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Research Article

EFFECT OF INTERVENTION PROGRAMME ON TEACHERS' AWARENESS AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN NAGALAND

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed in understanding the level of awareness and attitude of teachers towards Children with Special Needs and also to check the effectiveness of Intervention Programme on enhancing awareness and attitude of teachers. The study consisted of Phase I (Pre intervention) which used purposive sampling method to collect data from 48 teacher participants working in Inclusive schools in Nagaland, India. Awareness Questionnaire developed by the researcher and 'Teacher Attitude towards Inclusive Education' Kern (2006) were administered to the participants. In Phase II (Post Intervention), a quasi experimental research design, the participants were purposively selected based on the results of Phase I. 11 participants were selected here and an Intervention Programme was administered in the form of a training programme. Post-test was conducted in Phase II to check the effectiveness of the Intervention Programme. Wilcoxon signed rank test was used as a statistical tool to analyse the result and it was revealed that the Intervention Programme played a role in enhancing the awareness of the participants showing 0.01 significant level whereas for attitude it was not found to be significant. The study further highlighted the need for providing training in preparing teachers with skills and knowledge and also in enhancing their attitude.

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INTRODUCTION

Every child is special and unique; they have different capabilities and strength. They learn differently at their own pace and can strive accordingly. The term "Special" according to Oxford dictionary refers to "different from what is usual" it refers to being divergent in a unique way. For those people who require special needs or considered "special" due to certain specification are therefore not to be misunderstood as abnormal or displaced people. Children with Special Needs have long been discriminated deprived of various opportunities and being unaccepted in the society. The mind-set of the public is attached with misconceptions and stigmatisation, showing unfavourable attitude.

Children with Special Needs refer to those who have disadvantages in sensory, physical and intellectual capabilities and who requires early intervention, special education services or specialized services and support (NCERT, 2014). According to International Standard Classification of Education (UNESCO, 2011) this includes people with disadvantages in physical, behavioural, intellectual, emotional and social capacities. The World Health Organization (WHO, 1980) also defined Disability as restriction or inability to perform

activities in the manner or within the range which is normal for a human being as a result of impairment (temporary or permanent loss or an abnormality in physiological or psychological functioning). Thus any child who faces barrier to learning, development and participation and who require special support system are known as children with special needs.

Over the years however the ideology of disabilities has changed. With emergence in educational and social development, various international policies have put forwarded and acknowledged the universalization of education for all and initiated in creating an inclusive society. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008), World Declaration of Education for All (1990), UNESCO Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994) all emphasises on the right of education and adoption of principles of inclusive education. The Government of India also committed to the goal of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) therefore administered Constitutional (86th Amendment) Act, a fundamental right which provides free and compulsory education between 6-14 years old, which also incorporates education for those Children with Special Needs (CWSN). The most distinct legislation for special education in India is the

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Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 which have increased disabilities from the existing 7 (Persons with Disabilities bill, 1995) to 21 disabilities- Autism Spectrum Disorder, Blindness, Cerebral Palsy, Chronic Neurological conditions, Multiple Disabilities including Deafblindness, Hemophilia, Hearing Impairment, Intellectual Disability, Leprosy cured persons, Locomotor Disability, Low-vision, Mental Illness, Muscular Dystrophy, Multiple Sclerosis, Specific Learning Disabilities, Speech & Language Disability, Thalassaemia, Dwarfism, Sickle Cell disease, Acid Attack victim and Parkinson's disease with an aim to ensure empowerment and true inclusion for all. Educational schemes namely Integrated Education of Disabled Children (IEDC) have been administered to provide education opportunities for the disabled children. Also Inclusive Education for Children with Special Needs (CWSN) under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan emerged seeking to eradicate all forms of discrimination and promoting effective participation of CWSN. People with disabilities have now come to the fore front and is provided with platform in educational and other social affairs. Children with special needs are now provided with form of learning which is inclusive in nature known as Inclusive education. The special children here learn with fellow regular peers within regular education system to ensure quality education for all. This approach basically emphasises on changing the system as a whole rather than the child and follows child centred pedagogy. It makes efforts in altering and modifying the educational system, content, structure, curriculum and teaching methodologies to becoming more flexible and collaborative in order to achieve accommodation for all.

