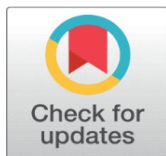


# A STUDY ON PREPAREDNESS FOR TEACHERS TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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## ABSTRACT

Any teacher training college plays a vital role in preparing teachers to manage and teach in an inclusive setup. Acceptance, diminishing discrimination and nurturing a classroom where children with disabilities alongside their non-disabled peers' study and play together helps to strengthen the goals of inclusiveness. The preservice teacher training not only prepares them to teach and manage an inclusive classroom but also affects their attitude towards disability and provides varied experiences to such children. This study looks at an elementary education program which had a component on education of children with special needs. A mixed method of pre and post data was taken from 50 students enrolled in the teacher training program. Films, field trips, interviews of persons with disability were used to make them understand the topic. There were positive changes, however some students looked at disability with a different perspective. The teacher educators need to further strengthen attitude towards these children as the Right to Education 2009 lays importance of free and compulsory education for children aged between 6-14 years in India under Article 21 of the Constitution of India. The pre service teachers will have to teach these children in an Inclusive setup.

**Keywords:** Pre Service Teachers, Inclusive Education

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education for all is one of the valued goals of national development. Intensive efforts have been taking place to make inclusive education possible in all institutions and across all levels

The educational provisions for children with disabilities in India since the past five decades have focused on education in the same setting as their peers without special needs. The education now being most advocated for children with disability is an Inclusive set up. Inclusive education has arisen from the credence that education is a basic human right and it is a foundation for any society.

All learners irrespective of caste, creed, gender, disability have a right to education, regardless of their individual characteristics or difficulties. If one rolls down the pages of history one can clearly see that children with special needs have experienced exclusion, discrimination and segregation from mainstream education and their peers. There have either been in separate special schools or classes or have not received any education at all.

## 2. ACCESS TO EDUCATION

While primarily inclusive education entailed educating and including students with disabilities, this has now evolved to include those with any special needs (Ainscow & Miles, 2008). A few countries in the world have a national provision to ensure both free and child-centred, child-friendly education. The Parliament of India enacted the Right to Education Act 2009 to grapple with the downward spiral of the education system and poor learning outcomes. The act aims towards providing free and compulsory elementary education to kids between the age group of 6 years to 14 years. The Indian government wants every child to get a quality education, irrespective of gender, caste, creed, and family income. Right To Education, (RTE) Act 2009, marks a historic moment for the children of India. This Act serves as a building block to ensure that every child has his or her right to get quality elementary education, and that the State, with the help of parents and communities, fulfils this commitment.

RTE provides a suitable dais to reach the unreached, with specific provisions for disadvantaged groups, such as economically weaker section, child labourers, migrant children, children with special needs, or those who have a “disadvantage owing to social, cultural economical, geographical, linguistic, gender or such other factor”.

RTE focuses on the quality of teaching and learning, which requires accelerated efforts and substantial reforms in the following areas

- Creative and continuous initiatives are vital to train new and untrained teachers and to reinforce the skills of in-service teachers to ensure child-friendly education.
- Families and communities also have a large role to play to ensure child-friendly education for each and every child.
- Disparities must be eliminated to assure quality with equity. Investing in preschool is a key strategy in meeting goals.
- Bringing out-of-school children into classes at the age-appropriate level with the support to stay in school and succeed poses a major challenge necessitating flexible, innovative approaches.

Inclusive education is not only concerned with disabled children, or with finding an alternative reform in school in terms of curriculum, assessment, pedagogy and grouping of children, for this the teacher handling children in an inclusive set up needs to be prepared.

Teachers are expected to educate an exceedingly diverse group of students; which can be a very complicated and demanding task. Teachers must be extremely capable and dedicated (Deppeler, Loreman, & Sharma, 2005) and teach across a range of students with and without categorical labels (Lauchlan & Boyle, 2007).

The pre service teacher training courses should be well prepared to deal not only adequate but adaptability of the curriculum, pedagogy and assessments also.

In some researches pre-service and in-service teachers do not display positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with special needs in an inclusive setup. The reason could be varied.

Avramidis and Norwich (2002) categorised these variables into three groups

-Child-related variables

-Educational environment-related variables

-Teacher-related variables

Child-related variables denote the nature of the child’s special needs. It has been mentioned by researchers that pre-service and in-service teachers display more positive attitudes towards including children with mild to moderate disabilities, compared to those with severe disabilities (Forlin, 1995; Hastings & Oakford, 2003)

The environmental factors also influence pre-service and in-service teachers’ attitudes towards inclusive education. The availability of support services, sociocultural background and the level they teach.

