



Effect of Inclusive Education Course on Beliefs, Attitudes and Concerns of Pre-service Teachers Towards Inclusion

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Abstract

With the intention of imparting training to prospective educators from the disciplines of Education, and Special Education, a course, 'Inclusive Education' was offered and trainees were given the opportunity to attend it to identify their limitations and inadequacies to deal with the phenomenon of inclusion in the educational context. The present research intends to investigate the effects of attending the course of Inclusive Education on attitudes, concerns, and beliefs of pre-service teachers from the domains of General and Special Education toward inclusion. The research was descriptive in nature, and the questionnaire consisting of twenty items was used as research design. Keeping in view the literature review, the items were constructed on the basis of attitudes, beliefs, and concerns about Inclusive Education. The instrument was pilot tested on 50 respondents (males and females). The overall Cronbach alpha was 0.73, whereas the reliability for the factor of beliefs was found as 0.64. It was 0.70 for attitudes, and for concerns, it was found as 0.60. The sample of the study was prospective teachers from the domains of General Education and Special Education who attended the course regarding Inclusive Education. The respondents/ prospective teachers were pretested for their attitudes, beliefs, and concerns about inclusion. The duration of course they attended was fifteen weeks. At the end of the course, the respondents were post-tested. The results indicated that the course, as attended by the respondents had significant effects on attitudes, concerns, and beliefs of pre-service educators towards inclusion. The research implications were discussed, and on the basis of research findings, it was recommended that the quality of the existing course outlines of Inclusive Education should be augmented in degree awarding institutions.

Keywords: attitudes, beliefs, concerns, Inclusive Education, prospective teachers, teachers training

1. Introduction

The education of disabled children at educational institutions rather than special schools or correctional facilities is a modern and promising pedagogical approach to the educational process (Prokopenko, Holmberg & Omelyanenko, 2018). Designing learning environments that fit the unique requirements of each individual, as well as acknowledging and appreciating the different diversity of the human community, is what Inclusive Education is all about (Corps, Ceralli, & Boisseau, 2012; Senturk and Ali, 2021). Over the last decade, there has been wide support for the development of Inclusive Education, which believes in the advocacy of inclusion of students with a variety of educational needs in mainstream classroom setting. At global level, Inclusive Education is increasingly viewed as every learner's right to participate in mainstream classrooms, and while legislation changes are vital, Inclusive Education ultimately comes down to transforming the educational sector in regular classroom settings (Srivastava, De Boer & Pijl, 2017). Since the interactive sessions between teachers and learners are imperative social processes leading to the development of every learner academically, socially, and emotionally, effectiveness of teaching quality in inclusion has garnered a lot of attention internationally (Luckner & Pianta, 2011). As a result, their attitudes toward inclusive education, as well as their understanding of its meaning and application, are critical to its success. Systemic contextual factors, that include the ethos within their own schools and the approach of a wider educational system to inclusive practices in education, influence the outlook toward inclusive education (Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel, & Tlale, 2015; Sajid and Ali, 2018).

Teachers serve a wide range of attitudes, values, abilities, beliefs, and knowledge to their daily interactions with students following the inclusive practices in classrooms by including all learners (Eccleston, Kaiser & Kraynak 2010). These factors significantly affect the abilities of teachers to fulfil their fundamental mission of offering productive, and good learning experiences and maximizing the learning outcomes for all learners (Forlin, 2012). All teacher education programmes aim at ensuring that graduates have the desired knowledge, positive attitudes, and necessary skills to support their students' learning (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Attitudes and beliefs about students with disabilities will be crucial (Lyons 2011). Some teachers, for example, may be reluctant to teach a student with disabilities, and their lack of confidence to handle a student with learning disability may cause as an obstacle to inclusive practice (Foreman 2011; Ring & Travers 2005). Negative attitudes to inclusion have negative effects on the process of a successful inclusion (Slee 2011; Soresi, Nota, & Wehmeyer 2011). This article outlines the survey research carried out with a group of pre-service prospective educators of Pakistan in a university from public sector

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to identify the nature of their attitudes, beliefs, and concerns regarding Inclusive Education, and to determine their level of comfort while engaging with people with disabilities after completion of a course on Inclusive Education. The researchers intended to examine if the attitudes of prospective teachers underwent any change after taking the course of Inclusive Education.

