

Teachers' Attitude towards Inclusive Education

Nidhi Kakkar

Assistant Professor, Vaisg College of Education, Rohtak (Haryana), India

Abstract

Regular teachers are the key service providers in teaching students with special needs in the inclusive classroom. Teacher attitudes regarding inclusive education vary widely. A review of the literature indicates that overall, teachers believe in the concept of inclusion. The studies suggest that teachers like what inclusion classrooms do for their students and they are generally interested in serving students in such a manner. However, studies also indicate that teachers do not believe they are receiving enough support and training in how to teach an inclusion classroom. It is this lack of support and training which prevents them from being the most effective teachers in the inclusion situation. Other factors which affect teachers' attitudes include training of the teacher, availability of support system and also the severity of the disabling condition. The present paper is an attempt to review the various factors affecting the attitude of teachers' towards inclusive education

KEYWORDS: Attitude, Inclusive Education, Special Education

Introduction

"Inclusive education is part of a human rights approach to social relations and conditions". The intentions and values involved are an integral part of a vision of the whole society of which education is a part. Therefore the role education plays in the development of an inclusive society is a very serious issue. It is thus important to be clear in our understanding that inclusive education is not about special teachers meeting the needs of special children. It is not about dumping pupils into an unchanged system of provision and practice. It is about how, where and why with what consequences, we educate all pupils.

Inclusive education involves embracing human diversity and welcoming all children and adults as equal members of an educational community. This involves valuing and supporting the full participation of all people together with in mainstream educational settings. Inclusive education requires recognizing and upholding the rights of all children and adults and understanding human diversity as rich resources, and everybody is the part of all human environments and interactions. Inclusive education is an approach to education free from discriminatory beliefs, attitudes and practices including free from ableism. Inclusive education requires putting inclusive values into action to ensure all children and adults belong, participate and flourish.

The goal of inclusive education is to break down the barriers that separate general and special education and make the inclusive students feel like and actually become active members of general education classroom.

Education is a process of enabling all children to learn and participate effectively within the mainstream school systems. It does not segregate children who have different abilities or needs. This in other words is to indicate the shift of thinking from an unnatural segregated setting towards supporting inclusive schools.

According to Neary and Halvorsen (1995) “the best environment for learning is those in which students are motivated, learning is active and information is presented in a manner that recognizes the diversity of each student”

An inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning directed to:

- The full development of human potential and some sense of dignity and self worth and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity.
- The development of persons with disabilities of their personality, talents and creativity as well as their mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.
- Enabling persons with disabilities to participate effectively in a free society.
- States parties shall enable persons with disabilities to learn life and social development skills to facilitate their full and equal participation in education and as members of the community.

Teachers’ attitude towards inclusion

One of the most significant stipulations that allow for successful inclusive of special education students is the attitude or attitudes of the general education teacher regarding the inclusion of special education students into their classrooms. Classrooms are now becoming more diverse with respect to students abilities therefore sensitivity and awareness on the part of general education teacher is essential to promote successful inclusion. Many factors influence the general education teacher’s inclusion. When general education teachers are provided proper training and supportive services through a collaborative consultant and designated time to meet willingness to participate in collaborative interactions, they can come at par with special teachers.

Numerous studies have done to find out the attitude of teachers towards inclusive education result vary. A study done by Singh (2001) and Alur (2001) it was found that the majority of regular education teachers had a negative attitude towards inclusion. A comparative study by Mastropieri (2004) showed that special education teacher tend to have a negative attitude towards inclusion like their mainstream counterparts do. On the contrary some research findings have indicated that regular education teachers are becoming more positive towards inclusion (singh 2001). In some cases it has been reported that some regular educators display enthusiastic professionalism dedicated to the development and implementation of inclusion school practice (Padeliadu and Lampropoulou 1997)

Studies in India like Singh (2001), Jha (2002), Mastropieri and Scruggs (2004) indicate that the majority of teachers who were participating in inclusion programs had strong negative feelings about inclusion. The teacher identified several factors that would affect the success of inclusion such as class size, inadequate resources, lack of adopted curriculum and lack of adequate training. There is some evidence that an important predictor of successful integration of students with disabilities in regular classroom is the positive attitude of teachers. Research evidence also suggests that positive teacher attitudes towards inclusion often begins during pre-service teacher’s preparation Subban and Sharma (2007) pointed out that if teacher leave from the

university with negative attitudes then those attitudes are difficult to change. Consequently, positive attitudes can and need to be fostered through both training and positive experiences with students with disabilities. Dickens and Smith (1995) conducted a study on the attitudes of both regular and special educators towards inclusion after their in-service training. They concluded that staff development is the key to the success of inclusion. Johnsons (1996) in a study described and analyzed the perceptions held by regular education teacher towards the placement of students with learning disabilities in their classrooms. Key findings of their study were that class size should be reduced to support inclusion and that teachers are basically enthusiastic about participating in inclusion. Teachers were also concerned about their level of training regarding modification and received effective teaching strategies for students with disabilities.

