

Understanding Teachers' Perspective of Inclusive Education for Children With Special Needs (CWSN)

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study was to explore teachers' opinions towards inclusive education in Chandigarh and to gain more knowledge about the factors that may influence the implementation of inclusive practices in a school system. Data has been collected from 65 primary teachers selected randomly from 10 government primary schools of Chandigarh. It was found that many of the teachers had opined that Children with severe disabilities should be educated in special or separate settings and special education teachers are trained to use different teaching methods to teach students with disabilities more effectively but at the same time most of them also agreed that Inclusive education is likely to have a positive effect on the social and emotional development of students with disabilities. Qualitative analysis of the open ended questionnaire along with Focus group Interview with teachers regarding the education of children with special needs revealed that they are quite ready for educating CWSN in regular classrooms but they face various barriers and challenges that impact the teaching and learning of these children in general classrooms.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, CWSN, Primary teachers, Attitude, Teaching Strategies

The past decade has seen consistent movement towards adopting an Inclusive Education (IE) approach, and moving away from the segregation of children with disabilities in schools across India. Inclusive education refers to a philosophical position as well as an arrangement of institutional facilities and processes. This is to ensure access to and conditions of success in education for all. The teachers need to be sensitized and aware of the inclusive philosophy and should be oriented to the different kinds of accommodations that have to be made with respect to infrastructure, curriculum, teaching methods and other school practices to relate teaching to the needs of all learners. Inclusive education as a policy is being implemented in the country using different approaches and models. In India, inclusive education has been mainly concerned with children with disabilities. Types of Children with disabilities /CWSN covered under inclusive education in SSA include - Intellectual Disabled (MR), Low Vision, Total blind, Hearing impaired,

Speech problem, orthopedically handicapped, Cerebral palsy, Autism spectrum disorder, Learning disabled, Multiple disabled. The National Action Plan for Inclusion in Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities (IECYD) developed by the MHRD (November -2005) emphasizes the inclusion of children and young persons with disability in all general educational settings. India has signed U N Convention on Rights of Persons with Disability (UNCRPD) in 2007. The convention makes it mandatory to change the educational policies of the countries to make education inclusive.

It should be noted that no state government has state-sponsored schemes specifically for inclusive education. However, in the 1970s, the government launched the centrally sponsored scheme of Integrated Education for Disabled Children (UNICEF, 2003, retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/InclusiveInd.pdf>). The scheme aimed at providing educational opportunities to children

with disabilities in regular schools, and to smooth the progress of their achievement and retention. In 1997, IEDC was amalgamated with other major basic education projects like the DREP (Chadha, 2002) and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiya (SSA) (Department of Elementary Education, 2000). SSA ensures that every child with special needs, irrespective of the Kind, category and degree of disability, is provided meaningful and quality education. No child with disability should be deprived of the right to education and is taught in an environment, which is best, suited to his/her learning needs (Disability News India, 2010). When children fail to learn in schools, it is only too tempting to perceive something wrong within them. The success of inclusion lies in the hands of the class teacher who is the ultimate key to educational change and school improvement. Since the teacher will be primarily responsible for bringing about this radical change, in practice it is vital that careful planning is undertaken to provide the required capacity building and make inclusive education a reality.

The reputation of a school and its influence on the life of the community invariably depends on the kind of teachers working in it. Thus a teacher's role is pivotal in imparting quality education and bringing about qualitative change in an educational system. Inclusive education can only be successful if teachers are part of the team driving this process. Teachers attitude toward inclusion are important to understand so that educators can be properly trained to make inclusion success. Parasuram (2006) in India found that teacher attitudes were more positive if teachers had exposure to people with disabilities, or had a higher level of education. If disabled children are going to be included on an equal basis with their peers the underlying prejudices and negative attitudes held by teachers have to be addressed. Bhargava, S., Narumanchi, A. (2011) explored the perceptions of parents of typical children towards inclusive education and children with special needs. Though, the study concluded that parents of non disabled children showed positive reactions towards children with special needs. And they supported inclusion, but suggested separate academic classes for disabled children in regular schools.