Children with Special Needs in Nagaland

Despite provisions given, the special needs children in a nation like India and State like Nagaland are still evidently ignored. According to the 2011 national census the total number of person with disabilities in Nagaland is 29,631. It remains to be seen that there is a wide gap between policy provisions and actual utilization of provisions in Nagaland; people are identified as unaware of their rights and facilities. On the educational side only few private institutions or NGO's in urban area offer educational facilities to children with special needs. On the other hand the rural area has being ignored, far from being aware and in receiving support and help. All in all the State limits itself from having an operational Disability Rehabilitation Centre to cater to the needs of the people with special needs.

The parents, teachers in particular and society in general still lack awareness about special children and their needs and requirement. There are untrained teachers, lack of progress for action plan, lack of identification and assessment and most importantly attitudinal barrier. As a State, there is absence of rehabilitation and resource centre for preparing teachers with training, providing quality teachers and standard equipment for people with disabilities. However now few prominent associations have emerged like Nagaland Parents' Association for Disabled (NAPAD), Cherry Blossoms Society, ENABLE with a core objective in uplifting the welfare and all round development of Person with Disabilities (PWD) in the state. Nagaland has become one of the few states in stepping forward to bring better provisions for the disabled; however initiatives

are keenly required to reach out to people widely and to break the attitudinal barrier amongst individuals greatly.

Teachers' Role and Attitude towards Children with Special Needs

Social Psychologist describes that individual's attitude are attached with different components in the formation of attitude. This could be stereotypes, prejudice and discriminations which usually leaves a negative impact on others. This form of attitude can be seen towards disabilities as well; people wish to stick to stereotypical beliefs, showing prejudices and form of discrimination in all social, emotional aspect. In 1960's a model call a social model of disability emerged among the disabled people as a result of response to the medical model of disability. The medical model of disability looks in what is wrong with the person and believes that people are disabled by their own impairments. Whereas the social model of disability refers that disability is caused by the way society is organised, it is the society which creates barriers and restriction to life choices for the disabled people. These barriers are not just physical but includes the attitude society creates towards disabled people. Attitude, known as set of beliefs and thoughts are essentially created by society, however they are purely flexible and can be altered, according to psychologists. Therefore, if only this form of attitude is altered or eliminated, disabled people can experience independence, equality and growth in the society and can move for progress in becoming more inclusive in nature.

Teachers are regarded as the key to change education; they play significant role in uplifting and moulding a child. The teachers' attitude towards children with special needs is an important aspect here especially in the education of children with disabilities. One of the reasons for attitudinal barrier is lack of awareness and training among the teachers and because of this it raises problem in successful implementation of inclusion (Kilimo & Hofman, 2014). Other findings also displayed that positive attitude and successful inclusion in schools depends on the training received by the teachers in special needs (Kern, 2006, Hodkinson & Devarakonda, 2011). In addition to this an intriguing research study by Arrah & Swain (2014) highlighted that there is additional stress and anxiety found among teachers who deal with students having special education needs. Basing on the review of literature it distinctly reveals that teacher's negative perception is due to lack of awareness, resources, training and skills in dealing children with disabilities. It not only highlights the need to eradicate negative perceptions but also on sensitizing and equipping teachers with training and skills in dealing children with special needs and inclusion.

Therefore it becomes crucial to check such needs among teachers in Nagaland as well for which the present study intent to explore the responses of teachers and to operate training program, to psycho-educate them thereby enhancing their awareness and attitude. One of the studies mentioned above provided findings on additional stress and anxiety among teachers, this imparts an immense concern as it shows that equipping teachers with information alone is not sufficient but there is a requisite to look into teachers' emotional needs additionally. To which the present study keeps in mind in equipping them with skills for obtaining positive mental wellbeing.

Research Design

The present study consisted of Phase I to assess teachers' awareness and attitude towards Children with Special Need and Inclusive education. Phase II to check the effect of the intervention program on the awareness and attitude of teachers for which the research possessed the following questions:

1. What is the awareness level of the teachers towards Children with Special Needs in Nagaland?
2. What are the attitudes of the teachers towards Inclusive Education in Nagaland?
3. Can an awareness programme enhance the awareness level of teachers about Children with Special needs and special requirements for them?
4. Can an awareness programme change the attitude of teachers towards Inclusive Education?

