

Review of Literature Attitude of Teachers towards Integration of Students with Special Needs In Relation To School Climate and Their Sense of Efficacy

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ABSTRACT: On the assumption that the successful implementation of any inclusive policy is largely dependent on educators being positive about it, a great deal of research has sought to examine teachers' attitudes towards the integration and, more recently, the inclusion of children with special educational needs in the mainstream school. This paper reviews this large body of research and, in so doing, explores a host of factors that might impact upon teacher acceptance of the inclusion principle. The analyses showed evidence of positive attitudes, but no evidence of acceptance of a total inclusion or 'zero reject' approach to special educational provision. Teachers' attitudes were found to be strongly influenced by the nature and severity of the disabling condition presented to them (child-related variables) and less by teacher-related variables. Further, educational environment-related variables, such as the availability of physical and human support, were consistently found to be associated with attitudes to inclusion. After a brief discussion of critical methodological issues germane to the research findings, the paper provides directions for future research based on alternative methodologies..

Keywords: Integration, inclusion, teacher attitudes, inclusive education

INTRODUCTION:

More recent studies have been of teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. Early American studies on 'full inclusion' reported results which were not supportive of a full placement of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools. A study carried out by Coates (1989), for example, reported that general education teachers in Iowa did not have a negative view of pullout programmes, nor were they supportive of 'full inclusion'. Similar findings were reported by Semmel et al. (1991) who, after having surveyed 381 elementary educators in Illinois and California (both general and special), concluded that those educators were not dissatisfied with a special education system that operated pullout special educational programmes. Another American study by Vaughn et al. (1996) examined mainstream and special teachers' perceptions of inclusion through the use of focus group interviews.

The basic proposition of inclusive education was stated by The Salamanca Statement in 1994, stating that education must satisfy the needs of all children and the educational institutions for ordinary children should also accept all kinds of children and adolescents with special needs in their respective areas (UNESCO 1994). In recent decades, developing inclusive educational practices has become a worldwide movement (Khochen-Bagshaw 2020, Mcilvaine 2020), including China. Recently, Chinese government pays more attention on inclusive education for children with disabilities and issued a series of policies. Special Education Promotion Plan (2014–2016) enacted by Ministry of Education *et al.* (MOE) in 2014 proposed to comprehensively promote inclusive education (Central People's Government 2017). Thereupon, MOE (2020a) issued a specific policy in inclusive education named Opinions on Strengthening the Work of Students with Disabilities Learning in Regular Elementary Schools. It demands education administrative departments at the county level shall ensure that students with disabilities can learn in regular schools and give priority to children and adolescents with disabilities' enrollment in general schools. Due to the policy of promoting inclusive education, the scale of enrolled students with disabilities learning in regular schools is grand. In 2019, there are 394 thousand students with disabilities studying in general schools, with a proportion about 49.2% of all students with disabilities in China (MOE 2020b).

However, in studies where teachers had active experience of inclusion, contradictory findings were reported; a study by Villa et al. (1996) yielded results which favoured the inclusion of children with SEN in the ordinary school. The researchers noted that teacher commitment often emerges at the end of the implementation cycle, after the teachers have gained mastery

of the professional expertise needed to implement inclusive programmes. This finding was also reflected in the Sebastian and Mathot- Buckner's (1998) case study of a senior high and a middle school in Washington School District, Utah, where students with severe learning difficulties had been integrated. In this study, 20 educators were interviewed at the beginning and end of the school year to determine attitudes about inclusion. The educators felt that inclusion was working well and, although more support was needed, it was perceived as a challenge. Similar findings were reported by LeRoy and Simpson (1996) who studied the impact of inclusion over a three-year period in the state of Michigan. Their study showed that as teachers' experience with children with SEN increased, their confidence to teach these children also increased. The evidence seems to indicate that teachers' negative or neutral attitudes at the beginning of an innovation such as inclusive education may change over time as a function of experience and the expertise that develops through the process of implementation. This conclusion was also reported in a recent UK survey of teachers' attitudes in one LEA, where teachers who had been implementing inclusive programmes for some years held more positive attitudes than the rest of the sample, who had had little or no such experience (Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden, 2000). However, there have been no studies which show the move towards more positive attitudes to inclusion, leading to widespread acceptance of full inclusion.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Even though the large scale of inclusive education in China, the preparation of inclusive education is still on construction. It is not until 2019, the Department of Teachers' Affairs in MOE requesting the subject of special education subject should be gradually added to the teacher qualification examinations for primary and secondary schools from 2020 (MOE 2020c). Before that, most general teachers did learn knowledge and skills of special education in their pre-teacher training programs. The Opinions on Strengthening the Work of Students with Disabilities Learning in Regular Elementary Schools (2020) try to improve the profession of teachers as well. It states schools all over the country should select outstanding teachers with certain special education qualities, more benevolence and sense of responsibility to serve as the head teachers and teachers of the classes for children with disabilities. This shows the preparation of general teachers to implement inclusive education is still in the process of gradual development.

