

9-24-2014

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ISSN 1918-5227

Pages 17- 30

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Recommended Citation

Bhatnagar, N., & Das, A. (2014) Attitudes of Secondary Regular School Teachers Toward Inclusive Education in New Delhi, India: A Qualitative Study. *Exceptionality Education International*, 24, 17-30. Retrieved from <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/eei/vol24/iss2/2>

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Attitudes of Secondary Regular School Teachers Toward Inclusive Education in New Delhi, India: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

This study aimed to identify the attitudes of regular school teachers in Delhi, India, toward the inclusion of students with disabilities. It also explored their views regarding facilitators of inclusive education. Respondents were secondary school teachers working in schools in Delhi that implement inclusive education for students with disabilities. Two focus group interviews with ten participants in each group and 20 individual semi-structured interviews were conducted. The flexible qualitative analysis program QRS NVivo was utilized for data analysis. The major finding of the study was that the teachers held positive attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities. The teachers also suggested a number of facilitators of inclusion in their schools such as improved infrastructure, policy changes, and provisions for institutional resources.

The landmark legislation, the Persons with Disabilities Act (1995), emphasized greater access to regular education curriculum for students with disabilities in India. Subsequent policies, programs, and legislation including *Sarva Siksha Abhiyan* [Education for All Movement] (2001), the Action Plan for Inclusive Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities (2005), and Right to Education (RTE) Act (2010) further strengthened the call for inclusive education. With developments like these and many others in the last three decades, inclusive education has come to the forefront of educational reform for children with disabilities in India.

Although India has made great strides in terms of economic growth and reduction of mass poverty in the last two decades, the same cannot be said for its record on providing educational opportunities to children with disabilities. According to government's estimate, there are about 30 million children with disabilities within India's borders but only about four per cent

of them have access to education (Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities, 2007). The situation is worse in rural areas and far flung hilly terrains. There is a clear disconnect between what these children need and what is currently available to them.

This discrepancy should not be misconstrued as lack of the government's commitment to this endeavour. In fact, the central government of India has made its intentions very clear regarding its commitment to inclusive education as early as the 1970s. With the implementation of the Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) program in 1974, the Indian government embarked on an arduous journey. In the last three decades, it has implemented legislation, policies, and programs to further enhance the educational opportunities for children with disabilities. In addition, it has set up national institutes to conduct research, disseminate knowledge, and train teaching personnel to serve the large number of children with a variety of disabilities in the country. The message is clear that the government is committed to providing appropriate opportunities to pupils who have disabilities. The question, however, remains: Why is there such lack of educational opportunities for these children in India? The gap between policy and practice can perhaps be best explained by the lack of fiscal and other resources necessary for inclusive education and a lack of trained teachers for this purpose (Bhatnagar & Das, 2013a; Das, Gichuru, & Singh, 2013). A policy without appropriate fiscal and other required resources cannot be implemented successfully. A number of researchers have also pointed out that there has been severe shortage of trained teachers, a lack of resources for teaching or learning, and a lack of infrastructure in schools that support the education of students with disabilities (Bhatnagar & Das, 2013a).

Research from around the world in the last three decades also indicates that inclusion requires both fiscal resources and trained personnel in order for it to be successfully implemented (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2004; Burke & Sutherland, 2004; Forlin, 2004). Without such a support system, these initiatives are likely to falter. Many developing countries, like India, while grappling with this issue are achieving varying levels of success (Das, Gichuru, et al., 2013; Fayez, Dababneh, & Jumiaan, 2011). One such critical element in this equation is the availability of regular school teachers that have required knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward inclusion. It is what these teachers believe and do in classrooms that has the potential to make inclusion a success.

Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusion

It is widely accepted that regular classroom teachers' positive attitudes and acceptance of inclusive educational programs are central to their successful implementation (Beacham & Rouse, 2012; Bhatnagar & Das, 2014; Das, Kuyini, & Desai, 2013; Hettiarachchi & Das, 2014). It is also vital that the teachers are psychologically prepared to teach a class comprised of diverse students. The positive attitudes of teachers toward all students and the general climate they establish in the classroom have a major effect on the academic and social achievement of all students, especially those with disabilities. Researchers including Das, Gichuru, et al. (2013), Forlin (2004), and others argue that teachers' knowledge and skills, together with their attitudes and beliefs, are crucial in the development of inclusive practice. However, in many cases teachers who feel ill-prepared and who have negative attitudes toward inclusion tend to employ less effective instructional strategies. This may result in students with disabilities having a poor academic performance (D'Alonzo, Giordano, & VanLeeuwen, 1997) and, without supports and

services, may result in a non-beneficial experience for the students (Daane, Beirne-Smith, & Latham, 2000).

Literature on teachers' attitudes toward inclusion indicates that they are generally mixed. While a vast majority of teachers have supported the principle of inclusive education, they have voiced some concerns as well. Reasons cited for the lack of supportive attitudes among teachers include apprehension about their lack of ability to accommodate students with disabilities in their classrooms, the lack of planning time to design and implement appropriate instruction for these children (Campbell, Gilmore, & Cuskelly, 2003), the lack of administrative support and instructional material (especially assistive technology), and inability to manage student behaviour (Forlin, 2004).

After conducting an extensive review of the literature from 1958 to 1995 regarding the perceptions of regular school teachers toward including students with disabilities in their classrooms, Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) found that only 29.2% of teachers indicated that they had received adequate training or possessed necessary competencies to work with these children. In another study, Cummings (2003) investigated the needs of regular school teachers in New Mexico, United States, toward special education and found that 65% of the respondents perceived themselves to be not at all prepared or somewhat prepared to work with special education students.

Teachers have also expressed a lack of knowledge of inclusion procedures, especially relating to special education laws, co-teaching, and collaboration with parents and other school professionals. Researchers have concluded that the teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education are affected by variables such as their age, position, professional experience, contact with a person with a disability, type and severity of a child's disability, support from administrators, availability of related services such as a speech therapist, teacher's knowledge of inclusion procedures, and exposure to pre-service or in-service training in special education (Beacham & Rouse, 2012; Das, Gichuru, et al., 2013; Das, Kuyini, et al., 2013; Forlin, 2004; Sharma, 2001).

A number of researchers have argued that intensive training in special education is required for all regular education teachers in order for them to be effective in an inclusive education setting (Shah, Das, Desai, & Tiwari, 2014). When such training was offered to these teachers, it increased their perceived self-efficacy in including children with special needs in their classrooms. For example, Burke and Sutherland (2004) found that the teachers who received intensive training in working with children with disabilities were later more successful and least eager to complain about inclusive practices. These researchers concluded that the provision of training for regular education teachers must be comprehensive before the inclusion process can take place.

Sharma, Forlin, & Loreman (2008) utilized a data set of 603 pre-service teachers from Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, and Singapore and reported the positive effects of training in inclusive education on pre-service teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. Other researchers including Webb (2004) employed quantitative methods to measure the attitudes of regular and special education teachers in inclusive classrooms. She found conflicting views regarding its practice among both groups of teachers. While special education teachers favoured inclusion, regular education teachers did not. The regular education teachers were concerned about including students with disabilities in their classrooms and dealing with their cognitive difficulties. Webb (2004) recommended more training in the inclusive classroom for regular

educational teachers regarding the instructional practices of students with special needs. Campbell et al. (2003) found that regular education teachers were not in favour of the influx of students with disabilities warranted by special education laws.

With regard to teachers' attitudes in the secondary setting, a number of researchers have concluded that teachers' attitudes are less positive in middle or high schools than in elementary environments (DeSimone & Parmar, 2006; Lopes, Monteiro, Sil, Rutherford, & Quinn, 2004; Smith, 2000). For example, Lopes et al. (2004) found that regular education teachers in Grades 5 thru 9 reported the lowest efficacy in teaching students with disabilities. These teachers reported that the inclusion of these students interfered with the learning of their peers without disabilities. DeSimone & Parmar (2006) also argued that middle and high school teachers do not have enough opportunities to develop personal relationships with students with disabilities as elementary teachers do because these students typically spend all day in one classroom. In addition, Smith (2000) hypothesized that less positive attitudes among middle or high school teachers may be due to the large amount of material that these teachers need to cover. Other researchers including Villa, Thousand, Meyers, & Nevin (1996) cited the complexities of managing the schedules of students with disabilities both in and outside the classroom as a contributing factor for negative attitudes among middle and high school teachers.

