

Attitude of Stakeholders towards Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities in Haryana State

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Abstract

Inclusive education for students with disabilities is mandated by the Right to Education Act, 2009 and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. A positive attitude among stakeholders is essential for implementing inclusive education. This paper examines the attitude of various stakeholders towards inclusive education in Haryana. The sample of this study consisted of four types of stakeholders: 27 school heads, 81 classroom teachers, 26 parents, and 17 members of the School Management Committees, all randomly selected from 84 inclusive schools across four districts of the State. A descriptive survey method was employed, utilising a self-constructed 30-item attitude scale for data collection. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics. The results revealed an overall positive attitude of stakeholders towards inclusive education. The members of the School Management Committees exhibited the least favourable attitude compared to other stakeholder groups. Conversely, the parents expressed a more positive outlook than the other categories of stakeholders. Additionally, the findings indicated that female stakeholders had a more positive attitude than their male counterparts. The influence of educational qualifications and age on stakeholders' attitudes was also observed.

Keywords: Attitude, Stakeholders, Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is a strategy aimed at educating students with disabilities along with their non-disabled peers in the least restrictive environment.

This approach has been globally recognised for several reasons. Avramidis *et al.* (n.d.), as cited in Thakur and Thakur (2012), argue

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that, “segregation of any form is morally incorrect.” Exclusion in any context can harm both individuals and society as a whole. Conversely, inclusive education welcomes all individuals, including those who may not fit societal expectations or who may feel out of place in the traditional educational settings. Inclusion benefits everyone (Bala, 2017) by fostering an environment in which all students can progress together.

Another significant reason to support inclusive education is its cost-effectiveness. Wang (2009) noted that inclusion not only serves as a financially efficient measure but also utilises resources effectively. Runswick-Cole (2008) highlighted that children in segregated settings often experience social regression, while those in inclusive environments tend to make progress. Furthermore, Wilson and Michael (2006) found that inclusion can enhance academic achievement for all students and promote acceptance of children with disabilities within the community. Research by Idol (2006) and Brigham *et al.* (2006) indicates that children included in mainstream classrooms exhibit academic improvements.

Socially, inclusion facilitates the development of healthy relationships, socio-emotional skills, early language and communication abilities, literacy skills, and appropriate behaviour, as emphasised by Henninger and Gupta (2014). From the perspective of Anisicow *et al.* (2006), the “human rights” viewpoint is more compelling

than any other argument advocating for meeting the needs of the children with disabilities in inclusive settings. International organisations such as UNESCO (2009), the World Bank (2014), and UNICEF (2015) emphasise that inclusive education benefits society overall, yielding positive returns on social, economic, and political levels.

The views of Indian educationists largely align with those of their Western counterparts. For instance, Jangira (1997) and Singal (2006) supported inclusion as a means to fulfil constitutional obligations regarding education for all, particularly in rural areas. Thakur and Thakur (2012) argued that segregation negatively impacts learners, teachers, and society. Bala (2017) noted that misconceptions about individuals with disabilities often prevail, with a tendency to view those who look physically different from others differently. Regular interaction between disabled and non-disabled individuals is encouraged to counter these myths.

In India, inclusive education was initiated in 2002 as part of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) to promote the universalisation of elementary education. Later, in 2009, another initiative called Inclusive Education for the Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS) was launched to educate students with disabilities who had completed elementary education and wished to pursue secondary education.

This initiative is also a crucial component of the Right to Education Act, 2009 and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. Today, inclusive education is practised at the school level as an integral part of Samagra Shiksha.

Many researchers have explored people's feelings, views, and perceptions regarding individuals with disabilities, as well as their understanding of the concept of disability (WHO, 2011; McLennon, 2012). It is widely recognised that attitude plays a crucial role in determining the success or failure of persons with disabilities in various aspects of life. Ison *et al.* (2010) noted that the public's negative attitude toward individuals with disabilities often arises from ignorance and misconceptions.

A study conducted by Su *et al.* (2020) focused on stakeholders' attitudes toward inclusive education. Their findings revealed that the parents of children with disabilities exhibited the most positive attitudes, while classroom teachers showed the least positive attitudes. Further analysis indicated that the stakeholders' attitudes were influenced by their role position in the education field. When individuals are well-informed about individual differences, disabilities, and inclusive practices, they are more likely to develop a positive attitude toward diverse learners.

