FACTORS INFLUENCING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS’ ATTITUDE TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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Society has changed the direction of the way in which it educates its children. This trend, which has gained momentum since 1970s, is the merger of regular or general education with special education; known as inclusion. Now the schools have to accommodate all children and arrange education according to their needs. The term Special Educational Needs (SEN) refers to all those children whose needs arise out of their specific abilities or learning difficulties. Special Education Need children should be provided education with the majority of normal children. Many students with mild to severe learning disabilities are no longer being separated from their peers when it comes to education.

Students with learning disabilities students, according to the Individuals Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), must be educated in what is known as the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Many people have confused the concept of inclusion with another educational buzzword, “mainstreaming”. Mainstreaming also involves the placement of a special education student into general curriculum. However, whereas the practice of inclusion allows for accommodations to the special students academic program, mainstreamed students are expected to meet the same academic standards as the general education students.

The goal of inclusive education is to break down the barriers that separate general and special education and make the included students feel like, and actually become an active member of general education classroom.

According to Neary & Halvorsen (1995), “the best environment for learning are those in which students are motivated, learning is active and information is presented in a manner that recognizes the diversity of each student”.

1
General education teacher need to recognize, identify and understand that each student (special education or general education) attaches to the learning process at different levels and rates. Special education students bring with them into the classroom a sort of “instructional manual” on how to create an environment fitted to meet their individual needs.

One of the most significant stipulations that allow for successful inclusion of special education students is the attitudes or attitudes of the general education teacher regarding the inclusion of special education students into their classroom. Classrooms are now becoming more diverse with respect to students abilities, therefore sensitivity and awareness on the part of general education teacher is essential to promote successful inclusion. Many factors influence the general education teachers’ attitude towards inclusion. When general education teachers are provided proper training and supportive services through a collaborative consultant and designated time to meet willingness to participate in collaborative interactions, they can come at par with special teachers.

In attempting to fulfill the vision of inclusion, school personnel must realize that “regular and special educator will need to share responsibility of educating all of their students”. The first step in implementing this type of program involves assessing the needs of the school and those involved, mainly the teachers. Once the specific needs are determined, the next step is to make the needs a reality. Both the general and special education teachers must function as a team. The team or partnership should be such that “…Special education and general education cooperatively assess the educational needs of the students with learning problems and cooperatively develop educational strategies for meeting the needs” (Mayhew, 1994.) One way to achieve the cohesive joining of the two disciplines is through training. This “Training must be systematic, promoting collegial interaction and fostering teacher support system” (Bernal & Torres; 1990).

The importance of studying the factors that influence the regular education teachers’ attitude of special education students incorporated into a regular education classroom is critical to the success of inclusion. The regular education teacher must now accept an additional role. The professionals who had specialized training and had the desire to be involved with special need students once held this role. Many school administrators feel the resistance by the regular education teachers to include the special education students into their regular programme. Therefore, in order to assist the regular education teacher, knowledge and understanding of their attitudes or perception towards having special
education students included is critical. School administrators need to understand not only that regular education teachers have these attitudes or perceptions, but also more importantly, understand and acknowledge the reason(s) why. This information is helpful for several reasons.

First, it provides school administrators insight into as to what are the inclusion practices in the classroom. Second, it provides insight in to the teachers’ biases or prejudices of special education students in their classroom. Third, it provides the administrators first hand knowledge of the supports and services needed by the regular education teacher in order to provide an effective educational program for special education students within the regular education classroom. Having a more crystallized understanding of what is needed to make inclusion work; school administrators may find it necessary to review the supports and services offered to regular education teachers and implement necessary changes (i.e., providing resources in the area of staff development). Semmel et al. (1991) carried out a study entitled, "Teacher Perceptions of the Regular Education Initiative", where they after having surveyed 381 elementary educators in Illinois and California (both general and special), concluded that those educators were not dissatisfied with a special education system that operated pullout special educational programmes. Dickens and Smith(1995) conducted a study on the attitudes of both regular and special educators towards inclusion. Here both groups of respondents reveal more favorable attitudes towards inclusion after their in-service training. They concluded that staff development is the key to the success of inclusion. Johnson (1996) in a study described and analyzed the perceptions held by regular education teachers toward the placement of students with learning disabilities in their classrooms. Key findings of this study were that class size should be reduced to support inclusion and that teachers are basically enthusiastic about participating in inclusion. Teachers were also concerned about their level of training regarding modification and received effective teaching strategies for student with disabilities.

