Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra0412 ISSN: 2277–7741

International Journal of

Asian Economic Light (JAEL) – Peer Reviewed Journal

SJIF Impact Factor (2025): 8.579 Volume: 13 | Issue: 2 | February 2025

ATTITUDE OF TEACHERS TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND AVAILABLE FACILITIES FOR *DIVYANG* STUDENTS

Dr. Madhu Sudan Murasingh[1], Dr. Sushil Kumar Tiwari[2], Bharti Kumari[3], Dr. Anuradha Mishra[4], Dr. Bhardwaj Shukla[5]

[1]*Assistant Professor, Department of Education, MBB College, Agartala*

[2]*Associate Professor, Department of Teacher Education, NCERT, New Delhi*

[3]*Ex M. Ed. Scholar, Jamshedpur Women's University*

[4]*Assistant Professor, Jamshedpur Women's University*

[5]*Assistant Professor, School of Open Learning, University of Delhi*

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.36713/epra20263

DOI No: 10.36713/epra20263

ABSTRACT

Present article reveals the teachers' attitude on inclusive education as well as its status as observed by the teachers. The study was conducted on 100 teachers of Jamshedpur city of Jharkhand among which 50 were from elementary level schools while 50 from secondary level. Following a mixed method approach, investigator used the attitude scale for teachers developed by Tiwari and Bajpai (2022) and a self-constructed checklist to explore the status. Surprisingly, it was found that a significant number of teachers were neutral towards inclusion of Divyang (with any form of recognised disability) students, although worldwide educational policies or even, National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 of India strongly recommends for it. It was also found that although, facilities for Divyang students are available at the schools but a very few are setting the standards as defined by the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) and in the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016. Study includes some future possibilities and suggestions for the concerned authorities to build a harmonious school environment for Divyang students.

KEYWORDS- *Inclusive education, attitude, Divyang students, mixed method approach*

PREAMBLE

The inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom has been a major topic of discussion for many years. The imperative of inclusive education is that all students are part of the school community, regardless of their strengths and weaknesses. These students deserve full access to all the resources and social connections that are available in the general education classroom. In India, inclusion of caste based marginalised groups, like Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Class (OBC) and Economically Weaker Section (EWS), receive adequate safeguards and opportunities constitutionally. Gender based inclusion also focused by the central and state governments through various schemes and scholarships. Class based inclusion is somehow tackled when central government introduced EWS category for providing them equal opportunities. Race based discrimination is not so common in India like western countries but among all these categorizations, commonly known and universally accepted 'disability' community is integral part of inclusion policy. 'Persons with disability' are also known as 'variably' or 'differently abled'.

The Word "Divyang"

Person with disability was termed as *Divyang* in India since 2016. Sharma (2016) states about the term 'disability' that it was accepted by United Nations but in India '*Divyang*' is being used in place of earlier used terms like 'Apang' or 'Viklang'. The term was coined by Indian Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi (Venugopal, 2015). *Divyang* is made up of two words- 'Divya' and 'Ang' and literally meant as 'Divine Body' which is more promising towards the idea of inclusion and a respectful word for a person with disability.

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Journey of Inclusion

Tiwari and Masih (2019) explained that earlier special education was a different area and *Divyang* students were segregated with different schools, taught by a different class of teachers, known as special teachers. Then, educationists rightly thought about this separation that why these children are not allowed to study in the same school with general children? Is it not a sort of injustice to them? Then, the concept of integrated education came in force and they are allowed in the schools of general students and extra support was there for them, if needed but far from "equally valued" notion of the classroom. Today's approach of inclusion, i.e., catering their individual needs with dignity and respect in the same classroom prevailed over the two. Now, achieving the true inclusion in classroom is still a multidimensional task and worldwide educational policies recommends it time and again.

Sustainable development goal (SDG) 4 calls for quality education and the commitment states to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" till 2030 (UNESCO, 2023). Similarly, true inclusion sought in India by its visionary document of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 also. Particularly, for *Divyang* students, it emphasises as, "One-on-one teachers and tutors, peer tutoring, open schooling, appropriate infrastructure, and suitable technological interventions to ensure access can be particularly effective for certain children with disabilities" (Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, 2020, para 6.5, p. 58). Inclusion of *Divyang* students in formal education is an indispensable part of the educational system, a progressive approach and need of the hour.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have been conducted to explore teachers' attitudes towards *Divyang* students with disabilities. For example, Clark et al. (1997) concluded that mainstream education is often limited to only reduced segregation rather than being fully inclusive. Mukhopadhyay and Sharma (1990), while identifying teaching competencies for integrated education of students with disabilities, found that teachers had a positive attitude towards equal educational opportunities for children with disabilities. A survey conducted by the US weekly educational magazine 'Education Week' found that only 30 percent of general education teachers "strongly" feel that they can successfully teach students with learning disabilities and only 50 percent believe that such students can reach grade-level standards. It is clear that most teachers are unaware of how to effectively implement inclusive education, so that proper development of children with disabilities is possible along with normal children (Mitchell, 2021).

