

## **Teachers' Attitude towards Inclusive Education: A Literature Review**

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*Of the many ways in which inclusion can be realized, inclusive education holds the key position in trying to bring about a semblance of equity and justice. One of the most important criteria for successful implementation of inclusive education would undoubtedly be the attitude of teachers towards inclusive education. The aim of this study is to examine the attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education across countries and the variables that might perhaps affect their attitudes. Findings of this review reveal that majority of the teachers hold positive attitudes towards inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in regular classrooms.*

**[Key Words:** Teachers, Attitudes, Inclusive Education, Special Educational Needs]

### **Inclusive Education**

‘One of the greatest problems facing the world today is the growing number of persons who are excluded from meaningful participation in the economic, social, political and cultural life of their communities. Such a society is neither efficient nor safe’ (UNESCO 2003: 3). As a result, inclusion, as a principal ideology, has become a central theme in social and educational policies, as established in the various philosophies and practices of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) among many others. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the Jomtien World Declaration on Education for All (1990), The Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993) and the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action adopted at the World Conference on Special Needs Education (1994) carry basic tenets of inclusion in them which play a crucial role in the implementation of inclusive policies worldwide. Of the many ways in which inclusion can be realized, inclusive education holds the key position in trying to bring about a semblance of equity and justice. ‘The World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) adopted in Jomtien, Thailand (1990), sets out an overall vision: universalizing access to education for all children, youth and adults, and promoting equity’ (UNESCO 2009: 8).

‘Inclusive education as an approach seeks to address the learning needs of all children, youth and adults with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalisation and exclusion. The principle of inclusive education was adopted at the Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education (UNESCO 1994) and was restated at the Dakar World Education Forum (2000)’ (UNESCO 2003: 4). ‘Inclusive education is about fitting schools to meet the needs of all pupils’ (Flem et al. 2004: 85). ‘The principles of universality, relevance, functionality and community localisation are essential for a successful inclusive education system’ (Kisanji 1999: 11). ‘An ‘inclusive’ education system can only be created if ordinary schools become more inclusive – in other words, if they become better at educating all children in their communities’ (UNESCO 2009: 8). ‘Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system’(UNESCO 1994: ix). ‘Inclusion implies a restructuring of mainstream schooling that every school can accommodate every child irrespective of disability (‘accommodation’ rather than ‘assimilation’) and ensures that all learners belong to a community. Such an argument locates the discussion in a social-ethical discourse which is strongly focused on values. The concept of inclusion thereby becomes part of a broad human rights agenda that argues that all forms of segregation are morally wrong’ (Avramidis et al. 2000a: 192). An education system draws significantly from the knowledge base, tradition and cultural values of a society. Hence, in order to fully comprehend the idea of inclusion in inclusive education setting, it not only is essential to deliberate on this phenomenon per se, but to also analyse it from the point of view of the cultural setting from which it stems. ‘Therefore, it is imperative that educators should acknowledge the fact that teaching and learning processes are entrenched by the core values, beliefs, and attitudes as well as the predominant cognitive and communication styles and linguistic patterns of a culture’ (Singh 2011: 13). For this reason, if inclusive education is to succeed, then perhaps, we need to retrospect not only on ways in which disability is looked at, but on how as a responsible society/culture we rise to the challenge that comes with it. This should begin from the home, the neighbourhood and then move on to schools where children spend most of their time. ‘Since the main arenas of inclusive education are general classrooms, the attitudes of general education teachers towards inclusion cannot be neglected’ (Hwang and Evans 2011: 3). Teachers’ attitudes towards the inclusion of pupils with special needs in regular classes and their sense of efficacy in working with them are critical factors for successful inclusion. It is probably one of the most important criteria for the successful implementation of inclusive policies since they are one of the two major stakeholders, the other being the students with special educational needs (SEN). This may lead to a better understanding of the

dynamics that are involved in the inclusion of students with SEN. Many studies have highlighted the issue of teachers' attitude towards inclusion and its importance and relevance to students with SEN as well as its impact on policy decisions (Ahmmed et al. 2012; Avramidis et al. 2000a, 2000b; Avramidis and Norwich 2002; Avramidis and Kalyva 2007; Gaad and Khan 2007; Sharma et al. 2009). 'Introducing inclusion as a guiding principle has implications for teachers' practices and attitudes – be it towards girls, slow learners, children with special needs or those from diverse backgrounds (cognitive, ethnic and socio-economic). Teachers' positive attitudes towards inclusion depend strongly on their experience with learners who are perceived as 'challenging' (UNESCO 2009: 20). This study aims at analysing the teachers' attitudes towards inclusion through a review of select articles spread across an international context.

