

Inclusive Education for Disabled— Teachers' Reflections

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Abstract

Inclusive education is the need and demand of present day cohesive and inclusive society. The fundamental rights enshrined in our Constitution make provisions for access, equity and equality of all type of opportunities (including educational opportunities) to all persons irrespective of their class, caste, creed, religion and physical and psychological variation. This calls for the adoption of principles of imparting education to all type of children in inclusive situations. Hence, the present investigation was undertaken to study the views and perception of elementary school teachers regarding different aspects of inclusive education. The data for the present investigation were collected from 200 elementary school teachers from Kullu and Kangra districts of Himachal Pradesh with the help of self-developed 'Scale for teachers' attitude towards inclusive education' and a 'questionnaire' for elementary school teachers. The data were analysed with the help of percentage analysis and responses to open-ended questions in the questionnaire were interpreted with the help of content analysis technique. The results revealed that majority of teachers possessed moderately favourable opinion towards different aspects of inclusive education. However, certain problems have been highlighted by the teachers that are acting as hindrances in making inclusive education, a successful venture. The suggestions have also been formulated for making inclusive education more effective in near future.

"... Every society that values social justice and is anxious to improve the lot of common man and cultivate all available talent must ensure progressive equality of opportunity to all sections of the population. This is the only guarantee for building up of an egalitarian and human society in which the exploitation of the work will be minimised."

— *The Education Commission (1964-66)*

To achieve the aforesaid objectives, various educational provisions have been made in our Constitution in the form of fundamental rights and directive principles of State policy. One of the major milestones in this direction is that the education up to elementary level has been made a fundamental right. But, for making educational process,

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effective and inspirational in nature, the individual differences of the learners must be taken into consideration. It is also because there can not be child-centred education without realising differences and similarities among learners. In view of the individual differences, it is also evident that same curriculum, same methods of teaching and, in some cases, even the same educational institution will not serve the individual needs of children. At the same time, it must be appreciated that there cannot be, in general, individualised instruction in formal system of education. Hence, the solution to all such problems lies in the concept of 'Inclusive Education'.

Inclusion is a concept that sees the children with disabilities as full time participants in and as members of their neighbourhood schools and communities (Knight, 1999). Inclusive education, as an approach, seeks to address the learning needs of all children with a special focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalisation and exclusion. It implies all learners – with or without disabilities being able to learn together through access to common pre-school provisions, schools and community educational settings with an appropriate network of support services. It aims at all stakeholders in the system such as learners, parents, teachers, community, administrators and policy makers to be comfortable with diversity and see it as a challenge rather than a problem. To be inclusive in education means that all students in a school, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses in any area, become part of the school community. It is an attempt to meet the unique needs of

every child in a regular school setting. All children, despite of their disability, try to participate in all facets of school life. They are included in the feeling of belongingness with other students, teachers and support staff. Inclusion is the provision of services to students with disabilities in their neighbourhood schools with necessary support services and supplementary aids for both children and teachers. It means meeting the needs of children with disabilities for a free and quality public education in the least restrictive and most effective environment. One of the major goals of inclusion is to prepare students to participate as full and contributing members of society. Looking from a different perspective, inclusion does not mean 'dumping'. Rather, it gives a message, "everyone belongs to school and everyone is welcome to the school".

The National Curriculum Framework 2005, states that a policy of inclusion needs to be implemented in all schools and throughout our education systems. The participation of all children needs to be ensured in all spheres of their life in and outside the school. The NCF 2005 says:

- Inclusive education is about embracing all.
- Disability is a social responsibility accept it.
- No selection procedures to be adopted for denying admission to learners with disabilities.
- Children do not fail, they only indicate failure of the school.
- Accept difference.... celebrate diversity.

- Inclusion is not confined to the disabled. It also means non-exclusion.
- Learn human rights... conquer human wrongs.
- Handicap is a social construct, deconstruct handicap.
- Make provision—not restriction; adjust to the needs of the child.
- Remove physical, social and attitudinal barriers.
- Partnership is our strength such as School- community; school- teachers; teachers- teachers; teachers-children; children-children; teachers-parents; school systems and outside systems.
- All good practices of teaching are practices of inclusion
- Learning together is beneficial for every child.
- Support services are essential services.
- If you want to teach, learn from the child.
- Identify strengths not limitations.
- Inculcate mutual respect and inter-dependence.

