

The Attitude of Elementary School Teachers towards Inclusive Education in Meghalaya

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Abstract

Over the years, the concept of Inclusive education has become an integral part of the initiatives taken by the Government of India to provide education for Children with Special Needs (CWSNs). This approach is based on the global consensus that all children, regardless of their background, abilities, or disabilities, have the right to receive a quality education in their local community. To successfully integrate Children with Special Needs (CWSN) into mainstream schools, the education system should be adapted to meet their specific requirements. Their attitudes and beliefs towards inclusion are crucial in determining the effectiveness of this approach. Numerous studies have highlighted the significant impact of teachers' positive attitudes on Inclusive Education (Jordan, et al., 2010). Therefore, the present study aims to examine the attitudes of elementary school teachers towards inclusion. Understanding teachers' perspectives and beliefs will contribute to creating an environment that fosters the successful inclusion of all students in the education system.

Keywords: inclusive education, attitude and elementary school teachers

Introduction

Inclusive education is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners. This idea was acknowledged at the World Conference on 'Education for All' held at Jomtien, Thailand, in the year 1990, which states that every person (child, youth, and adult) shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities that meet their basic learning needs. Since then, inclusive education has become a prominent focus in education across most countries. The Salamanca Statement, released by UNESCO in 1994, prompted many developing nations to revise their policies to integrate students with disabilities into mainstream schools. The importance of inclusive education was reiterated at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000, where governments were urged to prioritize inclusive education as a policy principle.

Several international declarations and conventions have further supported the idea of inclusion. The United Nations Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993) emphasized the principles of participation and equality for all. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), specifically Article 7, stressed the equal opportunities for children with disabilities. Additionally, the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda (2015) called for countries to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all as part of Sustainable Development Goal 4.

Rationale of the study

Teachers play a crucial role in successfully implementing inclusive education in mainstream schools. The positive attitude of teachers can facilitate a smoother transition to inclusive education. According to De Boer et al. (2011), teachers are seen as key figures in implementing inclusive education, and their positive attitudes are essential for successful educational change. Positive attitudes and beliefs also play a significant part in supporting diversity in inclusive education (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Silva & Morgado, 2004).

Unianu (2012) pointed out that teachers' attitudes toward inclusion can be a significant barrier to the practice of inclusive education. Studies have shown that countries with teachers holding positive attitudes towards inclusion have achieved successful inclusive education, while those with negative attitudes struggle to achieve the same (Horne & Timmons, 2009; Johnstone & Chapman, 2009; Todorovic et al., 2011; Armstrong et al., 2005; De Boer et al., 2011; Unianu, 2012).

Reinke et al. (2002) found that the majority of teachers have a positive attitude towards inclusive education. However, Singh (2001) and Alur (2001) found that many regular education teachers have a negative attitude towards inclusion. Additionally, Sawhney's study showed differences in attitudes towards inclusive education among male and female teachers.

Bourke (2010) emphasizes that creating an inclusive school environment is challenging and requires professionally trained teachers who can cater to diverse learners' needs. Proper professional development is crucial, as teachers play a vital role in transforming educational goals (Margolin, 2011). Teachers need training in techniques for including children with disabilities and sharing responsibilities to develop a positive attitude toward inclusion (Smith & Merry, 1995).

According to Singh (2001), expecting regular class teachers to include children with disabilities without adequate training is unrealistic and unfair. Pre-service teacher preparation is where positive attitudes towards inclusion should ideally begin (Singh, 2001; Jha, 2002; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2004; Mushoriwa, 2003; Kubyana, 2005; Sharma et al., 2006). Furthermore, in-service training is essential to enhance teachers' skills and knowledge, aligning them with the changes in the education system and goals of educational reform on inclusion (Jones, 2012).

In conclusion, to provide enriching learning experiences and improve learning outcomes for students, teachers must continually develop their professional competencies, knowledge, and pedagogy through both pre-service and in-service educational programmes.

Statement of the problem: In light of the preceding discussion, the researchers aim to examine the attitude of elementary school teachers towards Inclusive Education, shedding light on the significance of a positive attitude in facilitating the smooth functioning and implementation of inclusive education in the State of Meghalaya. Accordingly, the present study is titled "The Attitude of Elementary School Teachers towards Inclusive Education in Meghalaya."

