

Attitude of Stakeholders Towards Inclusive Education: A Study in the Context of West Bengal

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the attitude of stakeholders towards inclusive education in West Bengal. The sample comprised four types of stakeholders, namely 32 headmasters, 35 teachers, 30 parents, and 35 school management committee members, drawn randomly from 32 schools from the Howrah district of West Bengal. A descriptive survey method was employed to complete the study, and a 30-item self-constructed attitude scale was used for data collection. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics. The overall attitude of stakeholders was found to be positive for inclusive education. Compared to other categories of stakeholders, parents had the least desirable attitude when it comes to acting positively for inclusive education, while the school management committee viewed it more positively than parents. The most favourable attitude was seen by the teacher. In terms of gender, the female stakeholders were found to be more positive than their male counterparts. The influence of educational qualifications and age on the attitude of stakeholders was also observed. The study recommends that stakeholders' attitudes be positively shaped by organizing awareness programs and involving the media in the generation and dissemination of knowledge. The study has implications for teachers, differently-abled students, educational administrators, policymakers, rehabilitation professionals, and media personnel.

Keywords: Attitude, Stakeholders, Inclusive Education, School Management Committee

1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is a buzzword of international significance nowadays, with India being no exception. All over the world, it is practiced to provide equal opportunities to all children by protecting their basic human rights and ensuring full participation in the localized environment. In India, it is construed as educating children with disabilities in neighbourhood/ mainstream schools with appropriate support services. Inclusive education was launched in the country in 2002 as an intervention under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) to achieve the goal of universalization of elementary education. In 2009, another scheme named Inclusive Education for the Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS) was started to provide education to students with disabilities who have completed their elementary education and wish to pursue secondary education. Nowadays, it is an important component of Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan.

Inclusive education is a strategy to provide education to students with disabilities alongside non-disabled students in the minimum preventive environment. It has been started throughout the world due to its need felt on many grounds. For example, as per Thakur and Thakur (2012), they believed that 'segregation of any form is morally incorrect'. It is argued that any form of exclusion is detrimental to both the individual and society in a broader context. On the contrary, inclusion accepts and welcomes all those who are either not considered 'fit' by society or who

perceive themselves as ‘not fitting in’ the educational ambit. Inclusion is beneficial to all (Bala, 2017). Another reason for supporting inclusion is its low cost of operation. Peters (2003), while quoting a World Bank study, stated that inclusion is not only a cost-effective measure but also a cost-efficient practice. This finding is supported by Wang (2009) of Non-Hua University, Thailand. A study by Runswick-Cole (2008) found that children in segregated settings regressed socially, whereas in inclusive settings they progress. Wilson and Michael’s (2006) study showed that inclusion is capable of enhancing students’ academic achievement and acceptance of children with disabilities in the community. Idol (2006) and Brigham et al. (2006) found that included children demonstrate academic gains. The social benefits of inclusion, such as the development of good relationships, learning social-emotional skills, acquiring early language, communication, and literacy skills, and adopting appropriate behaviors, have been highlighted by Henninger & Sarika (2014). In view of Ainscow et al. (2006), the ‘human rights’ perspective outweighs any other view of meeting the needs of children with disabilities in inclusive settings. It is well recognized by international bodies, viz. UNESCO (2009), World Bank (2014), and UNICEF (2015) state that inclusive education is overall good for society because of its good returns on social, economic, and political platforms.

The voices of Indian educationists are, by and large, matched by their Western counterparts. For example, Jangira (1997) favoured inclusion to meet the constitutional obligations of education for all in rural areas. Singal (2006), while citing Sandhu (2001), Sinha (2001), and Mukhopadhyay & Mani (2002), supports inclusive education, citing that special education is very costly and it is dangerous for maintaining the self-esteem and personal dignity of students with disabilities.

In view of Berwal and Bala (2011), many people believe that persons with disabilities are sick persons. According to WHO (2011), disability is generally equated with incapacity.