Phase I: Exploratory Phase

This phase used exploratory research design to assess and understand the awareness of the teachers towards Children with Special needs and also their attitude towards Inclusive Education. The researcher here aimed to explore and discover the responses of the participants as there is lack of studies in this area, for which there has been no hypothesis set in this phase. Purposive sampling method was used to collect data from 48 teacher participants from 9 schools, teaching at pre and primary level Inclusive Schools in Kohima district of Nagaland. The participants were administered questionnaires to assess their awareness and attitude and descriptive statistics was utilized to analyse data obtained.

Procedure

First the level of Awareness part of the Survey questionnaire was given, followed by the questionnaire of 'Teacher Attitude towards Inclusive Education' Kern (2006). There was no time limit given, rapport was built and confidentiality was assured with each of the respondents.

Tools of assessment

1. Appendix I: Demographic details to collect basic and reliable information of the participants. It included name, age, gender, name of school, number of children with special needs, types of children with special needs, support systems provided in the school, educational qualification, training and certification of teachers in Special needs/disabilities, number of years teaching in present school, number of years teaching in total and amount of experience in teaching children with special needs.
2. Appendix II 'Level of Awareness'- Part A: This has been developed by the researcher to check the Awareness level of Teachers towards Children with Special Needs.
3. Appendix III 'Teacher Attitude towards Inclusive Education' Kern (2006) developed by the author consisted of two parts: Part B- teachers are instructed to circle their response on the 4 point Likert scale- SD (Strongly Disagree to SA (Strongly Agree). Part C of the survey consisted of open-ended responses related to the type of training teachers perceive would most benefit them in effectively implementing inclusion, and any other concerns they may hold in regard to teaching students with special

needs in their regular classroom. To establish face validity for the survey, the instrument was reviewed by ten expert reviewers, consisting of certified school psychologists from Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Suggestions were incorporated into revision of the instrument.

Piloting the tools

Before the assessment for Phase I, two participants took part in piloting the Awareness tool. Feedbacks of the participants were taken into consideration thereby added few correction.

Data Analysis

Awareness Level

There are 13 numbers of items, each of the item correctly answered would be given a score of one. This questionnaire is further divided into 3 domains- Special Needs and Types with a maximum score possible of 24, Strategies to teach Children with Special Needs with a maximum score possible of 5 and Policies with a maximum score possible of 20. The maximum score that can be obtained in total is 49. The participants were classified into the higher level, average and low level categories of awareness levels. This was based on calculating the Mean and Standard Deviation and then computing Mean+1 SD

Attitude level

Teacher Attitude Regarding Inclusive Education by Kern Evangeline (2006) have an item of 42, if correctly answered would be given a score of one each. This questionnaire is further divided into 5 domains. Student Variables with a maximum score possible of 40, Peer Support with a maximum score possible of 20, Administrative Support 32 as maximum score possible, Collaboration 36 as maximum score possible and Training with maximum score possible of 40. The maximum score that can be obtained in total is 168. The participants were classified into favourable, neutral and not favourable level categories of attitude levels. This was based on calculating the Mean and Standard Deviation and then computing Mean+1 SD.

Phase II: Quasi Experimental Phase

This phase used quasi experimental research design where the participants were selected based on their response in the Phase I of the study. The participants with low or average level of awareness and unfavourable or neutral attitude level were selected using purposive sampling method to participate in Phase II. Intervention Programme in the form of a training programme was conducted in this phase which consists of Part A: psycho educating the teachers to increase their awareness and attitudes on Children with special Needs and Inclusive Education. And Part B: educating the teachers with techniques and skills to handle children with special needs in classroom environment. Post-test was also conducted towards the end to assess if the intervention programme brought about change in the awareness and attitude of the teachers. Data obtained was analysed using Wilcoxon Signed Rank.

