

Perception of School Teachers Towards Actualising Inclusive Education

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education is a relatively new aspect in the field of education, and these days it is being advocated more and more. Many new policies are now coming to make inclusive education a reality to help students with various types of disabilities. But the implementation of inclusive education is a big challenge as the teachers are not prepared, they are not aware and they are not ready to accept the challenges they face with inclusion becoming the new normal. Inclusive education is being talked about at large everywhere but little is being done to support and train the teachers who are the actual stakeholders in the implementation of inclusion. The unpreparedness has made the task seem to be daunting and one that cannot be accomplished. The government has started taking initiatives to make inclusion a reality but much more is still to be done. Without proper planning for preparing the teachers and without proper awareness, ignorance regarding such a sensitive issue will not subside. Most school teachers have been seen to be apprehensive about the concept of inclusion simply due to lack of self-confidence and knowledge on this issue. This paper is an attempt to know about the perception school teachers have towards actualizing the concept of inclusion. Perception can be both positive or negative depending on the awareness the teachers have and also how much they are being familiarised with the idea of inclusive education.

Keywords: Inclusive education, perception, school teachers, challenges

Introduction:

The idea of inclusive education is not new. Since ancient times all students irrespective of their abilities and disabilities were taught together in a single classroom. They were cared for and made to study together to develop a sense of equality in the students. Later on, this idea changed as the need for special schools, special tutors, and special curricula for the disabled was felt. Many new special schools cropped up and disabled children were sent to such schools. But again, the idea of inclusive education came into the scholars' minds to generate a sense of equality in the students. Now a day's all the policymakers and the governments of all states are readily advocating the idea of inclusive education. Each day new policies and new ideas are being shared to actualize the idea of inclusive

education. But the actual work that needs to be done in the area of implementing inclusive education is still not being done properly. Many school teachers all over the world are of the view that the government must provide regular in-service training to the teachers and provide the equipment and facilities in order to properly actualize the idea of inclusive education. (Ocloo, & Subbey, 2008).

Endless talks have been done and numerous suggestions are given. A lot of research has been done and innumerable debates have taken place in order to bring out practical solutions for the actualization of inclusive education. The foremost thing that should and that needs to be done is the direct involvement of the school teachers. Their suggestions should be taken

seriously and they should be given a chance to become a part of the formulation of the policies.

NEP 2020 asserts that children with any type of disability will need equal participation and equal opportunities for such students across the educational system. 2016, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPWD) also had given provisions for inclusive education. Recommendations given include non-discrimination in schools, accessible infrastructure, reasonable accommodations, individualized support, recruitment of special educators, and use of Braille and Indian sign language for teaching and monitoring differently abled children in the class. In accordance with RPWD, the NEP also advocates the need for special schools for students having benchmark disabilities. Short-term specialisation courses are recommended by NEP to train teachers to teach students with disabilities in the classroom. Teachers will be trained to identify any disability in the child, especially specific learning disabilities. (Sarkar, 2020)

Many hindrances prove to be factors that develop a negative or neutral perception of school teachers toward inclusive education. (De Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011). Lack of proper training and facilities has been seen to develop a negative attitude towards inclusive education. The teachers fear the idea of inclusion on account of being unprepared for the challenges that accompany inclusive education. (Chhabra, Srivastava & Srivastava, 2010). The researchers have also studied the attitude of the parents towards inclusive education and found that the parents of children who study in an inclusive classroom are more positive towards inclusive education rather than parents of students who attend regular schools.

The attitude of the parents also depends on the type of disability included in the classroom in an inclusive class. (Paseka & Schwab, 2020). It was found that the children having dyslexia, a type of learning disability did not perform well in an inclusive classroom. They took more time in studying and understanding the lessons taught and could not complete their tasks in one setting. (Kalsoom, Mujahid & Zulfqar, 2020). Such types of results have shown that there is resistance to making inclusion fully applicable and keeping segregated schools intact. There is a limited desire to cooperate with colleagues from regular schools and it is quite impossible to teach in inclusive classrooms. (Göransson, Bengtsson, Hansson, Klang, Lindqvist & Nilholm,

2020). Further studies have revealed that there are several dilemmas that hover over the idea of the actualisation of inclusive education. The concerns mainly include the concerns of mainstream teachers meeting the needs of special educational needs of the special child and also the lack of knowledge of the non-disabled children towards the idea of supporting disability in the classroom. (Ring & Travers, 2005).