Cecelia (2014) found that many students in inclusive schools were

not educated about disabilities, which limited their understanding, acceptance, and empathy for peers with disabilities. Thornicroft *et al.* (2007) explored the impact of negative attitudes and behaviours on children and adults with disabilities and found that these negative perceptions harm the self-esteem of individuals with disabilities, ultimately reducing their participation in the community. Dalal (2006, as cited in Gowramma *et al.* 2018) reported that, "people with physical disabilities often suffer more due to societal prejudices than from the physical conditions they face." The NCERT (2008) survey revealed that the negative attitude towards children with disabilities was still prevalent in society.

Sharma and Deppeler (2005) concluded that negative attitude, poverty, ignorance, and a lack of adequate educational and infrastructural resources pose significant challenges to integrated education in India. In a study by Glazzard (2011), teachers at an inclusive primary school, demonstrated a negative attitude toward students with disabilities. These negative perceptions contributed to strong opposition from parents regarding inclusion, as many viewed it as a problematic practice.

Ross-Hill (2009) found that teachers had a positive attitude towards inclusive education. They also expressed confidence in their ability to teach students with disabilities

in inclusive settings, as they felt inadequately trained to meet those needs. Researchers have discovered that pre-service teachers in India are rarely exposed to inclusive education practices during their training. As a result, they have very limited knowledge of inclusive education (Sharma and Jacob, 2016). This lack of exposure and understanding can lead to a negative attitude toward students with disabilities, which ultimately undermines the principles of inclusive education.

In a study on the attitude of parents regarding the inclusion of children with Down Syndrome in regular schools in Australia, Campbell *et al.* (2003) found that while parents recognised the overall benefits of the inclusive education for both students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers, they further believed that the needs of children with disabilities were better met in special schools.

An NCERT (2020) study on the inclusiveness of schools reveals that inclusive education in India is far from reality. The stakeholders still hold a biased, discriminatory, and stereotypical attitude towards students with disabilities. Many teachers feel incapable and lack confidence when it comes to meeting the needs of these students, often relying on special education teachers for support. Additionally, stakeholders believe that special schools are more suitable for teaching students with disabilities, and many consider inclusion to

be an inadequate setting for their education. The study also indicates that School Management Committees (SMCs) need to take a more active role in the planning and management of inclusive education.

The result of Lemoine *et al.* (2024) study revealed that the enrollment of students with disabilities in inclusive schools of France has doubled during the last 15 years; however, this pattern is not similar everywhere but varies according to the type of disability, educational stage, and teachers' attitudes. In general, in and pre-service teachers held similar attitudes towards students with disabilities, but the attitude of pre-service teachers were more favourable than that of in-service teachers. Zanolini and Viterbori (2022) believe that inclusivity in educational settings promotes overall student well-being. Lindner *et al.* (2023) identify teachers' attitudes as a critical factor in the effective implementation of inclusive education. A lack of positive attitudes toward inclusion is frequently cited as a barrier to its successful execution. Avramidis *et al.* (2019) found that teacher age significantly influences attitudes toward inclusive education, with teachers aged 50 years or older demonstrating more positive attitudes than their younger counterparts. Aggarwal (2024) emphasises the necessity of fostering positive attitudes toward children with disabilities both in the classroom and in broader contexts. Prisiazhniuk *et al.* (2024) regard teachers as key agents in the implementation of inclusive education.

However, negative attitudes of the teachers continue to impede the smooth implementation of inclusive education in many central asian countries.

NEED AND JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STUDY

Inclusive education is a relatively new initiative in India, aimed at providing education to children with disabilities in mainstream neighbourhood schools, supported by various services. The key stakeholders in this process include school heads, teachers, parents, and members of school management committees. It is well-established that no policy or programme can succeed without the support of the individuals involved in its execution. Stakeholders engaged in any programme invest their efforts based on their beliefs and opinions about it. Successful inclusion, in particular, relies on the positive and accepting attitudes of headteachers, teachers, parents, and SMC members towards children with disabilities.