Independent variables

The administration of intervention program for teachers

Dependent variables

- Awareness level of teachers towards Children with Special Needs
- Attitude level of teachers towards Inclusive Education

Hypotheses: The current study used directional hypotheses which stated

1. The intervention program will enhance the awareness of teachers about Children with Special needs.
2. The intervention program will change the attitude of teachers towards Inclusive Education.

Procedure

11 teachers representing 8 schools were identified in Phase II. The researcher administered the intervention programme consisting of 15 modules to the selected teachers in three sessions in the form of a training programme followed by post test to assess the effectiveness of intervention programme.

RESULTS

Phase I (Pre Intervention Phase)

Percentage analyses were done to understand the sample characteristics. The participants predominantly consisted of female teachers 96% and male 4%. The sample comprised of younger age group i.e below 29 years of age covering 50% of the total sample showing 30 as mean age. The participants largely consisted of teachers with Graduate degree qualification 67%. A major 62% of the sample population showed details with no training and workshop and also 96% of total sample without any Certification on Special Needs. The participants were mostly in their mid-range into teaching profession falling between 3-8 years.

Participants' Awareness was assessed with survey questionnaire designed by the researcher. The data was tabulated and the mean and standard deviation was computed for the entire sample i.e 48.

Table 1 Mean and Standard Deviation of Awareness about Children with Special Needs

		Maximum Score Possible	Mean	Standard Deviation
Awareness Scores N= 48	Special Needs And Types	24	10.10	4.67
	Strategies To Each Cwsn	5	3.02	.887
	Policies	20	10.31	4.26
Total		49	23.44	7.37

The table shows the participants scored less than 50% of the maximum score possible, indicating that awareness is at the lower extent. A breakdown of the themes under Awareness is given, it is seen that there is low level of awareness in the Definition and Types of Children with Special Needs. The awareness towards Strategies to teach Children with Special Needs and Policies are seen to be at an average level.

Attitude was also assessed using the Teacher Attitude towards Inclusive Education (Kern, 2006) questionnaire. The data was tabulated and the mean and standard deviation was computed for the entire sample i.e 48.

Table 2 Mean and Standard Deviation of Attitude towards Inclusive Education

		Maximum score possible	Mean	Standard deviation
Attitude Scores N= 48	Student variables	40	27.15	3.13
	Peer support	20	14.40	1.55
	Administrative support	32	22.10	3.1
	Collaboration	36	22.69	2.67
	Training	40	24.73	3.09
Total		168	111.06	8.643

The table shows that participants have scored more than 50% of the maximum score possible. A breakdown of the themes/sub domains under Attitude was given. It is seen that there is a neutral level of attitude towards all the domains. It can be inferred that the participants have certain amount of favorable attitude towards Inclusive Education.

Phase II (Post Intervention Phase)

To test Hypothesis I 'The intervention programme will enhance the awareness of teachers towards Children with Special needs', the 11 participants who were selected for phase II were given the awareness questionnaire after the Intervention Programme again. The mean score of the pre test and post test were compared and Wilcoxon signed rank test was used to analyze data obtained

Table 3 Results of Pretest and Posttest of Awareness towards Children with Special Needs

Awareness towards Children with Special Needs	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Significance
Pre test	11	21.81	4.64	.003**
Post test	11	35.27	4.65	

*p <0.05, **p < 0.01

From the table it can be seen that the mean score for Awareness in pre-test is 21.81 and post-test 35.27 and the result were found to be significant at 0.01 level. The result showed that there was vast change of response of participants from pretest to posttest, thus indicating that the intervention programme played a role in enhancing the awareness of the participants. It can be concluded that hypothesis I has been accepted.

To test Hypothesis II stated 'The intervention programme will change the attitude of teachers towards Inclusive Education', the 11 Participants were given the questionnaire after the Intervention Programme again. The mean score of the pre test and post test were compared and Wilcoxon signed rank test was used to analyze data obtained

Table 4 Results of Pretest and Posttest of Attitude towards Inclusive Education

Attitude towards Inclusive Educaiton	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Significance
Pre test	11	113.27	3.71	.419
Post test	11	111.81	6.38	

From the table it can be seen that the mean score for Attitude in pre-test is 113.27 and post-test 111.81. The result here was not found to be significant. The result does not show change of response of participants from pretest to posttest, thus indicating that the intervention programme may have not help in

enhancing the attitude of the participants. It can be concluded that hypothesis has been rejected’.

