Inclusive Education: A Comparative Study of General and Resource Teachers' Understanding

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education has emerged as a key reform within contemporary educational systems, aiming to ensure equitable learning opportunities for children with disabilities (CWDs). Teachers' understanding, beliefs, and professional preparedness are critical determinants of successful inclusive practices. The present study examined and compared the understanding of inclusive education among general teachers and resource teachers working in mainstream schools under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in Maharashtra, India. A quantitative descriptive survey design grounded in the positivist paradigm was employed. Data were collected from a stratified random sample of 200 teachers (100 general teachers and 100 resource teachers) using a researcher-developed instrument, *PINNACLE*, comprising six validated and reliable subscales. Descriptive statistics and inferential analysis using the *z* test were applied. Results indicated no statistically significant difference between general and resource teachers in their overall understanding of inclusive education, including conceptual and component-based aspects. Both groups demonstrated moderate to high levels of understanding. The findings highlight the positive influence of policy initiatives, professional training, and experiential learning on teachers' understanding of inclusive education and underscore the need for sustained professional development to strengthen inclusive practices.

Keywords: inclusive education; general teachers; resource teachers; teacher understanding; descriptive survey

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is grounded in the principles of equity, participation, and respect for learner diversity. It advocates for the education of all learners, including children with disabilities, within mainstream classrooms supported by appropriate resources and instructional adaptations (Villa & Thousand, 2005). In India, inclusive education has gained significant policy attention through legislative frameworks such as the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2009), the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016), and the National Education Policy (2020).

Despite progressive policy intent, the effective implementation of inclusive education is contingent upon teachers' understanding, competencies, and classroom practices. General teachers and resource teachers play complementary yet distinct roles in inclusive settings. While general teachers are responsible for classroom instruction and curriculum delivery, resource teachers provide specialized support tailored to the needs of learners with disabilities. Differences in professional training and role expectations may influence how these

two groups conceptualize inclusive education. Examining similarities and differences in their understanding is therefore essential for strengthening inclusive practices and fostering collaborative professional cultures.

The present study compares the understanding of inclusive education among general and resource teachers, with a focus on (a) the concept of inclusive education and (b) its core components.

Objectives of the Study

1. To compare the overall understanding of inclusive education among general teachers and resource teachers.
2. To compare the understanding of the concept of inclusive education between general teachers and resource teachers.
3. To compare the understanding of the components of inclusive education between general teachers and resource teachers.

Hypotheses

- **H01:** There is no significant difference between the overall understanding of inclusive education among general teachers and resource teachers.
- **H01.1:** There is no significant difference between the understanding of the concept of inclusive education among general teachers and resource teachers.
- **H01.2:** There is no significant difference between the understanding of the components of inclusive education among general teachers and resource teachers.

METHOD

Research Paradigm and Design

The study was conducted within a positivist research paradigm, which assumes the existence of an objective and measurable reality. A quantitative descriptive survey design was adopted to systematically collect numerical data and compare two independent groups of teachers (Creswell, 2013).

Population and Sample

The population comprised general teachers and resource teachers working in mainstream SSA schools in the Mumbai, Mumbai Suburban, and Thane districts of Maharashtra. A stratified random sampling technique was employed. The final sample consisted of 200 teachers, including 100 general teachers and 100 resource teachers, selected based on predefined inclusion criteria related to qualifications, teaching experience, medium of instruction, and school type.

Instrumentation

Data were collected using a researcher-developed survey instrument titled *PINNACLE*. The tool comprised six subscales:

1. **Bodh** – Understanding of inclusive education
2. **Saksham** – Teacher self-efficacy

3. **Anukul** – Availability of a conducive environment

4. **Yash** – Estimation of scholastic achievement of CWDs

5. **Sarvarth** – In-service training needs

6. **Sansadhan** – Requirement of resources

Each subscale underwent expert validation, pilot testing, and reliability estimation using Cronbach's alpha. Reliability coefficients ranged from .70 to .89, indicating acceptable to high internal consistency (George & Mallery, 2003).