Ali, Mustapha and Jelas (2006) examined the attitude and perceived knowledge of mainstream and special education teacher of primary and secondary schools towards inclusion education in Malaysia.

The main finding shows that in general teachers have positive attitudes towards inclusive education. They agreed that inclusive education enhances social interaction and inclusion among the students and thus it minimizes negative stereotypes on special needs students. The findings also show that collaboration between the mainstream and the special education teacher is important and there should be clear guidelines on the implementation of inclusive education. The findings of the study have significant implication to the school administrators, teachers and other stakeholders who directly and indirectly involved in implementing inclusion education.

Factors affecting the Teachers' Attitude

Research has suggested that teacher's attitudes might be influenced by a number of factors, which are in many ways, interrelated. For example, attitudes studies reviewed earlier appeared to vary according to disabling conditions. In other words the natures of the disabilities and educational problems presented have been noted to influence teacher's attitudes. Eavranmidis and Brahmnorwich (2002) found that educators were cautiously accepting including a child with cognitive disabilities and were more accepting of children with physical disabilities. The degree of acceptance for inclusion was high for children considered to have mild or moderate disabilities.

A great deal of research regarding teacher characteristic has sought to determine relationship those characteristics and attitudes towards children with special needs. Research have explored a number of specific teacher variables, such as gender, age, years of teaching experience, grade level and contact with disabled persons and personality factors, which might influence teacher's acceptance of the inclusion principle.

With regard to gender studies conducted appear inconsistent; some researchers noted that female teacher had a greater tolerance level for integration and for special needs persons than did male teacher (Eavramids and Brahmnorwich 2002). On the other hand, research conducted by Singh (2001) confirmed that there is no statistical significant difference in attitudes between male and female regular teacher.

Teaching experience is another factor mentioned in several studies as having an influence on teacher's attitudes. In this case, much of the research conducted seems consistent. For example, as mentioned by Eavramidis and Brahmnorwich (2002) younger teacher and than those with fewer years of experience have been found to be supportive to inclusion than those with more experience.

Another factor that has attracted considerable attention is the knowledge about children with disabilities gained through pre and in service training. This was considered as an important factor improving teacher's attitude toward the implementation of an inclusion policy. Without a coherent plan for teacher training in the educational needs of the children with special needs, attempts to include these children in the mainstream would be difficult. (Eavamindis and brahmnowich 2002). In support of the above, a research conducted by Singh (2001) in some schools in India reveals a significant difference between regular teacher who had training in Inclusive Education and those who did not. Generally researches conducted in some schools of India show a high correlation of teachers' attitudes with factors like availability of support adapted curriculum, training materials and classroom size. In support of the above karna(1999) experimented 100 students in one class, which makes the teaching learning process more difficult even for the non- disabled children. As a result she concluded that teacher will not be in a position to attend the individual problem and be interested in them. Further, it is explained that the lack of accessible and flexible curriculum and lack of training are the ultimate challenge affecting teachers' attitude negatively.

Teacher Education for Inclusion

Preparing teacher for regular class teaching has undergone a major pedagogical shift in recent years. Training institution are now required or ensure that pre service teacher are competent to cater for the needs of an increasing range of diverse learners. This move has been furthered by International recommendations from UNESCO to include content on inclusion as part of teacher training program (UNSESCO 1994). In preparing teachers for inclusive classroom their attitudes, beliefs, expectations and acceptance of people with diverse needs may well be challenged. Teacher education is directly related to teachers' attitudes. Teachers who receive education about inclusion have been found to be more likely to have positive attitudes towards the inclusion of children who experience disability. Given the importance of attitudes for inclusion education educating all teachers as inclusion teachers is an important goal.

The notion that there is a special way to teach special children is in itself an ableist view. This ableist thinking results in categorizing some children as unacceptable for inclusion. By inference this view suggests that there is one way to teach all children except children who experience disability. The uncritical absorption of the myth of 'normal' creates the conditions where teacher are able to view children who experience disability as 'other' and this process results in a lack of confidence (and sometimes unwillingness) to teach all children. The notion that there is one way to teach any group of children is both problematic and untrue, as it denies the individuality of all children and diversity within the group, thus inclusive teachers are better teachers of any child.

Teacher Education has been found to lead to more inclusive attitudes. However, some studies show only minimal changes and the majority of pre-service teachers feel unprepared for inclusive education. The traditional approach to teacher education in which teachers are taught about disability categories often in a week by week fashion serves to reinforce the myth of the 'normal' and 'sub-normal' child thus perpetuating ableism and impeding the opportunity to develop inclusive attitudes. However, in more recent years research has exposed effective approaches to improving attitudes towards and confidence in inclusion education through teacher education.

