

## ATTITUDE OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS TOWARDS INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM AT ELEMENTARY STAGE

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### Abstract

This study attempted to find out the attitude of elementary school teachers towards inclusive classroom. Teachers' attitude played a significant role in implementing the inclusive education in classroom. The population of the study comprised of all the elementary teachers of Puri district. 70 teachers were selected through incidental sampling from 20 schools of Nimapara Block of Puri district. Teachers' attitude towards inclusive classroom was studied based on three demographic variables viz. locality, qualification and experience. The study was descriptive in nature and two tools (attitude scale and questionnaire) were used for data collection. The findings of the study revealed that (i) there was no significant difference in the attitude of rural and urban teachers towards inclusive classroom (ii) no significant difference was found in the attitude of more qualified and less qualified teachers towards inclusive classroom and (iii) no significant difference was found in the attitude of more experienced and less experienced teachers towards inclusive classroom. However, 90 percent of teachers perceived inclusion as a desirable educational practice because inclusive classroom facilitated participation, encouraged cooperation and enhanced learning achievement of students. Only 10 percent of teachers perceived inclusion negatively. The study also analysed some of the barriers to the development of successful inclusive practices and suggested the ways to overcome these difficulties and to reconsider the roles, responsibilities and identities of teachers.

**Keywords:** Attitude, Inclusive Education, Elementary Teacher, Disabled Children

### Introduction

In a democratic set up, respect to all people irrespective of caste, creed, sex, physiological disorder is the fundamental aspect. Education for all with quality and equity has a high priority in India. The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO,1994) document states, "Inclusion and participation are essential to human dignity and to the enjoyment and exercise of human rights". But in most parts of the world, people with disabilities are subject to several deprivations with limited access to basic services including: education, employment, rehabilitation facilities etc. About 26.8 million people in India were found to have disabilities (Census, 2011). These included persons with visual, hearing, speech, locomotor and mental disabilities. Most of the disabled children in India are out of school. Universalization of elementary education cannot be materialized if some children with disabilities are excluded from the general mainstream. "Inclusive education is an ongoing process aimed at offering quality education for all while respecting diversity and the different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of the students and communities, eliminating all forms of discrimination" (UNESCO, 2008).

The philosophy of inclusive education is based on giving equal opportunities to an integrated group of able bodied and differently abled children studying together. It refers to the opportunity for people with disability to participate fully in all of the educational, employment, consumer forum, recreational activities, community and domestic activities that make every society. It enables children with special needs to reach their potential and live with equality and dignity.

Inclusive education highlights the idea of togetherness and follows strategic approaches to facilitate learning success for all children. "Inclusion in education involves the process of increasing the participation of students and reducing their exclusion from the cultures, curricula and communities of local schools." (Puri and Abraham, 2004)

Inclusive education is the focal point of modern education to enable students of diverse needs to learn together in the same school. In the inclusion model, students with special needs spend most of their time with non-disabled students. Though there is large-scale support for inclusion at a philosophical level, still there are some concerns that the policy of inclusion is hard to implement because teachers are not adequately prepared and facilitate to work in inclusive ways. Inclusion requires teachers to accept the responsibility for creating inclusive classrooms in which all children can learn and feel they belong. In view of this, teachers are pivotal as vital role they play in promoting participation and reducing underachievement particularly with children who might be perceived as having difficulties in learning. Forlin (2004) viewed, "Teachers are crucial in determining what happens in classrooms and there are those who would argue that the development of more inclusive classrooms demand

teachers to cater for different students learning requirements through the modification or differentiation of the curriculum”.

### **Review of Related Literature and Rationale of the Study**

Clough and Lindsay (1991) found that younger teachers and those with few years of experience have been found to be more supportive towards inclusion. In a study Sharma (2002) identified the attitude of teachers towards the disabled and tried to perceive ways to bring about change in the attitude of teachers. The results revealed that teachers were interested to include disabled learners in general classroom depending on the conditions of the disability of the learners. The less experienced teachers and female teachers had more positive attitude than their more experienced and male counterparts respectively. In addition to this, Biswas & Panda (2004) studied the attitude barriers to inclusive education with the objective to explore and describe the nature and extent of attitudinal barriers to inclusion of children with disabilities in the regular school as perceived by high school senior students and found that the secondary school children possessed negative attitude to the persons with disabilities and also to their schooling.

