DOI: 10.48047/intjecse/v16i5.104 ISSN: 1308-5581 Vol 16, Issue 05 2024

A STUDY ON THE INITIATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENT TO IMPROVE QUALITY IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF KAKINADA DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT
Inclusive Education is a new approach towards educating the children with disability and learning difficulties with that of normal ones under the same roof. It denotes that the children, irrespective of their strengths and weaknesses, will be part of the mainstream education; and seeks to maximize the potential of all children. It is one of the most effective ways in which to promote an inclusive and tolerant society. The teachers working in general schools should have a positive attitude towards the inclusion of children with learning disabilities in the mainstream education. Though the Government has taken several initiatives towards promoting inclusive education, the expected targets have not yet been achieved. The teachers play a crucial role in bringing children with special needs into the mainstream education. The teachers in normal schools should possess a favorable attitude towards promoting inclusive education. The present study is an attempt to explore the attitude of primary school teachers towards the initiatives of the Government to improve quality in inclusive education. The study was conducted using survey method of research. The sample of the study consists of 250 teachers (50 Headmasters and 200 Secondary Grade Teachers) selected randomly from 50 primary schools in Kakinada District in Andhra Pradesh. The data were collected from the teachers using a questionnaire. The variables considered for the study include gender, Teaching Experience and Type of school management. The data were analyzed using Arithmetic Means, Standard Deviations and Critical Ratios. The findings of the study revealed that gender and Teaching Experience have no influence on the attitude of primary school teachers towards inclusive education. However, the type of school management has a positive influence on their attitude towards inclusive education.

Key Words*:* Inclusive Education, Children with special needs, Government initiatives, Primary school teachers.

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the most powerful instruments of social, economic and cultural transformation necessary for the realization of national goals. It helps to bridge the gap between different sections of people in the society. Education is fundamental for achieving full human potential, developing an equitable and just society, and promoting national development. Providing universal access to quality education is the key to India's continued ascent, and leadership on the global stage in terms of economic growth, social justice and equality, scientific advancement, national integration, and cultural preservation. The purpose of the education system is to develop good human beings capable of rational thought and action, possessing compassion and empathy, courage and resilience, scientific temper and creative imagination, with sound ethical moorings and values. It aims at producing engaged, productive and contributing citizens for building an equitable, inclusive and plural society as envisaged by our Constitution.

The educational scene in the country has undergone major changes over the past several years resulting in better provision of education and better educational practices. 'Education for all' is the global movement led by the UNESCO aiming to meet the learning needs of all the children. The National Education Policy (NEP)-2020 emphasizes that, "Education is the single greatest tool for achieving social justice and equality", which has implications for the development of an inclusive community and society at large. The NEP has infused the aspects of disability inclusion throughout the policy document with a dedicated chapter on equitable and inclusive education, focusing on issues, challenges and recommendations for bridging the gaps and reducing the disparities in access and participation of all learners in the educational process. The issues and recommendations for inclusion of underrepresented student groups including children with disabilities has been subsumed in the policy; and categorized as the 'Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups' (SEDGs), which is an umbrella term covering gender identities, socio-cultural and socio-economic identities, geographical identities as well as disabilities. The NEP-2020 advocates the provisions for Children with Special Needs (CwSN) as per the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016. The policy recommends inclusion and equal participation of Children with Special Needs (CwSN) across all stages of school education and to that end, endorses a whole school approach to inclusion such as resourcing school complexes and resource centers, engagement of special educators, capacity building of teachers and special educators, teaching-learning materials and co-curricular activities such as arts, sports, vocational education etc., thus equipping all learners with 21st century skills.

THE CONCEPT OF 'INCLUSIVE EDUCATION'

Inclusive Education denotes that all children, irrespective of their strengths and weaknesses, will be part of the mainstream education. It is a new approach towards educating the children with disability and learning difficulties with that of normal ones under the same roof. It brings all students together in one classroom and community; and seeks to maximize the potential of all students. It is one of the most effective ways in which to promote an inclusive and tolerant society.

Inclusive education is when all students, regardless of any challenges they may have, are placed in age-appropriate general education classes that are in their own neighborhood schools to receive high-quality instruction, interventions and support that enable them to meet success in the transaction of core curriculum. Successful inclusive education happens primarily through accepting, understanding and attending to student differences and diversity, which can include physical, cognitive, academic, social and emotional aspects of the child. The driving principle is to make all students feel welcomed, appropriately challenged, and supported in their efforts. Inclusive education aims at education for all and equal opportunities for every child. Every child has the right to education in a democratic country like ours. The main objective of inclusive education is to identify and enroll children with disabilities in regular schools and to provide them with effective academic support. All children should be given an equal chance to learn to the best of their abilities. We have to devise a classroom for all children with and without disabilities, which meets all the special educational needs. Hence, this system can prepare students to participate as full and contributing members of society.