### ***Defining 'attitude'***

Attitudes exist! And are not merely scientific reification nor are they hypothetical constructs, represented in memory as a knowledge base. 'They summarize our prior learning with respect to the valence of the outcomes produced by a given object. As summary evaluations associated with the representation of an attitude object, these attitudes can be activated from memory automatically when the object (or a sufficiently related object) is encountered' (Fazio 2007: 629). 'Attitudes can be stored and need not be constructed anew each time. Indeed, in the Meta-Cognitive Model (MCM), attitudes can be viewed as a person's stored evaluative associations that are not rejected' (Petty et al. 2007: 680). 'The most unique aspect of the MCM is the proposition that people can store validity tags' (ibid: 678). When trying to understand prejudice and why people indulge in it, the MCM's analysis of the validity tags and the consequent resulting attitude, which is viewed as social psychological phenomena, throws light on the behavioural pattern of individuals in a social realm.

Attitudes are the foundations of social psychology and a persistent notion throughout the social sciences. 'Attitude is a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavour' (Eagly and Chaiken 1993: 1). However, Eagly and Chaiken (2007) offers 'an abstract—or umbrella—definition of attitude that posits three essential features: *evaluation*, *attitude object*, and *tendency* which together these elements refer to an individual's propensity to evaluate a particular entity with some degree of favourability or un-favourability' (583).

### **Method**

A comprehensive search was performed for internet resources using ERIC (Education Resources Information Centre, <http://eric.ed.gov/>) to locate articles related to the paper. The descriptors used include: Inclusion / teachers' attitude/ inclusive education/ special educational needs. The focus was on teachers' attitude towards inclusion drawing from studies conducted in different countries. Most of the data was from peer reviewed journals, wherein

substantial studies have been carried out in this subject. The papers were selected based on certain criteria which include:

- Restricted to studies with empirical data
- Published between 2000-2017.
- Focused on teacher's attitude towards inclusive education
- The focal point of the studies should be on inclusion of children with special educational needs in regular education system.
- The most fundamental criterion of the study is that the articles selected were spread across an international milieu. This was done not with the intention of arriving at any generalization, since it would be impossible to do so, given differences in educational systems, policies and frameworks, but to investigate if there was any occurrence of cultural patterning of attitudes.

## **Results**

Vaz et al. (2015) study included a cross-sectional data collected from 74 primary school teachers across 74 schools in inner city and regional areas of Western Australia. Instruments used for data collection included; The Opinions Relative to Integration of Students with Disabilities scale (ORI) which measures teachers' attitudes toward the integration of students with disabilities in regular settings and the 30-item Bandura's Teachers Efficacy scale to assess teachers' efficacy. Four teachers attributes—age, gender, teaching self-efficacy and training collectively explained 42% of the variability in teachers' attitude toward including students with disabilities. 'The results from the current study add to the evidence that gender appears to be a predictor of teacher attitudes towards inclusion and that male teachers tend to have a more negative attitude than female teachers' (7), 'older teachers tend to have more negative attitudes towards inclusion...lack of confidence in regard teaching students with special needs were associated with negative attitudes to inclusion...training in teaching students with disabilities was associated with positive attitudes towards inclusion...and low self-efficacy in teaching skills was associated with negative attitudes' (8)

Haq and Mundia (2012) compared Brunei trainee teachers' attitudes to specific disabilities and students with high support needs using field survey research method which consisted of a three-part and quantitative self-report instrument wherein Part A collected demographical data, Part B was a 5-item Likert-type scale that measured attitudes toward inclusive education and Part C was also a 5-item a Likert-type scale measuring attitudes to specific disabilities. 'The first major finding of this research was that preservice teachers had positive attitudes toward inclusion of children with special needs in the general education classroom' (369). 'In addition, teachers with experience in working with children with disabilities had high comfort levels with inclusive education' (370). No significant differences were found in the attitudes of male and female teachers. Teachers also did not differ in attitudes based on their teacher education program. 'In Brunei, the idea of inclusion is not only supported by

educational policy and legislation but also receives encouragement from cultural and religious values' (371). The second main finding of the present study was that teachers were not favourable toward the inclusion of students with sensory, behavioural, and communication multi-disabilities. Overall, participants in the study had positive attitudes to inclusion but displayed negative attitudes toward some specific disabilities such as sensory impairments (hearing, communication, and visual), mental disorders, multiple disabilities, and challenging behaviours.

