

TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS INCLUSION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

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Abstract

Inclusive education has become important to governments around the world to provide education for all and international recognition of the importance of meeting the needs of diverse populations. The purpose of the study is to investigate teachers' attitudes towards inclusion in Myanmar and to explore the needs and challenges which exist in conducting inclusive schools across the country. This research was a survey of quantitative and qualitative mixed design. During December 2017 the data were collected by using questionnaire (Attitude towards Inclusion Scale of Thomas V. Sabella (2015) and Opinions Relative to Integration of Students with Disabilities (ORI) of Antonak, R. F., and Larrivee, B. (1995)) and interview. The teacher participants (900) were 150 from Sagaing Region, 150 from Mandalay Region, 150 from Rakhine State, 150 from Mon State, 150 from Ayerawady Region and 150 from Yangon Region. Results showed that the teachers' attitudes are positive. This study indicated years of teaching experience, age and status did not necessarily influence teachers' attitudes. The qualitative study revealed six factors for inclusion, nine barriers to inclusion, and seven themes. They thought that lack of resources including materials and personnel would be a major barrier to inclusion and need for more training related to inclusion of children with disabilities. According to the findings, the teachers are not opposed to the philosophy of inclusion but they believe that some children with disabilities would receive a better education in special schools.

Key words: Attitudes, Disability, Inclusion, Inclusive Education, Inclusive Schools, Special Schools

Introduction

Children with disabilities have the same rights as all children. Given opportunities to flourish as others might, children with disabilities have the potential to lead fulfilling lives and to contribute to the social, cultural, and economic vitality of their communities. Yet surviving and thriving can be especially difficult for children with disabilities. Across the world, children

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with disabilities confront challenges as a result of their impairments and many barriers that society throws their way (UNICEF, 2016).

Importance of the Study

Children with disabilities in Myanmar are one of the most marginalized and excluded groups of children and often remain invisible to the mainstream population and relevant officials. Analysis of teachers' attitudes toward inclusion of children with disabilities in Myanmar will be a timely and very relevant resource that will provide important evidence necessary to identify and address the needs of children with disabilities. Analysis on the challenges and barriers faced by children with disabilities in their daily lives and communities sets out the key areas where action is urgently required to ensure their social inclusion and full participation in society. Investigating the knowledge and beliefs of teachers concerning disability and inclusive education, which are not well researched will help improve the inclusive education system in Myanmar. Better understanding the teachers' beliefs and knowledge and their attitudes towards disabled children will help to inform national policy makers and improve the planning for a more equal and adequate inclusive education system.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the teachers' attitudes towards inclusion of children with disabilities.

Definitions of Key Terms

- **Attitudes** are evaluative reactions to person, objects, and events. This includes beliefs and positive and negative feelings about the attitudes objects. Attitude can guide experiences and decide the effects of experience on behaviors (Schneider, 1988).
- **Disability** is a condition where a person is at a greater risk than the general population of experiencing restrictions in performing routine activities (including activities of daily living) or participating in roles (such as work) if no supportive measures are offered (Myanmar Census, 2014).

- **Inclusion** is as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education (Booth, 1996).
- **Inclusive Education** based on the right of all learners to a quality education that meets basic learning needs and enriches lives. Focusing particularly in vulnerable and marginalized groups, it seeks to develop the full potential of every individual (UNICEF, 2016).
- **Inclusive Schools** are schools where children with disabilities attend regular classes with age-appropriate peers, learn the curriculum to the extent feasible, and are provided with additional resources and support depending on need (UNICEF, 2016).
- **Special Schools** are schools that are meant to provide highly specialized services for children with disabilities and remain separate from broader educational institutions (UNICEF, 2016).

Review of Related Literature

Inclusive education has its origins in special education. Special education is understood as education provided as a supplement to general education provision or that is provided entirely separately (UNESCO, 2005). Special schools provide supplementary or entirely separate education only to children with disabilities. For many students with disabilities, the initial goal of special education was to ensure that they were provided an opportunity to attend and profit from education; that is, that a free and appropriate public education be provided to them, just like to all other youngsters (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003). Inclusion is used to describe the extent to which a child with special needs is involved as a full member of the school community with the full access to and participation in all aspects of education (NCSE, 2010).