PRINCIPLES OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The following are some of the important principles of Inclusive Education:

- Every child has the right to learn and play together

- Children should not be discriminated because of their disability
- There are no valid reasons to separate children for the period of their schooling.
- No student is excluded from or discriminated within education on grounds of race, color, sex, language, religion, political, national, ethnic or social origin, disability, birth, poverty or any other status
- All students can learn and reward from education
- Schools adapt to the needs of students, rather than students adapting to the need of the school
- The views of students are to be taken note of seriously; but should not be ignored
- Individual differences among students are a source of richness and diversity, not a source of conflict.

INITIATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENT TO IMPROVE QUALITY IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN INDIA

It is a known fact that the 'Children with Special Needs' (CwSN) have long been ignored in enjoying the fruits of education on par with other normal children in our education system in general and that of school education in particular. The efforts of the Government of India over the last five decades have been in providing comprehensive range of services towards education of children with disabilities.

In 1966, the Kothari Commission had highlighted the importance of educating children with disabilities in regular schools. The government of India launched the Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) programme in 1974 with a view to provide equal opportunities to children with disabilities in general schools and facilitate their retention. This was the first formal step towards inclusion.

The first Indian policy that stressed the need of inclusion was the National Education Policy, 1986. The policy recommended integrating children with special needs in the normal schools. The objective to be achieved as stated in the NPE, 1986 is "to integrate the physically and mentally handicapped with the general community as equal partners, to prepare them for normal growth and to enable them to face life with courage and confidence". Thereafter, several initiatives were taken by the Government to mainstream the disabled children providing them an opportunity to receive education in regular schools along with normal children.

The Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992 was passed by the Parliament in 1992. This act made it mandatory for every special teacher to be registered by the council and laid down that every child with disability had the right to be taught by a qualified teacher. The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 stressed the need to provide free of cost education to all children in an appropriate environment till they are 18 years old. The government is committed to provide education through mainstream schools for children with disabilities in accordance with Persons with Disabilities Act (PWD ACT), 1995, and all the schools in the country will be made disabled friendly by 2020. In 2002, 86th amendment was made in the constitution that mandates the education of children from 6 to 14 years of age. The National Policy for Persons with Disability, 2006 made an attempt to clarify the framework under which the state, civil society and private sector must operate in order to ensure a dignified life for persons with disability. Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) was launched in 2009 to improve the secondary education system in India with great focus on eradicating barriers of gender, socio-

economic status and disability. Now, with the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009 in place, it has become imperative for most children with special needs to be mainstreamed; but not kept in the isolated 'special schools'.

The Centrally sponsored scheme of Samagra Shiksha, is an integrated scheme of the Ministry of Education for school education catering from pre-primary to senior secondary classes. The scheme aims to universalize access to school education and to support all States and Union Territories in implementing the recommendations of the NEP-2020. Ensuring equity and inclusion at all levels of school education is one of the major objectives of the scheme. Inclusive education for children with special needs is one of the interventions of the scheme. Under this component, various provisions are made available for the educational needs of children with special needs. Several activities such as block level assessment camps for disability identification, support for orientation and awareness programs, therapeutic services, sports events and capacity building programs for special educators etc. are covered. Further, student specific support is also provided through allowances for escorts, transportation & scribes, aids & appliances, teaching-learning materials and stipend for girls with special needs. Support has also been made available for strengthening of Block Resource Centers with equipment and TLMs for individualized learning support of Children with Special Needs (CwSN). Further, the scheme also supports provision for building of ramps with handrails and CwSN toilets in schools. The Ministry of Education is facilitating quality inclusive education for children with special needs in schools through various ventures and initiatives. Dedicated efforts such as ePathshala portal have been undertaken by NCERT as a part of student learning support.

Other initiatives such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009, People with Disabilities (PWD) Act, 2016 and many more policies were implemented by the government to achieve the universal system of education for every child across the country. The National Education Policy-2020 also aims for Equitable and Inclusive education as the goal to be achieved by 2030 in every school.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The studies carried out earlier by the other researchers that aim at finding out the attitude of school teachers towards inclusive education have been examined; and a brief review of the same is provided in the following paragraphs.

