

In-Service Teachers' Attitude And Instructional Practices In Inclusive Settings For Children With Special Needs In Chandigarh UT, India

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Abstract

Teachers play an important role in creating inclusive classrooms. The present study attempts to examine the attitudes and instructional practices of 100 regular teachers working in eight schools of Chandigarh. The study also aims to explore the challenges and opportunities perceived by teachers teaching children with disabilities. Mixed method study design was adopted for the study having both quantitative and qualitative data. Results indicated that teachers largely had a positive attitude towards children with disabilities. There was no significant difference in the attitudes of teachers in government & private schools. However, significant variations in the instructional practices used by teachers of government & private schools were found. Teachers of private schools adopted more inclusive practices as compared to teachers of government schools. The teaching methodologies and classroom adaptations used by teachers also varied significantly across settings as per availability of material and human resources and administrative support. Teachers in private schools had more freedom in the work environment hence more reluctance in modifying instructions was observed in teachers of government schools. The biggest hurdles faced by teachers included lack of professional development, challenging behaviors of children with disabilities, inadequate teaching learning resources, pressure of academic performance and overflowing classrooms. The opportunities provided by inclusion included growing acceptance of children with disabilities, greater confidence to teach variety of learners and better collaboration among teachers.

Key Words: regular teachers, inclusive school, inclusive education, children with disabilities, instructional practices

Introduction

As schools are becoming more inclusive in character with various schemes and policy initiatives of the government, there is an increased enrolment of disabled children in regular classrooms. Since disability is more of a cultural and a social concept, the way it is understood, defines and underlines the attitudes of school personnel towards disabled and greatly influences the acceptance and amalgamation of children with disabilities in the mainstream. According to census 2011, there are about 2.68 Crore (2.2%) disabled in India. Only 61% of children in the age group (5 – 19) years are attending school and 54% with multiple disabilities have never attended school. Thus, we have a huge population (39%) of out of

school children (Government of India, n.d.). The shift from charity to human rights perspective prompted the government of India to bring in landmark legislations for the benefit of children with disabilities. India being a signatory to UNCRPD (2008) was obliged to align its laws and policies with the international convention. With the introduction of 'Right to Free & Compulsory Education' (RTE) Act 2009 and RPWD Act 2016, the government of India reiterated its resolve to fulfill its commitment to Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and Education for All (EFA).

Thus, there has been a push towards universal elementary enrolment of children between 6 – 14 years with focus on 'zero rejection' policy through SarvShikshaAbhiyaan (SSA) the

flagship program of the government of India that later expanded to 'SamagraShiksha' to include children from pre-school to 18 years. The New Education Policy 2020 further gave impetus to inclusive education with a slew of measures to support children with special needs by ensuring barrier free access, availability of learning content in multiple formats, optimum utilization of technology and enhancing learning outcomes. Teachers play a significant role in the inclusion of children with disabilities by adopting more inclusive practices to enhance the participation of all learners. There have been mixed reactions to inclusive education and its benefits. Hence, it is important to examine the experiences of teachers in regular schools across various settings to understand the attitudes of teachers towards children with disabilities and the teaching strategies they are employing to address the needs of diverse learners in an inclusive classroom.

With increasing diversity in schools the researchers, practitioners and policy makers alike are trying to understand what factors contribute to create inclusive classrooms. Many research studies related to perceptions of school teachers across countries observed ambiguous interpretation and understanding of the concept of inclusion, fear of incompetence, concerns regarding limited training, lack of incentives to work in inclusive settings, planning time, concerns regarding examination success, challenging behaviours of children with special needs, instructional difficulties in diverse classroom and lack of policy awareness among teachers (Bailey et al., 2015; Hettiaarachi et al., 2018; Horne & Timmons, 2009; Yeo et al., 2016). The positive outcomes include acceptance of diversity, development of friendships with peer group, professional growth of personnel and collaboration (Downing et al., 2004).