Many researchers have investigated people’s feelings and perceptions about the disabled and their understanding of disability (WHO, 2011; McLennon, 2012). It is also found that, in larger life, attitude plays an important role in determining the success or failure of a person with disabilities. Ison et al. (2010) viewed that negative attitudes of the general public towards persons with disabilities are a by-product of their ignorance and misconceptions. In an investigation by Su et al. (2020) on the attitudes of stakeholders towards inclusive education, parents of children with disabilities held the most positive attitudes, whereas classroom teachers were the least positive. Further analyses revealed that attitudes were influenced by the role position of stakeholders. It is believed that when stakeholders feel well-informed on issues of individual differences, disability, and inclusion, they are likely to develop a more positive attitude towards diverse learners. In a study by Cecelia (2014), it was found that many students in inclusive schools were not educated on disabilities, which constrained their understanding, acceptance, and empathy for their peers with disabilities. Thornicroft et al. (2007), while exploring the effect of negative attitudes and behaviours on children and adults with disabilities, found that negative attitudes have harmed the self-esteem of persons with disabilities and, as a result, their participation in the community was reduced. Gowramma et al. (2018) reported that ‘people with physical disability frequently suffer more due to societal prejudices than due to the physical conditions in which they live’. Sharma (2005) concluded that negative attitudes, poverty, ignorance, and inadequate educational and infrastructural resources pose significant challenges to the integration of education in India. In a study by Glazzard (2011), teachers of an inclusive primary school were found to hold a negative attitude towards pupils with disabilities. Strong opposition from parents to inclusion was also observed. The parents viewed inclusion as a problematic practice. According to Bala (2017), positive attitudes are a necessary starting point for the successful implementation of inclusive

education; however, conversely, the attitudes of parents, family members, and the community were found to be negative. Past studies have revealed that, although inclusive education appears essential for many reasons but many stakeholders still do not hold positive attitudes towards it. Therefore, it appears essential to examine the existing attitudes of different stakeholders of the school education and to obtain a comprehensive view so that suggestions to bring effective changes in their perceptions and make inclusive education a successful practice.

2. OBJECTIVES

1. To find out the attitude of stakeholders (i.e., head master, teachers, parents, and members of School Management Committee (SMC) towards inclusive education
2. To compare the attitude of different stakeholders towards inclusive settings in the classroom.

3. HYPOTHESIS

In order to achieve the objective following hypotheses have formulated:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in attitude between teachers and SMC members.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in attitude between teachers and parents.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference in the Mean score of attitudes between the headmaster, parents, and SMC members.

4. DELIMITATION

The present study is restricted to the Howrah district only.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Sample

The sample comprised 32 headmasters, 35 teachers, 30 parents, and 35 SMC members drawn accidentally from 32 schools from seven blocks out of fourteen blocks of Howrah districts. Blocks have been chosen by Random Sampling Technique (RST), and schools have been chosen by the Purposive Sampling Technique (PST). A total of 132 stakeholders have been chosen for the study.

5.2 Research Method

A descriptive survey method was employed to complete the study.

6. TOOL FOR DATA COLLECTION

A 30 item self-constructed attitude scale was used to investigate the attitude of stakeholders. Some of the items were adapted from Khan's (2011). 'Scale for Attitude towards the Disabled' and Moline's (n.d) 'Attitudes toward Disabled Persons Scale' and adapted items were merged with self-constructed items to make them suitable for the study. While framing the items, some suggestions given by Edward et al. (1968), as well as Best & Kahn (2006), were considered. Therefore, the items of the attitude scale were not statements of fact but expressions of the desired behaviour; they were short, containing words such as only, just, and merely, referred to the present, and the vocabulary was simple. The double-barrelled statements and double negatives were avoided.

