



Are we preparing our teachers for inclusive education?

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Abstract: Inclusive education involves enhancing the educational system's ability to connect with all students. It includes changing school culture, rules, procedures, and pedagogy to cater to the diversity of children in the concerned area. One of the most important aspects of inclusive education is ensuring that all teachers are equipped to educate all children. Inclusion can only be achieved with teachers who are influential key stakeholders and possess the values, knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for every child to flourish. This study is an attempt to examine teacher education courses and to see to what extent do these courses prepare our teachers for the inclusive classrooms. B.Ed. Curriculum of three prominent universities present in Delhi will be taken into account for the study. The curriculums will be studied with particular reference to the concepts and ideas regarding inclusive education. This paper was helpful in understanding the level of preparedness of our teachers for inclusive education. Study findings suggest that teacher education courses discuss inclusive education as a concept and ideal situation but need to discuss the practical realities of inclusive classrooms.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Stakeholders, Curriculum, Teachers

Introduction: *“Inclusion is a philosophy which embraces the idea that everyone has something of value to contribute and that everyone has the right to belong”*- Lisa Friedman, Removing the Stumbling block

Inclusion is regarded as a fundamental human right. Inclusion aims to embrace everyone, regardless of colour, sex, disability, or anything. It entails granting equal access to and opportunities for everyone while eradicating prejudice and discrimination (removal of barriers). All aspects of public life are affected by this. We cannot talk about inclusion unless it is situated in diversity. Diversity in a social context means that society is made up of different people who are different from others in some way. Diversity can be of cultural, regional, economic, linguistic or inability and disability.

Persons with disabilities are identified in the new Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as “those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (WHO, 2009)

With an inclusive education approach, students with a variety of disabilities and learning needs take classes alongside typically developing and non-disabled children. In an inclusive setting, children who need additional support and services spend the majority of their time with their peers who do not have disabilities rather than in segregated classrooms or institutions (Kirschner, 2015)

In India, the system of special schools started even before independence. The first school for deaf students was opened in 1883. The number of special schools increased year by year. These special schools do, however, have several drawbacks, which the growth in their number made clear. These institutions were not cost-effective and only served a small number of primarily urban children.

Nevertheless, perhaps most significantly, these special schools isolated children with special needs (CWSN) from the general population, creating a distinct culture around disabilities (Kumar & Kumar, 2007). Most policies before 2016 talked about the education of children with disabilities either in special schools or integrating or mainstreaming them into the so-called normal school through some special provisions. After the Rights of the person with disability act 2016, the term Inclusive education was adopted, defining it as a system in which students with and without disabilities learn together while teaching and learning are appropriately adjusted to meet the individual learning needs of students with disabilities. This marked a shift in the law's emphasis away from special education.

However, accepting and enforcing is one thing, and the reality of the Indian school system is another. The number of disabled persons in India is very high; their issues are too complicated, so few resources are available, and social attitudes are so harmful and damaging. There are so many problems in this issue; one of the significant problems in the Indian scenario is the lack of teacher preparedness. Several kinds of literature show that in many surveys done in different parts of the country, many teachers did not understand the concept of inclusive education and lacked the mindsets, knowledge, skills and strategies to engage an inclusive classroom.

Pre-service teacher education is an essential foundation for teachers to acquire before entering the field. For education to be more inclusive and not exclusive in nature, student teachers must be prepared in a way that they are aware, sensitised and skilled to handle the inclusive classrooms. This study tries to evaluate the B.Ed. curriculum of 3 major universities in Delhi and see how these universities are preparing future teachers for inclusive education.

Review of related literature:

Inclusive education typically means that all children belonging to different backgrounds and cultures and having physical or learning differences should study in the same classrooms in the same schools. It negates the idea of having special schools for people with disabilities. According to UNICEF, Students from various backgrounds can learn and develop together through inclusive education to benefit everyone. It aims to maximise the potential of every student by bringing them all together in one classroom, regardless of their skills or deficiencies. It is one of the best strategies for fostering an open and tolerant society (Singh, 2016). Inclusive education (IE) is a process that reduces obstacles to and within the educational setting & environment in order to address the various needs of all learners. It entails the child attending the age-appropriate class at their neighbourhood school while

receiving specially designed support (UNICEF, 2007). Since gaining its independence from the British Raj in 1947, the Government of India (GOI) has initiated a number of programmes to help children with disabilities gain access to education. The government's efforts, though, have yet to have a significant impact. Only 1% to 4% of children with disabilities have access to education (Mani, 2003; Singh, 2001), and many are still not enrolled in school (Mitchell & Desai, 2005). Legislation from the government, such as PWD (1995) or RTE (2009), has spurred public interest in and participation in educational reforms like equal educational opportunities for SWDs (Tiwari, Das & Sharma 2015)

