

Review Article

Attitudes of Teachers towards Inclusive Education in Ethiopia

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Abstract

Many factors continue to affect and regulate the development of inclusive education in Ethiopia. A limited understanding of the concept disability, negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities and a hardened resistance to change are the major barrier impeding inclusive education. In response to this, there is a growing body of literature which argues that the problem should be approached methodically. Therefore, this paper reviews studies on attitudes of regular teachers towards inclusive education. It explores significance of attitudes, factors that might be affect teachers attitudes, teachers' role and training in an inclusive setting and challenges of inclusive education. Teachers' attitudes were found to be influenced by the nature and severity of the disabling condition, training of the teacher, experience, gender and availability of support. Implications from this review suggest the need to the availability of training, adapted curriculum, positive attitudes and utmost responsibility of the teachers.

Key words: Inclusive education; Teachers' attitude; Regular teachers; Regular class

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is a process of enabling *all* children to learn and participate effectively within mainstream school systems. It does not segregate children who have different abilities or needs. This, in other words, is to indicate the shift of thinking from an unnatural segregated setting toward supporting inclusive schools. In Ethiopia, the movement towards inclusive education continues on the assumption that teachers are willing to admit students within the regular classes and be responsible for meeting their needs. However, negative attitudes and misconceptions have begun to be reflected in a researches conducted in some schools.

Etenesh (2000), for example, found that most teachers reject the admission of students with disabilities into their schools. The same source indicates that teachers also refuse the placement of students with disability in their classes with the notion that this could be unrewarding and burdensome. The rejection is stronger with those children with severe disabilities than those with less severe disabilities are. On the other hand, a growing body of research, like (Wood, 1992; as cited by abate 2001) refutes claiming that perceptions and attitudes of teachers are gradually improving in a positive direction in inclusive educational setting. Whatever the case may be, attitudes of teachers toward

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inclusive education must be given the due attention it deserves if inclusive education is to be favored and practiced as educational modality.

METHODOLOGY

Systematic literature review was conducted for most articles published pertinent to inclusive education from 1997-2010. The objective is to bring together scientific papers on the topic, describe the content, summarize it, and identify gaps for further research. Altogether, more than 12 sources, which were relevant to inclusive education, were searched. The data was collected between 1995 and 2007 from, Journals of Psychology; Journal of Special Needs Education, unpublished report, unpublished master thesis conference documents, and electronic databases - Eric. In the search, no restrictions were applied in terms of age, country, disability group, gender, economic characteristics and outcome measures. Because, the main purpose of this review was to focus on established findings on inclusive education, only papers that included the phenomena were selected. A geographical filter was important to expose the situation in Ethiopia and hence local samples were included largely.

As the data focused on very different research types within the topic- both qualitative and quantitative descriptions, it was not possible to determine a statistical meta-analysis. Instead, results were analyzed using content analysis. Some of the available research even has not been published. The study can, therefore, not make any assumptions about possible bias within individual research papers.

Inclusive Education

The growing in public awareness, the achievement in the technological advancement and the improved legislation

in some countries have opened the way for better provision of education to children with disabilities (Moore, 1996; as cited in Abebe, 2001). The issues of inclusive education and its implication for education have been under scrutiny during the past thirty years. Today, societies have become concerned with ensuring the educational rights for all children in disregarding severity of disabilities. As a result, the integration of students with disabilities into the regular educational setting as regular class students has become the concern of educators, governments, and the society at large (Millward and Dyson, 1995; as cited by Tesfay, 2005).

However, the main challenge with integration/inclusion is that mainstreaming has not been accompanied by changes in the organization of the ordinary school, its curriculum and teaching and learning strategies (UNESCO, 2005; as cited by Tilahun, 2007). This lack of organization change has proved to be one of the major barriers to implementation of inclusive policies.