DISCUSSION

Awareness

The current study revealed that though the teachers may be working in an inclusive setting and handling special needs children they are not much aware of the different concepts, causes and policies with regard to Disabilities. Based on the pre test result as seen in Table 1, the teachers showed low awareness under the theme Special Needs and Types and on theme Policies. In the current study it was observed that teachers were unfamiliar of the terminologies used to describe special needs children which echoed the studies by Angelopoulou et. al (1994) and Harinath and Sarojini (2000) where they also found that teachers were unaware of the basic understanding regarding children with special needs. One of the teacher participants in the current study even mentioned “*I am hearing the word Children with Special Needs for the first time*”. In addition, the teachers were uninformed of various disability acts as well, similar to Astha & Bharga (2011) findings where teachers were not known of the Person with Disability Act, 1995 when assessed. Under the theme Awareness on the Strategies of Teaching Children with Special Needs, the participants also showed average score. Overall it showed low on awareness among the teachers regarding special needs.

However, with the introduction of the intervention programme in Phase II it showed vast change in the response of the participants. As seen in Table 3, there were increase of Awareness under all the themes and the result showed significant at 0.01 level indicating that the intervention programme played a role in enhancing the awareness of the participants. Knowledge about role of teachers to meet special needs of the disabled can be improved by organizing awareness program as suggested by Selvakani (2000). Children with Special Needs are perceived with misconception mainly due to poor awareness and negligence. However, from the results of the current study it was found that conducting training program has the capability of enhancing and changing the awareness of the people. With this result, the current study concluded that hypothesis I ‘the intervention programme will enhance the awareness of teachers about Children with Special Needs’ has been accepted.

In the State Nagaland various associations has emerged in recent years and initiated in conducting awareness programmes and workshops for both teachers and parents. They have contributed greatly in mainstreaming and supporting people with disabilities. However these initiatives may have not been found to be much effective, mainly due to short duration program and limited areas concentrated. Pre and in service training in the State on the areas of Special needs/disabilities is also limited, in fact teachers are not exposed to formal training on areas like Disabilities, Inclusive education, learning strategies and skills in teaching special needs children. To say the least teachers working in private setups are not at all well exposed to trainings or programs in such areas. Various policies and schemes provided for the disabled people in Nagaland are still made unaware not to mention poor implementation of provisions. One of the teacher participant

during training programme in the current study even commented on the critical need of formulating more awareness programs and workshops in the future for teachers working in private setups.

Attitude

The participants in the present study displayed neutral level of attitude towards Inclusive education. As the participants are working in inclusive settings, they are exposed to environment consisting of mild to moderate children with special needs, thus perhaps contributing to certain amount of favorable attitude towards inclusion. Supported with studies by Kalyva, Gojkovic & Tsakiris (2007) where they found that teachers with experience tend to have slightly negative attitude towards inclusion. The Attitude questionnaire used in the present study was divided into five themes- Student Variables, Peer Support, Administrative Support, Collaboration and Training. Basing on the pre test result, the participants showed neutral attitude towards all these areas.

The theme Student Variables refers to knowledge of different types of Special Needs. This domain is considered one of the important factors in influencing the attitude. Teacher’s attitude is strongly influenced by the nature and severity of the disabling condition Al-Zyoudi (2006). Therefore being aware of student variables may help in instilling positive perception. For an inclusion setup to work successfully teachers require each other constant support and encouragement. Studies by Walker (2012) and Desiree & Fakudze (2014) also revealed that Peer Support plays a core role for successful implementation of inclusion and in establishing positive attitude among teachers. This can be concluded that emphasis on Peer support needs to be made for a rewarding achievement for inclusion. In the current study, it was observed that the Administrative Support varied from school to school. The schools though functioning as inclusive in nature yet they lack infrastructure, facilities and awareness with regard to inclusion. One of the administrators with a keen, confuse and curious mind ask the researcher “*if inclusive education actually works for special needs children*”. This highlights the condition and status of administrators, decision makers lacking awareness and confused with the implementation of Inclusion thus presenting the need of sensitizing administrators in this area. Collaboration refers to teachers working together with other specialist or professionals. There needs to be a collaborative work among the teachers along with other specialist like psychologist, special educators, speech therapist, and occupational therapist etc. for achieving equal contribution, shared responsibilities and successfully implementation. On the other hand Training which refers to preparedness of educational background plays a crucial role in developing positive attitude among teachers. Most of the teachers were ignorant of the trainings they themselves required and the need for the functioning of inclusive education. Thereby it can be seen that the training component is a crucial need of the hour believing that it would enhance favorable attitude towards the implementation and functioning of Inclusion among the teachers.