Many recent studies have also shown that due to the awareness being spread and the need for inclusive education being largely felt in the education field, many teachers and stakeholders have developed a positive attitude toward inclusive education. There is a tendency of positivity felt by the school teachers of the urban areas mainly because of the professional training and incentives given to them to support the practical implementation of inclusive education. (Mishra, Siddharth., Bhardwaj, Elhence & Jalan, 2018). There should be a proper collaboration between the mainstream and special education teachers and there should be a clear guidelines on the implementation of inclusive education. All the stakeholders of education need to be in perfect coordination for the proper actualization of inclusive education. (Ali, Mustapha & Jelas, 2006).

The Rationale of the Study:

It is a known and well-established fact now that school teachers are the torchbearers of the education system. They are the people who are having a direct influence on the students as they are the ones who directly interact with the students in the classroom. No other stakeholder of the education system is on the front foot of education. Hence, it is needless to say that they can very well know and explain the different challenges that can be faced while teaching normal as well as differently abled students. This needs to be kept in mind while bringing about any major changes in the education system. The same goes for the actualising of inclusive education.

Hence, the present study is an attempt to know the perception the teachers have towards the implementation of inclusive education in the classrooms of India. Also, to know about their views and the inhibitions they have towards the actualisation of the concept of inclusive education. Their perception is most necessary to be known in order to chalk out the areas we need to work on before inclusive education

becomes a reality in the schools of our country. And they are also needed to minimize the hurdles that can become a big challenge while implementing inclusive education in schools. Therefore, the topic for the present study is:

Perception of school teachers towards actualising inclusive education:

Operational Definition of the Keywords:

Perception- In the present paper it is the way school teachers regard, understand, and interpret the concept of inclusive education. It is the awareness and knowledge of the concept of inclusive education that school teachers have in the present times.

School teachers: Teachers who are teaching in primary and secondary schools are included in the study.

Inclusive education: Inclusive education refers to the type of education system which accommodates all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions. For the present study, inclusive education refers to the education which includes children with special needs and differently-abled students in the regular classroom that has been designed for children without disabilities.

Challenges- Different threats that teachers face while implementing inclusive education. The various problems that teachers go through while putting inclusive education into practice.

Research Questions:

School teachers are the torchbearers of education. Any change in the educational setup or any new policy that is introduced directly affects the school teachers. Even the government before implementing anything new in the schools always asks for the opinion and suggestions of the school teachers. It is very important to know about the thinking, perceptions, the attitudes the teachers have toward anything new that is going to be implemented. It is because they are the ones who are in direct contact with the children in schools. They are very well aware and enlightened about the problems, and the challenges they will face if anything new is brought for the students.

The same is the case with the actualisation of the concept of inclusive education. It is imperative to know what actually the teachers are thinking about the actualisation of inclusive education in schools. They are aware of the glaring challenges they will face and the immense benefits it will bring about for the students in

the future. Hence to know about the perceptions of the school teachers following research questions were framed for the present study by the researchers:

1. What are the different challenges faced in actualising the concept of inclusive education in schools?
2. What are the valuable suggestions that will help in fully actualising the idea of inclusive education in schools?

Methodology:

Method- Mixed method research was used to study the problem. A descriptive survey method was used.

Population- The population for the study included all the school teachers (both middle and higher secondary) of the government and private schools of Patna.

Sample and sampling technique :

A convenient sampling technique was used to collect data for the study. The data was collected from 152 school teachers of which 74 were primary teachers and 77 were from secondary schools in Patna. Out of these 152 school teachers, 10 school teachers were interviewed.