Inclusive education is the need of the hour keeping in view the population explosion and availability of limited resources to meet out educational and other demands of all members of population. Under the programme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) for realising the goal of universalisation of elementary education (UEE), inclusive education has been given a special

place. Inclusion is not a new label for mainstreaming or integration, rather, it is related but different from the movement to integrate or mainstream students with disabilities into their regular neighbourhood schools. Keeping in view recent initiatives on inclusive education, a comprehensive review is necessary to help in better understanding the present status of education of children with disabilities, and how inclusive education can be promoted for a better future. A brief review of research studies undertaken in the area of inclusive education is provided below:

In a research study by Larrivee (1985) carried out on 118 primary school teachers in inclusive classrooms, it was reported that students with special needs demonstrated a greater level of achievement in the mainstream classrooms when the teacher used the time efficiently, his or her relationship with students was cordial, responded to all students positively and gave the students, a positive feedback. Jangira (1985) concluded that most developing countries visualised integrated education as an expedient measure to reinforce efforts to improve access to schools as a part of universalisation of basic education. Faselbhoy (1989) had reported lower cost of integrated education against special education for children with visual impairment because there is no investment in building, no maintenance of hostel etc. On the other hand, Advani (1990) expressed contradictory views and stated that in the Indian context, integrated education is not much cost effective as it is considered. Panda (1991) conducted a

study on the attitude of parents and community members towards disabled children and revealed that attitude depends upon sex of the people and type of disability among the children. It was reported by Banerji and Dailey (1995) that students with specific learning disabilities demonstrated academic progress at pace comparable to that of the students without such disabilities. In addition, teachers and parents of disabled children indicated progress in self-esteem and motivation level of children. Ahuja (1996) conducted a study entitled "Moving towards inclusive education: an innovative teacher training experiment". The study showed positive significant results in terms of changing the motivational level of the heads of the institution, classroom practices and attitude of students towards learning. The sampled teachers developed better training capabilities and understanding of pupils' learning styles and needs. The teachers further expressed their willingness to continue to work on inclusive education modules in day-to-day practice. It was remarked by Punani (1996) that integrated education enhances social integration and social acceptance of the students with visual impairments. It was further held that integrated education cannot be successful without active participation of parents, general educators and school administrators. Integrated education encourages the family to feel and assume its responsibility towards the child instead of shifting it largely to the institution. Shevde (1997) undertook a feasibility study of models of inclusive education and revealed that effect of inclusion, if initiated without the

support system would increase the workload of regular school teachers. Parental resistance was marked as a strong factor among the barriers to inclusive education and hence, it was recommended to increase the parental involvement in inclusive education. Julka (1998) was of the view that if inclusive education is to be the focus of educational policy in near future, the reciprocal role of regular and special teachers is crucial. Parents need to be counselled before the children are integrated in mainstream schools. Cook (2001) and Sharma (2002) inferred that teachers' attitude towards disabled children depend on the nature, type and degree of disability among the children. It was pointed out by Zaveri (2001) that teachers considered 'inclusion' as desirable but not feasible on account of large class size, vast and rigid curriculum content, lack of training and awareness to deal with disabled students. Soni (2004) revealed that the facilities for education of children with disabilities were in initial stage in Himachal Pradesh as well as Madhya Pradesh and were non-existing in Meghalaya and Mizoram. In all four states, the teaching-learning strategies being used in the classrooms did not meet the specific needs of different categories of disabled children due to inadequate training of teachers in the areas of inclusive education. Nayak (2008) concluded that parents of disabled children have actual interest in inclusive education and they wanted their children to get education along with normal children. She also revealed that teachers look forward to teach in an inclusive environment and were ready to face the future challenges. On the

contrary, Smitha and Acharya (2010) had reported that teachers possessed unfavourable attitude towards inclusive education. With regard to the factors affecting teachers' attitude towards inclusive education, it was pointed out by Sharma (2010) that gender, educational qualifications, teaching experience and location of schools did not affect attitude of primary school teachers' attitude towards inclusive education.

