

Perceptions of Prospective Teachers towards Inclusion at the Secondary Level

**# Mrs. T. Premalatha, Special Education, Avinashilingam Institute for Home
Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore-43**
*** Dr. K. Sambath Rani, Special Education, Avinashilingam Institute for Home
Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore-43**

Abstract

Inclusive education often refers to a school model wherein students with special needs (SEN) spend most of their school time with students without special needs. According to literature, for the implementation of inclusion, the attitudes towards inclusive education as well as the perception of inclusive teaching practices and resources are important factors. In present days Inclusive Education is gaining importance in Education System. The purpose is to accommodate children who need special education services in the general classroom. This becomes the importance of teacher training in educational institutes to prepare teachers in the future to meet the diverse need of students and implement inclusive education programs successfully. This study seeks to examine the perspectives of prospective teachers pursuing a two-year Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) program, General B.Ed.=174 & Special B.Ed.=82 (N=256) from secondary teacher training women institutions in Tamil Nādu, (between the age group of 21-23yrs) on inclusive education. Among several common practices on inclusive education, (a) Creating an Inclusive Classroom, (b) Construct Inclusive Policies, and (c) Developing Inclusive Practices were taken as the measures to determine the perceptions of the participants. The perceptions of the prospective teachers were examined with the above three concept by using Inclusion of Students with SEN: a checklist with 10 questions in each section. The results suggested that generally, prospective teachers of both general B.Ed. and special B.Ed. student teachers had a positive perception towards creating inclusive classroom and pragmatic mindset in developing inclusive practices in schools. Also, distinct variation was

recognised in the behaviour and attitude of General B.Ed. Student Teachers and Special Education Student Teachers towards inclusive educational policies.

Keywords: Student Teachers Attitude, Prospective Teachers, Inclusive Education, Teaching Biology

Introduction

Inclusive education refers to ensuring equal participation for all and students with varied abilities have the right to get an education that is purposeful, suitable, and parallel to that of peers. Inclusive teaching aims to achieve two goals: promoting individual learning by adapting teaching practice to the different abilities of students and providing joint learning settings in the classroom community with social goals of equal participation (Janney and Snell 2006; Krähenmann et al. 2019). Inclusive Education is a teaching model where all students irrespective of any ability learn in one single classroom. It is also known as Universal Education. It is the most constructive way to allow each and every child a reasonable probability to access education, learn quickly, and acquire the skills they need to survive (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund-UNICEF,) 2017. The aim and objective of Inclusive Education are that all students with exceptions are impartially treated and get equal opportunities. In an inclusive classroom, students, diversity, and uniqueness should be equally accepted without any discrimination. Currently, schools are focusing on practicing inclusion to impart quality in educating exceptional children in the least restrictive environment. **Inclusive education** allows students to receive high-quality education and intervention that supports them to attain success in their neighborhood schools. The National Education Policy (National Education Policy-NEP), 2020 insisted that, "Education is the single greatest tool for achieving social justice and equality" which has implications for development of an inclusive community and society at large. In order for policy to translate to practice, educational barriers, facilities and services for Children with Special Needs (CwSN) must be addressed. Many countries' education systems have adopted inclusion policies that focus more on teaching diverse students in an inclusive manner. (Graham 2020; Schwab, Sharma, and Hoffmann 2022).

Teachers set a significant part in uplifting the lives of student teachers within the classroom and in the wider society. In inclusive classrooms, teachers adapt their instructional practices so that all students, including students with special learning needs, achieve in ways that are meaningful (Andrews & Lupart, 2000; Hutchinson, 2007; Loreman, 1999). The teacher

is the most important element in any educational program (National Council for Teacher Education-NCTE,1998). The Indian Government has launched a refined and updated National Education Policy (2020) to ensure quality teacher training. Teacher training programs are implemented to furnish prospective school teachers with wider knowledge, behavior, approaches, and teaching skills they require to perform in their in-service days. It also includes the practice of inclusive education through academic and vocational skill training programs for students irrespective of their class, gender, and special needs. The student teachers in General Education and Special Education programs are allowed to learn and practice strategies for inclusive education. The inclusion of students with special educational needs (SEN) is a multifaceted issue that has been widely discussed within education systems worldwide (Garrote, Sermier Dessemontet, and Moser 2017).

However, there is a mild difference in perspectives toward exceptional children among the prospective teachers in general education and Special education programs. The prospective teachers held a positive attitude toward inclusive education, however, their spotted aptitude sag significantly according to the severity of disability and needs (Avramidis, E., Bayliss, P., & Burden, R., 2000).

