

Inclusive Education and Teacher's Attitude: A Study in Three Schools of Kolkata, West Bengal

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ABSTRACT

The concept of 'Inclusive Education'envisions an environment where key factors: educators, educational policies and administrators gear up to cater to the diverse learners in education system, which is conducive to all. 'Inclusive Education' enhances the quality of learning of students with Learning Difficulties as well as those without in any mainstream schools. Trajectory of 'Inclusive Education' at large is dependent on the key factors playing out their role for the actualisation of the proposed concept. In this context, the paper examines the classroom teacher's attitudes in mainstream schools regarding 'Inclusive Education' in selected schools of Kolkata, West Bengal. A study was conducted with the help of a questionnaire schedule administered on 100 teachers. Responses to crucial questions have been statistically computed by Chi-Square Test, interpreted and analysed.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, diverse learners, teachers' attitude, Learning Difficulties

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive Education is about putting right of education into action by reaching out to learners, respecting their diverse needs, abilities and characteristics and eliminating all forms of discrimination in learning environment. It should guide education policies and practices, starting from the fact that education is a basic right and foundation for an equal society.

In this system three fundamental factors that governs the mechanism of Inclusive Education are support provided by the policy makers, administrators of the educational institutions and educators of the children in mainstream classroom who manage the stage for an inclusive set up of education. It is thus imperative that a positive teacher attitude towards inclusion may be the key to the success of including students with special needs (Cochran, 1998). The attitudes of these teachers may play an important role to the success of an inclusion model and the factors that influence attitudes in a positive manor need to be examined. According to Kavale (2002) the requisite attitude to include students with special needs in general education setting are not yet in place. Individually designed instruction and support for students with special needs in the inclusive setting allow each student to participate equally in the opportunities and responsibilities of the general education classroom (Moore, Gilbreath, & Maiuri, 1998). The concept of inclusion not only fuelled a debate on the appropriate placement of students with special needs but also has called for a careful examination of inclusion –based education (Daniel, & King, 1997).

Students with disabilities in an inclusive setting out perform their peers who receive instruction outside of regular classroom setting. Regular students also benefit from inclusion practices both academically and socially. According to this line of research, inclusion seems to have a positive effort on all students academically and socially.

Inclusion in both principle and process, arising from a clear recognition that exclusion happens notonly from education but also within education. It requires adaptation and or transforming the education system at large, notably the way in which schools and other learning settings adapt their learning and teaching practices to cater forall learners with respect diversity. This requires attention to a wide range of interventions, among them the curriculum, the nature of teaching and the quality of the learning environment.

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The World Declaration on Education for All, adopted in Jomtein, set out an overall vision of universalising access to education for all children, youth and adults promoting equality.

The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action declares that Inclusive Education means: schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled' It is to be noted Salamanca Conference set a special focus in Special Needs in Education.

The Dakar Framework for Action, place special emphasis on 'Inclusive Education'. It reaffirmed the vision and mission of Salamanca Conference. Dakar thus, emphasised that 'Inclusion' is seen asaprocess of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all children, increasing their participation in learning and eliminating exclusion.

A right based approach in education is reflected at present in India as well with 'Rights of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act(RTE) 2009'. The RTE Act came into practice in 2010 in many states of India. In West Bengal it was implemented in 2012. The latest in this venture in facilitating educational facilities to the diverse group of learners is the amended 'Persons with Disability Act (2016)'.