The review of aforementioned studies provides conflicting conclusions and one can not arrive at a generalised idea or a consensus. But, the significance and vitality of inclusive education in present social and educational scenario can not be under estimated. The success of inclusive education depends on collaborative efforts of government authorities, parents, school administrators and school teachers. The prime factor in success of inclusive education is the commitment and attitude of school teachers 'the real field workers' towards special children who are to be imparted education in inclusive settings. Hence, it was considered worthwhile to ascertain the views and perception of school teachers regarding various aspects of inclusive education and problems encountered by them in applying the principles of inclusive education in normal classroom situations. The suggestions forwarded by the teachers will act as a benchmark for educational administrators, policy planners, curriculum framers and all other concerned in bringing necessary changes and modifications related to different dimensions of inclusive education.

Objectives of the present study:

1. To construct and standardise a scale for teachers to measure their attitude towards inclusive education.
2. To study views and perception of elementary school teachers regarding different aspects of inclusive education.
3. To identify the major problems faced by elementary school teachers in imparting education to the children through inclusive means.
4. To suggest intervention for improving implementation of inclusive education in normal educational settings.

Methodology

Survey technique under 'Descriptive Method of Research' was employed to develop attitude scale as well as to study the views and perception of elementary school teachers regarding various aspects of inclusive education.

Sampling

In the present investigation, a total of 200 elementary school teachers were selected from 35 primary and 22 upper primary schools of Kullu and Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh. For this, purposive sampling technique was adopted as it was not possible to employ probability sampling techniques due to non-availability of complete list of elementary school teachers.

Research Tools Developed

1. Scale for Teachers' Attitude towards Inclusive Education:

For ascertaining the views and perception of elementary school teachers regarding

different aspects of inclusive education, an attitude scale was developed and standardised by the investigators. The preliminary draft of attitude scale was comprised of 64 items (in Hindi language) which were to be rated on a three point scale i.e. agree, neutral, disagree. The statements of opinions were collected by carrying out discussions with field experts and reviewing the literature available in the area of inclusive education and special education. The items were critically discussed with field experts in regard to their technical accuracy, relevance and coverage. The assistance of language experts was also sought to remove any sort of linguistic ambiguity in the items. Thus, after undertaking initial modifications and editing, the preliminary draft was administered on 250 elementary school teachers for carrying out item analysis of attitude scale. After carrying out item analysis on the basis of responses in respect of upper 27 per cent and bottom 27 per cent groups of teachers, only highly discriminating items/statements (having t-value equal to or greater than 1.75) were retained in the final draft of attitude scale. On the basis of this, a total of 17 items were rejected and thus, the final draft of attitude scale was comprised of 47 items. The distribution of selected 47 items in four aspects of inclusive education was as under:

(i) Psychological Aspect	10
(ii) Social and Parents-Related Aspect	12
(iii) Curricular and Co-curricular Aspect	13
(iv) Administrative Aspect	12

The reliability of the scale was

ascertained through test-retest method that came out to be 0.82 which was fairly high index of stability. In addition to this, internal consistency of attitude scale was also established by computing correlation coefficients between total score on complete attitude scale and separate scores on each of four aspects of attitude towards inclusive education. Apart from this, content validity of the scale was reported high by the field experts consulted at the time of developing preliminary draft of attitude scale. Cross validity of the scale was ensured by selecting different sample of elementary teachers for carrying out item analysis, computing reliability and final data for achieving the objectives of present study.

2. Questionnaire for Elementary School Teachers

Apart from attitude scale for elementary school teachers, a questionnaire was also developed to identify the problems faced by teachers in imparting education through inclusive means in normal classroom situations. This questionnaire was comprised of six items which were of both close-ended as well as open-ended nature. The validity of questionnaire was ascertained by seeking critical comments and suggestions from DIET faculty members, experienced school heads and teachers and teacher educators. The comments and suggestions offered by the experts were taken into consideration to give a final shape to the questionnaire.