According to the UNESCO documents, inclusive education challenges all exclusionary policies and practices in education, is based on a growing international consensus of the right of all children to a common education in their locality regardless of their background, attainment or disability and aims

at providing good quality education for learners and a community-based education for all (Vislie, 2003).

The principle of inclusive education was adopted at the Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994) and was restated at the Dakar World Education Forum (2000). The Salamanca Framework for Action (1994) was a significant milestone in inclusive education that recommended the mode of service delivery of timing and intervention that linked to inclusive practices.

Based on the Salamanca Statement, Myanmar is now trying for the inclusion of these excluded groups such as: physically and intellectually challenged children; children belonging to ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities; children living in poverty/ slums, street children; child victims of trafficking, drug addiction and children in correction centers, children affected by HIV, etc.; and children with special needs (MOE, 2008). Myanmar has traditionally provided access to education to mentally and physically disabled children. Ministry of Education (2008) stated “Schools or learning centers are the best entry points for grouping children with different background to learn together and to find unity in diversity.

Inclusive education strives for addressing the learning needs of children with special needs, with a particular focus on those who are being isolated and excluded. The philosophy behind inclusive education is to promote opportunities for all children to participate, learn and have equal treatment, irrespective of their mental or physical abilities (Kaur & Arora, 2014). The ultimate vision for inclusive education systems is to ensure that all learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers (European Agency, 2015). The positive impact of inclusive placements on learners with disabilities includes improved social relationships and networks, peer role models, increased achievement, higher expectations, increased collaboration among school staff and improved integration of families into the community (cited in European Agency, 2012d).

For the Myanmar National Plan of Action for persons with Disabilities 2010-2012, the Government used a definition which comes close to the international definitions: “Disability is an evolving concept and that disability

results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.” The 2014 Census revealed that there were approximately 17.2 Million children in total in Myanmar. 1.35% of these, 232,021 children, were children with disabilities.

While numerous Government departments and organizations regularly produce statistics on children and women in the areas of their respective responsibility, quantitative and qualitative data related to children with disabilities is still scarce, incomplete and its quality questionable (UNICEF, 2016).

According to Myanmar’s new National Education Law enacted in 2014, all children with a disability should be enrolled in mainstream schools. The amendment made in 2015 highlighted that persons with disabilities should have an equal opportunity to an education (Myanmar Census, 2014).

One of the main barriers in the practice of inclusive education is represented by the teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion and its principles. Teachers' attitudes are one of the most important and decisive elements for the successful follow-up of the process of inclusiveness.

In view of attitudes, teachers should be committed, careful with their students to engage them in conversation and should not be seen as passive listeners. Teachers should be self-reflective, evaluate and re-evaluate the effectiveness of their work (World Vision, 2006, cited in Shatri, 2017).

Teachers are crucial in determining what happens in classrooms and there are those who would argue that the development of more inclusive classrooms requires teachers to cater for different student learning needs through the modification or differentiation of the curriculum (Forlin, 2004).

Nevertheless teachers do have concerns about inclusion and many surveys have found that teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion are not particularly positive (Ellins & Porter, 2005). Further, they express concerns about their lack of preparation for inclusion and for teaching all learners (Forlin, 2001). Attitudes about inclusion are extremely complex and vary from teacher to teacher and school to school.

Vygotsky was instrumental in the perception that: (a) Disability is a sociocultural developmental phenomenon, and (b) Disability consists of

‘primary disability’ (organic impairment) and the ‘secondary’ disability (distortions of higher psychological functions due to social factors) (Dixon, 2007). For Vygotsky, the primary disability may limit the acquisition and the use of some social skills and mean that children acquire knowledge at a slower rate. However, it is the child’s social milieu that may severely limit the course of development and lead to the delays or differences that are characteristic of many people with disabilities.