In recent years, there has been a clear need for considerable improvements in teacher preparation for mainstream education. It has been a significant adjustment to train teachers to meet the challenges of interacting with an increasingly diverse range of students whose learning takes place in an inclusive setup. (Forlin, Loreman, Sharma, & Earle, 2009). Consequently, teacher training institutions in several countries offer courses involving themes of student diversity and Inclusive Education.

The major resource for accomplishing the goal of Inclusive Education is defined as classroom instructors. Teachers, in particular, will need to increase their skills and knowledge in order to bear the responsibility of ensuring learning for all students (Oswald & Swart, 2011). Through teacher training programmes, prospective teachers must be provided necessary awareness to help them comprehending theoretical and practical breakthrough in teaching and learning that might improve students' inclusion. (Oswald & Swart, 2011). Teacher training institutions must be at the forefront to devise innovative instructional methods to enable pre-service teachers enter the profession with the ability to become agents of change in the establishment of inclusive schools and classrooms. In order to implement Inclusive Education successfully in Pakistan, pre-service teachers' perspectives, attitudes, and reservations regarding inclusion must be appropriately addressed.

Because children in teacher education do not have a consistent connection with learners who experience difficulties in learning, particularly those with disabilities, their ability in translating and applying what they learn in regular classrooms is undermined. (Engelbrecht & Van Deventer, 2013; Kozleski & Siuty, 2014; Nel, Engelbrecht, Nel & Tlale, 2014). As a result, teacher education programmes rarely focus on the essential goals for Inclusive Education-related teacher education programmes, as defined by Loreman (2010). These findings involve, for instance, a stronger insight of Inclusive Education and diversity; the awareness and range of skills required to team up widely with all interested parties; interacting in inclusive instructional planning by being fairly willing to act in response to greater needs within the mainstream classroom; and successfully promoting learners with diverse learning needs to fully participate in all classroom activities, instead of being assisted to engage partially in all classroom activities. (Watkins, 2012).

The course 'Inclusive Education' is taught to prospective teachers of the disciplines of Education and Special Education department in order to prepare them for Inclusive Education. The purpose of this study is to see the effectiveness of offering a course of Inclusive Education to pre-service teachers to change their attitudes, beliefs, and concerns about Inclusive Education.

1.1. Significance of the Study

The study is significantly important in the following ways:

The findings of the study may be useful for those teachers, who teach and train prospective teachers. It can be beneficial for them. The implications of this research may be helpful for promotion of inclusion and encouragement of those who raise concerns toward inclusion. It can help building a more positive and favorable attitude in prospective teachers in their outlook toward Inclusion.

The findings may also be helpful to widen the vision of the policy makers and committees of scheme of studies and board of studies in designing and developing the curriculum for prospective teachers. It may facilitate them to put emphasis not only on providing quality education, but also focusing on developing prospective teachers according to the trends and the latest demands of the present.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

The objectives to carry out the study was to attain the following objectives:

- To investigate the effectiveness of Inclusive Education course on developing attitudes, concerns, and beliefs of pre service teachers toward Inclusive Education
- To unfold differences among attitudes, concerns, and beliefs of pre service educators from the areas of special education and general education.

2. Methodology

The study aimed at investigating if a course designed to help the learners to meet the challenges of Inclusive Education produced the desired outcomes. The study was founded on the premise that teachers' attitudes, views, and concerns about Inclusive Education must be considered for the successful implementation of Inclusive Education. Self-developed questionnaire was used to investigate attitudes and concerns, of prospective teachers before and after studying the course of Inclusive Education and to unfold differences among the results of the prospective teachers on the basis of their disciplines. The instrument was pilot tested on 50 respondents (males and females) and overall

Cronbach alpha was found as 0.73 while reliability for factor of beliefs was found as 0.64, attitudes 0.70 and for concerns 0.60. In the first Part of the scale, each participant was requested to respond to general demographic information whereas the second Part comprised of twenty items that measured the attitudes, beliefs, and concerns of participants towards students with diverse needs. They were required to rate their concerns, attitudes, and beliefs on a six-point Likert-type scale which ranged from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'.