From Integration to Inclusion

Integration emerged from the advent of the twentieth century which was a step forward toward practicing inclusive education. The UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD; United Nations, Citation2006) was one of the starting points for implementing the idea of inclusion into all areas of society worldwide. Schools started enrolling students with diverse needs in their nearby schools as other students. Educating students with and without exceptions in mainstream classes represents the modern era and the changes in the attitude of society. Integration is when students with partially educated in a specialised program with the goal of integrating them in to mainstream education settings with some modification. Inclusion is when students with special educational needs are placed in regular classrooms with adaptations made to the education system to meet their needs (Eid,2018) Students in inclusive education can experience more exposure to learn, achieve and accomplish their goals. Inclusion is “a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education” (Acedo, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisations-UNESCO – IBE Director). So, education involves transformation and alteration in the subject area, methods, framework, and plan of action with the certainty that it is the authority of the state to give equal educational opportunities to all children. Previous research

already pointed out that a higher use of inclusive teaching practices is linked with a more positive attitude by students towards inclusive education (T. Loreman,2009). Currently no research is published about students' perception of teaching practices. Based on a study of students' perceptions, it can be assumed that in inclusive classes teaching practices are more inclusive (e.g. by using more individualised teaching strategies) compared to regular classes (Gebhardt et al. Citation2014).Successful inclusiveness occurs fundamentally through trusting, endeavouring, and taking care of students with different abilities and diversity, which includes somatic, reasonable, scholastic, communal, and spiritual. Much of what has been done comes from a paradigm of 'special education' rather than 'inclusion' and fails to recognize the broader contexts of inclusion (Thomas, 1999; Vlachou, 2004). As provinces and school districts move towards inclusive educational systems it becomes increasingly important to identify and describe factors that contribute to the success of inclusion. The main principle is to keep all students feeling welcomed, and pertinent, and assist them in all their efforts. It is predominant that adult is too supported in their activities. It comprises the regular classroom teacher and the special educator, as well as all other staff members and faculties who are the main stakeholders and parents. The school's efforts and commitment to inclusive practice has resulted in being identified as a "change leader" in the province by the provincial education ministry (Inclusive Education, 2011). F

The Objectives

Major objectives of this study were

1. To determine the attitudes of prospective teachers in creating an inclusive classroom.
2. To analyse the interest of prospective teachers to construct inclusive policies.
3. To study the mindset of prospective teachers to develop inclusive practices.
4. To summarize the perspectives of General and Special B. Ed. student teachers towards inclusion of students with special needs.

Hypothesis

1. There is significant difference in the attitudes of prospective teachers in creating inclusive classroom.
2. There is noticeable contrast in the interest of prospective teachers to construct inclusive policies.
3. There is wider gap in the mindset of prospective teachers in developing inclusive practices.

Theoretical Framework

Jury, et al. (2021) studied among the French context, that looks for recreating the former discovery regarding type of students' disability or status of teacher's and expand them by precisely investigating the relationship between these two variables. The outcome clone the former judgments by conveying that teachers' vantage point was more agreeable toward children having Motor Impairment than those having Cognitive Disorders and Autism Spectrum Disorders. Also, special educators show more constructive perceptions than mainstream teachers. However, they have reported a less beneficial attitude towards students with Autism in comparison with the other two disabilities.

Kunz, A. et al., (2021) examined the consequences of preceding contact with people with disabilities on their attitude toward incorporation after early teacher education. A survey online was conducted among 443 student teachers who had reported a significantly positive perception towards inclusion. The results indicated that the teacher trainees who were in association with people with impairment reported a remarkably positive attitude towards inclusion. Another study among 300 student teachers, was conducted in Jammu city by using the Scale of Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusive Classrooms (STATIC), which suggested that they have a positive attitude toward inclusive education. However, there was a remarkable variation in perception toward admittance among civic and country side student teachers (Gupta and Bharati, 2018).

D McGhie-Richmond, et al (2013) studied the perspectives of 123 elementary-to-secondary school teachers in Canada regarding (1) attitudes toward inclusion; (2) supportive communication and collaboration; (3) classroom community; and (4) support and training. Five key themes emerged from the qualitative interview that enriched survey findings of teachers' perspectives. The results of this study corroborate existing research and indicate some differences between elementary and secondary teachers' understanding and perceptions, with respect to some of the key themes.

