PARENTAL ATTITUDE TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL

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Abstract: *These children often experience extremes or excesses in terms of physical, mental, or social attributes to such an extent that they require dedicated social and educational services to unlock their maximum potential (Telford and Sawrey). Given their exceptional circumstances, their needs inherently diverge from the norm. Therefore, it becomes an essential national obligation to provide specialized education for differently-abled children. The effectiveness of inclusive education significantly hinges upon the level of support extended by parents of children with disabilities. Occasionally, there is an observed reluctance among certain parents to fully embrace the idea of integrating their children with disabilities into mainstream educational settings. Present research article is intended to study the parental attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level. A sample of 95 parents from Murshidabad District, West Bengal are used to conduct the present investigation. The findings of study revealed that there is significance difference between the male and female parents and have also significance difference in rural and urban parents in their attitude towards inclusive education. 4.The study revealed that urban and male parents showed a positive attitude towards inclusive education. However, although positive, it was only slightly above average. This condition indicates the need for meetings, community, awareness programmes, camps, seminars, workshops, street drama, etc. Inclusive education programmes should seek to positively influence parents and families.*

Key Words: Attitude of parents, Inclusive education, Secondary Level.

1. INTRODUCTION :

 The undeniable reality that individuals vary from one another in their existence cannot be overlooked. These natural differences are inherent, yet many children exhibit significant deviations from the anticipated spectrum of normal or average personality traits. This often leads to their needs being classified as special (Dewsbury et al., 2004; Hughes & Paterson, 1997). Within this context, children with unique or special needs play a critical role in the discourse of equity, particularly in the realm of education. Education stands as the singular tool capable of advancing these children while fostering their integration into society on an equal footing. Such groups of children necessitate distinct care, attention, and tailored measures to facilitate their proper adaptation (Harpur 2012).

These children often experience extremes or excesses in terms of physical, mental, or social attributes to such an extent that they require dedicated social and educational services to unlock their maximum potential (Telford and Sawrey). Given their exceptional circumstances, their needs inherently diverge from the norm. Therefore, it becomes an essential national obligation to provide specialized education for differently-abled children. However, it's worth noting that special education, to a certain extent, reflects a principle of segregation or isolation (Mohanta, 2016). The traditional notion that mixing exceptional children with non-disabled peers impedes the latter's educational progress has evolved into a significant barrier for personal development, creating obstacles for all. Education has the transformative power to emancipate disabled individuals; its ushers in a society that does not marginalize its members (Galbraith, 1996; Colleen Winis, 2013).

Nevertheless, a pertinent query arises regarding the type of education that can effectively cater to the needs of these children. Conventional educational systems prove inadequate in addressing their requirements. Any approach must be implemented with meticulous measures, considering the various challenges inherent in the system. These challenges often take the form of barriers, including beliefs, cultural norms, knowledge gaps, lack of awareness, rejection, insufficient facilities, teaching aids, and attitudes, among others.

In the present day, the term 'Inclusive education' encompasses a wide-reaching concept that encompasses students from diverse backgrounds, linguistic diversity beyond English, and students with disabilities. Inclusive education serves as a driving force for both integration and inclusion, stemming from a commitment to the rights of children and young individuals with special educational needs. This educational paradigm entails reshaping schools into communities where all children can receive education within a harmonized learning environment. The concept of inclusive education received official support at the 'World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality' held in Salamanca, Spain in 1994 and was subsequently reaffirmed at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal in 2000.

In the 21st century, inclusive education stands as a pressing imperative for society, aiming to ensure equal educational opportunities for all children with diverse abilities within their local contexts. The education of children with special needs within mainstream classrooms has ignited substantial global discourse in recent decades. The notion of placing children with special educational requirements in regular schools was once seen as impractical; however, a growing number of countries now facilitate the attendance of children with varying special needs in mainstream education settings.

The movement toward incorporating children with special needs into regular educational environments is commonly referred to as 'inclusion.' Inclusion denotes the process of educating children with disabilities in the same neighbourhood schools and regular classrooms they would attend if they did not have disabilities. This process entails offering the necessary services and support to these children. Inclusive education pertains to the rights of "all children, families, and adults" to engage in environments that embrace diversity as an enriching resource rather than a challenge. Examining past research underscores the significance of parental perspectives in successfully implementing inclusive education. Parents are central stakeholders in the inclusion process and are primarily responsible for selecting the appropriate educational setting for their children. Previous studies have revealed that while many parents are accepting of inclusive education, a considerable portion still considers special schools as preferable for the education of children with disabilities.

