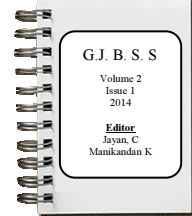




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Attitude of Prospective teachers at Primary Level towards Inclusive Education

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Abstract

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Attitude, Inclusive Education,
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The present study is an attempt to find out the attitude of prospective teachers at primary level towards Inclusive Education. It made use of proportionate stratified sampling in selecting 588 prospective teachers. Data were collected from the sample using the instrument 'Attitude scale on Inclusive Education'. The findings of the study reveal that prospective teachers are not having much favorable attitude towards inclusive education. There is no significant difference in the attitude of prospective teachers towards inclusive education based on locale of the institution and type of management of schools but there exists sex difference.

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The development of any nation depends mainly on the standers of its educational institutions. Education is the most powerful and effective instrument for including radical changes in the behavior of students. Education is the process through which an individual is developed into individuality and a person into personality. Effective supporting and enhancing learning is a major factor through which educators can contribute to sustain democracy and minimize inequality. Equity and equality are connected as inseparable features of good education provision and should not be considered as separate entities. The ability to foster quality and equality requires awareness of the obstacles that an individual faces in achieving their potential and of the barriers that obstruct harmonious relationship between group and individuals

It is reported that ten percent of our school aged children show evidences of specific learning disabilities and they can be considered as children with special needs. Children with Special Needs are those who deviate mentally, socially, educationally, physically or culturally from normal children. Such children need special educational care and their learning problems are to be tackled in a special manner. Educating these differently abled children is a challenging task in human resource development. Until the late 18th and early 19th centuries no attempts were made to treat disadvantaged individuals in a human fashion. Children with special needs have always been segregated from their peers. Parents of those children were discriminated and humiliated. Most of the people in the slum who are barely literate themselves believe that diverse abilities are contagious. The plan of action to improve education system created by the Education Commission (1964-66) suggested that people with disabilities should be included in mainstream and attempts should be made to bring in as many children in integrated programmes.

Children with special needs were taught in special schools. But it is expensive and has only limited reach. Subsequently the philosophy of integration and mainstreaming emerged. The national objective 'Education for all' is possible only when children with special needs get equal opportunities for education. "Education for All" conveys, "Every child has the right to receive basic quality education and no child regardless of special circumstances, may be denied this right." Many national and international initiatives have been made in this regard during the last fifty years. For realizing the dream of "Education for All", the concept of Inclusive education was accepted.



The Kothari Commission (1964) emphasized that education of children with diverse abilities should be 'an inseparable part of the general education system'. One way to provide education to Children with Special Needs is the establishment of special schools. In special schools, these children may not be able to achieve as much as they can because of lack of exposure to competition. The second approach recommended by the commission was integrated education. But integration treats the children separately.

The major impetus for inclusive education come from the 1994 World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca. The conference recommendations were based on the principle of inclusion. In the report of conference it was stated that, 'School should accommodate all children of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups.'

This led to the emergence of a new concept called 'Inclusive Education'. Inclusion offers a different perspective on the education of children with diverse abilities in ordinary schools. Inclusion means all children are welcome regardless of differences. An inclusive school is a place where everyone belongs; the child is accepted and is supported by his or her peers and other members of the school or community in the course of training for his or her educational needs. Inclusive education is a flexible and individualized support system and is provided in regular schools, committed to an appropriate education for all. Inclusive Education recognizes and responds to the diversity of the children's needs and abilities including in their ways and pace of learning.

There is a need of redesigning our educational environment in view of inclusion of each student. It requires not only dissemination of proper knowledge related to inclusive education but, major attitudinal change is also of utmost priority. Inclusive education is a system in which the school changes itself totally to respond all children equally. And if the sufficient changes are not done, it will not fulfill its goal. Thus, inclusive education without resources, without support, without teacher preparation, without commitment, without a vision treatment, without restricting, without staff development, would not work.

The Government of India has introduced different programmes like Integrated Education for the Disabled Children (IEDC, 1979), Project on Integrated Education for Disabled (PIED, 1987), District Primary Education Programme (DPEP, 1997) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA, 2000-2001). Being a democratic country, the educational policy should emphasise the development of each and every child according to his innate potential. This will be possible if Inclusive education is implemented in its full fledged.

