

Attitude of Elementary School Teachers towards Inclusive Education with Special Reference to Gangtok District, Sikkim

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 makes inclusive education central, aiming for equitable access for all learners, especially Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs). This strongly demands transformation in all aspects of education. First and foremost change that needs to be is the change in the attitudes of the stakeholders of education which always goes at the background. The researcher strongly believed that no meaningful change in the education system can be achieved without the active role of teachers. Hence, the present study aimed to understand the level of attitude of elementary school teachers towards inclusive education. The present study is a descriptive survey research. The study was conducted on a sample of 160 elementary school teachers from government and private schools in Gangtok district of Sikkim, using the Teacher Attitude Scale towards Inclusive Education developed by Vishal Sood and Arati Anand (2011). The results show that most of respondents demonstrated an above average favourable attitude towards inclusive education. The study also highlighted that both female and male teachers share similar attitudes towards inclusive education with $t(158)=0.872$, $p>0.05$. However, a significant difference was observed between government and private teachers $t(158)=2.92$, $p<0.05$, with government teachers leaning more towards a most favourable attitude.

Keywords: *Inclusive Education, Elementary School Teachers, Attitude.*

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is a philosophy that ensures all students, regardless of their differences, have the right to attend school and participate in learning. It is based on the idea that all people have inherent value and are entitled to equal access and opportunity. This philosophy aligns with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948), which identifies education as a fundamental human right. The policy also aligns with the Rights of Person with Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016, recognizing that inclusive education promotes social integration, reduces discrimination, and provides equal opportunities for all learners (Ministry of Education 2020).

The concept of inclusive education gained global recognition with the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), which emphasized that education systems must “accommodate all children, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions.”

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Governments and organizations worldwide, including the UNESCO, UNICEF and UNDP advocate for inclusive education as a means to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4, which focuses on quality education for all (UNESCO, 2007). The New National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 also makes inclusive education central emphasizes integrating children with special needs into the mainstream education system to ensure equity, accessibility, and inclusivity in learning.

However, it is the established fact that the successful implementation of inclusive education depends on many factors such as a change in the mindset of the stakeholders, policy reforms, curriculum, teacher training and adequate resources to create a barrier-free learning environment. Teachers being in the forefront their attitudes play a vital role to achieve inclusivity in education which always goes neglected. Therefore, the researcher strongly believed that no meaningful change in the education system can be achieved without the active involvement of teachers. In this regards, Kaur (2020) mentioned that Teachers' attitudes, as well as their behaviours, have been proposed as a key factor in successful inclusive education. The study also highlights that teachers' attitudes toward inclusionary programs are one of the most important factors in determining the success of the practice or program. The extent to which the attitudes of teachers validate or reject an inclusive approach will serve to predict the success of such inclusion. Supporting this, Sharma & Loreman, (2017) also stated that teachers' attitudes play a critical role in determining the success of inclusive education, as their beliefs and perceptions directly influence classroom practices and student outcomes. Further, they argue that teachers with positive attitudes are more likely to adopt inclusive teaching strategies, create supportive learning environments, and accommodate the diverse needs of students. Conversely, negative attitudes can lead to resistance, limiting the effectiveness of inclusive practices and marginalizing students with disabilities. Given that teachers are the primary implementers of inclusive education policies, understanding their attitudes is essential for identifying challenges and enhancing the overall success of inclusive initiatives.

Moreover, teachers' attitudes are shaped by several factors, including professional training, teaching experience, and personal beliefs. Research by Kuyini and Desai (2007) found that teachers with formal training in special education exhibited more positive attitudes toward inclusion compared to those without such training. Similarly, teachers with more years of experience in inclusive classrooms were found to be more confident and accepting of students with disabilities (Forlin, 2010). These findings highlight the importance of continuous professional development programs that equip teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to implement inclusive practices effectively. Without adequate training, even well-intentioned teachers may struggle to address the diverse needs of their students, leading to frustration and negative perceptions toward inclusion.