Incorporating inclusive education as a guiding practice typically requires change in education systems, and this change process is frequently faced with several challenges as mentioned above. Inclusive education involves important shifts and changes at the system as well as societal level (UNESCO, 2005; as cited by Tilahun, 2007). Therefore, the move toward inclusive education is not simply a technical or organizational change but also a movement with clear philosophy. In order for inclusive education to be implemented effectively, countries need to define a set of inclusive principles together with practical ideas to guide the transition towards policies addressing inclusive education in education

Recent reports of successful trends of inclusive education have been reported

from developing countries (UNESCO, 1998&1999; as cited in Tirussew, 1999). In Ethiopia, pockets of successful inclusive education trails with children having visual impairment and mental retardation in Kokebe Tseba primary School Gilnesh and Tibebe, (1999) and German Church Primary school Dangne, (2000) as cited in Tirussew, (1999) in Addis Abeba reported respectively. Furthermore, a study conducted on blind students integrated in Sebeta School showed positive experience on the part of the teachers, sighted students as well as blind students. However, shortage of adapted material, inconvenient school environment and lack of back-up support were considered as obstacles encountered in the course of their education. (Teferi, 1996; as cited by Tirussew1999).

Many factors continue to affect and regulate the development of inclusive education in Ethiopia. One of the determinant factors refers to the attitude of the community toward persons with disabilities and inclusive education. Among others, a limited understanding of the concept disability, negative attitude towards persons with disabilities and a hardened resistance to change are the major barrier impeding inclusive education. (IDDC, 1998; as cited by Tirussew 1999). Of particular concern is the fact that teachers' attitudes are seen as the decisive factors for successful inclusion. As mentioned earlier, Inclusive education has been based on the assumption that teachers are willing to admit students with disability into regular classes and be responsible for meeting their needs. However, regular classroom teachers do not perceive themselves as having the appropriate training and skills to meet the instructional needs of students with disabilities (Moberg, 1997 cited by Etenesh , 2001). Unfortunately, evaluation studies indicate that teachers do not always have the

support they need to make inclusive education successful.

Significance of Attitude

An attitude is a point of view that some one holds towards an idea or objects in his /her every day life. Any one can develop a positive or negative attitude toward the object or idea. In any case, to do a given task effectively there is a need to have a ppositive attitude toward it. According to Websre and Wood (1995) as cited in Tesfaye (2005) for inclusion to be well perceived by individual with disability and non-disability and by the staff who teach them, certain condition including the existence of positive attitude have to be met. Otherwise, as noted by the same source positive inclusion is unlikely to occur spontaneously in mainstreamed classrooms.

Moreover by emphasizing the impact of attitude on inclusive education Padeliadu and lampropoulou (1997), noted that 'the effectiveness of any program is dependent on the attitudes of the people" Taking part in the implementation. This appears true mainly due to the fact that individual with positive attitudes will be willing to invest their effort depending on how much they positively value the program and how they think it is going to be functional. Therefore, positive attitudes of individuals with disability, none-disabled peers, teachers and administrators contribute to successful implementation of inclusive education.

Teachers' Attitude

Previous research outcomes, in the area of in inclusive education suggests that attitudes play a key role in achieving successful social interaction among teachers and students and win their attention in favor of the required educational modality. According to Padeliadu and Lampropoulou (1997), one of the major arguments that have often been used in the debate about inclusion of

students with special needs has been the attitudes of teachers toward the inclusion with special needs. It further pointed out that teachers attitude have been considered as one of the major factors guaranteeing the success of inclusion of students with special needs. These studies also suggested that attitudes towards inclusion are strongly influenced by the nature of the disabilities and educational problems being presented and, to a lesser extent, by the professional background. Further, when previous research out comes are closely examined, regardless of the fact that confirms the significance of teachers' attitudes for effective inclusion, the available research evidences in the area of teachers attitudes are not consistent. In a focus group discussion and survey undertaken by (Abate2001; Abebe, 2001); it was found that the majority of regular education teachers had a negative attitude toward inclusion. Attitudes, which are largely negative, place limitation on students with special needs and inhibit the responsibility of their success (Tirussew, 1999). Other comparative study by Tesfye (2005) showed that special education teachers tend to have a negative attitude toward inclusion like their mainstream counterparts do.

On the contrary, some research findings have indicated that regular education teachers are becoming more positive toward inclusion (Wood, 1992; as cited by abate 2001). In some cases it has been reported that some regular educators display 'an enthusiastic professional dedicated to the development and implementation of inclusive school practices' Hollow wood, et al. 1994 as cited Padeliadu and Lampropoulou 1997). A similar study conducted in Addis Ababa by Tilahun (2007) revealed that the practices of inclusive education for the student with hearing impairment were found to be satisfactory.