Regarding the attitude of teachers towards inclusion it was found that overall teachers had a positive attitude towards inclusion (Odongo et al., 2016), however literature review found that teachers either displayed neutral attitudes or held negative views about inclusion with hardly any study supporting positive views. The variables most related to attitude included training (Bansal, 2018), experience with inclusive education and severity of disability (De Boer et al., 2011). Teacher attitude was

found to have negligible correlation with year of training and experience of having disabled students in class (Bansal, 2020; K, Mishra, V, Siddharth, P, Bhardwaj, A, Elhence, D, 2018) whereas, teachers' attitudes and self-efficacy were related to use of inclusive instructional practices (Schwab & H. Alnahdi, 2020). Bansal & Kaur (2021) stated 'lack of infrastructure and materials resources, special educators and support services, noncooperation from parents, large class size, and behaviour problems of children with disabilities' were the major challenges perceived by the school principals of Chandigarh, UT. On the other hand, pre-service teachers having sustained and systematic contact with children with disabled were found to have positive attitude towards inclusion of children with disabilities in their classrooms (Sharma et al., 2008). Teacher concerns have been found to be a multidimensional construct. The teachers were deeply disturbed by inadequate infrastructure but not bothered about social amalgamation of students with disabilities. Significant differences were found among teacher on the basis of demographic variables like gender, degree in special education, previous experience and number of disabled students (Shah et al., 2016). Studies have suggested the role of teacher to be central for inclusion to work in the real classroom settings (Yadava, 2013). The way the teacher chooses to work is what gives meaning to the concept of inclusion. So, the practice is the starting point of 'inclusion' (Idol, 2006).

A study examined the impact of teachers' attitude and inclusive practices on the social standing of students with disabilities. The researcher interviewed 93 primary school teachers and 923 students from grade 3 to 6 in a school in Tamil Nadu, India. The most significant finding was that teaching practices adopted by teachers ensured the social adjustment of students with disabilities (David & Kuyini, 2012). Inclusive practices like differentiation of instruction, broad based curriculum, use of computers, peer assistance, authentic assessment and parent involvement was found to support academic & social participation and achievement of students (Downing et al., 2004; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001; Prasad et al., 2017; Villa et al., 2005). Teaching strategies mostly used by teachers to support children include remedial classes, giving extra time, taking help from peers and

resource teachers. Teachers also relied heavily on support from mothers of children (Das & Kattumuri, 2010).

In an attempt to evaluate the effective teaching practices for children with special educational needs it was observed that in traditional practice the students who need support do not get it. In case of one to one support, students receive support both within and outside the classroom and had better interaction with the teacher. Varied and flexible practice best served the needs of special children (Buli-Holmberg, 2016). Balancing inclusion with individualized instruction was reported to be the most successful inclusive practice (Burstein et al., 2004). Teachers need to believe that all children can learn and their needs can be accommodated in the general classroom. This would require teachers to update their knowledge and skills, undertake structural changes in the way teaching learning process is organised, collaborate with other stakeholders and improve the learning experience of all children with enhanced classroom participation (Bansal, 2018; Singal, 2008).

The earlier research mainly focused on the attitudes, perceptions & concerns of teachers towards inclusion and benefits of inclusion. We need to understand the way teaching learning process is organized in the classroom that enhances inclusionary processes and combats exclusionary forces even when children are physically present in the class. The paper is an attempt to examine the experiences of government and private school teachers working in inclusive set-up, their attitudes towards inclusion of children with disabilities, instructional practices adopted, challenges and opportunities for creating effective inclusive classrooms.

Research Design

The research design is concurrent mixed method study involving both qualitative & quantitative methods designed to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the attitude of teachers towards inclusion of children with disabilities?
2. What instructional practices are employed by teachers to address the needs of diverse group of learners?
3. What is the relationship between attitude of teachers towards children with disabilities and instructional practices used by them in the classroom?
4. What are the challenges and experiences perceived by the general teachers regarding inclusion of children with disabilities in regular classrooms?