Inclusive education has garnered recognition as a pivotal policy for advancing education within minority groups in society. Numerous international legal frameworks, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Dakar Framework for Action: Education for All, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, underscore the imperative of equal educational access for all children. Nations endorsing these frameworks have responded to the call for inclusion by crafting policies that foster the education of all children in regular classrooms. However, this endeavour is multifaceted, involving diverse stakeholders, and successful implementation of inclusive practices demands their collective involvement.

In this context, there is a push for community-driven practices where communities, homes, and schools collaborate harmoniously to effectively execute inclusive education initiatives. This highlights the essential need for strong cooperation between educators and parents to ensure equitable educational access for all. While teachers play a primary role in adopting inclusive practices within classrooms, parents' contributions are equally indispensable for successful inclusive education. Parents, being the primary agents of socialization, possess an intimate understanding of their children's strengths, needs, and challenges. Their lived experiences with their children enable them to offer valuable insights to teachers, thereby enhancing the inclusion of all students in mainstream classrooms.

Given the global advocacy for poverty alleviation and inclusivity, there emerges a necessity to gain a comprehensive global perspective on parental attitudes concerning the implementation of inclusive education.

1.1. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Providing education for children facing challenges is a matter of upholding their rights. Even today in India, numerous children with challenges are deprived of essential education, crucial for their future well-being. Those residing in remote and marginalized areas are particularly excluded from receiving appropriate education. Despite governmental efforts towards universal education, certain gaps persist. Ensuring equal educational opportunities stands as a cornerstone in maximizing enrollment and achieving the goal of universal education.

Inclusive education, a burgeoning approach, seeks to restore equity among children and grant them equitable access to education through integration. The concept of inclusion calls for the integration of children with diverse abilities into mainstream education, transcending their disabilities. This approach has gained traction in recent times, finding acceptance among parents, educators, communities, and other stakeholders to a considerable extent.

Advocates believe that bringing children from various challenging backgrounds into schools fosters an environment conducive to their learning. This environment aids in honing their communication skills, promoting better adjustment within the community and their neighbourhoods. Nonetheless, prejudices and challenges persist alongside policies in India. A significant challenge pertains to attitudes towards inclusion, held by parents, teachers, social workers,

and stakeholders. These attitudes significantly influence the feasibility of implementing inclusive practices for children with challenges.

The principle of 'Inclusion' signifies equitable educational opportunities for children with special needs. It is the collective responsibility of the government, educational institutions, resource personnel, communities, and, importantly, teachers and parents, to ensure accessible education for all, including differently-abled individuals. Shifting social, economic, and political landscapes have also contributed to altering attitudes toward education.

Inclusivity aims to combat discrimination, celebrate diversity, foster participation, and overcome learning barriers. It necessitates transforming the system to accommodate the student, rather than the other way around. Inclusive education holds significance not just for children with special needs but for all students, teachers, and families. It enables diverse children to learn together in a secure environment, facilitating their cognitive, emotional, social, and creative development.

Inclusive education encompasses a range of strategies and processes aimed at realizing the universal right to relevant and quality education. This dynamic approach evolves according to cultural and contextual considerations. It supports an educational setting where children learn alongside each other, cultivating acceptance and learning from one another.

True inclusive education transcends mere physical proximity; it's a systemic reform that shifts the way teachers impart instruction, creating accessible content for all students. It's crucial to address individual educational needs for the approach to succeed. A focus on "Individualized education" underscores the importance of personalized attention. Inclusive education is not about superficial activities but about meaningful engagement that yields academic, functional, and social benefits. It fosters qualities like patience, trust, awareness, and acceptance of diversity. Moreover, it promotes better academic outcomes, enhanced communication skills, and a more positive self-concept.

An inclusive system is not only cost-effective but also provides the best foundation for an inclusive society. It promotes interaction and independence and leads to better social and communication development. Ultimately, inclusive education is about achieving equity for students with disabilities, celebrating differences, and fostering an accessible, just, and vibrant educational environment.