As mentioned earlier, numerous studies have involved teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and the results vary. However, it is possible to say that the majority of the teachers surveyed had strong negative feelings about inclusion. Leyser, Kapperman and Keller (1994) as cited by Mohammed ,(2006) conducted a cross-culture study of teachers' attitudes towards integration in the USA, Germany, Israel, Ghana, Taiwan and the Philippines. Their findings showed that there were differences in attitudes toward integration/inclusion between these countries. Teachers in the USA and Germany had the most positive attitudes. Teachers' attitudes were significantly less positive in Ghana, Philippines, Israel and Taiwan. The reason could probably be due to limited or non-existent training to acquire inclusion competencies; the limited opportunities for inclusion in some of these countries, limited teaching experiences, limited experience with students with special education needs and lack of Laws requiring inclusion.

Studies in Ethiopia, like, Tibebu (1995), Abate (2001) and Tilahun (1991) as cited in Tesfaye (2005) which are small-scale studies (survey- likert type scale), indicates that the majority of teachers, who were participating in inclusive programs, had strong negative feelings about inclusion. The teachers identified several factors that would affect the success of inclusion, such as class size, inadequate resources, lack of adapted curriculum and lack of adequate training.

Factors that Affects Attitudes of Regular Teacher

Research has suggested that teachers' attitudes might be influenced by a number of factors, which are in many ways, interrelated. For example, attitude studies reviewed earlier, appeared to vary according to disabling conditions. In other words, the natures of the disabilities and

educational problems presented have been noted to influence teachers' attitudes. Forlin (1995) as cited in Eavramidis and Brahmnorwich, (2002) found that educators were cautiously accepting of including a child with cognitive disability and were more accepting of children with physical disabilities. The degree of acceptance for inclusion was high for children considered to have mild or moderate disabilities. .

A great deal of research regarding teacher characteristics has sought to determine relationship between those characteristics and attitudes towards children with special needs. Researchers have explored a number of specific teacher variables, such as gender, age, years of teaching experience, grade level, and contact with disabled persons and personality factors, which might influence teachers' acceptance of the inclusion principle.

With regard to gender, studies conducted appears inconsistent; some researchers noted that female teachers had a greater tolerance level for integration and for special needs persons than did male teachers (Aksamit, Morris & Leunberger, 1987; Eichinger, Rizzo & Sirotnik, 1991; Thomas, 1985) as cited by Eavramidis and Brahmnorwich, (2002). On the other hand, research conducted by Abate (2001) confirmed that there is no statistical significant difference in attitudes between male and female regular teachers.

Teaching experience is another factor mentioned in several studies as having an influence on teachers' attitudes. In this case, much of the research conducted seems consistent. For example, as mentioned by Eavramidis and Brahmnorwich(2002) , younger teachers and those with fewer years of experience have been found to be supportive to integration/inclusion than with those more experience.

Another factor that has attracted considerable attention is the knowledge about children with disabilities gained through pre- and in-service training. This was considered as an important factor in improving teachers' attitudes towards the implementation of an inclusive policy. Without a coherent plan for teacher training in the educational needs of children with special needs, attempts to include these children in the mainstream would be difficult (Eavramidis & Brahmnorwich. 2002). In support of the above, a research conducted by Abate (2001) in some schools of Addis Ababa reveals a significant stasical difference between regular teacher who had training in inclusive education and who did not.

Generally, research conducted in some schools of Addis Ababa show a high correlation of teachers' attitudes with factors like availability of support, adapted curriculum, training, materials, and classroom size. In support of the above, Etenesh (2000), experienced 100 students in one class, which makes the teaching learning process more difficult even for the non-disabled children. As a result, she concluded that teachers will not be in a position to attend the individual problem and interested in them. Further, she explained that lack of accessible and flexible curriculum and lack of training as the ultimate challenge in affecting teachers' attitude negatively.

Role of Teachers and Training in Inclusive Education

It is the fact that regular schools and regular classroom environment often fail to accommodate the education needs of many students, especially individual with disability. This is the reason that so many pupils with disabilities do not attend regular schools. Until regular schools have developed capacity to cater to them; it is difficult to argue for inclusion. One of the major challenges to achieve this goal lies

on the changing task of the regular classroom teacher (Steenladd, 1995; as cited in Tilahun, 2007).

