

## A Study on Attitude of Teacher Trainees towards Special Needs Education

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### Abstract

Equitable access to education is a contemporary theme discoursed among the educationists in Sri Lanka. The disabled, the poorest and the marginalized are neglected in the society and that most of them are unaware of the opportunities available for them. In schools, most of the differently able students fail to get the support of the teachers due to the attitude of the teachers. In this backdrop, Attitude towards special need education is, *inter alia* need of the hour and the attitude of teachers are important in designing and implementing special needs education in the schools. The objective of this study is to find out the attitude of teacher trainees towards special needs education in terms of gender and locality. A sample of 100 teacher trainees were selected at random. Data were collected by using the tools of questionnaire and personal data sheet. The data were analyzed using t test. In the analysis, it was found that teacher trainees have favourable attitudes about special needs education. There was no significant difference in the attitude of teacher trainees towards special needs education in terms of their locality .

**Keywords:** Special Need; Awareness; Teacher Trainees; Attitude.

### Introduction

Equitable access to education is the current theme of discourse in Sri Lanka. In educating students with special needs, role of teachers is significant. Their attitude towards special needs education can impact on the implementation of any program in schools about special needs education.

Recently, substantial steps were taken in the international arena to ensure equalization of rights and opportunities for differently abled persons (Rajapaksa, 2011). Of them UN conventions on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) is quite significant. Nonetheless, there are still a number of concern and obstacles to mainstreaming the people with disabilities into the society and accessing to many aspects in equalization such as education, employment, rights, technology, dignity, etc.

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**Received on** 19.07.2018, **Accepted on** 30.07.2018

The major impetus for special needs education come from the 1994 World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca. The conference recommendations were based on the principle of inclusion. In the report of conference it was stated that, 'School should accommodate all children of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups.'

In this context, Sri Lanka too has a long convention of nurturing and caring of the disabled members of the society. Both the government and civil societies have undertaken significant initiatives for the welfare of the differently abled persons. Assuming full responsibility for the education of students with special needs, the government had adopted the model of integrated education in 1968 (Weerakoon, 1994), and the voluntary social services, agencies and private citizens for that matter took an interest in establishing special schools for children with

special needs (Lopez, 1996) in addition to other welfare activities provided.

It is common truth that education is the path way for success in life. The differently abled students too should be given equal access to education, access to special education education process. The mainstreaming the children with special needs into regular schools inspired Sri Lankan Educational authorities to get into the concept of access to inclusive education. In this line, compulsory education regulations for the 5-14 age group and proposals for the establishment of a well-equipped quality school in each of the 324 local administrative divisions to ensure on equitable distribution of educational opportunities were approved in 1997 (Ministry of Social Welfare, 2003).

Nonetheless, the role of teacher is important in implementing special need arrangement for the disabled students, The attitude of the teachers towards special needs education has to be identified for success of the special need education programmes, as the roles of teacher varies and they are close to the society where differently abled students live. A review related literature revealed there was no study done among the teacher trainees admitted to teachers college in Sri Lanka on the attitudes towards special needs education. Therefore, this study was planned to bridge this gap.

### *Objectives*

The following are the objectives of the study.

- To find out the attitudes of teacher trainees towards special needs education.
- To find out whether there exists any significant difference among teachers towards special needs education in terms of gender, and locality

### **Hypotheses**

There exists no significant difference in the attitude of teachers towards Special Needs Education based on gender, and locale

### **Methodology**

#### *Method of the Study*

For this study, the investigator adopted survey method. The data were collected from 50 teacher trainees and they were statistically analyzed for drawing conclusions.

#### *Population of the Study*

The population of the study is all the teacher trainees in Addalaichenai Teachers College.

#### *Sample of the Study*

A sample of 100 teacher trainees (male 40 and female 60) were selected by using random sampling technique

#### *Instruments*

*Questionnaire:* For collecting information from the teacher trainees. The investigator modified the questionnaire on 'Attitude Scale on Inclusive education' prepared by Reena and Bindhu (2012). It consists of 40 items. The scale consists of four dimensions of inclusive education such as concept of special needs education, understanding exceptionalities, special needs education strategies and policies on special needs education. The test-retest reliability co-efficient was obtained as 0.97 and content validity was established

*Personal Data Sheet:* The personal information of the teacher trainees were collected using personal data sheet. The investigator helped in filling in the personal data with the discussion with the sample. These data were rechecked and found reliable.

