

Effect of Included Experience Program on the Attitudes of Pre-Service Teachers towards Students with Special Needs

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of an included experience as well as professional development programme on the attitudes of pre-service teachers toward students with special needs. The intervention programme was given in 7 weeks to the pre-service teachers. The sample consisted of 42 pre-service teachers studying in bachelor degree programme of special education. Results provided evidence that after completing an included experience and receiving professional development programme, pre-service teachers had positive attitudes towards students with special needs. The overall findings suggest that the included experience programme had significant effects on changing the attitudes of pre-service teachers towards students with special needs with special reference to all the aspects i.e academic, cognitive, emotional and social development.

Key words: Included Experience, Pre-service Teachers, Students with Special Needs

The prime concern of any country is the equal care and attention of its children including students with special needs also. Such ideas led to the emergence of the concept of Inclusive Education for disabled. This inclusion trend is the merger of regular or general education with special education. Now the schools have to accommodate all children and arrange education according to their needs. But the effective implementation of this inclusive education has many barriers even in government policy, practice and procedures. For the successful implementation of inclusive education, the actions of teachers, students, and all stakeholders must begin to overcome the obstacles of existing attitudes and values; lack of understanding; lack of necessary skills; limited resources; and inappropriate resources (UNESCO, 2005).

One of the most significant stipulations that allow for successful inclusion of special education students is the attitudes or attitudes of the special education teacher regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities into the classroom. Classrooms are now becoming more diverse with respect to students abilities, therefore sensitivity and awareness on the part of pre-service teacher is essential to promote successful inclusion. They have their own personal belief and attitude towards inclusion and have many new challenging responsibilities to teach all students, especially students with disabilities. But when they are provided proper training and supportive services through a collaborative consultant and designated time to meet willingness to participate in collaborative interactions, they can come at par with special teachers.

Pre-service teachers, have the challenge of providing effective teaching to the students with special needs in a supportive general education learning environment. They were more negative about the impact of children with special needs on other children in the general education classroom (Hantngis and Oakford, 2003). But, after experiencing teaching at inclusive classroom, there is an improvement of acceptances and understandings of inclusion students and attitude towards inclusion (Forlin, Loreman, Sharma and Earle, 2009). Yellen et al. (2003) added that changing the attitudes of pre-service teachers towards students with special needs will require more than simple exposure and accepted in the general education classrooms. If students with special needs were to be completely integrated and accepted in the general education classroom, long –term changes in the attitudes of educational professionals would be required. So the present study attempted to find out the effectiveness of experiencing inclusion programme on the attitude of pre-service teachers.

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of an included experience programme on the attitudes of pre-service teachers toward students with special needs. This intervention programme includes 7 weeks of inclusion experiencing programme including 5 weeks of intervention programme like participate in seminars, workshops, lectures and different professional development programme and remaining two weeks of

involving pre-service teachers in inclusive classroom for teaching.

Concept of Inclusive Education

Children in special schools were seen as geographically and socially segregated from their peers, and the initial movement to locationally integrate these students in mainstream schools ('integration') shifted to one where the whole school was encouraged to become more adaptable and inclusive in its day-to-day educational practices for all students ('inclusive education'). Thus, inclusion is the provision of services to students with disabilities in their neighbourhood schools with necessary support services and supplementary aids for both children and teachers. It means meeting the needs of children with disabilities for a free and quality public education in the least restrictive and most effective environment. The philosophy of inclusive education envisions the idea of providing opportunities for students with disabilities to study as equal partners with their classmates without disabilities (Forlin, 2008; Mitchell, 2008). It is found that students with disabilities were enhanced their educational, social and emotional performance after getting appropriate accommodations and proper support in the general classroom. (Parua, 2008). Thus, an inclusive classroom is one in which the continuing emphasis on valuing individual differences leads all pupils, irrespective of social or cultural background, disability or difficulty in learning, to succeed in terms of the fulfillment of academic and social goals, and the development of positive attitudes to self and others (Alban-Metcalf & Alban-Metcalf, 2001). Sebba (1997) described inclusion as a school attempts to respond to all pupils as individuals, by reconsidering and structuring its curricular organization and provision, and allocating resources to enhance equality of opportunity. Through this process, the school builds its capacity to accept all pupils from the local community who wish to attend, and in doing so, reduces the need to exclude pupils. Thus, the high point of inclusion lies in its emphasis on restructuring of the entire school programmes and practices.