Ali, Mustapha and Jelas (2006) examined the attitude and perceived knowledge of mainstream and special education teachers of primary and secondary schools towards inclusive education in Malaysia. The main finding shows that, in general, teachers have positive attitudes towards inclusive education. They agreed that inclusive education enhances social interaction and inclusion among the students and thus, it minimizes negative stereotypes on special needs students. The findings also show that collaboration
between the mainstream and the special education teachers is important and that there should be a clear guideline on the implementation of inclusive education. The findings of the study have significant implications to the school administrators, teachers, and other stakeholders who directly and indirectly involved in implementing inclusive education.

Nayak (2008) examined the attitude of both parents and teachers towards inclusive education. Results of the study reported that teachers look forward to teaching in an inclusive environment and are ready to face the challenges. Result of the study also showed significant difference in the opinions of teachers of normal school.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

I. To study the difference between male and female elementary school teachers’ attitude towards inclusive education.

II. To study the difference between rural and urban elementary school teachers’ attitude towards inclusive education.

III. To study the difference between the attitude of teachers having more than 10 years and less than 10 years of experience towards inclusive education.

IV. To study the difference between trained (special education) and untrained teachers’ attitude towards inclusive education.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

I. There is no significant difference between male and female elementary school teachers’ attitude towards inclusive education.

II. There is no significant difference between rural and urban school teachers’ attitude towards inclusive education.

III. There is no significant difference between the attitude of teachers having more than 10 years and less than 10 years of experience towards inclusive education.

IV. There is no significant difference between trained and untrained teachers’ attitude towards inclusive education.

SAMPLE

The study was conducted on a sample of 40 elementary school teachers who were selected randomly from three districts i.e., Ambala, Kurukshetra and Karnal of Haryana.

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive survey method was used to gather data from the subjects.
TOOLS USED

Scale of Teachers Attitude Towards Inclusive Classroom (STATIC) developed and standardized by H. Keith Cochran was used to collect data from the subjects.

The present STATIC has 20 items consisting of statements regarding students with disabilities in the classroom. The instrument indicates the agreement level with each item by using a six-point Likert-type Scale. The possible ranges of responses in case of positive items are: 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. Incase of negative items, the investigator reversed the scoring. Score on the STATIC ranges from a low of 0 to a high of 100. Higher score on the STATIC reflects attitudes that are more positive or attitude of the practice of inclusive classrooms. Subjects who scored lower on the scale, tended to hold less positive or more negative attitude of inclusive classrooms.

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

RESULTS WITH RESPECT TO MALE AND FEMALE SCHOOL TEACHERS’ ATTITUDE TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

In order to find out the difference between the scores of male and female teachers, mean and S.D were calculated.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>S.Ed.</th>
<th>t-ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>67.33</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>7.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>61.16</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significant at .01 level

The t-ratio calculated in Table.1 was found to be 7.34 and the needed values to be significant at .01 level is 2.750 and at .05 level 2.042. So, the calculated t-ratio value is greater than the table value at .01 level of significance. Therefore, it is significant at .01 level. Hence, hypothesis no.1 i.e. there is no significant difference between male and female elementary school teachers’ attitude towards inclusive education stands rejected. It means
there exists significant difference in the male and female elementary school teachers’ attitude towards inclusive education. Again, the Mean scores of the Male (67.33), is greater than the Mean Scores of Female teachers (61.16). So, it can be interpreted that the male teachers’ attitude are more positive towards inclusive education as compared to their counterparts. It might be due to the reason that the male teachers are more aware about the inclusive education rather than their female counterparts.

![Graph Showing Difference between the Attitude of Male and Female Teachers towards Inclusive Education]

**RESULTS WITH RESPECT TO URBAN AND RURAL SCHOOLS TEACHERS’ ATTITUDE TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Locality</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>S.Ed.</th>
<th>t-ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>66.67</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>64.12</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant at .01 level

Table 2 shows that calculated value was 3.00, which is greater than table value (2.750) at .01 level of significance. Therefore, it is significant at .01 level. Hence, hypothesis No.2 i.e. there is no significant difference between urban and rural teachers’ attitude towards inclusive education is rejected. It indicates that there exists significant difference in urban and rural elementary teachers’ attitude towards inclusive education. The mean score of urban teachers’ attitude is (66.67) which is greater than the mean score of rural teachers’ attitude (64.12). So, it can be interpreted that the urban teachers’ attitude
towards inclusive education is more positive in comparison to rural teachers. This might be due to the fact that the urban teachers’ are more aware about inclusive education because in urban schools there are more facilities for inclusive education and all the teachers using internet and media are more aware than rural teachers.