Furthermore, Chapter III of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016 of the Government of India has three parts under the heading Education specifies provisions regarding duties of educational institutions and specific measures to promote and facilitate inclusive education and adult education. The Act also mandates providing facilities for children with disabilities in educational institutions to promote inclusive education. The research presented here focuses on the teachers' attitude towards inclusive education as well as the necessary facilities for *Divyang* students.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions were identified for the study:

1. What is the attitude of teachers towards inclusive education for *Divyang* students at primary level?
2. What is the attitude of teachers towards inclusive education for *Divyang* students at secondary level?
3. Is there any difference in the attitude of primary and secondary level teachers towards inclusive education for *Divyang* students?
4. What facilities are available for *Divyang* students at elementary level?
5. What facilities are available for *Divyang* students at secondary level?

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The ultimate goal of many schools is to create a classroom with a fair environment to meet the needs of all students. A classroom environment that is the least restrictive is usually most beneficial to all students. Unfortunately, many teachers have not been taught how to teach *Divyang* students, yet they have to include them in their general classroom. *Divyang* students should be given the opportunity to learn to their full potential. Teachers need to know the many different inclusion strategies for them to be most successful in an inclusive classroom. A positive attitude is the key. There is also a need for teachers to understand their needs. For this, it was necessary to know their opinion on the available facilities. Hence, keeping in mind the multi-dimensional objectives, the title of the study was-

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"Attitude of Teachers towards inclusive education and available facilities for *Divyang* students".

STUDY OBJECTIVES

The objectives formulated for the study were-

1. To study the attitude of teachers towards inclusive education for *Divyang* students at primary level.
2. To study the attitude of teachers towards inclusive education for *Divyang* students at secondary level.
3. To compare the attitude towards inclusive education for *Divyang* students between primary and secondary level teachers.
4. To examine the facilities available for *Divyang* students at primary level.
5. To examine the facilities available for *Divyang* students at secondary level.

METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve the objectives of the present study, it was necessary to use both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Hence, mixed method has been used in the present research. Since both quantitative and quantitative methods are different from each other and can be used simultaneously, hence under mixed research, Creswell (2014, pp. 219-220) 'Convergent Parallel Mixed Method' was used. While quantitative study was focused on measuring attitudes towards inclusive education using descriptive survey method, qualitative studies, on the other hand, were basically conducted to measure the facilities available for inclusive education using analytical methodology.