(Moodley, 2002) explained inclusion, it provides not only for institutional improvement, but also for an increased awareness of human rights and a reduction in discrimination. Essentially, inclusive education involves changes in attitudes, behavior and ways of working, and has the potential to make an effective starting point to address the right of learners in a range of cultures and contexts. Thus, the present study designed an Experiencing Inclusion Programme determine the attitudes of pre-service teachers towards students with special needs.

Attitudes of Pre-service Teachers

The inclusion of learners with special educational needs in general education is becoming more prevalent. As a result various special education researchers have begun to examine the success of inclusion, as well as the attitude and beliefs of general educators towards the inclusion of learners with disabilities in the general education classroom. Sze (2009) carried a research on pre-service teachers' attitudes towards students with disabilities. The study revealed that the attitude of the general education teacher is one of the most important predictors of successful integration of students with disabilities in general education classrooms.

Dawn (2011) examined the attitudes of teachers towards inclusion. Forty-eight teachers who were enrolled on a Master's programme in Special and Inclusive Education were surveyed via a questionnaire at the beginning and end of a ten-week introductory module. The results indicated overall attitudinal shift and attitudinal shift for four categories of inclusion to suggest more positive attitudes at the end of the module, compared with at the beginning. The implications for providers of pre- and in-service education and training courses for teachers are discussed.

Wilkins and Nietfeld (2004) compared survey responses of teachers from a reform-based programme focused on promoting inclusion-based classrooms, namely Project WINS (Winning Ideas Network for Schools) schools, with teachers from non-Project WINS schools with regard to their attitude about inclusion in the classroom. Surprisingly, the results of this study revealed no differences between the two groups of teachers on most facets of inclusion. The one significant difference found a greater preference for inclusion by non-Project WINS teachers with regard to classroom climate. The study also revealed a higher preference for inclusion for teachers with higher self-reported expertise in special education regardless of what group the teacher was surveyed from. Findings from this study indicate the need for further research and improvements in training methods for Project WINS and similar programmes that attempt to change teachers' attitudes towards inclusion as an important first step in improving practice in inclusion-based classrooms.

Golmic and Hansan (2012) determined the effects of an INCLUDED Experience on the attitudes, sentiments and concerns of pre-service teachers toward students with exceptional learning needs after 12 weeks of student teaching in secondary education classrooms. The INCLUDED Experience is an eight step performance based reflective child study of pre-service teachers' attitude, concerns, knowledge, and skills during their inclusion in the classroom. The sample consisted of 85 education majors seeking secondary teaching certification across the content areas. Results provided evidence that after completing an INCLUDED

Experience, pre-service teachers had positive attitudes and decreased concerns toward inclusion. The overall findings suggest that the INCLUDED Experience shows promise as a model that pre-service teachers should follow to support, teach and engage students with exceptional learning needs in general education classrooms. Carroll, Forlin and Jobling (2003) provided increased opportunities for interaction with people with disabilities in tutorials, including the viewing of relevant videos and participation in a 'buddy system' at schools. After the completion of the course positive changes in pre service teachers' attitudes were reported. Campbell, Gilmore and Cuskelly (2003) reached a similar conclusion. The attitude of pre service teachers were positively changed towards students with disabilities and inclusion after completing their one semester course.

Method

Design

The Experiencing Inclusion Programme, a seven weeks designed intervention programme for pre-service teachers. This programme consisted of two parts i.e. professional development programme and inclusion teaching experience programme. In the first 5 weeks of the intervention, the professional development programme like participation in seminars, workshops, lectures and discussions were provided. Provided basic concept of inclusive education, find out the factors affecting learning, discuss student needs and barriers to success and students strength and achievement in this phase. In the last two weeks of the intervention, the students were involved to teaching to special needs students at inclusive setting.

After reading and signing the required consent, 42 pre-service teachers agreed to participate. Students were informed that the Attitudes scale would be used to determine their attitudes towards students with disabilities. After completion of the pre-service teachers pre-experience survey, intervention programme of the parts were assigned. All the students attended an introductory seminar that provided the directions and instructions to receive intervention programme. Prior to the end of the pre-service teaching experience and professional development programme, students were administered the same survey as a post-experience measure.

Sample

The sample consisted of a total of 42 pre-service teacher from different training college of Himachal Pradesh, India including female 57.14 % (n=24) and male 42.85% (n=18) student teachers. The student teachers represented a wide range of ages, with 40.47% (n=17) reporting that they were 24 and under, 26.19% (n=11) falling between the ages of 25-29, and 33.33% (n=14) being 30-35 years old.