Objectives of the study:

1. To find out the overall attitude of Elementary School Teachers in Meghalaya towards Inclusive Education.
2. To find out the difference in the attitude of Elementary School Teachers of Meghalaya towards Inclusive Education, based on:
 - i. Sex,
 - ii. Levels of Education and
 - iii. Teachers' Professional Qualifications

Hypotheses

H₀₁ There is no significant difference in attitude between Male and Female Elementary School Teachers towards Inclusive Education,

H₀₂ There is no significant difference in attitude between Primary and Upper Primary School Teachers towards Inclusive Education and

H₀₃ There is no significant difference in attitude between the different Professional qualifications of Elementary School Teachers towards Inclusive Education.

Methodology

Sample: The current study includes a sample of 1910 Elementary School Teachers, comprising both male and female teachers. These teachers are actively teaching at the Elementary (Primary and Upper Primary) levels and possess varying professional qualifications. The sample was drawn from three districts of Meghalaya, namely, East Khasi Hills District, Ri-Bhoi District, and West Garo Hills District.

Tools: The researchers used the Teacher Attitude Scale toward Inclusive Education, developed by Sood, Vishal, and Anand (2011), to gather the opinions of Elementary School Teachers regarding Inclusive Education.

Sampling Technique: The study employed a Stratified Random Sampling Technique based on the categories of sex, levels of education, and professional qualifications of Elementary School Teachers from the three Districts of Meghalaya to identify the sample for the investigation.

Data analysis: The collected data was subjected to analysis using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, including Percentage, Mean, Standard Deviation (SD), 't' test, and 'F' test. The analysis and interpretation of the study objectives are presented below based on the stated hypotheses.

Analysis and Interpretation

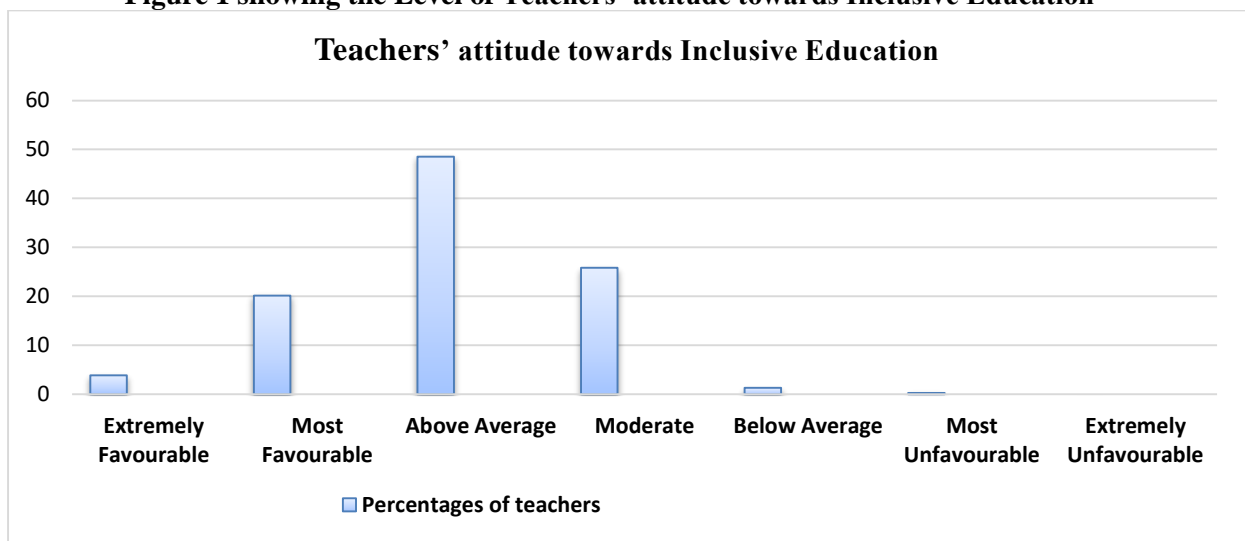
Objective 1: To find out the overall attitude of Elementary School Teachers in Meghalaya towards Inclusive Education.

For finding out the overall attitude of Elementary School Teachers in Meghalaya towards Inclusive Education the data of the sampled teachers have been classified according to the norms for interpretation of Level of Teacher’s Attitude towards Inclusive Education as provided in the scale - extremely favourable, most favourable, above average favourable, moderate attitude, below average unfavourable, most unfavourable and extremely unfavourable. This is given in Table 1.