As Drew, et al (1994) as cited by Tesfaye (2005), reported that, the regular classroom teacher is responsible for any adaptation that may be necessary for student's success in this environment, consequently, these teachers must have the skills to develop and adapt curricula to meet individual needs. Necessary skills for the regular classroom teachers include an understanding of how a disability affects the ability to learn academic skills or to adapt in social situation. According Abate (2001), it is unrealistic and unfair to expect that the regular class teacher will be able to include children with disability in regular classroom without first receiving adequate training. It through training that teacher could bring the necessary adaptation required to meet special needs of their student. A number of researchers have concluded that successful implementation of inclusion depends largely on the goodwill of educators in addition to the skill they required to have. Teachers with positive attitudes towards inclusion more readily change and adapt the ways they work in order to benefit students with a range of learning needs (Tilahun, 2007).

Specifically, Smith and Merry (1995), have shown that when teachers are not trained in techniques for including children with disability and do not share responsibilities with others, they would not have change of attitudes. In other words when planning and training have not taken place, teachers develops negative attitudes towards inclusion which inurn affects their roles.

To conclude, regular teachers must be provided with the training and resources they need to met children's specific learning and behavioral needs for the successful implementation of inclusion.

Challenges in Inclusive Education

The challenge of inclusive education is to meet the special needs of all children with and without disabilities (Kajubi, 1999; as cited in Tirrussew, 1999). Inclusive education is not a soft process, it requires a lot of struggle and commitment to overcome all types of barriers mainly attitudinal and social (Tirrussew, 1999).

It has been argued that for inclusive education to be meaningful, schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnership with their communities (UNESCO, 1994).

Evaluation of studies indicates that teachers do not always have the support they need to make inclusive education successful. For example, evidence suggests that several institutions of higher education in many places do not have training programs for regular teachers of students with disability and adapted curriculum. Etenesh (2000), specifically suggests that the lack of relevant facilities and materials is a major challenge to the implementation of effective inclusive education in many places. It seems to be the case that the simplest teaching materials that could even be produced locally such as maps, charts and other illustrative devices are not available in educational institutions in many school environments.

As in the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education indicated, a well-structured funding arrangement is desirable for meeting the cost of providing adequate educational services for students with disabilities in inclusive schools.

However, inadequate financial provision remains one to the major obstacle to the implementation of meaningful programs such as inclusive education in many countries. This idea also reflected by Tirussew (1999) as money is a constraint to run inclusive education programs.

Generally, teachers training programs, adapted curriculum, teachers' attitudes, materials and equipments provision and financial sources are among the frontiers of challenge in the implementation of inclusive education. Particularly attitudes of teachers' remains the ultimate challenge since it is influenced by the presence of all other factor mentioned above. For example, when resources and proper training are not available negative results concerning attitudes toward inclusive education are likely to happen. Therefore, for the successful implementation of inclusive education major challenges (like teachers attitude) have to be overcome beforehand.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper is to review the attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education. The analyses of literature review showed evidence of negative as well as positive attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education in different times and places. The inconsistency in the result indicates the need for further study in the area. However, in the research that resulted in the presence of negative attitude of teachers toward inclusive education, indicates the need for intervention to bring about more positive attitude, as long as teachers' attitudes remain critical for successful implementation of inclusive education.

Another conclusion of this review is concerned about factors that affect the attitudes of teachers like ,the nature of disability (which teachers hold negative attitudes to more sever impairments), lack of training, adapted curriculum, availability of support, materials and equipments and

Class size, which are found consistently influencing attitudes of teachers in implementation of inclusive education negatively . It seems reasonable to conclude here that with the provision of more resources and support, flexible and accessible curriculum, pre-service and in-service training; teachers' attitudes could become more positive. Furthermore, Variables like gender and age of experience are found to be inconsistent in this review, which may imply that these variables could not be strong enough to predict teachers' attitude.

Finally, the reviewers of this paper observed that many of the researches use survey –likert scale as their method and only few attempts were made to include other sources of data, such as teacher interviews, focus group discussion and classroom observation, which indicates the inadequacy of measurements and this, might be one of the reasons of inconsistent results.

Implication

This review implies the need for the development of positive attitude towards the successful implementation of inclusive education. Further, the review entails the need to the availability of training, adapted curriculum, resources and utmost responsibility of the teachers for the implementation of inclusive education. Another implication is for professionals, practitioners and policy makers to design programs to intervene negative attitudes and to control factors contributing towards negative attitudes in implementing successful inclusion.

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