

ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS FOR TEACHERS AND TEACHER EDUCATORS FOR EFFECTIVE INCLUSION

Simarpreet Kaur

Assistant Professor, Sri Guru AngadDev College of Education, Khadur Sahib, Punjab, India

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ABSTRACT

An equal access to education is a matter of birthright to all irrespective of what they are. Indian constitution also emphasizes the Right to Education and equality of educational opportunities. Inclusive education is based on the belief that all children can learn and will reach their full potential if they are provided a suitable environment and enough opportunities to learn. The role of educational institutions and especially the teachers becomes significant to realize the aim of maximizing learning for all children in the classroom including children with disabilities. Thus, the teacher preparation for handling the different needs of the students, using appropriate teaching strategies for effectively dealing with these children becomes significant. They are supposed to develop a congenial learning environment for making them worthy of living and developing their dignity. Professionally, teachers need to develop and for this Teacher Education becomes a mandatory factor. Certain endeavors like appropriate monitoring strategies and evaluation mechanisms need to be adopted for the effectiveness of Inclusive Education. Opportunities to learn from, support and develop relationships with one another are not possible when students are streamed into separate classes. Despite all odds, inclusion work and it's must have a more humane society where every child can grow and develop without fear of failure or ridicule. A coordinated action plan of holistic approach is required to bring out a change in the entire Education System. A fully Inclusive Education system will definitely reflect Indian society as a whole and contribute to its betterment.

KEYWORDS: *Inclusive Education, Teacher Education, Learning Environment*

INTRODUCTION

Education is the fundamental right of each and every child irrespective of his/her caste, religion or special needs. All students, irrespective of their sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability have the right to have equal opportunity in education (Klironomos et al., 2006) and to be considered as being an integral part of the learning-community, In this respect, inclusion of such marginalized students in mainstream is the demand in the present scenario and in this process, the role of the teacher is crucial. However, Teacher Education in this 21st Century still demands inclusive practices as a large number of children are not getting an opportunity to get quality education due to their social, physical and intellectual disabilities which is becoming an obstacle to achieving the main goal of universalization of education. Teachers need to develop required

competencies to teach such children effectively and understand concepts, strategies as well as tools that can be utilized to attain the goals of inclusion of children with special needs. However, such competencies can properly be developed during the phase of teacher preparation. Hence it is very essential to explore several problems of inclusive education with reference to teacher preparation.

Vision of Inclusive Education in India

“Inclusive education according to UNESCO, means that the school can provide good education to all pupil irrespective of their varying abilities. All children will be treated with respect and ensured equal opportunities to learn together. Inclusive education is an ongoing process. Teachers must work actively and deliberately to reach its goals”. In 1990, inclusion captured that field after the World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca in 1994, with the adoption of the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education.

Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all, moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system. - (The Salamanca Statement and Framework of Action on Special Needs Education) In India, The Draft Scheme on Inclusive Education prepared by the MHRD (2003) uses the following definitions.

Inclusive Education means all learners, young people with or without disabilities being able to learn together in ordinary preschool provisions, schools, and community educational settings with appropriate network of support services. UNICEF's Report on the status of Disability in India 2000 states that there are around 30 million children in India suffering from some form of disability. The Sixth All-India Educational Survey (NCERT, 1998) reports that of India are 200 million school aged children (6-14 years), 20 million required special needs education. While the national average for gross enrolment in school is over 90 percent, less than five percent of children with disabilities are in school. The majority of these children remain outside mainstream education.

The World Bank Report (2007) reported that educational attainment and attendance of the children with disability were very poor and far below than the national averages. Data suggests that people with disabilities have much lower educational attainment rates, with 52 percent illiteracy against a 35 percent average for the general population. The National Curriculum framework for School Education (NCERT, 2000) has recommended inclusive schools for learners with special educational needs by making appropriate modifications in the content, presentation and transaction strategies, preparing teachers and developing learning friendly evaluation procedures. The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) (2000), brought out by the NCERT, recommended inclusive schools for all learners.

According to NCFSE: ‘Segregation or isolation is good neither for the learner with disabilities nor for general learners without disabilities. Societal requirement is that learners with special needs should be the educated along with other learners in inclusive schools, which are cost effective and have sound pedagogical practices’. The National Curriculum Framework 2006 speaks as “For teaching to serve as a means of strengthening our democratic way of life, it must respond to the presence of first

generation school-goers, whose retention is imperative owing to the Constitutional amendments that have made elementary education a fundamental right of every child. Ensuring health, nutrition and an inclusive school environment empowering of children in their learning, across differences of caste, religion, gender, disability, is enjoined upon as by the Constitutional amendment". The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 had a clear provision in its Chapter II under clause 3 subsection 2 stated that- For the purpose of sub-section (1), no child shall be liable to pay any kind of fee or charges or expenses which may prevent him or her from pursuing and completing the elementary education. Provided that a child suffering from disability, as defined in clause (i) of section 2 of the persons with disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection and full Participation) Act, 1996 shall have the right to pursue free and compulsory elementary education in accordance with the provision of Chapter V of the said Act. To achieve the aim of Inclusive Education, major endeavors must be visualized practically in the field.