Furthermore, according to Avramidis and Norwich (2002), inclusive practices are more likely to succeed when teachers feel supported, both professionally and institutionally. Therefore, promoting positive attitudes among teachers not only enhances the implementation of inclusive education but also fosters a more equitable and compassionate learning environment for all students. Since teachers play a significant role in ensuring the successful integration of all children to school, the study aims to understand the attitude of teachers towards inclusive

education at primary level of Gangtok District of Sikkim. Also, examining teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education can provide valuable insights for policymakers and educational stakeholders to bring positive change in education favorable for creating inclusive environment.

1.2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

For the related literature it has been reflected that most of the studies conducted both in India and Abroad have highlighted that the positive attitude of the teacher towards inclusive education is one of the major factor catering to meaningful implementation of inclusivity in education as they view that the teachers who are positively inclined towards the philosophy of inclusive education, perceiving the process as beneficial to all participants within the inclusive setting (Subban & Sharma, 2005). Lozana, *et al.* (2022) has mentioned that it is critical to focus on teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education to create an inclusive culture. Teachers' positive attitudes towards inclusive education can contribute to the creation of more inclusive learning environments as well as the use of more effective teaching strategies whereas, teachers' negative attitudes towards inclusive education can lead to unsuccessful attempts to include students with SEN. Condeza & Mongas (2025) also highlights that the role of teachers in adapting to inclusive education is vital. Based on this idea that the teachers' positive attitudes play a crucial role in the successful implementation of inclusive education large number of studies: such as Singh, Kumar & Singh, 2020; Kaur (2020); Mishra, (2024) have attempted to examine teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. Though, the result of these researches varies significantly. Such as, the study conducted by Singh, Kumar & Singh (2020) in their study found that the attitude of teachers towards inclusive education was moderate to a favorable level. Pre-service and urban teachers had a more positive/favorable attitude towards inclusive education than the attitude of In-service and rural teachers, respectively. In contrast, there was no significant difference between the attitude of male and female teachers towards inclusive education. However, Kaur (2020) found that that there is significant difference between private and government teachers towards inclusive education. There is significant difference between male and female teachers towards inclusive education. It has been further found that there is significant difference between rural and urban teachers towards inclusive education. The study also found that while some teachers see the value in inclusion, there is significant concern regarding the conditions of schools. Mantry & Pradhan, (2023) reveals that there is significant difference in attitude of teachers with respect to their educational qualification.

Whereas, Mishra, (2024): Patra & Upadhyay, (2023): **Thapa, *et al.* (2022)** in their study revealed that there was no significant difference in the attitude of teachers based on locality, qualification, gender, age group, teaching levels and experience towards inclusive classroom. The also highlighted that the substantial majority of teachers perceived inclusion as a desirable educational practice because inclusive classroom facilitated participation, encouraged cooperation and enhanced learning achievement of students which is also supported by the study conducted by Mishra, (2024).

However, the primary source of negative attitudes and concerns is the lack of practical support such as safer playgrounds, accessible toilets, less crowded classrooms, and greater education

for teachers and support staff (Dorji, Bailey, *et al.*, 2019) and a shortage of personnel support (Jugan, *et al.*, 2024). Other study believe schools lack the conditions necessary for successful inclusive education (Radojlović, *et al.*, 2022).

The studies on teacher's preparedness studies such as Mucherah, Holmes, *et al.* (2023); Saloviita (2020); Jury, *et al.*, (2021) and Sharma, (2020) revealed that the educators with degrees in special education, who had also taken more courses in special education, held more positive attitudes about inclusion and reported higher perceived preparedness. However, the majority reported limited knowledge about special education and opportunities for collaboration as significant barriers to inclusive practices. These findings suggest that increased educator training for inclusive education is needed and desired by educators.