There were two phases of the project. The first phase investigated the beliefs, attitudes and concerns of pre-service teachers toward inclusion before attending the course, 'Inclusive Education'. The second phase was conducted at the end of the course to determine how the course, 'Inclusive Education' influenced beliefs, attitudes and concerns of the same group of pre-service teachers. The data was collected from only those pre-service teachers who participated in both phases of the project i.e. pre- and post-questionnaire. In this phase, the data was used to analyze the effect of education on change in perceptions. The students/prospective teachers of General Education and Special Education studying the course, 'Inclusive Education' were selected as a sample of the study. Purposive sampling technique was employed. These students were pretested for their beliefs, attitudes and concerns about inclusion. They both attended the course, 'Inclusive Education' for fifteen weeks and at the end they were post-tested. The course, 'Inclusive Education' served as intervention in this research. The demographic characteristics of the sample are as under:

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Variables	Groups	Educators	Special Educators
		F	F
Gender	Male	7	3
	Female	27	24
Age of the Students	20-25	33	27
	26-30	1	0
Experience	No experience	23	19
	1-2 years	9	8
	3-4 years	2	0
Disability in Family	No	26	20
	Yes	8	7
Peers with disabilities during whole academic career	No	27	21
	Yes	7	6

3. Results

Table 1: Comparison of the Attitudes, Beliefs and Concerns of Prospective Special Educators on pretest and posttest

		N	M	SD	T	Sig
Beliefs towards IE	Pretest	27	2.38	.923	.610	.04
	Posttest	27	2.53	.989		
Attitudes towards IE	Pretest	27	3.31	.640	-1.800	.01
	Posttest	27	3.95	.891		
Concerns towards IE	Pretest	27	2.65	.365	.221	.00
	Posttest	27	2.31	.418		

To investigate the effect of the course, 'Inclusive Education' on beliefs, attitudes and concerns of prospective Special Educators paired sample t test was applied. The result revealed that there is a significant mean score difference in the pretest and posttest responses of prospective Special Educators. The course, 'Inclusive Education' improved the beliefs ($t = .610, p = .04$) and attitudes ($t = -1.800, p = .01$) of special educators towards Inclusive Education and their concerns ($t = .221, p = .00$) were also addressed. The results demonstrate that attending the course was useful in bring positive change in the attitudes of participants.

Table 2: Comparison of the Attitudes, Beliefs and Concerns of Prospective General Educators on pretest and posttest

		N	M	SD	T	Sig
Beliefs towards IE	Pretest	34	2.67	.989	1.129	.00
	Posttest	34	3.23	2.70		
Attitudes towards IE	Pretest	34	3.35	.418	-1.869	.01
	Posttest	34	4.07	.451		
Concerns towards IE	Pretest	34	2.52	.451	-1.176	.30
	Posttest	34	2.33	.455		

To investigate the effect of the course, 'Inclusive Education' on beliefs, attitudes and concerns of prospective General Educators paired sample t test was applied. The result revealed that there is no significant mean score difference in the pretest and posttest of the respondents about the concerns towards Inclusive Education. It was noticed that the means score of the posttest (M= 2.52) was higher than the pretest (M= 2.33) whereas there is a significant mean score difference in the pretest and posttest responses of prospective general educators concerning the beliefs and attitudes towards Inclusive Education. The mean score of posttest (M= 3.23, 4.07) was higher than the pretest (M= 2.67, 3.35). The course, 'Inclusive Education' improved the beliefs ($t= 1.129$, $p=.00$) attitudes ($t= -1.869$, $p=.01$) and concerns ($t= -1.176$, $p=.30$) of special educators towards Inclusive Education. The results reveal that participating in the course was productive in improving the attitudes of participants, and removing their concerns.