Inclusive Education is an approach that looks into how to transform education systemsby removing barriers that prevent students. These barriers may be linked to disability etc Ittherefore examines how educational provisions can be modified or changed to make sure that education is relevant to the context of the learner. It is a transverse issue that is relevant to the local context, that it includes and treats all pupils with respect and that it is flexible so that all can participate. It aims to enable both teachers and learners to feel comfortable with diversity and to see it as a challenge and enrichment in the learning environment. This entails that teachers not only should be prepared to accommodate diverse learners in their classrooms but also be prepared to provide additional attention and support to this group. Thus, 'Inclusion' as a guiding principle has implications for teachers' practice and attitudes towards learners with challenges etc. Teacher's positive attitude towards 'Inclusion' depends strongly on their experiencewith learners perceived as 'challenging'. A successful 'Inclusive Education' creates an optimum learning environment so that all children can learn well and achieve their potential. This involves considering an education system that is learner –centric and adopting support system in education that considers the diverse needs of the learners in classrooms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review in this area shows a mixed response of teachers towards inclusive education. Despite strong support for inclusion most teachers demonstrate mixed responses to the inclusion of children with Learning Difficulties (Woodcock, Stuart, Vialle, Wilma 2016). Bansal(2016a)conducted a study on the attitudes of teachers in private school towards inclusive education. This study highlighted the fact that there existed significant amount of differences in attitude. Yet another study in the same year by Bansal (2016b) found out teachers were infavour of learning theory but were reluctant to practice the teaching methods needed to support diverse learners. Bansal (2018) conducted another study in Chandigarh, India, on primary school teachers' attitude towards inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms which was found to be neither positive nor negative. However thematic analysis revealed that they were in favour of segregated institutions for these children. Research further indicated lack of skills to teach these students acted as primary source of impediment for successful implementation of inclusive education.

Teachers participating in a study in 2017 expressed marginally positive opinions towards inclusive education (Galaterou et al, 2017). In the same study, a number of teachers questioned the appropriateness of their training to work in an inclusive environment as a consequence of their cautiousness towards behavioural problems displayed by Special Needs Children (SEN). Teachers in the younger age-group also expressed more positive attitudes, maybe as a result of the better training they received. Negative perceptions were associated with stress caused by the integration of students with special needs. In a study by Charitaki et al. (2022) it was observed that teachers with the most years of experience (15-19 and >20) had the least positive attitudes towards teaching all students across all factors. The same study's findings urge stakeholders to invest in the training of pre-service teachers and the professional development of in-service teachers. This corresponds with the results of a study by Singh (2020) that concluded that there is moderate to a favourable attitude of teachers towards inclusive education, maybe as a result of the inclusion of inclusive education in pre-service as well as in-service teacher programs.

Some studies have shown a difference between male and female teachers with female teachers being more favourable to inclusive education (Vaz et al, 2015) while some others have not (Benoit, 2016). Desombre et al. (2019) found that general teachers express less favourable attitudes than special education teachers, and that this is partly due to their lower level of general teaching efficiency. Special education teachers were also found to be more



favourable to inclusive education than general education teachers in a meta-analysis by Guillemot et al (2022). The same study showed that teachers; attitudes towards inclusive education is overall positive, and this attitude has progressed notably over the period from 2000 to 2020.

Problem Statement

In India recent educational policies such as the National Education Policy 2020 have emphasised the importance of implementing inclusive education program in schools. As teachers' attitude is crucial in ensuring the success of an inclusive education program, it was felt that a study is needed to look into the ground reality in schools of Kolkata. Hence, 'Problem Statement' of the study is: 'Inclusive Education and Teachers' Attitude: A Study in 3 Schools of Kolkata, West Bengal, India'.

Objectives

- 1. To assess the attitude of mainstream school teachers towards inclusion of children with Learning Difficulties in classrooms
- 2. To assess the attitude of mainstream school teachers towards providing additional guidance to children with Learning Difficulties in classrooms

Rationale

Based on the objectives, the rationale of the research study was to study the mind set of teachers in the mainstream schools regarding mainstreaming and inclusion of children with Learning Difficulties in general classrooms. The teachers are one of the key factors in making 'Inclusive Education' a true reality, hence a small study in three schools of Kolkata, India was conducted.

Hypotheses

Based on the review, researchers formulated two hypotheses for the study:

H₁: The attitude of mainstream school teachers' towards inclusion of children with Learning Difficulties in classrooms will be positive.

