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A study on awareness of B.Ed students towards inclusive education

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Abstract

The main objectives of this study are (i) to study the awareness of B.Ed students towards inclusive education and (ii) to find out the difference if any in the awareness of B.Ed students towards inclusive education regarding gender. In this study, the descriptive survey method was employed. The population of this study consists of all the B.Ed students of B.Ed colleges of the South Kamrup area of Kamrup District, Assam. The sample of the present study was selected from all these (03) B.Ed colleges by applying proportionate Stratified Random sampling technique. 30% B. Ed students from the population are selected as sample i.e. 163 B.Ed students out of which 48 are male and 115 are female B.Ed students. A self-constructed 'Awareness Scale towards Inclusive Education' is used in this study to collect necessary data from the respondents. The awareness level of B.Ed students towards inclusive education is calculated by using Simple Percentage and to find out the gender difference in the awareness of B.Ed students towards inclusive education, t-test has been employed. The main findings of this study are (i) the awareness level of most of the B.Ed students towards different dimensions of inclusive education such as concept, benefits, attitudes, strategies, and as a whole is average; (ii) Gender has not significantly influenced the awareness about inclusive education among B. Ed students concerning the concept of inclusive education, benefits of inclusive education, attitude towards inclusive education, strategies of inclusive education, and awareness as a whole; and (iii) Awareness of male B.Ed students towards inclusive education is higher than that of the female teachers.

Keywords: Inclusive education, B.Ed students, awareness, gender

Introduction

The Constitution of India ensures equality, freedom, justice, and dignity of all individuals and implicitly mandates an inclusive society for all including persons with disabilities. In recent years, there have been vast and positive changes in the perception of society toward persons with disabilities. It has been realized that the majority of persons with disabilities can lead a better quality of life if they have equal opportunities and effective access to rehabilitation measures. The earlier emphasis on medical rehabilitation has now been replaced by an emphasis on social rehabilitation. There has been increasing recognition of the abilities of persons with disabilities and emphasis on mainstreaming them in society based on their capabilities. Education is the most effective vehicle of social and economic empowerment. In keeping with the spirit of Article 21A of the Constitution guaranteeing education as a fundamental right and Section 26 of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995, free and compulsory education has to be provided to all children with disabilities up to the minimum age of 18 years. There is a need for mainstreaming persons with disabilities in the general education system through inclusive education. Mainstreaming policies for serving students with disabilities meet challenges to change the functional conditions of regular education classes so that, as far as possible, all students, including children and youth with special needs, will have a chance to work and learn together. The response to this challenge has consequences for curricular planning, methods of teaching and working, and cooperation between regular and special education teachers as well as other school personnel. That is, well-integrated services become a necessary prerequisite for a successful outcome for both students with special needs and other students in regular classes. The formal, non-formal, adult education, vocational education, special education, and open schooling systems all have to optimize their services and support to promote the full and equal participation of persons with disabilities.

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The success of inclusive education is mainly determined by the factors like attitude, perception, and awareness of the different stakeholders like teachers, heads of the institutions, parents, and society as a whole. Teachers are the most important agent in this regard. The success of inclusive education would be possible through teachers only. Hence, the teachers of the school education must be trained. Teacher training institutes and specially B.Ed courses play a pivotal role in developing awareness among B.Ed students towards inclusive education. It is very important for prospective teachers to have great knowledge and understanding about inclusive education and should have effective and high-level awareness towards special children as well as inclusive education. Teacher trainees should be given proper special training to gain proper knowledge and understanding about special children. They will develop abilities to encounter problems of their students while teaching in the future.

Conceptual Background

The concept of inclusion has emerged from the idea of providing equal opportunities to 'all' children keeping in mind the diverse nature of their individual needs. The dictionary meaning of 'inclusion' is -to take in, or consider as part or member of, or to embrace. The general philosophy of inclusive education provides for good teaching practices, and healthy relationships between teachers and students, to improve the quality of education for all children in a classroom and help the development of all children in different ways. All children can do well when the regular classroom environment is adjusted to meet their individual needs. Inclusive education by its definition includes all children and all schools. Thus inclusion is an ideology and not a program. It is a concept of effective schools where every child has a place to study and teachers become facilitators of learning rather than providers of information. The move to inclusive educational practices is driven by respect for diversity and a strong commitment to the rights of individuals with disabilities to be a part of every community. All these things being considered, our position on the subject of Inclusive Education is a statement of what we feel should be done in the process of moving towards inclusion and integration around the world to ensure that education for disabled people is:

- Not segregated or in a "special" school
- A quality education that recognizes the principle of lifelong learning
- Develops all the talents of each learner to reach their full potential
- And accommodates the individual needs of each learner's disability.