Aims of the Study

While abundant research has been conducted in western countries on teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education in the last three decades, there is a paucity of research in India on this topic. A review of literature (Bhatnagar & Das, 2013b; David & Kuyini, 2012; Gafoor & Asaraf, 2009; Sharma, 2001; Sharma, Moore, & Sonawane, 2009) indicated that all of these studies used quantitative methods for their data analysis. The present study was perhaps the first of its kind in India to use qualitative research methodology to determine teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education. While previous research helped in understanding teachers' attitudes in general, this study was aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' views on key aspects of inclusion and how they shaped teachers' attitudes toward including or perhaps not including students with disabilities in their classrooms. In addition to determining teachers' attitudes, this study also aimed to identify the facilitators of inclusion as viewed by these teachers. Specifically, the following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the attitudes of the secondary school teachers in Delhi, India, regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities in their classrooms?
2. What are the facilitators of inclusion as viewed by the teachers in Delhi, India?

Method

In order to answer the research questions, an interpretive qualitative methodology was utilized. Qualitative methodology helps to provide understanding of a topic from the population's perspective as they experience it. The resulting textual description is analyzed to look for themes and to infer transferable interpretations (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003).

Participants and Settings

Respondents in this study were secondary regular school teachers working in schools operated under private management in Delhi. This autonomous body, however, adheres to Department of Education rules and regulations for some key aspects of school operation, including the adoption of the syllabi set by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), the admission requirements, and the high school graduation criteria, among others. It is worthwhile noting here that India has two parallel systems of school structure. One is maintained by private independent organizations and the other is run by central and/or state governments. There is an extensive network of these private schools reaching far into the hilly terrains and rural areas of India. According to India Human Development Survey (2011), only about 42% of urban children ages 6–14 are enrolled in government schools, while this figure jumps to 76% in rural schools. Private school enrollment stands at 58% in urban areas but at 24% in rural areas.

The private organization from which the sample of teachers was drawn from for this study operates 35 secondary schools in four administrative zones of Delhi: East, West, North and South. These schools are open for admission to any Indian national, but parents are required to pay a tuition fee to send their child to these schools. The schools included in this study typically have a student enrollment between two and three thousand students; and teachers at these schools are required to have appropriate teacher certification in the content area they teach, including special education. Inclusion of students with disabilities is encouraged by the administrators and school management at these schools, but special education teachers mostly use the consultative service delivery model to serve students with disabilities. The teachers selected for this study have taught Grades 9 and 12 in a variety of content areas. A vast majority of them were less than 40 years of age, and held postgraduate qualifications. A systematic random sampling method was used to select the participants for the study. The names of all the teachers were placed in alphabetical order, and a random number 'seven' was chosen. After the initial selection of the seventh teacher on the list, the next seventh teacher was selected. The procedure was repeated until the pre-determined number of teachers, five, was obtained in each administrative zone. These teachers were then invited to participate in individual semi-structured interviews as well as the focus group interviews.

Two focus group interviews were conducted and each group had ten participants. Group 1 had teachers from East and West administrative zone of Delhi; while Group 2 had teachers from North and South zone. In addition to the focus group interviews, 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teachers selected from the four administrative zones. Some teachers opted to be interviewed in Hindi, while others were interviewed in English. Informed consent forms were provided to the participants to complete before participating in the interview. Individual interviews typically lasted between 30 and 45 minutes, while focus group interviews lasted for about 90 minutes. Open-ended questions were asked to understand teachers' attitudes and facilitators of inclusion. Teachers were assured the anonymity of their responses and they were offered transcripts of the interview to view their responses. No monetary or any other form of allowance was provided to the participants.

Data Analysis

The flexible qualitative analysis program QRS NVivo was utilized for the analysis of the qualitative data obtained from the interviews and focus groups. After reviewing the audio recordings, translating and transcribing Hindi transcripts into English, the resulting data was imported as rich text format (rtf) into the computer software package NVivo. The authors coded the data in consultation with an external research expert in qualitative research methodology. All participants were provided a pseudonym.