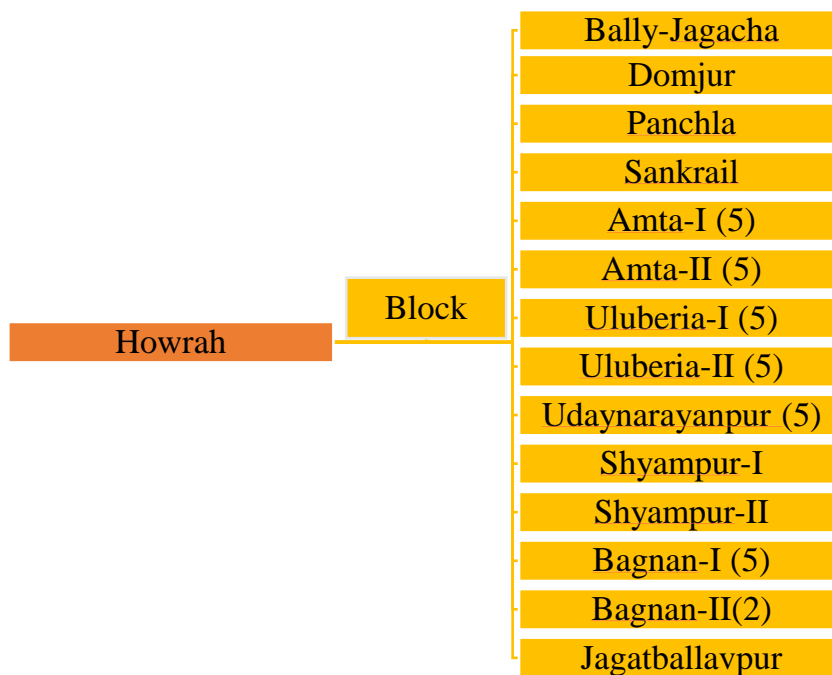


Figure 1: Sampling Distribution

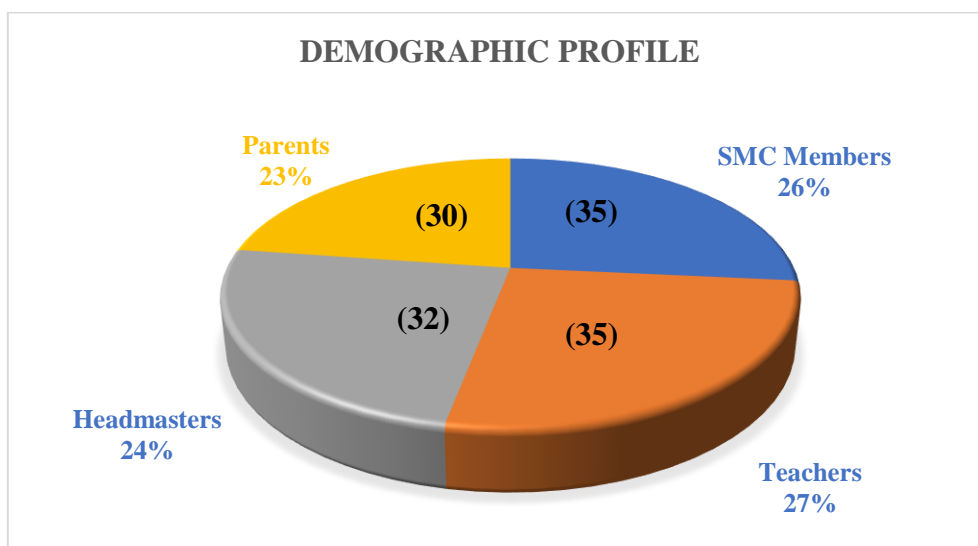


Figure 2: Distribution of 132 Samples

Statements containing universals such as all, always, none, and never were used. The attitude scale so constructed was given to language and subject experts for content validity and clarity of language. Feedback received was used to modify the items. There were five responses to each item, i.e., strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree. The scores of participants could range from 0 to 150. There were three levels of attitude: negative (score less than or equal to 50), neutral (score less than or equal to 100), and positive (score greater than 100). It means a high score on the scale reflects a positive attitude.

7. ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The data collected through the attitude scale were analysed using descriptive statistics.