1.2. ISSUES CONCERNING ATTITUDES TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

While the research literature has shed light on numerous success stories related to inclusion (e.g., Ainscow, 1997; Florian & Rouse, 2007), its practical implementation has been hindered by a range of challenges (Evans & Lunt, 2002; Dennis & Launcelot, 2011). These obstacles have been linked to various factors, including conflicting policies, insufficient funding, and resources, entrenched special education practices, and a dearth of research evidence (Forlin, 2001). Furthermore, the deficiency of essential knowledge, skills, and attitudes among educators required to execute these endeavours has posed a significant hindrance (Frosted & Piji, 2007). This discourse delves into several of these pressing concerns:

I. Inadequate State Provision: Collaborative synergy among communities, NGOs, and government entities stands as a pivotal factor in realizing inclusive education. Nonetheless, certain regions exhibit a disheartening lack of governmental prioritization of access to education for students with special needs (Srivastava et al., 2015).

II. Parental Resistance: Some parents are reticent about integrating their children with disabilities into mainstream education, generating an obstacle to inclusive education implementation (Palmer et al., 2001).

III. Limited Community Engagement: Successful inclusive education hinges on robust collaboration between states, governments, NGOs, and local communities. Regrettably, local communities often face resource constraints that impede the actualization of inclusive values (Armstrong et al., 2011).

IV. Resource Scarcity: The dearth of appropriate resources, encompassing financial and human assets, is frequently identified as a critical hurdle impeding the realization of inclusive education in practice (Singalet et al., 2011).

V. Structural Challenges: Insufficiently sound and positive structural arrangements within schools, such as classroom layouts, student group dynamics, teacher roles, and student-teacher interactions, can pose formidable challenges to inclusive education (Mahanta et al., 2016).

VI. Recognition Gap: The absence of acknowledgment for individuals experiencing disability fundamentally undermines the success of inclusive education. A scarcity of consultants committed to listening to the perspectives of those with disabilities further compounds the challenges of implementation (Mahanta et al., 2016).

VII. Negative Teacher Attitudes: Teachers wield a significant influence over the inclusion of children with disabilities. Negative attitudes among educators can serve as substantial impediments to successful inclusive education, often stemming from feelings of inadequacy in knowledge and confidence (Frostad & Piji, 2007).

VIII. Insufficient Teacher Training: Many educators lack adequate training to teach children with disabilities due to the dearth of comprehensive training programs (Jung, 2007; Kim, 2011; Novick & Salomon, 2017).

IX. Social Stigmas: Societal prejudices and negative attitudes towards disability, often rooted in religious and cultural beliefs, pose formidable obstacles to inclusion (Armstrong et al., 2011).

X. Shortage of Educational Resources: Inclusive education extends its welcome to all children, regardless of diverse needs. However, fulfilling the needs of all students necessitates essential resources for learning within a shared classroom, contingent also on the economic landscape of the nation. The dearth of necessary materials emerges as a significant challenge in the proper implementation of inclusion (Singalet et al., 2011).

XI. Transportation Impediments: Adequate transportation stands as a pivotal feature of an inclusive environment. The absence of such provisions may deprive children with disabilities of dignified and equitable access to education, thereby emerging as a substantial obstacle to the realization of inclusive education (Mahanta et al., 2016).

XII. Policy Hurdles: Policies can, at times, pose barriers to inclusive education. Certain policies may introduce contradictions within inclusive settings—such as discriminatory policies barring children with disabilities from attending school or policies that tether inclusiveness to resource availability. Policies divergent from mainstream education or targeted at marginalized groups further impede the effective implementation of inclusive education (Srivastava, 2015).

XIII. Government Disregard: Instances emerge where governments exhibit indifference toward providing education for children with disabilities, outsourcing the responsibility to non-governmental organizations (Srivastava et al., 2015).

XIV. Misconception of the Concept: Frequently, misconceptions cloud the understanding of inclusive education. The absence of comprehension regarding the social construction of disability emerges as a substantial obstacle (Armstrong, 2005).

To usher in the reality of inclusion, it is imperative to surmount these barriers through the cultivation of an inclusive culture. This entails deploying resources, establishing appropriate infrastructural setups, spearheading cultural transformations, adopting models of full inclusion, enhancing teacher training, and embracing individualized educational designs each of these measures contributes to the effective implementation of inclusive education (Singalet et al., 2011; Srivastava et al., 2015; Mahanta et al., 2016).

1.3. JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

Inclusive education is more a necessity than an option; considering the huge population of disabled children in West Bengal, India, education of children with disabilities needs to happen only in special schools with available resources. If a child is part of a normal school, he/she will develop the feeling of being accepted. The teacher, as a teacher of all children, including the disabled, can promote a positive attitude in society, which would help the child get recognition in society, and the child will learn to adjust to the work situation. The parents, too, should have a positive attitude towards it and send their child to an inclusive educational setting.