According to Rejecki (1982), attitudes encompass desires, beliefs, feelings, views, opinions, hopes, judgments, and sentiments. This study is crucial because there is a prevailing belief that human behaviour and decisions are shaped by attitudes. The beliefs and attitudes of teachers profoundly affect their classroom teaching and management strategies, which in turn impact students' learning outcomes. A teacher's beliefs about the learning capabilities of students

with disabilities indicate how willing they are to modify teaching methods, the curriculum, and organise the classroom, or even recognise the presence of special educational needs within their class. Similarly, the attitudes of headteachers influence how the philosophy of inclusive education is implemented within the school system. Students with disabilities require special education services, such as aids, accessible classrooms, laboratories, and restrooms, to achieve success. It is the responsibility of the school head to provide these essential facilities, making their positive attitude a prerequisite for successful inclusion. The attitudes of parents and SMC members towards inclusion are also critical, as they play a significant role in this process. Negative attitudes from parents and SMC members can lead to the social marginalisation, teasing, and discrimination of students with disabilities within or outside the school system. Conversely, if these stakeholders hold positive views about inclusive education, they are more likely to support children with disabilities in their homework, social interactions, and efforts to create an accessible school campus.

In light of this, it is vital to examine the attitude of various stakeholders within the educational system of Haryana to gain a comprehensive understanding of their perspectives on inclusive education. Such an examination can lead to recommendations for effective changes in stakeholders' attitudes,

ultimately making inclusive education a successful practice.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS OF

KEY TERMS

- **Attitudes:** In this study, Attitudes are the feelings, beliefs, and opinions of school heads, teachers, parents, and School Management Committee (SMC) members toward inclusive education.
- **Stakeholders:** In this study, stakeholders are school heads, teachers, parents, and members of the School Management Committees (SMC), connected with the implementation of inclusive education in Haryana.
- **Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities:** In this study, inclusive education for children with disabilities refers to an educational practice wherein students with and without disabilities learning together, supported by the special teachers, aids, and accessible facilities.

OBJECTIVE

The study aimed to explore the attitude of school heads, teachers, parents, and members of the school management committees regarding the inclusive education of students with disabilities in Haryana.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions, in particular, guided this study:

- What are the attitudes of school heads, teachers, parents, and

School Management Committee (SMC) members towards inclusive education?

- How do the gender, age, and educational level of stakeholders influence their attitudes toward inclusive education?

METHODOLOGY

Sample

A random sample was drawn using a multistage sampling technique, which involved selecting one district each—Hissar, Faridabad, Jind, and Rohtak—representing the four administrative divisions of Haryana State, which comprises 22 districts. A comprehensive list of all schools within these districts was obtained from the District Education Officer (DEO) and the District Programme Coordinator (DPC). From this list, 21 schools were randomly selected from each district for an in-depth study. The chosen schools were then categorised into educational blocks and divided into two main groups—urban and rural. In total, 84 schools were selected, and a sample consisting of 27 school heads, 81 teachers, 26 parents, and 17 members of the SMC(s) was randomly drawn to assess their attitudes toward inclusive education. Only those participants from 84 schools who were fully willing to take part in the study were included as representatives of the population.

The assessment of stakeholder attitudes was one of the objectives of

the major research project assigned to the first author by the University Grants Commission (UGC), New Delhi. This project among other things, includes an evaluation of accessibility parameters for children with disabilities in 84 schools. Accessibility parameters were examined in all 84 schools, while stakeholder attitudes were measured only in those schools where stakeholders were willing to respond and participate in the study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical procedures were strictly followed in this study. The researchers obtained written consent from all participants and relevant authorities before commencing the research. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, and their participation was entirely voluntary. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process.

