Exploring the Knowledge and Attitude of Primary School Teachers on Inclusive Education

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Abstract

The present paper exploring the level of knowledge and attitude of primary school teachers on inclusive education. The study carried out in a descriptive in nature and the universe of the study includes all the primary school teachers working in Thrissur Corporation. The researcher adopted a simple random method of sampling with 55 samples. The researcher included only the teachers who are working in the government school and excluded the private as well as aided schools. The questionnaire was prepared based on the objectives which consist of three parts; socio-demographic profile, questions to assess knowledge and questions to assess attitude. The results of the study depict that there is a high level of knowledge and attitude among the primary school teachers on inclusive education.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Knowledge, Attitude, Primary School Teachers, Child Friendly School

Introduction

“Inclusive education as a landmark of education for all is a pressing need of this day and age. It takes each educator and everyone’s responsibility and implication to make it a reality that helps everyone learns and grow”.

EcaterinaVrasmaș

Children with Special Education Needs (CSEN) in India have so far been mostly educated in the ‘segregated’ model. Integrated education has been in practice in some schools for children with milder forms of impairment. The Right to Education Act (2010) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (2001) are two key policies that have brought about a lot of awareness among the varied stakeholders involved in the education of CSEN (Subramanian L, Manickaraj S, 2017). On a positive view of difference and has at its heart the principle that all pupils, including those who are ‘different’, are considered to be valued and
respected members of the school community. (Zoniou-Sideria & Vlachou, 2006). Inclusive education differs from its predecessor ‘integrated education’, where the latter can be described as “the process of moving children from special education settings into regular classrooms where they undertake most, if not all of their schooling” (Ashman and Elkins, 1998). Here the students are required to and prepared for adapting and accommodating to the existing normal curriculum (Carrington and Holm, 2005) and the special education system is a part of the of the general education.

Inclusive education can be very effective in combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all. It provides an opportunity for cooperative learning and teamwork at a very young age, ultimately resulting in a holistic learning of academic and life skills including social skills within the curricular framework. It makes education cost-effective by including all stakeholder’s participation and involvement (Gillies and Carrington, 2004). The benefits of such an inclusive education for CSEN include positive social, communication and personal development. It may bring about moderate improvement in their academic skills as they may lack the more individualized support. However, positive peer interactions and inclusive experiences can boost their self-esteem and confidence levels and prepare them for the realistic inclusion in future. For children without disabilities, when inclusion is part of their development from early childhood, it teaches them to respect diversity and inculcates positive attitudes and perception towards persons with disabilities. It also teaches them ways to work as a team with their counterparts with disabilities and to be their spokespersons and stand alongside them in times of need (Frederickson & Cline, 2002).

The process of integrating the special education systems with the general education system requires making significant changes pertaining to the reconstruction and realignment of the educational components of ‘curriculum, instruction and assessment’. In addition to modifications in curriculum, instruction and assessment, rethinking and modifications are required in the other components of program evaluation, professional development and accountability of the teachers. The success of the inclusive model is dependent upon such an overhaul involving both the system and the stakeholders responsible for it (Trueba et al., 1997, Smith, 1998). Restructuring of the education system involves modifying the thoughts, beliefs, concerns and skills of the educators who are the primary stakeholders in the implementation and success of the inclusive model. Such restructured thought and practice can only be possible if the differences in knowledge and experiences are recognized, respected and represented (Carrington, 1999; Carrington and Robinson, 2004; Moss, 2003).

Understanding the knowledge-attitude-behaviour continuum is key to such reconstructions. In general, better knowledge influences positive attitudes and when equipped with appropriate and accurate
knowledge and a positive attitude towards the task, efficacy and competency in performing it increases. Knowledge is directly associated with social-emotional factors as in a person’s perception of self and in relation to others (self- esteem, self-confidence, self-awareness etc.). (Subramanian L, Manickaraj S, 2017). As for Inclusive Education, Awareness and knowledge about the various disabilities, their signs and symptoms, causes and effect of certain behaviours can shape or reshape our attitudes towards CSEN. Sentiments, attitudes and concerns are key factors that determine the teacher’s participation and lead to the success or failure of the inclusive education program. The amount and extent of exposure of the teachers to the world of disabilities and CSEN along with their personal or professional experiences related to the same bears a significant influence in their participation and contribution to the inclusive education model. The success of inclusive education depends on the regular teacher’s support for inclusion. Their perspective and perceptions of CSEN and inclusive education influence the instructional implications. Hence understanding of the regular teacher’s knowledge, their attitudes and competency skills is crucial to bring about appropriate changes to their acceptance of diverse learners in their classes and in their instructional strategies. (Subramanian L, Manickaraj S, 2017).

