
INFLUENCE OF INTERNSHIP ON ATTITUDINAL TRANSFORMATION AMONG PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS TOWARDS CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the effectiveness of internship in attitudinal transformation towards children with special needs among prospective teachers who are preparing to work with children with special needs. As inclusive education gains prominence, the need for teachers to possess positive attitudes towards diverse learners becomes critical. The article explores the impact of internships on prospective teachers' attitudes, seeking to determine whether such practical experiences lead to attitudinal shifts that foster more inclusive teaching practices. To conduct this research, a survey method was employed. Survey was administered to a cohort of prospective teachers who participated in internships that focused on special needs education. The study analysed their attitudes towards children with special needs before and after the internship program, as well as their perceptions of the internship's influence on their attitudes. Preliminary findings indicate a significant positive correlation between internships and attitudinal transformation. The majority of participants reported an increased understanding of the unique needs and capabilities of children with special needs. Furthermore, they demonstrated heightened empathy, greater self-efficacy, and an increased willingness to employ differentiated instructional strategies. These findings suggest that internships play a vital role in shaping prospective teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards inclusive education. This research sheds light on the importance of experiential learning opportunities, such as internships, in teacher preparation programs. It contributes valuable insights to the ongoing discourse surrounding inclusive education and the significance of

fostering positive attitudes among educators. Ultimately, the study advocates for the integration of internships as a fundamental component of teacher training, equipping future educators with the attitudes and skills necessary to create supportive and inclusive learning environments for all students, including those with special needs.

KEYWORDS: Internship, Attitudinal Transformation, Prospective Teachers, Handling Children with Special Needs.

INTRODUCTION

Interns can improve their future professional performance through the internship educational system. It's crucial to become proficient in their field of work. The training provided to interns throughout their internship period increase their knowledge and skills, which enable high-quality performance. Internships will only strengthen the personalities and attitudes of degree-holding college students. It offers practical learning opportunities for interns. It aims to implement a very lasting change in an intern to improve his capacity to complete the assignment. The comprehension and skills of the interns for completing the specific assignment will be successfully shown during the internship. Getting a good impression of the trainee is the major objective of the internship application.

Although it is not for everyone, teaching is a fulfilling and inspirational vocation. It is extremely demanding that its practitioners have a true understanding of what must be done to lead to the student's flawless acquisition of information and have a notable level of proficiency in the skills required to perform these obligations. It's not always simple to get your word out there via teaching. That is a challenging communication issue. We may address the communication issue by utilising various instructional strategies, tools, and procedures. Successful usage of various teaching techniques may be achieved by a teacher with professional training. Prospective teachers get instruction from all of the institutions that train educators in both theoretical and practical knowledge and skills related to teaching various disciplines. Teaching exercises are conducted at the conclusion of the session to put the theoretical knowledge of various teaching techniques into practice. It typically lasts for one month. Teaching is the action of assisting others in learning. That is one of the most significant things we do. All of the learning opportunities that student teachers have in classrooms are referred to as "teaching practice." "Attitudes are generated out of the instructional tones that constitute an emotive aspect of every experience," claim Crow &

Crow. "Attitude is mainly a manner of being set towards or against particular things," claim Murphy & Murphy.

Internship

Internships are highly effective in facilitating attitudinal transformation among prospective teachers who will be working with children with special needs. Here are some reasons why internships are beneficial in this regard:

1. Practical Experience: Internships provide prospective teachers with hands-on experience working directly with children who have special needs. This practical exposure enables them to witness the challenges faced by these children and gain a deeper understanding of their unique learning requirements. This first-hand experience often leads to a shift in attitudes and an increased empathy towards children with special needs.

2. Exposure to Diverse Needs: Internships offer opportunities to work with a diverse range of children with special needs, such as those with physical disabilities, intellectual challenges, or behavioural issues. By interacting with these students, prospective teachers can develop a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse needs within the special education spectrum. This exposure can help dispel misconceptions, reduce stereotypes, and foster a more inclusive mindset.