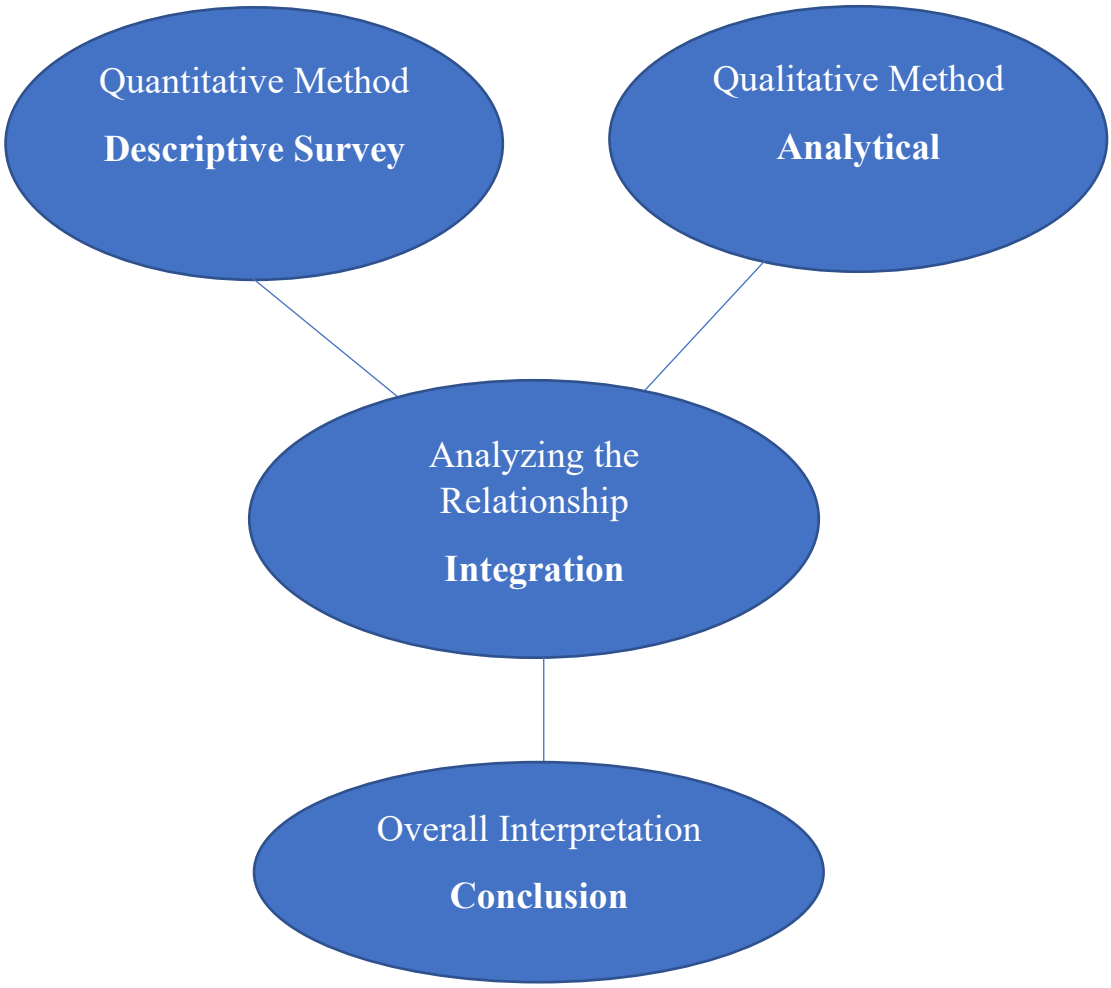


Fig.1: An outline of the Convergent Parallel Mixed Method

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POPULATION AND SAMPLING

All the teachers working at elementary and secondary level in Jamshedpur city were the population of the study. Purposive sampling was used to select 100 teachers. 50 teachers were selected from 5 schools of elementary level and 50 from the secondary level.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

The findings and conclusions of the study are based on teachers' perceptions of inclusive education and achievement improvements. The findings and conclusions of the study are subject to the methodological limitations of quantitative survey method and qualitative analytical method under mixed methodology. The findings and conclusions of the study are based on convenient non-probability sampling of teachers**.**

RESEARCH TOOL

Tool I: Attitude Scale

A close ended attitude scale (Tiwari & Bajpai, 2022) to measure the attitude of teachers was used as the research tool. There are 28 statements in this scale, which have three options- 'agree', 'disagree' and 'neutral'. Statements number 2, 12, 16, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27 and 28 i.e., 12 statements are negative units while the remaining 16 statements are positive units. For every positive statement 3 marks will be given for choosing the agree option, 2 marks for the neutral option and 1 mark for disagreement whereas for every negative statement 1 mark will be given for choosing the agree option, 2 marks for the neutral option and 3 marks for disagreement.

Tool II: Checklist to check the basic amenities in primary and secondary schools

The investigator explored several resources and related websites (such as Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities- DEPwD, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, RCI etc.) to prepare a checklist for checking the basic amenities available in the sample schools. The checklist was prepared by the investigator based on certain required dimensions (keyboard, book holder, page turnover, laptop, large display material, magnifying lens, tape recorder, large chart, power point presentation, visual display panels and lanterns, television display, toilet, wheel chair, ramp etc.). Basically, it was a self-made equipment by the applicant based on 10 different criteria mentioned in RCI related and RPwD Act-2016.

STUDY FINDINGS

The attitude of teachers towards inclusive education for *Divyang* students at both primary and secondary levels was mid-range or average i.e., neither positive nor negative. It means that many teachers are neutral towards the inclusion of *Divyang* students. The results of primary level teachers with respect to the 10 parameters of checklists can be categorised in two categories. First, more than 60% teachers have given positive response on providing inclusive education to Divyang students, availability of sports and recreational activities, physical aids, computer related lab facilities and vocational training assistance. However, in the second category, around 50 % reported that the schools are lacking suitable transport facilities, assistive technology or special equipment facility, basic infrastructure facilities such as ramps and/or lifts and they face few structural barriers such as uneven incline in accessing classrooms, laboratories, libraries and toilets in the school. While, at secondary level more than 60 percent believe that their schools are providing the facilities as per the parameters. However, low percentage was reported on suitable transport facilities, assistive technology or special equipment facility and basic infrastructure facilities.

CONCLUSION

From the qualitative and quantitative parallel studies included in the presented mixed method, it is clear that there is awareness about inclusive education in the city of Jamshedpur, but whether it is a primary level teacher or a secondary level teacher, almost all the teachers lack the knowledge of the basic facts and the basic needs of the Divyang students. This is the reason why the attitude of the teachers of both the levels towards inclusive education are found to be in the middle or average category. When the whole world and the whole educational community are unanimous for inclusive education, then the teachers of the city of Jamshedpur are also expected to have the same sensitivity towards Divyang students. The analytical study using qualitative method along with the descriptive survey of quantitative method corroborate each other's findings that the attitude of secondary level teachers is slightly better than that of primary level teachers in both the cases whether it is a matter of approach towards inclusive education or approach towards availability of facilities for Divyang students. But this difference

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is not very high. The number of secondary level teachers answering 'yes' in all the categories of criteria of attitude towards available facilities is more than the number of primary level teachers answering 'yes' in the same categories. The study found that different schools have common facilities but some schools are struggling even on basic requirements.

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