Anderson, Klassen, and Georgiou (2007) studied how the teachers lacked the knowledge they require to be more effective in teaching and dealing the students with special needs. The study also revealed that the teachers thought that school psychologist should play a major role in educating them about students with special needs. They realized that with a better understanding of the types of students who they were working with, they could be more effective teachers to them. To understand how these children better work mentally, emotionally and physically, changes in many aspects of the teaching-learning process are required. Elliot (2008) examined the relationship between teachers' attitude towards the inclusion of children with mild to moderate mental disabilities in physical education settings and the amount of practice attempts performed and the levels of success attained by these students were compared to their peers without disabilities. The findings revealed teachers with a positive attitude toward inclusion provide all of their students with significantly more practice attempts at a higher level of success. Sharma (2008) reported the impact of training on pre-service teachers' attitude and concerns about inclusive education and sentiments about persons with disabilities. The findings suggested that there was positive impact on the training of inclusive education on pre-service teachers' attitudes and concerns towards inclusion.

Korkmaz (2011) made a study on elementary teachers' perceptions about implementation of inclusive education in elementary schools. The findings of study revealed that teachers encountered some difficulties in implementing inclusive classrooms. A crowded classroom was main obstacle to obtain desired objectives in educational activities. The levels of students' disability were related to effectiveness of classroom management. Further, the effectiveness of inclusive education was depended on not only the teachers' quality but also the school administrators.

Bhatnagar and Das (2014) studied the attitude of secondary school teachers toward the inclusion of students with disabilities and found teachers had positive attitude towards the inclusion of students with special needs. This study also indicated that the teachers who were more positive about inclusive education were male, younger teachers (less than 40 years of age), less experienced (less than ten years) and had post-graduate qualifications. However, Thaver et al., (2014) examined the attitudes of mainstream pre-service teachers towards disability and inclusive education and found that pre-service teachers had little or no knowledge and experience with disability, and generally possessed negative attitude towards people with disabilities. In a study Prasad & Rao (2017) found that locality had high influence in development of attitude of teachers towards inclusive education so also gender.

Kumar (2021) in a sample of 160 elementary school teachers conducted a study on their attitude towards inclusive education. The study revealed that, majority of elementary school teachers have average attitude towards inclusive education. Locale wise and experience wise teachers had different attitude towards inclusive education. Dey & Bika (2023) in a study on attitude of teachers towards inclusive education found that the majority of the teachers possess moderate to above average favourable attitude towards inclusive education. The study also revealed that the attitude of pre-service and in-service teachers toward inclusive education did differ significantly; however, pre-service teachers had more positive attitude towards inclusive education than the in-service teachers.

Kochhar, West, & Taymans (2000); Moore & Chris (1999); and Ticoll & Miriam (1995) highlighted the benefits of inclusive classrooms and how the issues like negative attitude, and shortage of pedagogical support affects inclusion. Similarly, the researchers like Ozlem & Samuel (2012); Korkmaz (2011); Batsiou & Panteli (2008); Elliot (2008); Anderson, Klassen & Georgiou (2007) found that both the teachers and policy makers have positive attitude towards inclusion. Studies conducted by Sharma (2008); Biswas & Panda (2004); Soni (2004); and Sharma (2002) revealed that training programme has a positive impact in fostering positive attitude towards inclusive education and the less experienced and female teachers were more positive in attitude than their more experienced and male counter parts respectively. Likewise, Watson (2003) in his study stated that the participants' average attitude towards inclusion and their nature of experience is more important in formulating positive attitude than attending an 'Inclusive' school. A little study has been conducted in this regard taking sample from Odisha in

general and Puri district in particular. Hence, the researcher is interested to study the attitude of elementary school teachers towards inclusive classroom at elementary stage.

**Objectives of the Study**

1. To study the attitude of elementary school teachers towards inclusive classroom with respect to their locality.
2. To study the attitude of elementary school teachers towards inclusive classroom with respect to their qualification.
3. To study the attitude of elementary school teachers towards inclusive classroom with regard to their level of experience.
4. To study the problems faced by the elementary school teachers in an inclusive classroom.