3. Collaboration with Professionals: During internships, prospective teachers often collaborate with experienced special education professionals, including teachers, therapists, and administrators. This collaboration allows them to observe and learn from these professionals' expertise, strategies, and approaches. Interacting with these mentors and witnessing their dedication and passion for supporting children with special needs can inspire prospective teachers and shape their attitudes positively.

4. Reflective Practice: Internships typically involve reflective practice, where prospective teachers analyze and reflect on their experiences, challenges, and successes. Engaging in this process encourages them to critically evaluate their own attitudes and beliefs towards students with special needs. By identifying their preconceived notions and biases, prospective teachers can actively work towards transforming their attitudes and adopting more inclusive perspectives.

5. Professional Development Opportunities: Internships often offer professional development opportunities, such as workshops, seminars, or training sessions. These activities focus on building knowledge, skills, and awareness related to teaching children with special needs. By acquiring new insights and learning evidence-based practices, prospective teachers can develop a more positive attitude towards inclusive education.

6. Supportive Environment: Internships provide a supportive environment where prospective teachers can experiment with different teaching strategies and receive feedback from mentors. This feedback helps them to refine their approaches and deepen their understanding of effective instructional techniques for students with special needs. The encouragement and guidance received during internships contribute to the attitudinal transformation process.

While internships can be highly effective in transforming attitudes, it's important to note that sustained and ongoing professional development is also crucial. Attitudes can continue to evolve and develop throughout a teacher's career, especially as they encounter different students and gain more experience in the field of special education.

Pre-service teachers participate in the internship as part of a school-based plan, which can last between four and twelve weeks. Internships provide students the chance to strengthen the connections between theory and practice, preparing them for career as teachers. This program's fundamental tenet was one of mutual benefit for all members. Teaching internships are a shared obligation of collaborating teachers, students, cooperating schools, and college supervisors or teacher educators.

The internship is crucial for today's teachers since it provides the student-teacher with the training they need to better comprehend the students diverse needs. A skilled educator can essentially address the class with assurance. All of these concerns for instructors in education have been resolved by the introduction of internships: he or she is able to handle a wide variety of unexpected scenarios and does not shrink away from challenging situations. A programme called an internship enables teachers to simplify their lessons and enter the classroom with greater self-assurance than a teacher without the proper preparation. It fosters a good attitude towards lifelong learning and keeps interns abreast of the most recent information and techniques. In fact, it assists the teacher in enhancing their current competencies to develop into an independent, self-reflective, and collaborative manager of learning, prepared to enter the teaching profession.

Walia (1992) asserted that the B.Ed. programme may use improvement because the internship that was offered throughout the course's one-year term was insufficient and the course was primarily theoretical in nature. On the basis of his research idea, Mishra (1992) claimed that in-service training had a favourable effect on instructors' behaviour and students' active involvement in the classroom. According to Dana (1998), interns' opinions of successful teaching were significantly influenced by the environment in the classroom and at school. The expectations that interns had for their internship experience were different from

what they actually encountered. The collaborating instructor significantly influenced the interns' development as reflective practitioners and their opinions on the best teaching techniques.

There were few opportunities to practice useful techniques and pick up instructional knowledge. Beggs, Ross, and Goodwing (2008) claim that internship courses give undergraduate students the chance to learn through experiencing professional practice and knowledge application activities. Saleha (2012) discovered that student teachers saw internship programmes as a genuine chance to hone and enhance their teaching abilities in a real school environment. The findings of the in-depth interview with the principal show how important the internship programme is and how it affects student teachers' performance. Singh (2013) found no discernible difference between male and female student teachers' attitudes regarding internship. The attitudes of student teachers from different areas (urban and rural) about internship did not change significantly. When sex and location were examined, there was no discernible difference in the pupil instructors' opinions regarding internship. Attitudinal transformation also occurs during Internship. The attitudinal change occurs when people intentionally minimize cognitive dissonance by altering their attitude, beliefs, or conduct in relation to the contradictory cognitions in order to eliminate uncomfortable or guilty feelings.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

