



INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF PRE-SERVICE AND IN-SERVICE TEACHERS

Sashapra Chakrawartyⁱ,
Pratima Pallai

Department of Education,
School of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Tezpur University,
Assam, India

Abstract:

Inclusive Education advocates for equitable access to mainstream activities for all learners while using intentional and suitable methods to guarantee high-quality education for everyone. The present school system is progressively moving towards inclusivity. A crucial aspect in the successful inclusion of children with special needs is the attitude of both pre-service and in-service teachers toward integrating these students into their classrooms. This study aims to explore the perspectives of teachers on the integration of children with disabilities and to compare the attitudes of pre-service and in-service teachers toward inclusion. Further, it also seeks to mention some of the significant challenges that come across in classroom transactions and interviews with teachers. For the present study, a sample of 70 consisting of 35 pre-service and 35 in-service teachers has been taken from Tezpur city of Assam. In the present study, a standardized instrument titled the “Teacher Attitude Scale towards Inclusive Education,” developed by Dr. Vishal Sood and Dr. (Mrs.) Arti Anand was utilized to assess teachers' attitudes towards including special needs children. The results indicated that most teachers have positive views regarding the integration of children with special needs, and there were no notable variations in their attitudes. However, there exist significant challenges to implementing inclusion during classroom transactions. Henceforth, investigators have tried to highlight a few suggestions for the successful implementation of inclusion.

Keywords: inclusive education, children with special needs, teachers' attitude, pre-service teachers, in-service teachers

ⁱ Correspondence: email sashapra@gmail.com, pratima@tezu.ernet.in

1. Introduction

UNESCO asserts that *“education is a fundamental human right for individuals throughout their lives and that access to education must be accompanied by quality.”* With this perspective, UNESCO has established specific Sustainable Development Goals, among which Goal 4 focuses on education. Goal 4 encompasses ten aims that span several domains of education. The Incheon Declaration for Education 2030 outlines a fresh perspective on education for the upcoming fifteen years. The program aims to ensure equitable and inclusive access to excellent education and lifelong learning opportunities for all individuals. No educational objective should be deemed achieved unless every individual achieves it. The United Nations defines sustainable development as *“development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”* To attain sustainable development, a country or state must ensure equitable access to education for all its citizens. Inclusive education addresses the issue of inequality by providing equal opportunities to students regardless of their gender, physical abilities, social background, or disabilities.

Inclusive education advocates for the integration of children with special needs into the mainstream educational system without any kind of segregation or distinction. To promote the concept of inclusion in our schools, it is imperative to cultivate a positive mindset among both pre-service and in-service teachers. The effectiveness of inclusion is contingent upon various aspects, such as the educators’ attitudes and the caliber of training they provide to their students (Leyser & Tappendorf, 2001). Research has shown that teachers who have a positive attitude towards inclusion are more confident in their abilities and are more dedicated to meeting the needs of students in inclusive settings. They achieve this by adapting classroom materials and using appropriate teaching methods (Cuskelly *et al.*, 2003). To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals of 2030 and create inclusive classrooms, it is crucial to cultivate a positive mindset among teachers and address the existing challenges.

2. Review Literature

Arnesen *et al.* (2009) argue that inclusion involves more than just making additions to current structures. Instead, it entails transforming cultures, communities, and institutions such as schools to better accommodate diversity. In their 2016 study, Bansal examined the preparation of teachers for inclusive education and emphasized the significance of stakeholders ensuring that schools have all the necessary facilities for inclusion. Teachers have expressed worries about the limited collaborative possibilities and believe that they lack the training to provide inclusive services (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003). Esther M. Mwangi and John Aluko Orodho (2014). In their study, Sarao, T. (2016) highlighted several challenges associated with adopting inclusive education, including insufficient teaching and learning resources and a lack of qualified teachers to address the needs of students in special education effectively. In their works, Yadava (2013) and Janmohamed

(2012) have accurately discussed the difficulties of implementing inclusive education in schools.

3. Rationale of the Study

Inclusive education is an essential tool or way to remove the disparity in the education system and to achieve the goal of sustainable development in 2030. Many countries, including India, at present, are striving towards making their education system an inclusive one. The government has also developed numerous policies to ensure the success of the procedure. However there exists a multitude of pupils with special needs who are isolated from the inclusive education system. When it comes to Assam, the grassroots condition is also not satisfactory. To implement inclusion effectively, teachers must be approachable towards the meaning of inclusion. The previous studies conducted to study the attitudes of the teachers cover only one aspect, either pre-service or in-service teachers' training. Therefore, the principal aim of this study is to examine the perspectives of both prospective and in-service teachers regarding inclusive education, along with the obstacles and concerns associated with it. Furthermore, the study aims to uncover any significant correlations in their attitudes. Ultimately, this study could motivate educators in academic environments to reevaluate their comprehension of inclusive education.