A number of steps were then followed to ensure the trustworthiness of the data and analysis. First of all, data triangulation was conducted between individual interviews and focus group interviews to rule out any authors' bias. Secondly, authors acknowledged their own beliefs to themselves regarding the problem at hand. In addition, an audit trail was completed during the course of the research. A step-by-step description was outlined with decisions made at each point along the way. The themes inherent in the research questions were divided into four tree codes (characteristics of the project, teachers' responses, facilities, and school communities). The characteristics were again divided into various child codes which were: new approach to inclusive education, advantages and disadvantages of the new approach, difficulties of inclusive education, and teachers' attitudes for inclusive education. Sibling codes also gave examples of teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education.

Results

Teacher Attitudes

The analysis of the interview and focus group transcripts indicated that the teachers in Delhi generally held positive attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities. While it was noted that the majority of the teachers were not familiar with the term *inclusive education*, they did recognize that the practice was being implemented in their schools. *Integrated education* or *integration* have been the most widely used term in India but slowly inclusive education or inclusion has started gaining acceptance. Teachers were also forthright in their views to adopt inclusion, and they supported government's initiatives in this regard. A number of themes emerged from the semi-structured interviews, which are presented and illustrated with individual teachers' statements. These statements are representative of the overall themes that were identified during the individual or focus group interviews.

1. A healthy process to integrate the whole society. A vast majority of the participants expressed that the Indian government considers the formation of a knowledge-based society to be its priority. They felt that such a society represents a prerequisite for democratic development, scientific and technological progress, economic growth and social security, employment and growth. Participant RP, with 15 years of teaching experience, seemed to be highly enthusiastic about the new approach of inclusive education in India and explained the significance of it:

Inclusion is a very healthy process as it helps in making an equal society where each and every individual is given equal rights. Education is a fundamental right in India and nobody should, therefore, be denied of it. It is the most appropriate step to integrate the whole society. The children learn tolerance, acceptance by the process of inclusion in schools.

2. An ideology. The majority of respondents considered inclusion as an ideal situation where children with disabilities are educated with their other friends in the same environment. SH, a young science teacher, strongly supported this new educational trend of education and commented:

Inclusive education is an ideology and not a program. It is a concept of effective education where each and every child has a place and it is their right to be educated in the same place with other students.

3. A new approach. A brand new teacher, CH, emphasized the importance of inclusion in schools and expressed the idea that all teachers must be made aware of this universal, new approach. It is important to mention here that although inclusive education has been part of government's initiative since 1970s, its implementation has been sporadic. It is only in the last 10 years that a sustained effort to initiate inclusion has been made by the government of India through the implementation of programs such as *Sarva Siksha Abhiyan* [Education for All Movement]. It is therefore not surprising that the teachers in Delhi are seeing inclusion as "a new approach."

We can remove a complex of inferiority and superiority from our society by integrating the schools and all the peer of the classrooms. Without inclusion we cannot promote the well-being of the special children. But it is unfortunate that all the teachers are not aware about the basic rules of integration and how to handle the special kids in our schools.

4. A step toward equality. OP, a teacher with ten years of teaching experience, expressed that all educational institutions must adopt inclusive education to promote the well-being of children. According to this teacher, inclusion is valuable not only for the special needs children but for all pupils, as this process enables them to understand the structure of our society. OP asserted:

Inclusion is a very good step to remove inferiority and superiority from a classroom. If integration is a success, it will be bliss for the special children and they can very happily study in the school with a positive attitude. Without integration we cannot promote the well-being of special children.

5. An essential step in education. A young teacher, SH, believed that inclusion helps in integrating the whole society and is a constructive step in education. This process is a fundamental shift and needs to address certain educational difficulties in Indian schools. According to the interviewee, inclusion in education is an essential step in our educational system to be adopted by all of us. SH suggested:

Inclusion is very essential as it helps in making an equal society where every individual is given equal rights. I have always believed that children are the best gift of the Almighty and each child must be given every opportunity of equal upbringing in our society. It's not only the parents' responsibility but also the responsibility of the teachers to look after the special children and no effort should be spared to include them. It is the most appropriate step to integrate the whole society as other children also learn about the special part of our society. They learn tolerance, which is a very essential part of our society.