Arrah and Swain's (2014) study examines 130 general education teachers perceptions of including students with special education needs in secondary schools from five secondary government, denominational or lay private schools in Buea subdivision of Cameroon. The teachers completed a 26-item survey where 'Likert scale format was used. The results show teachers have a positive perception of teaching students with special education needs. Results of the study, as is consistent with findings of other studies, indicate varied problems in implementing inclusive education such as insufficient resources for special education (78.3%), class size (51%) and lack of institutional support (52.7%). Male teachers indicate a higher level of challenge faced while teaching students with SEN than their female counterparts which can be attributed towards cultural differences between them. Years of teaching does seem to have a grave impact on the perception of teachers towards teaching students with SEN where 'teachers with 11 or more years of experience had significantly more positive perceptions towards including students with special education needs than teachers who had 0-5 years of teaching experience' (108).

Gaad and Khan (2007) investigate the attitude of mainstream teachers of students with special educational needs (SEN) within the context of the expatriates (India and Pakistan) in Dubai and data was obtained from two schools. Questionnaires and interview schedules were the methods of data collection and twenty-five questionnaires (completed anonymously) were distributed to the respondents and responses to questions and statements were modified from the 5 item Likert-type scale. The findings reported that the teachers surveyed held the opinion that students with SEN were disruptive to other students in the class, however, teachers had a positive attitude towards educating students with Learning Difficulties, students with Behavioural Disorders, Physical Disability and Health Impairments could be included in the mainstream classrooms. Nevertheless, teachers had negative attitudes towards inclusion of students with Hearing Impairment, Communication Disorder, Intellectual Challenges and PMLD (Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities)' (99). Findings indicate that mainstream teachers lack confidence in their ability to facilitate learning, especially when it comes to retention capacity of students with SEN and were uncertain whether they could coordinate lessons and instructional materials for such students since they have no proper knowledge of strategies for teaching students with SEN.

Lifshitz et al. (2004) study was to examine the effects of an intervention programme on sense of efficacy and attitudes towards inclusion of pupils with six types of disability, among Israeli (66) and Palestinian (192) teachers. The Regular Education Initiative Questionnaire was used in order to examine the attitudes towards inclusion and sense of self-efficacy relating to four types of disability (physical handicap, sensory deficit, emotional/behavioural disorders and mental retardation). 'As hypothesized, in all types of need the willingness of the Israeli teachers to include pupils with special needs was significantly higher as compared to the Palestinian teachers, with an indication of the Israeli teachers being less conservative than their Palestinian counterparts. For two types of needs: visually and hearing impaired, and for mental retardation, the attitudes of the Israeli teachers before the intervention were positive and the attitudes of the Palestinian teachers were negative...As stated above, the attitudes of the Palestinian teachers towards inclusion of pupils with blindness and mental retardation were negative. There is a strong belief in these communities that those disabilities are results of punishment from God' (184). The teachers of both nations, however, expressed a more positive attitude towards students who are physical handicaps than any other disability, and negatives attitudes towards students with learning or emotional disturbance (moderate or severe) and mild mental retardation. Perhaps, the most significant finding of the study would have to be the change in attitude and behaviour of regular teachers towards inclusion after the intervention programme.