Methodology

The objective of this research was to capture the actual experiences of regular teachers working in government as well as private schools in inclusive settings. A survey was carried out to analyse the teachers attitude towards disabled children and the instructional practices used by them in their classrooms. The study also measured the relationship between attitude of teachers and the instructional practices employed by them. The data for the study was drawn from a convenient sample of 100 teachers working in eight schools from Chandigarh, a Union Territory located in north India. Out of these eight schools, four were government and four were private schools. Due permission was obtained from the Education Department Chandigarh and the principals of respective schools to conduct the survey. Ethical considerations were followed and teachers were informed that their participation in the survey was voluntary. Effort was made to involve teachers teaching core subjects, activity classes and physical education instructors having special needs children. Demographic details like age, sex, educational qualification, teaching experience and training in special needs was also collected. Teachers' lived experiences along with challenges and prospects for creating inclusive classroom were explored through focused group discussions. The demographic details of teachers are given in Table 1.

TABLE I. Demographic Details of Participants

No. of Teachers	100
Government School	52
Private School	48

Age	
21 – 30 Years	13
31 – 40 Years	37
41 – 50 Years	36
51 – 60 Years	14
Gender	
Male	12
Female	88
Educational Qualification	
Graduate	26
Post – graduate	65
Others	09
Teaching Experience	
1 – 10 Years	43
11 – 20 Years	42
21 – 30 Years	13
31 – 40 Years	02
Training in Special Needs Education	
Yes	03
No	97

Ethical Approval

The approval for research study was taken from institution ethics committee for research and publication of Chitkara University vide no. EC/NEW/INST/2021/531/83 dated January 27, 2022.

Data Collection Tool

The survey used in this study was adapted from ‘Index for Inclusion’ developed by Tony Booth and Mel Ainscow and literature review, taking only components related to attitude of teachers towards children with special needs and instructional practices employed by teachers in the classroom to address the needs of a variety of learners. The survey instrument was pilot tested with 6 teachers from a school outside the study population. The teachers reported the survey questions to be comprehensive and lucid.

The survey included 15 items for self-reflection by teachers, first 3 statements (1-3) elicited the responses of teachers to the attitude towards inclusion and 12 statements (4-15) pertained to the instructional practices used by teachers. For each statement, participants recorded their responses on a 3-point scale ranging from ‘not yet’, ‘partially’ to ‘fully’. Where ‘not yet’ indicates either the absence of the practice or only awareness about the practice with a score of 1, ‘partially’ indicates the teacher occasionally practicing with score of 2 and ‘fully’ means the practice is fully embedded in the system and part of culture of school with a score of 3.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, percentages and correlation were calculated for quantitative data analysis using SPSS software 26. Qualitative data was collected through two focus group discussions involving 10 teachers from government schools and 10 teachers from private schools. The contents of focus group discussion were coded and themes related to challenges faced by teachers and opportunities presented in inclusive classrooms were generated.

Results and Discussion

Quantitative Analysis

The findings of the survey are summarised in three parts (1) attitudes of teachers (2) instructional practices and (3) Correlation between attitude of teachers and instructional practices.

TABLE 2. Responses of Teachers Regarding Attitude Towards Inclusion of Children with Disabilities

Section I: Attitude				
S. No.	Statement	Not yet (1)	Partially (2)	Fully (3)
1	Teachers readily accept all children in their class irrespective of disability and make effort to improve their performance.	4	19	77
2	Teachers are easily approachable by all students especially children with disabilities without fear of stigmatization.	1	20	79
3	Teachers ensure that students do not use names or disability labels while communicating with disabled children.	3	9	88
Values are in percentages				

Attitude of Teachers

Table 2 indicates the responses of teachers of both government and private schools for attitude towards children with special needs in their classes. The category mean was calculated for section – I (Attitude) and is found to be 3.0 whereas the overall mean score for attitude of teachers for 3 statements comes out to be 2.79 so we can say that teachers have a fairly neutral attitude towards inclusion of children with disabilities neither too positive nor too negative. It is supported by earlier studies that teachers have either neutral or negative attitudes with no clear cut positive results (De Boer et al., 2011). The exposure to children with disabilities does not necessarily result in developing positive attitude towards children with disabilities, rather teachers may be overwhelmed by the extra demands on their time and lack of practical skills to teach such diverse group of learners in common classroom (Schwab & H. Alnahdi, 2020).

Statement 1 (acceptance) 77% of teachers reported they readily accepted all children irrespective of disability and made effort to improve their performance.