Data Collection Procedure

Prior permission was obtained from SSA authorities and school principals. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, assured of confidentiality, and participation was voluntary. Instruments were administered in person, and completed responses were collected following standardized procedures.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (means and variances) were computed. Inferential analysis was conducted using independent-samples *z* tests to compare mean scores of general teachers and resource teachers, given the large sample size and approximate normality of data. Analyses were conducted using SPSS and Microsoft Excel.

Results

To examine differences in understanding of inclusive education between general teachers and resource teachers, mean scores were compared across three dimensions: (a) concept of inclusive education, (b) components of inclusive education, and (c) overall understanding of inclusive education. Independent-samples *z* tests were employed.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and results of the *z* test analysis.

Table 1: **Comparison of General and Resource Teachers on Understanding of Inclusive Education**

Subvariable	Group	n	Mean	Variance	z	z (critical, .05)	Significance
Concept of inclusive education	General teachers	100	13.08	6.34	0.79	1.96	Not significant
	Resource teachers	100	13.41	11.13			
Components of inclusive education	General teachers	100	28.53	17.26	1.85	1.96	Not significant
	Resource teachers	100	29.66	20.07			

Overall understanding	General teachers	100	41.61	24.60	1.92	1.96	Not significant
	Resource teachers	100	43.67	33.44			

Across all three dimensions, the calculated *z* values were lower than the critical value of 1.96 at the .05 level of significance. Accordingly, the null hypotheses (H01, H01.1, and H01.2) were retained, indicating no statistically significant difference between general teachers and resource teachers in their understanding of inclusive education.

