

Student Teachers Attitudes Towards Inclusion in Pakistan

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the attitudes of student teachers towards inclusion. A sample of 23 male and 117 female student teachers were selected from a public sector university of Lahore district. The ultimate aim of the study was to determine the attitudes of student teachers enrolled in general and special teacher education programs. The sample was distributed across general teacher education and special teacher education programs; namely the four courses of B. Ed General, B. Ed Special, M. Ed General and M. Ed Special. Student teachers' responses were obtained on Attitudes towards Inclusion Scale; a five-point Likert scale for the six factors of inclusive practices, inclusive concept, inclusive instruction, inclusive education, inclusive classroom management and inclusive teaching efficacy. ANOVA and t-test were used to interpret the results of the study. Results indicated only one gender difference; that female student teachers held significantly more inclusive concepts than males. Students enrolled in M. Ed special program showed significantly more positive attitudes towards inclusive practices and inclusive instruction. Regarding the confidence level to teach children with disabilities, students with high level of confidence showed higher ratings to inclusive practices and inclusive concept. Students with prior experience to teach children with disabilities showed more positive attitudes towards inclusive practices and inclusive concept. This research study recommends policy makers and teacher educators to reform the teacher education program by incorporating inclusive education as a compulsory subject in general teacher education programs to develop positive attitudes towards inclusion.

Keywords: Inclusive, practices, teacher education, student teachers, efficacy, General, Special

Inclusion is a comprehensive trend in education that requires the involvement and collaboration between educational professionals (Dyson & Millward, 2000). Inclusive education is a concept that permits students with diverse needs to be placed and obtain instruction in mainstream classes and be taught by mainstream teachers (Haider, 2008). Inclusive education enables students to reach their achievable levels of excellence using grit and intellect, thus giving a boost to their communities. Inclusive education is the 'putting together of the children with disabilities and those in the normal stream. Child-centeredness helps us in recognizing that children can contribute positively towards the grooming and flourishing of the society by making they understand that they have to explore the facilities available to take maximum advantage of their potential. It may be added that the isolation and differentiation between schools and the communities should exist no more the two should go together. There are many alternatives but the best possible one to promote special children is to groom them through exposure to novel situations, and by providing them with unique learning experiences woven around potential, self-esteem and a sense of belonging to the school community and the larger society. Inclusive education leads both the teacher and students toward recognizing and celebrating diversity as learners of general and special stream. Such measures should be a compendium of varied personalities with diverse needs in a general classroom environment (MacKay, 2007).

Inclusion may have different perspectives and measures involving restructuring of mainstream schooling to accommodate the child notwithstanding his or her disability (Hammed, 2003). Inclusive education is not described as per financial economy or time and space management, rather it supports the individuals to explore, understand and exploit the use of resources to optimize learning experiences. Achieving an understanding of inclusion may widely be explained in terms of the range of resources such as teaching materials, equipment, additional personnel and differentiated approaches to teaching (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). If we talk of inclusive education as a process we would advance in maximizing the participation of all students studying in a general classrooms environment, irrespective of any disabilities. Favouring inclusion in school policies would enhance the diversity of students in schools. Like any other reform inclusion may be seen as a wider reform in the country's education system with a tilt towards effective education system and society. It may further be added that the inclusive education approach makes the system responsive to learner diversity with the assurance that all learners should have and exploit the best possible opportunities to learn, grow and excel (Dark & Light Blind Care Foundation, 2008).

The teacher's attitude is an important element in the success of the inclusive classroom. Teachers should encourage and build positive interactions among children with and without disabilities, which supports a positive environment for inclusion. Because the teachers facilitate the children's' participation in the same activities and encourage the development of relationships among the children, they create an accepting environment in the classroom (Leatherman & Niemeier, 2005).

The relationship between teachers' attitude and inclusion can be considered an important component in inclusive education settings and teachers need practice to attempt and perform at optimum levels of success with both types of students. The positive attitude of teachers towards inclusion is a more important aspect in an inclusive educational environment.