8. FINDINGS

The investigators contacted the heads and visited the 32 schools. A good rapport was established with the stakeholders, and they were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and used solely for research purposes. A demographic profile of stakeholders was prepared by the researchers according to their role position, gender, age, and educational level. The detail of the demographic profile is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Stakeholders

S. N.	Stakeholders	Number	Percentage
1.	Role Position		
	School Management Committee (SMC) Members	35	26.5
	Teachers	35	26.5
	Headmasters	32	24
	Parents	30	23
	Total	132	100
2	Gender		
	Male	88	66.7
	Female	44	33.3
3	Age		
	18-30 years	08	6
	31-45 years	89	68
	46-58 years	32	24
	58-above	03	2
4	Level of Education		
	Illiterate	02	1.5
	Primary	08	6.06
	Matriculation	12	9.09
	10+2	14	10.60
	Graduation	20	15.15
	Post-graduation & above	76	57.60

Table 1 indicates that 132 stakeholders responded to the attitude scale, out of which 35 (26.5 per cent) were SMC members, 35 (26.5 per cent) teachers, 32 (24 per cent) headmasters, and 30 (23 per cent) parents. In terms of gender, 88 (66.7 per cent) stakeholders were male and 44 (33.3 per cent) females. The age range of teachers and head-teachers was from 18 to 58 years, while it exceeded 58 years for parents and SMC members. Eight stakeholders (6.0 per cent) fell within the age bracket of 18 to 30 years, whereas 89 stakeholders (68.0 per cent) belonged to the age group of 31 to 45 years. A moderate number (N=32, 24.0 per cent) of the stakeholders were between 46 and 58 years of age, while a very small proportion (N=3, 2.0 per cent) was above 58

years of age. Educational levels of the participants varied from illiteracy to postgraduation and only two of them (1.50 per cent) were illiterate, while eight stakeholders (6.06 per cent) were primary educated, twelve were (9.09 per cent) matric pass, fourteen were (10.60 per cent) passed 10+2 stage, twenty stakeholders were (15.15 per cent) graduate, and seventy-six stakeholders (57.60 per cent) were having post-graduation and above qualifications.

8.1. TEACHERS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Table 2 presents the teachers' mean scores on the 'Attitude towards Inclusive Education' scale.

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

S. N.	Stakeholders	Number	Percentage	Mean score
1	Role position			
	Teachers	35	26.5	111.06
2	Gender			
	Male	24	68.57	110.42
	Female	11	31.43	112.45
3	Age			
	18-30 years	04	11.43	116.58
	31-45 years	21	60	107.24
	46-58 years	10	28.57	116.874
4	Level of Education			
	Graduation	10	28.57	108.68
	Post-graduation & above	25	71.43	113.89

Table 2 depicts that the group of classroom teachers had a 'positive' attitude towards inclusive education since the mean of total scores (N= 35) on the attitude scale for this group was found to be 111.06. This implies that the total scores for female teachers (N = 11, M = 112.45) were slightly higher than those of male teachers (N = 24, M = 110.42), indicating that female teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education were relatively more positive than those of male teachers. The age of teachers varied from 18 to 58 years. The teachers of the age group 46-58 years had a higher mean score (N=10, M=116.874) than those who were between 18 and 30 years of age (N = 04, M=116.58). The group of teachers with the lowest mean score (N=21, M=107.24) was between 31 to 45 years.

8.2. HEADMASTERS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Table 3 presents the mean scores of the headmasters on the attitude towards inclusive education scale.