Interpretation of Results

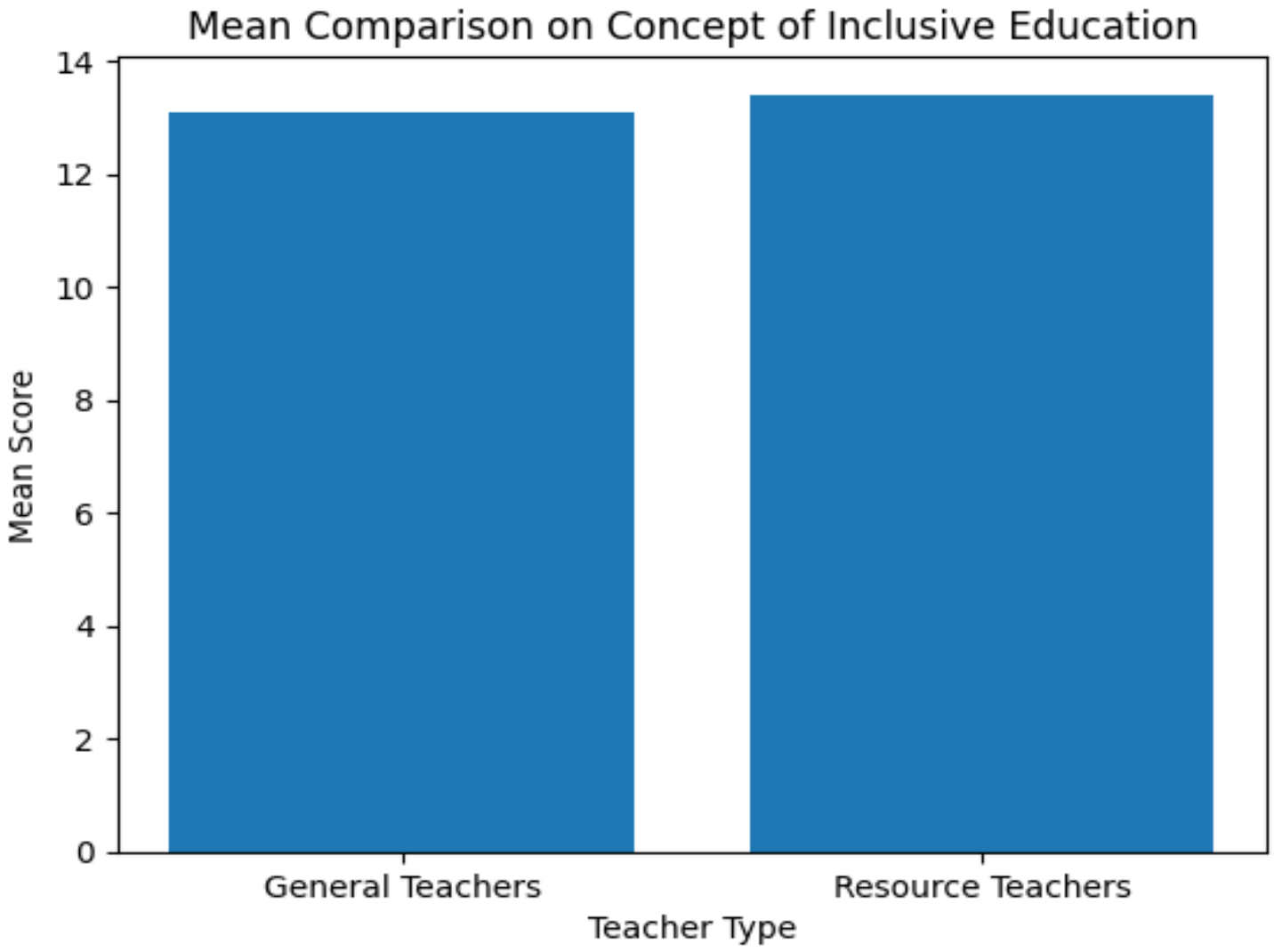

Figure 1 illustrates the comparison of mean scores on the concept of inclusive education.

Objective 1(a): Concept of Inclusive Education

The calculated z-value (0.79) for the concept of inclusive education is less than the critical z-value (1.96) at the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H02) is retained. This indicates that there is no

statistically significant difference between general teachers and resource teachers in their understanding of the concept of inclusive education.

The *Bodh* tool included 23 items assessing the conceptual understanding of inclusive education, with a maximum possible score of 23. The mean scores obtained by general teachers (M = 13.08) and resource teachers (M = 13.41) were slightly above 50% of the maximum score. This suggests that both groups of teachers possess a **moderate level of conceptual understanding** of inclusive education.