Table 1
Demographic Distribution of the Sample:

Teachers' Characteristics	Categories	Frequencies	Percentage
Gender	Female	126	82.9
	Male	26	17.1
Type of School	Private	122	80.3
	Government	30	19.7
School	Primary	75	50.7
	Secondary	77	49.3
Locality of School	Urban	129	84.9
	Rural	23	15.1
Educational Level	Graduate	37	24.3
	Post-Graduate	115	75.7
Teaching experience	Below 10 years	82	53.9
	Above 10 years	70	46.1

Tools Used:

- To explore the perception of teachers' perception of the challenges of an inclusive classroom, an opinionnaire was constructed by the investigators

which contained 14 items regarding the challenges of inclusive education and it was a three-point scale having three types of responses: Agree, Undecided, and Disagree. Data was collected through Google Forms given to school teachers during the survey.

ii. Another tool used for the data collection was a semi-structured interview designed to take face-to-face interviews with the school teachers of the schools of Patna.

The tool had four open-ended questions that were asked by the school teachers.

Data collection:

The data was collected from school teachers in Patna by sending Google forms. The data was collected from 152 school teachers teaching at the

middle and higher secondary level. School teachers belonged to both urban and rural schools in Patna.

Delimitations:

School teachers from the schools of Patna in Bihar only were taken as the sample for the study.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data:

The quantitative data was analysed using the percentage analysis of the responses given for each item of the opinionnaire by the school teachers. Table 2 depicts the percentage analysis of all the items in the opinionnaire. The figures indicate the percentage of school teachers who agreed with the item of the opinionnaire.

Table 2

Percentage analysis of the items of the opinionnaire towards challenges of inclusive education as perceived by the school teachers against the background variables who agreed with the items.

Item No	Statements regarding Challenges of Inclusive Education	Gender		Teaching Experience		Location of School		School Level		Type of School		Educational Qualification	
		Female	Male	Below 10	10 Years	Urban	Rural	Secondary	Middle	Private	Govt.	U.G.	P.G
1.	Teachers are not given proper training to handle an inclusive classroom.	46.03	57.69	45.78	51.42	45.38	65.21	55.8	40	41.46	77.4	36.84	52.17
2.	The infrastructure at most schools is not suitable for inclusive education	70.63	65.38	65.06	75.71	53.07	60.86	72.72	66.66	65.04	90.3	65.78	71.3
3.	The curriculum taught at the schools does not include the syllabus as per the needs of the special children	71.42	73.07	71.08	72.85	70	69.56	80.5	62.66	71.54	74.1	71.05	72.17
4.	Parents are not ready and open to accepting the idea of sending their children to the inclusive classroom.	52.38	69.23	55.42	55.71	74.61	56.52	51.94	58.66	56.91	51.61	63.15	53.04
5.	The presence of special students in the classroom proves to be the cause of stress for the teachers.	25.39	38.46	22.89	34.28	55.38	56.52	19.48	36	30.08	22.58	39.47	24.34
6.	Students usually lack the amount of support needed	57.14	69.23	61.44	57.14	29.23	21.73	58.44	60	59.34	61.29	63.15	58.26

	for an inclusive classroom from teachers, and the community.												
7.	Admission to inclusive schools is still a barrier for many students.	69.84	61.53	69.87	67.14	61.53	47.82	58.44	70.66	69.1	67.74	68.45	68.69
8.	We do not get the materials and resources needed for an inclusive classroom	68.25	69.23	72.28	64.28	66.92	78.26	74.0	62.6	63.41	90.3	52.63	73.91
9.	We have felt that many parents and students feel that inclusive education will have an adverse effect on the development of normal students.	46.03	61.53	44.57	54.28	65.38	86.95	42.9	54.66	51.21	41.93	50	48.69
10.	The presence of special needs children in our classroom increases our responsibility and increases our workload.	59.52	53.84	57.83	60	46.92	60.86	57.14	60	61.78	48.38	55.26	60
11.	Inappropriate communication with special needs children is a barrier for most teachers	68.25	88.46	68.67	75.71	59.23	56.52	76.62	66.66	69.91	80.64	76.31	70.43
12.	Lack of funding is a problem	74.60	69.23	73.49	74.28	73.07	65.21	79.22	68.54	71.54	83.87	65.78	76.52
13.	There is a lack of transportation facilities.	58.73	65.38	61.44	58.57	54.61	78.26	61.03	58.66	56.91	74.19	50	63.47
14.	The present education system is not flexible enough to incorporate inclusive education fully.	69.04	80.76	72.28	70	70	91.3	76.62	65.33	69.91	77.41	63.15	73.91