In-Service Professional Development Programs for Inclusive Education

The term 'professional learning' has been taken up in education to describe the process of ongoing learning that keeps teachers up-to-date, ensuring a proficient and highly accomplished educational workforce. 'Professional development' is a term that has also been used to describe ongoing teacher learning and is still used in some of the current literature. The definitions are unclear in this area. However, the Northern Territory Teacher Registration Board website (2015) provides the following explanation about the interrelationship between professional development and professional learning.

"Professional learning describes the growth in knowledge, skills and attitudes that comes from being engaged in professional development activities, processes and experiences." Over time the term 'professional development' has become associated with the delivery of some kind of in-service program, often to whole school staff groups, that is intended to influence or change teacher practice. Professional learning implies a more internalised process where individual teachers interact with information and ideas about teaching and learning to further develop their skills and knowledge. Whatever the term, it is clear that in order for inclusive education to be successful, teachers need to continually update their knowledge and to apply information about meeting the needs of diverse students in inclusive classrooms.

One means of upskilling is for teachers to undertake post-graduate studies that prepare them for inclusive education. In the United Kingdom, Male (2011) surveyed 48 teachers enrolled in a Master of Education program in special and inclusive education. Teachers were surveyed at the beginning and end of a ten-week introductory module in order to ascertain whether their attitudes towards inclusive education had changed. Before undertaking the module teachers held generally positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with physical/sensory difficulties, social difficulties and academic difficulties. They were less positive about including students with behavioural difficulties. At the end of the period of focused professional development, results showed that the teachers had more positive attitudes towards all students. In a comparative study Takala, Hausstatter, Ahl and Head (2012) questioned 241 teachers engaged in post-graduate courses with an inclusive education focus. These teachers were from Norway, Sweden and Finland and had both special and general classroom experience. There are inherent differences in approaches to inclusion in these three countries. In Norway there is no special education and no special education teachers are employed. The Swedish education system, however, includes special teacher education and pedagogy, with special pedagogues working as advisors in schools in roles that focus on the whole school system. In Finland,

special education teachers are employed within the education system. Finland has the higher proportion of students in special schools or classes of these three countries. Data from the questionnaires indicated that teachers, including special teachers, actively sought to improve their skills to teach students with a range of disabilities.

Waitoller and Artiles (2013) completed an important and comprehensive review of the literature on professional development for inclusive education. Their extensive search of the literature uncovered an initial pool of 1115 articles. Once six strict criteria were imposed, 42 eligible articles were selected for review. Their results indicated that approximately 70% of the professional development undertaken and reported related to responses to ability differences in students through instructional methods such as differentiated instruction or by changing school cultures so that ability differences were accepted. School-wide action research projects to promote learning for all students made up a further 20% of the research, with the remaining 10% of studies relating to professional development about issues of race, class, gender or culture. These researchers found that about 80% of their sample of studies focused on supporting teachers to address a single form of difference. They expressed concern that this approach can result in partial solutions to the complex problems experienced in schools where there is competition for the recognition of different categories of diversity and ensuing competition for resources. In their conclusion, the Waitoller and Artiles (2013) recommend “designing and examining professional development efforts using an intersectional approach in which teachers identify and dismantle interesting and multiple barriers to learning and participation for all students”.

Nishimura (2014) also undertook a review of the literature related to professional development for inclusive education and identified three themes:

- **Engagement:** The most powerful and meaningful professional development experiences for teachers link their level of engagement through active participation in teaching, modelling, supporting and assessing student learning;
- **Reflection:** Effective professional development allows teachers to set goals for their learning that are meaningful to their own practice and incorporate time for self-evaluation;
- **Empowerment:** Meaningful and sustainable professional development empowers teachers' engagement in collaboration with their colleagues and creates communities of practice.

Nishimura's (2014) review was used as the basis of the development of an inclusive professional development program in which eight Californian teachers voluntarily participated. Professional development sessions took place weekly for eight weeks during grade level planning meetings. Resource handouts were provided, followed by in-class coaching sessions tailored to individual teacher need. Teachers received between eight and 14 coaching sessions. Nishimura (2014) hypothesised that participation in the intervention would increase positive attitudes towards students with disabilities and teachers' perceived ability to include these students in their classrooms. In terms of results, all eight participants reported they had positive experiences and a new appreciation for inclusive education practices as a result of their participation. Six of the eight teachers reported improved awareness and increased ability to carry out inclusive practices in their classrooms.