Inclusion is a concept that sees children with diverse abilities as full time participants in and as members of their neighborhood schools and communities. Inclusive education, therefore, involves all children learning together with their peers in the same environment. Inclusion is a more precise and refined form of mainstreaming and integration. In the process of mainstreaming and integration, it is the child who adapts himself/herself according to the environment of the school whereas in the process of inclusion, it is the school, which adapts its policies and facilities according to the needs and requirements of the child. Inclusion is a child-centered policy. Inclusive education aims to reform school environment rather than characteristics of children. The focus of inclusion is not merely on academic literacy but also on emotional and functional literacy for all children. Inclusive education extends the scope of the school so that it can include a greater diversity of children.

Inclusive education is a human right, it is good education and it makes good social sense. Inclusive education promotes the value of equality. The differently abled become more aware about the real life situation. Students without special needs can learn much about personal courage and perseverance from special needs students. The peer tutoring situations



can help them to get mastery over the subject matter. They have the opportunity to learn educational skills such as Braille or sign language. Inclusive education strategies are less expensive compared to special schools.

Inclusive education benefits the teachers also. Teachers get an opportunity to develop their professional skills in an atmosphere of congeniality, collaboration and peer-support. They can plan and conduct their task as a part of a term. Inclusive schools allow collaboration and consultation among teachers and provide psychological support to them. Peer collaboration and consultation helps teachers to improve their professional capabilities.

Inclusion of students with diverse abilities into regular schools is now one of the most significant issues facing the education community both nationally and internationally. While talking about inclusive schools it is important to remember that everyone in the school should be involved in inclusion. For successful Inclusion to take place, it should necessarily be a team approach with the teachers, parents, management, students, school and community rather than a single approach. Team work helps in better implementation of Inclusive education. Teachers should have the capacity to work within a collaborative framework to meet the universal needs of all individual students.

A number of researches have come to the conclusion that successful implementation of inclusion depends largely on the attitude of teachers. Nayak (2008) focused on the attitude of parents and teachers towards inclusive education. Findings indicated significant difference between the opinions of parents of differentially abled children, parents of normal children and teachers of normal children. In another study involving teacher educators and pre-service teachers in Solomon Islands, it was found that teacher educators and pre-service teachers had limited knowledge and understanding on what constitutes special education and inclusive practices (Simi, 2008). Kenize (2010) studied teachers' attitude and pedagogy of inclusion on a sample of 225 full time primary school teachers. The results indicated that most of the teachers had no education in special needs and felt challenged by inclusion and unsure about how to implement inclusion.

The study involving primary school teacher in Haryana, it was found that the teachers having professional training/qualification had very high positive attitude as compared to the teachers not having this type of qualification. (Astha & Smriti, 2011). The study conducted by Chireshe (2011) on the views of in-service teacher trainees on inclusive education reveals that the teacher trainees felt that the present curriculum did not meet the needs of differentially abled children. In the light of these and other research findings, the investigators found that the degree of success of inclusion depends on several factors, perhaps the most important being teachers' perception, attitude and opportunity for collaboration.

Teacher development has to be the heart of initiatives for developing inclusive practices in schools. This necessitates building competencies of all regular teachers to deal with diverse population of students and to learn pedagogical strategies that facilitate the learning of all students in their classroom. The entire teachers need to be prepared who can teach in inclusive setting, meeting the needs of all students.

Inclusive education system requires a more knowledgeable, highly skilled teaching force. It is now widely accepted that the most effective way to improve the quality and effectiveness of education programme in inclusive setting is to reach teachers and teacher educators. There is need for strengthening knowledge, skills and attitudes of teachers for creating inclusive ethos and learning environment in schools. The triangulated effect of knowledge, skills and attitudinal building develop the awareness among teachers and comprehensive perspectives of inclusive education as part of their role and responsibilities.

Teacher requires right type of awareness and attitude on various aspects of diverse abilities, causes and characteristics, identification and assessment, teaching and training

methods and guidance and counseling to the children with diverse abilities, their parents and community. Such an awareness and attitude will lead to better competencies in teachers. A teacher with right type of awareness, attitude and competencies is an asset to any institution offering programmes for the differently abled. Researchers that probe into the awareness, attitude and competencies of teachers will go a long way for policy planning, development and implementation of training programmes to the existing as well as to the prospective teachers. Prospective teachers are of high significance as they are the leading force for the coming generation. By considering all these factors, investigators decided to find out the attitude of prospective teachers at primary level towards inclusive education.

Objectives

1. To find out the extent of attitude of Prospective Teachers at primary level towards Inclusive education.
2. To find out whether there exist any significant difference in the attitude of Prospective Teachers at primary level towards Inclusive education based on gender, locale of institution and type of management of the institution.

Hypothesis

1. There exists significant difference in the attitude of prospective teachers at primary level towards Inclusive education based on gender, locale and type of management of the institution.