Tools

An Attitude scale is prepared and standardized by the Researcher for the collection of the data. The statement of the scale is expressing definite favorableness or unfavorableness about students with special needs.

This study has 40 item/statements spread over in four factors including academic development, cognitive development, emotional development and social development. Each factor has 10 items/statements. This scale is designed to understand the differences in individual reactions to various situations. The scale is self administering. The respondents are required to record their response in 5 categories i.e. strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree and strongly disagree.

Internal consistency reliability coefficients in the current study as measured by Cronbach's coefficient alpha for the pre-test were high for the scale overall ($r = 0.87$) and for the attitude towards academic development ($r = 0.43$), cognitive development ($r = 0.85$), emotional development and social development ($r = 0.85$) item subsets on the pre-survey.

Note: Mean scores of pre and post summary of pre- service teachers on attitude towards SWSN is given Table-1.

It is revealed from the table-1 above, that the mean scores of pre-summary and post-summary of pre-service teachers on attitude towards students with special needs are 85.02 and 99.20 with SD's 11.34 and 10.17 respectively. The t-ratio came out from the above two groups is 6.03, which is significant at any .01 level of significance. That means there is significant difference between pre-summary and post-summary pre-service teachers on their attitude towards students with special needs. Further, the Figure-1 shown that the mean score of post-summary pre-service teachers was more than the pre-summary scores, it indicates that teachers with included experience programme had more favorable attitude towards students with special needs than the teachers without experience.

Note: Significance of Difference between Pre-Summary and Post-Summary Scores of Pre-Service Teachers Attitudes Towards 'Academic Development' of Students With Special Needs is given Table-2.

Table 2 above, shown that the mean scores of pre-summary and post-summary scores of pre-service teachers on attitude towards 'academic development' of students with special needs 18.16 and 21.93 with SD's 6.82 and 5.61 respectively. The t-ratio came out from the above two groups is 3.36, which is significant at .01 level of

significance. That means there is significant difference between pre-summary and post-summary scores of pre-service teachers on their attitude towards 'academic development' of students with special needs. Further, the figure-2 shown that, the mean score of post-summary was more than the pre-summary scores, it indicates that teachers with included experience programme had more favorable attitude towards academic development of students with special needs students than the teachers having without experience.

Note: Significance of Difference between Pre-Summary and Post Summary Scores of Pre-Service Teachers Attitude towards 'Cognitive Development' of Students With Special Needs is given Table-3.

It is revealed from the Table- 3 above, that the mean scores of pre-summary and post-summary scores of pre-service teachers on attitude towards cognitive development of students with special needs 12.019 and 15.03 with SD's 6.14 and 5.87 respectively. The t-ratio came out from the above two groups is 2.25, which is significant at .05 level of significance. That means there is significant difference between pre-summary and post-summary scores of pre-service teachers on their attitude towards cognitive development students with special needs. Further, the Figure-3 shown that, the mean score of post-summary pre-service teachers was more than the pre-service teachers, it indicates that teachers with included experience had more favorable attitude towards cognitive students with special needs students than the teachers having without experience.

Note: Significance of Difference between Pre-Summary and Post Summary Scores of Pre-Service Teachers on the Attitude towards Emotional Development of Students With Special Needs is given Table-4.

It is denoted from the Table- 4 above, that the mean scores of pre-summary and post-summary scores of pre-service teachers on attitude towards emotional development of students with special needs 12.38 and 16.23 with SD's 6.02 and 5.88 respectively. The t-ratio came out from the above two groups is 3.26, which is significant at .01 level of significance. That means there is significant difference between pre-summary and post-summary scores of pre-service teachers on their attitude towards 'emotional development' students with special needs. Further, the figure-3 shown below that, the mean score of post-summary scores was more than the pre-summary score of pre-service teachers, that means teachers with included experience had more favorable attitude towards emotional development students with special needs students than the teachers having without experience.

Note: Significance of Difference between Pre-Summary and Post Summary Scores of Pre-Service Teachers on the Attitude towards Social Development of Students With Special Needs is given Table-5.