Vygotsky criticized the parents’, teachers’ and psychologists’ pathological approach to “child abnormality”. Parents and many teachers continuously pity, and consequently help, the helpless children with disabilities, thus hindering the zone of proximal development, and causing secondary disability. The excessive surveillance, the manifold limitations, and the deprivation of independency, the long-term period outside the child collective - all these factors were crucial to the occurrence of secondary socio-cultural disability among children with an intellectual disability (Rodina, 2005). These factors constitute a secondary complication of primary (biological) disability. Parents tend to limit awareness of organic needs and their satisfaction; the child is protected, but is not developing.

Method

This study was designed a survey to investigate the attitudes of Myanmar teachers towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in their classrooms.

Participants of the Study

Subjects of this study were 900 in-service teachers from the selected schools at Yangon Region, Mandalay Region, Sagaing Region, Ayeyarwady Region, Mon State and Rakhine State.

Instruments

Attitude towards Inclusion Scale of Thomas V. Sabella (2015) and Opinions Relative to Integration of Students with Disabilities (ORI) Antonak, R. F., and Larrivee, B. (1995) were used to data collection.

Data Analysis and Findings

According to the result, the obtained mean was 90.50 and the standard deviation was 12.899. The mean score of teachers' attitude was high. This result showed that general-classroom teachers have the positive attitudes necessary to work with students with disabilities. Most of the general-classroom teachers agreed with the philosophy of inclusion.

The primary qualitative data for this investigation was collected by asking questions at the end of the teacher questionnaire collected from 900 teachers from 4 Regions and 2 States. Teachers are asked to write about factors and barriers to inclusive education in two open-ended questions. All qualitative data were coded and analyzed together and shared with an education professional for peer debriefing. Similar codes were grouped into categories. All qualitative data were reviewed for answers to the research questions and found the following major themes which cut across the research questions and summarized the important discoveries of this study.

The teachers' responses, frequency of the respective factors and the percentages are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Responses, Frequency and Percentage of the Factors for Inclusion

No	Responses/Factors	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Inclusion should be made for the children with disabilities to get equal opportunities and chances just like children without disabilities; and for their physical and mental, as well as social skills development.	436	48.4
2.	If children with disabilities can get equal participation in general education, they become entitled to the rights of children and that they could avoid depression and their morality can become higher.	363	40.3
3.	Children with mild disabilities such as specific learning disabilities and speech and language disorders should be included	97	10.7

No	Responses/Factors	Frequency	Percentage
	in general education because teachers and peers, in collaboration, can help them in class, and the children with disabilities become more confident and strive to develop themselves knowing that they can live and perform just like normal people regardless of their disabilities.		
4.	Inclusion should be made because there are not adequate special schools for the children with disabilities in Myanmar, and the children with disabilities can even develop their academic skills more quickly in general classroom than in special classroom.	74	8.2
5.	Education is one of the basic necessities for the development of the lives of children with disabilities, their families, their society and their country, thus, parents and teachers should encourage inclusion for the children with disabilities in order for them not to develop mental illness. When teaching the children with disabilities, without excluding and without discrimination, they can build their social and mental development and can positively contribute to the society as well.	42	4.7
6.	Being able to make interaction with one another, both children with disabilities and without disabilities can accept individual differences, and by getting helping hands from their friends, children with disabilities can become satisfied with their own lives.	20	2.2

436 out of 900 respondent teachers (48.4%) expressed inclusion should be made for the children with disabilities to get equal opportunities and

chances just like children without disabilities; and for their physical and mental, as well as social skills development.

The Salamanca Statement said, “The fundamental principle of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have” (UNESCO, 1994a).

Significant number of respondent teachers, 363 out of 900 (40.3%) pointed out that if children with disabilities can get equal participation in general education, they become entitled to the rights of children and that they could avoid depression and their morality can become higher.

The international community has committed to providing equal access and quality of education to all children regardless of their different abilities and needs, with a focus on including children with disabilities in all schools. “Integration” refers to the idea that children with disabilities “should be educated alongside their peers in mainstream schools” (Pijl & Dyson, 1998). The teachers interviewed did not express great concern for how inclusion would affect classroom management. Teachers are not concerned about classroom management or peer interaction in an inclusive classroom.