Successful inclusive education can not only provide equal access in education to all children but also, more importantly, provide appropriate education to students to achieve positive outcomes (Erten and Savage 2012, Messiou 2017). However, the quality of inclusive education is questioned by scholars (Deng and Zhao 2019, Wei *et al.* 2017, Lei *et al.* 2017), a primary school teachers (He 2019) and parents (Chen *et al.* 2019), which is affected by many factors, including classification of students with special needs, role assignment between special education staff, support personnel, and mainstream teachers, and attitudes among other stakeholders (Du and Fen 2019, Alquraini 2012, Bhatnagar and Das 2014, Bornman and Donohue 2013). Among them, the key factors of implementing inclusive education are the principles of teachers towards inclusive education and teachers' attitudes towards students with disabilities (Bender *et al.* 1995, De Boer *et al.* 2011, Hellmich *et al.* 2019, Pang 2017).

Thaver and Lim (2014) considered the prosperity of inclusion of students with disabilities largely rest on the attitudes of mainstream teachers, for instance, when they hold disapproving attitudes, they less frequently implement inclusive educational strategies (e.g. Bender *et al.* 1995, Singh *et al.* 2020, He 2019). Furthermore, apathetic or even passive attitudes among mainstream teachers have highly destructive effects on students with disabilities, such as isolation, psychosocial stress, and a deepened sense of vulnerability caused by their disabilities (Hogan *et al.* 2000, Holzbauer 2004, Tregaskis 2000). For example, due to disabilities, it is difficult for affected students to get equally high academic scores as mainstream students. This further exacerbates teachers' neglect of the potential of students with disabilities. It follows that teachers' attitudes play an essential role in the development of students with disabilities and inclusive education.

The self-efficacy towards inclusive education is a specific expression of the sense of efficacy in inclusive education. It is a self-perception of achieving expected educational and teaching objectives and finishing inclusive education practical work successfully (Park *et al.* 2016). Bandura argued (1977) that self-efficacy is defined as 'beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments. Base on this idea, some scholars argued that sense of self-efficacy relies on four sources: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and somatic and emotional states (Fernandez *et al.* 2016, Morris *et al.* 2017). Generally, collaboration, managing behavior, and inclusive instruction are regarded as the dimensions of self-efficacy towards inclusive education (Savolainen *et al.* 2012). Teachers may present various in different abilities of inclusive education needed. Alnahdi (2020) investigated teachers' self-efficacy to teach in inclusive classrooms in Saudi Arabia, and found teachers' efficacy scored low in abilities such as involving families in school activities, raising awareness regarding laws and policies related to the inclusion of students with disabilities, and dealing with physically aggressive students, while felt better to get children to follow classroom rules, make parents feel comfortable about coming to school, and provide alternate explanations for students.

Teachers' self-efficacy, collective efficacy, and the experiences already acquired in teaching children with special needs intimately interact with attitudes towards inclusion (Urton *et al.* 2014). There would be more positive views of educating children with special needs in regular classroom when teachers got higher self-efficacy (Savolainen *et al.* 2012). High self-efficacy of teachers is related to effective and positive teaching behaviours, which are very important for inclusive education (Schwab *et al.* 2017). Specifically, if teachers obtain a higher sense of efficiency, they would provide less referral behaviors, more positive coping styles to deal with students' problematic behaviors, and diversified instructional approaches for special educational needs (SEN) (Wertheim and Leyser 2002). The predictive functions of self-efficacy towards inclusion between teachers' attitudes towards inclusion were illustrated further by scholars in America, Europe, Africa and Asia (e.g. Savolainen *et al.* 2012, Savolainen *et al.* 2020, Emam and Mohamed 2011, Malinen *et al.* 2012, Thaver and Lim 2014).

