Inclusive Education: Attitude among Elementary School Teacher Trainees

Abstract

Inclusive education can be defined as an approach that ensures not only the presence of all students in education in an inclusive classroom, but also assures their participation and achievement. Unlike in an integrated system, an inclusive system work towards changing the structure, system, culture, policies, practices and attitudes to be able to respond to the diversity among the students. Inclusive education is about designing learning environments that meets the unique needs of each individual, acknowledge, and appreciate the diverse nature of the human community. The present study aimed at finding out the attitude of teacher trainees towards inclusive education and to compare them with reference to their gender, teaching experience and their educational qualification. It was found that majority of teacher trainees had negative attitude towards inclusive education, that more experienced teachers have more favourable attitude towards inclusive education than less experienced teachers and that post graduate teachers have better attitude towards inclusive education than undergraduate teachers.

I. INTRODUCTION

The fundamental principle of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Inclusive
schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities. There should be a continuum of support and services to match the continuum of special needs encountered in every school (Salamanca Framework for Action, 1994). 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. General education teacher needs 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. Inclusion is a global trend in education that requires the involvement of and collaboration between educational professionals. While educational professionals accept the educational rights of children with disabilities and the principle of inclusion - that schools should provide for the needs of all the children in their communities, regardless of ability and disability - there remain significant barriers to achieving these ideals.

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. 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 raising awareness at grass-roots level (including for parents), to teacher education (including sensitizing teachers to listen to the children’s perspectives), to administrative capacity-building, to policy-making.

II. RATIONALE

Teachers are seen to be very essential in the implementation of inclusive education. They are the key to the success of inclusive education and they are the most significant person in the process of including children with special needs into the regular classes. Inclusive education can only be successful if teachers play an active role in the process of including CWSN in the class. It is important to examine the attitudes of teachers toward including students with special needs into regular classrooms as their perceptions may influence their behavior towards such students. The success of an inclusive program may be at risk if regular classroom teachers hold negative attitude toward the inclusion of students with
disabilities. Negative perceptions of inclusive education by teachers may become an impediment for the success of inclusive education. For that reason, it is essential that teachers should have positive attitudes towards inclusive education. Therefore, the present study to find out teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education has been taken up by the investigators.

III. OBJECTIVES

1. To find out the attitude of elementary school teacher trainees towards inclusive education.
2. To compare the attitude of elementary school teacher trainees towards inclusive education with reference to their gender.
3. To compare the attitude of elementary school teacher trainees towards inclusive education with reference to their length of teaching experience.
4. To compare the attitude of elementary school teacher trainees towards inclusive education with reference to their educational qualification.

III. HYPOTHESES, SAMPLING & TOOLS

1. Hypothesis: There are no significant differences in the attitude of elementary school teacher trainees towards inclusive education with reference to their gender, teaching experience, and educational qualification.

2. Sample of the study: The sample for the present study consists of 100 elementary school teacher trainees (53 males & 47 females) who were undergoing training at DIET.

3. Tool used: An attitude scale towards Inclusive Education developed by the investigators was used for collection of data.

IV. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Analysis was done on the basis of the objective as follows:

Objective - 1: To find out the attitude of elementary school teacher trainees towards inclusive education:

The mean score of the elementary teacher trainee's attitude is found to be 86.14. Teachers who score above the mean were considered to have favorable attitudes towards inclusive education, while teachers who scored below the mean were considered as having unfavorable attitudes towards inclusive education. The following table no. 1 shows the number and percentages of teacher trainees' attitudes towards inclusive education.

Table - 1: Percentages of teacher trainee’s attitude towards inclusive education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>No of teachers (100)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Favourable attitude</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfavourable attitude</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table 1 shows that out of 100 elementary school teacher trainees, 40% of teachers have favorable attitudes towards inclusive education, and the rest 60% have unfavorable attitudes.
Discussion: Van Reusen et al., (2001) found that teachers who have not undertaken training regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities, may exhibit negative attitudes toward such inclusion. Most of the teacher trainees in the present study were teachers who have not undergone any previous training in the field of inclusive education. This may be the reason why majority of the teacher trainees in the present study were found to have negative attitude towards inclusive education.

Objective-2: To compare the attitude of elementary school teacher trainees towards inclusive education with reference to their gender

The following table no. 2 shows the gender difference in the attitude of elementary school teacher trainees towards inclusive education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>MD</th>
<th>SEM</th>
<th>t- value</th>
<th>Sig. level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>85.60</td>
<td>10.798</td>
<td>1.141</td>
<td>2.106</td>
<td>.589</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>86.74</td>
<td>10.248</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in Table 1 there is no significant difference between male and female elementary school teacher trainees in their attitude towards inclusive education.

Discussion: Although not statistically significant, the gender difference suggests the possibility that female teacher trainee’s attitudes may be more positive towards inclusion than that of the male teacher trainees. In line with the present findings. Avramidis et al. (2000) in their study of attitude of teachers towards inclusive education and also came to the conclusion that gender does not contribute to significant differences.

Objective-3: To compare the attitude of elementary school teacher trainees towards inclusive education with reference to their length of teaching experience

Table 3: Teachers were categorized into three groups on the basis of their teaching experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching experience</th>
<th>Categorized group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Above 10 years</td>
<td>More experienced teacher trainees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 5 - 10 years</td>
<td>Middle experienced teacher trainees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below 5 years</td>
<td>Less experienced teacher trainees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Difference in the attitude towards inclusive education between more experienced teacher trainees and middle experienced teacher trainees:

The following table no. 3 shows the difference in the attitude towards inclusive education between more experienced and middle experienced teacher trainees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>MD</th>
<th>SEM</th>
<th>t- value</th>
<th>Sig. level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More experienced</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>91.25</td>
<td>9.835</td>
<td>4.886</td>
<td>3.695</td>
<td>1.323</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle experienced</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>86.36</td>
<td>12.934</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows that there is no significant difference between the more experienced and middle experienced teacher trainees in their attitude towards inclusive education.

