

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN INDIA: THE PERCEPTIONS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

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Abstract

Inclusion is an effort to make sure that diverse learners those with disabilities and normal children get education together under a roof in the same compound and same class room irrespective of their strengths and weaknesses. It is clear that education policy in India has gradually increased the focus on children with special needs, and that inclusive education in regular schools has become a primary policy objective. In almost every country, inclusive education has emerged as one of the most the dominant issues in education system. With the release of the Salamanca Statement in 1994 (UNESCO), a large number of developing countries started reformulating their policies to promote the inclusion of students with disabilities into mainstream schools. The idea of inclusion is further supported by the United Nation's Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for Person with Disability Proclaiming Participation and Equality for all. At the Jometin World Conference (1990) in Thailand, the goals for 'Education for All' were set and it was proclaimed that every person (child, youth and adult) shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities which would meet their basic learning needs. The researches show that teachers in inclusive settings collaborate more and spend more time planning, learn new techniques from one another, participate in more professional development activities, show a greater willingness to change, and use a wider range of creative strategies to meet students' needs. All school going children, whether they are disabled or not, have the right to get education as they are the future citizens of the country. Today it is widely accepted that inclusion maximizes the potential of the vast majority of students, ensures their rights, and is the preferred educational approach for the 21st century.

Keys Words: Perception, Inclusive Education, Inclusion;

INTRODUCTION

In India the first attempt to educate handicapped children were made in the nineteenth century with the establishment of the first school for the hearing impaired in Mumbai in 1885 followed by the first school for the visually impaired in Amritsar in 1887. India had just 32 schools for the blind in (1947) A.D. The number rose to 170 in (1980) A.D. Now there are 243 schools for the visually impaired in the country. The number of schools for the hearing impaired was only 35 in (1947) A. D. but had risen to 180 in (1980) A. D. The present figure of schools for the hearing impaired is about 478 as per the rehabilitation council of India (RCI) directory of which 97 are secondary schools. The largest number are in the state of Maharashtra contains 139 schools. According to the estimates of national survey organization, the number of disabled persons is about 120 lakhs. The government of India has established several special institutes for the handicapped such as, national institute for visually handicapped at Dehradun, national institute of handicapped at Mumbai, national institute of orthopedic at Kolkata and national institute of mentally retarded at Hyderabad. It is estimated that there are two million disabled children needs special care viz. improvement of health serviced, nutritional standards, mother care, and effective measures to prevent disability. The National Policy of Education (1986) planned to establish 10,000 schools for these children with 130 to 200 children in each.

India has been struggling since Independence to raise the standard of living of its masses. The success of such efforts along with other factors depends upon the quality of man-power which in turn is related to the standard of education in

the country. No doubt, in every successive national plan, some efforts are made but in fact, success of educational process can only be realized through the responsible teachers.

The increasing integration of many disabled children into mainstream education since the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001) has led to an examination of the physical and educational needs of disabled children in and around the school buildings. The disabled children included in the study are referred to as the 'focus children' of the study. A disability may be physical, cognitive, mental, sensory, emotional, and developmental or some combination of these. Disabilities are an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. Impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Inclusive education is based on fundamental human rights. The efforts of the Government of India over the last five decades have been towards providing comprehensive range of services towards education of children with disabilities. In 1974, the centrally sponsored scheme for Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) was introduced to provide equal opportunities to children with disabilities in general schools and facilitate their retention. The government initiatives in the area of inclusive education can be traced back to National Educational Policy, 1986, which recommended, as a goal, 'to integrate the handicapped with the general community at all levels as equal partners, to prepare them for normal growth and to enable them to face life with courage and confidence'. The Rehabilitation Council of India Act 1992 initiated a training programme for the development of professionals to respond to the needs of students with disabilities. The National Policy for Persons with Disability, 2006, which attempts to clarify the framework under which the state, civil society and private sector must operate in order to ensure a dignified life for persons with disability and support for their caretakers. Most recent advancement is the Right of Children for Free and Compulsory Education (2009) which guarantees right to free and compulsory education to all children between ages six to fourteen. For education for a child with disability, the act has to be read in conjunction with Chapter V of the Persons with Disability Act, 1995.

In India, National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) joined hands with UNICEF and launched Project Integrated Education for Disabled Children (PIED) in the year 1987, to strengthen the integration of learners with disabilities into regular schools. In recent years, the concept of inclusive education has been broadened to encompass not only students with disabilities, but also all students who may be disadvantaged. This broader understanding of curriculum has paved the way for developing the National Curriculum Framework (NCF-2005) that reiterates the importance of including and retaining all children in school through a programme that reaffirms the value of each child and enables all children to experience dignity and the confidence to learn.