![Graph showing difference between the attitude of urban and rural teachers towards inclusive education](image)

**RESULTS WITH RESPECT TO EXPERIENCE OF ELEMENTARY TEACHER’S ATTITUDE TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

**Table 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>S.Ed.</th>
<th>t-ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than 10 Years</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>64.29</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>1.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 10 Years</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>65.62</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant at .01 level

The calculated t-value shown in the table No.3 is 1.58, which is less than the table value (2.042) at .05 level. Therefore, it is insignificant at .05 level of significance. Hence, the hypothesis No-3 i.e. there is no significant difference between the attitude of teachers having more than 10 years and less than 10 years of experience towards inclusive education is accepted. It is clear from the above table that there exists no significant difference between teachers attitude having more than 10 years and less than 10 years of experience towards inclusive education. This might be due to the reason that both more experienced
teachers and less experienced teachers have more knowledge about the children-learning environment because of the present day practice of inclusion of special need children.

Graph Showing Difference between the Attitude of Teachers having More than 10 Years and Less than 10 Years of Experience towards Inclusive Education

RESULTS WITH RESPECT TO TRAINING OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS’ ATTITUDE TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Table.4
Significance of Difference between the Attitude of Trained and Untrained Teachers towards Inclusive Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>S. Ed.</th>
<th>t-ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trained</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>66.37</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>3.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Untrained</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>63.33</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant at .01 level

The t-ratio calculated in Table 4 was found to be 3.53, and the needed values to be significant at .05 and .01 levels are 2.042 and 2.750 respectively. Therefore, it is significant at both the levels. Hence, hypothesis no. 4 i.e. there is no significant different between trained and untrained teachers’ attitude towards inclusive education is rejected. It indicates that there exists significant difference between trained teachers’ and untrained teachers’ attitude towards inclusive education. Again, the mean score of trained teachers (66.37), is greater than the mean score of untrained teachers (63.33). So it can be interpreted that the teachers who are specially trained, their attitude is more positive towards inclusive
education as compared to their untrained counterparts. It might be due to the reason that the trained teachers know more about the inclusive education.

![Graph Showing Difference between the Attitude of Trained and Untrained Teachers towards Inclusive Education](image)

Above finding may be supported by the results of Forlin (1995) where it has been documented that teachers from the Education Support Centres (special centers that cater for the educational needs of children with SEN requiring limited or extended support) were more accepting of a child with intellectual and physical disabilities than educators from regular mainstream primary schools which co-existed on the same site. Forlin concluded that special education resource teachers tend to have a more positive attitude towards inclusion than their mainstream counterparts. Werts et al. (1996) found that training was one of the identified needs. Special and general educators have similar levels of need for resources, but special educators reported greater availability of resources than general educators. It might be due to reason that those who are trained have more positive attitude towards inclusive education.

The present study has its implications for teachers, parents, administrators or policy makers and government, since the present study is conducted on the attitude of the teachers toward inclusive education. The study has some practical implication for teachers. It has been found from the present study that the teachers are already aware about the desirability of inclusion of disabled children in the regular classroom, but still there is need to spread the awareness regarding inclusion of special need children in the regular classroom. It is necessary because the teachers belonging to rural origin exhibit less positive attitude towards inclusive education in comparison to their urban counterparts. There is also need to develop awareness about inclusive education among female teachers as they revealed less positive attitude towards inclusive education than the male teachers.

The present study bears implications for the parents as well as the community members. Disabled are no more considered differently able. The parents of the Special
Educational Needs (SEN) children should exhibit positive attitude for the education of their children in the regular classroom along with normal children, rather than placing them in segregated setting exclusively meant for a particular disability. The parents should also discuss the problem of their children openly instead of trying to hide their disability so that the teacher can take effective measures to bring the children to mainstream. Society plays a crucial role as far as the inclusion is concerned. It is the society, which aggravates the condition of the disabled children by labeling and stigmatizing them, which in turn develops poor self-concept and confidence among children. The members of the society should try to understand that these children are not burden on the nation rather they are the assets of the nation, which can be proved by giving them equal opportunity in every field.

The present study also has the implications for the administrators or policy makers. The administrators and policy makers should frame policies and laws, where maximum opportunity should be made available for the disabled children. Policies should be framed in such a way that the disabled children can have access to regular classroom, where they get plenty of opportunities to utilize their potentialities to the fullest possible extent. Again the present study essentially has some implications for the government also. Administrators simply can form the policies, but it is the government who executes and implements those in actual sense. Government should allocate more funds to implement the policies that are framed on behalf of disabled.

CONCLUSION

To conclude it can be said that inclusive education is a mandate today. In-fact, inclusive education is the need of the hour. It becomes a crucial issue in the field of education, which attracts all concerned. It is a matter of immense pleasure that inclusive education is in a progressive way all over the world, but still there is room for improvement. To remove the gap between inclusion and exclusion, teachers, parents, society, administrators and government should collectively work to implement the policies of inclusive education.
REFERENCES


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