97 respondent teachers (10.7%) said children with mild disabilities such as specific learning disabilities and speech and language disorders should be included in general education because teachers and peers, in collaboration, can help them in class, and the children with disabilities become more confident and strive to develop themselves knowing that they can live and perform just like normal people regardless of their disabilities.

Several studies provided similar results including a study by Haring, Stern and Cruickshank (1958), in which 85.2% of teachers agreed they could “handle” a student with mild sensory, physical, or learning problems. An inclusive system where students are integrated with their same age peers also provides the best social foundation for an inclusive society (UNESCO, 1994a).

74 respondent teachers out of 900 (8.2%) said inclusion should be made because there are not adequate special schools for the children with disabilities in Myanmar, and the children with disabilities can even develop

their academic skills more quickly in general classroom than in special classroom.

In many developing countries neither special classes nor special schools are readily available, especially outside of urban centers. “Development is defined as the person’s evolving conception of the ecological environment, and his relationship to it, as well as the person’s growing capacity to discover, sustain, or alter its properties” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

42 respondent teachers (4.7%) said education is one of the basic necessities for the development of the lives of children with disabilities, their families, their society and their country, thus, parents and teachers should encourage inclusion for the children with disabilities in order for them not to develop mental illness. Those teachers also believed that when teaching the children with disabilities, without excluding and without discrimination, the children can build up their social and mental development and can positively contribute to the society as well.

Odom et al. (2004) noted the importance of interaction between parents and teacher to affect the participation of the child in an inclusive setting. Inclusion is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education (Booth, 1996). It is important to note that a system which educates all children together is not only less costly than one that relies on separate placements, but an inclusive system where students are integrated with their same age peers also provides the best social foundation for an inclusive society (UNESCO, 1994a).

20 respondent teachers (2.2%) believed that being able to make interaction with one another, both children with disabilities and without disabilities can accept individual differences, and by getting helping hands from their friends, children with disabilities can become satisfied with their own lives.

Ncube (2011) explained that the advantage of peer collaboration was that “students with disabilities learn academic and social skills from general education students while general education students develop the social skills of tolerance and acceptance of others who are different.”

The teachers' responses, frequency of the respective barriers and the percentages are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage of Barriers to Inclusion

No.	Barriers to Inclusion	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Children with disabilities shouldn't be included in general education because their weaknesses can become more apparent and stress them out if they cannot follow the lessons or play or participate in group activities just as normal children do.	363	40.3
2.	Bullying, criticizing and looking down from other unsympathetic students in class as well as less consideration and discrimination from ego-centered parents of other children are also the barriers for the inclusion of children with disabilities in general education.	231	25.7
3.	Overcrowded classrooms with no sufficient teachers, and no extra teaching time for the children with disabilities since teachers are occupied not only with teaching lessons but also with extra duties, inadvertently affect teacher's patience and their compassionate on children with disabilities.	211	23.4
4.	Including children with disabilities in general education can delay the teaching process and disturb normal children's education because normal children and children with disabilities have different learning abilities. Besides, the normal children have to help the children with disabilities as they cannot do certain activities in class themselves such as going to toilet and submit exercise books to teachers.	169	18.8
5.	Lack of professional teachers with special training for the children with disabilities is also a barrier.	77	8.6

No.	Barriers to Inclusion	Frequency	Percentage
6.	Lack of support and encouragement from parents of children with disabilities, as well as lack of their own willingness for their education are barriers for the inclusion of children with disabilities in general education.	72	8.0
7.	Including children with severe disabilities such as blind, deaf, mental disorder or mental retardation in general education can exhaust both children and teachers and can waste time; and that they should only study in special schools which are the best for them.	58	6.4
8.	Incompleteness in overall education added by inadequacy of teaching/learning materials for disabled is also a barrier for the inclusion of children with disabilities in general education.	49	5.4
9.	Even though Myanmar Educational objective is aimed to include every children, in reality, there is not much room in schools for inclusion.	25	2.8

363 respondent teachers (40.3%) said children with disabilities shouldn't be included in general education because their weaknesses can become more apparent and stress them out if they cannot follow the lessons or play or participate in group activities just as normal children do.