Gale Bhushan et al. (2022) pointed out intervention that successfully leads teachers and leaders to improve Inclusive Education in the classroom, which includes capacity building, training of the teachers and other staff, professional development, collaborative and optimal teaching-learning environment. The study suggested that the attitude, mindset, beliefs and commitment of school teachers have to be improved for inclusion. Professional learning opportunities should be provided to teachers of the schools for attitudinal change. The study also suggested to encourage decentralized culture in schools. Implementation of rights-based policies in schools, improving working culture and classroom support, motivation and collaboration among teachers are also necessary for fostering the inclusive culture in schools.

Sarkar, T. (2020) examined the implications of National Education Policy (NEP)-2020 for children with disabilities around four key aspects: school choice, teacher and special educators, assessments and curricula and terminology of inclusion and disability and pointed out that teachers are generally not able to implement the policy in the classroom or are unaware of the policy, teachers are not enough trained to facilitate inclusivity in normal

classroom or do not have enough resources and peer support in the system. Other than that, parents of the unrepresented groups often lack proper knowledge, facilities, and confidence in sending their wards to general classrooms. Curriculum is also a major concern, which is not in line with the diverse needs of the children in the classroom. Teachers have given flexibility to mould the curriculum and not to be rigid while teaching students in an inclusive classroom as envisioned by National Education Policy (NEP)-2020.

Monika Sharma (2019) conducted a study to know the attitude of secondary school teachers & head teachers towards inclusive education. It aims to determine the effect of type of teacher, gender, age level & training in inclusive education on the attitude of teachers & head teachers towards inclusive education in government senior secondary schools of Himachal Pradesh. Teacher Attitude towards Inclusive Education Scale (TATIES) developed by the researcher was administered on a sample of 160 teachers and 40 head teachers from 41 schools selected through stratified sampling technique. The findings of the study revealed that teachers and head teachers of senior secondary schools were found to possess a moderate level of attitude towards inclusive education. Further, the study revealed that teachers and head teachers did not differ significantly in their attitude in relation to gender and training in inclusive education. However, there is significant difference in the attitude of teachers towards inclusive education with regard to their age. Teachers and head teachers with lower age level were found to have a higher level of attitude towards inclusive education as compared to the teachers and head teachers with higher age levels

Itfaq Khaliq Khan (2017) conducted a study on the perceptions of primary school teachers towards inclusive education in the mainstream government schools of Islamabad capital territory, where inclusive education was being supported by Sight savers and other international organizations. The study was carried out involving 54 teachers in six randomly selected primary schools. The sampled group comprised both, teachers trained in inclusive education and teachers working in same schools, but not trained in inclusive education. Purposive sampling method was used to select the teachers. Structured questionnaire (Likert Scale) and structured interview method were used for data collection. The results of the study revealed that inclusive education is considered to be a desirable practice. The teachers believed that all learners regardless of their disabilities should be in regular classrooms and they showed more favorable attitude towards children with mild disabilities, but were not very optimistic about children with severe disabilities. The study also recognized teachers' capacity as an essential component of inclusive education and recommends that inclusive education should be a part of pre and in-service teacher education.

NEED FOR THE PRESENT INVESTIGATION

Inclusive education provides the right to education to all the children irrespective of their gender type, type of disability, impairment, locality or area, caste, religion, and socio-economic background. Education under one roof is the motive of inclusion. It is an initiative to make a discrimination-free environment, where every child is free to interact, learn, and grow; and achieve the goals of life. The act of inclusion creates a sense of unity, patience and co-operation between the peer groups so that the sensitivity can be increased. Special children study and collaborate with the normal children in an inclusive classroom. This makes them fear-free and barrier-free, which ultimately increases the learning outcomes. Teachers are to play the most important role in inclusion. A variety of instructional and pedagogical strategies are to be adopted by the teachers for this type of teaching and learning to make inclusion possible.

Teachers are to create such an environment that every student feels comfortable, motivated and eager to learn and achieve their best. Children with Special Needs (CwSN) sometimes require extra assistance, for this, special educators are to be appointed by the schools. These special educators will collaborate with the normal teachers in the school to tackle the needs and requirements of the special children. The teachers working in an inclusive environment are expected to possess a positive attitude and right perceptions towards children with disabilities. They should be aware of the initiatives taken by the Government to improve quality in inclusive education. The researcher felt that it is desirable to conduct a study on the attitude of primary school teachers to improve quality in inclusive education for the benefit of the children with Special Needs (CwSN).