Teachers with a positive attitude toward inclusion provide the entire positive attitude towards inclusion. The positive attitude of the teacher can have a direct influence on the successful inclusion of children with disabilities into regular education classrooms (Fakolade, Adeniyi, & Tella, 2009).

Attitudes of teachers in an inclusion classroom are the most important aspects in creating an inclusive class. It is essential that teachers have positive attitudes towards inclusion. Schools should emphasize and enhance teachers' thoughts and perceptions towards inclusion (Cipkin & Rizza, 2003). The attitudes of teachers have an impact on the overall classroom climate. The teacher-student relationships influence their acceptance of their peers with disabilities. When teachers respond in a positive and caring manner to students with behavior concerns, their peers are often found to have greater acceptance to work with them. Special education teachers have great confidence in their ability to teach the children in an inclusive environment as compared to general education teachers. The development of an accepting classroom environment toward inclusion may be easily influenced by the teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. Inclusion is a teaching philosophy where students are actively engaged with their non-disabled peers, not a physical location in a classroom or a school building. Inclusion guides how teachers respond to student differences in the promotion of academic success (Silva & Morgado, 2004).

The intents of teacher education programs both for general and special education are not alike because of their inclination. These two streams of teacher preparation are known to have different focuses and priorities, with marked disparities in content and pedagogical approaches. Brownell, Ross, Colon, and McCallum, (2005) report, that general teacher education programs rarely focus on the provision of knowledge and training with reference to the management of children with disabilities. With all reservations, it must be acknowledged that the special education teacher is empowered to invoke the potential of inclusion and diversity. In understanding the scenario in view of teaching philosophy, that under lies general and special education, the two are found to differ right from inception to implications and it's becomes imperative to bridge the gap.

Pre-service teacher training combined with a taste of inclusive education has been shown to be an effective method for improving attitudes towards inclusion (Forlin, 2001). Attitudinal concern is found to be reflective of the commitment to the development of children with disabilities. The more the concern and commitment, the more the acceptance from the school community, towards accommodation of the children with disabilities (Harvey, 1992; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). A study conducted by Loreman, Forlin, and Sharma (2007) which peeped into the attitudes before and after training for inclusive education could Serve to exemplify that training causes improvement in attitudes. A recent study by Forlin and Chambers (2011) found that while attitudes towards inclusive education were improved through training and knowledge, but pre-service teachers' concerns and perceived stress about the implementation of inclusive education were not improved.

In addition, demographic differences have also been reported as affecting the attitudes of pre-service teachers towards inclusion. Sharma, Forlin, Loreman, and Earle, (2006) found that prospective teachers with higher educational qualifications (undergraduate or post graduate)

were seen to be more optimistic about students with disabilities in their classrooms than their counterparts with lower qualifications. Prospective female teachers have been found to have more patience to work with students with disabilities (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000; Ellins & Porter, 2005) and generally have more sympathetic attitudes towards inclusive practices as compared to their male counterparts (Carroll, Forlin, & Jobling, 2003). Jamieson (1984) reported that knowledge about children with special education needs (SEN) is also a significant aspect of attitudinal development towards inclusion. Forlin and Chambers (2011); Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk (2001) reported that educators with prior teaching experience have significantly more positive attitudes and less discomfort as compared to pre-service teachers towards inclusion.

The ultimate objective of the study was to determine the student teachers' attitudes towards inclusion to assess their attitudes towards inclusion before joining a teaching profession. Further the current study will explore the role of a teacher education program for developing positive attitudes of student teachers regarding inclusive education.

Hypotheses

- There will be no significant difference between male and female student teachers' attitudes towards inclusion.
- There will be no significant difference in student teachers' attitudes towards inclusion enrolled in different teacher education programs.
- There will be no significant difference in student teachers' attitudes towards inclusion among different levels of teaching experience.
- There will be no significant difference in student teachers' attitudes towards inclusion among different levels of confidence.