6. A blessing in disguise. MU, a teacher with 20 years of experience, did not seem familiar with the term *inclusion* but supported the concept as a benefit to children with disabilities. The respondent showed some surprise that some of the teachers were still not aware

of the concept, especially since the Persons with Disabilities Act (1995) had been passed by the Indian Parliament nearly two decades ago. According to MU:

In reality we had no idea about the term inclusion before your arrival here. I had no knowledge of inclusion but have an idea that this is a healthy process and should be encouraged in our society. If we have successful inclusion programs in our schools, it is a blessing in disguise for the special needs students.

7. Diversity in education. A newly graduated teacher, AK, stressed the need for inclusive education, as it is beneficial for all children including those with disabilities:

Inclusion has become a necessity today as special needs children should not be segregated at all. It's a process by which these children get the opportunity to mingle with the normal students and be friendly with them. On the other side, the normal children also learn to accept those special children as a part of our society. The schools must arrange all the required facilities for these students.

This sentiment was also reiterated by RV, a senior science teacher who believed that "inclusive education is about creating genuine relationships between all types of students."

8. All-round development of students. The interviewees shared common views that favoured inclusive education and all of them expressed the same opinion that teachers must welcome and include all children into their classrooms. They were of the opinion that diversity in education must be embraced and teachers must deal, as never before, with heterogeneity in their classrooms. A rookie teacher, AP, talked about teachers' humanitarian responsibility while implementing inclusive education. According to this respondent, inclusive education gives an opportunity for the well-rounded development of students with disabilities:

It is our humanitarian responsibility to integrate all kinds of students in our schools. We must be careful and sensitive toward their needs in the process of integration. The teachers must be careful in providing an all-round development of the special child in the class.

In addition, a young teacher, LN, stressed that the teacher's first responsibility is to develop the confidence of all children. Children with disabilities, especially, must not be neglected or isolated in inclusive classrooms. According to the respondent, the teachers have a responsibility to look at the unique needs of the children at all levels. LN added that:

We should be careful and sensitive toward the needs of special children in our school on humanitarian grounds. We have to be very careful that a special child does not feel out of place in the school or in the society. In the same way we need to be very careful that the special needs children do not feel neglected or isolated in regular education classrooms. It is the teacher's responsibility to look that the special child is able to get along with other students. The teacher must make arrangements for the personal development for the special child.

9. Some concerns. While a vast majority of the respondents in the study painted a bright picture of inclusive education in India and their willingness to offer all that they could to students with disabilities, a handful of teachers also expressed some concerns about including those children with severe needs, e.g. children with autism or those exhibiting behaviour difficulties. It was interesting to hear these teachers' concerns, which gave a sense to the researchers that these were perhaps not examples of negative attitudes but rather a lack of confidence in their self-

efficacy beliefs in working with these children that required a very specific set of skills and knowledge.

Facilitators of Inclusive Education

The teachers were asked to suggest facilitators of inclusive education in their schools. Most teachers gave their views based on their experiences of the inclusive settings at their school. Their suggested facilitators focused on three main areas: (a) infrastructural and organizational, (b) policy changes, and (c) institutional resources.

1. Infrastructural facilitators. According to the teachers, the environmental or infrastructural facilitators included technological solutions, and basic architectural changes to doors and ramps of the buildings were important facilitators. Voice-recognition technology was suggested for hearing-impaired students, as was including motion sensors to open the doors and keypad entry for opening lockers and classrooms. Architectural changes to school buildings included lowering the height of sinks and water taps, building wider corridors and classrooms to enable wheelchair access, installing ramps near the stairs, and adding more or larger elevators in the school buildings.