Bansal, S. (2016) conducted a Study on Attitude of Teachers towards Inclusive Education in Relation

to their Professional Commitment by showed that there exist significant difference in the attitude of teachers towards inclusive education with respect to the type of school and years of teaching experience. Teachers working in private schools showed favorable attitude towards inclusive education than the government school teachers.

A number of researchers have highlighted that the regular school teachers in India have reported not receiving appropriate training in special education instructional methods (Das, 2001; Jangria, Singh, & Yadav, 1995; Shah, Das, Desai, & Tiwari, 2016). Several studies showed that positive attitudes of teachers towards students with special needs and inclusive education could be improved through teacher training (Bentley-Williams & Morgan, 2013; Engstrand & Roll-Pettersson, 2014), especially when they had direct contact with these children (Leatherman & Niemeyer, 2005). Conversely, another study by Forlin & Chambers (2011) disclosed that there was no improvement of pre-service teachers' attitudes after receiving training and being given opportunities of having applied experiences with persons with disabilities during the initial teacher education. Sucuoglu, Bakkaloglu, İscenKarasu, Demir, & Akalın (2013) conducted a research to investigate a relation between knowledge and attitudes of teachers who worked in preschool setting towards inclusive education in practice. In consistency with the results from Forlin & Chambers's study (2011), their findings revealed that there was no significance of relationship between level of teachers' knowledge and attitudes.

Bansal, S. presented a research study in International Education Conference 'Education as a right across the levels: Challenges, Opportunities and Strategies', at Jamia Milia Islamia, New Delhi in year 2014 on study of awareness of learning disabilities among elementary school teachers in inclusive setting. The findings of the study were also in lined with the existing study which concluded that the teachers had a meager knowledge about teaching learning disabled children in regular classrooms. A reviewed study on Teacher Education Programmes Preparing Teachers for Inclusive Classrooms: A North India Context conducted by the researcher in year 2016 also reflect the extent to which teacher education programme prepares their teacher education candidates to identify the specific needs

of each individual learner, and respond to them by deploying a wide range of teaching strategies in inclusive classrooms. It has been found that teachers remain heavily biased towards learning the theory of inclusive education without opportunities to practice and gain confidence with teaching methods needed to support diverse learners. The reality is that general educators receive limited preparation to meet the academic needs of students with disabilities (Salend & Duhaney, 1999; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1998).

However, other studies have shown that even after completing staff development training, many teachers still question their ability to teach students with disabilities, and some doubt they will be provided with resources and support necessary for the programs (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000; Kearney and Durand, 1992). However, few researchers have stated that the implementation of the Inclusive Education programme had never evaluated in primary schools. Various figures quoted above in the introduction and related literature and the status report of India show that we have to go a long way in Universalisation of elementary education especially the access to education for different categories of children with disabilities.

General educator's attitude and willingness to accommodate students who have disabilities in their class is one of the key factors in success of inclusive education therefore, it is important to examine general educator's attitudes towards inclusion. This is vital since attitude is a significant contributing factor in determining success with the inclusive education model. In India, the concept of Inclusive education has not yet been linked to a broader discussion of pedagogy (Anita, 2000) and quality education (Taneja, 2001).

Any broad reform in education cannot be implemented without taking the inclusion of learners with SEN into consideration. To make inclusive education possible, and to better accommodate students with different learning abilities, the present education system, educational structure, and educational practices need to become more flexible, more inclusive, and more collaborative. The current survey by National University Of Educational Planning And Administration (NUEPA) based on the DISE data brings out the status of

inclusive education as it highlights that, even though disabled children enroll at the primary school, they dropout sooner or later and this trend is much more among girls. Julka (2005) study showed that teachers considered teacher training, resource support, planning, pedagogy, partnerships and change in attitude extremely significant for inclusive education. There is a need to understand the teacher related factors that can encourage CWSN to complete their schooling. In fact, teachers need a variety of ongoing opportunities to improve their skills. The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' opinions towards inclusive education in Chandigarh and to gain more knowledge about the factors that may influence the implementation of inclusive practices in a school system.