Method

Participants

The population under study is prospective teachers at primary level. The participants selected for the study consists of 588 Prospective Teachers from Kannur, Wayanad, Kozhikode, Malappuram and Thrissur revenue districts of Kerala. The sample was selected using the stratified sampling technique and representation was given to factors like gender, locale and management of institution.

Instrument

1. Attitude scale on inclusive education: Attitude of Prospective Teachers towards Inclusive education was measured by using 'Attitude Scale on Inclusive education' prepared by Reena and Bindhu (2012). It consists of 38 items. The scale consists of four dimensions of inclusive education such as Concept of inclusive education, Understanding exceptionalities, Inclusive education strategies and Policies on inclusive education. The test-retest reliability co-efficient was obtained as 0.77 and content validity was established.

Procedure

After the selection of the sample the investigators made necessary arrangement for the administration of the instrument. The investigators sought permission from the heads of the selected training institutions for administering the instrument. The investigators met the students in the class and explained the nature and confidentiality of the study. The scale was distributed to the students and an instruction with regard to the method of responding to the items in the instrument was given. The response sheets were scored according to the scoring key prepared for the purpose. The final sample of the study includes 588 prospective teachers at primary level of five districts of Kerala. Statistical techniques like 't' test and percentage analysis were used according to the objectives of the study and the hypothesis to be tested.

Results & Discussion

The extent of Attitude towards inclusive education in the total sample was established by using Percentage Analysis. The results are presented in table 1 and table 2.

Table 1

Attitude of Prospective Teachers towards Inclusive Education

Response Categories	Number	Percentage
Favorable	251	42.68
Unfavourable	308	52.38
Neutral	29	4.93
Total	588	100

From table, it can be seen that 52.38% of Prospective teachers are having unfavorable attitude towards inclusive education and 42.68% of Prospective teachers are having favorable attitude.

To know whether there exists any significant difference in the Attitude of Prospective Teachers towards Inclusive education between male and female prospective teachers, Government and Private students and between rural and urban students, critical ratio was computed for each case and result is presented in table 2.

Table 2

Mean, Sd, n, and 't' value of Attitude towards Inclusive education with respect to gender, type of management and locale.

No	Group	N	Mean	Sd	t value
1	Male	41	94.97	8.89	2.44*
	Female	547	98.46	8.10	
2	Government	194	98.68	8.94	0.92
	Private	394	97.99	7.81	
3	Urban	158	98.22	8.85	0.001
	Rural	430	98.22	7.95	

* $p < .05$

From table 2, it can be seen that there exist significant difference ($t=2.44$, $p < .05$) in the attitude towards Inclusive education between male and female prospective teachers.

The 't' value obtained in the case of prospective teachers of private and Government institutions is 0.92 which is less than 1.96, the required value of 't' for significance at 0.05 level. Hence there is no significant difference in the mean scores of attitude of prospective teachers in government and private schools towards Inclusive education. This shows that prospective teachers in government and private schools are identical in their attitude towards Inclusive education.

The mean score obtained for attitude towards inclusive education for both urban and rural sample is 98.22. As the mean scores of prospective teachers towards inclusive education based on locale is same there is no observed difference in attitude towards inclusive education based on locale.

Conclusion

The findings of the study reveal that the attitude of Prospective Teachers is not much favorable towards Inclusive education. By considering the gender, locality of the institution and type of management of the institution of prospective teachers they are not different in their attitudes. Therefore, mainstream teachers courses needed training in special needs in education field. Thus, inclusive education could work if teacher training courses were restructured to make them compatible with inclusive education and special needs education practice in teacher training. At present, all schools in Kerala funded by the Government are running under the policy of Inclusive education. Inclusion is the provision of services to the children with special

needs in their neighborhood schools with necessary support services. It means meeting the needs of children with special needs for a free and quality public education in the least restrictive and most effective environment. Inclusive education system can only be realized if teachers are aware of the nature of the situation and are committed to work for it. Without the changes in the attitude towards the pupil with difference, all efforts to bring successful implementation will certainly go in vain. Fostering a positive attitude towards difference is a gradual and continuous effort. It is a well known fact that the attitude of individuals and society influence the services of persons with diverse abilities.

In the case of Prospective Teachers following measures can be taken to make them aware about the concept and to arouse positive attitude towards Inclusive education. It is ideal to include a separate paper on 'Children with Special Needs' in pre-service teacher preparation course. Measures should be adopted by to provide more organized school based training in inclusion for TTC students. Practice on different strategies of Inclusive education should be given to prospective teachers. Seminars, symposium, documentaries etc. can be effectively utilized for building a positive attitude towards Inclusive education.

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