2. Organizational facilitators. LB, a senior language teacher, believed that the most important role in a successful inclusive setting in a school was the role of the principal and teachers in the school. According to the respondent, all of the teachers and principal had positive attitudes toward children with disabilities and worked collaboratively to develop a successful inclusion program. According to LB:

The decision to implement a school reform such as inclusion may occur at the building, district, or state level, or at all three levels. However, the most influential of these changes actually happens at the classroom level. First and foremost factor of the successful integration in our school is the strong role of our principal, who listens to the parents carefully and admits the special children in our school. This special quality of the peer group is a major factor of successful integration in our school. There is no inferiority or superiority complex among these students.

Another senior science teacher, R, believed that the successful inclusion of students with disabilities resulted from the school community working together. The students and teachers play an important role in making the integration program a success. R commented:

Firstly, the credit goes to the children themselves. Whenever there is a new special student in the school, the entire peer group willingly helps them. The teachers make sure that there is no bullying of the special child in any way. Then after that, it is the awareness and helpful nature of the teachers that should be given credit. The management and parents are also responsible for the successful integration of our school.

Some teachers believed that a mixed approach, with all factors working in collaboration, makes inclusion a success. According to SH, the success of inclusion was not because of the efforts of one or two people, rather it was a combined effort of all stakeholders of which everyone must be proud. SH stated:

Firstly, the management gets a big hand and a big credit because they want to do inclusion in the school. Then, it's the positive attitude of the peer group who make it a great success. The students are accepting the special students in the classrooms with their open arms and with

very sympathetic attitudes. This makes inclusion very easy and very successful. The parents of all the children are also making their contribution in making it a success.

3. Policy changes. In New Delhi schools, the implementation of the government's policy of compulsory education in pursuit of the elusive "Education for All" has provided a foundation and impetus for the introduction of inclusive education programs. This policy has cleared the way for the entry of children with disabilities into mainstream schools and recognizes that curricula, teaching, and organizational changes may need to occur within the system to accommodate the different needs of these children. In addition, the implementation of the policy has created a "climate of change" within the country with regard to education. This alteration is a major motivating factor throughout the education system. People are expecting change, are eager to participate, and are anxiously waiting for a policy structure for inclusive education. The new attitudes and approaches are good for inclusive education. MU mentioned a need for a concrete policy for the success of inclusive education by stating

Perhaps the most important factor in the program's progress has been the ways of working within a planned policy. Decision making has always been important, and all parties affected by the policy makers (education and health, teacher, trainers, parents, children, and local communities) have been involved. Because everyone is aware of the developments and has a chance to affect them, work is facilitated. Commitment to the policies from the people working with it has always been strong and this has particularly facilitated the implementation phase.

4. Institutional resources. SF also indicated that in order for a policy about inclusive education to be successful it should be carried out from government level. The respondent talked about the support that the schools should be required to provide in order for the inclusion program to be a success. SF commented:

If inclusion is feasible, and this seems to be the case, only the government has the capacity to carry it forward. Involvement of decision makers in the Ministry of Education and their close support and supervision of the program from the beginning has meant that implementation should go forward with the minimum of fuss. Having this involvement also means that practice can more easily influence policy, and program adjustment is more easily achieved.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was two-fold. First, it aimed at determining the attitudes of the secondary regular school teachers in Delhi regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities. Second, it also aimed to identify the facilitators of inclusion as perceived by these teachers. The semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews indicated that the teachers in Delhi were positively disposed toward the inclusion of children with special needs. They expressed a sincere desire and enthusiasm to work with these children with disabilities and expressed a number of facilitators for inclusion.

The findings of this study indicated that secondary regular education teachers in Delhi believe that students with disabilities in an inclusive classroom not only succeed academically but also gain opportunities for socialization with their peers without disabilities. However, the study also suggested that the teachers in Delhi do not perceive inclusion as leading to higher levels of academic or social learning for students with disabilities. In addition the teachers in the study do not feel prepared for teaching students with disabilities in their classrooms.

The findings of this study therefore concur with the results obtained by Das, Kuyini, et al. (2013). These authors conducted a survey of 130 secondary regular education teachers in Delhi and reported that the vast majority of the teachers did not consider themselves adequately prepared for inclusive education. There are obvious implications for teacher educators in India who are responsible for designing and implementing pre-service and in-service training of regular school teachers. They need to revise existing pre-service programs to include more course work and field experiences related to the education of students with special needs.