Table 3: Comparison of the Beliefs of the Prospective General and Special educators about IE on pretest and posttest

		N	M	SD	T	Sig
Pretest	Special educators	27	2.38	.933	.610	.392
	Educators	34	2.59	.988		
Posttest	Special educators	27	2.67	.951	-1.12	.014
	Educators	34	3.23	2.70		

To investigate the effect of the course, 'Inclusive Education' on beliefs of prospective general and special educators independent sample t test was applied. The result revealed that there is no significant mean score difference in the pretest of the respondents about the beliefs ($t= .610$, $.392$) towards Inclusive Education whereas there is a significant mean score difference in the posttest responses of prospective general and special educators concerning the beliefs ($t= -1.12$, $p= .014$) towards Inclusive Education. It was observed that the mean score of educators (M= 3.23) was higher than the special educators (M= 2.67) in posttest.

To investigate the effect of the course, 'Inclusive Education' on the attitudes of prospective General and Special Educators independent sample t test was applied. The result revealed that there is no significant mean score difference in the pretest of the respondents about the attitudes ($t= 1.86$, $.402$) towards Inclusive Education. However, there is a significant mean score difference in the posttest responses of prospective general and special educators concerning the attitudes ($t= -1.80$, $p= .509$) towards Inclusive Education. It revealed that the mean score of educators (M= 3.56) was higher than the special educators (M= 3.48) in posttest.

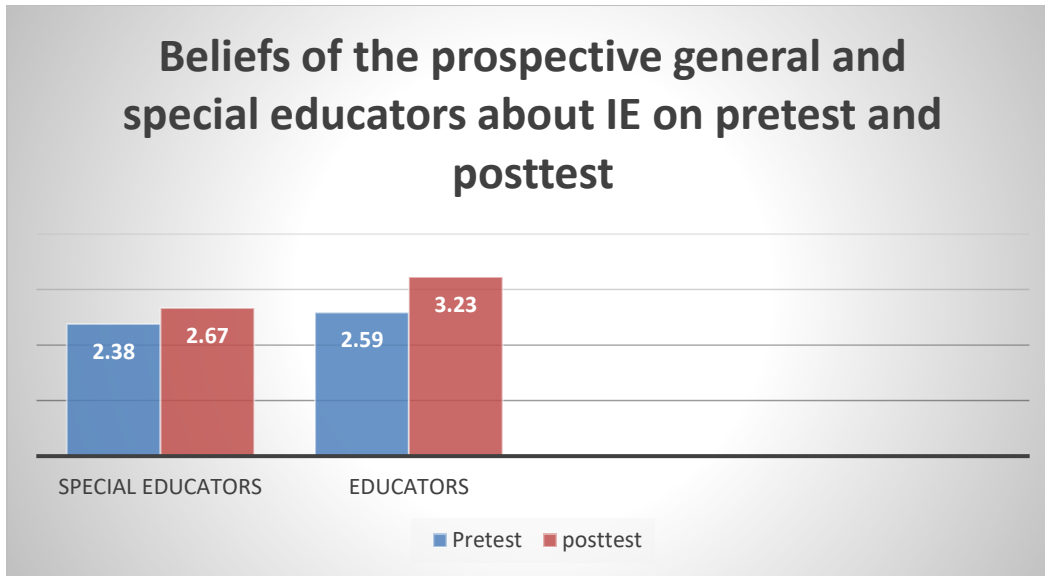


Figure 1: Beliefs of the Prospective General and Special Educators about IE on pretest and posttest

Table 4: Comparison of the Attitudes of the Prospective General and Special Educators about IE on pretest and posttest

		N	M	SD	T	Sig
Pretest	Special educators	27	2.95	.640	1.86	.402
	Educators	34	3.31	.891		
Posttest	Special educators	27	3.48	.682	-1.80	.05
	Educators	34	3.56	.982		