Key elements of teacher education which results in more positive attitude

- Teacher education that enables teachers to develop an understanding of ableism recognizes ableist values and practices and seek to disestablish ableist attitudes including consideration of representation of people who experience disability.
- Support to move beyond deficit thinking entrenched within the special education paradigm towards an approach to education that welcomes and celebrates diversity.
- Engaging in critical reflection about belief and practice.
- Building confidence for inclusive education through reflective practice on developing knowledge of flexible pedagogy and universal design for learning.
- Developing an understanding of diversity as a resource, rather than a 'problem' and learning to presume competence and hold positive expectation of all children.
- Learning about available supports for facilitating inclusive education.
- Developing an understanding of importance of listening to people who experience disability including children and drawing on the disability rights movement in striving towards inclusive education. Within this providing opportunities for respectful engagement with people who experience disability.
- Establishing strategies for ongoing collaboration with other teachers, including the provision of a theoretical toolbox to assist with engaging in ongoing critical thinking and critical reflection.

According to Singh (2001)- It is unrealistic and unfair to expect that the regular class teacher will be able to include children with disability in regular classroom without first receiving adequate training. It is through training that teachers could bring the necessary adaptation required to meet special needs of their students. A number of researches have concluded that successful implementation of inclusion depends largely on the good will of educators in addition to the skill they are required to have. Teachers with positive attitudes towards inclusion more readily change and adapt to the ways they work in order to benefit students with a range of learning needs (Jha 2002). It was also found that when teachers are not trained in techniques for including children with disability and do not share responsibilities with others they would not have change of attitudes. In other words when planning and training have not taken place, teachers develop negative attitudes towards inclusion which in turn affects their roles. To conclude regular teacher must be provided with the training and resource they need to meet children's specific learning and behavioral needs of the successful implementation of inclusion.

Barriers in Inclusion Education

Evaluation of studies indicates that teachers do not always have the support they need to make inclusive education successful. For inclusive education to be meaningful, schools must recognize and responds to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula organizational arrangements teaching strategies, resources use and partnership with their communities.

Structural Barriers

- Providing specialist support within mainstream settings when needed to ensure equitable access to education (e.g teaching Braille, assistance with setting up AAC systems).
- Ensuring that the education of specialist support providers (e.g. teacher of deaf; Braille teachers, allied health therapists) adequately facilitates the development of specialist skills. (Fluent signing, knowledge of how to teach Braille etc) as well as education to support recognition of and resistance to ableism and the ability to collaborate with teachers to support inclusive education.
- Applying Principle of universal design for learning.

Systems of support

Even when a child is labeled and therefore funding for support may be available, limited funding and resources, lack of support from specialist staff and education authorities and inadequate professional development opportunities were identified as barriers. Teacher's lack of knowledge support and resources impacts on the implementation of inclusion practice in their classrooms and can also impact negatively on attitudes.

Brown et al. found that many teachers were aware of strategies to adapt the curriculum to be more inclusive. However, they lacked knowledge and support regarding preparing the environment and using visual aids. Additionally they lacked adequate resources and specialist support required for genuine inclusion. Limited training combined with inadequate specialist input, personnel planning time and resources to support staff poses a serious challenge for teacher to implement inclusion for students with visual impairment.

Implications

“It is because of the offensiveness of exiting injustices and barriers that we must not on the one hand underestimate the degree of the struggle involved if our vision of an inclusive society, it is to be realized or on the other hand fail to recognize the importance of establishing effective working relationships with all those involved in removing oppression and discrimination”.

- Undertake a comprehensive review of policy and practice at all levels of the education system to ensure the rights of the students with disability.

- Inclusive education practice should become an integral part of education and training for allied health, education leaders and other education support professionals.
- Entails the need for the availability of training, adapted curriculum, resources and utmost responsibility of the teachers for the implementation of inclusive education.
- Direct accountable and regular consultation with students with disability and their families must be built into the next phase of the development of the funding model for students with disability, including the collection of nationally consistent data on students with disability.
- To control factors contributing to negative attitudes in implementing successful inclusion.

Conclusion

Teachers and other professionals often lack understanding about roles and responsibilities in the care and education of children who experience disability. Careful consideration of and communication about the roles of different professionals is essential in order to avoid creating situation of exclusion.

Regular collaboration with all members of the educational team including parents and specialist support professionals is required. This involves allied health professional and specialist teacher working with teachers and families, rather than with children directly. Where appropriate this support may be provided a support staff member is directly involved within classroom practice. Consulting children regarding the support they need and how this is best implemented is also essential within this process. It seems reasonable to conclude here that with the provision of more resources and support, flexible and accessible curriculum, pre-service and in-service training, teachers attitudes could become more positive towards inclusive education.

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