EXPLORING AWARENESS AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS INCLUSIVE PRACTICES IN TEACHER EDUCATION: A STUDY ON TEACHER TRAINEES

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Abstract

Inclusive Education encompasses an academic system that ensures equal learning opportunities for all learners, regardless of their social, physical, and mental disadvantages. Creating inclusive learning environment is a multifaceted and challenging endeavor. While notable progress has been made, substantial obstacles persist in implementing such environments within our schools. The efficacy of inclusive practices relies on various factors, with classroom teachers standing out as the most crucial variable. Therefore, it is imperative to equip teachers with the necessary skills to effectively provide and implement Inclusive Education in schools. While many teachers embrace this change, some may encounter difficulties in accommodating a wide range of academic abilities or feel uncertain about their new roles. Given that teacher education institutions play a pivotal role in preparing educators, it becomes crucial to enhance their knowledge, skills, and attitudes regarding Inclusive Practices in Teacher Education. The primary objective of this study is to discern the extent of Inclusive Practices in Teacher Education and the attitudes of teacher trainees towards fostering Inclusive Education. To achieve this, the researcher adopted the Survey Method and employed a standardized and validated questionnaire on Inclusive Practices in Teacher Education to gather insights from 50 teacher trainees. These participants were randomly selected from a diverse array of Teacher Education Colleges located in Patna, Gaya and Darbhanga districts (Bihar, India). By undertaking this research, it shed light on the depth of understanding and eagerness among teacher trainees to wholeheartedly adopt and contribute to Inclusive Practices.

Keywords: Inclusive education, Inclusive practices, Teacher education.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Background of the Study*

Numerous groundbreaking initiatives are currently being extensively examined and actively implemented in the realm of education in India. Among these progressive measures lies a paramount initiative: guaranteeing access to education for all children, including those with special educational needs, within mainstream schools. This revolutionary concept, widely recognized as inclusive education, stands as a beacon of hope. The present endeavor centers its attention on the attitude and awareness of teacher trainees regarding the profound significance of inclusive education.

Internationally, the education of students with diverse needs and specific disabilities remains a highly debated topic, challenging conventional notions of fairness and equal access to education. Only in recent decades has there been a growing recognition of the fundamental right of every individual, regardless of their physical and intellectual capabilities, to receive an education

alongside their typically developing peers *[Ali, Mustapha & Jelas, 2006]*. India, like numerous other nations with a long-standing history of providing education for all, has pledged its commitment to inclusive education. However, like many countries, it continues to face significant obstacles in fully realizing this objective.

In their insightful exploration of social inclusion in schooling, *[Bottrell and Goodwin, 2011]* underline the profound notion that schools are purposefully designed and meticulously crafted institutions. They serve as integral substitutes for the essential roles that families and communities have conventionally played in equipping young individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge for their transition into responsible adults within society.

In today's modern society, schools are designed as independent institutions that serve as gateways to essential knowledge and social connections, not only within Western culture but on a global scale. Individuals who lack access to education are not only deprived of the necessary knowledge and skills needed to thrive in the realms of business and politics, but also miss out on the chance to form meaningful friendships and establish social networks within their peer groups. Consequently, the ability to exert influence and hold power within society is greatly influenced by whether one is included or excluded from mainstream educational systems.

1.2 *Inclusive Education*

Inclusive Education (IE) was first introduced on an international scale during the *Salamanca World Conference* in *1994*, held in *Spain*. This conference featured various international papers focusing on the education of special needs children *[Ainscow & Cesar, 2006]*. While some countries perceive inclusive education as an approach primarily aimed at serving special educational needs children within mainstream educational settings, it is viewed globally as a comprehensive system that caters to the needs of diverse learners and actively promotes diversity, thereby eradicating all forms of discrimination *[UNESCO, 2001, 2009]. [Boer, Pijl, and Minnaert, 2011]* emphasize that the inclusion of children with disabilities in regular schools is a crucial objective in many nations, serving as a significant indicator of educational development.

According to the teacher's manual on inclusive education provided by the Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education Project [TQI-SEP, 2010], which is a project initiated by the Ministry of Education in Bangladesh, inclusive education is built upon seven fundamental principles:

i. All children have the right to education;
ii. All children can learn and they learn from one another;
iii. Every child is different, so instruction should be organised according to their needs;
iv. Inclusive education is student-centred;
v. The inclusive approach addresses all aspects of the learning environment;
vi. Learning is possible only when there is cumulative cooperation among teachers, students, parents or guardians, and society;
vii. An active participation of all education agencies in society is important for the successful implementation of inclusive education.

According to these fundamental principles, inclusive education in India is regarded as a collective societal responsibility to educate all children, with teachers playing a pivotal role in ensuring its successful implementation. Inclusive education is also seen as fostering a versatile

learning environment, wherein educators embrace student-centered approaches and acknowledge the diverse learning styles of individual children.