Analysis of Data

The data obtained through attitude scale were analysed with the help of percentage analysis. In addition, the technique

of 'content analysis' was employed to analyse responses of elementary school teachers to open-ended questions provided in the questionnaire.

Discussion of Findings

After computing percentage for each of three categories of responses (i.e. agree, neutral and disagree) to all items of attitude scale, the interpretation of results was carried out separately for four aspects of attitude towards inclusive education. On the basis of this, the views of teachers regarding different aspects of attitude towards inclusive education were extracted out which are presented ahead:

1. Teachers' Opinion regarding Psychological/Behavioural Aspects of Inclusive Education

Almost all elementary teachers (more than 90 per cent) reflected that inclusive education is the demand of present social and educational scenario and through such type of education; special children can be brought into the mainstream of society. It was indicated by 61 per cent elementary school teachers that inclusive education helps in enhancing self-confidence level of special children. With regard to effect of inclusive education on other psychological and behavioural characteristics of students, it was perceived by elementary school teachers that inclusive education; helps in full development of abilities of special children (63 per cent), develops positive social attitude among special children (67 per cent) and has a positive impact on educational development of special children (58 per cent). Similarly, elementary school teachers reflected their

disagreement with regard to the ideas that inclusive education does not help in intellectual development of special children (54 per cent) and it negatively affects educational development of normal children (59 per cent). Furthermore, about three fourth of sampled teachers each were of the opinion that while imparting education in inclusive settings, neither the normal children are neglected nor there is any detrimental effect on their learning capabilities. In addition, 54 per cent teachers revealed that in inclusive settings, there is no pressure on special children to perform similar to their normal counterparts present in their class.

2. Teachers' Perception regarding Social Aspects of Inclusive Education

With respect to teachers' attitude towards social and parents-related aspect of inclusive education, it was viewed by elementary school teachers that inclusive education; helps in providing equal social rights to special children (84 per cent); a better option for special children in comparison to special education (62 per cent); helpful in social adjustment of special children (52 per cent); helpful to improve national literacy rate (82 per cent) and; also helpful for getting full cooperation/contribution from special children in social reconstruction and development (62 per cent). However, 65 per cent of teachers pointed out such parents of special children that were not comfortable in sending their child for receiving education in inclusive settings and the number of problems that they face during the whole period of education of their child in the schools. Hence, it

was suggested by 68 per cent of teachers that for successful implementation of providing education in inclusive situations, it is very essential to receive willingness and cooperation of parents of both special as well as normal children.

3. Teachers' Opinion regarding Curricular and Co-Curricular Aspects of Inclusive Education

It was revealed that for implementation of inclusive education in normal schools, the teachers at present are mentally and emotionally ready (51 per cent) and about three fourth (74 per cent) of teachers perceived that teachers need to be well aware about various needs of special children in order to impart education in inclusive settings. Further, it was opined by about two third teachers (64 per cent) that inclusive education should be comprised of appropriate co-curricular activities along with curricular activities so that the needs of both special children as well as normal children can be easily satisfied in normal schools. It has been revealed that teachers are comfortable with special children (60 per cent) in normal classrooms and for imparting education in inclusive settings more effectively, it was perceived that they need to employ different teaching-learning strategies to provide varied learning experiences to students with differing characteristics (66 per cent). Majority of teachers (52 per cent) held that they had to face problems as well as an extra burden is levied upon them at the time of imparting education to children in inclusive settings. It was pointed out by 58 per cent teachers that it is not possible for them to cover the syllabus in schools

on account of use of inclusive education strategies in classroom situations. It was suggested by 70 per cent teachers that they need to improve their professional qualifications for better execution of inclusive education strategies in normal classroom situations.