**Hypotheses and Research Questions for the Study**

The following hypotheses will meet objective no.1, 2 and 3.

Ho1. There is no significant difference in the attitude of rural and urban elementary school teachers towards inclusive classroom.

Ho2. There is no significant difference in the attitude of high and low qualified elementary school teachers towards inclusive classroom.

Ho3. There is no significant difference in the attitude of more experienced and less experienced elementary school teachers towards inclusive classroom.

The following research questions will meet objective no. 4.

1. What do the elementary school teachers believe about inclusive classroom?
2. What are the problems faced by elementary school teachers in an inclusive classroom?
3. What do the elementary teachers perceive to improve the inclusive classroom process?

**Method of the Study**

The present study comes under descriptive survey method. The population of the study comprises of all the elementary school teachers of Puri district, Odisha. The researcher selected 20 elementary schools of Nimapara Block of Puri district purposefully, where inclusive education system was practised. The researcher incidentally selected 70 teachers as sample of the study. Because, on the day of data collection, the teachers who were present in the school, researcher incidentally selected them as sample for the study.

**Table-1**

**Variable -wise Distribution of Sample**

Sample Category	Sub-category	No. of Samples	Percentage
Locality	Rural	46	65.71
	Urban	24	34.29
	Total	70	100
Qualification	High qualified (B.Ed)	20	28.57
	Low Qualified (CT)	50	71.43
	Total	70	100
Experience	More Experienced (>10)	32	45.71
	Less Experienced (<10)	38	54.29
	Total	70	100

**Tools**

- (i) A self-made Likert type of attitude scale was used for collecting data from teachers pertaining to their attitude towards inclusive classroom containing 30 items covering five dimensions: attitude towards acceptance of inclusion, pedagogical functions, social functions, emotional and psychological functions and feasibility of inclusive classroom.
- (ii) A questionnaire, developed by researcher containing 9 items, was used to collect data pertaining to three major aspects such as, teachers believe about inclusion, barriers they faced in an inclusive classroom and their suggestions to improve inclusive classroom process. Data collected from teachers were analysed by using both quantitative (descriptive statistics) and qualitative (content analysis) techniques.

**Results and Discussion**

**Table-2**

**Locale-wise variation in teachers' attitude towards inclusive classroom**

Locality	N	Mean	SD	SE <sub>D</sub>	't' value	df	Level of Significance
Rural	46	117.8	10.87	2.84	0.88	68	NS
Urban	24	115.3	11.5				

From the table-2, it is found that the calculated 't' value 0.88 is less than the table value (2.00 at 0.05 level and 2.65 at 0.01 level) with df 68. Hence, the formulated null hypothesis ( $H_{01}$ ) was not rejected. From the result, it can be concluded that there was no significant difference between the attitude of rural and urban teachers towards inclusive education. The result of this study is similar to the previous studies conducted by Bindhu & Niranjana (2014), Kumar (2021) and contradict with other previous studies of (Chavhan, 2013; Kaur & Kaur, 2015; Kumar, 2016; Bansal, 2018; Singh et al., 2020).

**Table-3**

**Qualification-wise variation in teachers' attitude towards inclusive classroom**

Qualification Level	N	Mean	SD	SE <sub>D</sub>	't' value	df	Level of significance
High Qualified	20	117.5	10.5	2.82	0.50	68	NS
Low Qualified	50	116.1	11				

From the table-3, it is interpreted that there exists no significant difference in the attitude of high and low qualified teachers towards inclusive classroom as the calculated 't' value 0.50 is lower than the table value at both the level (2.00 at 0.05 level and 2.65 at 0.01 level) with df 68. It implies that the difference which exists in the attitude of elementary school teachers with reference to qualification is not statistically significant. Hence, the formulated null hypothesis ( $H_{02}$ ) is accepted.

Therefore, it is attributed that the qualification level does not count to differentiate the attitude of teachers. The results might be due to both group of teachers are ready to respond inclusive classroom.