Ahmed et al (2012) studied the milieu of elementary education in Bangladesh focusing to scrutinize the adaptable that dominate teacher's mindset about including of students with special needs in general classrooms. The data was collected from 738 teachers those who work in 293 government elementary schools situated in Bangladesh. The outcome designated that discern school fund for inclusive teaching practices and a set of numeric variables

including earlier success in teaching students with different abilities and contact with a differently abled student were accompanied with more positive approach of the school teachers towards inclusive education.

Beacham and Rouse (2011) studied student teachers' perceptions and beliefs on inclusion and exclusion in a newly reformed one-year professional graduate diploma course at the University of Aberdeen. The results suggested that the primary and secondary student teacher's perceptions and beliefs were practical for the whole course and were largely intact by school experience. Another study was conducted in the Maseru district of Lesotho regarding incorporating education related to students with visually challenged to explore the perceptions of eight students in secondary education. The research was conducted with a qualitative approach among two focus groups, one comprised of four students with visual impairment and four without visual impairment. Findings suggested that the learners had mixed opinions about inclusive education. Inadequate resources, unwelcoming infrastructure, and exclusion from sports activities were the significant barriers they faced during school hours. However, peer tutoring was an effective strategy to practice inclusion (Ralejoe, M., 2021).

Methodology

The present study used the descriptive type survey method. Simple Random Sampling was used in this study. The investigator adapted a tool from Booth, T. & Ainscow, M (2002): Index for Inclusion. It was modified as "Inclusion of Students with SEN: a Checklist". The checklist consists of 30 questions with a combination of three sections: 1). Creating an Inclusive classroom, 2). Construct Inclusive policies, and 3). Developing Inclusive practices. This checklist was used to collect, analyze and interpret the data. Student teachers General B.Ed. – 174 & Special B.Ed. – 82 (256) who were undergoing the two-year B.Ed. program of the 2020-22 batches in the secondary teacher training institutions (women) in Tamil Nādu comprised the population of this study. A 3-point scale was used by the investigator to collect the responses from the participants. The responses were scored as 3 for 'Agree' 2 for 'Neutral' and 1 for 'Disagree'. The data was collected and analysed using SPSS software to find the Mean, SD, and ANOVA scores.

Results and Discussion

The results are presented separately for each of the four categories.

Table 1

Mean and SDs of Students Teachers' attitude towards Inclusion with respect to Type of Degree

	Levels	N	Mean	SD
Inclusive classroom	General B. Ed.	174	28.07	2.84
	Special B. Ed.	82	27.22	3.25
Inclusive Practices	General B. Ed.	174	27.60	3.50
	Special B. Ed.	82	27.14	3.06
Inclusive Policies	General B. Ed.	174	28.13	3.44
	Special B. Ed.	82	27.25	3.69

The student teacher's perceptions towards inclusion were analysed through descriptive statistics. It was found that there exists a marked difference among the perception of student teachers enrolled in General B.Ed. and Special B.Ed. The Mean scores of intensions toward creating inclusive classrooms for General B.Ed. is $M=28.07$, $SD=2.84$, and for Special B.Ed. is $M=27.22$, $SD=3.25$. It indicates that there is significant difference in perceptions toward inclusive classrooms among general B.Ed. student teachers and special B.Ed. student teachers. (In table 1).

The mean scores of perceptions towards inclusive practices of prospective teachers enrolled in General B.Ed. ($M = 27.60$, $SD = 3.50$) and Special B.Ed. ($M=27.14$, $SD = 3.06$) is significantly different. It means, the prospective teachers of both the general and special B.Ed. groups had different attitude towards the practice of inclusion in classrooms.

In addition, scores of perceptions towards the practice of Inclusive policies among prospective teachers enrolled in General B.Ed. ($M=28.13$, $SD =3.44$) and Special B.Ed. ($M=27.14$, $SD=3.69$) were significantly different. Thus, it was evident that both the general B.Ed. and special B.Ed. groups had different perception towards practising Inclusive policies. Hence the hypothesis is accepted.

Table 2

Student Teachers Perception towards creating Inclusive classroom with respect to type of Degree

Sources	SS	Df	Ms	F	P
Between groups	40.762	1	40.762	4.59	0.03*
Within groups	2256.078	254	8.882		
Total	2296.840	255			

***=significant at 0.05 level**

A one-way ANOVA was used to differentiate General B.Ed. and Special B.Ed. student teachers' perception toward inclusive classroom. It was found that there was a noteworthy difference between the group and within the group ($F=4.59$, $p=0.03$) value in their perception towards inclusive classroom at $p<.05$ level. Earlier study by, Sari, (2009), supported the results of the study, i.e., the prospective teachers were not sufficiently being aware of the importance of inclusion. Thus, they need an additional training to know it, else the students will be denied to access the benefits of inclusion. In this case, the hypothesis is accepted. (Look at table 2).