Tools for Data Collection

A 30-item attitude scale was developed to investigate the attitudes of stakeholders. Some items were adapted from Khan's (2011) "Scale for Attitude towards the Disabled" and Moline's (n.d.) "Attitude toward Disabled Persons Scale." These adapted items were combined with self-constructed items to make them suitable for the study. In developing the items, suggestions from Edward (1968) and Best and Kahn (2006) were taken into account. Consequently, the items on the attitude scale were framed not as statements of fact but

as expressions of desired behaviour. The items were kept concise, using straightforward vocabulary and avoiding words like "only," "just," and "merely." Additionally, the items referenced the present, avoided double-barreled statements and double negatives, and did not include universal terms such as "all," "always," "none," and "never." The constructed attitude scale was then reviewed by language and subject experts for content validity and clarity. The feedback received from these experts was used to modify the items. Each item offered five response options—strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree. Participants' scores ranged from 0 to 150. Three levels of attitude were identified—a negative attitude (score of 50 or less), a neutral attitude (score of 100 or less), and a positive attitude (score above 100). A higher score on the scale indicates a more positive attitude. The study was conducted from 2018 to 2020. The attitude scale was developed in English, then translated into Hindi and communicated orally in the local dialect, when needed. For illiterate respondents or those unable to fill it properly, the investigator himself or, in some cases, special teachers recorded their responses. The services of special teachers were arranged in sample districts through written approval from the State authorities at Panhkhula. The data collected through the attitude scale were analysed using descriptive statistics.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

In order to examine the attitude of 151 stakeholders towards inclusive education, the researcher(s) prepared a demographic profile of the stakeholders based on their roles, gender, age, and educational level. The details of this demographic profile are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 indicates that a total of 151 stakeholders responded to the attitude scale. Among them, 17 (11.26%) were School Management Committee (SMC) members, 81 (53.64%) were teachers,

27 (17.88%) were head teachers, and 26 (17.22%) were parents. In terms of gender, 96 (63.58%) of the stakeholders were male, while 55 (36.42%) were female.

The age range of teachers and head teachers was from 18 to 58 years, whereas the ages of parents and SMC members were even above 58 years. Nine stakeholders (5.96%) were aged between 18 and 30 years, while 97 stakeholders (64.24%) belonged to the 31 to 45 age group. A moderate number of stakeholders ($n=44$, 29.14%) were aged between 46 and 58 years, and only one

Table 1
Demographic Profile of Stakeholders

S. No.	Stakeholders	Number	Percentage
1.	Role Position		
	School Management Committee (SMC) Member	17	11.26
	Teacher	81	53.64
	Head Teacher	27	17.88
	Parents	26	17.22
	Total	151	100
2.	Gender		
	Male	96	63.58
	Female	55	36.42
3.	Age		
	18–30 Years	9	05.96
	31–45 Years	97	64.24
	46–58 Years	44	29.14
	58–Above	1	0.66
4.	Level of Education		
	Illiterate	1	0.66
	Primary	10	6.62
	Matric	14	9.27
	10+2	16	10.59
	Graduation	26	17.22
	Post-graduation and above	84	55.63

participant (0.66%) was above the age of 58 years.

The educational levels of the participants varied from illiteracy to post-graduation. Only one participant (0.66%) was illiterate, while 10 (6.62%) had completed primary education, 14 (9.27%) had passed their matriculation, 16 (10.59%) had completed 10+2, 26 (17.22%) were graduates, and 84 (55.63%) had post-graduate or higher qualifications.

Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusive Education

Table 2 shows the mean attitude scores of teachers towards Inclusive Education.

Table 2 illustrates that the group of teachers exhibited a 'positive' attitude towards inclusive education, with a mean score of 110.10 ($n=81$) on the attitude scale. Among these teachers, females ($n=29$, mean=111.45)

demonstrated a slightly more positive attitude than their male counterparts ($n=52$, mean=109.35). The age of the teachers, ranged from 18 to 58 years. Younger teachers (aged 18–30 years) had a higher mean score ($n=8$, mean=126.62) as compared to those who were aged 46 to 58 years ($n=19$, mean=109.10). Notably, the group of teachers aged 30 to 45 recorded the lowest mean score ($n=54$, mean=108). Additionally, teachers with an educational background upto 10+2 had the lowest mean score among all sub-categories ($n=2$, mean=107.50).

The positive attitudes and feelings of teachers reflect a new trend in inclusive education. The findings show that teachers are becoming more knowledgeable and aware of the principles of inclusive education. They are willing to adapt their teaching methods, materials, curriculum, and classroom furniture to meet the needs of children with disabilities.