4. Statement of the Problem

4.1 Objectives of the Study

- 1) To study the attitude of teachers towards the inclusion of children with special needs.
- 2) To assess the attitudes of both pre-service and in-service teachers towards the inclusion of children with special needs.
- 3) To evaluate the issues and challenges of inclusion during classroom transactions.

4.2 Research Hypothesis

- **HR1:** There is a significant difference in the mean scores of pre-service and in-service teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with special needs.

4.3 Delimitations of the Study

- 1) Only secondary school teachers of Sonitpur district were included in this study.
- 2) Only B.Ed. programmes in the Department of Education of Sonitpur district were included in this study.

5. Methodology

The study utilized descriptive survey methodology. The study included both pre-service and in-service teachers from secondary schools in Tezpur, Sonitpur district of Assam. The present study included a sample of 70 teachers. The statistical method used in this part is

descriptive statistics, which displays the frequency and percentage of the secondary school instructors' attitudes towards including children with special needs. The analysis was further conducted by using a t-test using SPSS to compare the set of objectives. The study adopted a tool called "Teacher Attitude Scales towards Inclusive Education (TASTIE)," which was developed and standardized by Dr. Vishal Sood and Dr. (Mrs.) Arti Anand in 2011.

6. Findings

6.1 Objective 1: To study the attitude of teachers towards the inclusion of children with special needs.

Table 1: Attitude of teachers towards the inclusion of children with special needs

	Attitude Level of Teachers	N	Percentage
1.	Extremely Favorable	4	5.71
2.	Most Favorable	17	24.28
3.	Above Average Favorable	33	47.14
4.	Moderate Attitude	14	20
5.	Below average Unfavourable	2	2.85
6.	Most Unfavourable	0	0
7.	Extremely Unfavourable	0	0
	Total	70	0

According to Table 1, the findings indicate that 5.71% of teachers had an extremely favorable attitude, 24.28% had a very favorable attitude, 47.14% exhibited above-average favorable attitudes, 20% showed a moderate attitude, 2.85% had a below-average attitude, and none displayed either a most unfavorable or extremely unfavorable attitude. With a significant majority of teachers holding moderate to favorable attitudes towards inclusion, students with special needs are poised to benefit from increased educational opportunities alongside their peers. Given this positive outlook among instructors, teacher training colleges must ensure that pre-service teachers are adequately equipped with the skills needed to effectively support an increasingly diverse student population (Tarwana, 2008). A small proportion of teachers who are inadequately trained or worried about the idea of inclusion may transmit their dissatisfaction to the pupils, so compromising the confidence and achievement of such children if their attitude is not promptly transformed into a positive one. On the other hand, most teachers who endorse and have faith in the idea of inclusion can offer special education kids' assurance and a conducive learning atmosphere. An affirmative teacher's disposition towards inclusion could be the crucial factor in the achievement of integrating pupils with exceptional needs (Cochran, 1998).

6.2 Objective 2: To assess the attitudes of both pre-service and in-service teachers toward the inclusion of children with special needs.

Table 2: t-value of attitude of pre-service and in-service teachers towards the inclusion of children with special needs

Groups	Attitude of Teachers towards Inclusion	
	Pre-Service	In-service
N (Total)	35	35
Mean	115.28	116.88
S.D.	9.224	10.85
t-value	.506	
Level of Significance at 0.05	Not Significant	

Table 2 shows that there is no statistically significant difference in the mean attitude scores between pre-service and in-service instructors regarding inclusion. A possible explanation for the similarities in attitudes towards inclusive education across pre-service and in-service teachers could be their comparable exposure to inclusive education policy. Thus, they go through similar professional training, which could have a positive impact on their attitude. Studies have proved that training helps in fostering a favorable mindset towards inclusive education (Al. Khatteeb, 2002; Beh-pajoo, 1998; N. *et al.* Das, 2014). Marchesi (1998) discovered that professional training of teachers is a crucial element for successful inclusion. Trained pre-service teachers have a positive attitude towards inclusive education. One possible reason for the similarities in views between pre-service and in-service teachers could be their exposure to similar content on inclusion, both during their training and when working as teachers. Cultural background could also be an essential factor in fostering a favorable mindset towards inclusive education. Teachers in this study come from almost the same cultural background; this could also be a reason for similarities in their attitudes, which is positive. Thus, their level of education is also an important factor in showing a positive attitude toward inclusive education (Bhatnagar & Das, 2014).

6.3 Objective no. 3: To evaluate the issues and challenges of inclusion during classroom transactions

For the finding related to objective no.3, views of the pre-service teachers and in-service teachers were taken on different aspects of classroom transaction and were analysed to evaluate the above-mentioned objectives.

Some of the essential observations are given below:

6.3.1 Infrastructure

From the school observation and interaction with teachers, researchers came to know that in a few schools, the basic requirements of physical infrastructure were well maintained. However, in most of the schools, the basic requirement for an inclusive setting/education was hardly seen, including toilet facilities, which were also well supported by the studies done by (Janmohamed, N.S. 2012; Thomas, 2005). The study collected opinions from

respondents regarding additional amenities that should be present in a special education classroom, including computers, audio-visual technology, a life skills room, resource rooms, and a language lab. From one of the observations, researchers found that access to students to their lab was denied as there was neither a lift nor a ramp facility available to the first floor.