Table 3

Student Teachers Perception towards creating Inclusive Policies with respect to type of Degree

Sources	SS	Df	Ms	F	P
Between groups	11.646	1	11.646	1.025	0.31ns
Within groups	2885.882	254	11.362		
Total	2897.527	255			

ns= Not Significant

One-way ANOVA was applied to examine the difference between general B.Ed. and special B.Ed. students' perception towards inclusive policies. The results ($F=1.025$, $p=0.31$) indicated that the prospective teachers had positive awareness towards constructing inclusive policies in the classrooms. Thus, it can be interpreted that both groups were sure about the need and importance of practicing inclusive policies in the classroom. Hence the hypothesis is rejected (See table 3).

Table 4

Student Teachers Mindset towards Inclusive classroom with respect to type of Degree

Sources	SS	Df	Ms	F	P
Between groups	42.778	1	42.778	3.445	0.06*
Within groups	3153.582	254	12.416		
Total	3196.359	255			

*= Significant at 0.05 level

It was found that there exists a significant difference among within and group effects towards prospective teachers' mindset on inclusive classroom, ($F=3.45$, $p=0.06$). It indicated that the prospective teachers need to understand the importance of inclusion. Thus, they need a sensitization program regarding the components pertaining to effective inclusion. Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted. (See table 4).

Discussion

The present study sought to bring insights regarding the perception of prospective teachers towards inclusion. It was indeed seen that there was a significant difference among the Mean scores of opinions in between the General B.Ed. and Special B.Ed. student teachers. The general teacher interprets more in terms of method and task, while the special educator focuses more on the learning pathway or how to facilitate access to certain content (Kuntz and Carter 2021). The teachers' positive attitude and mind set towards students with special needs is crucial for successful inclusion. While considering the perception towards inclusion quantitatively, it was evident that the prospective teachers had positive awareness towards creating inclusive policies. A teacher can provide a need -based support for a students' overall development. Thus, adequate training can help the prospective teachers on the importance of inclusion so that they can implement it in future. In addition, the results indicated that there was a significant difference in the mindset of prospective teachers on inclusive classroom.

Also, it was found that there was no notable dissimilarity on approach towards inclusiveness. It may be due to government initiatives for implementing inclusive education. The prospective teacher's positive attitude towards inclusive policy can result in promoting equal participation of diverse learners under one roof.

Directions for Future Research

There is demand for nurturing research projects in education to enrich the syllabus to impart knowledge about inclusive education in teacher training institutes and come out with a plan of action for the better implementation of inclusive education in an effective way. Regular visits to Inclusive Schools can be involved in Curriculum to enhance the learning experiences of B.Ed. students in Inclusive Education. Practical experience and exposure are necessary for student teachers to implement Inclusiveness in their schools.

Conclusions

Inclusive education is essential in our present-day schools to provide equal educational opportunities to all children. An inclusive learning environment caters to all pupils, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, or special need (Chen, in 2015). For implementing successful inclusion in schools, different people are involved: teachers, students, parents and external groups, such as psychologists or leisure trainers. All of them have been considered as important and influencing variables for successful inclusion over the years. This paper focused on student teachers and examined their attitudes towards inclusive education and perceptions about essential key issues for implementing inclusive classroom, inclusive policies and inclusive practices. For a better tomorrow, we need a society, a school, and a nation that is accommodating and caring for children who have different learning needs. And this can be carried forward if instructors grasp a conducive view towards inclusiveness and reach out to children with diverse needs. In spite of the fact that different research has brought forth contrasting findings with regard to the viewpoint of tutors towards inclusion, this frame of mind could be shaped through the proper orientation of teachers. It is very applicable that teachers need to develop the knowledge, skills, and competencies required to effectively deal with these new educational endeavors toward inclusion. Thus, we need humane teachers who will be empathetic toward their students of any disability or diversity in culture, caste, class, creed, religion, etc. to attain the target of inclusive education.

Acknowledgements

First of all I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. K Sambathrani, Head, Department of Special Education, Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and

Higher Education for Women, for her support and guidance to complete this research paper.

I am grateful to all my Bachelor of Education students, (2021-2022 batch General and Special B.Ed.) Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, who helped me in collecting data for my research paper.

Lastly, I am thankful to my family for their understanding, encouragement, and support.