Table 3: Mean Scores of Headmasters' on 'Attitude towards Inclusive Education' Scale

S. No.	Stakeholders	Number	Percentage	Mean score
1	Role position			
	Headmasters	32	24	103.5
2	Gender			
	Male	20	62.5	105.40
	Female	12	37.5	100.33
3	Age			
	31-45 years	21	65.60	104.8
	46-58 years	11	34.4	101.02
4	Level of Education			
	Graduation	08	25	102.8
	Post-graduation & above	24	75	103.73

It is evident from Table 3 that a total of 32 headmasters responded to the scale, and they are found to have a 'positive' attitude towards the implementation of inclusive education. A majority of these participants were male (N = 20, 62.50 per cent), with fewer females (N = 12, 37.50 per cent). The mean score of male headmasters (N = 20, M = 105.40) was greater than that of their female counterparts (N = 12, M = 100.33). The mean score of old-age headmasters (N = 11, M = 101.02) is smaller than less experienced heads of schools (N = 21, M = 104.80). A large percentage of headmasters (N = 24, 75 per cent) were holding qualifications equal to post-graduation and above, while a couple of them were graduates (N = 8, 25 per cent). Highly qualified heads hold a higher mean score than their less qualified counterparts.

8.3. SMC MEMBERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Table 4 provides the mean scores of SMC members on the 'Attitude towards Inclusive Education' scale.

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

S. N.	Stakeholders	Number	Percentage	Mean score
1	Role position			
	SMC Members	35	26.5	98.60
2	Gender			
	Male	26	74.3	100.50
	Female	09	25.7	93.11
3	Age			
	18-30 years	03	8.6	97.5
	31-45 years	27	77.1	98.2

	46-58 years	04	11.4	101
	Above 58 years	01	2.9	103.1
4	Level of Education			
	Primary	05	14.3	100.14
	Matric	02	5.7	101.2
	10+2	09	25.7	99.42
	Graduation	02	5.7	94.68
	Post-graduation & above	17	48.6	97.86

Table 4 shows that the overall attitude of 35 SMC members was neutral. The group of SMC members consisted of females (N = 09, 25.70 per cent) and males (N = 26, 74.30 per cent). The males (N = 26, M = 100.50) reported a marginally positive attitude than females (N = 9, M = 93.11). The age of this group ranges from 18 to 58 years and above. The aged members showed a relatively positive attitude than the younger members. Education is not found to have a positive impact on attitude towards inclusive education, revealing secondary school educated (N = 09, M = 99.42) members holding neutral attitudes similar to graduates (N = 02, M = 94.68), but primary (N = 05, M = 100.14), and matric pass (N = 02, M = 101.2) respondents were having positive attitudes. Interestingly, compared to secondary and matric pass respondents, the sole graduate was found to have a lower mean score. The 17 SMC members were holding postgraduate degrees.

8.4. PARENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Table 5 provides the mean scores of parents on the 'Attitude towards Inclusive Education' Scale.

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

S. N.	Stakeholder	Number	Percentage	Mean score
1	Role position			
	Parents	30	23	96.53
2	Gender			
	Male	19	63.3	94.6
	Female	11	36.7	99.86
3	Age			
	18-30 years	01	3.30	98.6
	31-45 years	20	66.7	96.4
	46-58 years	07	23.3	100.4
	Above 58 years	02	6.7	83.25
4	Level of Education			
	Illiterate	02	6.7	95.42

	Primary	03	10	99.81
	Matric	10	33.3	97.67
	10+2	05	16.7	95.80
	Graduation	00	00	00
	Post-graduation & above	10	33.3	94.99

Table 5 reveals the overall mean score of 30 parents on the attitude scale as well as their respective mean scores in three subcategories (gender, age and level of education). In aggregate, parents have a moderate attitude towards inclusive education, with mothers (N = 11, M = 99.86) coming out slightly more positive than fathers (N = 19, M = 94.6). Parents within the age range of 45 to 58 years were more positive than the rest of the group. Strangely, parents possessing a graduate degree and having a primary education hold a moderate attitude towards inclusive education.

8.5. OVERALL AS WELL AS CATEGORY-WISE ATTITUDE OF STAKEHOLDERS TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Table 6 summarizes the overall as well as category-wise mean scores of 132 stakeholders on the 'Attitude towards Inclusive Education' Scale.