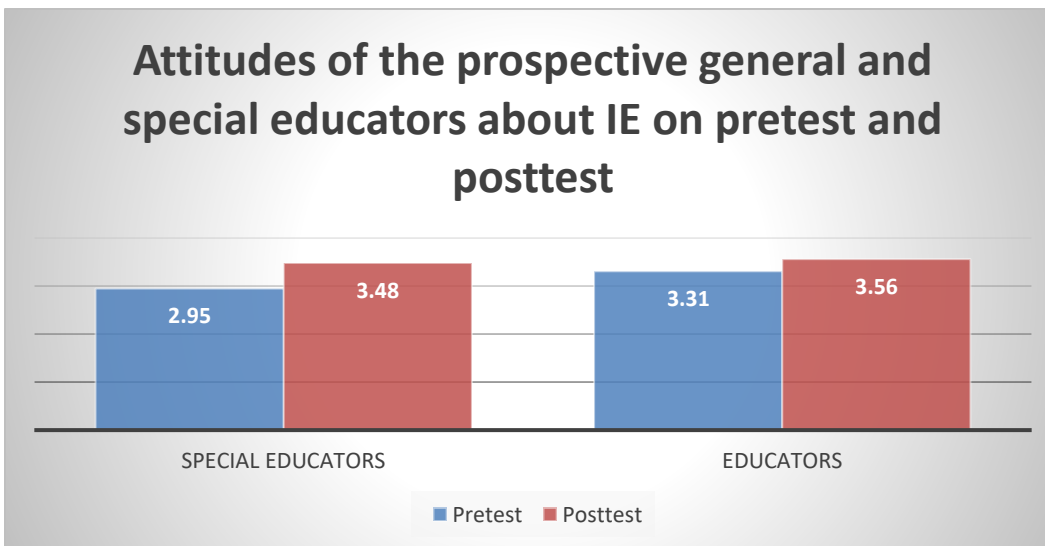


Figure 2: Attitudes of the Prospective General and Special Educators about IE on pretest and posttest

To investigate the effect of the course, ‘Inclusive Education’ on the concerns of prospective General and Special Educators independent sample t test was applied. The result revealed that there is no significant mean score

difference in the pretest of the respondents about the concerns ($t= 2.19, .826$) towards Inclusive Education. Likewise, there is no significant mean score difference in the posttest responses of prospective general and special educators about the concerns ($t= -1.20, p= .23$) towards Inclusive Education. The mean score of special educators ($M= 2.65$) was higher than the educators ($M= 2.52$) in posttest.

Table 5: Comparison of the Concerns of the Prospective General and Special Educators about IE on pretest and posttest

		N	M	SD	T	Sig
Pretest	Special educators	27	2.33	.451	2.19	.826
	Educators	34	2.31	.418		
Posttest	Special educators	27	2.65	.363	-1.20	.23
	Educators	34	2.52	.455		

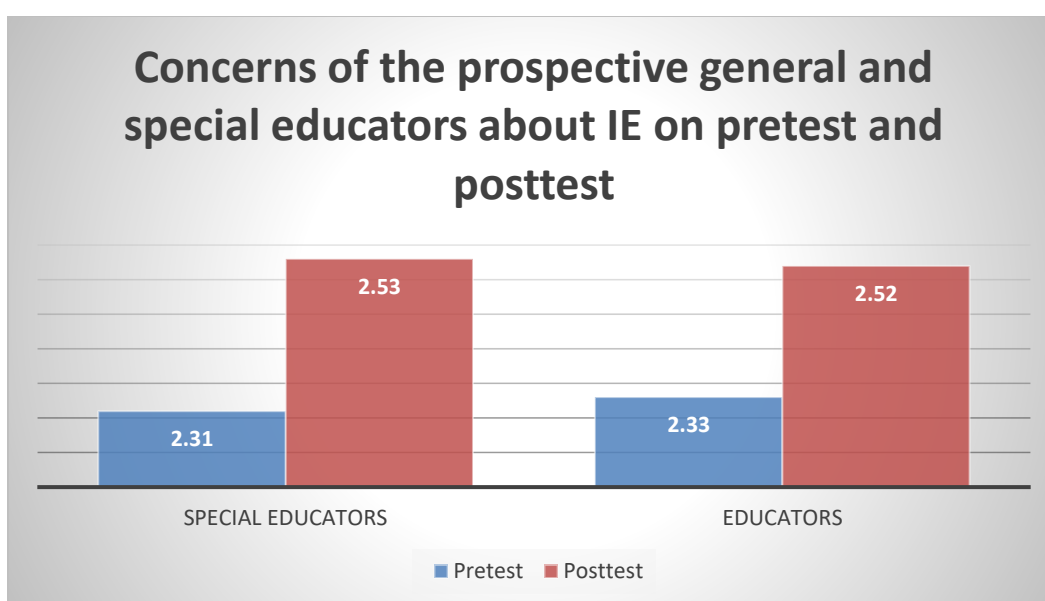


Figure 3: Concerns of the Prospective General and Special Educators about IE on pretest and posttest