References

Ahmed, Masud, Umesh Sharma, and Joanne Deppeler. "Variables affecting teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education in Bangladesh." *Journal of research in special educational needs* 12, no. 3 (2012): 132-140.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-3802.2011.01226.x>

Ainscow, Mel, Tony Booth, and Alan Dyson. "Understanding and developing inclusive practices in schools: A collaborative action research network." *International journal of inclusive education* 8, no. 2 (2004): 125-139.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1360311032000158015>

Andrews, J., & Lupart, J. L. (2000). *The inclusive classroom: Educating exceptional children* (2nd Edition), Scarborough, ON: Nelson Canada.

Avramidis, Elias, Phil Bayliss, and Robert Burden. "Student teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs in the ordinary school." *Teaching and teacher education* 16, no. 3 (2000): 277-293.

[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742051X\(99\)000621](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742051X(99)000621)

Beacham, Nigel, and Martyn Rouse. "Student teachers' attitudes and beliefs about inclusion and inclusive practice." *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs* 12, no. 1 (2012): 3-11.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-3802.2010.01194.x>

Bhatnagar, Nisha, and Ajay Das. "Attitudes of secondary school teachers towards inclusive education in New Delhi, India." *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs* 14, no. 4 (2014): 255-263.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12016>

Booth, Tony, and Mel Ainscow. *Index for inclusion: developing learning and participation in schools*. Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE), Rm 2S203 S Block, Frenchay Campus, Coldharbour Lane, Bristol BS16 1QU, United Kingdom, England (24.50 British pounds), 2002. <http://www.inclusion.org.uk>.

Florian, Lani, and Martyn Rouse. "The inclusive practice project in Scotland: Teacher education for inclusive education." *Teaching and teacher education* 25, no. 4 (2009): 594-601.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2009.02.003>

Galović, Dragana, Branislav Brojčin, and Nenad Glumbić. "The attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education in Vojvodina." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 18, no. 12 (2014): 1262-1282.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2014.886307>

- Gupta, Arun K., and Bharti Tandon. "Attitude of teacher trainees towards inclusive education." *MIER Journal of Educational Studies Trends and Practices* (2018): 17-28. <https://doi.org/10.52634/mier/2018/v8/i1/1427>
- Jury, Mickaël, Anne-Laure Perrin, Odile Rohmer, and Caroline Desombre. "Attitudes toward inclusive education: An exploration of the interaction between teachers' status and students' type of disability within the French context." In *Frontiers in Education*, vol. 6, p. 655356. Frontiers Media SA, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2021.655356>
- Kunz, André, Reto Luder, and Wassilis Kassis. "Beliefs and attitudes toward inclusion of student teachers and their contact with people with disabilities." In *Frontiers in Education*, vol. 6, p. 650236. Frontiers Media SA, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2021.650236>
- Mastropieri, Margo A., and Thomas E. Scruggs. "Promoting inclusion in secondary classrooms." *Learning Disability Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (2001): 265-274. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1511115>
- McGhie-Richmond, D., Irvine, A., Loreman, T., Lea Cizman, J., & Lupart, J. (2013). Teacher perspectives on inclusive education in rural Alberta, Canada. *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue canadienne de l'éducation*, 36(1), 195-239. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1002317.pdf>
- Prediger, Susanne, and Raffaele Buró. "Fifty ways to work with students' diverse abilities? A video study on inclusive teaching practices in secondary mathematics classrooms." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 28, no. 2 (2024): 124-143. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2021.1925361>
- Ralejoe, Malehlanye. "A study to understand the inclusion of learners with and without visual impairment in a secondary school in Lesotho." *South African journal of education* 41, no. 1 (2021): 1-12. <https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-educat-v41-n1-a16>
- Singh, Shiba, Saurav Kumar, and Ranjan Kumar Singh. "A study of attitude of teachers towards inclusive education." *Shanlax International Journal of Education* 9, no. 1 (2020): 189-197. <http://www.shanlaxjournals.in/journals/index.php/education>
- Tiwari, Ashwini, Ajay Das, and Manisha Sharma. "Inclusive education a "rhetoric" or "reality"? Teachers' perspectives and beliefs." *Teaching and Teacher Education* 52 (2015): 128-136. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2015.09.002>
- Wang, Dongsheng, Liang Huang, Xianhan Huang, Meng Deng, and Wanying Zhang. "Enhancing Inclusive Teaching in China: Examining the Effects of Principal Transformational Leadership, Teachers' Inclusive Role Identity, and Efficacy." *Behavioral Sciences* 14, no. 3 (2024): 175. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14030175>