1.3 *The Significance of Teachers' Perceptions of Inclusive Education*

Teachers are widely recognized as vital contributors to the effective implementation of inclusive education *[Haskell, 2000]*. Extensive research consistently emphasizes the pivotal role of teachers in the success of inclusionary programs *[Cant, 1994],* as they serve as linchpins in the seamless integration of students with disabilities into regular classes *[Stewart, 1983; Whiting & Young, 199]).* Furthermore, it is acknowledged by various studies that the achievement of successful inclusive education hinges upon the active involvement of teachers as essential members of the team driving this process *[Horne, 1983; Malone, Gallagher, & Long, 2001].*

Examining the attitudes of mainstream educators towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular settings is of utmost importance, as their perceptions significantly impact their behavior and acceptance of these students *[Hammond & Ingalls, 2003; Sideridis & Chandler, 1996; Van Reusen, Shoho, & Barker, 2001].* The success of an inclusionary program is potentially jeopardized if regular classroom teachers harbor negative perceptions regarding the integration of students with disabilities *[Horne, 1983; Van Reusen et al., 2001].* These negative perceptions of inclusive education can pose formidable obstacles for general education teachers when attempting to incorporate students with disabilities *[Cawley, Hayden, Cade, & Baker-Kroczynski, 2002].*

While several studies indicate that teachers generally hold positive attitudes towards inclusive education *[Avramidis et al., 2000; Kuester, 2000; Schmelkin, 1981],* other research suggests that teachers' attitudes can be affected by concerns about the potential impact on their time and skill set *[Avramidis et al., 2000].* This study addresses factors identified in previous research that may influence teachers' attitudes and awareness regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classrooms.

To empirically address the aforementioned inquiries, the present study was undertaken with the formal title,

"Exploring Awareness and Attitude towards Inclusive Practices in Teacher Education: A Study on Teacher Trainees."

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are:

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

- To find the awareness of and attitude towards inclusive practices in teacher education.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To find the significant difference between male and female teacher trainees in their awareness of and attitude towards inclusive practices in teacher education.
2. To find the significant difference between urban and semi-urban teacher trainees in their awareness of and attitude towards inclusive practices in teacher education.
3. To find the significant difference between autonomous and state institutions teacher trainees in their awareness of and attitude towards inclusive practices in teacher education.
4. To find the significant difference between autonomous and central institutions teacher trainees in their awareness of and attitude towards inclusive practices in teacher education.

5. To find the significant difference between state and central institutions teacher trainees in their awareness of and attitude towards inclusive practices in teacher education.

NULL HYPOTHESES

1. There is no significant difference between male and female teacher trainees in their awareness of and attitude towards inclusive practices in teacher education.
2. There is no significant difference between urban and semi-urban teacher trainees in their awareness of and attitude towards inclusive practices in teacher education.
3. There is no significant difference between autonomous and state institutions teacher trainees in their awareness of and attitude towards inclusive practices in teacher education.
4. There is no significant difference between autonomous and central institutions teacher trainees in their awareness of and attitude towards inclusive practices in teacher education.
5. There is no significant difference between state and central institutions teacher trainees in their awareness of and attitude towards inclusive practices in teacher education.

METHODOLOGY

i. Population

The population selected for the study is teacher trainees of Patna, Gaya and Darbhanga district (Bihar, India).

ii. Sample

50 teacher trainees studying in St. Xavier's College of Education (Patna), Central University of South Bihar (Gaya), and Lalit Narayan Mithila University (Darbhanga) were selected.

iii. Sampling Techniques

Incidental sampling of the sample was followed.

iv. Tools Used

A self- constructed tool on awareness of and attitude towards inclusive practices in teacher education.

v. Research Design

The investigator used Survey Method for the present study.

vi. Statistical Techniques

The statistical techniques used are Mean, Standard Deviation, t- test, ANOVA and Tukey-Kramer HSD.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Null Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference between male and female teacher trainees in their awareness of and attitude towards inclusive practices in teacher education.

TABLE No. 1

AWARENESS AND ATTITUDE OF MALE AND FEMALE TRAINEES

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Calculated t- value	Level of Significance
Male	23	110.63	39.19	-2.0744	
Female	27	110.39	42.79		NS

(At 5% level of significance, the table value of 't' is 1.96)

It is inferred from the above table that there is no significant difference between male and female teacher trainees in their awareness of and attitude towards inclusive practices in teacher education. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Null Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference between urban and semi-urban teacher trainees in their awareness of and attitude towards inclusive practices in teacher education.

TABLE No. 2

AWARENESS AND ATTITUDE OF URBAN AND SEMI-URBAN TEACHER TRAINEES

(At 5% level significance, value of 't' is 1.96)

Habitat	N	Mean	SD	Calculated t- value	Level of Significance
Urban	32	114.94	38.08	4.0036	S
Semi-Urban	18	72	35.42		

It is inferred from the above table that there is a significant difference between urban and semi-urban teacher trainees in their awareness of and attitude towards inclusive practices in teacher education. Therefore, the null hypothesis failed to reject.

Null Hypothesis: 3

There is no significant difference between different types of institutions among teacher trainees in their awareness of and attitude towards inclusive practices in teacher education.