Method

A descriptive research design was adopted to collect data from prospective teachers enrolled in a one year teacher education program. A survey type research design was used in collecting data from a sample of 140 prospective teachers. A questionnaire was administered during a teacher education program. Within the questionnaire, participants recorded responses on a 5-point Likert scale.

Participants

Student teachers enrolled in the teacher education programs from one public university of Lahore district (N = 140) were surveyed. Participants were taken from one of the two programs of teacher education. These programs were Bachelor of Education (B. Ed-G) Master of Education (M. Ed-G) in a regular education stream or Bachelor of Special Education (B. Ed-SE) and Masters of Education in special education (M. Ed-SE) streams. Student teachers number of each stream was as follows: B. Ed (G, n = 40), B. Ed (SE, n = 22), M. Ed (G, n = 37) and M. Ed, n = 41 (SE) programs. Generally, more females join teacher education programs as compared to male students that is why a large number of females participated in this study where, they had the age group of 20 to 24 years. Majority of student teachers (n = 63) were training to teach at

secondary level while only few (n = 2) were getting training to teach at the elementary level. Regarding the teaching experience to teach students with diverse needs, majority of student teachers had nil (n = 54) or some (n =54) experience (less than six months). In regard of student teachers' confidence to teach students with disabilities, the large number of respondents (n= 48) indicated having average (34.3%) confidence level. Regarding previous training relating to teach students with diverse need, the majority (n = 74) had obtained some training (52.8%). In regard to their knowledge about local policies or legislation concerning to children with disabilities, a large number of participants had average knowledge (47.8%).

Table 1
Summary of *Demographic Variables*

Variables	N	%
Gender		
Male	23	16.4
Female	117	83.6
Age		
20-24	107	76.4
24-28	28	20.1
28-32	5	3.5
Program of study		
B. Ed General	40	28.6
B. Ed Special	22	15.7
M. Ed General	37	26.4
M. Ed special	41	29.3
Training to teach at		
Early childhood	2	1.4
Primary/elementary	16	11.4
Secondary	63	45.1
Special education	59	42.1
Teaching experience to teach students with disabilities		
Nil		
Some (less than six months)	54	38.6
High (greater than six months)	54	38.6
	32	22.8
Level of confidence in teaching with disable students		
Very low		
Low	13	9.3
Average	24	17.1
High	48	34.3
Very high	33	23.6
	22	15.7

Level of training on educating students with disabilities		
None		
Some	2	1.4
High	74	52.8
Very high	62	44.3
	2	1.4
Knowledge of local policy to teach students with disability		
None		
Poor	21	15
Average	33	23.5
Good	67	47.8
Very good	18	12.8
	1	0.71

Measures

Attitudes towards Inclusion Scale (ATI). Salend (1999) established this likert type scale, to determine the student teachers' attitudes towards inclusion with 5-points to rate from on each statement from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The ATI Questionnaire consisted of two parts; part one of the questionnaire was based on demographic information about the participants, such as gender, age, programs, teaching experience and confidence level to teach students with diverse needs, while part 2 contained 31 statements to examine student teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. Prior to the final administration, the Attitudes towards inclusion scale was pilot tested on some of the respondents to assess its suitability in terms of language and understanding of the concepts. After determining the appropriateness of the instrument the scale was finally administered in English language. Scale was divided into six factors: Inclusive practices, Inclusive concept, Inclusive instruction, Inclusive education, Inclusive classroom management, Inclusive teaching efficacy. Cronbach alpha for six factors of the scale were, for Inclusive practices 0.79, Inclusive concept 0.73, Inclusive instruction 0.60, Inclusive education 0.70, Inclusive classroom management 0.50 and Inclusive teaching efficacy 0.60.

Procedure

Data was collected from student teachers enrolled in a one year teacher education program from a public university. Data was collected from those student teachers who were in their final semester B. Ed and M. Ed as the purpose of this study was to determine how well the student teachers were prepared to teach in an inclusive classroom just before leaving the university environment. Total of 140 participants responded to this questionnaire. The participants took only 15 minutes to complete this scale. Researchers collected data from all the participants in their classroom on the same day. Demographic information like gender, age, qualification was also taken from them. They were also told about the anonymous nature of the survey.