In the inclusive education setup, three types of services are provided directly or indirectly to the disabled child. The most essential services are provided by the general classroom teachers and parents as well. The concept of child-to-child learning, cooperative learning approaches, etc. has demonstrated that learning can also happen through interaction between the disabled child and the non-disabled child. Therefore, the use of the assistance of normal children is also vital in inclusive education. The second type of service is the support services given by qualified specialist teachers. These teachers provide necessary academic and material support to children with disabilities and also

provide needed consultancy to regular classroom teachers. The third type of service includes need-based peripheral services provided by the community.

Thus education should be accessible to all those who desire to be educated, no matter what their ability is; disabled people should have the option to be integrated with the general school population, rather than being socially and educationally isolated from the mainstream without any choice in the matter. Students who are deaf, blind, or deaf-blind may be educated in their groups to facilitate their learning, but must be integrated into all aspects of society.

Literature Review

Any worthwhile research study in any field of knowledge requires an adequate familiarity with the work which has already been done in the same area. Some of the previous works done in the field of inclusive education and B.Ed students are discussed below.

Subban and Sharma (2001) ^[19] revealed that teachers who reported having undertaken training in special education were found to hold more positive perceptions about implementing inclusive education.

Smitha and Acharya (2010) ^[17] found that teachers have an unfavorable attitude toward inclusive education. Conclusively, it can be said that teachers' attitudes towards disabled students, in particular and inclusive education, in general, is the main pivot for making the concept of 'inclusion', a successful venture.

Greene, B. L. (2017) ^[3] found that teachers had a positive attitude toward inclusive teaching practices and a negative attitude towards philosophical aspects of inclusionary teaching practices. The findings of the study were hoped to contribute to a positive social change that impacts teaching practices and student learning.

Gupta and Tandon (2018) ^[5] studied that teacher trainees had a positive attitude toward inclusion in schools. The findings highlight that there was a significant difference in attitude towards inclusion between urban and rural teacher trainees. However, there was no significant difference in the attitude towards inclusion among the sub-groups of teacher trainees based on qualification, previous awareness about inclusion, or familiarity with the disability in the family.

Nakro, K. R. (2019) ^[14] found that there is a significant difference in the attitudes of pre-service and in-service student teachers and no significant differences were found between male and female, graduate and post-graduate students. It also revealed that the majority of student teachers (65%) hold a positive attitude towards inclusive education, 17% of the student teachers had a negative attitude towards inclusive education and the rest 18% of the student teachers showed a moderate attitude towards inclusive education.

Need of the Study

Education plays an important role in providing opportunities for the development of potentialities of an individual to contribute to the development of a nation. Education is considered the strongest instrument for achieving the ideals of life and the proper development of a human personality. Upholding this belief, the Government of India declared 'Education for all' by the year 2012. The education of children with special needs was included in this declaration. The disabled population in India as per Census 2011 (2016 updated) is 2.21% of the total population and major parts of

these are school-going children. Providing proper education to this group of students is always a challenging task in front of teachers. In traditional schools, they were partially or totally rejected and subjected to being the butt of the class. B.Ed students are the future teachers of the country. Hence, they should have and develop proper awareness about inclusive education.

It has been observed that in teacher education programmes, there is a limited scope for the trainees to address key aspects of inclusion, prospective teachers expressed concern regarding their ability to teach students with diverse needs in mainstream classrooms and blamed it on their preparation for inclusion. For many pre-service teachers, their only exposure to the area of inclusive education is an introductory inclusive education subject included in their teacher education course. Research has shown that these introductory inclusive education subjects can have a positive influence on the awareness, attitudes, and confidence of those studying these subjects.

