

Reappraisal of Attitudinal Perception of Stakeholders towards Inclusive Education Placement

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ABSTRACT

Implementation of Inclusive Education is still a matter of debate in many countries. The available research evidences with respect to the stakeholders' attitudes towards the inclusion are not consistent. The educationalists have reported many differences among the attitudes of regular education teachers, special education teachers, administrators, and others toward students with disabilities. This article provides information on perceptions attached to thematic components of attitudes involving beliefs, feelings, values and dispositions by Stakeholders (teachers, peer students, parent, community etc.) and their roles in the strengthening of inclusive practices in schools.

I INTRODUCTION

Children represent our future. Promoting their development and well being is widely accepted as an essential investment, as well as a moral obligation. Education is the innermost core of human life and development. Any nation is graded according to the literacy of their people. All the children whether they are differently abled or not have the right to education as they are the future citizens of the country. Worldwide, an estimated 650 million people live with disability and about a quarter of them are younger than 18 years (WHO, 2011). Children and adolescents with special need face inequalities in healthcare, transport, education, employment and other aspects of human endeavor. About 85% of them live in developing countries where they often suffer neglect, stigma and discrimination (United Nations Children's Fund, 2005). People with disabilities represent a significant part (approximate 21 million computing 2.1%) of the population of marginalized and disadvantaged group in India (NSS, 2003). Since Independence, the Government of India has made various schemes and benefits to address their position, both as a matter of human rights and in recognition of the close links between disability and poverty. Many of these schemes and policies are particularly aimed at facilitating the participation of young people with special need in mainstream society.

As India is moving towards meeting some of its Education for All (EFA) goals, there is increasing concern with issues of schooling quality and recognition of the need to improve the outcomes of schooling for marginalized and disadvantaged groups.

A person, group or organization that has common interest or concern for a project/object are said to be stakeholders. Stakeholders can affect or can get affected by the organization's actions, objectives and policies. The primary stakeholders in an inclusive setting are its Regular Teacher, Normal Students, Parents and Community Members. Studies carried out in several countries indicate that in an inclusive education setting, stakeholders always develop a certain attitude when dealing with differently abled learners. Regular Teacher, Parents, and Community Members' attitudes and beliefs are known to influence teaching practices and management strategies in the classroom, and therefore influencing directly students' learning (Smith, 2000). A better understanding of attitude towards inclusion can assist in improving the learning environment. This article retrospect the attitude of regular teacher, parents, stake holders and community towards the inclusion of children with special needs in light of enactments of various legislatures and laws, administrative approach and policy instrumented in the last 30 years in India.

II TEACHERS' PERCEPTION

Teachers' attitudes towards integration and inclusive practices have been studied in many parts of the world, commencing as early as the 1950s (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Among the findings from such studies it is evident that, when first confronted with the prospect of integrating students with disabilities in their own classes, teachers tended to be somewhat negative and uncertain about their own ability to cope, and they often point to lack of personal experience and relevant training (Smith, 2000).

Educators with worried attitudes may use practices that promote exclusion rather than inclusion in their classrooms (Sharma *et. al.*, 2008). On the other hand, educators who hold positive attitudes towards inclusion tend to use teaching strategies that allow them to accommodate individual differences (Campbell *et. al.*, 2003; Forlin, 2010). In purview of these, teachers are crucial because of the central role they play in promoting community development and participation and reducing underachievement, especially with children who might be comprehended as having difficulties in learning.

Santhi S Prakash (2012) research in the recent years endeavors concern the broad area of Attitude and Inclusion. The most significant contributions made by him in this direction through his research paper entitled “**Inclusion of Children with Hearing Impairment in Schools: A Survey on Teachers’ Attitudes.**” The study was conducted in the state of Andhra Pradesh in India to measure and compare teachers’ attitudes towards the inclusion of children with hearing impairment in schools. The study revealed significant difference in the observed attitudes based on the teachers’ qualifications, teaching experience, gender, level of teaching and management. The results also indicated that most of the teachers were agreeable to the inclusion of students with disabilities in their classrooms. The study also concluded that there is a need for intervention to foster more positive attitudes among teachers, if the implementation of inclusive education is to succeed. It also has implications for the framing of laws and policies for children with hearing impairments.

Samir J. Dukmak (2013) investigated the attitudes of regular classroom teachers towards including students with disabilities in the regular classroom. Teachers’ attitudes were studied in relation to their gender, age and years of teaching experience. The influence of teachers’ views about the best educational placement for students with various disabilities on their attitudes towards educational inclusion was also investigated. The findings revealed that, in general, teachers showed positive attitudes towards educational inclusion but male teachers showed more positive attitudes than females did.

Muhammed Mahbubur Rahaman’ (2012) study revolved around the attitudes of teacher educators towards inclusive education in Bangladesh secondary schools in order to further understand the challenges faced by countries that are economically marginalized in implementing educational reforms that even developed countries sometimes struggle with. Teacher educators’ attitudes towards inclusive education was generally positive, however

participants were unsure how to implement inclusive education.