**Table-4**

**Experience-wise variation in teachers' attitude towards inclusive classroom**

Experience Level	N	Mean	SD	SE <sub>D</sub>	't' value	df	Level of Significance
More Experienced	32	115.1	11.7	2.63	0.87	68	NS
Less Experienced	38	117.4	10				

From the table-4, it is analysed that the calculated 't' value 0.87 is lower than the table value at both the level (2.00 at 0.05 level and 2.65 at 0.01 level) with df 68. So, there is no significant difference between more and less experienced teachers on the basis of their attitude score towards inclusive classroom. Hence, the formulated null hypothesis ( $H_{03}$ ) is accepted. The result of the study contradicts with the previous study conducted by Sharma (2008); Biswas & Panda (2004); Soni (2004); and Sharma (2002) that the less experienced teachers had more positive attitude than their more experienced teachers.

**Analysis of Research Questions**

Teachers' response, opinions and suggestions to different dimensions of inclusion were analysed under the following headings.

**Question No.1: What do the Elementary School Teachers Believe about Inclusive Classroom?**

- i. **Opinion of teachers about inclusion is a desirable educational practice:** Out of 70 teachers, 63 teachers (i.e. 90%) perceived that inclusion is a desirable educational practice whereas only 7 teachers (i.e. 10%) perceived inclusion negatively (Fig.1). Those who were perceived inclusion as desirable educational practice they opined that inclusive classroom facilitates universal participation, universal access to education irrespective of type of diversity, Joyful and affectionate environment and develop

self confidence among learners. Similarly, the rest 7 teachers (10%) were not in favour of inclusive classroom and they suggested that inclusive classroom creates chaotic situation in classroom, practically the severely disabled face problem and it is difficult to provide individual attention.

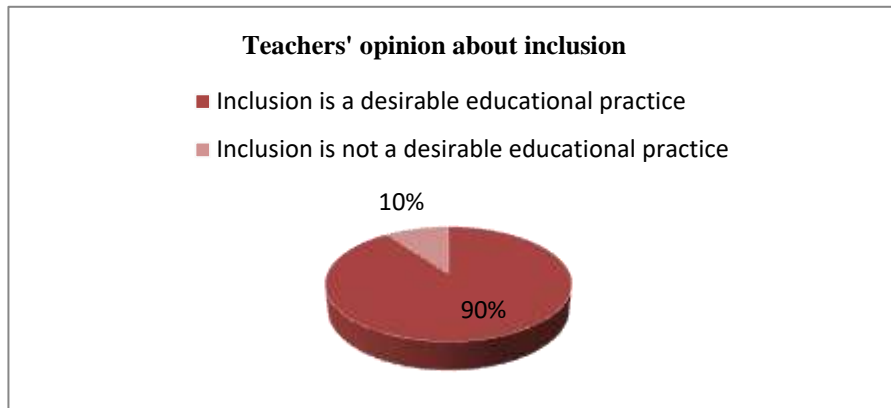


Fig.1: Teachers' opinion about inclusion

ii. **Attainment of students' outcome through inclusion:** Most of the teachers responded that inclusion enhances students' participation and achievement not only in curricular subjects but also in other areas like co-operation, friendship, fellow feeling etc.

iii. **Inclusion of all students regardless of their type and degree of disabilities:** With regard to the statement of inclusion of students regardless of their type and degree of disability, 49 teachers (70%) responded that inclusion is possible irrespective of students' degree and type of disabilities as government has supplied many supportive devices, established ramps, organised training programmes and appointed Block Resource Persons (BRPs).

iv. **Inclusion of gifted, regular and disabled students in general classroom set up:** 56 teachers (80%) opined that inclusive classroom provides scope for participation and peer learning. Different categories of learners get scope to learn from each other. So, all learners can be benefited in inclusive classroom setup.

v. **Supportive facilities for disabled learners:** All teachers viewed that under the scheme of RTE- SSA every school have ramps, special toilets, wheelchair, Braille books, eye testing kits and other supportive instrumental devices to support the learning of disabled learners.

vi. **Training need of teachers for management of inclusive classroom:** Most of the teachers opined that they need special training on inclusive education. Primarily they need training on innovative teaching-learning strategies, inclusive curriculum, supportive devices and its pedagogical functions and inclusive pedagogy etc.

vii. **Teachers have undergone inclusive education related training:** Only 30% of the teachers viewed that they have undergone training related to Children with Special Needs. They also stated that the knowledge they acquired from this training would help them to identify the disabled learners and to manage the inclusive classroom effectively.