In Assam, the curricula and the duration of the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) programme were modified by the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) norms. In the revised structure of the curriculum, the B.Ed students are required to study a course on Inclusive Education. This prompted the investigator to conduct a study on the B.Ed students with regards to their awareness towards inclusive education as only a few studies have been conducted on this topic till now in the study area chosen for this study.

Statement of the Problem

The title of the present study is “A Study on Awareness of B.Ed Students towards Inclusive Education.”

Operational Definition of Key Terms

To provide a scientific base and semantic clarity, it is necessary on the part of the investigator to define the terms, which have come in the formal title of the problem and the variable. The operational definitions of the key terms are stated below:

- 1. **Inclusive Education:** In the present study, inclusive education refers to the process of bringing children with

special needs of whatever condition into the general classroom for their education.

- 2. **B.Ed Students:** In this study, B.Ed students refer to the students who are studying in 1st and 2nd year of a B.Ed course in B.Ed colleges.
- 3. **Awareness:** In this study, awareness refers to the ability of the B.Ed students to perceive, feel, or be conscious of events, objects, thoughts, emotions, or sensory patterns about inclusive education.
- 4. **Gender:** Gender refers in this study to the B.Ed students of Male and Female sex.

Objectives of the Study

The following are the objectives of the study:

- 1. To study the awareness of B.Ed students towards inclusive education.
- 2. To find out the difference if any in the awareness of B.Ed students towards inclusive education regarding gender.

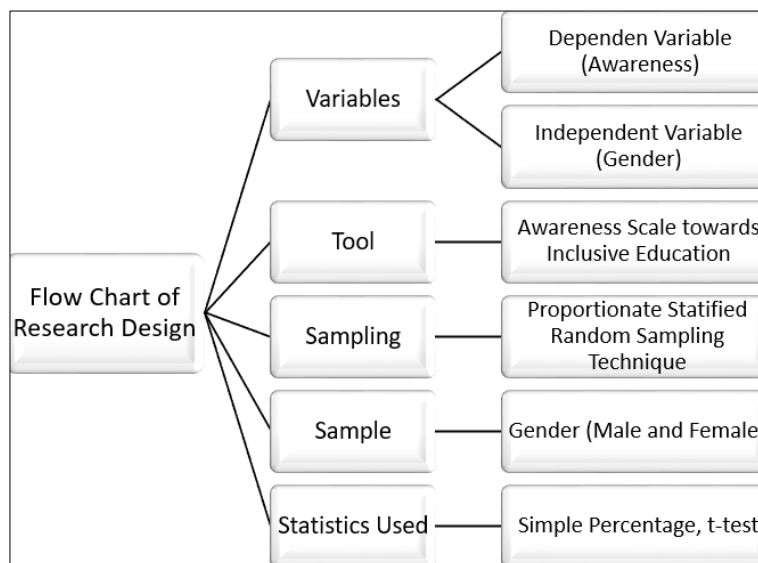
Hypothesis of the Study

The following hypothesis is framed to test objective no. 2:

H₁: There is no significant difference between the awareness of male and female B.Ed students toward inclusive education.

Plan and Procedure

- **Selection of Research Method:** In the present study, a descriptive survey method was employed. It is descriptive because it aims to describe the nature and present status of the phenomenon. The present study was designed to study the awareness of B.Ed students toward inclusive education. Because of the approach followed, the present investigation falls in the domain of descriptive survey. It was done through the survey method because it involved surveys or visits to various Teacher Training institutions for the collection of data to analyze, compare, and interpret the existing status.
- **Research Design:** A flow chart of the research design for this study is shown below:

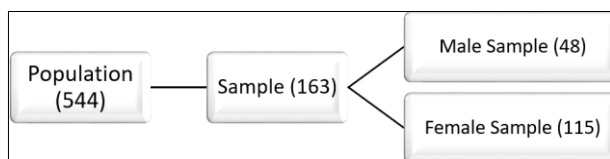


Population and Sample

The population of this study consists of all the B.Ed students of B.Ed colleges of the South Kamrup area of Kamrup