DEFINITIONS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Inclusive education has been defined at various ways that addresses the learning needs of the differently abled children. Inclusive education means that schools should be include all children regardless of the physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. It should include all types of children such as gifted, backward, and mentally retarded, learning disabilities, Socio- economic disadvantages students etc. It is an approach that fulfills the learning needs of all children, youth and adults who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion from the educational system. Inclusive education means that all students attend and are welcomed by their neighborhood schools in age-appropriate, regular classes and are supported to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of the life of the school (www.inclusionbc.org).

Inclusive Education (IE) is defined as a process of addressing the diverse needs of all learners by reducing barriers to, and within the learning environment. It means attending the age appropriate class of the child's local school, with individually tailored support (UNICEF 2007). Inclusive education is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to

reach out to all learners. Inclusion is an educational approach and philosophy that provides all students greater opportunities for academic and social achievement. This includes opportunities to participate in the full range of social, recreational, arts, sports, music, day care and afterschool care, extra-curricular, faith based, and all other activities.

According to **Stainback and stainback (1992)**, Inclusive education may be defined as “A palace where everyone belongs, is accepted. Supports and is supported by his or her peers and others members of the schools community in the course of having his or her educational needs met.

According to **M.F.Gingrec (1997)**, Inclusive education is a set value, principles, and Practice that seeks more effective and meaningful education for all students, regardless of whether they have exceptionally labels or not.

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M. Manivannan (2001) says that, Inclusive education is the implementation of policy and process that allows all children to participate in all programme. Policy means that disabled children should be accepted without any restrictions in all the educational programme meant for others children. The process of inclusion denotes the way in the system, makes it welcoming to all.

According to **Alqurani & Gut (2012)**, Inclusive education when all students, regardless of any challenges that may have, are placed in age-appropriate general education classes that in their own neighbourhood schools to receive high quality instruction, interventions and supports that enable them to meet success in the core-curriculum.

UNESCO- defines inclusive education “as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education”.

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Inclusion means to educate the children with disabilities in ordinary classroom. Inclusive education is a system of education in which all the students with special education needs are enrolled in general classes and is provided with special supportive services. This type of education is based on the diverse needs of pupils. In this system of education, there is a specialist who assists the classroom teachers in developing the best strategies for teaching those students who have learning disabilities, sensory impairments such as problems with visions and hearing etc. It makes use of different styles of teaching and provides quality education through appropriate use of resources.

NATURE OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Inclusive education is when all students, regardless of any challenges they may have, are placed in age-appropriate general education classes that are in their own neighborhood schools to receive high quality instruction, interventions, and supports that enable them to meet success in the core curriculum (Bui, Quirk, Almazan, & Valenti, 2010; Alquraini & Gut, 2012). Inclusive education is about how we develop and design our schools, classrooms, programs and activities so that all students learn and participate together.

A successful inclusive learning community fosters collaboration, problem solving, self-directed and critical discourse, which allows students with extra-ordinary gifts and talents to move at their natural learning rate, to move at the best of their ability, specific learning challenges to receive creative and effective support to maximize the success.

All children benefit from inclusive education. It allows them to:

- Develop individual strengths with high and appropriate expectations for each and every child to work on individual goals while participating in the classroom activities with other students of their own age.

- Involve the parents in their wards' education and the activities organized in an institution.
- Foster a school culture of respect and belongingness. It provides opportunities to learn about and accept individual differences, lessening the impact of harassment and bullying.
- Positively affect both their school and community to appreciate diversity and inclusion on a broader level and develop friendships with a wide variety of other children, each with their own individual needs and abilities.

Inclusive schools put the values upon pluralism, tolerance, and equality into action where teachers provide appropriate individualized supports and services to all students without the stigmatization that comes with separation. Research shows that most students learn and perform better when exposed to the richness of the general education.

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Inclusive education is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners. Inclusion is an educational approach and philosophy that provides all students greater opportunities for academic and social achievement. This includes opportunities to participate in the full range of social, recreational, arts, sports, music, day care and afterschool care, extra-curricular, faith based, and all other activities. Several mainstream teachers view the philosophy of inclusive education as an exciting challenge, the stresses associated with its introduction being seen as life-sustaining, enjoyable and beneficial. On the other hand, it has been noted that the experience of being an inclusive educator is challenging enough to cause teachers to become physiologically and psychologically stressed. Positive attitudes are considered to encourage the inclusion of students with disabilities into regular classrooms, while negative attitudes support low achievement and poor acceptance of students with disabilities into mainstream settings. Inclusive education can only be successful if teachers are part of the team driving this process. It is important to examine the attitudes of mainstream teachers toward the inclusion of students with disabilities into regular settings as their perceptions may influence their behavior toward and acceptance of such students. Negative perceptions of inclusive education may become obstacles, as general education teachers attempt to include students with disabilities.