#### Question No.2: What are the Problems faced by Elementary School Teachers in an Inclusive Classroom?

i. **Barriers in attaining students' outcome through inclusion:** Though most of the teachers believe that inclusion is a desirable educational practice, still they could not gain the benefits of inclusive classroom due to lack of special training on inclusion and lack of supportive devices.

Moreover, 21 teachers (30%) were responded that they accept and respect inclusion, but opined that for better achievement of their students, they must be referred to special schools for proper nourishment and treatment as their school did not have any sophisticated instruments to deal with the fully disabled learners.

ii. **Barriers for gifted, regular and disabled students in general classroom set up:** About 20% of the teachers did not support inclusion stating the barriers of inclusive classroom such as: the gifted learners feel bore, due to

loss of sensory organs the severely disabled did not benefit from normal classrooms and the normal child feels a chaotic situation etc.

iii. **Barriers relating to provisions of inclusive education training:** About 70% teacher viewed that due to lack of scope they did not undergo such type of training and they need training on CWSN.

### **Question No.3: What do the Elementary Teachers Perceive to Improve the Inclusive Classroom Process?**

i. **Suggestions to improve inclusive classroom process:** Many suggestions were given by teachers for improvement of inclusive classroom process. These are as follows:

- Strict policy in the context of inclusion should be designed by the government
- At least one special education teacher should be appointed in every school
- More pedagogical support needs to be provided by the authority to handle inclusive learners
- Curriculum should be redesigned
- Adequate and need based supportive learning materials should be supplied to schools and compulsory training on CWSN need to be provided to the learners.

### **Major Findings**

The findings of the study are stated as follows:

1. The rural and urban elementary school teachers do not differ significantly in their attitude towards inclusive classroom at elementary level ( $N=70$ ,  $SE_D = 2.84$ ,  $t=0.88$ ,  $df = 68$ ).
2. The high and low qualified elementary school teachers do not differ significantly in their attitude towards inclusive classroom at elementary level ( $N=70$ ,  $SE_D = 2.82$ ,  $t = 0.50$ ,  $df = 68$ ).
3. The more and less experienced elementary school teachers do not differ significantly in their attitude towards inclusive classroom at elementary level ( $N = 70$ ,  $SE_D = 2.63$ ,  $t = 0.87$ ,  $df = 68$ ).
4. 90% teachers perceived that inclusion is a desirable educational practice where as 10% teachers perceived inclusion negatively.
5. Teachers who perceived inclusion as desirable educational practice opined that inclusive classroom facilitates participation, co-operation and group activity.
4. 70% teachers thought inclusion is possible irrespective of students' degree and type of disabilities as government has supplied many supportive devices, established ramps, organised training programmes and appointed Block Resource Persons (BRPs).
5. Most of the teachers required special training on inclusive education. Primarily they need training on innovative teaching-learning strategies, inclusive curriculum, supportive devices and its pedagogical functions etc.
6. Only 30% teachers have undergone training related to CWSN. These training help them to recognize the disabled learners and to manage the inclusive classroom effectively.
7. The teachers viewed that lack of special training on inclusion and supportive devices are barrier for inclusive education.
8. 20% of the teachers opined that in view of inappropriate pedagogy the gifted, normal and disabled learners are not benefited in an inclusive classroom.
9. About 70% teachers viewed that due to lack of scope they did not undergo such type of training and they need training on CWSN.

### **Conclusion**

The research study has revealed the importance and usefulness of inclusive education at elementary stage. No doubt, inclusive education is a bare necessity in the context of making education accessible to all. Access of educational facilities for all is only possible through implementing the concept of inclusive education. It is a great challenge especially for those teachers who teach the students in the inclusive classrooms, as they have to deal with students with and without disability at the same time in the same classroom. Teachers suggested that government should develop standard policy, meet the training requirements of teachers, organised improved teacher training programmes and make provision of supportive materials in time for disabled learners. Above all, its success largely depends upon the positive attitude of all the stakeholders related to the process of inclusive education.

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