Research Questions

The present study was investigated to answer the following questions:

- Q1. What are the teachers' attitude/opinions towards Inclusive Education?
- Q2. What are the barriers/ challenges perceived by the teachers to teach children with special need in inclusive settings?
- Q3. What are the methods/strategies used by the teachers while teaching children with special needs in general classrooms?
- Q4. What are the suggestions/ inputs given by the teachers for successful inclusion?

METHODS

The attitude of teachers towards the inclusive education was studied through awareness scale prepared by CBSE containing 13 items where in each item was scored ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. In addition, an Open ended Questionnaire with Focus Group Interview covering 3 major areas was carried out which include:

- The specific difficulties faced by CWSN in general classrooms as well difficulties face by teachers while teaching them,
- Methods/strategies use by the teachers to include CWSN in regular classrooms, and
- Suggestions/ Support that facilitate them to teach CWSN along with other children in their class.

□ Data has been collected from 65 primary teachers selected randomly from 10 government primary schools of Chandigarh. Both Quantitative and Qualitative techniques have been used to understand the perception of teachers regarding the education of children with special needs in regular school.

RESULTS

Discussion on Attitude Scale

Item-wise analysis of responses given by teachers in the attitude scale with 13 items are recorded - out of which 4 were concerned with inclusive philosophy, 5 with special or separate settings and 4 concerned with teacher and infrastructure in regular school.

The first part of the table depicts that majority of the teachers agree (53.8%) that all students should be educated in a common regular classrooms and because of inclusive education, they improve academically (52.3%) and have a positive effect

on social and emotional development (47.6%) and provide opportunities for mutual communication (56.9%). 26.1% of the teachers are not sure about the inclusive education practices. However, at the same time, Table 1 indicate they do they believe that the needs of students with disabilities can be best served in special and separate settings (35.3%) and special education teachers are trained to use different teaching methods to teach students with disabilities more effectively (50.7%) and children who communicate in special ways (e.g. Sign language or braille) should be educated in special or separate settings (46.1%).

Table 1 further indicate that majority of the teachers disagree with that there are sufficient supportive resources and trained professionals to support inclusive education in a regular school and sufficient knowledge and skills to educate students with special needs (30.7%). They also perceive that they are not comfortable while working with students with disabilities and their parents (56.9%)

Table 1: Observation Results on Attitude Scale

Statement	Agree	SA	Disagree	SD	NS
All students should be educated in a common regular classroom.	53.8% (35)	24.6% (16)	6.1% (4)	6.1% (4)	9.2% (6)
All students, with or without disabilities, can improve academically because of inclusive education.	52.3% (34)	41.5% (27)	0% (0)	1.53% (1)	4.6% (3)
Inclusive education is likely to have a positive effect on the social and emotional development of students with disabilities.	47.6% (31)	49.2% (32)	1.53% (1)	1.5% (1)	0% (0)
Inclusive education programs provide different students with opportunities for mutual communication thus promote students to understand and accept individual diversity.	56.9% (37)	38.4% (25)	3.07% (2)	0% (0)	1.53% (1)
Inclusion sounds good in theory but it does not work well in practice.	13.8% (9)	3.07 (2)	38.4% (25)	18.4% (12)	26.1% (17)
The needs of students with disabilities can be best served in special and separate settings.	35.3% (23)	15.3% (10)	30.7% (20)	3.07% (2)	15.3% (10)
Children with severe disabilities should be educated in special or separate settings.	40% (26)	16.9% (11)	24.6% (16)	7.69% (5)	10.7% (7)
Special Education teachers are trained to use different teaching methods to teach students with disabilities more effectively.	50.7% (33)	47.6% (31)	0% (0)	0% (0)	1.53% (1)
Children who communicate in special ways (e.g., sign language) should be educated in special or separate settings.	46.1% (30)	26.1% (17)	13.8% (9)	4.61% (3)	9.2% (6)
There are sufficient supportive resources and trained professionals to support inclusive education in a regular school.	20% (13)	6.15% (4)	30.7% (20)	20% (13)	23% (15)
I have sufficient knowledge and skills to educate students with special needs.	21.5% (14)	3.07% (2)	30.7% (20)	6.15% (4)	38.4% (25)
A teacher’s instructional effectiveness will be enhanced by having students with disabilities in a regular class.	16.9% (11)	20% (13)	7.69% (5)	3.07% (2)	52.3% (34)
I feel comfortable while working with students with disabilities and their parents.	18.4% (12)	10.7% (7)	56.9% (37)	3.07% (2)	10.7% (7)