In many ways, though, the changes these governmental laws and policies bring are merely symbolic. Due to the tight bureaucratic system, teachers typically only accept government policies on a symbolic level (Singal, 2010). Das, Kuyini, and Desai (2013) reported in a survey conducted on Delhi of classroom teachers that many instructors in Delhi needed to comprehend the idea of inclusion. The majority of general education teachers lacked the ability to execute meaningful inclusion, including methods for integrating kids into regular classroom settings. Most teachers mainstream children with disabilities in regular education classes. Because there was no collaboration between general education and special education teachers, it was difficult to explain the actual requirements of children with disabilities in general education classes. As a result, general education teachers believed that children with disabilities education was the primary responsibility of special education teachers. Various studies suggest that teachers in India do not have adequate pre-service or in-service training in inclusion. No or negligible in-service training and professional workshop opportunities were given to the teachers regarding inclusive education and handling children with disabilities in the classroom.

Aims of the study: The study's main aim is to understand teachers' preparedness for inclusive classrooms. This study tries to look at the reasons and understands that even after so many years of implementing inclusive education why it is still a far cry from reality. Considering this study's primary aim, these research questions were made.

- 1- What is being taught in the pre-service training of teachers regarding inclusion?
- 2- What more can be incorporated into the pre-service teacher training curriculum regarding inclusion?

Methodology: The research methodology that is used in this study is qualitative. Furthermore, the method is content analysis method under which relational analysis has been followed. It goes beyond the mere counting and presence of concept. It explores the relationships within the concept. This can also be called semantic analysis.

Sample: The sampling technique used here is purposive sampling, and the curriculum of B.Ed. Program (pre-service teacher training) of three major universities in Delhi was chosen as the sample, i.e., IGNOU, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University and the University of Delhi.

The codes on which the curriculum will be analysed are: -

1. Understanding the need and Abilities of CWDs
2. Sensitivity towards CWDs
3. Concept of having different bodies
4. Understanding of societal stereotypes related to disability

5. Understanding the differences in the learning abilities
6. Understanding of classroom issues like bullying, name calling etc.
7. Knowledge of different kinds of teaching strategies.

Analysis:

In **IGNOU B.Ed.** Course, there is a course in 2nd year called “Creating an inclusive school” (BES-128). The course is divided into two blocks; block 1 is about diversity and inclusion, which deals with 4 units namely, 1) Introduction to diversity and inclusion, 2) children with sensory, 3) children with neurodevelopmental disabilities & 4) children with locomotor, multiple and other disabling conditions.

Block 2 is about strategies for creating an inclusive class which deals with four units 1) Strategies of Teaching-Learning and Evaluation, 2) Adaptations in Curriculum and Expanded Core Curriculum, 3) Aids, Appliances and ICT, and 4) Resources for Inclusion.

There was no mention of practical assignments or field engagement like a visit to the inclusive school or observing an inclusive class and critically analysing them.

Now if we talk about **GGSIP** university, there is a course in the 2nd year with the same name, i.e., “Creating an inclusive school” (BED218); this course is then divided into four units. Unit 1 deals with the idea of inclusive education in which forms of social exclusion against the marginalised section of society are discussed. This unit also talks about the historical, philosophical and social perspectives of inclusion. How children with disability can be benefitted from this is also discussed.

Unit 2 deals with the aspect of children with special needs, where they talk about historical and contemporary perspectives on inclusion and disability, types of disabilities and various learning problems associated. Assessment and assistive device learning, adaptation & accommodation according to various disabilities have also been discussed. Educational provisions and laws on disability also occupy a brief discussion place into the curriculum.

Unit 3 is about school preparedness for inclusion in which it discusses the ideology of school, assistive devices needed and all the supportive services. Unit 4 talks about the inclusive practices of the classroom, which includes different strategies for differentiating content, pedagogical strategies, and provisions for sitting in the examination. It also talks about CCE and how it can be implied in inclusion.