The present investigation is an attempt to study the attitude of teachers towards the initiatives of the Government in developing quality in inclusive education in the primary schools of Kakinada District in Andhra Pradesh. Further, the study also takes into its purview the influence of certain demographic variables, viz., gender, Teaching Experience and Type of school management on the attitude of teachers towards the initiatives of the Government to improve quality in inclusive education in primary schools.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the present investigation is to explore the attitude of teachers towards the initiatives of the Government to improve quality in inclusive education in primary schools. The present study also aims at studying the influence of gender, Teaching Experience and Type of School Management on the attitude of teachers towards the initiatives of the Government in improving quality in inclusive education in primary schools.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

The following hypotheses have been formulated for the present investigation:

(i) There is no significant difference in the attitude of male and female teachers towards the initiatives of the Government to improve quality in Inclusive Education in primary schools

(ii) There is no significant difference in the attitude of teachers with an experience of less than 10 years and those with 10 years and above towards the initiatives of the Government to improve quality in Inclusive Education in primary schools.

(iii) There is no significant difference in the attitude of teachers working in Government and Private schools towards the initiatives of the Government to improve quality in Inclusive Education in primary schools.

DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study is limited to find out the attitude of 250 teachers (50 Headmasters and 200 Secondary Grade Teachers) selected randomly from 50 primary schools in Kakinada District of Andhra Pradesh towards the initiatives of the Government to improve quality in Inclusive Education. The study is confined to know the influence of three demographic variables, viz., Gender, Teaching Experience and Type of School management on the attitude of teachers working in the primary schools towards initiatives of the Government to improve quality in Inclusive Education.

METHODOLOGY

(a) Sample: The sample of the study consists of 250 teachers (50 Headmasters and 200 Secondary Grade Teachers) selected randomly from 50 primary schools in Kakinada District of Andhra Pradesh selected by using Random Sampling technique.

(b) Research Tool: The researchers used a well prepared questionnaire consisting of 33 items as the tool of research for the present investigation. After selecting the items for the tool, the researchers verified whether the tool prepared for the present investigation is in conformity with the conditions required by a standard measuring instrument. The tool was initially administered to 25 teachers (5 Headmasters and 20 Secondary Grade Teachers) working in the primary schools located in and around Kakinada town under pilot study. On conducting item analysis, the discriminating power of 30 items has been found positive and that of 3 items is negative. The negative items have been removed from the pool; and the final form of questionnaire consists of 30 items which are foolproof in all respects; and this final form of the tool is a standardized tool.

(c) Administration of the Tool

The final form of the standardized questionnaire consisting of 30 items on various factors relating to the initiatives of the Government to improve quality in Inclusive Education in primary schools has been administered to 250 teachers (50 Headmasters and 200 Secondary Grade Teachers) working in 50 primary schools in Kakinada district of Andhra Pradesh. These teachers include male and female, working in Government as well as Private schools.

STATISTICAL INTERPRETATION OF DATA

The data collected has been analyzed using different statistical techniques such as Mean score values, Standard Deviations and t-ratios; and is presented in the following table:

Table showing t-values of different variables relating to the attitude of teachers towards the initiatives of the Government to improve quality in Inclusive Education in primary schools

S. No.	Variable		N	Mean	S.D.	t-ratio	Result
1	Gender	Male Female	120 130	99.83 100.35	28.04 25.96	0.15*	*Not Significant at 0.05 and 0.01 levels
2	Teaching Experience	Less than 10 years 10 years & above	160 90	101.88 102.72	26.09 25.02	0.25*	*Not Significant at 0.05 and 0.01 levels
3	Type of School Management	Government Private	140 110	101.64 93.77	25.49 25.48	2.42*	*Significant at 0.01 level

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

On the basis of the analysis and interpretation of data, the researchers have arrived at the following findings and drawn the conclusions.

1. There is no significant difference in the attitude of male and female teachers towards the initiatives of the Government to improve quality in Inclusive Education in primary schools.
2. There is no significant difference in the attitude of teachers with an experience of less than 10 years and those with 10 years and above towards the initiatives of the Government to improve quality in Inclusive Education in primary schools.
3. There is significant difference in the attitude of teachers working in Government and Private schools towards the initiatives of the Government to improve quality in Inclusive Education in primary schools.

It is concluded that teachers working in Government schools possess a higher level of attitude towards the initiatives of the Government to improve quality in Inclusive Education in primary schools as compared to their counterparts working in Private schools.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that Gender and Teaching Experience have no influence on the attitude of teachers towards the initiatives of the Government to improve quality in Inclusive Education in primary schools. However, the type of school management has a significant positive influence on the attitude of teachers towards the initiatives of the Government to improve quality in Inclusive Education in primary schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has suggested that the teachers should possess a favorable attitude towards inclusion of children with special needs in the regular secondary schools.

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