Statement 2 (approachability) 79% teachers felt they were easily approachable to all children although 20% teachers were unsure how they were perceived by students with disabilities.

Statement 3 (disability labels) 88% of teachers agreed that they ensured disability labels were not used during their classes and dissuaded peers from name calling.

The self-reported responses to the statements for attitude indicate that though teachers have reservations about including children with disabilities yet there is growing acceptance for these children and their needs. Moreover, teachers are more accepting of children with mild physical and sensory deficits as indicated by previous studies (Singal, 2008).

TABLE 3. Independent Sample T-test for Attitude of Teachers

School	N	Mean	SD	T value	P value	Remarks
Government	52	2.79	0.396	0.052	0.958	Not significant
Private	48	2.78	0.311			

According to Table 3, the mean score and standard deviation of government schools is 2.79 and 0.396 respectively. The mean scores and standard deviation for private schools is 2.78 and 0.311 respectively. The p value is found more than 5 % level of significance indicating that the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. No significant difference is found between the attitudes of govt. and private school teachers. The results indicate acceptance of children with disabilities in both government and private schools and relatively positive attitude of teachers towards inclusion.

Instructional Practices

Table 4 indicates responses of teachers regarding the instructional practices used by them during the teaching – learning process

through 12 statements. The category mean was calculated for section – II (Instructional Practices) and is found to be 3.0 whereas the overall mean score for instructional practices of teachers for 12 statements comes out to be 2.42 so teachers are fairly average in using inclusive instructional practices to support the needs of children with disabilities. It is evident from earlier researches that teachers largely modify classroom arrangements and take peer assistance for supporting children with disabilities in class without changing their teaching practice (Singal, 2008). There is more dependence on peer assistance, special educator and mothers of disabled children (Das & Kattumuri, 2010).

TABLE 4. Responses of Teachers Regarding Instructional Practices Used by Them in Class

Section II: Instructional Practices				
S. No.	Statement	Not yet (1)	Partial y (2)	Full y (3)
4	Learning goals or objectives are modified as per the level of special needs children.	2	37	61
5	Textbooks and learning materials are available as per the needs of special children. (braille books, talking books, large print etc.)	29	47	24
6	Teachers differentiate instruction to accommodate needs of children with special needs.	3	34	63
7	Teachers use multi-sensory approach by using visual, tactile, auditory & kinesthetic stimulus.	13	37	50
8	Teachers provide instruction in a variety of ways including one to one, small group or whole class.	2	26	72
9	Teachers assist special educators in teaching students with disability.	18	30	52

10	Facility of using computers and assistive technology is available for children with disability.	35	33	32
11	Teachers use multi-media and computers to enhance the learning experience of children with special needs.	21	40	39
12	The teachers use different modes of evaluation to assess the progress of children with special needs.	4	24	72
13	Learning outcome of the students is assessed as per IEP goals.	17	38	45
14	Student achievement is encouraged even when working on modified curriculum	2	22	76
15	Remedial classes or extra classes are conducted for students to improve their performance.	9	19	72
Values are in percentages				

Statement 4 (learning objectives) teacher responses indicate that 61% teachers were able to modify the learning goals & objectives to meet the needs of special children.

Statement 5 (teaching learning material) shows that only 24% teachers reported having adequate teaching learning material and resources whereas 29% reported lack of material resources and 47% had access to limited resources.

Statement 6, 7 & 8 (teaching strategies) while 63% teachers reported differentiating instruction, and 72% teachers chose a variety of teaching strategies only 50% teachers reported using multi-sensory approach to support children with disabilities.

Statement 9 (collaboration) Only about half of teachers 52% reported working in collaboration with special educator.

Statement 10 & 11 (use of technology) indicate that only about 32% teachers reported having facility of computers and assistive technology for use of children with disabilities whereas 35% teacher responses indicated absence of these services and 33% reported partial availability or access to such facilities. Only 39% teachers were fully able to use multi-media to enhance the learning experience of children with special needs.