The World Report on Disability acknowledged that inclusion can be difficult and that "there will be poor outcomes for children with disabilities in a general class if the classroom and teacher cannot provide the support necessary for their learning, development, and participation" (WHO & World Bank., 2011).

231 respondent teachers (25.7%) believed that bullying, criticizing and looking down from other unsympathetic students in class, as well as less consideration and discrimination from ego-centered parents of other children

are also the barriers for the inclusion of children with disabilities in general education.

But UNESCO pointed out that the merit of inclusive schools is not only that they are capable of providing quality education to all children; their establishment is a crucial step in helping to change discriminatory attitudes, in creating welcoming communities and in developing an inclusive society (UNESCO, 1994a).

211 respondent teachers (23.4%) said overcrowded classrooms with no sufficient teachers, and no extra teaching time for the children with disabilities since teachers are occupied not only with teaching lessons but also with extra duties, negatively affect teacher's patience and their compassionate on children with disabilities.

Odom et al. (2004) pointed out that teachers felt that "support from their administrators, resources (i.e., time, personnel), and training" were needed for successful inclusion.

169 respondent teachers out of 900 (18.8%) said including children with disabilities in general education can delay the teaching process and disturb normal children's education because normal children and children with disabilities have different learning abilities. Besides, the normal children have to help the children with disabilities as they cannot do certain activities in class themselves such as going to toilet and submit exercise books to teachers.

Some teachers believed that the presence of children with disabilities, or those with significant learning problems, can interfere with the learning of other students, since students with difficulties need more attention and it takes more time from the teacher (Sabella, 2015).

77 respondent teachers (8.6%) said lack of professional teachers with special training for the children with disabilities is also a barrier.

Multiple studies in other countries have found training to be a factor affecting teacher attitude toward inclusion (Ahmmed et al., 2012; Alghazo & Gaad, 2004; Avradmidis & Kalyva, 2007; Lifshitz et al., 2004 cited in Sabella, 2015). Hernandez (2006) noted that poor quality of primary education in general was a barrier to providing for children with disabilities, specifically lack of adequate teacher training. The development of the teacher is equally

important to examine as that of the child, as the teacher's actions and thought processes in the classroom will have great effect on the development of the children in that room.

72 respondent teachers (8.0%) believed that lack of support and encouragement from parents of children with disabilities, as well as lack of their own willingness for their education are barriers for the inclusion of children with disabilities in general education.

Schools cannot be inclusive until both teachers and parents fully appreciate the advantages of inclusion. Attitudes which undervalue children with disabilities hinder their potential and limit their opportunities.

58 respondent teachers (6.4%) believed that including children with severe disabilities such as blind, deaf, mental disorder or mental retardation in general education can exhaust both children and teachers and can waste time; and that they should only study in special schools which are the best for them.

Teachers interviewed for this study were committed to the idea that it was the teachers' responsibility to teach all children who came to the school. They agreed with the philosophy of inclusion but believed that some children with disabilities would receive a better education in special schools.

49 respondent teachers (5.4%) said incompleteness in overall education added by inadequacy of teaching/learning materials for disabled is also a barrier for the inclusion of children with disabilities in general education.

Modification to teaching practices and learning materials is an important aspect of inclusive education (UNESCO, 2005).

25 respondent teachers (2.8%) argued that even though Myanmar Education aims to include every child, in reality, there is weakness in implementation.

Myanmar's current legal framework, including the Education Law and its next revision, which is in progress, as well as the Disability Law and especially the CESR set the framework for inclusive education in Myanmar. However, theory and reality in the field are not matching. The consultants were under the impression that the MOE is eager to realize inclusive education, but lacks ideas on how to overcome challenges and barriers to do so (Hauschild & Htet, 2015).

Conclusion

The qualitative study revealed seven themes which cut across the research questions. The findings are discussed in relation to the theoretical framework of this study and social-cultural theory of Lev Vygotsky.