and only 18.4% agree that their instructional effectiveness enhanced by having students with disabilities in a regular class. It is not surprising that teachers believe or see themselves not competent in education children with disabilities in regular classrooms. The results of the study also line with the number of researchers (Das, 2001; Jangria, Singh & Yadav, 1995; Shah, Das, Desai & Tiwari, 2016) who have highlighted that the regular school teachers in India have reported not receiving appropriate training in special education instructional methods. The results indicated that overall attitude of teachers towards the education of children with disabilities in regular setting was neither positive nor very negative. However, the item wise analysis of responses shows that do believe that children with disabilities should be educated in separate settings rather than common regular classroom. Research also indicates that negative attitudes of teachers and their lack of skills impede the successful implementation of inclusive education programs (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Swaroop, 2001).

Findings on the Basis of Open Ended Questionnaire and Focus group interview

Open ended Questionnaire covering 3 major areas regarding the specific difficulties faced by CWSN in general classrooms as well difficulties face by teachers while teaching them, methods/strategies use by the teachers to include CWSN in regular classrooms and the supports/ suggestions that facilitate them to teach CWSN along with other children in their class was carried on. The Findings revealed that they were quite reluctant and apprehensive for educating CWSN in regular school because of the various reasons cited by them as follows:

Specific difficulties faced by teachers and CWSN in inclusive classrooms

Overcrowded Classrooms with Multiple Job Assignments: Majority of teachers felt that it is almost impossible to give adequate attention and time to the disabled children due to large class size (1: 70/80), lack of barrier free environment, Overburdened with syllabus and multiple job assignments (beyond teaching). One teacher stated: *"I am teaching physically handicapped children and we have four storied school building with classrooms . But there are no ramps*

for such children in our school". Another teacher having CWSN in her classroom said: *"I just do not get time and support to give them any remedial/special teaching as we have around 90 students in a section".*

In the word of one teacher regarding education of children with special needs in regular classrooms, he stated:

"..... Being a class teacher, I did his counseling. He became friendly with me but his behavior was not good with other teachers. He is always after me in school. Sometimes it irritates me also, I think these type of children need love and affection. May be they will not be able to perform very well in exams but at least they can cope up and attain minimum passing marks. But personally I feel we must teach them, how to fit themselves in society to live independently i.e. to earn for themselves. But I do feel that they need special schools as they are being ignored in regular schools. Gradually, inclusion can be there but full time inclusion has pros and cons, and time and feasible experience will tell us the result of the same".

Education Policy and Assessment: Secondly, majority of the teachers showed dissatisfaction regarding education policies and assessment. According to them, as per the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, where a child above six years of age has not been admitted in any school or though admitted, could not complete his or her elementary education, then, he or she shall be admitted in a class appropriate to his or her age. Teachers are of the view in this case, it is very difficult to teach the child grade appropriate syllabus as most of them have not achieved minimum levels of learning i.e. not able to read and write age appropriately. Most of the teachers also commented that children with special needs are not able to perform as per the level of other children, but as per as the assessments are concerned, it is very difficult to evaluate them with the same syllabus. There should be prescribed syllabus meant for CWSN so that teacher teach only those topics to them. Additionally, they are more concerned with the slow learners also who lag behind academically but they are not counted in CWSN. For them they also need limited syllabus with relaxation in board exams.