4. Discussion

The goal of this study was to investigate how perceptions of prospective educators changed after taking an intervention course on Inclusive Education, with an emphasis on including students with disabilities. After taking the course, the opinions of prospective teachers regarding their comfort level during their interaction with learners with disabilities improved significantly. There were also noticeable changes in their attitudes toward inclusion in mainstream classes. These findings are similar to those of the Forlin, & Chambers, (2011); Oswald & Swart, (2011). They found that prospective teachers were better equipped to incorporate students with disabilities after completing an appropriate coursework. According to Deppeler, Loreman, and Sharma (2005), self-efficacy, and confidence of pre-service teachers' can be enhanced by equipping them with a necessary training addressing the concerns and needs of individuals while also enhancing their ability to teach all students. If prospective teachers are confident in their ability to integrate students with disabilities in their training courses and believe they are capable of coping well with this difficulty, there would be positive effects of their attitudes, and their concerns will also undergo noticeable changes (Woolfolk, 2010).

According to Killoran, Woronko, and Zaretsky (2014), teacher education courses emphasizing on inclusive concerns changed perspectives and self-efficacy, as well as providing students with a fundamental understanding of Inclusive Education (Loreman, Sharma, & Forlin, 2013). Teacher training programmes should provide a comprehensive understanding of legislation, and policies involving inclusive practices in education. These programs must also

address the components that can make prospective teachers more confident in dealing with students with learning needs (Philpot, Furey, & Penney, 2010; Loreman, Sharma, & Forlin, 2013).

There was no significant mean score difference in the posttest responses of prospective general and special educators about the concerns towards Inclusive Education. Similarly, findings found by Oswald & Swart, (2011); Loreman, Mackay, Sharma, Forlin, & Earle (2005) that following relevant course content, pre-service instructors were much more motivated to accommodate students with special needs, but were more concerned about the availability of training and assistance in classrooms.

The mean score of educators was higher than the special educators in terms of beliefs, attitudes, and concerns towards Inclusive Education in posttest. The finding of the present study contradicts with the findings of the previous study where researcher reported that training programs in special education also influence the perception of individuals toward inclusion. They are inclined to be more appreciative of the idea of inclusion as compared to segregated institutes for students with learning needs. The change in their attitude occurred after attending training regarding teaching students with special needs. However, it is noticeable that educators without any form of training had no tendency to support of the concept of inclusion (Mngo & Mngo, 2018). The reason behind this finding is that special educators are more concerned about the placement of learners with disabilities in regular classrooms as they may be mistreated by others in inclusion and they find the segregated classes or placement more appropriate for the accomplishment of their unique needs (Bekirogullari, Soyurk, & Gulsen 2011).

5. Conclusion

The findings revealed that perceptions of prospective teachers engaging with persons with special needs and the comfort level can change even after a very short- term training on Inclusive Education. We must pay special attention to the concerns, and attitudes of pre-service teachers while updating and designing our scheme of studies. It will give assurance to an increased sense of self-efficacy and boost the morale and develop the confidence in embracing ownership for the learning of students with disabilities. As teacher educators, we must ensure that our courses provide pre-service teachers with the required information, skills, and attitudes to help schools promote Inclusive Education. The scheme of studies must be revamped to facilitate teaching and learning. Awareness of the latest trends in research toward inclusion, introduction of new instructional strategies to facilitate educators teaching students with learning disabilities, and training of teachers to impart innovative pedagogical practices can better enhance attitudes of teachers toward inclusion, and accepting it as a social norm in the academic institutions. It will equip educators with requisite skills for an effective delivery of course contents and will enhance their understanding of desired knowledge of their courses in practical field. Course outlines must be designed keeping in view the practical needs, the scope of discipline, and future trends of society.

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