 H_2 : The attitude of mainstream school teachers'towards providing additional guidance to children with Learning Difficulties in classrooms will be positive.

METHOD

Population

The population of the study consisted of 100 mainstream school teachers, of which 75 were from 2 girl's schools and 25 were from a Co-ed Institution. Out of 75 individuals 39 were from institution A(girl's school), 36 individuals were from institution B (girl's school) and 25 individuals were from institution C (Co-ed school). Attention was given to have all parameters same, such as all institutions were from English medium schools, all taught at Secondary level, teachers' training and teaching experience were more or less of similar level, all institutions were mainstream schools, socio-economic back ground of school students and teachers were similar and last of all schools were from inner city of Kolkata, West Bengal.

Sampling Procedure

Random stratified sampling procedure was followed.

The names of 2 girls' schools and a Co-ed schools were selected from a list of English medium schools published by a leading publishing house. A random selection procedure of selecting girls' schools were followed. Similar procedure was followed in selecting the Co-ed institution from the same publication. For this2lists were drawn. One list consisted of all girls' schools of Kolkata and a chit drawing system was followed to draw out names of 2 girls' schools. After this a list was drawn out of Co-ed schools from the same publication, again by a chit drawing out system to draw out the name of a Co-ed school.

Once the three (3) schools were selected, the names of teachers were selected from school register, especially from those teaching in Secondary stage of the school.

Research Tool

The research tool used for this study consisted of a 3point question schedule. This was constructed by the researchers for the purpose of the research. It was validated by 5 experts in the field. It consisted of 14 questions in all. The teachers of mainstream schools were to put ticks against the questions in appropriate places of: Yes, No and Not Sure. A key was also developed for the questionnaire schedule.

The questionnaire schedule had instructions written on it instructing teachers regarding the procedure to fill in the form. There was also the option to fill in with additional comments if they choose to write in their personal opinion. For the purpose of narrowing down the research, two questions deemed crucial in this research study and related to the hypotheseswere selected:



- Q1. Is it possible to give additional guidance and attention to students with Learning Difficulties in your class?
- Q2. Do you think giving special attention to these children in your class is unfair to other children who may not have Learning Difficulties?

Procedure

On a particular dayresearchers visited institution A and met up with administrators and sensitized teachers regarding the questionnaire schedule. Then, teachers of Secondary section were asked to fill in the questionnaires in a conducive environment. Discussions among the teachers were discouraged to maintain objectivity.

Similarly, on a particular day in the same week researchers visited institution B and met up with administrators and sensitized teachers regarding the questionnaire schedule. Then, teachers of Secondary section were asked to fill in the questionnaire schedule. Teachers were then asked to fill in the questionnaires in a conducive environment. Discussions among the teachers were discouraged to maintain objectivity.

During the same week on another day, researchers visited institution C and met up with administrators and sensitised teachers regarding the questionnaire schedule. Then teachers of Secondary section were asked to fill in questionnaires in a conducive environment. To maintain a parity with two previous schools, in the third school teachers were discouraged to discuss their response to maintain objectivity.

Then from the total data collected two crucial questions were selected. The researchers considered these two questions would give an idea of the teachers' attitude towards 'Inclusive Education'. As teachers are an important factor that can create an ideal situation in an 'Inclusive System of Education', their response in 'Yes, No and No Sure'in the 3 point rating scale were computed and statistically analysed.

Here a Social Survey method was followed by giving out questionnaire schedule to teachers of mainstream schools. At the same time a qualitative data analysis was followed. Here a nominal scale was applied when Chi- Square Test was conducted.

RESULTS

To question 1, Is it possible to give additional guidance and attention to children with learning difficulties in your class? The total responses were computed by applying a Chi-Square Test.

The following given Table 1A test score will illustrate the comparative results among 2 girls'schools in their response to the above question.