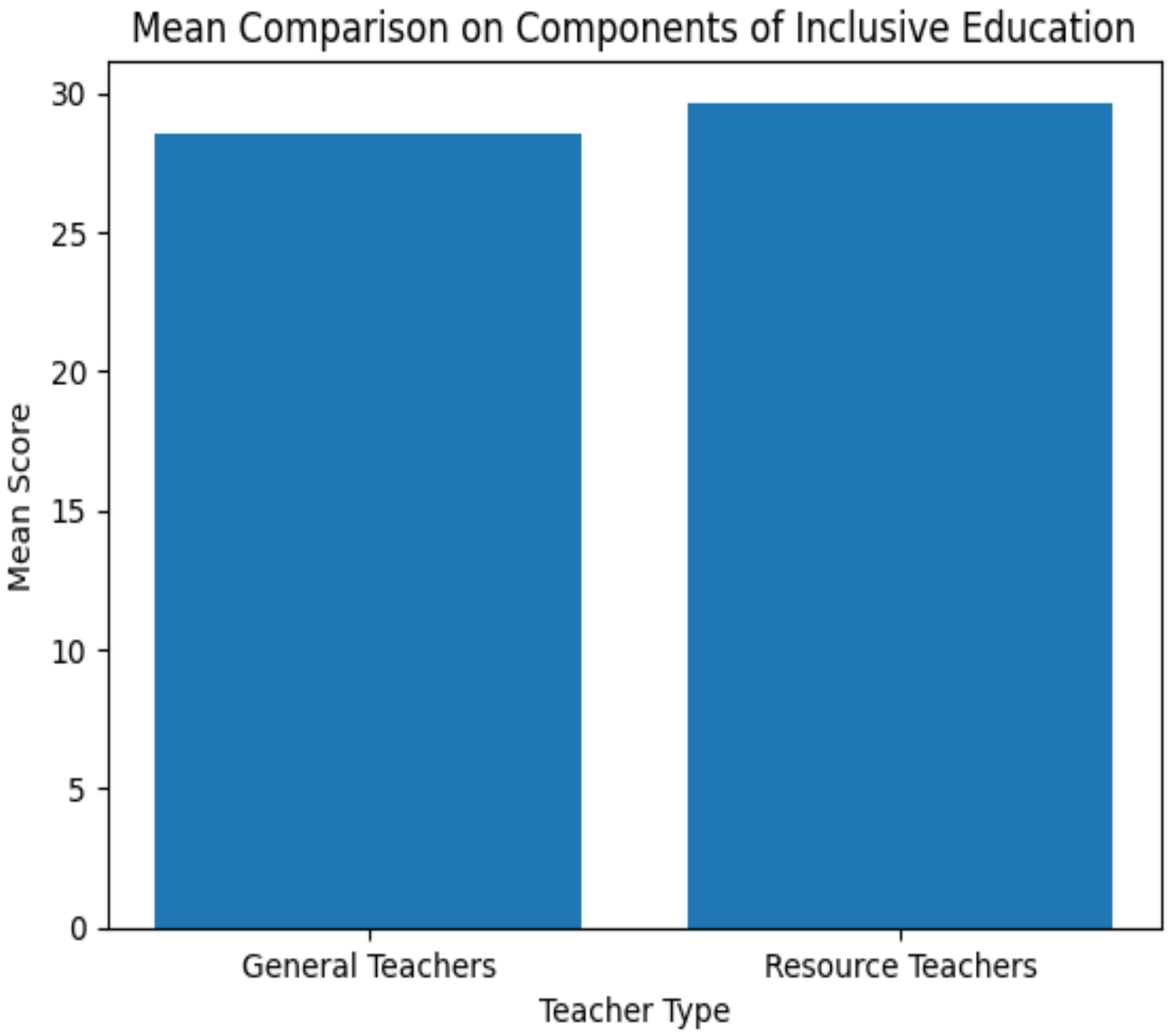

Figure 2 presents the mean comparison on the components of inclusive education.

Objective 1(b): Components of Inclusive Education

The calculated z-value (1.85) for understanding the components of inclusive education is lower than the critical value (1.96) at the 0.05 significance level. Hence, the null hypothesis (H03) is retained, indicating no significant difference between the two groups.

The components aspect of the *Bodh* tool was measured using five-point rating scale items, with scores ranging from 7 to 35. The mean scores of general teachers (M = 28.53) and resource teachers (M = 29.66) were above 75% of the maximum possible score. This reflects a **high level of understanding of the components of inclusive education** among both groups.

