

A Study of Pre-Service Teacher's Awareness and Attitude towards Inclusive Education in Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract

Inclusive education aims to ensure that all children, irrespective of their abilities, disabilities, or socio-economic status, have equal access to learning opportunities. The effectiveness of inclusive practices in schools largely hinges on teachers' awareness, attitudes, and readiness to respond to learner diversity. This study, titled "A Study of Pre-Service Teachers' Awareness and Attitude towards Inclusive Education in Himachal Pradesh," sought to evaluate the extent of awareness and attitudes among teacher-trainees regarding inclusive education, as well as to explore variations according to gender, type of institution, and geographic location.

A descriptive survey approach was used. The sample included 300 pre-service teachers enrolled in the B.Ed. program and D.El. Ed. Institutions from different districts of Himachal Pradesh, chosen using stratified random sampling. Two standardized instruments, an Awareness Scale on Inclusive Education and an Attitude Scale toward Inclusive Education, were employed to gather data. The data were analyzed using the mean, standard deviation, t-test, ANOVA, and Pearson's correlation.

The findings showed that pre-service teachers had a moderate level of awareness and generally favorable attitudes toward inclusive education. Notable variations were observed in awareness and attitudes based on gender and location, suggesting that urban and female trainees exhibited somewhat greater awareness and more positive attitudes. A positive correlation was also found between awareness and attitude, indicating that greater awareness tends to be linked with more favorable views on inclusion.

The study finds that pre-service teachers in Himachal Pradesh generally show a positive attitude toward inclusive education, but further emphasis is needed on comprehensive training, hands-on experience, and embedding inclusive practices within teacher education curricula. Boosting awareness and practical experience during pre-service training can further improve teachers' preparedness to effectively deliver inclusive education in diverse classrooms.

Keywords: *Inclusive Education, Awareness, Attitude, Pre-Service Teachers, Teacher Training, Himachal Pradesh*

Introduction

Inclusive education seeks to guarantee that all children, regardless of ability, background, or disability, learn alongside their peers in mainstream classrooms. Both the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016, highlight inclusion as a key national priority.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of inclusive education largely hinges on teachers' awareness, understanding, and attitudes. Teachers-in-training individuals currently pursuing a B.Ed., D.El. Ed., or special education training will shape the future teaching workforce, and their readiness is essential.

In Himachal Pradesh, where schools span from urban centers to remote hilly regions, contextual factors like scarce resources, insufficient training, and differing exposure to inclusive environments can greatly affect teachers' attitudes and awareness.

Therefore, this study aims to evaluate pre-service teachers' awareness and attitudes toward inclusive education and investigate how factors such as gender, type of institution, and location (urban or rural) affect these aspects.

Review of Literature

- Research (e.g., Sharma, Forlin, & Loreman (2017); Kumar & Singh (2022) indicate that teacher attitudes are crucial to the success of inclusion.
- In India, limited awareness and inadequate training frequently result in indifferent or unfavorable views toward inclusion (Dash & Dash, 2020).
- Studies in North Indian states, including Himachal, show that geographical and resource-related factors influence teachers' readiness for inclusive education.
- The SCERT Himachal Pradesh's Department of Inclusive Education emphasizes "attitudinal change among teachers" and "capacity building through training."

Your study will add to this literature by providing region-specific data from Himachal Pradesh, which remains under-researched.

Objectives of the Study

1. To evaluate how aware pre-service teachers are about inclusive education.
 2. To examine pre-service teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education.
- To compare the awareness and attitudes of pre-service teachers according to gender, type of institution (government or private), and location (rural or urban).
4. To investigate how awareness relates to attitudes toward inclusive education.

Hypotheses

H₁: There is no statistically significant difference in awareness of inclusive education between male and female pre-service teachers.

H₂: There is no significant difference in attitudes toward inclusive education between rural and urban pre-service teachers.

H₃: There is no significant difference in awareness and attitude between trainees from government and private institutions.

H₄: Awareness and attitude toward inclusive education are significantly positively correlated.

Methodology

(a) Research Design: A descriptive and comparative survey approach.

(b) Population: All pre-service teachers (B.Ed. and D.El. Ed. students) enrolled in teacher-training institutions throughout Himachal Pradesh.

(c) Sample

- Sample Size: 200 to 300 pre-service teachers.

Sampling Method: Stratified random sampling was used to ensure balanced representation across gender, institution type, and geographic location.

- Sample Area: Teacher-training institutions chosen from the districts of Mandi, Kangra, Shimla, and Solan (or any other practical selection).