The school and classroom operate on the premise that students with disabilities are as fundamentally competent as students without disabilities. Therefore, all students can be full participants in their classrooms and in the local school community. Successful inclusive education happens primarily through accepting, understanding, and attending to student differences and diversity, which can include the physical, cognitive, academic, social, and emotional. Inclusive education is about ensuring access to quality education for all students by effectively meeting their diverse needs in a way that is responsive, accepting, respectful and supportive. Students participate in the education program in a common learning environment with support to diminish and remove barriers and obstacles that may lead to exclusion.

Inclusive education is carried out in a common learning environment, an educational setting where students from different backgrounds and with different abilities learn together in an inclusive environment. Common learning environments are used for the majority of the students' regular instruction hours and may include classrooms, libraries, gym, performance theatres, music rooms, cafeterias, playgrounds and the local community. A common learning environment is not a place where students with intellectual disabilities or other special needs learn in isolation from their peers.

Effective common learning environments:

- Enable each student to fully participate in the learning environment that is designed for all students and is shared with peers in the chosen educational setting;
- Provide a positive climate, promote a sense of belonging and ensure student progress toward appropriate personal, social, emotional and academic goals;
- Are responsive to individual learning needs by providing sufficient levels of support and applying student-centred teaching practices and principles.

• **Common learning environment:** an inclusive environment where instruction is designed to be delivered to students of mixed ability and with their peer group in the community school, while being responsive to their individual needs as a learner, and used for the majority of the students' regular instruction hours.

Inclusion in education is an approach to educating students with special educational needs. Under the inclusion model, students with special needs spend most or all of their time with non-disabled students. Implementation of these practices varies. Schools most frequently use them for selected students with mild to severe special needs.

IMPORTANTANCE OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Inclusive system provides a greater chance to educational system in all children and instrumental in changing inequitable attitude. Schools provide the outline for a child's first relationship with the outside world of their families; facilitate the development of social relationship and interaction. Respect and understanding grow when students of diverse abilities and backgrounds play, socialize, and learn together.

Here are key findings about the benefits of inclusion for children and families:

- **Families' visions of a typical life for their children can come true:** All parents want their children to be accepted by their peers, have friends and lead "regular" lives. Inclusive settings can make this vision a reality for many children with disabilities.
- **Children develop a positive understanding of themselves and others:** When children attend classes that reflect the similarities and differences of people in the real world, they learn to appreciate diversity. Respect and understanding grow when children of differing abilities and cultures play and learn together.
- **Friendships develop:** Schools are important places for children to develop friendships and learn social skills. Children with and without disabilities learn with and from each other in inclusive classes.
- **Children learn important academic skills:** In inclusive classrooms, children with and without disabilities are expected to learn to read, write and do math. With higher expectations and good instruction children with disabilities learn academic skills.
- **All children learn by being together:** Because the philosophy of inclusive education is aimed at helping all children learn, everyone in the class benefits. Children learn at their own pace and style within a nurturing learning environment.

Full inclusion puts students with special needs in standard classroom environments without testing or demonstration of skills. Individuals that support full inclusion believe that all children belong in the same classroom environment no matter what.

When a teacher performs the role of an inclusive teacher it will help in following ways:

- It is helpful in inclusion of children with special needs into general classroom.
- It fulfills the commitment to education for all and provides sense of success and rewarding experience to the students.
- It is helpful in formulating instructional objectives as per the level of learners and selecting the teaching learning materials as per the learner's need.
- It helps in monitoring whole teaching –learning process to make it effective and learner centered.
- It is helpful in measuring and promoting learners' accomplishments by improving instructional efficiency as well as making congenial environment for learner.
- It is used to apply remedial measures to the needy learners and helpful in progress of poor performers by providing

diagnostic descriptive data.

NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The disabled people in India are so large, their problems are so complex, available resources so scarce and social attitudes so damaging, it is only legislation which can eventually bring about a substantial change in a uniform manner. The impact of well-directed legislation in the long run would be profound and liberating (p.273-274). Baquer & Sharma (1997).