Killoran et, al (2014) conducted a study on exploring preservice teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. This study responds to a call for research into existing teacher-education programmes and their impact on teacher candidates' attitudes. An inclusive education course that examined the difference between 'soft inclusion' (inclusion which addresses the issue of place rather than substance of learning) and genuine inclusion was used to explore pre-existing teacher candidate beliefs and assumptions. Using the Opinions Relative to Mainstreaming-Adapted, four classes of students from two different teacher-preparation programmes within the Faculty of Education at York University in Toronto, Canada, were surveyed pre- and post-course. A statistically significant change in the scores was found for all of the classes. A significant difference was also found between the changes in scores of the two programme groups. Results indicate that the course was successful at shifting preservice students towards inclusion and gave the students a foundation that will hopefully translate into practice.

Mangope et, al (2018) conducted a study on Teaching Practice Experiences in Inclusive Classrooms: The Voices of University of Botswana Special Education Student Teachers. Teaching practice (TP) remains one critical means of exposing student teachers to actual classroom experiences with a view to equip them with the needed pedagogical skills. The voice of the student teachers is vital in order to understand their experiences in the field as a way to ensure better outcomes for current and future teacher trainees. Using a qualitative research methodology, this study explored the Teaching Practice experiences of student teachers enrolled in the Special Education program at the University of Botswana. Individual and focus groups interviews were conducted with third- and fourth-year student teachers on Teaching Practice in inclusive classrooms. The data was analysed using content analysis. The findings indicated that teaching learners with special educational needs (SENs) was challenging for the student teachers. They (participants) expressed both positive and negative experiences of teaching practice relating to knowledge and skills, mentor relationship and how Teaching Practice is organised. A key recommendation is that teacher trainers should ensure that student teachers being prepared for entry into the teaching profession are exposed to positive inclusive experiences and equipped with relevant pedagogical skills around inclusive education as they progress through the special education program.

Otara, A. (2014) examined the study on Students' Perceptions on Education Internship Program in Rwanda: Effectiveness and Challenges. It focuses on the experiences and perceptions of student internees in the College of Education under the University of Rwanda. The primary aim of the study was to reveal how internees perceive the internship program that was newly introduced. Findings revealed that whereas internees consider the internship program as being beneficial in their career development, the level of supervision by both mentors and supervisors in regard to action research needs improvement. In addition, emphasis given to action research during training was not sufficient. They also expressed their dissatisfaction by saying that they receive supervision on writing their action research report too late and that there is no harmony in presentation as there seems to be different viewpoints from supervisors.

Jogan(2019)conducted a study on evaluating the effectiveness of a school internship. Internship plays a pivotal role in completion of professional courses. As such it is also included in teacher education course. It provides direct experiences to trainees on various roles of a teacher including teaching and developing command over the subject. It also

provides an opportunity to integrate the theoretical knowledge on strategies and methods and instructional aids to try out in the real life situation. The investigator tried to reflect and evaluate the effectiveness of internship program based on the teacher trainees' opinion and feedback. The main objective is to understand the mindset of trainees through the internship; to realize and prepare them to perform the duties of a teacher in the school; to find tentative solutions to the constraints faced. Data were collected from all the trainee teachers of IV semester. After successful completion of their internship, investigator asked all the trainees to fill questionnaire through Google form. It was analyzed with the percentage analysis. The result and discussion shows that trainee teachers have developed integrated skills of teaching with the proper guidance and support of school subject teachers and supervisors. They were highly satisfied throughout the internship program.