Table 2
Mean Scores of Teachers on the 'Attitude towards Inclusive Education' Scale

S. No.	Stakeholders	Number	Percentage	Mean Score
1.	Role Position			
	Teacher	81	53.64	110.10
2.	Gender			
	Male	52	64.19	109.35
	Female	29	35.81	111.45
3.	Age			
	18–30 Years	8	9.88	126.62
	31–45 Years	54	66.67	108.00
4.	Level of Education			
	10+2	2	2.47	107.50
	Graduation	19	23.46	108.68
	Post-graduation and above	60	74.06	110.63

Teachers appear to be more hopeful about the individuals with disabilities, recognising their abilities and limitations, and are willing to accommodate them accordingly.

Furthermore, the positive attitude of teachers indicates that children with disabilities are viewed not as burdens on the school system, but as an integral part of it. If this trend of positive attitudes among teachers continues, it could lead to increased enrollment and improved retention of students with disabilities within the inclusive education system. This shift indicates the success of ongoing efforts by policymakers and educators to raise awareness among teachers about inclusive education by highlighting the unique strengths and needs of children with disabilities in professional development programmes or in-service trainings. Younger teachers tend to have a more positive attitude towards inclusive education than their older colleagues. This difference suggests that including a course on special and inclusive education in pre-service teacher programmes—something that wasn't offered three or four decades ago—has made a significant impact on the perceptions and opinions of teachers about inclusive education, which among other things, helps in the success of this policy as young teachers would be more collaborative with special teachers and paramedical staff in facilitating inclusive practices. The effect of higher education on

attitudes is evident, as individuals with lower education levels tend to have less positive attitudes compared to those with higher education. This indicates that teachers may be encouraged to continually improve their qualifications, as it affects their attitudes, which, in turn, influences the implementation of inclusive education.

Head Teachers' Attitude towards Inclusive Education

Table 3 shows the mean attitude scores of head teachers towards inclusive education.

Table 3 indicates that a total of 27 head teachers participated in the survey, and they demonstrated a 'positive' attitude towards the implementation of inclusive education. Among the participants, the majority were male ($n=17$, 62.96%), while there were fewer females ($n=10$, 37.04%). The average score of male head teachers ($n=17$, $m=109.59$) was higher than that of their female counterparts ($n=10$, $m=107.40$). The older head teachers ($n=17$, $m=107.29$) had a lower mean score than their less experienced colleagues ($n=17$, $m=111.30$). A significant majority of head teachers ($n=24$, 88.89%) held qualifications equivalent to a post-graduate degree or higher, while only a few of them were graduates ($n=2$, 7.40%). Interestingly, the more highly qualified heads had a lower mean score than those with lower

Table 3
Mean Scores of Head Teachers on the ‘Attitude towards Inclusive Education’ Scale

S. No.	Stakeholders	Number	Percentage	Mean Score
1.	Role Position			
	Head Teacher	27	17.88	108.78
2.	Gender			
	Male	17	62.96	109.59
	Female	10	37.04	107.40
3.	Age			
	18–30 Years	0	0	0
	31–45 Years	10	37.04	111.30
	46–58 Years	17	62.96	107.29
4.	Level of Education			
	10+2	1	03.70	101
	Graduation	2	07.40	127.50
	Post-graduation and above	24	88.89	107.54

educational qualifications, suggesting that they may be less positive about inclusive education.

The positive sentiments expressed by school heads imply that they will be more cooperative when relieving a teacher for in-service training on inclusive education. Furthermore, they will collaborate more effectively with outside agencies to mobilise and pool resources for inclusion. They are also likely to monitor accessibility parameters for children with disabilities while planning or overseeing civil work in the school. The impact of gender, age, and educational qualifications on attitudes towards inclusive education is also evident, and it should be considered by policymakers and educators while designing and implementing a training programme on inclusive education for head teachers.

SMC Members’ Attitude towards Inclusive Education

Table 4 highlights the mean attitude scores of SMC members towards Inclusive Education.