Table 1A Observed Frequencies

Schools	A	В	Total
Yes	31	8	39
No	5	31	36
Total	36	39	75
			Grand Total

(Here, A, represents the girls' school A, and Brepresents the girls' school B)

Table 1B Expected Frequencies

Schools	Frequencies	Frequencies
A	E ₁₁ : 18.72	E ₁₂ : 20.28
B	Far: 17.28	East 18.72

Test statistic Chi-Square for difference between two proportions :

 $X^2 = 32.27$ with df = 1

Interpretation:

As observed value is greater than the tabulated value of Chi- Square for 1 at $\alpha = 0.05$ (3.841), so we can conclude that there is significant difference between the two schools A and B. Thus we can specify that there is a difference in response between the two girls' schools.

On the same question again, computation was done to see if there was any significant difference in response between girls' schools and the Co-ed school. This is illustrated in two following tables: Table 2A & 2B.

Table 2A Observed Frequencies

Schools	A & B	C	Total
Yes	39	20	59
No	36	5	41
Total	75	25	100
			Grand Total

(Here, A& B represent the two girls' schools. C represents the Co-ed school)

Table 2B

Schools	Frequencies	Frequencies
A & B	E ₁₁ : 44.25	E ₁₂ : 14.75
С	$E_{21}: 30.75$	E ₂₂ : 10.25

Test Statistic Chi-Square for difference between 2 proportions is $X^2 = 6.076$ with df = 1.

Interpretation:

As observed value is greater than the tabulated value of Chi-Square for 1 df at $\alpha = 0.05(3.841)$, we can conclude that there is a significant difference between the girls' schools A& B and the Co-ed school C.

To question 2, Do you think giving special attention to these students in your class is unfair to other students who may not have Learning Difficulties?, the total responses were computed by applying a Chi-Square Test. The following given Table 3A test score will illustrate the comparative results among 2 girls' schools in their response to the above question .

Table 3A Observed Frequencies

Schools	A	В	Total
Yes	8	20	28
No	29	10	39
Total	37	30	67
			Grand Total

(Here, Arepresents the girls' school A, and B represents the girls' school B)

Table 3B Expected Frequencies

Schools	Frequencies	Frequencies
A	E ₁₁ : 15.46	E ₁₂ : 12.53
В	E ₂₁ : 21.53	E ₂₂ : 17 .46

Test statistic Chi-square for difference between 2 proportion is $X^2 = 13.808$ with df = 1.

Interpretation:

As observed value is greater than the tabulated value of Chi-Square for 1 df at α =0.05(3.841), we can conclude that there is significant difference between 2 girls' schools A & B. On the same question again, computation was done to see if there was any significant difference in response between girls' schools and the Co-ed school. This is illustrated in two following tables: Table 4A & 4B.

Table 4A Observed Frequencies

Schools	A & B	С	Total
Yes	28	22	50
No	39	3	42
Total	67	25	92
			Grand Total

(Here, A& B represent the two girls' schools. C represents the Co-ed school)

Table 4B

Schools	Frequencies	Frequencies
A & B	$E_{11}:36.41$	E ₁₂ :13:58
С	E ₂₁ :30.58	E ₂₁ : 11.41



Test Statistic Chi-Square for difference between 2 proportion is $X^2 = 15.65$ with df = 1.

Interpretation:

As observed value is greater than the tabulated value of Chi-Square for 1df at $\alpha = 0.05(3.841)$, we can conclude that there is significant difference between girls' schools A & B and Co-ed school C.

DISCUSSION

The research study data was collected from the questionnaire schedule that was given to 100 teachers of mainstream school. The number of teachers from girls school A were N=39, girl's school B were N=36 and in Coed school were N=25; hence amounting to total N=100.