#### *Procedure*

After the selection of the sample the investigators made necessary arrangement for the administration of the instrument. The investigators sought permission from the principals of the teachers training college, Addalaichenai for administering the instrument. The investigators met the teacher trainees in the class and explained the nature and confidentiality of the study. The questionnaire was distributed to the teacher trainees and an instruction with regard to the method of responding to the items in the instrument given. The response sheets were scored according to the scoring key prepared for the purpose. Statistical techniques like 't' test and percentage analysis were used according to the objectives of the study and the hypothesis to be tested.

### **Results and Discussion**

From the data collected from the sample teachers, the following hypotheses which were formed as per research objectives and tested to find out the result of the research study.

Response Categories	Number	Percentage
Favourable	53	53
Unfavourable	36	36
Neutral	11	11
Total	100	

In analysis of the data collected it was found that 53% of teacher trainees are having favorable attitude towards special needs education while, 36% of teacher trainees are having un favorable attitude towards special needs education. Only 11% of teacher trainees chosed to be neutral. From this the This is a favoural situation when it comes to the influence of special need education introduced in the country. However, the attitude of a large number of teacher 47 per cent of teacher trainees are not favourable for special need education. This is an alarming situation and need to be considered by the policy makers. Though the educational level of Sri Lankans compared to the other South Asian countries is higher, the prominence given to Special Need Education in national curriculum is not adequate (Jazeel et al, 2013). At the same time, Unicef (2003) indicated in the case study done in Sri Lanka that the government has taken early steps to implement inclusive education though there were slow progress. There are differences in the meaning and modes of practice of inclusive education among schools (Ibid). Similarly NEREC in a research study mentioned teachers do not have satisfactory level of awareness on inclusive Education (NEREC). The attitude of teachers towards special needs education will have impact on the life of the differently abled children

### Hypothesis 1

The second hypothesis of the study is 'there is no significant difference between the mean score of male parent and female teacher trainees towards special needs education'. The main findings of the data analyzed are given in the Table 1.

It is found in the analysis that the calculated "t" value 2.91 at 5% level is greater than the table value 1.96. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. It indicates that there is significant difference in attitude

**Table 1:** Difference in awareness of inclusive education due to sex of the parents

Variables	Nos	Mean	SD	t Value
Male	40	84.52	7.93	2.91
Female	60	81.65	8.58	

(Significant at 0.05 level)

towards special needs education due to gender of the teacher trainees. The mean value of male teacher trainees is more than the female teacher trainees. Therefore, male tea revealed that male parents have more favorable than the female parents.

This situation can be due to the prevailing culture in Sri Lanka. Male teacher have more access to media and other social activities than female teachers. In general, culturally female teacher trainees are occupied with household work and that they have limited access to media and other social contacts. Lopez (1996) argues that the females should be given more awareness than males as most of the disabled children are more attached to the female parents in South Asian countries. It reflects that as compared to male and female, there are more awareness among males than females in these countries. Prabavathi (2015) strengthens this notion that the overall attitude about inclusive education in India is not up to the expected level according to researches and females are mostly ignorant of the system of special needs education which is affordable.

### Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis of the study is "there is no significant difference between the mean score of parents residing in rural area and urban area towards access to inclusive education" and main findings from the analysis are given in the Table 2.

**Table 2:** Difference in awareness of parents due to residential area of the parents

Variables	Nos	Mean	SD	t Value
Rural	68	73.37	14.67	0.97
Urban	32	73.29	11.69	

From the analysis it was found that the calculated "t" value 0.97 at 5% level is less than the table value 1.96 hence, the null hypothesis is accepted. The mean score of both rural and urban teacher trainees are the same and that there is no observed difference in the attitude toward special need education.

This finding contradict the conclusions drew in the previous studies Rajapaksa (2011) reiterates that those living in disadvantaged area should be given more access to the awareness of the disabled than those in the cities. Pointing out the access to knowledge about special needs education Jazeel et al. (2013) argues that any educational system need to be introduced in village level to achieve its outcome as most of the people in Sri Lanak live in rural areas.

## Conclusion

It is concluded from the analysis of the data that teacher trainees at Addalaichenai have favourable attitude towards special needs education. It could be possible about role of media and new educational policies implemented at school levels.

It is also concluded from the analysis that there is significant difference in the attitude of the teacher trainees towards special needs education in terms of gender. Male teacher have more favourable attitude than the female teacher trainees. This could be due to the fact that male teacher trainees have more access to the media and other access to information regarding the access to education, particularly to the differently abled and about inclusive education.

It is also concluded that there is no significant difference observed in the attitude of the teacher trainees due to their locality.

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