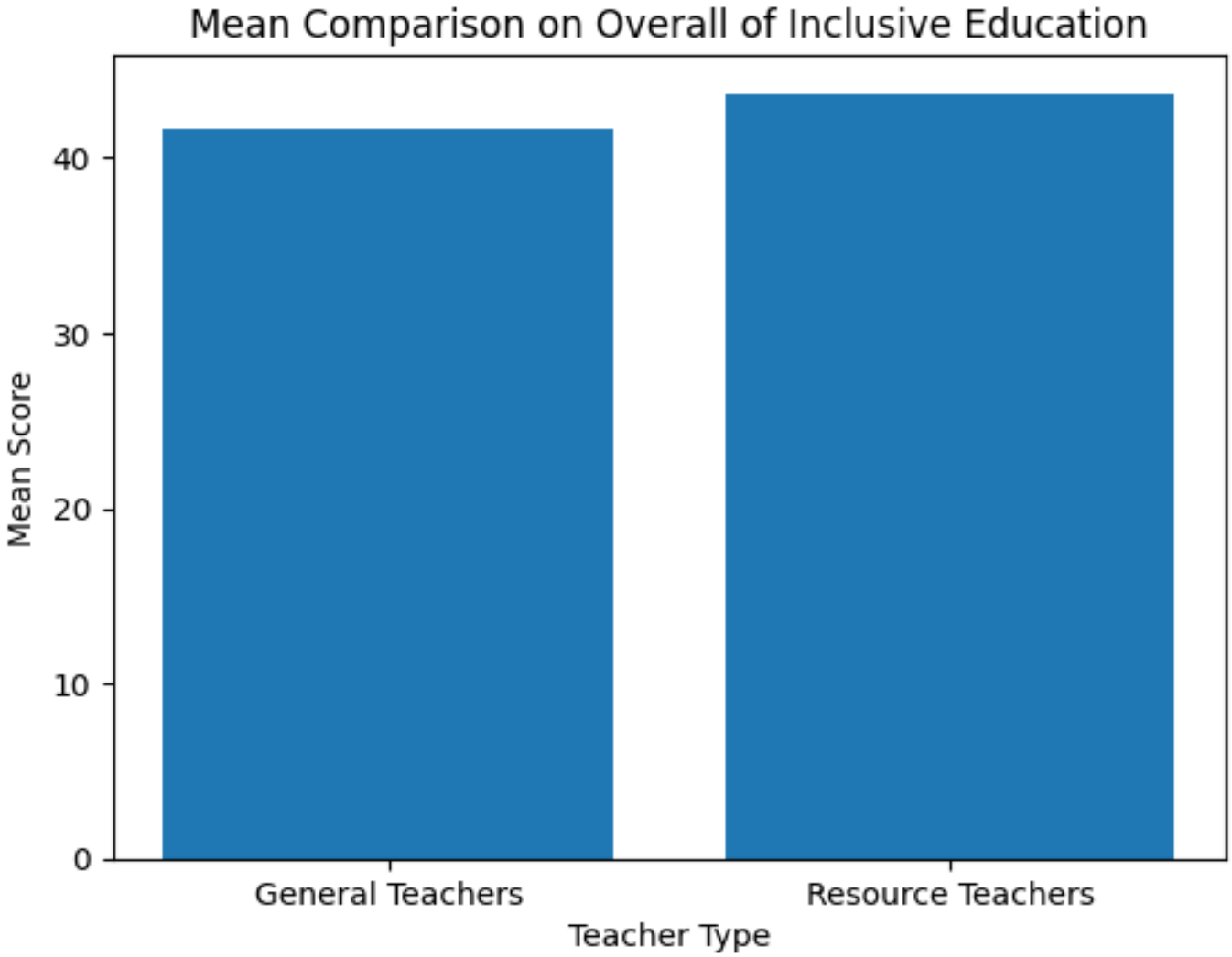

Figure 3 Depicts the overall understanding of inclusive education.

Overall Understanding of Inclusive Education

The calculated z-value for overall understanding (1.92) is less than the critical z-value (1.96) at the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H01) is retained. The mean scores of general teachers (M = 41.61) and resource teachers (M = 43.67) do not differ significantly, indicating that both groups demonstrate a **similar and adequate overall understanding of inclusive education**.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined and compared the understanding of inclusive education among general teachers and resource teachers working in mainstream schools under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in Maharashtra. The findings revealed no statistically significant differences between the two groups with respect to their understanding of the concept of inclusive education, its core components, and overall understanding. This convergence is a significant outcome, as earlier literature frequently highlighted disparities between general and

special educators in terms of preparedness and conceptual clarity (Hodkinson & Devarakonda, 2009; Sawhney & Bansal, 2014).

The moderate level of conceptual understanding observed among both groups suggests that teachers possess a foundational awareness of inclusive education as a rights-based and equity-driven approach. While the philosophy of inclusion appears to be reasonably well understood, the results also indicate scope for deeper theoretical engagement, particularly with contemporary inclusive frameworks such as universal design for learning and differentiated instruction.

The high level of understanding of the components of inclusive education reflects teachers' practical familiarity with inclusive strategies, including curriculum adaptations, flexible assessment, collaborative teaching, and resource utilization. This finding suggests that sustained engagement with inclusive classrooms under SSA has enabled teachers to translate policy mandates into functional classroom practices.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings are consistent with Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory, which emphasizes the role of mastery experiences in strengthening self-efficacy. Regular exposure to children with disabilities, coupled with in-service training and professional support, may have enhanced teachers' confidence and competence in inclusive settings. Furthermore, the results can be interpreted through the lens of situated cognition, wherein professional knowledge is constructed through participation in authentic contexts. Teachers' understanding of inclusion appears to have evolved through experiential learning, reflective practice, and collaborative problem solving within real school environments.