**Role of Teachers**

Teacher attitude is one of the essential factors in determining the effectiveness of inclusion (Weiner, 2003). Teachers who are guided by their beliefs and values about the importance of inclusion, are able to effectively implement it and also have been able to enhance the classroom Regular school teachers’ in principle are in favour of inclusive education, however, their commitment to the same is limited due to significant concerns. Many teachers are conflicted in their opinions too. Many regular school teachers were concerned that inclusion might interfere with their ability to teach in the traditional manner i.e. deliver classroom instruction via a didactic approach (Jangira, Singh, & Yadav, 1995). Individualizing lessons, collaborating with other teachers, modifying lesson plans, inadequate training, huge class sizes, lack of assistive devices and equipment and support personnel, the lack of specialized training and support for child care providers to provide inclusive child care have been some of the most commonly expressed concerns with regards to teaching CSEN in inclusion settings. Apart from these physical resources, the negative attitudes from other stakeholders as peers and their parents about the effect of inclusion on the quality and standard of education on their “normal” children were also expressed (Rafferty and Griffin, 2005).

A teacher’s behaviour in class is likely to be influenced by their own efficacy expectations and their belief that what they do will be effective (Palmer, 2006). Teaching efficacy is another potentially important variable with regard to teaching learners with learning support needs. Teaching efficacy relates to a
teacher’s feelings of his/her own capacity to successfully facilitate learning (Brady and Woolfson, 2008). It has been found to be related to student outcomes such as achievement (Ross, 1992), and motivation (Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989). Other reasons that might contribute to the lower self-efficacy and attitudes toward inclusion include the insufficient working conditions inside the classroom, lack of physical equipment, class density, teachers’ burnout because of stress and lack of motivation, lack of professional and qualified personnel in general education settings which embrace IE. Inclusion and inclusive education are concerned with the quest for equity, social justice, participation, and the removal of all forms of exclusionary assumptions and practices.

As we know that Inclusion cannot occur in isolation. Several stakeholders need to work together to make Inclusion a reality. One such stakeholder and perhaps the most important one for its success is the regular classroom teacher. A major part of the responsibility for the actualizing of an inclusive system where excellence and equality work in perfect harmony, therefore, rests in the hands of the teacher. Teachers are the ‘key change agents’ responsible for the success of inclusive education programs. Teacher’s beliefs to a great extent shape the format of instructions and learning that children with disabilities will receive in a regular classroom. Teachers play a fundamental role in implementing an open and inclusive environment for all children in the classroom. Education must strive to achieve full development of human personality, a sense of dignity, and to strengthen the observance of human rights, of children’s rights, and of fundamental freedoms. The success of Inclusive Education depends on various factors, of which teacher is the most important factor. For becoming a competent and successful Inclusive teacher, it is necessary to have required knowledge, skills, democratic attitude, positive attitude and an attitude of collaboration and networking. In order to become more effective as an inclusive classroom teacher, the teachers need to be well aware of the type of disability, the requirements of children with special needs and regularly update themselves with newer methodologies and upcoming technology and at the same time believe in the policy of inclusive education and have a positive attitude towards it. Therefore, the need of the hour is to have a separate subject on disability and inclusive education in the teacher training courses. It is imperative to make the general educator aware of the disabilities and prepare them with skills and competencies that are needed to handle all diversity in class.

One of the main barriers in the practice of inclusive education is represented by the teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion and its principles. These attitudes are influenced by several factors such as: the degree of children’ difficulties, the nature of children’ disabilities, the teachers’ experience with children with
special educational needs, the trust in their own capabilities to implement inclusive activities (the teachers’ preparedness for integrated classrooms) or the expectations towards the children no matter what are the difference between them, the curricula and so on. Children without disabilities also benefit from the inclusive classroom. They learn to accept differences more easily by diversifying their friendships, cooperation makes them more receptive towards the needs of others, developing tolerance and unconditional acceptance. They learn to empathize and to accept everyone as a unique individual as opposed to labelling, prejudice and stereotype are lowered and socio-emotional intelligence grows. To ensure successful inclusive education teachers should be equipped with deep knowledge and a positive attitude. If the teachers have thorough knowledge and positive attitude towards inclusive education, then only the inclusive education promoted. The knowledge and attitude of the teachers are important in conducting classes in inclusive classrooms. So it is important and valid to know the knowledge and attitude of the teachers teaching in highschools.