Moreover, studies such as Jury, *et al.*, (2021); Hamid & Mohamed, (2021) reflect attitude is highly contingent on the student's needs. Teachers show more favorable attitudes toward students with mild or physical disabilities (e.g., Learning Disabilities or Motor Impairment) and the least favorable attitudes toward students with complex or severe needs (e.g., Autism Spectrum Disorder or severe intellectual disability).

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aims to address the following objectives:

- i. To find out the prevailing level of attitude of elementary school teachers towards inclusive education.
- ii. To find out the significant difference in the level of attitude of female and male elementary school teachers towards inclusive education.
- iii. To find out the significant differences in attitudes of government and private elementary school teachers toward inclusive education.

1.4 HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

The following hypothesis has been developed for this research:

- i. **H₀₁**: There is no statistically significant difference between female and male teachers attitude towards Inclusive Education.
- ii. **H₀₂**: There is no statistically significant difference between government and private school teachers' attitude towards inclusive education.

1.5 RESEARCH METHOD

The present study used a descriptive survey research design in which quantitative methods were employed. For the collection of relevant data present study used standardized tool "Teacher Attitude Scale towards Inclusive Education (TASTIE)" developed by Vishal Shood and Arati Anand published by National Psychological Corporation, Agra. The population for the present study comprises of all elementary school teachers teaching in both government and private schools of Gangtok District. Further, for selecting the sample of the study simple random sampling technique has been utilized, sample for the present study consist of 100 elementary school teachers (50 female and 50 male) of Government and Private School of Gangtok District. For analyzing the assembled data, the following statistical techniques such

as: Percentile, Mean, Standard Deviation and t-test has been applied to find the significance of difference in Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusive Education.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Table 1: Attitudes of elementary school teachers towards inclusive education

N=160	
Level of attitude	Total
Most and Extremely Favourable (116 and above)	28%
Above Average (105-115)	39%
Moderate (90-104)	30%
Below Average to Extremely Unfavourable (90 and below)	3%

The Table 1 above shows that out of total participants 28% were falling under most and extremely favourable level of attitude towards inclusive education, 39% respondents under above average favourable level, 30% of the respondents under moderate attitude and 3% of respondents under below average unfavourable level of attitude towards inclusive education. Further, it also indicates that maximum of the respondents i.e. 39% are falling under the category of above average favourable level of attitude towards inclusive education and minimum respondents i.e. 3% were falling under extremely favourable and also 3% were falling under below average level of attitude towards inclusive education.

Table 2: Female and male teachers' attitude towards Inclusive Education

N=160		
Level of Attitude	Number of Respondents	
	Female n=80	Male n=80
Most and Extremely Favourable (116 and above)	20%	36.67%
Above Average Favourable (105-115)	43.34%	33.33%
Moderate Attitude (90-104)	36.66%	23.33%

Below Average to Extremely**Unfavourable**

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6.67%

(90 and below)

The Table 2 above shows that out of total female participants 20% falls under most and extremely favourable level of attitude towards inclusive education, 43.34% under above average favourable level and 36.66% of female falls under moderate attitude. Whereas, out of total male participants 36.67% of male falls under most and extremely favourable level of attitude towards inclusive education, 33.33% under above average favourable level, 23.33% of male are under moderate and 6.67% male falling under below average to extremely unfavourable attitude. Further, it also indicates that out of total female respondent there are still significant percentage i.e. 36.66% having moderate attitude towards inclusive education and out of the total male participants 23.33% at moderate and 6.67% at below average to extremely unfavourable which is a matter of concern.

H₀1: There is no statistically significant difference between female and male teachers attitude towards Inclusive Education.