Parents' positive attitude is considered as an important prerequisite for the successful inclusion of children with special needs in mainstream classrooms. The attitude of parents is a complex issue as it varies from one parent to another. Some parents are not interested in sending their disabled child to a regular school. This is because, traditionally, children with special needs have been segregated into a separate learning environment.

A large number of works have been done on inclusive education, but the investigator felt that it is the demand of time to study on "Parental attitude towards Inclusive education at secondary level". This study will also helpful to study the following points: 1. The present study will be helpful to know about the attitude of parents of normal children towards inclusive education in the secondary level.

2. The present study will be helpful to know about the attitude of parents of special child towards inclusive education in the secondary level.

3. The present study will be helpful to compare the difference in attitude of parents of normal children with the parents of special children towards inclusive education in the secondary level.

4. The present study will be helpful to compare the attitude of mother with the father of secondary level students towards inclusive education.

It is in this background that the present study has been undertaken to determine whether parents possess a positive attitude or a negative one towards the inclusion of a student with special needs in mainstream schools.

1.4. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

"Parental attitude towards inclusive education at secondary level."

1.5. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

1. To study the attitude of parents towards inclusive education at the secondary level.
2. To study the difference between male and female parents' attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level.

3. To study the difference between urban and rural parents' attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level.

1.6. THE HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY
The null hypothesis of the present study is as follows:
H01. The attitude of parents towards inclusive education at the secondary level will not vary.
H02. There will be no significant difference between male and female parents' attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level.
H03. There will be no significant difference between urban and rural parents' attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level.

1.7. DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY
i) The present study is confined to the parents of the secondary level at Murshidabad district.
ii) The present study is confined to 85 samples only.)

2. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY:
Method of study: For the present study, a descriptive survey method of research has been used.
Population of the Study: All the parents whose children were studied in the Secondary school at Murshidabad district of West Bengal, India was the population of parents in the present study.
Sample of the Study: Eighty-five parents (Male-48 and Female-47) were randomly selected as samples of the present study.
Statistical technique used: The Standard Deviation, Mean, t-test, etc. Statistical techniques were used by the investigator.
Tool used: The investigator used a self-made attitude questionnaire for parents.

3. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF COLLECTED DATA :
This chapter analyses and reports the results of the hypotheses on parental attitude towards inclusive education in the Secondary school at Murshidabad district. The raw data was put into the IBM SPSS for analysis. Objective-wise analysis and interpretation of Collected Data are given below.

Objective 1: To study the attitude of parents towards inclusive education at the secondary level.

H01. The attitude of parents towards inclusive education at the secondary level will not vary.

The study was analysed based on the parental attitude questionnaire towards inclusive education. For that purpose, the percentages of the responses of parents towards inclusive education were calculated. As per the responses of the sample group on the questionnaire, the mean value comes out to be 91, with a standard deviation of 7.62. This implies that a score above 80 shows a highly positive attitude (i.e., highly favourable orientation), scores between 60 to 79 shows a positive attitude (i.e., favourable orientation), scores between 50 to 60 show a neutral attitude (i.e., moderate), scores between 20 to 49 show a negative attitude (i.e., unfavourable) and scores less than 20 show a highly negative attitude (i.e., unfavourable orientation).

Table 3.1
Showing the attitude of parents towards inclusive education at the secondary level based on Gender.

Gender	Numbers	Mean	SD	Range	Skewness
Male	48	83.657	7.11	76	-5.21
Female	47	74.175	9.31	88	-4.13

Table 3.1 shows that the total samples of male parents exhibited a favourable attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level with the mean score being 83.657, SD being 7.11, range being 76.00, and skewness being -.521. On the other hand, the total samples of female parents also showed a favourable attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level (mean=74.175, SD=9.31, range= 88.00 and skewness=-.413). Hence, both male and female parents were found to have a favourable attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level. Therefore, on the basis of the mean score, it can be said that the attitude of parents towards inclusive education at the secondary level will not vary.

Objective 2: To study the difference between male and female parents' attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level.

H0 2. There will be no significant difference between male and female parents' attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level.

Table 3.2

showing the difference between male and female parents' attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level.