- According to Avramidis and Norwich (2002) support services can be categorised in two ways-

Physical services which include IT resources

- Human services which include availability of teaching aids.

Researchers have concluded that human and physical support have a positive influence over pre-service and in-service teachers’ attitudes towards inclusive education (Avramidis et al., 2000; Boyle, Topping, Jindal-Snape, & Norwich, 2012; Minke, Bear, Deemer, & Griffin, 1996).

Training has also revealed to have a strong impact on pre-service teachers’ attitudes towards the inclusion of students with special needs. Carroll et al. (2003) had taken up a study with more than 200 pre-service teachers’ attitudes towards inclusive education in Australia. The consequences of the training received by the participants had a level of comfort and

adaptability than the ones who had received no training, they experienced greater discomfort and uncertainty towards individuals with disabilities. Some more studies have confirmed that training institutions play a key role in shaping pre-service teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education.

### 3. NEED OF THE STUDY

Pre-Service Teacher Preparation in India has various programs for different duration and to teach various levels in school. The duration of the course varies. Most training programs for pre-service teachers were for two to three years. Some are for a duration of four years also. In every pre-service teacher preparation program couple of weeks are spent in a school practicum. The school-based practicum focuses on acquiring skills and knowledge on teaching pedagogies that they can be used in classrooms, classroom management, teaching methodologies, developing teaching resources, implementing the curriculum and developing leadership attributes.

In all preservice education the concept of inclusive education is taught under different nomenclature of the paper-The Inclusive School, Children with Special Needs etc. The concerns to teach in inclusive classrooms could be considered suitable representation of pre-service teachers' subjective norm, keeping in consideration that the participants had not yet started working in a school. When pre service teachers reflect on their levels of concern they are reflecting on practical aspects of implementing inclusion and level of support they would or would not receive.

Bearing in mind the strong impact that media specially the films have, the researcher took selected films to use it as a tool to create awareness and acceptance regarding disabilities amongst pre service teachers.

To increase awareness of how different disabilities are portrayed in films so they can be prepared to deal with possible negative stereotyping that may occur as a result of these portrayals. A visit to an Inclusive school was also undertaken by the researcher to give them firsthand knowledge of the set up. To look at the pedagogies, adaptations done for children with various disabilities in an inclusive school.

### 4. INSTRUMENT

The Bachelor of Elementary Education (B.El.Ed) Programme is a four-year integrated professional degree programme for Elementary Teacher Education offered by the University of Delhi after the senior secondary level (class XII or equivalent). The foundational paper -Child Development has a unit on Children with special needs. 50 female students enrolled in the first year were taken up for this study.

Before the questionnaires was administered, pre-service teachers were told about the nature and importance of the study. They were advised that participation was voluntary, that they could refuse to participate if they were not comfortable with responding to the questionnaire, and that information gathered would be treated as confidential. Pre-service teachers were given time to ask questions regarding the study and how it might affect them. They had the option of withdrawing from the research by not completing the questionnaire.

They were given a Pre-test questionnaire comprising of 20 items about Inclusion of children with special needs. These items ranged from awareness about these children, concept of inclusive education, adjustment in an inclusive set up.

### 5. PROCEDURE

After administering a pre-test questionnaire, students were given intervention on inclusive education. During the course of completion of the theory paper in particular the unit on Children with special needs

**1.EXPOSURE THROUGH MEDIA** -Three films portraying disability were shown to students in the college.

- i) Taare Zamin Par (2007)-This film portrayed the role of a teacher in an inclusive set up. The simple strategies which can be used to work according to the limitations of the child.
- ii) My Left Foot (1989)- This movie is about Christy Brown, born with cerebral palsy, learns to paint and write with his only controllable limb - his left foot. It was shown to make students understand the capabilities despite of locomotor disability.
- iii) Dosti (1972)- It is a story of two friends, one who has a non-functional leg as a result of polio, and the other who is visually impaired. Both of them earn their bread and butter by singing in the streets. Ramu plays the harmonica and Mohan sings well. The movie deals with how they manage the many hurdles that they have to face.

### 2.VISIT TO AN INCLUSIVE SCHOOL.

Students had to spend a day at an inclusive school. An inclusive school was chosen to see the placement of children with special needs in a regular school set up.