(b) Difference in the attitude towards inclusive education between more experienced teacher trainees and less experienced teacher trainees:
The following table no. 4 shows the difference in the attitude towards inclusive education between more experienced and less experienced teacher trainees.

**Table -5: Comparison between more experienced and less experienced teacher trainees towards inclusive education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>MD</th>
<th>SEM</th>
<th>t- value</th>
<th>Sig. level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More experienced</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>92.25</td>
<td>9.835</td>
<td>6.508</td>
<td>2.735</td>
<td>2.380</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less experienced</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>84.74</td>
<td>9.428</td>
<td>6.508</td>
<td>2.735</td>
<td>2.380</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table no. 5 shows that the difference in the attitude towards inclusive education of more experienced teacher trainees and less experienced teacher trainees is significant at .05 level. This means more experienced teacher trainees possessed a more favourable attitude towards inclusive education than the less experienced teacher trainees.

**Discussion:** Training in the field of special education appears to enhance understanding and improve attitudes regarding inclusion (Powers, 2002). One possible reason why the present study found that teachers with more teaching experience have more favourable attitude towards inclusive education than teachers with less teaching experience could be because teachers who have had a long teaching experience acquire greater competence as a result of increased training in the field of inclusive education, while less experienced teachers may have inadequate knowledge with regard to instructional techniques and curricular adaptations, which contributes to decreased confidence and a less favourable attitude towards inclusive education.

(c) Difference in the attitude towards inclusive education between middle experienced teacher trainees and less experienced teacher trainees:

The following table no. 6 shows the difference in the attitude towards inclusive education between middle experienced and less experienced teacher trainees.

**Table- 6: Comparison between middle experienced and less experienced teacher trainees towards inclusive education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>MD</th>
<th>SEM</th>
<th>t- value</th>
<th>Sig. level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middle experienced</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>86.36</td>
<td>12.934</td>
<td>1.622</td>
<td>3.006</td>
<td>.539</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less experienced</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>84.74</td>
<td>9.428</td>
<td>1.622</td>
<td>3.006</td>
<td>.539</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Between the middle experienced teacher trainees and less experienced teacher trainees, the difference in their attitude towards inclusive education is not significant at any level as can be seen in Table no. 6.

**Objective- 4:** To compare the attitude of elementary school teacher trainees towards inclusive education with reference to their educational qualification

The following table no. 6 shows the difference in the attitude of elementary school teacher trainees towards inclusive education with reference to their educational qualification.

**Table- 6: Comparison between post graduate and undergraduate teacher trainees towards inclusive education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>MD</th>
<th>SEM</th>
<th>t- value</th>
<th>Sig. level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post graduates</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>90.25</td>
<td>7.698</td>
<td>4.893</td>
<td>2.358</td>
<td>2.167</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under graduates</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>85.36</td>
<td>10.819</td>
<td>4.893</td>
<td>2.358</td>
<td>2.167</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table no. 6 illustrates that there is significant difference in the attitude of elementary school teacher trainees towards inclusive education with reference to their educational qualification. Post graduate teacher trainees have higher mean scores than the undergraduate teacher trainees indicating that post graduate teacher trainees have a more favourable attitude towards inclusive education than the undergraduate teacher trainees.

Discussion: Basically, higher education enable individuals to expand their knowledge and skills, express their thoughts clearly in speech and in writing, grasp abstract concepts and theories, and increase their understanding of the world and their community. The reason why post graduate teachers show more positive attitude towards inclusive education than the undergraduate teachers in this study, could be because post graduate teachers are able to expand their knowledge and skills and are able to grasp the true concept of inclusive education as compared to the undergraduate teachers.

V. SUGGESTION
The following recommendations are suggested in the light of the present findings:
1. The investigators recommend the development of workshops for teachers about students with disabilities and instructional strategies to support these students. Increasing teachers’ knowledge and awareness about these students could be an important step in implementing.
2. Moreover, developing a degree program in special education in the university could be a fundamental step toward providing a thorough education to the future teachers of students with disabilities, thus changing and improving attitudes toward this population of students.
3. 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.

V. CONCLUSION
The present study is conducted on elementary school teacher trainees undergoing training at DIET. Some of them have been working at the elementary schools for more than 10 years; these teachers seem to have undergone some sort of training in the area of inclusive education, making them more positive in their attitude towards inclusive education. Teachers who had been in the teaching profession for less than 5 years are more negative in their attitude towards inclusive education indicating that they had less training in the area of inclusive education. This shows how important training in the area of inclusive education has been, since training seems to have changed teachers attitude towards children with special needs.

VI. REFERENCES


[9] [http://www.crosswalk.com/family/homeschool/why-is-higher-education-important-1367463.html](http://www.crosswalk.com/family/homeschool/why-is-higher-education-important-1367463.html)


[12] [http://uzspace.uzulu.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10530/744/Educators’ Attitude Towards Inclusive EducationJNMashiya.pdf?sequence=1](http://uzspace.uzulu.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10530/744/Educators’ Attitude Towards Inclusive EducationJNMashiya.pdf?sequence=1)

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