

STUDENT TEACHER'S PERCEPTION AND PREPAREDNESS TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION OF LEARNERS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education of learners with intellectual disability has been debated since long. Perception of teachers and their preparedness regarding inclusion of learners with intellectual disability is studied in this paper with help of a questionnaire. Students of Bachelor of Education (both regular and special education) gave their responses reflected current situation of training in teacher education in a specific institute where both the courses were running simultaneously. This paper reflects the view of students from both these courses. The students were positive about some aspects of inclusion of learners with mild disability but were not sure about learners with severe disability.

KEYWORDS: Intellectual Disability, Inclusive Education

INTRODUCTION

The advent of inclusive education took place in India with change in the policies after 1970's. Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) and similar efforts later paved the way for inclusive education of the Children with Special Needs (CWSN). With the implementation of Right to Education act, the possibility of finding CWSN in a regular school has increased manifold. If we consider Enrollment of disabled children under the Integrated Education Programme (Upper Primary), the number of students in mentally retarded category is much lower with respect to visually impaired, hearing impaired and orthopedically handicapped.(NCERT, 2005). According to the Census 2001, there are 2.19 crore persons with disabilities in India who constitute 2.13 percent of the total population. This includes persons with visual, hearing, speech, loco motor and mental disabilities. The number of mentally challenged individuals is substantial in this category which implies that those who need to be part of formal school system are also very high. The diversity in the category of mentally challenged category is also very high with different types of nomenclatures and categorizations being used.

Special set ups have been the main contributors towards providing education for mentally challenged students in the past but their access in regular set up has increased recently. Thus inclusive education has become a realistic vision for learners with intellectual disability in India. The various possibilities for implementing inclusive education for mentally challenged students are evolving and debated at various platforms. Inclusive education may have been defined differently but the main assumption is the possibility of educating learners from different backgrounds and different abilities in the same set up.

“The fundamental principle of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Inclusive schools must recognize and respond to the diverse

needs of their students, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities. There should be a continuum of support and services to match the continuum of special needs encountered in every school." Salamanca Framework for Action (1994).

Teacher education is of paramount importance if inclusion is intended to be achieved by any system of education. The role of teachers is given great importance for the effective handling of the inclusive classroom. Development and use of appropriate classroom practices, resources and assessment is considered critical for the success of any classroom, it becomes more challenging considering the diverse needs of the learners in an inclusive classroom.

According to Loreman and Deppeler(2006), “ *Questions and concerns from educators about barriers to inclusion are*

- *Inadequate teacher training.*
- *Not being able to deliver an appropriate curriculum for children with diverse ability.*
- *Not having enough resources to help them.*
- *The way their schools and classrooms are organized.”*

Inadequate knowledge about various aspects related to inclusive education can be a serious barrier that can negatively impact other variables also. Attitude of the teachers towards inclusion of CWSN can influence the way a CWSN is included or excluded from a regular school. When it comes to learners with intellectual disability it becomes important to address the pre conceived notions related to them which exist.

“Teacher training programmes plays significant role in fostering positive attitude towards the children with diverse abilities which is essential for running inclusive programmes successfully” (Saxena & Rajeshwari, 2011). Thus it becomes critical to assess the perception and preparedness of student teachers towards inclusion of learners with intellectual disability.

The attempt is made to find the perception and preparedness of student teachers of the two different types teacher education courses towards Inclusive education of disabled. The two different courses were B.Ed. and B.Ed. (Special Education-Mental Retardation). A comprehensive questionnaire was used to ascertain the knowledge, and attitude of teachers towards inclusive education of learners with intellectual disability. The questionnaire was also used to compare the perception and preparedness of students of these two courses.

The questionnaire focused mainly on following aspects related to assessing the attitude of student teachers towards inclusion of learners with intellectual disability:

- Inclusion as the right of learners with intellectual disability.
- Issues faced by the teachers in inclusive set up with learners with intellectual disability.
- Possible reaction of participants towards presence of learners with intellectual disability in the set up.
- Preparation related to dealing with inclusive set up with learners with intellectual disability.

16 items based on the above were used in the questionnaire. The students were supposed to rate their responses from five choices ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. One open ended question was given to give their responses. The questionnaire was validated by the expert in the field.

The findings here are presented highlighting the main points of the whole the research.