III PEER STUDENTS’ PERCEPTION

The dynamics of peer relations in an inclusive classroom is a complicated field of study with a number of reasonable and theoretical explanations. Attitudes of elementary and secondary students toward peers with disabilities were explored by Bunch. & Valeo (2004). Findings indicated development of friendships and lower degrees of abusive behaviour in inclusive schools. Though students in both systems advocated for peers with disabilities, advocacy was more routine in inclusive settings.

The research carried out by Steven *et. al.* (2005) investigated any potential changes in peer attitudes following the inclusion of previously segregated students into a regular school setting. Gender differences at the pre-test stage also prove to be significantly different in several measures. After six months of the inclusion program, data trends and the focus group discussion indicated an increased acceptance of students with disabilities by their mainstream peers. Maria Georgiadi *et. al.* (2012) explored typically developing children’s attitudes towards peers with intellectual disabilities, with special reference to the type of school they attended. Girls and students who expressed more positive social, emotional and overall attitudes towards students with intellectual disabilities chose more positive adjectives to describe a child with intellectual disabilities. It was concluded that effective inclusive practices should be promoted to foster social acceptance of students with intellectual disabilities. Students’ attitudes, intentions and behaviors towards their peers with disabilities were evaluated by Evangelos Bebetos *et. al.* (2013) in Democritus University of Thrace (Greece). The study revealed several correlations among the variables, only general attitudes accounted for both general and modified behavior.

IV GENDER PERCEPTIONS

Peer acceptance is also tied to gender. Female students tend to have more positive attitudes toward students with physical disabilities and/or cognitive disorders than males. On the other hand, male students demonstrate a more positive attitude toward included students with behavioral and emotional disorders (BED) (McGregor & Forlin, 2005).

From the perspective of gender role, attitude is based on interpersonal contact, Abiola Olaleye *et. al.* (2012) assessed the ATTITUDES of students without disability towards their peers with disability

in Nigeria. Having a friend/relative with a disability was associated with more positive attitudes among female students. However, this difference was marginal and non-significant among males. Furthermore, **McDougall and associates (2004)** examined the attitudes of ninth-grade students toward students with disabilities and found that, although the majority had attitudes classified as neutral to positive, slightly over 20% had negative attitudes. They also found that females had slightly more positive attitudes than the males, and students who had a friend or classmate with a disability had more positive attitudes than those students without direct contact with students with disabilities. In this study, girls generally had more positive attitudes towards students with disability.

V PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS

Parents play a critical role in bestowing social validity on inclusion and in facilitating its implementation. Duhaney & Salend (2000) reviewed 17 studies published between 1985 and 1998 that investigated the perceptions of inclusion held by parents of children with and without disabilities. They found that these were complex, multidimensional, and affected by a range of intervening variables. Both groups had mixed, but generally positive, perceptions of inclusive education. Parents of children with disabilities believed that inclusion promoted acceptance by non-disabled peers and helped their children's social, emotional and academic development. Concerns included a loss of access to specialised personnel. Parents of children without disabilities valued their children's greater awareness of others' needs and their enhanced acceptance of human diversity. Some, however, were concerned that their children would not receive sufficient assistance from their teachers and they might emulate inappropriate behaviours of children with disabilities.

VI COMMUNITY PERCEPTION

Despite hopes that inclusion strategies will enhance confidence and social skills of special need students, it is often noted that these students actually face isolation and rejection from predominating socio-social connection. Most of the research on social acceptance has shown that students with special needs are often not accepted by their community. It was also evidenced that students with special needs frequently have lower social position in a social hierarchy compared to their typically developing peers, and are over represented in the rejected and neglected socio-metric groups (**Kuhne & Wiener, 2000**). Thus the predominating socio-social connection is an

alternate component which affects inclusive placement. Sociologists have ascertained that certain convictions and taboos common in the society or community impact the attitude and qualities for incorporation of kids with extraordinary needs. There is a solid faith in a few families that the conception of the kid with incapacity in the present life is attributable to past life. The family and particularly the parents of the kid with uncommon needs confront a great deal of social segregation. An alternate pervasive thought is about God dispensing the misery on 'good individuals,' to test their flexibility and internal quality. In the Indian circumstance, families who have youngsters with incapacities see themselves as the weaker segment of social order. Superstitions, witchcraft, disposition and practices have been restraints to the improvement of youngsters with extraordinary needs.

VII CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Content of this article revealed that *attitude of stakeholders affect the atmosphere of learning and influence inclusive setting specified for students with limited abilities for receiving equal educational chances*. It is on record that negative attitudes from peers and from other members of community represent barriers to full social inclusion of students with special needs in schools. *This can be shown by looking at situations in different parts of the world*. The belief and attitudinal perceptions of stakeholders may be based on a number of discrete factors *due to lack of professional preparedness, available resources, sufficient orientation and specialist assistance*. Therefore, *influence in inclusive setting is problematic, both conceptually and practically*. It may be included that to make inclusive education placement an actuality, it is essential that each one of those included in implementing inclusive programs must have paramount commitments to fulfil the Millennium Development Goal of 'Education for All'.

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