**Child Friendly Schools and Inclusive Education**

UNICEF has developed a framework for rights-based, child-friendly educational systems and schools that are characterized as "inclusive, healthy and protective for all children, effective with children, and involved with families and communities - and children" (Shaeffer, 1999).

Within this framework:

- The school is a significant personal and social environment in the lives of its students. A child-friendly school ensures every child an environment that is physically safe, emotionally secure and psychologically enabling.
- Teachers are the single most important factor in creating an effective and inclusive classroom.
- Children are natural learners, but this capacity to learn can be undermined and sometimes destroyed. A child-friendly school recognizes, encourages and supports children's growing capacities as learners by providing a school culture, teaching behaviours and curriculum content that are focused on learning and the learner.
- The ability of a school to be and to call itself child-friendly is directly linked to the support, participation and collaboration it receives from families.
- Child-friendly schools aim to develop a learning environment in which children are motivated and able to learn. Staff members are friendly and welcoming to children and attend to all their health and safety needs.
A rights-based, child-friendly school has two basic characteristics:

- It is a child-seeking school — actively identifying excluded children to get them enrolled in school and included in learning, treating children as subjects with rights and State as duty-bearers with obligations to fulfill these rights, and demonstrating, promoting, and helping to monitor the rights and well-being of all children in the community.
- It is a child-centred school — acting in the best interests of the child, leading to the realisation of the child’s full potential, and concerned both about the "whole" child (including her health, nutritional status, and well-being) and about what happens to children — in their families and communities - before they enter school and after they leave it (UNICEF, 2007)

One of the foremost characteristics of a Child Friendly School is its inclusivity: An inclusive education platform in all the countries which is accessible to all the children irrespective of their cast, creed, religion, disability etc. The school does not exclude, discriminate, or stereotype on the basis of difference. It should provide education that is free and compulsory, affordable and accessible, especially to families and children at risk. It respects diversity and ensures equality of learning for all children (e.g., girls, working children, children of ethnic minorities and affected by HIV/AIDS, children with disabilities, victims of exploitation and violence). It also promotes good quality teaching and learning processes with individualized instruction appropriate to each child's developmental level, abilities, and learning style and with active, cooperative, and democratic learning methods (UNICEF, 2007)

Materials & Methods
The design of the study is descriptive in nature. It describes the twocharacteristics such as knowledge and attitude of primary school teachers on inclusive education. The primary objective was to study the knowledge and attitude of primary school teachers on inclusive education. The universe of the study includes all the primary school teachers working in Thrissur Corporation. The researcher adopted a simple random method of sampling with 55 samples. The researcher included only the teachers who are working in the government school and excluded the private as well as aided schools. The questionnaire was prepared based on the objectives which consist of three parts; socio-demographic profile, questions to assess knowledge and questions to assess attitude.

Results and Discussion
After data collection, the data were edited, tabulated, analyzed and interpreted. It is a process, which is
consist of closely related operation. The relevant data were collected using a questionnaire from 55 respondents who are teaching in high schools of Thrissur district.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Teaching Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>98.2 %</td>
<td>74.5 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: Gender, Qualification and Teaching Experience*

The present table depicts the gender, qualifications and teaching experience of the respondents. Among the respondents, 98.2% of the respondents are female and 74.5% of the respondents having a bachelors degree in the concerned subject and 25.5% having a post-graduate degree in the concerned subject. While calculating the teaching experience 18.2% respondents possess the teaching experience of below 10 years, 38.2% of the respondents possess 11 – 20 years of teaching experience and 43.6% of the respondents possess 21 -30 years of teaching experience. It's evident that the majority of the respondents having the teaching experience of more than 10 years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Low level</th>
<th>Average level</th>
<th>High level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Score</td>
<td>0 -11</td>
<td>12-23</td>
<td>24- 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of the Respondents</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2: Level of Knowledge*

Table 2 explains the level of knowledge of the respondents on inclusive education. The researcher divided the score for knowledge into three levels. Score from 1 – 11 considers as the lowest level, 12 – 23 considers the average level and only 1 person comes under this category. The highest score starts with 24 and ends with 35, and most of the respondents (54) are under this knowledge level. The results are clearly indicating that the respondents possess a high level of knowledge on inclusive education. When we examine the earlier results, most of the respondents having the teaching experience of minimum ten years and all of them undergone a one-year compulsory teacher training programme.
before they join the schools.