Table-1: Level of Teachers’ attitude towards Inclusive Education: No. of Teachers and their Percentage

Sl. No.	Range of raw scores	Range of z-scores	Level of attitude	No. of Teachers	Percentage (%)
1	127&above	+2.01 and above	Extremely favourable	74	3.87
2	116-126	+1.26 to +2.00	Most favourable	385	20.16
3	105-115	+0.51 to +1.25	Above average favourable	927	48.53
4	90-104	-0.50 to +0.50	Moderate Attitude	494	25.86
5	80-89	-0.51 to -1.25	Below Average Unfavourable	25	1.31
6	69-79	-1.26 to -2.00	Most Unfavourable	5	0.26
7	68 &below	-2.01 and below	Extremely Unfavourable	0	0.00
Total				1910	100.00

Figure 1 showing the Level of Teachers’ attitude towards Inclusive Education



Interpretation: Table 1 and Figure 1 presented above illustrate the elementary school teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. The results indicate that the overall attitude levels were positive, with a majority of teachers (48.53%) falling into the category of above-average favourable. A smaller proportion of teachers (20.16%) were classified as most favourable, and only a negligible percentage (3.87%) expressed an extremely favourable attitude, amounting to a combined total of 72.56%.

Conversely, a smaller portion of teachers (25.86%) exhibited a moderate attitude, while a negligible percentage (1.31%) demonstrated a below-average unfavourable stance. Merely 0.26% of teachers were categorized as most unfavourable, and none of the teachers were identified as extremely unfavourable towards inclusive education.

Objective 2: To find out the attitude of Elementary School Teachers in Meghalaya towards Inclusive Education, based on:

- i. Sex,

- ii. Levels of Education and
- iii. Teachers' Professional Qualifications.
- i. Difference between male and female elementary school teachers with regard to their attitude towards inclusive education**

In order to find out the level of significant difference between male and female elementary school teachers, the data has been analysed and interpreted using 't' test. The 't' value was set at 0.05 level of significance with d.f=1908 is 1.96. It is represented in table No. 2.1

Table No.2.1

Difference in attitude between male and female elementary school teachers towards inclusive education

Sex	N	Mean	SD	t-value	d.f.	p-value	Remarks
Male	477	110.05	9.932	1.201	1908	0.23	Not Significant
Female	1433	109.46	9.055				

Interpretation: Table 2.1 shows that there is no significant variation between male and female teachers with regard to teaching attitude since the t-value (1.201) is statistically not significant at 0.05 level. With p-value greater than 0.05, there is not enough evidence to determine that there is a significant difference between the male and female teachers. The Mean and S.D. of the male teachers are found to be higher than the female teachers with regard to teaching attitude.

- ii. Difference between primary and upper primary school teachers with regard to their attitude towards inclusive education**

In order to find out the level of significant difference between primary and upper primary elementary school teachers, the data has been analysed and interpreted using 't' test. The 't' value was set at 0.05 level of significance with d.f=1908 is 1.96. It is represented in Table No. 2.2

Table No. 2.2

Difference in attitude between primary and upper primary elementary school teachers towards inclusive education

Groups	N	Mean	SD	Levene's test(F)	t-value	d.f.	p-value	Remarks
Primary	1123	109.41	9.18	0.023	1.112	1908	0.263	Not Significant
Upper Primary	787	109.89	9.426					

Interpretation: The table above shows that there is significant difference between upper primary and primary schools with regard to teacher's attitude since the t-value (1.112) is not significant at 0.05 level. The insignificant p-value implies that there is not enough evidence to conclude whether there is a significant difference between the upper primary and primary schools in relation to teaching attitude scale. The Levenes's test for equality of variances is found to be insignificant with F=0.023, indicating that equal variances have been assumed. The mean (109.89) and S.D.(9.426) of upper primary is found to be higher than that of primary.

- iii. Difference in attitude towards inclusive education of teachers based on their professional qualifications**
- iv.** In order to find out the level of significant difference between types professional qualifications of the data has been analysed and interpreted using 'F' test. The 'F' value was set at 0.05 level of significant. With d.f=1908 is 1906. It is represented in table No. 2.3.i

Table No. 2.3.i

Difference in attitude between the professional qualifications of teachers towards inclusive education

ANOVA							
Groups	N	Mean	S.D.	Levene's test(F)	F-statistic	p-value	Remarks
Untrained	1438	109.51	9.34	1.156	4.144**	0.006	Significant

D.El.Ed	219	110.14	9.35				
B.Ed	242	109.32	8.823				
B.Ed (Special)	11	119	4.98				
Total	1910	109.61	9.282				

d.f₁=3, d.f₂=1906.