The Persons with Disabilities (PWD) Act, 1995 ushered in a new era for the education of children with disabilities in India. A major emphasis of this law was the inclusion and full participation of students with disabilities in regular schools. It guaranteed non-discrimination and removal of barriers, both physical and psychological; to facilitate the inclusion of students with special needs into regular schools. It urged policy makers, educators, parents and other service providers to consider the premise that special education should be seen not only in the context of separate education but also as an integral part of regular education. It aimed for the infusion of a research-based knowledge of special education and the systematic application of sound instructional practices for the education of students with disabilities who are placed in regular education classrooms. Thus the acceptance of social justice, equity and school effectiveness reform literature from the west provided a sound rationale for the inclusion of students with disabilities into mainstream education in India.

A working draft of the PWD Act, 2011 is prepared by the Center for Disability Studies, University of Hyderabad and is due to pass in 2012 (Deccan Herald, Jan. 14, 2012). The changes in the new draft legislation have been made in respect of several areas including right to education and provision for inclusive education. This has arisen because in spite of the effort, actions demanded by the PWD Act 1995, including educational provisions for students with disabilities were still inadequate. Several studies have shown that there is inadequacy of teacher training in India especially pertaining to inclusive education provisions for all students (Bindal & Sharma, 2010; Sharma & Desai, 2002). Other studies show that teachers who have received training are still concerned about implementing inclusion (Sharma & Desai, 2002) and yet some are able to translate training into actual instructional practices to promote inclusion of those with disabilities (David & Kuyini, 2012).

Many years ago, special classes were created for students with special needs. Special teachers felt that if they could just teach these students separately, in smaller groups, they could help them to catch up. However, the reality is that students in segregated special education classes have fallen further and further behind. Over time, we have learned that inclusive education is a better way to help all students succeed.

Today it is widely accepted that inclusion maximizes the potential of the vast majority of students, ensures their rights, and is the preferred educational approach for the 21st century. Our thinking and acceptance has evolved rapidly over the last century, and continues to evolve, in response to federal and state law, along with our changing social and political beliefs. When compulsory public education began near the turn of the century, no public school programs existed for students with disabilities.

Right to Education Act 2009 ensures education to all children irrespective of their caste, religion, ability, and so on. It is essential to build an inclusive society through an inclusive approach. Inclusion is more than a method of educating students with disabilities. It stresses that each child, regardless of the intensity and severity of his or her disabilities, is a valued member of society and is capable of participating in that society. A good inclusive education is one that allows all the students to participate in all aspects of classroom equally or close to equal. To meet the challenges, the involvement and cooperation of educators, parents, and community leaders is vital for the creation of better and more inclusive schools. The Government of India is trying to improve its education system focusing on the inclusive approach. The challenges can be overcome by raising awareness of human rights in communities and publicizing positive examples of disabled children and adults succeeding in inclusive education and in life beyond school as a result. We need to develop an inclusive design of learning to make the education joyful for all children so that the education for them is welcoming, learner friendly and beneficial and they feel as a part of it not apart from it. The study will help to know that how much teachers are responsible towards their profession what they should perceive for inclusive education.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The study under investigation is entitled as “*Inclusive Education in India: The Perceptions of Secondary School Teachers*”.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

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. Therefore the main objective of the study is to know the perceptions of secondary school teachers towards inclusive education.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Research design is basically a mapping strategy which sets up the framework for the whole study. It tells us what observations to make and how to analyze. The present study is a descriptive survey which aims at analyzing the perceptions of secondary school teachers toward inclusive education.

Population and Sample of the Study

Population for the present study comprised of teachers teaching in secondary schools of Faridabad district. The sample for the present study consisted of 320 teachers teaching in secondary schools of Faridabad district of Haryana. The teachers were selected by stratified random sampling technique from 16 secondary schools located at urban and rural area of Faridabad district. The secondary schools were selected by simple random sampling technique.

TOOL USED IN THE STUDY

Teacher’s Attitude Scale towards Inclusive Education standardized and validated by **Vishal Sood** and **Arti Anand** was employed for data collection for present study.

DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study is delimited to;

1. Secondary school teachers only.
2. Secondary schools located at Faridabad district of Haryana state only.
3. The 320 teachers, working in secondary schools located at urban and rural area of Faridabad district of Haryana.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Analysis means the categorizing, ordering, manipulating and summarizing of data to obtain answers to research questions. Bare facts and objective data have no meaning unless these are analyzed and interpreted in the light of accepted standards and assumptions. Analysis of data means studying the tabulated material in order to determine inherent facts or meanings.