Table 3: Summary of Variable, N, Mean, SD, t-value, P-value of female and male school teachers' level of attitude towards inclusive education

Variable	N	Mean	SD	t (158)	P
Female	80	108.16	8.47	.872	.387
Male	80	110.36	10.91		

*Note level of confidence at 95%

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare attitude of teachers towards inclusive education scores between male and female students. Results showed that there was no significant difference in exam anxiety scores between females ($M = 108.16$, $SD = 8.47$) and males ($M = 110.36$, $SD = 10.91$); $t(158) = .87$, $p = .38$. The results indicated that gender does not have a statistically significant effect on attitude towards inclusive education levels. Although male teachers reported slightly higher mean scores (110.36) than female teachers (108.16), the difference was not large enough to be considered significant. Therefore, attitude towards inclusive education levels among female and male teachers appear to be relatively similar and the hypothesis that there is no significant difference between male and female teachers on attitude towards inclusive education is retained.

Table 4: Government and private school teachers toward inclusive education

N=160		
Level of Attitude	Management	
	Government	Private

	n=80	n=80
Most and Extremely Favourable (116 and above)	43.34%	13.33%
Above Average Favourable (105-115)	33.33%	43.33%
Moderate Attitude (90-104)	23.33%	36.67%
Extremely to below Average Unfavourable (90 and below)	-	6.67%

The table 4 indicates that out of total government school teachers 43.34% of teachers falls under most and extremely favourable level of attitude towards inclusive education, 33.33% under above average favourable level of attitude and none of the teachers are under extremely to below average unfavourable level. Whereas, out of total private school teachers 13.33% falling under most and extremely favourable level of attitude towards inclusive education, 43.33% of teachers are under above average favourable level, 36.67% moderate and 6.67% extremely to below average unfavourable level of attitude towards inclusive education.

Further, it also indicates that out of total government teachers there are still significant percentage (23.33%) having moderate attitude towards inclusive education and out of the total private school teachers (36.67%) at moderate and 6.67% at below average to extremely unfavourable which needs careful strategies to be taken by the concern authorities.

H₀2: There is no statistically significant difference between government and private school teachers' attitude towards inclusive education.

Table 5: Summary of Variable, N, Mean, SD, t-value, P-value of government school teachers and private school teachers' level of attitude towards inclusive education

Variable	N	Mean	SD	t(158)	P
Government	80	112.73	9.36	2.92	.005
Private	80	105.80	8.99		

*Note level of confidence at 95%

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare attitudes towards inclusive education scores between government and private teachers. The results revealed a statistically significant difference in attitudes towards inclusive education scores between government (M = 112.73, SD = 9.36) and private (M = 105.80, SD = 8.99); $t(158) = 2.92$, $p < .05$. The findings indicated that government teachers have significantly better in attitudes towards inclusive education compared to private teachers. The mean for attitudes towards inclusive education of government teachers (112.73) was notably higher than that of private teachers (105.80), and

this difference was found to be statistically significant ($p < .05$). Therefore, the hypothesis that there is no significant difference between government and private teachers on attitudes towards inclusive education is failed to retain.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of the present study show that most elementary school teachers have a generally positive attitude toward inclusive education. In fact, majority of the teachers showed stronger support than average (most and extremely favourable attitude 28%, above average 39%, moderate 30% and below average 3% only) , which is a good sign. A notable number of them even demonstrated attitudes that were more favorable than average; whether a teacher is female or male doesn't seem to change how they feel about inclusive education, which is consistent with majority of the existing researches such as Mishra, (2024): Patra & Upadhyay, (2023): Thapa, *et al.* (2022).

However, the type of school where teachers work did show a meaningful difference in the present study with $t(158) = 2.92, p < .05$. Teachers in government schools tended to have more positive views about including all students in the classroom than that of private school teachers. This could be because government schools often have more training opportunities and also the government may have extended more resources support, which can make teachers feel more confident and supported. This suggests that training, institutional environment and available resources may influence teacher perspectives. It means that if we want inclusive education to work well, we need to support our teachers and the schools better. That could be through better training, more resources in classrooms, and making sure all schools have what they need to succeed. These results are important for shaping future education policies. If we prepare our teachers well and reduce resources gaps in schools, we can create classrooms where every child feels welcomed, supported, and able to learn together.

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