The research schedule had pertinent questions that would draw out attitudes and flexibility of mind of teachers who may require to make certain accommodations to accommodate divergent learners in a general classroom .For the purpose of narrowing down the sphere of research, two questions from 14 questions in the questionnaire schedule considered crucial by the researchers were considered in the study. Responses in 'Yes, No' were computed to find out the difference in responses. For the purpose of comparative analysis between teachers of two girls' schools and teachers of two girls' schools and teachers of Co-ed school were computed for both the questions.

The first Question: Q1, for which responses were computed was: Is it possible to give additional guidance and attention to students with Learning Difficulties in your class?

The response of the first question in yes and no were computed for the Q1. From the above Table 1A, the Chi-Square results indicated that there is a significant amount of difference in responses between A & B. Here, A and B are both girls' school. It was evident from the Chi-Square Test, the positive response in the form of 'Yes' was more in girl's school Aas compared to girl's school B.

On the same question a comparative analysis was done to see if there was any significant difference between the responses of teacher's from girls' school and that of the Co-ed school. Chi-square test revealed that there was a significant difference in response to the question. Girls schools' teachers provided significant number of positive responses to the question in comparison to teachers of Co-ed school. Hence it can be inferred that teachers in girls' schools A andB had the mental flexibility to provide additional attention and guidance to students with Learning Difficulties in their classes in comparison teachers in school C.

The hypothesis (H1) drawn by the researchers that attitudes of teachers of mainstream school will be positive in all schools stood its ground only in Girls' School 'A' and 'B'. In Co-ed School 'C' the hypothesis was nullified.

The 2nd crucial question also tries to fathom the mindset of teachers who may think providing additional attention and guidance to one group of students with Learning Difficulty in the class may not be doing justice to their peers who may not have any special needs in learning. In answer to the second question, it was found out after data analysis by applying Chi- square Test that there was significant difference in responses between the two girl's schools A & B. Here it was further revealed more teachers in school B thought that giving additional guidance to students with Learning Difficulties was not fair to the ones without any special needs.

On the same question when a comparison was done between responses of teachers of girls' schools and Co-ed schools, again teachers of girl's schools in general showed an attitude that providing additional guidance to students with Learning Difficulties was unfair to the rest of the class who may not have any difficulties. Here responses from Co-ed school's teachers was less opposed to the idea that special attention and guidance to students with Learning Difficulties was unfair to the students without any Learning Difficulties, in comparison to that of the girls' schools. Thus, the data analysis revealed that teachers of girl's school A were willing to provide additional guidance to students who have a need for same and they did not think this additional guidance may not be unfair to the rest of the class. Whereas, teachers of girl's school B showed a mental resistance to provide additional support to students who may need the same as they believed this to be unfair to the rest of the class.

Teachers of Co-ed school did not show a positive attitude towards providing additional support. However their opinion regarding additional support to be unfair for the rest of the class was less supportive in comparison to girls school combined together. The hypotheses (H2) of the researchers that the attitude of mainstream school teacherstowards providing additional guidance to children with Learning Difficulties in classrooms will be positive, was thus justified only in respect of school A, and co-ed school C in comparison with both the girls' schools 'A' and 'B'.

CONCLUSION



The researchers conclude that in general teachers of girls' school A emerged with a positive attitude towards catering towards divergent learners which is crucial for 'Inclusive Education'. However conclusive opinion could not be drawn regarding attitude of teachers of girls' schools as school B showed resistance to the requisite mindset to facilitate an Inclusive Educational environment. The teachers of co-ed school in comparison to the girls' school showed resistance to provide additional support to students in need but their opinion was less strong regarding unfairness of additional support in comparison to girls schools taken together. Hence response of teachers of co-ed school was mixed.

Definite conclusions could not be drawn as limitation of the study had small number of schools involved. Only English medium schools were taken under the purview of the research study and schools of regional language as medium of teaching were left out. Only teachers of girls' schools and co-ed school were considered but teachers of boys' schools could not be taken within the purview of the research due to technical factors and time constraints. Further in-depth and expansive research in this very crucial domain of 'Inclusive Education' is needed to be carried out with utmost urgency.

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