Inclusive instruction	3.29	0.69	3.54	0.63	-1.80	0.91
Inclusive education	4.05	0.39	3.91	0.65	0.93	2.84
Inclusive classroom management	3.26	0.72	3.25	0.8	0.09	0.79
Inclusive teaching efficacy	3.62	0.45	3.67	0.63	-0.35	2.74

Results

An Independent samples t-test and ANOVA were carried out to examine the student teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and its six factors.

Table 2
Mean Score Differences between Male and Female Student Teachers Attitudes towards Inclusion

Attitudes towards inclusion	Male (n=23)		Female (n=117)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Inclusive practices	3.82	0.49	3.78	0.62	0.33	0.46
Inclusive concept	3.85	0.83	3.99	0.87	0.201	0.02*

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81

df= 139 *p<.05

Female students held significant attitudes towards inclusive concepts to teach children with diverse needs as compared to male students. No significant differences were found on other factors.

Table 3
Mean Score Differences in Student Teachers Attitudes towards Inclusion among Different Programs

Attitudes towards inclusion	B.Ed General (n=40)		B.Ed Special (n=22)		M.Ed General (n=37)		M.Ed Special (n=41)		F	p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Inclusive practices	3.83	0.55	3.81	0.49	3.37	0.63	4.09	0.46	11.91	0.00**
Inclusive concept	3.7	0.58	4.29	0.5	3.35	0.94	4.23	0.68	11.41	0.00**
Inclusive instruction	3.59	0.54	3.15	0.79	3.43	0.67	3.69	0.55	3.89	0.01**
Inclusive education	3.81	0.77	4.04	0.37	3.85	0.59	4.07	0.55	1.67	0.18

Inclusive classroom management	3.36	0.78	0.76	0.76	3.08	0.74	3.11	0.8	2.57	0.56
Inclusive teaching efficacy	3.74	0.59	3.69	0.44	3.48	0.58	3.73	0.71	1.54	0.21

df 139, **p<0.01

Student teachers enrolled in M. Ed special teacher education program had significant attitudes towards inclusive practices, concepts and instruction to teach children with disabilities than other student teachers enrolled in general and special B. Ed program and M. Ed general teacher education program.

Table 4
Mean Score Differences in Student Teachers Attitudes towards Inclusion among Different Levels of Teaching Experience

Attitudes towards inclusion	Nil (n=54)		Some (n=54)		High (n=32)		F	p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Inclusive practices	3.60	0.68	3.28	0.54	4.02	0.45	5.30	0.00**
Inclusive concept	3.46	0.88	4.05	0.75	4.22	0.72	11.77	0.00**
Inclusive instruction	3.63	0.62	8.49	0.70	3.47	0.53	1.91	0.15
Inclusive education	3.85	0.6	3.95	0.71	4.04	0.46	0.85	0.42
Inclusive classroom management	3.24	0.79	3.29	0.79	3.17	0.79	0.25	0.77
Inclusive teaching efficacy	3.61	0.62	3.74	0.56	3.66	0.67	0.67	0.51

df = 139, **p<0.01

Student teachers with high level of experience held significantly positive attitudes towards inclusive practices and concepts to teach students with diverse needs.

Table 5

Mean Score Differences in Student Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusion among Different Levels of Confidence

Attitudes towards inclusion	Very Low (n=13)		Low (n=24)		Average (n=48)		High (n=33)		Very High (n=22)		F	P
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Inclusive practices	3.33	0.93	3.69	0.54	3.79	0.58	3.86	0.45	3.99	0.54	2.91	0.00**
Inclusive concept	3.38	0.94	3.67	0.99	3.8	0.73	3.94	0.93	4.34	0.59	3.39	0.00**
Inclusive instruction	3.82	0.48	3.56	0.64	3.54	0.60	3.35	0.77	3.44	0.56	1.42	0.15
Inclusive education	3.72	0.45	3.75	0.91	3.94	0.56	3.97	0.49	4.18	0.54	1.88	0.42
Inclusive classroom management	3.12	0.94	3.44	0.59	3.15	0.74	3.47	0.78	0.3	0.91	1.89	0.77
Inclusive teaching efficacy	3.40	0.51	3.46	0.53	3.68	0.66	3.92	0.58	3.59	0.56	2.93	0.51

df= 139, **p<0.01

Student teachers with very high levels of confidence held significant attitudes towards inclusive practices and concepts to teach children with diverse needs.

