this may reflect teachers' feelings about educating pupils with special needs. The behavioural component reflects someone's predisposition to act towards the attitude object in a particular way. This might include teachers' views on how to act with a child with special needs in his/her classroom. This study has focused to study the attitude of elementary school teachers towards inclusive education. It also focused to see whether attitude is influenced by the variables such as: gender, teaching experience and locality. Mainstream teachers' attitudes may be a contributory barrier to successful inclusive practices [27-29]. It is established from various studies that positive attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education has a significant role in successful implementation of inclusive education policy. In contrary, negative or unfavourable attitudinal dispositions developed among the teachers towards inclusion hampers success of inclusive classroom. Similarly the researchers like Anderson, Klassen & Georgiou [30] found that both the teacher and policy makers have positive attitude towards inclusion. By taking into account the findings of different researches, it was imperative to study the attitude of elementary teachers towards the inclusive education.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the attitude of elementary school teachers towards inclusive education with reference to gender.
2. To study the attitude of elementary school teachers towards inclusive education with reference teaching experience.
3. To study the attitude of elementary school teachers towards inclusive education with reference their locality.

Hypotheses of the Study

1. There is no significant difference in the mean attitude scores of elementary school teachers towards various aspects of inclusive education with reference to gender.
2. There is no significant difference in mean attitude scores of elementary school teachers towards various aspects of inclusive education with reference to their teaching experience.

3. There is no significant difference in mean attitude scores of elementary school teachers towards various aspects of inclusive education with reference to their working locality.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Design of the Study

Survey design of descriptive research was followed for conducting the study. The purpose of this present study is to explore the attitude of elementary school teachers towards inclusive education in relation to their gender, teaching experience and locality. Therefore, the design of the study was preferable type of descriptive research since it described the conditions that already existed.

Sample

Keeping objectives of the study in view, stratified random sampling technique was adopted for selection of the sample from the target population. A unit of 120 elementary school teachers was selected from Choudwar block and Cuttack city of Cuttack district in Odisha. The variables such as: gender (Male and female) and locality (urban and rural set up) were adopted while selecting sample; and teaching experience was categorized into two as below 10 years of teaching experience and above 10 years teaching experience. In this regard, 40 male teachers from urban area and 20 from rural area were selected. Total male teachers were 60 (n=60). Similarly, 40 female teachers from urban area and 20 from rural area were selected. Total female teachers were 60 (n=60). While teaching experience was taken as a variable, total 50 teachers found from the category of below 10 years of teaching experience and 70 from above 10 years teaching experience.

Tools Used for Data Collection

For collection of data, a self-developed five point attitude scale consisting 30 items/ statements was administered. The dimensions included in the scale were such as: aims and objectives, curricular and co-curricular activity, teacher-student relationship, method of teaching, achievement, teaching aids, evaluation. Favourable and unfavourable statements were having different scores in the five point scale. Scores for favourable statements: Strongly Agree-5, Agree-4, Undecided-3, Disagree-2, and Strongly Disagree-1. Scores for unfavourable statements: Strongly Agree-1, Agree-2, Undecided-3, Disagree-4, and Strongly Disagree-5. The full score varies from 30 to 150. The collected data were analysed quantitatively by using statistical techniques such as Mean, SD, t-test to find the significance of means.

RESULTS

The results are presented dimension-wise hereunder.

Attitude of teachers towards inclusive education with reference to gender

Table-1: Means, SDs and t-values of attitude of teachers towards inclusive education with reference to gender

Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	df	SED	t- value	Remarks
Male	80	120.75	47.21	118	7.646	2.48	Significant at 0.05 level of significance
Female	40	101.75	14.24				

Table-1 reveals that mean attitude score of male teachers (M_1) is 120.75 and mean attitude score of female teachers (M_2) is 101.75. The SD of attitude scores of Male teachers is 47.21 and SD of attitude scores of female teachers is 14.24. The calculated critical ratio 't' value is 2.48 with $df=118$ was found to be greater than table value of 't' (1.98). Hence, the 't' is found to be significant at 0.05 level of significance.

The null hypothesis-1 stated as: H_{01} . There is no significant difference in the mean attitude scores of secondary school teachers towards various aspects of inclusive education with reference to gender. Here, the 't' value was found to be significant. Thus, the hypothesis is rejected. The mean score of male teachers was 120.75 which were higher than mean score of

Based on the total scores and hypothesis-1 of the study (There is no significant difference in the mean attitude scores of elementary school teachers towards various aspects of inclusive education with reference to gender), the results are presented hereunder.

female teachers (101.75). It was assumed that Male teachers were having more positive attitude towards inclusive education than female teachers. It may be concluded as there is significant difference in the mean attitude scores of secondary school teachers towards various aspects of inclusive education with reference to gender.

Attitude of teachers towards inclusive education with reference to teaching experience

Based on the total scores and hypothesis-2 of the study (There is no significant difference in mean attitude scores of elementary school teachers towards various aspects of inclusive education with reference to their teaching experience), the results are presented hereunder.