Analysis based on gender:

From Table 2 it can be seen that 80.76% of male teachers agreed that the present education system is not flexible enough to incorporate inclusive education fully. 74.60% of female teachers feel that lack of funding is a major problem. 88.46% of male teachers feel that inappropriate communication with special needs children is a barrier for most teachers in the inclusive classroom.

Analysis based on teaching experience :

It is seen from Table 2 that 75.71% of school teachers who have teaching experience of more than

10 years agreed to the fact that communication is still a problem in an inclusive classroom. 74.28% of them feel lack of funding is a major barrier to implementing inclusive education.

Analysis based on the location of the school:

It can be seen from Table 2 that 78.26% of teachers of rural schools feel that they do not get the appropriate materials required for an inclusive classroom and there is a lack of transportation facilities in the schools. 91.35 % of rural background teachers

feel that there is rigidity regarding the incorporation of inclusive education fully. 74.61% of urban school teachers feel that parents are not ready and open to sending their children to inclusive schools.

Analysis based on school level:

From Table 2 it can be clearly seen that 80.5% of teachers teaching in secondary schools agreed that the curriculum taught in schools is not inclusive friendly. 79.22% of them feel that lack of funding is a major problem. 70.66% of middle school teachers feel that admission is still a problem in inclusive schools.

Analysis based on the type of school:

From Table 2 it can be seen that 71.54% of private school teachers and 83.87% of government school teachers are of the view that lack of funding is a problem in implementing inclusive education. 71.54% of private school teachers feel that the curriculum taught in such schools does not include a syllabus for special children. 80.6% of government school teachers feel that there is a communication problem as the teachers are not trained enough to effectively communicate with the special children in the class. 90.3% of government school teachers agreed that infrastructure is not proper for an inclusive classroom.

Analysis based on the educational qualification of school teachers:

It can be seen from Table 2 that 76.31% of school teachers who are graduates feel that there is inappropriate communication with special children in an inclusive classroom. 76.52% of school teachers who are postgraduates feel that lack of funding is still a problem. 73.91% of them feel there is rigidity regarding the inclusive education concept in the education system.

Qualitative Data:

Responses from the interviews taken:

Respondent 1 - The first respondent was of the view that the mindset of the teaching community still does not welcome the idea of inclusive education. The infrastructure and the sitting arrangements in the classrooms are not inclusive and friendly. The teachers should be properly oriented and the peer group should

be adequately sensitized for their behaviours towards the differently abled child. The differently abled child should not be labelled and he/she should be kept away from the monster of labelling.

Respondent 2- The second respondent was of the view that teachers lack training for handling true inclusive education situations. Teachers' workload is already very high in the classes and such inclusion will increase their workload. She also argued that small children cannot have that much empathy towards differently-abled children owing to their tender age. She also felt that this inclusion may hamper the normal progress of the normal students. She was of the view that inclusive education is practically not possible owing to the numerous challenges present.

Respondent 3- The third respondent was also of the view that lack of training is one of the biggest challenges in implementing inclusive education. Facilities according to the needs of the differently abled children are not available in schools. It is important to prepare normal children to welcome such children into the classrooms. One initiative on part of the government for this is that the books of NCERT have included chapters with the message to sensitise school-going children to the proper inclusion of such children in the classroom.

Special supporting teachers should be present in order to help the teacher in the classroom. Class time should also be increased in order to include the extra time needed by the special child. She was of the view that observation can help identify such children in the classroom as well as studying the progress report of the students also gives an idea of such children in the classroom.