Statement 12 & 13 (assessment) While 72% teachers reported using different modes of evaluation only about 45% teacher responses indicate that learning outcomes of students are

assessed as per IEP goals while 55% responses were either not taking into account the IEP goals or were partially utilizing assessment data to enhance student learning outcomes.

Statement 14 & 15 (student performance) teacher responses indicated that 76% teachers were making effort to enhance student performance even when working on modified curriculum and 72% teachers reported organising remedial or extra classes to support children with special needs.

The responses of teachers to statements for instructional practices indicate that paucity of appropriate teaching learning material, text-books, access to computers and assistive devices were impediments to successful implementation of inclusive practices as evident from responses to statements 5, 10 & 11 (Bailey et al., 2015; Hettiaarachi et al., 2018; Horne & Timmons, 2009; Yeo et al., 2016). Need for professional growth and ongoing teacher training is most important for adopting more inclusive practices in class. The responses to statements 4, 6, 7 & 8 underline the need for updating teacher knowledge and skills in teaching diverse group of learners (Downing et al., 2004; Singal, 2008). Strategies like co-planning and collaborative learning have been found to be effective in inclusive classrooms (Singal, 2008). Teacher responses indicate only 52% teachers engage in collaborative work showing a need for developing a collaborative culture in schools. Responses to statements 12 & 13 and 14 & 15 corroborate results of previous studies that

individualized instruction, authentic assessment as per IEP goals and using data to monitor student progress results in enhanced student learning outcomes as evidenced from previous

studies (Das & Kattumuri, 2010; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001; Villa et al., 2005).

TABLE 5. Independent Sample T-test for Instructional Practices

School	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value	Remarks
Government	52	2.32	0.364	-3.134	0.002*	Significant
Private	48	2.53	0.308			

The mean scores and standard deviation for instructional practices for teachers of government school are 2.32 and 0.364 respectively. The mean scores and standard deviation for instructional practices for teachers of private school are 2.53 and 0.308 respectively. As depicted in Table 5, the p-value is found less than 5 % level of significance indicating that significant difference is found between the instructional practices employed by teachers of government and private schools. The mean score for private school teachers is higher than teachers of government school teachers. Hence, teachers of private schools are better able to adapt instructional practices than teachers of government schools. The results indicate

variations in the teaching strategies and classroom instructions in different administrative settings depending upon the resources available and the way teaching learning process is organised.

Further, to find the relationship between attitude of teachers and instructional practices, correlation was calculated (Table 6). For government schools, $r = 0.119$ which is more than p-value 0.05 hence, there is no significant relationship between attitude of teachers and the instructional practices of teachers of government schools.

TABLE 6. Correlation Between Attitude of Teachers to Instructional Practices of Teachers.

School Type	r-value	Remarks
Government	0.11	Not significant
Private	0.80	Not significant

For private schools, $r = 0.80$ which is more than p-value 0.05 hence no significant relationship between attitude of teachers and the instructional practices was found for private schools (Table 6).

The results indicate that attitude of teachers have negligible correlation with instructional practices. Results support previous studies that attitude of teachers have an association with inclusive instructional practices but causality

could not be established (Schwab & H. Alnahdi, 2020).

Qualitative Analysis

The results of focus group discussion were coded and after thematic analysis the following themes emerged namely challenges faced by teachers and opportunities presented in inclusive classrooms. The themes and the sub-themes or categories identified are tabulated in Table 7.

TABLE 7. Themes and Sub-Categories Identified

Themes	Sub-categories
Theme 1: Challenges to inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overcrowded classrooms • Lack of training • Behavior issues of children with disabilities • Pressure of academic results • Infrastructure & architectural support
Theme 2: Opportunities presented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater acceptance for CWD • Confidence to teach diverse learners • Better co-operation among teachers • Skill development/ vocational courses for CWD

Theme 1 - Challenges in Implementing

Inclusion: The teachers described the various challenges that were being faced by them in implementing inclusion. These included overcrowded classrooms, lack of training to teach children with special needs, behavior issues of children with disabilities, pressure of academic results, infrastructure & architectural support.

Overcrowded Classrooms: Almost all teachers lamented large classrooms to be a major hurdle for including children with disabilities. The teachers have to attend to 40 to 45 children in a 40-minute class. Even if the teachers are willing to help all children, they simply can't find the time. Moreover, some children were not able to cope with the syllabus as there was too much lag.