Table-2: Means, SDs and t-values of attitude of teachers towards inclusive education with reference to teaching experience

Teachers' Teaching experience	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	df	SED	t-value	remarks
Teaching experience Above 10 years	70	143.21	13.09	118	3.552	3.3957 (3.40)	Significant at 0.05 level of significance
Teaching experience Below 10 years	50	131.15	25.39				

Table-2 depicts that mean attitude score of Male teachers (M_1) is 143.21 and mean attitude score of female teachers (M_2) is 131.15. The SD of attitude scores of Male teachers is 13.09 and SD of attitude scores Female teachers is 25.39. The calculated t value is 3.36 with $df=118$ is found to be greater than table value of t (1.98). Hence, the 't' is found to be significant at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis-2 stated as: H_{02} . There is no significant difference in mean attitude scores of secondary school teachers towards various aspects of inclusive education with reference to their teaching experience. Thus, the hypothesis is rejected. The mean score of male teachers is 143.21 which are higher than mean score of female teachers (131.15). It is assumed that Male teachers are having

more positive attitude towards inclusive education than female teachers. It may be concluded as there is significant difference in the mean attitude scores of secondary school teachers towards various aspects of inclusive education with reference to teaching experience.

Attitude of teachers towards inclusive education with reference to locality

Based on the total scores and hypothesis-2 of the study (There is no significant difference in mean attitude scores of elementary school teachers towards various aspects of inclusive education with reference to their working locality), the results are presented hereunder.

Table-3: Means, SDs and t-values of attitude of teachers towards inclusive education with reference to locality

Locality	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	df	SED	t- value	Remarks
Urban	60	70.03	66.85	118	10.494	4.4910	Significant at 0.05 level of significance
Rural	60	117.16	46.25				

Table-3 reveals that mean attitude score of teachers having urban background (M1) is 70.03 and mean attitude score of teachers having rural background (M2) is 117.16. The SD of attitude scores of teachers having urban background is 66.85 and SD of attitude scores of teachers having rural background is 46.25. The calculated t value is 4.49 with $df=118$ is found to be greater than table value of t (1.98). Hence, the 't' is found to be significant at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis-3 stated as: H_{03} . There is no significant difference in mean attitude scores of elementary school teachers towards various aspects of inclusive education with reference to their locality, is rejected. The mean score of teachers with urban background is 70.03 which is less than mean score of teachers with rural background (117.16). It is assumed that teachers with rural background are having more positive attitude towards inclusive education than teachers with urban background. It may be concluded as there is significant difference in the mean attitude scores of elementary school teachers towards various aspects of inclusive education with reference to their locality

MAJOR FINDINGS

1. Attitude of elementary school teachers differs significantly with regard to gender. ($M_1=120.75$; $M_2=101.75$; $SD_1=47.21$, $SD_2=14.24$, $t=2.48$, calculated $t >$ table t value at 0.05 level of significance)
2. Attitude of elementary school teachers differs significantly with regard to their teaching experience ($M_1=143.21$ $M_2=131.15$; $SD_1=13.09$, $SD_2=25.39$, $t=3.3957$ calculated $t >$ table t value at 0.05 level of significance)
3. Attitude of elementary school teachers differs significantly with regard to their locality such as urban and rural background. ($M_1=70.3$, $M_2=117.16$; $SD_1=66.85$ $SD_2=46.25$, $t=4.4910$. The calculated $t >$ table t value at 0.05 level of significance.

CONCLUSIONS

The current study was conducted among the elementary school teachers to study their attitude towards inclusive education. The study identified that the variables such as: teaching experience, gender and locality play significant role for developing attitude towards inclusive education. Regarding teaching experience, the study has similar findings that Clough and Lindsay [20] found. They found that younger teachers and those with fewer years of experience have been found to be more supportive of inclusion. Similar results found by Leyser *et al.*, [15] also found that teachers with 14 years or less teaching experience had a significantly higher positive score in their attitudes to inclusive than those with more than 14 years; and at par with also the findings of Kumar [22] which established a significant difference in attitude between low experience & high experience teachers towards inclusive education. Regarding gender variable, the findings has a similar trend with the findings of Beh-

Pajoo [14] and Leyser *et al.*, [15] where, the female teachers expressed more positive attitudes towards the idea of integrating children with behavior problems than male teachers. Additionally, the current study determined, locality as a determining factor for developing attitude towards inclusive education that corroborates with Kumar [22] which established a significant difference in attitude between rural and urban teachers towards inclusive education. This study also concluded that there is significant difference between male & female teachers and low experience & high experience teachers towards inclusive education; and Prasad and Rao [23] determined that locality had high influence in development of attitude of teachers towards inclusive education so also gender. Therefore, the stakeholders like administrators, policy maker as well as implementing agencies need to think over the matter that attitude of teachers at elementary school level as a vital aspect for implementation of inclusive education policy. As revealed from this study, locality, teaching experience and gender determine attitude of teachers. Hence, appropriate measures may be incorporated in the upcoming policies for smooth implementation of inclusive education.

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