From the result of the post test, the attitude of participants showed no change or difference after the intervention programme concluding that hypothesis II ‘the intervention

programme will change the attitude of teachers towards Inclusive Education' has been rejected. This could be because the five domains presented in the Attitude questionnaire (Kern, 2006) in the current study are such that it would remain unchangeable as it seeks for factual information and also there was barely a gap duration provided between the two tests conducted which could be one of the study's limitations. However the researcher during the occurrence of the intervention program received various feedbacks through group discussion and from participant's reflective reports. One of the participants mentioned "though I am working in an Inclusive school, I am attending training on Inclusive Education for the first time", suggesting lack of training amongst teachers. In conversation with one of the administrators of the school, the administrator commented that "it is an eye opener" for them having to be introduced to such crucial yet neglected part of the education (Inclusive Education). The teacher participants further mentioned about the need of giving awareness not only to teachers but to parents and sensitizing students about children with special needs/ disabilities. One of the teacher participants in a very concern and distinctive manner mentioned how people in general call their school as "pagala school" (mad school) as they have students with special needs. Such is the perception of the society, thus the teacher participants in the current study strongly voiced out to sensitize the public including the parents.

Insufficient resources and lack of training on special needs students' leads to additional stress and anxiety according to a study found by Arrah & Swain (2014). Therefore the researcher in the current study also highlighted Empathy and Coping with Stress skill in the intervention programme with an aim in creating understanding, tolerance and empathy towards students with special needs in the classroom and also to equip the teachers with skills for thriving and coping. The researcher observed that during this skill building training the aura of the room transformed completely, every participant was remarkably engaged into the activities and was being alleviated through the various individual and group exercises conducted. One of the teachers specified "having to do this exercise I felt happy, I was able to share my struggle". It can be concluded that there is a need in making effort and action plans in not just equipping teachers with information but also to look into their emotional and mental wellbeing.

CONCLUSION

From the results of the current study it revealed that teachers in particular have poor knowledge regarding children with special needs, also inadequate attitude towards Inclusive Education. As a State it lacks facilities, services, sensitizations, implementation and functioning of policies. The 19th Joint review Mission state report SSA (2014) also mentions how training and sensitization of teachers in Nagaland is a challenge due to lack of state based training institution, trained professionals, materials and services. To overcome the system of exclusion and to break the chain of stigmatization a simple knowledge on the different types of disabilities is not enough. What is also important and needed is a profound change in the way we think, feel and behave. Dapudong (2014) in his study found that teachers have neutral attitude towards Inclusion however they are not fully aware of the background and is unprepared in dealing with the environment, which echoes the

condition of teachers in the present study. Therefore the current study suggests intimate concern and urgency in conducting workshops and training for teachers to enhance skill, knowledge and attitude towards Special Needs. The study reveals significant implications on the level of policy and practice, also apart from teachers it displayed the need of sensitizing students, parents and administrators to eliminate misconception and to work on achieving decent inclusive learning environment. The researcher distinctively highlights the need of looking into the teacher's emotional and mental wellbeing as well for complementing positive mental health. With the training module developed in the current study, it suggest for introducing teacher training programme with an aim to train and equip teachers in identifying and handling Children with Special Needs and also to the new concept of Inclusive Education in the education field in Nagaland.

Negative attitude existing in the society and especially among teachers, only create a hindrance and barrier for successful implementation of inclusion. Therefore it brings to notice the importance of creating right type of attitude along with awareness.

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