It is revealed from the Table- 5 above, that the mean scores of pre-summary and post-summary scores of pre-service teachers on attitude towards 'social development' of students with special needs 12.45 and 16.01 with SD's 6.02 and 5.88 respectively. The t-ratio came out from the above two groups is 1.18, which is significant at .01 level of significance. That means there is significant difference between pre-summary and post-summary scores of pre-service teachers on their curricular attitude towards students with special needs. Further, the Figure-5 shown that the mean score of post-summary was more than the pre-summary score, it indicates that teachers with included experience had more favorable attitude towards social development of students with special needs than the teachers having without experience.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of an inclusion experience programme on the attitude of pre-service teachers toward students with special needs. By designing a structured inclusion experience that encouraged our pre-service teachers to teach, and support students with exceptional learning needs in inclusive secondary education classrooms. Results of the study shows that after participating in the Inclusion Experience Programme, attitudes were even more positive among teachers. Specifically, results of pre-post mean comparisons were statistically significant for developmental factors like academic, cognitive, emotional and social development..

Pre- and post-survey results provided encouraging evidence that pre-service teachers had positive attitudes toward students with special needs. These results are meaningful because they show that pre-service teachers found the experience rewarding and became more comfortable around students with disabilities after their individual experiences. The findings of this study are consistent with the study by Henning and Mitchell (2002) reported improved attitudes toward students with exceptional learning needs when pre-service teachers were required to adapt lessons, reflect on improving their own practices, and collaborate with general education and special education teachers about curriculum.

Future Studies

The sample in this study includes only secondary education pre-service teachers who have received inclusion experience programme and completed the included experience of teaching.. It would be useful to examine the impact of the only included experience on the attitude of teachers.

Research has suggested that the attitudes of secondary education teachers are less positive that those of

elementary students (McHatton & McCray, 2007). While our data showed positive attitudes from secondary education students both pre and post participation in the included experience and receiving professional development programme, it would be useful to compare attitudes for secondary and elementary pre-service teachers from the current institution.

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Table – 1 Significance of Difference between Pre-Summary and Post-Summary Attitude Scores of Pre-Service Teachers towards Student With Special Needs

Variables	Group	N	Mean	SD	SED	t-ratio	Level of Significance
Attitude towards inclusive education	Pre-summary	42	85.02	11.34	2.35	6.03	.01
	Post-summary	42	99.20	10.17			

Table value of 98 df at .05 level = 1.96 at .01 level = 2.58

Figure-1

Mean scores of pre and post summary of pre- service teachers on attitude towards SWSN

Table-2 - Significance of Difference between Pre-Summary and Post-Summary Scores of Pre-Service Teachers Attitudes Towards ‘Academic Development’ of Students With Special Needs

Variables	Group	N	Mean	SD	SED	t-ratio	Level of Significance
Academic Development	Pre-summary	42	18.16	6.82	1.12	3.36	.01
	Post-summary	42	21.93	5.61			

Table value of 98 df at .05 level =1.96 and .01 level=2.58

Figure-2

Mean scores of pre and post summary of pre- service teachers on attitude towards academic development of SWSN

Table – 3 Significance of Difference between Pre-Summary and Post Summary Scores of Pre-Service Teachers Attitude towards ‘Cognitive Development’ of Students With Special Needs

Variables	Group	N	Mean	SD	SED	t-ratio	Level of Significance
Cognitive Development	Pre-summary	42	22.01	6.14	1.34	2.25	.05
	Post-summary	42	25.03	5.87			

Table value of 98 df at .05 level =1.96 at .01 level= 2.58

Figure-3

Mean scores of pre and post summary of pre- service teachers on attitude towards cognitive development of SWSN

Table -4 - Significance of Difference between Pre-Summary and Post Summary Scores of Pre-Service Teachers on the Attitude towards Emotional Development of Students With Special Needs

Variables	Group	N	Mean	SD	SED	t-ratio	Level of Significance
Emotional development	Pre-summary	42	22.38	6.02	1.18	3.26	.01
	Post-summary	42	26.23	5.88			

Table value of 86 df at .05 level =1.96 at .01 level= 2.58

Figure-4

Mean scores of pre and post summary of pre- service teachers on attitude towards emotional development of SWSN

Table – 5 - Significance of Difference between Pre-Summary and Post Summary Scores of Pre-Service Teachers on the Attitude towards Social Development of Students With Special Needs

Variables	Group	N	Mean	SD	SED	t-ratio	Level of Significance
Social development	Pre-summary	42	22.45	6.02	1.18	3.01	.01
	Post-summary	42	26.01	5.88			

Table value of 86 df at .05 level =1.96 at .01 level= 2.58