Source of Variation	Numbers	Mean	SD	SED	df	t-Value	p- value
Male	48	83.657	7.11				
Female	47	74.175	9.31	1.77	93	5.308**	.0001

** Significant at 0.01 level

The above table no. 3.2 shows the t-value for the difference between male and female parents' attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level. The mean score calculated data revealed that the male parents had a more favourable attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level as compared to the female parents. The calculated t value of 5.308 was found to be higher than the table value at df= 93 at 0.01 level significance. Thus, there existed a statistically significant difference between male and female parents' attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level. Hence, the null hypothesis that "There will be no significant difference between male and female parents' attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level" was not accepted. On the basis of mean scores of the total samples of male parents, it can be said that the male parent exhibited a favourable attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level. Likewise, the female parents do not show as much as favourable attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level.

Objective 3: To study the difference between urban and rural parents' attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level.

H0 3. There will be no significant difference between urban and rural parents' attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level.

Table 3.3

Showing the difference between urban and rural parents' attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level.

Source of Variation	Number of Students	Mean	S.D.	SED	df	t-value	p-value
Urban Parents	44	84.104	6.22				
				1.76	93	5.051**	0.0001
Rural Parents	51	75.201	9.31				

**Significant at .01 level

The above table no. 3.3 shows the t-value for the difference between urban and rural parents' attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level. The mean score of calculated data revealed that the urban parents had a more favourable attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level as compared to the rural parents. The calculated t value of 5.051 was found to be higher than the table value at df= 93 at 0.01 level significance. Thus, there existed a statistically significant difference between urban and rural parents' attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level. Hence, the null hypothesis that "There will be no significant difference between urban and rural parents' attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level" was not accepted. On the basis of mean scores of the total samples of urban parents, it can be said that the urban parent exhibited a favourable attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level. Likewise, the rural parents do not show as much as favourable attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level.

4. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:

1.The total samples of male parents exhibited a favourable attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level. Likewise, the total samples of female parents also showed a favourable attitude towards inclusive education at the

secondary level. Hence, both male and female parents were found to have a favourable attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level.

2.The findings of the study show that the male parents had a more favourable attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level as compared to the female parents. The calculated t value of 5.308 was found to be higher than the table value at df= 83 at 0.01 level significance. Thus, there existed a statistically significant difference between male and female parents' attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level.

3.The findings reveal that the urban parents had a more favourable attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level as compared to the rural parents. The calculated t value of 5.051 was found to be higher than the table value at df= 83 at 0.01 level significance. Thus, there existed a statistically significant difference between urban and rural parents' attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level.

5. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS:

1.One of the foremost aims of this study was to identify factors that contribute to developing more inclusive practices at the secondary level. For the achievement of this goal, it was vital that parents of Murshidabad District have a sound understanding of the inclusive education system and basic knowledge of the minimum needs of children with special needs.

2.The study revealed that the parents of Murshidabad District have only a slightly positive attitude towards inclusive education. This highlights the need for the organization of systematic awareness programmes on disabilities and workshops on different methods of educating children with disabilities for parents by specialists. Such programmes may help develop a favourable attitude towards inclusive education.

3.This study may help the authorities concerned, planners, stakeholders, and teachers to provide inclusive education in schools and create a soothing environment to develop a right and positive attitude towards inclusive education among parents.

4.The study revealed that urban and male parents showed a positive attitude towards inclusive education. However, although positive, it was only slightly above average. This condition indicates the need for meetings, community, awareness programmes, camps, seminars, workshops, street drama, etc. Inclusive education programmes should seek to positively influence parents and families. Therefore, every parent having normal or children with special needs should show a positive attitude towards inclusive education.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The influence of the family on the overall development of the child is three times more powerful than any other institution. Therefore, it is recommended that parents have a positive attitude towards children with special needs and inclusive education.

2. The parents are recommended to collect information as to how to treat the problems of their children to the maximum extent possible and how to educate them.

3. Parents should remove fear and anxiety and shed their feelings of guilt and shame. They should stand up with their child and provide every possible help.

4. Meetings, community awareness programmes, camps, seminars, workshops, street drama, etc., should be organised to create and develop awareness among parents about inclusive education. These can develop a positive attitude towards inclusion.

7. CONCLUSION : In the present study, an attempt has been made to study the Parental attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level. However, this study may have its own limitations as it did not cover all factors influencing the Parental attitude towards inclusive education at the secondary level. Hence, the future research scholar may take up the following research work. Further research will be suggested to investigate what socio-cultural and religious factors significantly influence and drive the Parental attitude towards inclusive education. Future researchers can investigate the factors that challenge the effective implementation of inclusive education in West Bengal. Future research may involve work on the primary school, higher secondary school, and college students' parental attitudes towards inclusive education.

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