In addition, although many teachers were hopeful of inclusion in their schools, a few of them were less willing to teach students with disruptive behaviours and autism. A number of researchers including Cook, Cameron, and Tankersley (2007) found that regular education teachers' attitudes toward students with disabilities reflected a feeling of insufficient preparation for this purpose. Other researchers including Koutrouba, Vamvakari, and Steliou (2006) found that a lack of training was the primary contributor to regular education teachers' negative attitudes toward inclusion. They reported that 64% of the teachers in their study had never received any training in special education methods.

Although the teachers in the study were enthusiastic about inclusion and embraced the notion philosophically, it was also clear that they were concerned about their lack of skills and knowledge to meet the needs of a certain sub-group of students. The study found that some teachers may perceive students with autism and behaviour difficulties as needing more time and effort to cope with the demands of a regular education classroom and their lack of perceived preparation in meeting the unique needs of children with behaviour difficulties and autism. Such findings are important while interpreting the results of this study.

Literature indicates that changing teacher attitudes toward inclusion requires a deep conceptual change (Bhatnagar & Das, 2013b). The teachers in India must examine the source of their feelings toward inclusion of students with autism and behaviour difficulties. To facilitate the conceptual change, the deeply held beliefs that shape teachers' attitudes toward inclusion must be exposed and these inconsistencies need to be addressed. This may require school administrators to organize professional development activities relating to these topics and provide carefully organized mentoring assistance.

Research indicates that teachers learn best through practice and observing other teachers (Shah, 2005; Shah et al., 2014). Praisner (2003) indicated that exposure to special education environments through pre-service or in-service training were related to a more positive attitude toward inclusion. This exposure enabled a regular education teacher to understand special education a little better by learning what inclusion entails. Future teachers and current teachers in India could benefit from both pre-service and in-service education that aims at equipping these teachers with the skills and knowledge needed to work with students with disabilities.

Implications for Future Research

According to the findings of the study, there are some implications that might be considered for future research. First, this study was conducted in one city (New Delhi) of India. Future research might include a larger sample of teachers from other parts of the country. Second, this study was conducted in schools affiliated with only one particular school system in New Delhi. Their responses, therefore, may not be representative of teachers from public schools

or schools run by other managements. The model of inclusive education adopted by this school system may be different from the models of inclusive education adopted by other schools. Therefore, there is a need to conduct a study including teachers working in a variety of setting such as public, private, and government affiliated schools. Third, this study included only secondary school teachers. Future research may include teachers from elementary and middle schools as well. Also, attitudes of other stakeholders need to be identified as they have crucial roles in the implementation of inclusive education programs. Fourth, this study used only a qualitative research method involving a much smaller sample size. Other research might use quantitative research or mixed methods involving a larger sample to examine teachers' attitudes.

Conclusion

This study was perhaps the first study in India that explored teachers' attitudes regarding inclusive education using qualitative research methods. It revealed that regular school teachers in Delhi generally had positive attitudes toward educating students with disabilities. A number of themes emerged from focus groups and semi-structured interviews including "a healthy process to integrate the whole society," "a step toward equality," and "diversity in education," among others. By analyzing these themes, it appears that the teachers in Delhi are positively disposed toward including children with disabilities into their classrooms. However, it was also observed that the teachers are cautious about implementing inclusion. Their cautionary attitudes may stem from their lack of preparation and resources necessary for inclusion and from the perceived difficulties of working with students with autism and those with behaviour problems. They also expressed concerns about academic and social gains of students with disabilities in an inclusion setting.

In addition to exploring teachers' attitudes toward inclusion, this study also identified facilitators of inclusion as perceived by the teachers in New Delhi. The study paints a picture of cautious optimism for inclusive education in India; hence, it is urgent that increased efforts be paid to professional development of in-service teachers and to ensuring that the pre-service teachers get adequate exposure to special education content and methodology. There are implications for the government of India's response to perceived facilitators for inclusion as identified in this study, as a way to ensure that the schools have appropriate infrastructure and classrooms are equipped with necessary resources for meeting the needs of students with disabilities.

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