Parveen& Mirza(2012) conducted a study on Internship program in education: effectiveness, problems and prospects. Internship program in Teacher Education is of great significance because it ensures the professional preparation of prospective teachers. It provides them a practical opportunity to develop true understanding of the teaching profession and future prospects of working conditions in that profession. This study looks at issues and challenges that the prospective teachers experience during internship program. The study also deals with the perception and experience of the principals of cooperative schools involved in the internship program. Research approach for this study was both quantitative and qualitative. Population consisted of all student-teachers of B.Ed at Faculty of Education and principals of cooperative schools where students go for internship program. The 80 student-teachers and 05 principals of collaborative schools were selected as sample. Data was collected through three-point likert scale and in-depth interviews. The findings show that student-teachers view internship program as a real opportunity to refine and improve their teaching skills in actual school setting. The results of the in-depth interviews with the principals reveal that internship program is of crucial importance and it has positive impact on the performance of student-teachers.

Bhattacharya & Neelam(2018) examined the study perceived value of internship experience: a try before you leap. The purpose is to examine how internship value is manifested in the context of a business school. The study has examined the internship experience in terms of experiential learning and employability. Specifically, the study investigates the factors that determine internship at four phases: design, conduct, evaluation and feedback. The study found that at various stages of internship program quality of mentor – intern exchanges (as defined by leadership exchange theory), and task characteristics as indicated by autonomy,

task variety, task significance and performance feedback determine intern's performance. An intern's performance is antecedent to an intern's and a mentor's satisfaction and overall internship value. The study also found that intrinsic capability of intern such as critical thinking ability and learning orientation result in enhanced value of internship experience. The proposed models, postulate that at designing stage, lower the level of communication from employers, higher the feeling of ambiguity and lower the perceived internship value in terms of experiential learning and perceived employability. Feeling of ambiguity is moderated by existence of prior work experience of interns. At conduction stage, mentor-intern exchange is directly related to flexibility in structure of the program and inversely related to dependency on peer learning. Mentor-intern exchange also related to mentor and intern's learning value. However, the learning value is moderated by learning orientation of the intern. Originality/value the study has tried the summer internship experience from the perspective of interns and mentors. This is the uniqueness of the research.

Oluremi(2015) conducted a study on attitude of teachers to students with special needs in mainstreamed public secondary schools in Southwestern Nigeria: the need for a change. The study investigated the attitude of regular and special teachers to students with special needs in mainstreamed public secondary schools in Southwestern Nigeria; it examined the qualifications of teachers teaching in mainstreamed public schools; and compared the academic performance of students with special needs in relation to regular students. It adopted descriptive survey design. Two research questions and three research hypotheses were answered in the study. The population for this study comprised 2,701 teachers in the 35 public secondary schools where mainstreaming of students with special needs is being implemented in Southwestern Nigeria. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 10 out of the 35 mainstreamed public secondary schools. From the selected schools, 200 teachers were involved in the study. The teachers were selected through stratified sampling technique using sex and class as strata. Two research instruments were used for data collection. The data were analyzed using simple percentages and t-test analysis. The results showed that 78.8% teachers had positive attitude to students with special needs. 16.8% teachers had negative attitude to students with special needs, while 6.4% teachers had neutral attitude to students with special needs. Also, there was no significant difference between the attitude of male and female teachers to students with special needs ($t=.45$, $p>0.05$). However, there was a significant difference between the attitude of special teachers and regular teachers to students with special needs ($t=.91$, p social behaviours' of the special needs children. The above quoted studies evince the importance of internship in the teacher education

programme. Whereas, the study on the attitudinal transformation towards special needs children after internship is very rare and the present study is an attempt in this direction.

TITLE OF THE STUDY

Influence of Internship on Attitudinal Transformation among Prospective Teachers towards Children with Special Needs.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To assess the attitudinal transformation among prospective teachers towards children with special needs

HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

1. There exist significant attitudinal transformation among prospective teachers towards children with special needs

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey method was adopted to study the attitudinal transformation among prospective teachers towards children with special needs after internship program.

SAMPLE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

For the present study, the researcher followed the purposive sampling technique. The B.Ed. special education prospective teachers in Sivaganga District served as a sample for the study.