District, Assam. All total three (03) B.Ed colleges are there in the South Kamrup area and in these colleges a total of 544 students are there out of which 160 are male students

and 384 are female students. The sample of the present study was selected from all these (03) B.Ed colleges by applying proportionate Stratified Random sampling technique. 30% B.Ed students from the population are selected as sample i.e. 163 B.Ed students. The flow chart of the sample is shown below:



Research Instrument

A self-constructed ‘Awareness Scale towards Inclusive Education’ is used in this study to collect necessary data from the respondents. This scale comprises 25 statements covering the range of four (04) dimensions of Concept (8 statements), Benefits (7 statements), Attitude (5 statements), and Strategies (5 statements). For each statement, the numerical values 3, 2, and 1 were given for three responses namely Agree, Undecided, and Disagree respectively. In this scale, Agree reflects High Awareness, Undecided reflects Medium Awareness, and Disagree reflects Low Awareness. For this scale, split-half reliability was employed and was found to be 0.81 which was significant. This scale has been found to possess high content validity.

- **Statistical Techniques:** The awareness level of B.Ed students towards inclusive education is calculated by using Simple Percentage. To find out the gender difference in the awareness of B.Ed students towards inclusive education, Mean and Standard Deviation have been calculated. Based on the Mean and Standard Deviation, t-test has been worked out to find out the significant difference between the groups.
- **Delimitations of the Study:** The present study is subjected to several limitations *viz.*
 1. The present study is confined to B.Ed students studying in B.Ed colleges only. B.Ed students studying in DIET are not included.
 2. The study is limited to B.Ed students of three B.Ed colleges of the South Kamrup area of Kamrup district, Assam.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The resulting data are analyzed by using appropriate statistical treatment. The results have been explained below.

Table 1: Percentage of B.Ed Students’ Awareness of Inclusive Education

Dimensions of Inclusive Education	Level of Awareness (N=163)					
	High		Average		Low	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Concept	34	20.9	99	60.7	30	18.4
Benefits	49	30.1	91	55.8	23	14.1
Attitude	41	25.1	90	55.2	32	19.7
Strategies	29	17.8	88	54.0	46	28.2
As whole	38	23.3	92	56.4	33	20.3

From table 1, it is observed that out of 163 B.Ed students, 20.9% are with high-level awareness regarding the concept of inclusive education, and 60.7% and 18.4% are with average and low-level awareness respectively. The percentage of teachers with high, average, and low-level

awareness regarding the benefits of inclusive education is 30.1%, 55.8%, and 14.1% respectively. The high, average, and low-level awareness regarding attitude toward inclusive education of B.Ed students is 25.1%, 55.2%, and 19.7% respectively. The table also reveals that 17.8%, 54%, and 28.2% of B.Ed students preferred high, average, and low-level awareness regarding strategies of inclusive education respectively. The percentage of high, average, and low-level inclusive education awareness of B.Ed students as a whole are 23.3%, 56.4%, and 20.3% respectively.

Table 2: Mean, SD, and t-values of the Awareness Score of Male and Female B.Ed Students towards Inclusive Education

Dimensions of Inclusive Education	Gender				t-values	Remarks
	Male (48)		Female (115)			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Concept	15.85	2.88	15.73	3.33	0.23	NS
Benefits	13.64	3.08	13.30	3.29	0.63	NS
Attitude	10.81	2.21	10.33	1.39	1.38	NS
Strategies	10.52	1.98	10.20	1.34	1.02	NS
As whole	50.83	6.10	49.57	6.90	1.15	NS

NS= Not significant at 0.05 level

From table 2, it is clear that the obtained t-values concerning concept (0.23), benefits (0.63), attitude (1.38), strategies (1.02), and as a whole (1.15) are not significant at 0.05 levels. Hence, the formulated null hypothesis is accepted. It means, there is no significant difference between the awareness of male and female B.Ed students towards inclusive education. From the Mean values, it is evident that male B.Ed students have slightly higher awareness (mean value=50.83) of inclusive education than female B.Ed students (Mean value=49.57).

Results and Discussion

The main findings of this study are as follows:

- The awareness level of most of the B.Ed students towards different dimensions of inclusive education such as concepts, benefits, attitudes, strategies, and as a whole is average.
- Gender has not significantly influenced the awareness about inclusive education among B.Ed students concerning the concept of inclusive education, benefits of inclusive education, attitude towards inclusive education, strategies of inclusive education, and awareness as a whole.
- Awareness of male B.Ed students towards inclusive education is higher than that of female teachers.