Some practical assignments are mentioned in the curriculum, like exploring spaces for inclusion in schools or how school structures create barriers to inclusion.

In **Delhi University**, there is a course in 2nd year named "The inclusive school" (F.6) with three units in total. Unit 1 is named "Concept of special needs and inclusion with reference to children with disabilities", which talks about disability as a part of diversity; it also talks about disability as a social construct and classification of disability. It then talks about the process of inclusion with particular reference to CWDs. Process of inclusion: Concerns and issues across disabilities, Contextualization of inclusion for diverse learners, Modification of

curriculum including assessment, Universal design for the teaching-learning process, Reasonable accommodations and Instructional adaptations have also been included in the curriculum.

Unit 2, which is named Towards inclusion: Paradigm and policy perspective with reference to CWDs, talks about various trends and models of disability. It also discusses various international and national laws and policies and the role of various institutions with regard to CWDs

Unit 3 specifies Inclusive practices in classrooms: Position of teacher, support structures and networks, where school readiness in terms of inclusion, the role of regular and special teachers, along with pedagogical strategies are considered to be an important part of the curriculum. The curriculum also provides attention to the supportive services required to meet an inclusive school's needs. The curriculum also throws light on the collaboration that is needed between various stakeholders for inclusive schools.

Delhi university's B.Ed. Curriculum also mentions practicums to be done, which is quite extensive as compared to GGSIP university practical assignments. Visit to an inclusive school to observe the transactional process, preparation of individualised learning materials, carrying out a case study and preparing a lesson plan and materials according to inclusive classrooms.

Now let us discuss according to the codes that we have identified.

Understanding the need and Abilities of CWDs: - from the description of the syllabus, it can be seen that all three university talks about the varied needs of children with disabilities and there are several units and readings allotted to this. While addressing these topics, we should keep in mind that these issues should be dealt with sensitively and not just factually. Teacher educators should make sure that student teachers are not reading about these issues to pass the tests and exams but actually realise the importance of this.

Sensitivity towards CWDs: - There are units and parts of B.Ed. Curriculum that talks about sensitivity towards CWD but not very explicitly. Student teachers should be made aware of the situations. They must develop sensitivity to understand that disability is not a curse and that there is nothing as such so-called "normal" and "abnormal" children. The curriculum should also make sure that sensitivity should not be confused with pity and charity.

Concept of having different bodies: - Not one of single universities curriculum of B.Ed. they have talked about the 'body'. For an inclusive classroom to succeed, it is essential to understand that teachers must have the understanding that all the students in the classroom have different bodies, yet they should be considered equal. It is also crucial that the bodies of CWDs are also normal bodies, neither "abnormal" nor weak.

Understanding of societal stereotypes related to disability: - The Curriculum of Delhi University and GGSIP university did talk about disability as a societal construct, but the IGNOU curriculum did not mention it anywhere. As a student teacher, it is important to understand that many societal notions are attached to disability. Moreover, these notions make the base for prejudice and discrimination. This part should be paid attention to.

Understanding of the differences in the learning abilities: - This part was common in the curriculum of all three universities. As it was discussed in detail in each of the curriculum.

Understanding of classroom issues like bullying, name calling etc.: - The curriculum of the three universities has not given this issue any attention. This issue constitutes an important part of teacher preparedness, as several studies show that CWDs are more prone to be bullied in the classroom because of their disabilities. If it is not handled properly, it can hamper the confidence and motivation of the child and make them feel excluded.

Knowledge of different kinds of teaching strategies: - This has been given the utmost importance in the curriculum of all the universities. The practical assignments in GGSIP university's curriculum and Delhi university also focus on this aspect. Some practical assignments should also be included in IGNOU B.Ed. curriculum of inclusive education to give student teachers hands-on experience.

Conclusion: Through analysis and discussion, all three universities are trying to prepare the student teachers for inclusive classrooms and schools, which was not the case in earlier times. But there are some aspects that need to be included in the syllabus of the inclusive classroom/school. The syllabus should be evaluated from time to time. Also, some teachers have been working in the education sector for a long time and did not get any training regarding inclusive education. It should ensure that those teachers receive in-service training regarding inclusion; only then can expectations be changed into reality.

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