TOOL

The researcher used a self prepared questionnaire, which was forwarded via Google Form, and successfully collected data. Reliability and validity of the tool were established and found high (0.95) thus the tool possesses reliability and validity.

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Mean, Standard deviation, Skewness and kurtosis were calculated. Based on the means scores and standard deviation the t-test was calculated and presented in the table. The number and percentage analysis were carried before and after internship programme.

Table 1: Mean Standard Deviation, Skewness and Kurtosis of Attitudinal Transformation among Prospective Teachers towards Children with Special Needs.

	MEAN	MEDIAN	MODE	SD	SKEWNESS	KURTOSIS
PRE TEST	5.84	6	7	1.83	-0.561	-0.399
POST TEST	18.48	19	19	0.97	-0.701	-0.384

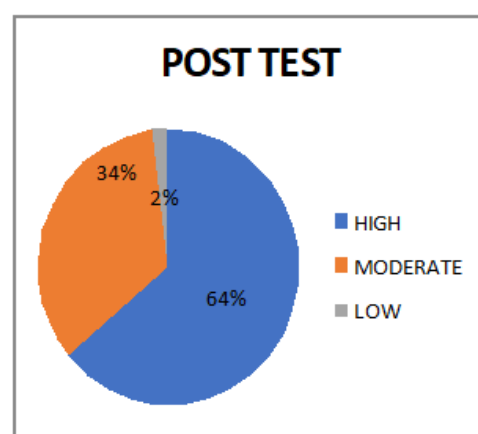
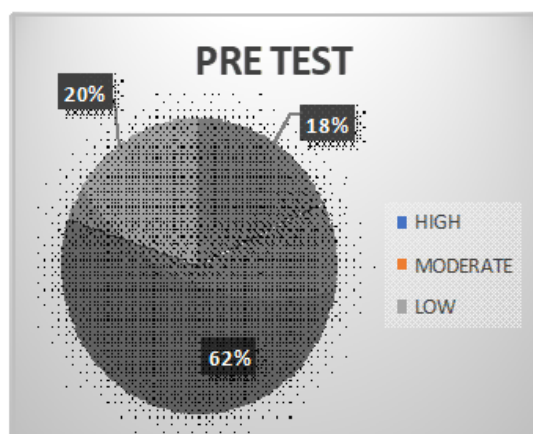
The average attitudinal transformation score for prospective teachers increased significantly from 5.84 in the pre-test to 18.48 in the post-test. This indicates a positive shift in attitudes towards children with special needs among the participants. The median for both the pre-test (6) and post-test (19) is close to their respective means, suggesting a somewhat symmetrical distribution of scores around these central values. The mode represents the most frequently occurring score. In the pre-test, the mode was 7, and in the post-test, it was 19. This suggests that for the post-test, more participants had scores around 19, which might indicate a shift towards higher scores compared to the pre-test. The standard deviation measures the dispersion of scores around the mean. A higher standard deviation means more variability from 1.83 in the pre-test to 0.97 in the post-test, indicating increased variability in the post-test scores.

Skewness measures the symmetry of the distribution. A negative skewness (-0.561 in the pre-test) indicates that the distribution is slightly skewed to the left, meaning there might be a few scores lower than the average. Conversely, a negative skewness (-0.701 in the post-test) indicates a slight left skewness, suggesting more scores are lower than the average than pre test. Kurtosis measures the “tailedness” of the distribution. A negative kurtosis (-0.399 in the pre-test) indicates a flatter distribution compared to a normal distribution, while a negative kurtosis (-0.384 in the post-test) indicates a flatter distribution with lighter tails compared to a normal distribution.

Overall, the data indicates a substantial positive shift in attitudes toward children with special needs among the prospective teachers from the pre-test to the post-test. The post-test scores show higher means, higher variability, compared to the pre-test, suggesting a more diverse range of attitudinal transformation in the post-intervention. The skewness and kurtosis values indicate changes in the shape of the distribution of scores between the pre-test and post-test.