Discussion

The study of teacher preparation is a multifaceted field, as many variables contribute in developing student teacher attitudes towards inclusion. In order to better comprehend the influence of teacher preparation on inclusion, it is essential to investigate student teachers' attitudes toward the different streams of teacher preparation programs including general and special teacher education programs. Teacher preparation plays an important role in developing student teachers' positive attitudes toward inclusion, and affects the level of self-confidence and knowledge which teachers regard as necessary for them to better cater for the needs of diverse learners. Impact of teacher training and the role of demographic variables in the development of student teachers' attitudes toward inclusion have explicitly been explained in this paper. This study reflects that female students hold significantly more positive attitudes towards inclusive concepts to teach children with diverse needs than male students. This finding is consistent with previous research that female pre-service teachers held positive attitudes to teach children with diverse needs than males (Shaukat, Sharma, Furlonger, 2013). Shaukat and Siddiquah (2007) also reported that female prospective teachers demonstrated greater levels of self-efficacy after their final year of teacher training than males.

It may be assumed that females are tolerant and are more apt in satisfying the needs of children with disabilities (Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden, 2000) it has also been found out that females are generally sympathetic to work with special people (Carroll, Forlin, & Jobling, 2003).

Another finding of the study that student teachers enrolled in M. Ed special teacher education program had significant positive attitudes towards inclusive practices, concepts and inclusive instruction to teach children with disabilities than other student teachers enrolled in general and special B. Ed program and M. Ed general teacher education program. The reason could be that students enrolled in special teacher education program get more awareness to teach children with special needs. The nature of special teacher education program differs from general teacher education program as it puts more emphasis on inclusive perspectives based on inclusive content, pedagogies and training (Hammed, 2003). Prospective teachers get more knowledge to deal with students with diverse needs (Hsien, 2007).

In this study, student teachers with high level of experience held significantly positive attitudes towards inclusive practices and inclusive concepts to teach children with diverse needs. As Forlin (2011) reported previous experience and involvement in teaching students with disabilities result in developing more positive attitudes and in particular empower prospective teachers to cater the needs of special children.

Moreover, this study found out that prospective teachers with very high level of confidence held significant attitudes towards inclusive practices, concepts and efficacy to teach children with diverse needs. This finding leads to the recommendation that students' involvement in special teacher education programs make them more efficacious to bring about changes in the learning of students with disabilities (Hsien, 2007). With the progression of special education teacher training students get experience of handling children with diverse needs and experiences enhancing their confidence towards inclusive education.

This depicts the significance of inclusive education to cater to the needs of children with special needs and suggests introducing inclusive education as a compulsory subject in general teacher education programs to develop positive attitudes towards inclusion.

Conclusion

The conclusion from this study is that inclusive education is more highly rated by those being taught in the two Special programs, yet there appear to be deficiencies in attitude development on four of the six questionnaire scales. The more the exposure and experience related to children with diverse needs, the greater will be the confidence to teach these children with disabilities. This study provides evidence for policy makers and educationists in Pakistan when considering the possibility of introducing inclusive education as a compulsory part of the general teacher education program. If inclusive education should be incorporated into general education, then current special courses should be evaluated to remove perceived deficiencies.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is that the sample size of this study was not adequate enough to generalize findings, because only one teacher education program was selected from public sector in Lahore only. There is a dire need to conduct qualitative study to investigate the attitudes of student teachers towards inclusion to strengthen the results at international level.

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