Using a sample of 359 in-service teachers, Yada and Savolainen's (2017) study examines Japanese teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education and their self-efficacy for inclusive practices. The study employs a survey approach and questionnaire design and a convenience sampling method was adopted. Data were obtained from 359 primary and secondary in-service school teachers working in Japanese private 96 (27.5%) and public schools (252, 72.2%). Data was collected using an instrument consisting of two scales, the Sentiments, Attitudes, and Concerns about Inclusive Education Revised (SACIE-R) scale designed to measure pre-service teachers' perception of the three constructs of inclusive education and the Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practices (TEIP) scale was developed to assess teachers' self-efficacy for inclusive practices. 'The results indicate that although teachers' sentiments toward disabilities were generally positive, the teachers had some concerns about implementing inclusive education in their classroom. The overall level of self-efficacy was relatively low in the Japanese sample compared to that of other countries, particularly in relation to managing problematic student behaviour. Self-efficacy regarding managing behaviour and collaboration was related to overall attitudes toward inclusive education' (222).

Fayez et al. (2011) study was to understand inclusion from the perspectives of Jordanian preservice early childhood teachers using individual in-depth interviews as the main source of data collection which consisted of open-ended, semi-structured questions. In order to recruit participants for the

study, the snowballing technique was used depending on two criteria (sufficiency and saturation of information) to determine if they had interviewed enough participants. Findings suggest that preservice early childhood teachers in Jordan have positive attitudes towards the concept of inclusive education with some of them referring to it as 'social justice' and 'rights' of children with SEN. However, all 20 participants expressed their apprehension when having to deal with students with intellectual disability (mild and severe) as they felt they were least prepared to handle them as compared with students with other disability types (learning disabilities, hearing impairments, and physical disabilities). They had major concerns with social acceptance and the potential success of inclusion in the Jordanian context due to lack of institutional support, resources and adequate services.

Sharma et al. (2009) 'is perhaps the first study that examined the attitudes and concerns of pre-service teachers about implementing inclusive practices in India' (329) with 480 surveys distributed and returned among pre-service teachers enrolled for a B. Ed. programme of Pune University. The authors employed a three-part survey instrument, with the first part consisting of questions on demographic information, the second employing the Attitudes Towards Inclusive Education scale (ATIES) and the third being the Concerns about Inclusive Education Scale (CIES). The findings are not very encouraging for children with SEN in regular schools. This may perhaps be better understood when viewed from the education policy of the country as children with SEN have always studied in inclusive schools and never taught in regular schools. 'Overall, pre-service teachers from Pune were found to be somewhat negative in their attitudes towards inclusion' (326). The participants were vague and anxious about the concept of inclusive education and 'were least positive about including students who display disruptive behaviours' (327).

The three-component model of attitudes (affective, cognitive and conative/behavioural components) was adopted for Avramidis et al. (2000b) study among student teachers' of UK. However, a new instrument for measuring teachers' attitudes toward inclusion was developed due to the authors' dissatisfaction with existing instruments since the format of their questionnaire was different, addressing all the three components. The instrument consisted of: reported personal and situational variables and a Likert scale measuring beliefs relative to inclusion (cognitive component). 135 participants were involved in the study that appeared to be positive towards the overall concept of inclusion and thus, can be concluded that newly qualified teachers hold positive attitudes towards inclusion when entering the professional arena and the study also found that female prospective teachers were more positive than male teachers. Pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) were seen as causing more concern and stress than other types of special needs. 'However, the most important finding of the study was the identification of the participants' lack of confidence in meeting the IEP requirements of children with special educational needs. What is striking here is that their confidence drops significantly

according to the stage at which the pupils are perceived as standing in the statementing process' (289). Therefore, it is essential that newly qualified teachers have sufficient knowledge, skills and experience in order for them to retain positive attitudes towards students with SEN.

Ross-Hill (2009) sample consisted of 100 elementary and secondary regular education teachers of rural areas of southeastern USA which were drawn via convenience and purposive sampling of schools located in the area. Depending on availability and interest as well as possessing certain characteristics (teaching experience and actual classroom time in the teaching assignments) described on the STATIC, participants (only elementary and secondary regular education teachers) were selected for the study. 'Since regular education teachers in this district have received specialised training in the area of special needs students and learning' (194), it was not surprising that the findings of the study indicated a positive response to inclusive education by the teachers. They were found to be very responsive, cooperative and more accommodating to SEN, however, there were teachers who were not open to the concept of inclusion. Nonetheless, they all expressed added confidence to teach students with special needs when they are well equipped with adequate training to meet their needs. Inclusion is present in many school districts across the USA and has many service delivery areas and 'the results of the current study impact social change because they offer awareness that attitudes are critical to the success or failure of an inclusion programme' (196).