Table 6: Overall as well as Category-wise Mean Scores of 132 Stakeholders on 'Attitude towards Inclusive Education' Scale

S. N.	Stakeholders	Number	Percentage	Mean score
1	Role position			
	SMC Members	35	26.5	98.6
	Teachers	35	26.5	111.06
	Headmasters	32	24	103.5
	Parents	30	23	96.53
	Overall	132	100	102.62
2	Gender			
	Male	88	66.7	102.05
	Female	44	33.3	103.76
3	Age			
	18-30 years	08	6	103.64
	31-45 years	89	68	101.54
	46-58 years	32	24	101.42
	58-Above	03	2	144.74
4	Level of Education			
	Illiterate	02	1.5	101
	Primary	08	6.06	101.40

	Matric	12	9.09	103.28
	10+2	14	10.60	101.5
	Graduation	20	15.15	100.31
	Post-graduation & above	76	57.60	103.50

Table 6 presents the response data to a 30-item scale designed to identify the respondents' attitudes towards inclusive education. Table 6 further provides a comparison of the groups of respondents based on their demographic characteristics. The mean scores for all groups lie between 96.53 and 111.06 which indicates that the stakeholders had a mixed attitude towards the provisions of inclusive education. The difference in mean scores was found between different groups of stakeholders. However, the size of the mean differences was small suggesting little practical significance.

Compared to SMC members (N = 35, M = 98.6), headmasters (N = 32, M = 103.5), teachers (N = 35, M = 111.06) had a higher mean score. This suggests that classroom teachers, when compared to other stakeholders, have the most desirable attitude when it comes to acting positively for inclusive education.

In terms of gender, the female stakeholders (N = 44, M = 103.76) were found to be more positive than their male counterparts (N = 88, M = 102.05). This might be due to the fact that females are generally instinctively concerned, soft-hearted, and associated with the education of their children. They regularly attend SMC and Parents Teachers Association (PTA) meetings, as well as participate in annual parent counselling and awareness camps.

In terms of age, the maximum stakeholders were middle-aged. Collectively, they had favourable mean scores which represented greater positivity for inclusive education. The very young stakeholders in the age range 18-30 years (N = 8, M = 103.64) having positive attitude towards inclusive education indicating that inclusive education has a bright future. The young and old age stakeholders had less positive attitudes than middle-aged stakeholders.

Although the majority of the stakeholders were postgraduates. The number of matric and primary educated was 12 and 08. Only two stakeholders were illiterate. This can be interpreted to imply that the influence of educational qualifications on the attitude of stakeholders can be established. The attitude scores of the subjects ranged from 101 to 103.5 within the group: [illiterates (101), the primary school educated (101.40), matric pass (103.28), 10+2 (101.5), graduates (100.31), postgraduates and above (103.5)], revealing that there is a positive attitude towards inclusive education among stakeholders having a post-graduation and graduation degree. Therefore, the result suggests a positive relationship between the educational qualifications of stakeholders and their favourable attitudes.

8.6. COMPARISON OF THE ATTITUDES OF STAKEHOLDERS TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Table 7: Significance of difference in Attitude between Teacher and SMC members

Group	Teacher	SMC Member	SE _D	df	t-value	P-value	Remarks
Mean	111.06	98.6	1.621	68	7.6856	<.0001 (Extremely significant)	Null Hypothesis (H ₀₁) Rejected
SD	7.18	6.36					
SE _M	1.21	1.07					
N	35	35					

Standard error of difference has obtained 1.621, and the calculated ‘t’ value has found 7.6856, which is greater than the tabulated value. Hence, the P-value is significant. H_{01} rejected. So, there is a significant difference in attitude towards inclusion between teachers and SMC members.

Table 8: Significance of difference in Attitude between Teacher and Parents.

Group	Teacher	Parent	SE _D	df	t-value	P-value	Remarks
Mean	111.06	96.53	1.830	63	7.9351	<.0001 (Extremely Significant)	Null Hypothesis (H ₀₂) Rejected
SD	7.18	7.56					
SE _M	1.21	1.38					
N	35	30					

SE_D=1.830 against degree of freedom 63. Calculated ‘t’ value 7.9351 which is higher than tabulated one. Here Null Hypothesis (H₀₂) has also rejected. So, there is significant difference of attitude between Teacher and Parents towards inclusive education.