Lack of Support System: The success of the inclusion program is actually only possible if they have full support from the school principals, resource teachers and other para-professionals. Education Department, UT under SSA has appointed one resource teacher for each cluster and in each cluster there are approximately 5-6 schools and these teacher could only visit once in a week in each school. The nature of disability determines the needs of a child and regular medical checkups may be needed to ascertain whether the disability of the child requires different kinds of help. But due to non-availability and dearth of time, resource teachers not able to give adequate support to CWSN and their problem remained unnoticed or ignored. They require support of Occupational therapist, speech therapist, psychologist and other experts.

Lack of Training: Teachers were also of the opinion that they are not equipped adequately with the curriculum modification and adaptation with respect to different subjects for handling these children. As per pre-service training is concerned most teachers expressed that their teacher education programme did not include subjects related to inclusion and even if its being taught not practical aspects had covered. Teachers described their teacher education in the following way: *"We feel that the university lives in a world of its own, separate from real school life. This means there is no systematic way of getting students familiar with knowledge that could help them when they encounter pupils who have learning disabilities or physical disabilities or behavioural issues... we had not been prepared for what might be waiting for us at the school."* They also added it is difficult to teach VI and HI child with special way i.e. braille and sign language. Most of the teacher appreciate and recognize the training programmes organized by SSA but they were of the view that techniques to incorporated in lessons should be taught in actual classroom settings. Most of them stated that: *"Conducting workshops on Inclusive education does not solve the problem related to education of children of special needs. Practical demonstration in actual classroom settings should be shown where we are being taught how to teach a child with visually impaired or hearing impaired along with the other children"*

Socio-economic background of children: They were also of the opinion that children in government schools come from the families of lower socio economic

strata and their parents lack motivation to educate them. Teachers commented that: *"the parents of these children are hardly interested about the performance of their children. They send them to schools only for Mid-day meal. The family environment at home is also not conducive. Their fathers are alcoholic and they do not support teachers in education i.e. completing homework or other academic work. They don't even come for parent-teacher meetings. Without cooperation of the parents, they felt it is not possible to teach them in regular schools"*.

Method and Strategies Employed By The Teachers

Most of the teachers suggested the following ways to teach CWSN in inclusive classrooms which most of them are being employed by them in their classrooms given below:

1. With the limited resources and training, we should motivate them and give special support with the help of peer group i.e. buddy system
2. More attention being given to these children in the classrooms
3. Break the topic into small parts
4. Give Examples of daily life
5. Ask them to repeat things
6. Make them sit in front and use projects, models and charts, flash cards to teach them
7. Focusing on basic skills of reading and writing
8. Develop interest in them
9. Teach them with love and affection
10. Give them extra worksheets in visual form i.e. with diagrams to practice
11. Giving them extra time after class in free period
12. Nurture their talent in other skills e.g. Clay modeling, candle making, art and craft, weaving, drawing
13. Provide positive role models
14. Modification of environment in term of appropriate physical setting, comfortable furniture, lightning facilities, adequate learning and play material
15. Prompting i.e. support to be provided where needed

16. Use of Reward System
17. Case study of the child should be prepared by the teacher with the help of resource teacher

Suggestions by the teachers to promote Inclusive Education

Various suggestions have been given by the teachers to teach CWSN in regular classrooms including:

1. Provision of ramps in the school
2. Safe building
3. Proper space for playground (swings for CWSN)
4. Need of pure water facility
5. Cleanliness of toilets
6. Pupil teacher ration should be 1:30
7. Sitting arrangements should be comfortable
8. One separate room for indoor activities
9. Arrangements of Audio-Visual aids
10. Provision of computer class
11. Camps for community awareness
12. Resource teacher in every school
13. Classes should be on ground floor (for CWSN)
14. Training programme regarding strategies for CWSN for in-service teachers should be conducted in actual classrooms so that Practical experience should be provided regarding teaching CWSN in the classes itself
15. There should be Game corners in the school
16. Teacher assistant should be given
17. Morning Batches for classes I to V and XI –XII and evening for classes 6 to 10th
18. Syllabus should be less for CWSN
19. Proper transport facility should be provided to the students
20. Detain the student if not achieve minimum passing marks.