Inclusion, therefore, now is a demand of the day and a need of the hour. We can't meet the educational and adjustment needs of a vast population of Children with Special Needs (like gifted, creative, and disabled) by adhering to the philosophy of segregation i.e. establishing separate schools, classes, or setups for them. Moreover, when the task of providing normal schools for ensuring education to all in our country is becoming in itself an uphill task and a big challenge, then how can we expect to establish and run effectively the institutions or programmes to meet the needs of a diversified group of the Children With Special Needs (CWSN) covering varying types of giftedness, creativity, and disabilities? It is neither feasible nor desirable in terms of the realization of the outcomes. What we need is the all-round growth and development of the personality of the

children along with their adequate adjustment in their social life. In the segregated setup, we can't expect CWSN to learn the lesson for better adaptation and sociability needs in their adult life. Inclusion is the only best answer and solution to the success of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and implementation of the Right to Education Bill as it stands for including all types of children in the school programme (curricular and co-curricular) irrespective of their normality or exceptionality.

Although the government is making efforts with several new initiatives, inclusive education is at its infancy stage in the country and it should be encouraged further because it would make education accessible to children with disability in all parts of the country. Inclusive education is still an evolving concept, but now there is a clearer focus on how to change systems, methodologies, policies, curricula, and environments, rather than on how to prepare or change individual children. A few years ago the discussion tended to focus on 'special' or 'integrated', whereas now it has moved on to 'integrated' or 'inclusive' thus indicating a belief that inclusive education is possible. Therefore, in light of the results obtained, the following suggestions are required to be considered to develop more awareness among B.Ed students:

- Even though the results of this study indicate a moderate level of awareness of B.Ed students towards inclusive education, it is important to explore their readiness to implement inclusive education programmes in their schools.
- A modified recruitment policy for teachers should be adopted to promote quality teachers having a willingness to serve the special educational needs of this population. Training in inclusive education should be for all teachers and related educational staff; additional training should be given to heads and deputies in the management of inclusive education.
- It may be suggested that practical experiences and exposure are required to be added to the curriculum regarding inclusive education to strengthen content knowledge in the teacher training program at the B.Ed. level. This would not only help to reduce the gap between theory and practice but would also make the programme more meaningful and relevant for the teacher trainees.
- College managements need to provide the necessary support to enhance the meaningful learning experiences of B.Ed students towards inclusive education. For this, regular visits to the inclusive school need to be scheduled in the curriculum. In addition, the participation of the B.Ed students in the teaching-learning process of children with special needs requires to be introduced as a regular feature of the instruction related to inclusive education. The B.Ed students require to be shown videos, and recordings of clippings of children with special needs in inclusive settings.
- There is a need for promoting educational research projects not only to further improve the curriculum of inclusive education in the teacher training programmes but also to develop strategies for the effective implementation of inclusive education. Discussions, debates awareness programmes, and interaction with children with special needs require to be made regular features in the practicum and internship programmes in the Colleges of Education.

- Most of the time, teacher educators themselves do not possess a positive attitude towards inclusive education either due to lack of proper training or awareness, which influences the attitude of teacher trainees towards inclusion. For this, in-service awareness and training programmes need to be organized regularly for teacher educators.
- It is suggested that the National Council for Teacher Education and the Rehabilitation Council of India should join hands to take appropriate measures for ensuring adequate changes in the curriculum to include both hands-on experiences and theory in inclusive education courses in the teacher training programmes

Conclusion

The idea of inclusive education is more relevant now since education has become a fundamental right. If inclusive classroom practices can successfully be achieved elsewhere in the world then it can be achieved in India as well. What is required is a positive outlook by all the members of society who need to work in tandem and not in isolation for achieving this meaningful task. All the stakeholders need to make efforts to make inclusion socially and academically meaningful and to achieve the goals of Education for All. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights clearly states in Article 1.1 of the World Declaration of Education for all about basic learning needs. It states- 'Every person- child, youth and adult shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs.'

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