Table 9: Significance of difference in Mean score of Attitude between Headmaster, Parents and SMC Members

Calculated ‘F’	df ₁	df ₂	F _{0.05} (Table Value)	Remarks
$F = \frac{\text{Larger estimate of variance}}{\text{Smaller estimate of variance}}$ $= 40.424/27.29$ $= 1.481$	31	34	0.554	Null Hypothesis (H ₀₃) Rejected

Calculated ‘F’ value (1.481) higher than table value (0.554). Significant difference at 0.05 level. Hence null hypothesis (H₀₃) is also rejected here.

9. DISCUSSION

Although stakeholders collectively had a positive attitude towards inclusive education, their attitudes were influenced by their respective roles. These findings are contrary to Cohen (1994), Evans et al. (1998), Sharma and Deppeler (2005), and Glazzard (2011), who found attitude a potential barrier to inclusive education. The present results also challenge Bala (2017) that the attitude of the parents, family members, and the community is that there is no use in educating a child with a disability. This study has gained support from Khan (2011) that secondary school teachers have predominantly positive attitudes towards inclusive education.

The SMC members are lagging behind other categories of stakeholders in holding a constructive attitude towards inclusive education. The role of SMCs in inclusive education is significant because they are the responsible authorities for identification, enrollment, and providing instructional and infrastructural facilities to children with disabilities. It also has a role in the preparation of the annual plan and in monitoring the expenditure. Therefore, the attitudes of this group are required to be shaped more positively through awareness programs and involving the media in the dissemination of knowledge.

The positive attitude of teachers towards inclusion is a reflection of their confidence and skills in educating children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. However, the relatively fewer score of upper primary teachers (10+2 pass) seems worrisome because they are the ones with whom a child with a disability interacts first after enrollment in the school. NEP-2020 has put heavy obligations on these teachers for engaging these students in speech, Art, and sensory therapy while facilitating foundational literacy and numeracy during the stage of early childhood care and education classes. The only way to translate the positive effect of NEP is to invent and implement strategies for modifying the attitude of upper primary teachers.

The headmasters ranked second in holding a positive attitude towards inclusive education. Administrative support is necessary for the success of any program and policy. A positive attitude of the headmaster makes it easy for teachers to attend in-service training, organise interventions for SMC members and parents, collaborate with other agencies to procure aids and appliances, submit a plan for greater funds, improve infrastructure, and ensure better attendance of students with disabilities, as well as medical and instructional facilities.

The positive attitude of parents towards inclusive education is a reflection of 21st-century India. Parents are the main stakeholders in the education of children with disabilities because the efforts of teachers at school may be nullified if parents are not supporting them at home. Most of the parents belong to the most disadvantaged section of society, but despite the adversities on many fronts, their motivation and positive attitude are laudable. The positive attitude among parents may be a result of the annual training received by them on inclusive education. It is a reflection of the progressive and transforming state of West Bengal.

The study has implications for the media, rehabilitation professionals, and the educational sector. The media must give proper coverage to the abilities and achievements of persons with disabilities so that a positive picture is developed in the minds of the common people. The rehabilitation professionals must capitalize on the positivity among the mindsets of the school world. They must try to bring out-of-school children with disabilities into mainstream education. The positive attitude of teachers and school administrators may be used in pooling additional resources from the community.

10. CONCLUSION

It is well recognized that the maladjustment of a child with a disability is not so much due to his/her disability but due to emotional stress imposed by society as a result of negative attitudes and perceptions about their abilities or disabilities. Therefore, there is an urgent need to work continuously to make people aware of their duties and responsibilities towards students with disabilities and to remove their myths and misconceptions about the disabled and disability. If the school education is not positive towards students with disabilities, any move to involve all in the education process will fail. For successful inclusive education, a positive attitude of stakeholders is essential.

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