## **Discussion**

The results of the review show that majority of the teachers were quite positive regarding inclusive education *vis-a-vis* the inclusion of students with SEN in the regular classrooms. A number of variables are considered important when accessing the attitudes of teachers teaching students with SEN as these do have an impact on the acceptance of inclusive schooling of such students. Two important variables that can decide the positivity or negativity of teachers' attitudes are years of teaching experience and previous training received for inclusive education. Haq and Mundia's (2012) study on Brunei teachers indicate that previous experience of the teachers resulted in a positive attitude and so is the case with Arrah and Swain's (2014) study on Cameroon teachers. Teacher training programmes have helped to combat many issues related to inclusive education, and one of the most significant impacts of this is perhaps the brewing of positive attitudes among teachers which have resulted as a consequence of training as was evident from the analysis of the studies (Lifshitz et al. 2004; Ross-Hill 2009, Sharma et al. 2009). However, no significant difference was found in attitudes of teachers who had undergone training in Brunei (Haq and Mundia 2012) which can be attributed to the idea of inclusion not only being supported by educational policy and legislation of the country but also encouraged and inculcated from the cultural and religious points of view. This perhaps is also apparent from Lifshitz et al. (2004) study on Israeli and Palestinian teachers wherein they have concluded that due to the Israeli teachers

being less conservative than the Palestinian teachers, the idea of inclusion is better accepted among them. Another important factor that contributes to this is that 'the Palestinian community apparently is still affected by a 'stigma conceptualization' towards persons with a disability and a strong belief in these communities that those disabilities are results of punishment from God' (ibid: 184). According to the review, the gender of the teacher also affects the outcome of inclusion as was found in the studies that were analysed. Haq and Mundia (2012) found no significant difference in teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, Avramidis et al. (2000), Arrah and Swain (2014) and Vaz et al. (2015) concluded that the female teachers were positive and male teachers negative towards inclusive education, however, in Ahmmmed et al. (2012) study, the female teachers expressed negative attitudes as opposed to the positive attitudes of the male teachers.

The type of disability also gravely impacts the attitudes of teachers. Most teachers expressed a positive attitude towards certain disabilities and negative towards others, depending upon the severity of the disability and how it affects their classroom management system. Teachers were found to be anxious and averse towards students with sensory, behavioural, and communication multi-disabilities (Haq and Mundia 2012), hearing impairment, communication disorder, intellectual challenges and PMLD (Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities) (Gaad and Khan 2007), intellectual disability (mild and severe) (Fayez et al. 2011), emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) (Avramidis et al. 2000b), and disruptive behaviours (Sharma et al. 2009). Behavioural disorders, physical disability and health impairments (Gaad and Khan, 2007) and learning disabilities, hearing impairments, and physical disabilities (Avramidis et al. 2000b) were disabilities that teachers were willing to accommodate based on the analysis of the studies. Pune teachers were least positive about the inclusion of children who display disruptive behaviours and would rather have children in their classrooms who would require academic and physical accommodations only (Sharma et al. 2009). Some of the major factors that negatively affect the prospect of inclusive education, especially when the issue of integrating SEN in regular schools is concerned, has been highlighted as lack of institutional support, inadequate resources and insufficient teacher training (Fayez et al. 2011, Arrah and Swain 2014).

## **Conclusion**

Due to differences in educational policy and reforms, laws and regulations as well as implementation agencies, structural differences were observed across nations in the context of inclusive education. Various countries have tried to implement policies regarding inclusive education which would actually change the way disability is perceived. In some, inclusive education has sprung roots, while in others it is still budding with much left to do. It is also important to note that cultural context of the Country plays a vital role in the acceptability rate of inclusive education. The cultural patterning of attitudes in the form of social acceptance and social rejection, such as "stigmatization" of

the disabled individual, has major impacts in the context of inclusive education. 'The best way to change the attitude of the community towards persons with disabilities may be by ensuring that the teachers have positive attitudes' (Sharma et al. 2009: 329). For this reason, one of the most important criteria for the successful implementation of inclusive education would undoubtedly be the positive attitude of teachers towards inclusive education.

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