- When students were asked about if inclusive education should be followed in every school, Most of the students from both the courses agreed to it or strongly agreed to it. Thus students displayed positive attitude towards inclusive education in general.
- When students were asked if inclusive education is right of the CWSN or not, 17 out of 18 students from B.Ed. (S.Ed.) strongly agreed to it whereas 9 students from B.Ed. course agreed to it. Although all students from both the courses agreed to it. It shows that majority of the students in both the set up were sensitive towards the right of the learners with intellectual disability. It is also reflected by the next statement also.
- 13 students from B.Ed. and 12 students from B.Ed. (S.Ed.) agreed to the statement that children with mental challenge will find it difficult to be part of a regular school.
- 7 students from B.Ed. were not sure about the possibility of learners with intellectual disability creating discipline problems. 8 students from B.Ed. (Sp.Ed.) disagreed to the statement which was much more than students from B.Ed. It shows that B.Ed. (S.Ed.) students were more aware about the issue. It may be because they get more field exposure relate to learners with intellectual disability.
- When asked about peers of mentally challenged not being able to adjust in inclusive classroom 8 students from B.Ed. were not sure against 2 from B.Ed.(S.Ed.).
- 9 students from B.Ed. against 2 from B.Ed. (S.Ed.) were unsure about possibility of inclusive education being successful for learners with intellectual disability. B.Ed. (S.Ed.) were more positive towards the issue.
- Similar kind of responses were there from both the students of both the courses when asked about learners with intellectual disability being isolated by their peers and teachers in regular set up.
- Most of the students from both the students agreed to the need for special training in dealing with the learners with intellectual disability in an inclusive classroom. It may be because they felt they had lot more to learn before dealing with learners with intellectual disability.
- 13 students from B.Ed. (S.Ed.) against 8 from B.Ed. disagreed to the statement that only mild learners with intellectual disability should be part of an inclusive set up.
- 14 students from B.Ed.(S.Ed.) compared to 8 from the B.Ed. disagreed that regular teacher will not need to change their methodology in an inclusive classroom with mentally challenged learner. The number of students who were unsure about in B.Ed. was much more (8) with respect to B.Ed. (S.Ed.)(1).
- Almost equal number of students disagreed in both the set up that present curriculum is suitable for learners with intellectual disability.

- Majority of the students agreed that there is a need to be flexible in an inclusive classroom with learners with intellectual disability.
- 17 students from B.Ed. (S.Ed.) disagreed that inclusion is not suitable for social development of learners with intellectual disability whereas the number or same response was 12 from B.Ed.
- 9 students from B.Ed. (S.Ed.) and 2 students from B.Ed. strongly disagreed that inclusion is not good for emotional development of the learners with intellectual disability although 7 students from B.Ed. agreed to the same.

MAJOR FINDINGS

- Most of the categories had similar kind of responses from B.Ed. and B.Ed (S.Ed.) students. The main difference was in the conviction with which the learners answered. The students from B.Ed. (S.Ed.) were preferred strongly disagreeing or strongly agreeing to the statements whereas B.Ed. students preferred disagreeing and agreeing to the statements. This implies that the students from B.Ed.(S.Ed.) were more sure about their responses which may be because they have better exposure and content knowledge related to issues related to education of the learners with intellectual disability. It is also verified from the next statement.
- In some of the statement 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 15 respondents from B.Ed. who were unsure about their response was much more than B.Ed.(S.Ed.)
- Most of the students from both the set up were sure about inclusion being right of learners with intellectual disability. But the main issue emerged from the awareness about the specific issues related to inclusion of learners with intellectual disability. There seems to be a lack of clarity related to the suitable curriculum for learners with intellectual disability in an inclusive classroom, possibility of them being isolated in regular set up, how they will face and adjust in an inclusive set up etc.
- In some of the statements B.Ed.(S.Ed.) students showed positive attitude compared to the B.Ed. students towards the learners with intellectual disability.

CONCLUSIONS

The inclusive education has been presented as a positive approach in the syllabus of the B.Ed.(S.Ed.) which is reflected in the responses of the students of the course. The students of B.Ed. also reflected a positive approach towards the inclusive education of CWSN and it being the right of learners with intellectual disability. Both the courses were run by the same institution thus it may be possible that the awareness among the learners of B.Ed. improved because of collaborative learning environment. The students of the B.Ed. (S.Ed.) were more convinced about their responses as compared to B.Ed. students. But still there were some aspects which need to be addressed with them so that they can take develop a more positive attitude towards inclusion. The students of B.Ed. would be going to teach in regular set up thus their perception should also be addressed. The positive attitude can develop if they get exposure in terms of theory and practice related to inclusive education of learners with intellectual disability in this case. As both the courses are running in the same institute it may lead to a positive development towards inclusion. This model can be fruitful model in other institutions also as collaborative approach can prepare teachers for an inclusive classroom.

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