Savolainen *et al.* (2020) considered that an abundance of studies have assessed teachers' attitude and self-efficacy beliefs related to inclusive education in the past decades. However, most studies about the above variables have only been carried out in a single relationship between each variable. A deeper relationship among each variable should be emphasized. It is normally an investigation of mediating effects that is pointed out by clinical psychologists and developmental psychologists (MacKinnon and Fairchild 2009, MacKinnon *et al.* 2007). Protheroe (2008) pointed out teacher's efficacy to promote learning can depend on past experiences or school culture and for those with high self-efficacy combined with higher level to cooperate and deal with challenge tasks predicating teachers more positive attitude to inclusion (Weisel and Dror 2006). Therefore the possible mediation role of teachers' perceptions of school climate and the role of teachers' self-efficacy levels could also be further investigated.

Before starting the current study, there were several preliminary studies about the correlation between teachers' efficacy, school climate and teachers' attitude toward inclusion provided circumstantial evidences for the mediating path: school climate toward inclusion → teachers' sense of efficacy toward inclusion → teachers' attitude towards inclusion. Dating from 1998, Sodak *et al.* suggested that collaboration with other teachers mediated the relation of teachers' efficacy beliefs on their feelings of receptivity toward inclusion. Hosford and O'Sullivan (2015) considered that teachers' ratings of the severity and confidence in managing commonly experienced behaviors in inclusive classrooms were influenced by teachers' efficacy and perception of school climate. The investigation of teachers in regular preschools produced by Sun (2017) fingered out that school climate not only had a direct effect, but also an indirect effect on attitude towards inclusion through teacher self-efficacy (the mediating variable). Wilson *et al.* (2020) found self-efficacy acted mediating role between teachers' perceptions of the school climate and reported inclusive behaviour. More precisely,

instructional strategies efficacy significantly mediated the relationship between school climate perceptions and reported behaviour.

Society as a whole wish for physically and emotionally healthy individuals for progressing in various socio-economic and educational realms. In developing countries such as Pakistan, 50 percent of the population comprises children and thus the welfare of this population is considerably significant for the well-being and prosperity of society (Hameed and Manzoor, 2019). Behavioral disorders, particularly emotional disorders, are common problems that cause many troubles for children and their families across the globe and particularly in developing countries. It is, therefore, crucial to take some measures to cater children with emotional and behavioral disorders (Anna and Angharad, 2021). There are a multitude of behavioral problems including short attention spans, low self-confidence, lack of social adjustment, along with communication difficulties within the social circle. Most complaints and behavioral instabilities are the outcomes of overlooking the delicate period of childhood and a dearth of precise regulation during the developmental stages (Anuruddhika, 2018). The inception of many behavioral difficulties is during the kindergarten age and they affect the further stages of development. If these children are not catered to, then there is a great possibility of severe behavioral disorders and social maladjustments. One way to handle this undeniable problem is to include them in a regular non-inclusive classroom setup. Inclusive education is the best way to solve this issue as inclusion discourages exclusion (Gupta et al., 2017).

Inclusive education is based on the notion of societal impartiality; where all learners are permitted the same right of access to every learning opportunity, regardless of disability. As Cassidy (2011) states, educators all over the world are now raising their voices for disabled children to be integrated into regular non-inclusive classroom settings, but simply raising one's voice does not assure that the policy is accepted by classroom teachers. Research studies have shown that the attitude of teachers is the biggest hurdle to the effective execution of inclusive classroom practices (Carrington et al., 2019). The drive behind this research study is that there is a need to study teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education as the assertiveness of teachers toward the idea of an inclusive classroom can be vital for catering to and accepting diversity. Kazmi et al. (2021) also argue that instructors' self-efficacy is important to enhancing student learning and creating a positive learning environment. Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as "one's capabilities to prepare and execute the actions necessary to manage possible conditions." In this regard, the role of self-efficacy is also studied as it can help to promote inclusion.

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