UNICEF (2003) reported that the IEDC scheme has been implemented throughout Kerala since 1992. About 8000 school caters for 27,350 children with special needs (visual handicap: 1700; hearing handicap: 5650; orthopaedic handicap: 13,000; mental retardation: 4000). The Ministry of Human Resource Development supports the Integrated Education of the Disabled Cell under the Directorate of Public Instruction in Kerala. About 56 resource rooms and one vocational rehabilitation centre are functional. UNICEF further reports that in the Malappuram district (the largest; predominantly Muslim population) of Kerala, which has 22,000 teachers and 800,000 children in classes 1-12. There are 14,146 children with special needs who have been identified and enrolled in normal schools. This is cited as one of the five best models of inclusive education in India.

Kerala is one of the few states with distinct units for education of children with special needs; with clear policies for opening of special schools and for the integration of children with special needs into mainstream schools; with provision for special teachers under the SSA and a designated resource room and equipment. As per the report of General Education Department in Kerala, total of 9287 schools have practicing inclusive education, among this 37.02 percent of them are government schools and remaining 62.98 percent of schools are private aided with academically and professionally qualified teachers in both government, and aided schools. The number of children with special needs in mainstream schooling has more than tripled in the last 15 years from 2002-2017.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Low level</th>
<th>Moderate level</th>
<th>High level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Score</td>
<td>1 - 40</td>
<td>41 - 80</td>
<td>81 - 120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of the respondents</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Attitude of the respondents

To assess the attitude of the respondents the researcher used an attitude scale which contains 20 questions and each carry 6 scores. The score classified 1 – 40 as the low-level attitude, 41 – 80 as the moderate level of attitude and 9 persons are under this category. 81 – 120 as the higher level of attitude and 46 teachers come under this attitude level. The study shows that majority of the respondents having a high level towards inclusive education. Keith & Ross (1998) aimed to investigate the attitudes of a group of junior primary school teachers from the Gauteng area towards the inclusion of hearing-impaired
children into regular classes. Results indicated that the teachers surveyed were relatively positive in their attitudes towards inclusion. Sreeja (2017) found in her study that that primary school teachers have moderate attitudes towards persons with disabilities point to the urgent need for teacher training for transforming teacher attitudes. She also suggests that improving teacher attitudes is important because teachers with positive attitudes become in time the best sources for propagating positive attitudes towards special needs children among their peers as well as others in the society. Contrast to the results mentioned here, the present study found that Most of the school teachers having high level of Attitude towards the Inclusive education. As we discussed regarding the Knowledge aspect, the trainings and continuing professional development programmes organized by Department of Education, Govt. of Kerala plays a significant role in shaping the attitude of teachers towards inclusive education.
The results clearly show that there is a positive co-relation between the attitude and knowledge of the respondents. When the attitude is in higher terms, the level of knowledge also tends to be high. Signal (2006) focused on knowledge and aimed to understand inclusive education at various levels of the Indian education system by conducting a qualitative study. She suggested that teachers’ knowledge and skills for developing inclusive teaching practices, as well as the encouragement of a change in existing values, beliefs and attitudes, were essential to ensure full participation of all children in a school setting.

Conclusion

The process of integrating the special education systems with the general education system requires making significant changes pertaining to the reconstruction and realignment of the educational components of ‘curriculum, instruction and assessment’. In addition to modifications in curriculum, instruction and assessment, rethinking and modifications are required in the other components of program evaluation, professional development and accountability of the teachers. The results of the study show that the respondents having a high level of knowledge as well as better attitude towards the inclusive education All the teachers who’re undergoing Teacher Training Course (TTC) before joining to the teaching profession. Being served in government schools, the education department offers compulsory refresher programmes as well as continuing education programmes for the teachers periodically. These could be the reasons for the high level of knowledge on inclusive education which directly influence the formation of the high level of attitude on inclusive education. The results which we discussed is a significantly positive sign that our education system is inclusive and the torchbearers of this education system are welcoming the inclusive education for a brighter future.
References


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