It is pertinent to mention that architectural barriers must be removed as early as possible so that special needs children can move freely inside the school building.

6.3.2 Teaching Approach and TLM (Teaching-Learning Material)

Almost all the in-service teachers said that the teaching strategies should include those things that make every student learn without any difficulty. On the other hand, in the pre-service teacher education program (B.Ed), researchers found that during the internship program, students' teachers were not trained to keep in mind the inclusive classroom. During the lesson plan and teaching learning material preparation emphasis was given only on the individual differences. The teaching and learning resources are important to prepare the pre-service teachers (M. Taweechaisupapong, 2015).

It is further proposed that the course materials, including textbooks and other teaching and learning materials, must be made available to children based on their special needs. Children with visual impairment may be provided in braille, large print, audio form, and daisy prints to create the inclusive classrooms.

6.3.3 Curriculum

Investigators found syllabus and other activities that are being followed in schools do not focus on inclusiveness. Only one syllabus is meant for all individuals without considering any special needs of students. If any resource room is available, they are less likely to be meant for any special child. The teaching methodology being employed by teachers for special needs children is totally neglected.

To reach the sustainable goal, syllabus must be flexible considering all the special needs of each and every child. The resource room and other reading materials fulfill the mandate of these children. Teachers should mould their teaching methodology to give equal priority and importance to children with special needs.

6.3.4 Co-curricular activities

As per school observation researchers found that students having severe disability were unable to participate in co-curricular activities. If they are unable to participate in the co-curricular activities, it means that they are not gaining equal rights, and their all-round development is not possible. School must provide a differently abled friendly atmosphere which must be well supported by their peers and teachers.

Teachers should give ample opportunity to participate in such students in a way to give equal right to each and every student and to help them in their all-round development. Various indoor games such as chess and carom; music, dance and art facilities could be made available in the co-curricular activities. Creative work such as handcraft will also provide them with an opportunity to express their skills and talents.

6.3.5 Evaluation System

Many respondents felt that they did not have enough competence to administer different evaluations to students with special needs. Generally, schools followed one assessment technique to evaluate students for inclusive education. If this is the case, differently abled students will suffer and may not be successful in completing the course.

There must be flexibility in the continuous comprehensive evaluation system. Schools should consider children with special needs to be exempt from taking the test in written language if any student has difficulties with language and communication. Teachers should provide an oral test or other simpler methods for children with writing problems.

7. Conclusion

Inclusion refers to the principle of integrating students with special educational needs fully into general education classrooms and schools, focusing on personalized instruction that emphasizes their abilities rather than limitations (Al Zyoudi, 2006; Forlin, 2004). Indeed, that is the necessity of the current moment. It becomes a crucial matter in the realm of education, which particularly captivates all those involved, especially instructors. However, in the absence of positive teacher attitudes, inclusion will revert to merely being a physical arrangement of kids with impairments, lacking the ability to foster the growth and progress of all students. The beliefs and acceptance of teachers on the policy and philosophy of inclusive education strongly influence the extent to which they implement inclusive practices. They also emphasized their willingness to teach in inclusive environments, if they receive sufficient training opportunities. The current study indicates that a large proportion of teachers in training and those already working in the field express their endorsement of the idea of inclusion and hold the belief that inclusion has advantages for all pupils.

The educational implication of the present paper indicates that teachers should be given appropriate training facilities and other resources to transform their positive attitudes into actions.

The teacher training institutes must emphasize including those elements in the training program, which facilitate the teachers in handling an inclusive classroom to reach the Sustainable Development Goals of 2030.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

About the Author(s)

Dr. Sashapra Chakrawarty currently serving as Associate Professor and Head in the Department of Education, Tezpur University (A Central University), Tezpur, Assam, India. She has 15 years of teaching and research experience. She completed Master in Botany from Ranchi University, M.Ed from R.I.E, Bhubaneswar, and Ph.D. in Education from Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India. Her few major areas of

interest are pedagogy of Biological Sciences, ICT in education, Teacher Education, Inclusive Education, Curricular Studies to mention a few.

Institutional webpage: <https://www.tezu.ernet.in/dedu/faculty/doc/Dr.SC.pdf>

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-2147-5642>

Dr. Pratima Pallai is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Education at Tezpur University (Central), India. She holds the following qualifications: M.A, B.Ed., M.Ed., UGC -NET (Education) and PhD in Education. Her areas of interest are pedagogy of social sciences, ICT in education, teacher education and measurement and evaluation in education to mention but a few. She has widely published articles both at national and international accredited journals on the aforementioned research interests. Apart from acting as a resource person at different levels, she has also participated and presented research papers both at national and international seminars. institutional webpage: <https://www.tezu.ernet.in/dedu/faculty/doc/pratima.pdf>

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