Table 4 reveals that the overall attitude of 17 members of SMCs was borderline positive. This group of School Management Committees (SMCs) consisted of 9 females (52.94%) and 8 males (47.06%). Males ($n=8$, $m=100.50$) revealed a slightly more positive attitude than females ($n=9$, $m=100$). The age of the members ranged from 18 to 58 years and above, with the middle-aged members displaying a relatively more positive attitude as compared to the older and younger members. Interestingly, education levels did not indicate a significant positive impact on their attitude towards inclusive education. The findings further reveal

Table 4
Mean Scores of SMC Members on the 'Attitude towards Inclusive Education' Scale

S. No.	Stakeholders	Number	Percentage	Mean Score
1.	Role Position			
	SMC Member	17	11.26	100.24
2.	Gender			
	Male	8	47.06	100.50
	Female	9	52.94	100
3.	Age			
	18–30 Years	0	0	0
	31–45 Years	15	88.24	100.33
	46–58 Years	1	5.88	102
	Above 58 Years	1	5.88	100
4.	Level of Education			
	Illiterate	0	0	0
	Primary	7	41.18	100.14
	Matric	4	23.53	104.5
	10+2	5	29.41	98.60
	Graduation	1	5.88	92
	Post-graduation and above	0	0	0

that respondents with secondary level school education ($n=5$, $m=98.60$) had a 'neutral' attitude similar to the graduates ($n=1$, $m=92$), while those with primary education ($n=7$, $m=100.14$) and those who passed matric ($n=4$, $m=104.5$) exhibited a 'positive' attitude. Notably, the sole graduate had a lower mean score than both the secondary and matriculate respondents. Additionally, none of the SMC members held a post-graduate degree.

The School Management Committees (SMCs) play a vital role in raising community awareness to facilitate the admission of children with disabilities into local schools. They assist local Anganwadi workers and officials from primary health

centres in the preliminary screening of students with disabilities. SMCs are also responsible for contributing to school infrastructure development plans. When SMC members hold positive views about inclusive education for children with disabilities, the school infrastructure is more likely to be accessible and supportive for all students. This positive attitude helps to ensure compliance with the zero-rejection policy during admissions. Furthermore, the supportive perspective of SMC members positively influences the social acceptance of children with disabilities. The influence of gender, age, and educational levels has implications for policymakers and educators when designing and

executing training programmes for SMC members on inclusive education.

Parents' Attitude towards Inclusive Education

Table 5 provides the mean attitude scores of parents towards Inclusive Education.

Table 5 reveals the overall mean attitude score of 26 parents as well as their respective mean scores in three sub-categories. In aggregate, parents were found to hold a 'positive' attitude towards inclusive education, and between them, mothers ($n=7$, $m=109.86$) had a more positive attitude than fathers ($n=19$, $m=103.37$). Parents in the age group of 45 to 58 years showed a more

positive outlook as compared to other age groups. Strangely, parents possessing a graduate degree and those with only primary education had a more positive attitude than the rest of the members of their group.

The overall positive attitude of parents has a significant impact on the education of children with disabilities. Parents who maintain a positive outlook are more likely to send their children to school rather than keep them at home due to social stigma or fear. This positivity about inclusion highlights the importance of education in their mindsets, even though many parents of children with disabilities are daily wage earners and may be illiterate or have

Table 5
Mean Scores of Parents on the 'Attitude towards Inclusive Education' Scale

S. No.	Stakeholders	Number	Percentage	Mean Score
1.	Role Position			
	Parents	26	17.22	105.11
2.	Gender			
	Male	19	73.08	103.37
	Female	7	26.92	109.86
3.	Age			
	18–30 Years	1	3.85	107.00
	31–45 Years	18	69.23	103.22
	46–58 Years	7	26.92	109.72
	Above 58 Years	0	0	0
4.	Level of Education			
	Illiterate	1	3.85	101.00
	Primary	3	11.54	107.66
	Matric	10	38.46	105.60
	10+2	08	30.77	102.87
	Graduation	4	15.38	107.50
	Post-graduation and above	0	0	0

lower educational qualifications. The results indicate that educated, willing, and optimistic parents are more likely to assist their children in completing homework and seeking better career opportunities after finishing school.