Table 2: Pre Test and Post Test Score and Percentage of Attitudinal Transformation among Prospective Teachers towards Children with Special Needs.

Attitudinal Transformation	Pre Test						Post Test					
	H		M		L		H		M		L	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
	9	18	31	62	10	20	32	64	17	34	1	2



Comparing the pre-test and post-test scores

There was an increase in the number of prospective teachers who scored in the "High" category, rising from 9(18%) in the pre-test to 32(62%) in the post-test. This indicates a positive shift, showing that more individuals had a higher attitudinal transformation towards children with special needs after the intervention. The number of prospective teachers in the "Medium" category decreased from 31 (62%) in the pre-test to 17 (34%) in the post-test. This indicates that some individuals shifted from the medium level to the high. The number of prospective teachers in the "Low" category decreased from 10(20%) in the pre-test to 1 (2%) in the post-test, suggesting that those who initially had low scores in the pre-test significantly improved their attitudes towards children with special needs.

The data evince a positive transformation in attitudes among the prospective teachers. More individuals moved from lower attitudes (medium and low) towards higher attitudes (high) after the internship or training related to children with special needs. The complete absence of individuals in the "Low" category in the post-test indicates a significant improvement in attitudes within this group after internship.

Table 3: Calculated 't' value of Effectiveness of Internship on Attitudinal Transformation of Prospective Teachers handling Children with Special Needs at Pre and Post Assessment Stage.

	N	MEAN	SD	T VALUE
Pre-test	50	5.84	1.83	42.42@
Post -test	50	18.48	0.97	

Note @ statistically significant at 0.05 level

The table presents data regarding the calculated 't' value measuring the effectiveness of an internship program on the attitudinal transformation of prospective teachers handling children with special needs at both the pre-assessment and post-assessment stages. The 't' value is often used in statistics to determine if there is a significant difference between the means of two groups. In this case, it appears to be extraordinarily high (42.42) for the pre-test stage.

As the obtained 't' value 42.42 is higher than the table value at 0.01 level it suggests that there exist a substantial and statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of prospective teachers' attitudinal transformation towards children with special needs. Therefore, based on the data 't' value, it can be inferred that the internship program has had a highly significant impact on the attitudinal transformation of prospective teachers handling children with special needs. The significant increase in the mean score from the pre-test to the post-test, combined with the exceptionally high 't' value, strongly suggests that the internship has been effective in positively influencing the attitudes of the participants towards working with children with special needs.

DISCUSSION

The study explores the effectiveness of internship on attitudinal transformation of prospective teachers handling children with special needs. According to research results, internship is a very important learning practice that oversteps the theoretical knowledge and formal education. Repeated exposures to real life teacher environments, especially in inclusive setting have worked wonders to transform prospective teachers' attitudes.

It came clear that internships are vital in developing empathy, sensitivity, and comprehension of the distinctive problems and possibilities of children with disabilities. Through working closely with such students, the interns develop a wider understanding the nature of children with special needs, strategies and teaching skills to help them to provide better inclusive teaching learning classroom transaction that caters diverse learning styles and

abilities. Moreover, the research stresses the need for collaboration between teacher training colleges and schools that host internships. Collaboration ensures total integration of knowledge from college to school for actual practice that is needed by any potential teacher of an inclusive classroom. The study demonstrated the benefits of the internship programs, but it also highlighted some areas that warrant additional attention and enhancement. Such include specialized training for specific disabilities, stronger emphasis on individualized education plans, and continuous professional development for teachers during their careers.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, internships have become a vital tool for preparing future teachers to deal with students with special needs. Moving towards inclusion, investing in strong and well designed internship programs will develop compassionate educators who can positively impact the lives of children who have disabilities. Through this, internships can empower prospective teachers to build equitable and inclusive learning environment where students' strengths and challenges are considered.

CONFLICT INTEREST

The author(s) declare no competing interests.

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