CONCLUSION

Elementary teachers included in this study acknowledged that they were not sufficiently trained and educated on the topic of inclusion during their teacher training years and more intensive training need to be given during in-service training

programme based on demonstration and practical inputs. Teachers generally require the support and collaborations of various para-professional which appeared to be inadequate.

On the basis of the attitude scale and open ended questionnaire along with interview with teachers regarding the education of children with disabilities in general classrooms, it has been concluded that the negative attitude of the teachers are shown due to various factors i.e. lack of infrastructure facility, lack of proper training related to the behavioural sign of the children shown in the classroom with respect to various disabilities, teaching strategies i.e. curriculum modification and adaptation, Lack of availability of resource teachers and other paraprofessional , Lack of motivation among the students due to non-involvement of parents and overcrowded class size. Various strategies like peer tutoring, cooperative learning, using TLMS like charts, models, pictures, computer assisted learning, Behaviour modification techniques and modification in environment have been shared by the teachers. Number of suggestions including Proper provision for drinking water and sanitation facilities to be provided, reduction in syllabus, reduced the class size and appointment of resource teacher in every school has been noted.

On the basis of above discussion, following suggestions/recommendations have emerged

1. ***Support and Cooperation of Para-Professionals:*** Proper support and guidance should be taken from para professionals including special educators, occupational therapist, speech therapist, medical officers and psychologist to identify the children and provide educational assistant. Individualized education programme should be prepared and implemented with the help of resource teacher and other experts. Special teacher/ Resource teacher in each wing i.e. primary and secondary should be appointed on regular basis in each school instead of cluster. Proper support from Heads and administrations should also be provided to implement the practices. Under SSA, 5 Special Resource Centres are functioning in GSSS-38W, GMHS-28C, GSSS-15, GMSSS-8 and GSSS-45 for providing remediation

and therapeutic support to CWSN. Around 4213 CWSN enrolled in schools (U-DISE) in mainstream with varying degree and types of disability and they need extensive support for successful inclusion. More number of special resource centres should be started.

2. ***Involvement of parents and Community:*** Parents as well as community should be sensitized and informed about the needs of these children and relevance of education to live independent life. If they are motivated they cooperate with the school and teachers which help in providing quality education to CWSN. Awareness camps should be organized on various issues related to children with disabilities and makes them aware with the rehabilitation programmes and for that NGOs and social institutions working for CWSN should be involved.
3. ***Need based training of teachers:*** Proper in-service training should be provided to the teachers on inclusive education on the basis of teachers need. Demonstration of using strategies on curriculum adaptation and modification with respect to nature and types of disabilities should be done in the classroom only so that the teachers understand its implementation. Procedure for certification for CWSN for relaxation and exemptions in exams should be informed and proper guidance should be provided to the teachers regarding other provisions available for these children.
4. ***Skill based pre-vocational training:*** There is a need to develop proper guidelines on assessing CWSN in regular classrooms as nature and degree of disabilities varies. Skill based pre-vocational training should be imparted in government schools for children with special needs by means of employment and to make them economically independent. Trained vocational trainers should be recruited for the purpose who should work in coordination with the head, class teacher and Resource Teachers in a group of 4-5 children with special needs.

To conclude, the findings of this study suggest that future research should explore the development and

implementation of relevant teaching programs and policy makers need to revisit the teacher education programme taking the help of both the ministries i.e. MHRD and MSJE and bridge courses that could equip in-service teachers in providing quality education in inclusive classroom to improve not only the enrollment but also the retention rate of CWSN. Supportive network system and services of para-professionals also need to be established, so that children with special needs as well as regular teachers adequately implement the inclusive practices and make 'School for All' to achieve the Millennium Development Goals .

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