4. Teachers' Opinion regarding Administrative Aspects of Inclusive Education

About two third (67 per cent) elementary school teachers were of the view that present school curriculum is not according to the needs of special children. In addition, for making inclusive education successful in present scenario, elementary school teachers reflected that; there is a need to make normal schools more appropriate for special children (56 per cent), need for making present education system more flexible (60 per cent), need for providing intensive in-service training to teachers (72 per cent) and government should undertake financial and policy reforms for better execution of inclusive education in normal schools (58 per cent). Apart from this, elementary school teachers agreed that for imparting education through inclusive means, teachers serving in normal schools should be provided special training (68 per cent). It was opined by 58 per cent elementary teachers that it is a great challenge to impart education through inclusive means because adequate facilities are not available in normal schools.

5. Major Problems faced by Elementary Teachers in Imparting Education in Inclusive Settings

Although, it has been reflected by

majority of elementary school teachers that inclusive education is a better alternate for educating special children as compared to special education, but certain problems are faced by them in imparting education through inclusive means in an effective manner. It was pointed out that normal schools are lacking in basic facilities which are pre-requisite for effective implementation of inclusive education in general school situations. It hampers complete development of special children and their needs can not be completely fulfilled in normal schools. The unavailability of special teachers/resource teachers/well trained teachers, equipments and specific teaching-learning materials in normal schools were perceived as major hindrances for effective execution of inclusive education. Lack of in-service training to teachers serving in normal schools has also been considered as a problem by 68 per cent elementary teachers due to which they are unable to understand the problems and needs of special children. The other major problems as forwarded by elementary school teachers included; (i) not enough scope in present curriculum for educating special children (34 per cent), (ii) less number of teaching staff in normal schools (48 per cent), (iii) unfavourable attitude of parents of normal children towards needs of special children (28 per cent), (iv) engagement of teachers in non-academic tasks like census, elections etc. (45 per cent) and, (v) difficulties in establishing and maintaining good relationship between normal children and special children in same classroom or school.

6. Suggestions for Improving the Status of Inclusive Education

It has been visualised by elementary school teachers that for improving the status of inclusive education and making it more acceptable to all sections of society, the need is to sensitise the working school teachers about fundamentals of inclusive education and needs and problems of special children. For this, it was recommended that teachers serving in normal schools should be provided intensive and extensive training through seminars, workshops, refresher courses etc. In this regard, DIETs, BRCs and CRCs should come forward with specifically devised and designed programmes for imparting training to teachers. The training programmes for teachers should be made more need-based and student-oriented. It was reflected by teachers that they should be oriented about various teaching-learning strategies for educating children in inclusive settings. Furthermore, the teachers of general schools and special schools should come on a common platform to share their experiences about characteristics, needs and problems of different kinds of children. This will help both in making a barrier free and congenial environment for imparting education to all children of varying abilities. Educational authorities and administrators should initiate to devise such schemes and programmes for bringing general teachers and special teachers on a sharing platform. In addition to this, for sensitising parents about the concept and nature of inclusive education, parents-teacher associations (PTAs) and mother-teacher

associations (MTAs) at elementary stage can play an effective role. In addition, village education committees/school management committees constituted under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) can provide effective leadership in bringing awareness among community members regarding usefulness of inclusive education not only for the betterment of special children but also for upliftment of society. For making inclusive education effective and successful, the cooperation and assistance of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can be received in generating awareness among the community members. The colleges of education can play an effective role in providing training to school teachers and developing teaching-learning material for special children. The government authorities should appoint additional teachers in schools so that teachers can pay full attention to the needs and problems of all children in the schools. Adequate as well as appropriate infrastructural facilities and a barrier free environment should be provided in schools to make inclusive education,

a successful venture. The requisite curriculum changes or modifications can be undertaken by the concerned authorities for making curriculum in accordance with the blended needs of normal children as well as special children. The curriculum should have enough scope for employing various teaching-learning strategies by teachers as well as use of different teaching-learning equipments and materials for imparting varied kinds of learning experiences to the children. A special teacher and a resource room must be made compulsorily available in every school so as to resolve the problems of special children. Apart from this, on an extreme, the government may consider an alternative system with more openness and flexibilities to accommodate learners with disabilities. In such a system, special children should be allowed to choose the curriculum and there should be a flexible teaching and evaluating mechanism so that mainstreaming does not stop at mere physical inclusion of child in the class but actively foster his/her learning potential.

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