Interpretation: The ANOVA table given above shows that there exists a significant difference among the professional qualifications of teachers with regard to teaching attitude scale since the F-statistic=4.144 is statistically significant at 0.01 level. The Levene's test for homogeneity of variances (1.156) is found to be statistically not significant at 0.05 level indicating that the equality of their variances have been assumed. The Mean was found to be higher in the B.Ed Special Education (119) with S.D.=4.98 and the least is among the Untrained teachers (109.51) with S.D.=9.34. With significant ANOVA test results, a Post-Hoc test is then conducted to obtain the mean differences between the professional qualifications of teachers with respect to teaching attitude scale.

(ii) Table No. 2.3.ii

Showing the mean differences in the professional qualifications of elementary school teachers towards inclusive education

ANOVA Post-Hoc Test			
(I) Professional Education	(J) Professional Education	Mean Difference (I-J)	p-value
Untrained	B.Ed	0.185	0.992
D.El.Ed	Untrained	0.63	0.784
	B.Ed	0.815	0.781
B.Ed (Special)	Untrained	9.493*	0.004
	D.El.Ed	8.863*	0.011
	B.Ed	9.678*	0.004

The above table shows ANOVA Post-Hoc test where the teachers with B.Ed (Special) qualification has significant Mean differences with Untrained teachers(9.493) and those with D.El.Ed (8.863), B.Ed (9.678) qualifications as their p-values are found to be statistically significant at 0.05 level. On the other hand, the mean differences between Untrained&B.Ed, D.El.Ed& Untrained, D.El.Ed&B.Ed are found to be statistically not significant as their p-values are larger than 0.05 level.

Findings and Discussions of the study objective-wise:

1. In terms of the overall attitude of elementary school teachers towards Inclusive Education, it was found that majority of the teachers (48.53%) exhibited an above-average favourable attitude, while a smaller percentage (25.86%) showed a moderate attitude. Additionally, a smaller but noteworthy proportion (20.13%) of teachers held an extremely favourable attitude towards Inclusive Education. When considering both favourable and unfavourable attitudes collectively, it was determined that 72.56% of elementary school teachers held a favourable attitude, whereas a small percentage (27.43%) displayed varying degrees of unfavourable attitudes, including moderate and below-average unfavourable stances. Importantly, none of the elementary school teachers were found to have an extremely unfavourable attitude towards Inclusive Education.

Discussion:The study's results indicated that a significant majority of teachers (up to 72.56%) demonstrated a favourable attitude towards including Children with Special Needs (CWSN) in regular mainstream schools, signifying a positive disposition towards Inclusive Education among Elementary School Teachers. These findings align with previous studies conducted by Natasha ChichevskaJovanova et al. (2020) and Jeneva Jones (2020) on primary school teachers. These earlier studies also reported that a majority of teachers exhibited positive attitudes towards inclusion, with minor variations in their attitudes regarding the inclusion of children with special needs.

The implications of this study suggest that Elementary School Teachers in the three districts of East Khasi Hills, Ri-Bhoi, and West Garo Hills in Meghalaya are receptive to the recommended changes in educational patterns and policies related to Inclusive Education in the country. This receptiveness bodes well for fostering an inclusive and supportive educational environment for children with special needs in mainstream schools.

2. i) With regards to the mean difference in attitude between male and female elementary school teachers of Meghalaya towards inclusive education, it was found that there was no significant variation between male and female teachers regarding their attitude towards Inclusive Education since the t-value (1.201) is statistically not significant at 0.05 level. Hence, the finding implies that the attitude of elementary school teachers was not influenced by sex.

Discussion: The current study's results indicate that there is no significant difference between male and female elementary school teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. These findings align with the results of previous studies conducted by Bhakta and Shit (2016), Shah and Ashraf (2009), Abate (2001), and Hannah (1998). Those studies also found no significant difference in attitudes between male and female teachers regarding inclusive education.

On the other hand, the current study's results contrast with the findings of Parkash and Hooda (2016) and Alghazo and Gaad (2004). These studies asserted that female primary school teachers had more positive attitudes towards inclusive education compared to their male counterparts. Additionally, the study conducted by Bansal (2013) revealed that male teachers had more positive attitudes towards inclusive education than female teachers.