Category-wise Attitude of Stakeholders towards Inclusive Education

Table 6 presents the mean attitude scores of 151 respondents towards inclusive education with particular reference to their role in the school

system. The mean attitude score of all groups ranges from 100.24 to 110.10, indicating that the stakeholders possessed a 'positive' attitude towards inclusive education. Although differences in mean attitude scores were found between different groups of stakeholders, the size of the mean differences was small, suggesting little practical significance.

While comparing specific groups, teachers ($n=81$, $m=110.10$) exhibited the most favourable attitude towards inclusive education, followed by parents ($n=26$, $m=105.11$),

Table 6
Mean Attitude Scores of 151 Stakeholders towards Inclusive Education

S. No.	Stakeholders	Number	Percentage	Mean Score
1.	Role Position			
	SMC Members	17	11.26	100.24
	Teacher	81	53.64	110.10
	Head Teacher	27	17.88	108.78
	Parents	26	17.22	105.11
	Overall	151	100	107.89
2.	Gender			
	Male	96	63.58	107.47
	Female	55	36.42	108.63
3.	Age			
	18–30 Years	09	5.96	124.44
	31–45 Years	97	64.24	106.24
	46–58 Years	44	29.14	108.34
	Above 58 Years	01	0.66	100.00
4.	Level of Education			
	Illiterate	01	0.66	101.00
	Primary	10	6.62	102.40
	Matric	14	9.27	105.28
	10+2	16	10.59	102.00
	Graduation	26	17.22	109.31
	Post-graduation and above	84	55.63	109.75

head teachers ($n=27$, $m=108.78$), and SMC members ($n=17$, $m=100.24$).

In terms of gender, female stakeholders ($n=55$, $m=108.63$) demonstrated a more positive attitude towards inclusive education than their male counterparts ($n=96$, $m=107.47$). This may be attributed to women generally being more caring and emotionally attached to their children's education. Additionally, females, as mothers and nurturing figures, are more likely to attend SMC, Parents and Teachers Association (PTA) meetings, and also participate in training during annual counselling and awareness camps.

Most stakeholders were middle-aged, and collectively, they exhibited higher mean scores that reflected a greater acceptance of inclusive education. Interestingly, stakeholders in the 18–30 age range ($n=9$, $m=124.44$) displayed the highest level of 'positive' attitude towards the inclusive education as compared to all other age groups, indicating a promising future for inclusive education. While the majority of stakeholders had post-graduate qualifications, a small number of them possessed undergraduate degrees, and even fewer among them had education up to 10+2 only. There were 14 stakeholders, having education upto matriculation level and 10 with a primary education; only one stakeholder was illiterate. The mean attitude scores within the educational groups were: illiterates ($m=101$), stakeholders with a primary

level of education ($m=102.40$), matriculates ($m=105.28$), 10+2 ($m=102$), graduates ($m=109.31$), and post-graduates and above (109.75). This reveals that stakeholders with post-graduate and graduate degrees had a highly positive attitude towards inclusive education, while other groups were lagging behind them. Therefore, the results suggest a positive relationship between stakeholders' educational qualifications and their attitudes towards inclusive education. The findings further suggest that educational qualifications influence stakeholders' attitudes.

DISCUSSION

Although stakeholders collectively had a positive attitude towards the inclusive education, the mean attitude scores varied depending on their roles within the school system as well as according to their age, gender, and educational levels. These findings address both the research questions. These findings are in agreement with Su, Guo, and Wang (2020) but contradict earlier research by Cohen (1994), Evans *et al.* (1998), Sharma and Deppeler (2005), NCERT (2008), and Glazzard (2011), which indicated that people had negative attitudes toward inclusive education. Additionally, the current results challenge Bala's (2017) assertion that parents, family members, and the community believe there is no benefit in educating children with disabilities. This study aligns

with Khan's (2011) findings that teachers predominantly have positive attitudes toward inclusive education. This finding has implications for training stakeholders, because training programmes on various aspects of inclusive education can be designed considering the different roles of stakeholders in the overall inclusion process.