Interpretation takes the result of analysis, makes inference pertinent to the research relations studied, and draws conclusions about these relations. Interpretation is by no means a mechanical process. It calls for a critical examination of the results of one's analysis in the light of all the limitations of his/her data gathering.

In the present study the investigator calculated mean, standard deviation and t-test for analysis and interpretation of the data.

SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

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.

Teacher training institutions should emphasize teaching skills that would enhance prospective teacher's capacities to support students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms, as well as it will expose them to practicum experiences that involve such students. The India government is trying to adopt this method. This is essential as a way of developing better multi-disciplinary collaboration around inclusive education implementation in India.

The major findings of the study are given below:

- Majority of secondary school teachers perceives that inclusive education is favourable for all round development of all students irrespective of their normality or disability. Only a few of them were extremely unfavourable towards inclusive system of education. Such teachers should be motivated to change their perception towards inclusive education.
- The male and the female teachers differ in their perception towards inclusive education. Female teachers of secondary schools were found to be more favourable than the male teachers of secondary schools.
- The private school teachers were found to be more favourably towards inclusive education in comparison to their counterpart the government school teachers.
- The teachers of urban secondary schools were found to be more favourable in towards inclusive education than the teachers of rural secondary schools.
- Urban teachers are supposed to avail more facilities in handling an inclusive class situation and considerably play a role of an effective teacher in teaching of students in an inclusive system.

CONCLUSION

Inclusive education is one of the most educational programmes in education system. It gives equal opportunity to all children to learn together in regular class room without being any discrimination between normal children and the children with special needs. The result of the study shows that majority of secondary school teachers were found under moderate attitude towards inclusive education. So this result indicates that the implementation of inclusive education at the secondary school teachers are needed to apply knowledge and application based programmed. Therefore, it is important that the teachers must have the clear ideas about various issues and challenges of inclusive education like human resource deficit, lack of collaboration between special teachers and regular school teachers, and the most significant is inappropriate the training programmes in inclusive education. Teachers should perceive inclusive education as favourable as a good practice in this field. Restructure of the curricula, more help from support teachers, more time for preparing the educational activities, decreasing the number of students in one class, creating and developing opportunities for interactive partnerships between teachers, students, support teachers and parents and so on can make inclusive education more effective. The reform of the curriculum should be made in parallel with a proper training for teachers regarding their knowledge of inclusion and its principles.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Inclusive education helps the disabled children to develop a sense of pride in their work because they actually feel like they accomplished something. The Government of India needs to bridge the gaps in their education system to build a strong system of inclusive education in the country. So, there are following measures for better implementation of Inclusive Education in India.

1. A policy of inclusion needs to be implemented in all schools and throughout Indian education system (NCF, 2005). Schools need to become centers that prepare children for life and ensure that all children, especially the differently abled children from marginalized sections, and children in difficult circumstances get the maximum benefit of this critical area of education.
2. A school-based support team should develop strategies for the whole school to meet the needs of learners with special educational needs. This team should also be a resource for teachers experiencing problems in their classrooms.
3. As a system, inclusive education should be flexible. Its flexibility must be reflected in the methods and materials used to give these children the widest possible access to the regular curriculum.
4. Bringing special children into mainstream requires adjustments that schools need to make in advance. Transport facilities should be altered, so that these children can move around with relative ease. Architecturally, there should be ramps and wheelchair access constructed in service areas such as toilets.
5. Differently abled children should be treated equally as the normal children and instead of looking at them in sympathy their talents and abilities should be recognised for their self-respect and welfare of the society.
6. Families with children without disabilities should develop relationships with families with children with disabilities and be able to make a contribution.
7. Periodic evaluation of the training programmes and constant updating to meet the challenges of changing trends in special education should be part of the planning of teacher preparation.
8. Student-oriented components, such as medical and educational assessment, books and stationery, uniforms, transport allowance, reader allowance and stipend for girls, support services, assistive devices, boarding the lodging facility, therapeutic services, teaching learning materials, etc. should provide according to need of the students.
9. The preparation of teachers for rural special education programmes should be planned differently, as the aim of these programmes would be to integrate disabled persons in their own environment and community.
10. The reform of the curriculum should be made in parallel with a proper training for teachers regarding their knowledge of inclusion and its principles. The curriculum for each of the programmes should be carefully developed by experts for practicing work in an inclusive system of education.
11. An inclusive school must enable education structures, systems and methodologies to meet the needs of all children, particularly those who face the greatest barriers to achieving their right to education.

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