The following table shows the results of the one-way ANOVA along with the Tukey post-hoc multiple comparisons table:

Analysis of Variance

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Ratio	Prob > F
INSTITUTION	2	35868.895	17934.4	16.32	<.0001 *
Error	47	51655.585	1099.1		
C. Total	49	87524.480			

Means for One way Anova

Level	No.	Mean	Std Error	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
Autonomous	17	103.647	8.0405	87.47	119.82
Central	17	129.118	8.0405	112.94	145.29

State	16	63.563	8.2880	46.89	80.24

A one-way ANOVA was performed to compare the effect of three different types of institution teacher trainees in their awareness of and attitude towards inclusive practices in teacher education.

A one-way ANOVA revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in different types of institutions (F (2, 47) = [16.3181], p = 0.0001).

Means Comparisons

Comparisons for all pairs using Tukey-Kramer HSD

Confidence Quantile

q*	Alpha
2.42012	0.05

HSD Threshold Matrix

Abs (Dif)-HSD

	Central	Autonomous	State
Central	-27.519	-2.049	37.609
Autonomous	-2.049	-27.519	12.139
State	37.609	12.139	-28.366

*Positive values show pairs of means that are significantly different

Connecting Letters Report

Level			Mean
Central	A		129.11765
Autonomous	A		103.64706
State		B	63.56250

*Levels not connected by same letter are significantly different.

Ordered Differences Report

Level	- Level	Diff	Std Err Dif	Lower CL	Upper CL	p-Value
Central	State	65.555	11.547	37.609	93.501	<.0001*
Auto.	State	40.084	11.547	12.138	68.030	0.0032*
Central	Auto.	25.470	11.371	-2.048	52.989	0.0749

*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level

Tukey's HSD Test for multiple comparisons found that the mean value of different types of institution was significantly different between 2 institutions i.e. central and state level

institution (p = 0.0001, 95% C.I. = [37.609, 93.501]), and state and autonomous level institutions (p = 0.0032, 95% C.I. = [12.138, 68.030]).

Tukey's HSD Test for multiple comparisons found that there was no statistically significant difference in central and autonomous level institution (p=0.0749).

FINDINGS

1. There is no significant difference between male and female teacher trainees in their awareness of and attitude towards inclusive practices in teacher education.

2. There is a significant difference between urban and semi-urban teacher trainees in their awareness of and attitude towards inclusive practices in teacher education.

3. There is no significant difference between autonomous, central and state level institution teacher trainees in their awareness of and attitude towards inclusive practices in teacher education.

4. There is a significant difference between autonomous and state and central and state level institution teacher trainees in their awareness of and attitude towards inclusive practices in teacher education.

5. There is no significant difference between autonomous and central level institution teacher trainees in their awareness of and attitude towards inclusive practices in teacher education.

CONCLUSION

The establishment of inclusive schools poses a formidable challenge, as not everyone is fully committed to fostering inclusion. Some individuals hold steadfast beliefs regarding the specific locations and methods for educating different "types" of children. One key issue that remains unresolved pertains to the purpose and essence of specialized knowledge in the realm of additional support needs. Despite these challenges, there exist ample instances of exemplary practices worldwide, giving us cause for optimism that, if we so desire, we can successfully create inclusive schools that cater to all students. If the Inclusive Practice Project can support new teachers in 'knowing', 'being' and doing,' it would signify a significant stride in this crucial endeavor.

IMPLICATIONS

1. When designing the curriculum for Teacher Educators, it is crucial to incorporate components of Inclusive Education.

2. Principals/Head teachers should genuinely acknowledge the hard work and dedication of the teachers under their supervision, fostering effective interpersonal skills.

3. It is essential to provide them with proper opportunities to contribute when making significant decisions.

4. The school management should thoroughly assess the actual needs of the school, including the competencies required to address these needs. Furthermore, they should provide comprehensive feedback to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the teachers.

5. Head teachers should actively encourage teachers to utilize their emotional intelligence skills in their role and create a conducive environment that fosters teachers' insights.

6. It is crucial to strengthen the organizational structure and climate of schools, offering opportunities for professional development through active participation in meetings and seminars. Additionally, promoting healthy professional interactions and establishing a flexible working environment are essential.

7. Teachers should receive specialized training to effectively handle children with individual differences.

SUGGESTIONS

Future studies can be conducted to gain a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon across various settings, thereby yielding valuable data that can enhance our knowledge.

1. This study can be replicated in various educational settings, encompassing different cities in India, diverse education levels (primary and higher), and even other countries to enhance comparability and generalization of the findings.

2. Future studies can be conducted to monitor advancements in inclusive education and track improvements over time.

3. Among the limited number of studies conducted in the field of inclusive education, one notable observation is the initial progress made. However, the existing research is primarily exploratory and lacks precision. To realize inclusive education on a larger scale, it is crucial to undertake more specific, precise, and scientifically rigorous research. Additionally, the development of teacher training modules should extend beyond pre-service teachers to include in-service teachers as well.

4. Researchers in the field of Education have made efforts, but there remains a scarcity of both quantitative and qualitative research on inclusive education, its underlying causes, and effective strategies for teachers to adjust in their work environment. Hence, this research could be considered significant and warrant further exploration.

Number of tables used in the research paper is eight.

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