One teacher commented:

'I can either attend to these children or to the rest of the class. These children require personal attention and one – to -one interaction. The other children are ignored; it is injustice to them.'

Lack of Training: Most teachers cited lack of training as a big hurdle. Although the teachers were attending workshops and seminars still most teachers were not confident in dealing with children with disabilities. The trainings were mostly theoretical in nature and did not provide any practical exposure in addressing needs of children with disabilities. Teachers still struggled in classrooms trying to figure out how to modify the curriculum to the needs of children and individualize instruction to suit specific needs.

A teacher commented:

'I attended 3- day training last year but it did not help me much as the problem of each child is different. Ultimately you have to see what works with the child. But it would be really helpful if more such trainings are organized, where we learn how to practically help special children.'

Behaviour Issues of Children with Disabilities: Class disruption due to indiscipline and behaviour issues among children with disabilities emerged as one major theme. Some of these behavior problems are difficult to tackle and teachers felt that children with cognitive disability and those with learning disabilities are quite difficult to teach along with regular children.

One teacher told:

'This child I have with me, keeps roaming in class, doesn't listen, sometimes gets so aggressive, climbs on benches, once he picked up the chair and tried to hit me.'

Similar sentiments were conveyed by another teacher:

'We have a girl with ADHD in senior wing. She doesn't listen to teachers, does not note down anything from the board, keeping giggling in class and makes scary noises. She even pushes and hits other children.'

Pressure of Academic Results: Another apprehension voiced by most teachers was the adverse effect on school results due to inclusion

of children with disabilities. Some children are not able to cope with even modified curriculum and have to be guided to opt for open school exams. The accountability of results and student performance was another reason for resistance to inclusion as teachers had to deal with expectations of parents of other children who fear their own children's academic performance is affected as teacher's attention is divided.

One teachers shared:

'This boy doesn't understand anything, can't write anything, he can't cope with the syllabus even when I make separate worksheets for him. He just likes to colour. For activities also he needs help from his classmates.'

Infrastructure & Material Resources: Lack of physical infrastructure and material resources was another issue cited by many teachers. Absence of ramps, modified toilets, wheelchair access and teaching aids was a major concern for many teachers. Although text-books are provided free of cost in government schools but children who are working on modified curriculum do not get separate text-material.

One teacher from government school commented:

'In the absence of proper infrastructure and barrier-free movement in corridors some children with locomotor problems can't go to playground. One child in class-II cries and cries every time other children of her class move out for morning assembly or for games period because she can't go with them. My heart goes out for this child.'

Another teacher shared:

'Text-books and materials should be according to the current level of the child. There is this child in my class who is still struggling with alphabets, what use is this text-book to him.'

The challenges for teachers in creating inclusive classrooms that emerged during focus group discussions and the experiences of teachers of both government and private school teachers recorded in this study are in consonance with previous studies (Bailey et al., 2015; Hettiaarachi et al., 2018; Horne & Timmons, 2009; Yeo et al., 2016).

Theme 2 - Opportunities Presented: The following opportunities arise due to inclusion both for teachers as well as students:

Greater Acceptance for Children with Disabilities (CWD): There is generally a positive attitude towards children with disabilities although mixed reactions are there from teachers as supported by previous researches (De Boer et al., 2011; Odongo et al., 2016). Teachers are more accepting of children with mild disabilities and those who are able to cope with syllabus, particularly in upper primary classes. Teachers usually encourage peer support and cooperation. It helps in creating opportunities for social interaction and helps lighten demands on teachers' time.

Some comments from teachers:

'Some teachers don't accept these children; they want them to be in separate school. They want these children to come to school only on days the special educator is available so that they don't have to deal with them.'

'Those with severe problems should be taught separately.'

'I don't have any problem with them, with a little bit planning I can attend to them individually in the same class.'

'Children can be very helpful and accepting. I have this child with Down's syndrome in my class. He often runs out of class, removes his shoes, but his classmates are very supportive. His friends take turns to help him, they bring him back to class, help him in his work. He has shown great improvement since joining school, there is more compliance to basic instructions.'