Respondent 4 was of the view that the administration is not careful enough to take care of the infrastructure needed for inclusive education. Many times, the peer group without being sensitised is given the burden of handling such children in the classroom. There is a lack of awareness and sympathy given to them much proves to be toxic for them.

Encouragement to the students on part of the parents and teachers can boost the morale of the students. Teachers should understand that too much

dependency on such students can prove negative for them. Observation can lead to the identification of such children in the classroom.

Respondent 5- According to him lack of awareness about inclusive education is the major problem in the actualisation of inclusive education. Resources are not according to the needs of the differently abled child, especially ICT resources. Motivation in teachers is less because of a lack of training. Parents are also not aware of the main concept of inclusive education. Society also does not support such children and give those adequate opportunities and time required for them. Study materials and resources should be given to the students according to their needs and language preference. The environment should be made conducive for such students. Talking to such students and observing them can help identify such children in the classroom. Remedial classes should be given to such students apart from the normal class.

Respondent 6- was of the view that the class hour is not sufficient for including such children in the classroom. Teachers are arrogant and they give toxic sympathy to such students in the class. Teaching ethics should be kept in mind. There is pressure on part of the administration and also biases on part of the teacher is also there. Proper enrolment of such students does not take place in the school as rejection is also a problem for such students. Audio-visual learning should be promoted for such students. Resources and aids should be present in the school according to the needs of the child.

Respondent 7 also was of the view that teachers lack the requisite training required for the implementation of inclusive education. There is a severe dearth of practical knowledge among the teachers as well as the students who deal with special children. Practical knowledge and training should be given to the teachers and the infrastructure should be made compatible in order to actualise the idea of inclusive education.

Analysis of the Interviews Taken Challenges Identified in Actualising Inclusive Education

From the thematic analysis of the above responses given by the school teachers and by identifying the recurring themes in the interview responses, the following challenges have been identified in actualising inclusive education

- i. Lack of proper infrastructure and facilities supportive of inclusive education.
- ii. Lack of proper training for the teachers for preparing them for an inclusive classroom
- iii. Stereotype mindset of the teachers as well as the parents towards inclusive education.
- iv. Less class time is needed to accommodate the differently abled child in the class.
- v. Teachers lack enthusiasm and motivation for an inclusive classroom.
- vi. Lack of awareness amongst the parents and peer groups for an inclusive classroom.
- vii. Equal enrolment opportunities are not given to all the students in the school.
- viii. Improper use of sympathy by the peer group and the fear of facing rejection are big hindrances.
- ix. Labelling proves to be toxic for the students in an inclusive class.

Suggestions for Proper Actualisation of Inclusive Education:

- i. Giving proper training to teachers in order to prepare and motivate them for an inclusive classroom.
- ii. Giving teachers good remuneration that can prove to be a morale booster for them.
- iii. Sensitising students and teachers to change the stereotypical mindset towards inclusive education.
- iv. Class time should be increased in order to accommodate the special students in the normal classroom.
- v. Organising seminars and workshops and 'nukkad natak' in order to increase awareness amongst teachers and parents as well as peer groups.
- vi. Equal enrolment opportunities should be given to all students irrespective of their abilities.

Conclusion:

Therefore, after analysing the responses of both the opinionnaire and the interview, a few challenges have been identified in the actualisation of inclusive education. Many teachers have strongly mentioned that lack of proper training and availability of adequate resources will never make the dream of proper inclusive education a reality. They were also apprehensive that the teachers involved in the classroom will not get their share of a good salary, which can prove negative for the school teachers' motivation. Lack of funds, lack of awareness, and lack of acceptance among students and peer groups have been also identified as major challenges in actualising inclusive education. Hence, before we think about properly witnessing inclusive classrooms, we need to work on the challenges that are hovering over the teachers of future inclusive classrooms. Only then can we think of making this a possibility from which all the students can reap benefits. Government and the society both need to still do a lot in order to place an inclusive classroom in the main limelight of the education system of our country.

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