### 3 TALK/SESSION- Three sessions were conducted by experts from the field.

The topics were-

- i) Rights of Person/Student with Disabilities Act 2016 & implications for teachers, Schools/Institutions
  - ii) Type of 21 Disabilities: Symptoms & Challenges in an educational setting
  - iii) Students with Disabilities & Need for Inclusion: Classroom Strategies to deal with these challenges
- Besides this 6 hours of theory was also taught to them as part of a foundation paper.

## 6. RESULTS

The results of the intervention were as per the table mentioned below

Intervention	Time per Activity	Number of Students who attended
Film screening Taare Zamin Par	3 Hours	48
Film screening My Left Foot	2 Hours	30
Film screening Dosti	3 Hours	45
Visit to an Inclusive school	5 Hours	48
Talk/session 1 Rights of Person/Student with Disabilities Act 2016 & implications for teachers, Schools/Institutions	2 Hours	40
Talk/session 2 Type of 21 Disabilities: Symptoms & Challenges in an educational setting	2 Hours	41
Talk/session 3 Students with Disabilities & Need for Inclusion: Classroom Strategies to deal with these challenges	2 Hours	42

After the intervention of six weeks through various tasks a post-test questionnaire was given to them. The responses were compared and the result were analysed. Out of 50 pre service teachers,40 returned the filled in post-test questionnaire.

95% of the pre service teachers showed interest in the subject. They willingly attended film screening, talk/session by the experts in the field besides the theory classes.

Out of 50 pre service teachers,40 returned the filled in questionnaire.

Data are collected pre and post participation in a course on inclusive education to identify its impact on pre-service teachers' intentions, attitudes, concerns and awareness to teach in inclusive classrooms. Data can be used to inform the proposed revision of the existing teacher education program to address education reforms towards inclusive education. In order to determine the effect of training in combination with various teacher variables on pre-service teachers' awareness to inclusive education and various associated understanding based on it, one needs to understand that the following areas need to be focussed upon.

## 7. TRAINING AND SESSIONS/TALK

The impact of training, talks, session with experts made the preservice teachers aware about the rules,benefits ,laws for the benefit of the children with special needs.

### MEDIA/FILMS

Screening of three films on disabilities made the pre service teacher aware about the limitations of these children. They are also able to see how the school /teacher/children adjust with the children with special needs. The impact of watching a film on topics related to inclusive classroom (Taare Zamin Par, My Left foot, Dosti) made them understand the needs of these children. It also showed how a teacher with positive attitude deal with these children along with the others in an inclusive set up. It also makes them understand that training with a positive outlook impacts the children with special needs.

The film Dosti made them understand the peer collaboration and independent living.

The film *My Left foot* was screened for students to make them understand how people with limitations can lead an almost life like an able-bodied person.

**VISIT TO AN INCLUSIVE SCHOOL/INSTITUTION** -The visit to an inclusive school was done to give a first-hand experience of how children with special needs learn with their peers. The activities in which they can collaborate with their peers.

## 8. DISCUSSION

It is evident from the present study's findings that positive attitudes in pre service teachers may begin to decrease before they even complete the training. It appears that if a pre-service teacher commences the teacher training course with positive attitudes towards inclusive education, things will automatically help these children to be part of the regular system.

Pedagogy of teaching, adaptations in the methodology, curriculum, assessment become much easier to implement however, during placements, there is a significant decrease in attitudes towards inclusion.

It could be concluded that pre-service teachers' attitudes are more influenced by their perceptions of matters of classroom practice, such as the availability of resources and support rather than by any biases towards including children with special needs into mainstream classrooms. Boyle, Topping, Jindal-Snape et al. (2012) demonstrated the importance of peer support and adequate resources for in-service teachers.

It appears that additional support besides the theory classes is needed for pre-service teachers. Regular inservice training programs are required for managing an inclusive classroom.

## 9. CONCLUSION

The present study has revealed the important role of training for pre service teachers. It was shown that pre-service teachers' attitudes are influenced by a different form of practical training which can be with the help of media or actual visit to inclusive schools.

The results from this study assists in gaining a better understanding of pre-service teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education and to make necessary improvements to inclusive education delivery. It is of supreme importance to focus on pre-service teachers training as this will be the most effective means to ensure the successful achievement of inclusive education. A single approach of lecture method to training pre-service teachers in inclusive education is not sufficient. Training institutions need to amend the unit offered on inclusive education/special education to suit the varying needs of pre-service teachers as well as offering more support to pre-service teachers during their student placements to ensure that they feel supported and competent to teach in an inclusive classroom.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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