'This child in my class was not even able to hold pencil when he came. I used to hold his hand, put dots in his worksheet. Now, he is able to write independently. He still lags behind in class but with support he has begun to respond now.'

Better Co-operation Among Teachers: The move towards inclusive education has fostered co-operation among teachers. Most teachers admitted their co-teachers helped them. The resource teachers and special educators provide them guidance regarding the best method to be adopted for some children. One special educator from a government school informed that they

have to support each other as most of the courses available train teachers in only one disability. There are hardly any courses across disability but we have all kinds of children in school.

Some comments from teachers:

‘I discuss with the resource teacher every time I face any problem.’

‘There is only one special educator in our school, how many children she can support. So we take turns and divide children in groups with similar kinds of problems.’

One special educator said:

‘I can only help with teaching strategies; I don’t have expertise for every subject. Teachers have competency in their subject area. So we share ideas.’

Confidence to Teach Diverse Groups: The teachers of both government and private schools feel that having children with disabilities in class was although a challenge but it provided them opportunity to interact with these children and learn to work with them. Most teachers had devised innovative ways to engage special children like seating these children near the teacher table, having a buddy support them, extra time and individual attention.

One teacher commented

‘All children are essentially the same. Initially I was apprehensive when this girl with cerebral palsy came to my class. She was wheel chair bound and had difficulty in speech also. But I found her to be very enthusiastic and a keen learner. With little modification she could do almost everything others in class did and participated in all activities.’

One mathematics teacher shared:

‘When the rest of the class is completing written assignments, I spend 10 minutes quickly with this child for a quick recap of the topic and help him practice the sums.’

Skill Development/ Vocational Courses: Few schools offered some kind of vocational or skill development courses especially for children with disabilities. Although teachers of government schools talked about organizing skill development camps but these activities hardly prepared children for any career. The teachers of both government and private schools

cited space constraints and non-availability of trained persons to provide skill-based training.

One government school teacher felt:

‘There should be pre-vocational and vocational training for children with disabilities and experience of working in safe environment should be provided by school.’

A teacher from a private school said

‘There should be mapping of skills with various vocations by the government agencies so that we can guide the students according to their abilities, aptitude and interest. It would be easier for children to transition to life after school and lead independent lives.’

Limitations

The present study was conducted to examine the experiences of teachers working in both government and private schools regarding their attitude and instructional practices. One of the limitations of the study was that the data was analysed on the basis of self-reported responses. The actual classroom interaction of the teacher with students determines the extent of inclusion and participation of the student in the class. An in-depth case study with actual classroom observation would be more suitable for understanding the attitude of teachers towards children with disabilities. It would be really instructive to observe what teaching strategies teachers choose and how they modify their lessons to accommodate different kinds of learners. Secondly, the attitude of teachers and effective teaching practices need closer examination to determine factors that contribute to creating inclusive classrooms. Moreover, future studies can take into account the responses of students with disabilities also regarding their actual experiences of being in an inclusive classroom.

Conclusions

There is increasing diversity in classrooms in India because of policy initiatives of the government and demands from parents of children with disabilities. It is crucial therefore, that teachers’ roles are examined and redefined in the light of changing landscape of our classrooms. Teachers beliefs determine their attitude towards children with disabilities that in turn defines the social environment of the child. The ability of the teachers to adapt their

instructional styles to the demands of diversity of learners will determine the success of any program aiming for academic success of all learners. Thus, teacher training courses need to incorporate extensive practical component involving special needs children for teachers during pre-service and in-service training programs. Teachers experiences in inclusive classroom through this study point out many challenges like need for infrastructure, material resources, teaching learning resources, time for collaborative work, large class sizes and opportunities for professional growth. The move towards inclusive practices offers great opportunities for school systems to restructure the way teaching learning is organised. More focus can be given to collaborative decision making, co-planning and team work for teachers to learn from each other and engage in dialogue. The success of inclusive education program depends upon supporting teachers in providing meaningful learning experiences to all children.

Conflict of Interest

The present study is based on data collected as part of doctoral research. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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