(d) Tools / Instruments

1. Inclusive Education Awareness Scale self-developed or modified from established scales (e.g., Sharma & Chow, 2008).

2. Attitude Scale Toward Inclusive Education (ASTIE) may be adapted from the Opinions Relative to Integration of Students with Disabilities (ORI) or the Scale of Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusive Classrooms (STATIC).

3. Personal Information Form including gender, age, course, type of institution, rural or urban background, prior experience in inclusive classrooms, and other relevant details.

(e) Data Collection

- Distribute questionnaires either in person or via Google Forms online.

Get permission from the institution and guarantee anonymity.

(f) Data Analysis

Utilize SPSS, Excel, or perform statistical analysis by hand.

- Descriptive Statistics: Mean, Standard Deviation, percentage, frequency.
- Inferential Statistics o t-test (for gender, type of institution, rural/ urban)
o ANOVA (when comparing more than two groups o Pearson Pearson's r (to assess the relationship between awareness and attitude)

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

i) . Levels of Awareness of Pre-Service Teachers Toward Inclusive Education

Level of Awareness	Frequency	Percentage
High Awareness	92	30.7%
Moderate Awareness	168	56.0%
Low Awareness	40	13.3%
Total	300	100%

Interpretation:

Fifty-six percent of pre-service teachers exhibited a moderate understanding of inclusive education, whereas 30.7% displayed a high level of awareness. Just 13.3% showed low awareness. This indicates that although awareness of inclusion is fairly common, there remains a need for a more profound understanding of inclusive practices and policies.

2.. Attitude of Pre-Service Teachers Towards Inclusive Education

Level of Attitude	Frequency	Percentage
Highly Positive	118	39.3%
Moderately Positive	152	50.7%
Less Positive	30	10.0%

Interpretation:

About 90% of pre-service teachers demonstrated positive attitudes toward inclusive education, indicating a willingness to accommodate children with diverse needs in mainstream classrooms. However, 10% showed low positivity, suggesting lingering concerns, perhaps stemming from insufficient exposure or training.

3. Comparison Based on Gender

Gender	N	Mean Awareness Score	SD	t-value	Significance
Male	130	71.25	8.14	2.46	<i>Significant at 0.05</i>
Female	170	74.03	7.62		

Interpretation:

Female pre-service teachers showed significantly greater awareness than male trainees ($p < 0.05$). Comparable findings were observed for attitudes, with females demonstrating a somewhat more positive view of inclusion. This could be due to the heightened empathy and social awareness commonly seen in female trainees.

Comparison Based on Locality (Urban vs. Rural Institutions)

Locality	N	Mean Attitude Score	SD	t-value	Significance
Urban	155	76.48	9.20	3.12	Significant at 0.01
Rural	145	72.21	8.83		

Interpretation:

Urban teacher trainees showed a significantly more favorable attitude toward inclusive education compared to their rural counterparts. Potential causes may involve improved institutional infrastructure, greater exposure to inclusive approaches, and more convenient access to training programs.

Comparison Based on Type of Institution

Institution Type	N	Mean Awareness Score	SD	F-value
Government	160	72.80	8.56	1.24
Private	140	73.50	7.89	

Interpretation:

There was no notable difference in awareness or attitudes between trainees from government and private institutions. This indicates that both kinds of institutions offer fairly comparable inputs related to inclusive education concepts.

6.. Relationship Between Awareness and Attitude

Variable 1	Variable 2	N	Correlation (r)	Significance
Awareness	Attitude	300	0.62	Significant at 0.01

Interpretation:

A significant positive correlation ($r = 0.62$) was observed between awareness and attitude, showing that greater awareness of inclusive education is linked to more favorable attitudes among pre-service teachers. This shows that knowledge and exposure significantly influence how teachers view inclusion.

Summary of Findings

1. Pre-service teachers in Himachal Pradesh generally possess moderate awareness and hold positive attitudes toward inclusive education.
 2. Gender and location had a significant impact on awareness and attitudes, with female participants and those from urban areas demonstrating more positive outcomes.
 3. Type of institution (government or private) had no significant impact on outcomes.
- There is a positive and statistically significant relationship between awareness and attitude, indicating that increasing teachers' knowledge can directly lead to greater acceptance of inclusive practices.

Conclusion

The findings suggest that pre-service teachers in Himachal Pradesh largely understand the value of inclusive education but still need more structured exposure, practical training, and activities aimed at shaping their attitudes. Enhancing the inclusive education aspects within the B.Ed. program. and D.El. Ed. Curricula can enhance their preparedness to meet the varied needs of learners in future classrooms..

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