The findings also align with recent national and international research reporting improved teacher preparedness in systems where inclusive education is supported by coherent policy frameworks and professional development (Florian, 2014; Kumar & Rao, 2019; Loreman et al., 2010). The diminishing distinction between general and resource teachers' understanding suggests a shift toward inclusive education as a shared professional responsibility rather than a specialized function.

Although statistical differences were not observed, effect size analysis indicated small to approaching-moderate effects, particularly in overall understanding. This suggests that resource teachers may possess a marginal experiential advantage due to specialized roles and training. However, the small magnitude of these effects reinforces the conclusion that both groups are largely comparable in practical terms, which is encouraging for collaborative inclusive practice.

In addition teacher deeper insights they are more are same feeling about they wanted to practical knowledge about teaching. Teacher having the sign disability knowledge but they are working in cross disability. The resource teacher have more knowledge about practical inclusive pedogogy but they are not working more time with the student and general teachers are working with children with special needs but they don't have practicle knowledge. They In contrast, general teachers often expressed conceptual awareness of inclusion but highlighted challenges in implementation, such as large class sizes, lack of training, and limited institutional support.

Common themes across both groups included the importance of collaboration, the need for continuous professional development, and positive attitudes toward inclusion despite systemic constraints. These qualitative findings enrich the quantitative results by highlighting gaps between theoretical understanding and classroom practice.

Implications

The findings of the study have important implications for inclusive education policy, teacher education, and school practice.

At the policy level, the results provide empirical support for the effectiveness of inclusive education initiatives under SSA. The comparable understanding among general and resource teachers indicates that sustained policy emphasis, structured training, and resource allocation can foster a shared vision of inclusion across professional roles.

For teacher education, the study underscores the need to position inclusive education as a core competency for all teachers. Pre-service and in-service programs should move beyond awareness-building to emphasize advanced inclusive pedagogies, collaborative consultation skills, and evidence-based instructional strategies.

At the school level, the findings highlight the importance of collaborative professional cultures. School leaders should promote co-teaching models, joint lesson planning, and shared accountability for learner outcomes to translate inclusive understanding into effective classroom practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Sustained Professional Development:** Regular, school-based professional development programs focusing on inclusive pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and universal design for learning should be implemented for both general and resource teachers.

2. **Collaborative Teaching Practices:** Schools should institutionalize co-teaching, collaborative planning, and peer mentoring to strengthen inclusive classroom practices.

3. **Strengthening Teacher Education:** Inclusive education should be integrated as a mandatory and assessed component in pre-service teacher education curricula.

4. **Policy and Administrative Support:** Educational authorities should ensure adequate funding, monitoring, and resource provision to support inclusive practices at the school level.

5. **Reflective and Research-Oriented Practice:** Teachers should be encouraged to engage in reflective practice and action research to continuously improve inclusive strategies.

Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, the study has certain limitations. The sample was confined to SSA schools in selected districts of Maharashtra, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. The reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of social desirability bias. Additionally, the study focused on teachers' understanding rather than direct observation of classroom practices, which restricts conclusions about the actual implementation of inclusive education.

Directions for Future Research

Future research may adopt mixed-method or qualitative approaches to explore how teachers translate understanding into classroom practice. Longitudinal studies could examine changes in teacher understanding and practice over time in relation to professional development initiatives. Comparative studies across states, school systems, or international contexts would further enrich the evidence base for inclusive education.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that general teachers and resource teachers working in SSA schools demonstrate comparable and satisfactory levels of understanding of inclusive education. The absence of significant differences across conceptual and component-based dimensions indicates that inclusive education is increasingly perceived as a collective professional responsibility. Sustained professional development, collaborative school cultures, and strong policy support are essential for strengthening inclusive practices and ensuring equitable learning opportunities for all learners.

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