Theme 1: The philosophy of inclusion was agreed by the teachers but they believed that children with severe disabilities would receive a better education in special schools

Philosophy of inclusion was agreed by most of the respondent teachers. But many were also concerned that children with disabilities cannot follow the lessons or participate in classroom activities. They also expressed that children with severe disabilities could receive a better education in special schools. The fundamental concepts of Vygotsky's theory on dysontogenesis and cultural-historical theory for the practice of inclusive education are significant in this finding.

Theme 2: Some children with disabilities do not have access to school and those enrolled with mild disabilities are not always getting needed services

Although many teachers believed that inclusion should be made for the children with disabilities to get equal opportunities, some teachers pointed out that there is not much room in general education for inclusion, despite Myanmar Educational Objective aimed to include every children in education. In Vygotsky's special education contexts, inclusion means that approaches to teaching, leadership and school organization will have to be reconceptualized. Inclusion is a philosophy that implies the complete acceptance of a student with a disability in a regular class.

Theme 3: Teachers are not concerned about classroom management or peer interaction in an inclusive classroom

Many of the respondent teachers believed that children with mild disabilities should be included in general education because teachers and peers, in collaboration, can help them in class, and the children with disabilities become more confident and strive to develop themselves knowing that they can live and perform just like normal people regardless of their

disabilities. This is in line with Vygotsky's social constructionist view on learning and development which said that the development of mental processes is mediated by adults in the context of social interaction with children.

Theme 4: Teachers require training

Many teachers think lack of professional teachers with special training for the children with disabilities is also a barrier for the inclusion of children with disabilities in general education. The need for more training was the most dominant theme found in the teacher questionnaire. According to Vygotsky, different methodologies have to be developed for different disabilities to help children develop the scientific concepts.

Theme 5: Lack of resources, including materials and personnel, is a major barrier to inclusion

Incompleteness in overall education added by inadequacy of teaching/learning materials for children with disabilities is also a barrier for inclusion. Teachers indicated the need for improved infrastructure, special didactic materials designed for learning problems and disabilities, and direct support from personnel trained in disability to improve their ability to provide inclusive education. According to Vygotsky, to provide support for intact functions among children with disabilities, enabling a realization of these resources, is the main task in a special educational context of inclusive education.

Theme 6: Teachers' attitudes were consistent regardless of teaching experience, status and age

There was no significant difference in the attitudes of in-service teachers towards inclusion based on teaching experiences. It can be reasonably said that the teachers having less total service and the teachers having a great deal of total service have the same attitudes towards inclusion. There was also no significant difference for overall attitudes of teachers towards inclusion by status. It can be said that primary assistant teachers, junior assistant teachers and senior assistant teachers had similar attitude on inclusion. There was no significant difference for overall attitudes of teachers towards inclusion by age as well.

Theme 7: Teachers are concerned about family support for children with disabilities

Lack of support and encouragement from parents of children with disabilities, as well as lack of their own willingness for their education are barriers for the inclusion of children with disabilities in general education. Teachers acknowledged the importance support from families in the educational progress of their students and some expressed concern that families of children with disabilities may not have the ability or the understanding to provide what their children needed. Vygotsky's view on the negative developmental consequences for children with disabilities due to secondary complications of primary disabilities, confirms this.

While the findings of this study are consistent with other literature related to inclusion of students with disabilities, several factors may limit the value of these findings. The small sample size may have limited power of some statistical analysis. Since no other published research was found which examined the attitudes of teachers in Myanmar toward the inclusion of children with disabilities, this study was designed as an exploratory study to examine teachers' attitudes.

A large scale survey of more teachers would avoid the weakness of the small sample size of this study and provide more valuable data which could be generalized to the entire population of teachers in the country. Teachers often expressed a need for more resources but were not able to give specific needs, perhaps due to their lack of training in disability. Another suggestion for future studies would be to look at what other factors affect general education teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, as this study indicates years of teaching experience, age and status do not necessarily influence attitudes.

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