Apart from the gender-specific comparisons, the current study suggests that both male and female teachers generally exhibit a neutral attitude towards inclusiveness. This finding is in line with the results of other studies conducted by Cook (2001), Chung (1998), Scruggs & Mastropieri (1996), and Barherhuff & Wheatley (2005), which also reported that teachers of both genders tend to have neutral attitudes when it comes to inclusive education.

It's important to consider that attitudes towards inclusive education can be influenced by various factors, such as cultural differences, educational background, teaching experiences, and personal beliefs. Therefore, the findings from different studies may vary depending on the specific context and participants involved.

2.ii) With regards to the mean difference between primary and upper primary school teachers attitude towards inclusive education it was found that there was no significant difference between primary and upper primary schools regarding teacher attitudes since the t-value (1.112) is insignificant at 0.05.

Discussion: The study also found no significant difference between primary and upper primary school teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education. In light of this, the study's conclusion that elementary school teachers are more supportive of inclusive education is consistent with that of Todorovic et al. (2011). In contrast, Leyser et al. (1994) discovered that high school teachers had more supportive attitudes toward integration than those in primary schools. Additional evidence for it came from Alvrarnadis, Bayliss, and Burden (2000) and Hanwi (2003), who discovered that secondary school teachers had more favourable opinions regarding inclusion than elementary school teachers (Al-Zyoudi, 2006).

2. iii. With regards to the difference of mean between the professional qualifications of teacher's attitude towards inclusive education, the ANOVA shows a significant difference among the professional qualifications of teachers on the teaching attitude since the F-statistics=4.144 is statistically significant at 0.01 level. The post-hoc test shows that teachers with B.Ed (Special) qualification have Mean significant differences with Untrained teachers (9.493) and those with D.El.Ed (8.863) and B.Ed (9.678) qualifications as their p-values are statistically significant at 0.05. On the other hand, the mean differences between Untrained & B.Ed, D.El.Ed and Untrained, D.El.Ed & B.Ed are found to be statistically not significant as their p-values are larger than 0.05 level. In addition, the post-hoc test also revealed that teachers with B.Ed (Special) (9.678*) qualification have Mean significant differences with Untrained teachers (9.493) and those with D.El.Ed (8.863) and B.Ed (9.678) qualifications as their p-values are statistically significant at 0.05. On the other hand, the mean differences between Untrained & B.Ed, D.El.Ed & Untrained, D.El.Ed & B.Ed were found to be statistically not significant as their p-values are larger than 0.05 level.

Discussion:

The findings of this present study are in line with the findings of K. RuniNakro (2019), Deb and Shit (2016) Čagran andSchmidt(2011)Beyene&Tizazu (2010) which revealed that there is a significant difference in the attitude of pre-service and in-service student teachers.However, the study conducted by Umesh Sharma et al. (2006) suggests that in most instances pre-service teachers have more positive attitudes towards people with disabilities and inclusion, and more confidence in implementing inclusive practice when they have had additional training and/or experience with people with disabilities. In support of the above, a research conducted by Abate (2001) in some schools of Addis Ababa reveals a significant statistical difference between regular teacher who had training in inclusive education and who did not(Beyene and Tizazu,2010). However, Galović, Brojčin (2014) concluded that no significant differences were found among groups of teachers with and without trainings (Supriyanto,2019).Hence, the professional development of teachers is effective to develop a positive attitude towards the inclusion of diverse children in the classroom (Sharma, 2020).

Conclusion

It may be concluded that the overall attitude of Elementary School teachers in Meghalaya towards Inclusive Education wasfavourable as teachers having a favourable attitude are higher than those who were unfavourable. Further, the findings show that the attitude of teachers towards inclusive education was not influenced by sex. Similarly, the attitude of teachers towards inclusive education was not affected by the levels/stages of education i.e., whether they are Primary or Upper Primary School Teachers. However, the attitude of teachers towards inclusive education was influenced by the Professional Qualifications of teachers and the professional development of teachers.

In the words of Brookfield (2006) “Teaching is a highly emotional reality, a marvellously and frustratingly complex mix of deliberate intent and serendipity, purpose, and surprise”. This is very apt as Inclusion is a new phenomenon in the field of education which requires teachers to develop a right and positive attitude, beliefs, and mindset; supported by quality professional education both pre-service and in-service training for the successful implementation of inclusive education in mainstream schools.

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