The members of the School Management Committee (SMC) are falling behind other stakeholder groups in developing a positive attitude towards inclusive education. This finding has significant implications for inclusive education, as SMC members play a crucial role in this process. They are responsible for identifying and enrolling children with disabilities from their local communities and for ensuring that the necessary instructional and infrastructural facilities are available in schools. Furthermore, members of SMCs are instrumental in the development of annual plans, mobilising local resources, monitoring expenditures and conducting social audits. To foster a more proactive and supportive attitude among SMC members, it is essential to design and execute comprehensive awareness programmes for them. Engaging media to disseminate knowledge about inclusion and sharing success stories of persons with disabilities with SMC members can also play a pivotal role in reshaping their attitudes.

Teachers' positive attitude towards inclusion reflects their knowledge

and skills in educating children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. However, the relatively lower attitude scores among junior basic teachers/primary teachers (who had their educational level up to 10+2 only) are a matter of concern, as primary teachers are the first with whom children with disabilities come into contact after their enrollment. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 places obligations on these teachers to engage these students in speech, art, and sensory therapy, besides facilitating foundational literacy and numeracy during early childhood education. To effectively implement the positive changes envisioned by the NEP 2020, it is imperative to develop and execute strategies which have a bearing on the attitudes of JBT teachers.

Head teachers ranked second in terms of fostering a positive attitude towards inclusive education. Administrative support is crucial for the success of any programme or policy. A head teacher with a positive attitude can facilitate teachers' participation in in-service training, take up initiatives for SMC members and parents, collaborate with other agencies to receive aids and appliances for children with disabilities, submit funding proposals, enhance infrastructure, and ensure better attendance of students with disabilities, along with providing necessary medical and instructional support. Therefore, it is desirable to maintain and upgrade

their awareness about inclusive education through professional development programmes so that their attitude remains always positive towards inclusive education.

Parents also exhibit a positive attitude toward inclusive education, reflecting the progressive nature of parenting in Haryana. Parents are considered the first teachers of a child and are primary stakeholders in their children's education. Parents of children with disabilities have a vital role in inclusive education, and the efforts of teachers may be undermined if parents do not support their children at home. Despite facing numerous challenges, many parents, often from disadvantaged backgrounds, demonstrate motivation and positivity. Their positive attitude may stem from annual training on inclusive education, highlighting the transformative changes occurring in Haryana. The positive attitude of parents has a significant impact on the implementation of inclusive education because, as a part of SMC, they can influence the annual budget, make recommendations for building accessibility, and ensure that special teachers are appointed at each school. Additionally, parents can participate in social campaigns or collaborations with government agencies that enhance the implementation of inclusive education.

The findings of this study have implications for the media, policymakers, rehabilitation professionals, and schools. The

media should highlight the abilities and achievements of persons with disabilities to create a positive image in the public mindset. Policymakers may allocate more funds to provide quality education to students with disabilities by building on positive attitudes. Rehabilitation professionals should instil positivity in schools and help bring out-of-school children with disabilities into mainstream education. The positive attitude of teachers and school administrators can help pool additional resources from the community.

The study's findings should be applied carefully, as it was delimited to stakeholders of children with seven distinct disabilities, ranging from blindness and low vision to mental illness and leprosy-cured. Drawing its sample from inclusive schools across Faridabad, Jind, Hissar, and Rohtak in Haryana, the research lays a foundation for the future exploration. Expanding the scope to include all 21 disabilities recognised in the RPwD Act 2016 could offer a richer understanding. There is also great potential in comparing students from diverse landscapes such as hills, plains, deserts, and forests. Further studies might delve into the impact of early interventions, mental health, academic progress, personal hygiene, and sex education, opening new avenues for meaningful change.

CONCLUSION

It is well recognised that a child's maladjustment is often not due to

their disability itself, but rather due to the emotional stress imposed by societal perceptions and attitudes regarding their abilities or disabilities. For inclusive education to be successful, all stakeholders are required to have a positive attitude. The study highlights the need for continuous efforts to develop and upgrade the awareness of the stakeholders regarding inclusive education according to their role position, as well as to dispel any myths or misconceptions about disability, especially among those teachers who are on the verge of retirement and those who have not enhanced their educational qualifications after 10+2. By fostering a positive attitude in

them towards inclusion, we can better support students with disabilities. If the education system does not embrace students with disabilities positively, then, despite initiatives by the Government of India for all types of students in the mainstream school system, it cannot yield fruitful results for achieving the intended goals.

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