Schlessinger (2014) conducted an inquiry-based project that also featured a partnership between a tertiary institution and school system. In this project, teams of between 10 to 30 teachers met with facilitators at the tertiary setting on a monthly

basis throughout the year. During this time, teachers were provided with concepts and practices; research; ideas about how to implement practices; time and space to discuss them; and support to implement these new practices and strategies, which were all targeted to identified dilemmas in their classrooms. Schlessinger concluded that as a result of this process, teachers reported feeling more able to autonomously make decisions supportive of student learning in inclusive settings. As many of the reviewed studies suggest, professional development for inclusion needs to be tailored to specific needs identified in particular school settings. In their review, Jenkins and Yoshimura (2010) contend that professional development should prepare teachers to both identify student needs and determine how best to meet them. They present a five-step framework to structure professional development practices at a school level:

- Build readiness– Conduct awareness-building activities and plan collaboratively before training and implementation. Reflect on the school vision and needs. Identify broad goals for the professional development activity;
- Conduct planning– Translate the broad goals into detailed plans for activities to build knowledge and skills and plans for application. Establish a planning team representative of the teaching faculty. Consider opportunities for active learning, the pacing of learning, allowing time for reflection;
- Implement training– Space professional development activities over time to promote integration of knowledge into practice;
- Allow for implementation– Provide support for teachers while they integrate knowledge to practice; and
- Maintenance– Provide continuous monitoring and reassessment of professional development activities. Encourage reflection, which may either be shared or kept confidential.

From a related perspective, Nichols and Sheffield (2014) encouraged the 49 teachers in their study to journal their experiences following bi-monthly professional development sessions focussing on co-teaching. A main finding from this study was that participants developed an appreciation for knowing their students and understanding the importance of becoming familiar with students' cultures.

Similarly, Walton, Nel, Muller and Lebeloane (2014) emphasise the need for professional learning to be embedded in the professional lives and work of teachers. They report the results of a two-day differentiated teaching practices professional development activity undertaken with 19 staff at a school in South Africa. Immediately after this workshop, participants completed an anonymous questionnaire, which showed that respondents were positive about the course presentation, the quality of the theoretical information provided, the practical applicability of the material presented, and their acquired confidence. The researchers were interested, however, in the longer-term impact of the workshop on teachers' classroom practice so they returned to the school eight months later to collect further data through focus groups. At this point, six of the 19 participants indicated that they remained satisfied with aspects of the workshop. Criticism of the workshop was targeted at the fact it was a one-off event with no follow-up support. Staff did not believe that they required additional workshops, but requested a non-site support person who could work alongside them, so they could learn more about successful differentiation through effective group instruction, adapting learning and teaching procedures and curriculum and assessment modification. Walton

et al. (2014) concluded that equipping teachers to be effective in inclusive settings requires more than workshops alone. They state that systemic support for teachers are crucial.

In a further systematic review of professional development literature responding to globalization and inclusion, Philpot, Furey, and Penney (2010) identified six areas of importance:

- Professional Development for Inclusive Policy - Presentation of information about policies that support the monitoring and provision of resources to enable inclusive practices;
- Professional Development for Diversity - Provision of information to develop the knowledge of exceptionalities necessary for more successful inclusion of students;
- Professional Development to Nurture Positive Attitudes - Building positive attitudes toward inclusion and nurturing the belief that learning ability is improvable;
- Professional Development for Evidence-Based Teaching Strategies - There is a need for innovation in professional development focussed on both acquiring and using evidence-based teaching strategies for instructional differentiation;
- Professional Development for Collaborative Teaching - Effective school leaders enable their schools to become professional learning communities of practice. Sufficient time is allocated for teachers to build critical collaborative skills of mutual trust and commitment to working together; and,
- Professional Development for Meaningful Teaching - Practicing teachers require ongoing professional development that reflects their current roles, addresses existing problems, and affords time for reflection.

The above researches assist in understanding inclusive practices through international perspectives. Indian practitioners may adopt suitable strategies to confront the challenges and successfully achieve the Inclusive vision.

Inclusive Framework of Teacher training programs

The common reference on inclusive education frameworks that must be present in all Teacher Training Programs are:

- **Common Vision:** The philosophy of inclusion, legal frameworks that enable an education for all with quality and equity, educational policy that promotes attention to diversity, the historical evolution from marginalization to inclusion and conceptions among others, are fundamental aspects in educational programs.
- **Language and Common Knowledge:** Emphasize the student's possibilities and support systems, with a clear vision that all children can learn. In this way, the school needs to prevent the barriers and limitations for learning that could marginalize children and young people from their potential. It also includes learning conception, individual differences, the values of solidarity, respect, and collaboration, Cognitive and affective elements framed in the conception of collectivity and community empowerment as well.

- **Educational Attention to Diversity** practices includes strategies for large or small groups and one-on-one, mentoring, curricular adjustments, alternative support systems, diversity assessment actions, collaboration with other professionals and co-teaching trans-disciplinary action, among others. They are essential for the development of the professional skills of attention to diversity.
- **Mentoring:** New teachers must participate with experienced teachers atleast during the first two years. This includes dialogue sessions, reviews of situations, decision-making arrangements and workplans, among others to provide the following to the new teacher: intervention (guidance), facilitation (advice) and cooperation (corresponsibility).

Structure of Teacher Preparation Programs in Facilitating Inclusive Programs

Teachers are the key to success in inclusion. Here, seven essential components for Teacher Preparation Programmes should be introduced based on the experience of training teachers in several teacher education institutions.

- The Inclusive Teacher is a professional in education with a strong commitment to his/her community. The Teacher Preparation Programme should include subjects with high social and community content because they need to be sensitive to the needs of students and the environment.
- The Inclusive Teacher recognizes individual differences and implements learning strategies for all. The educational intervention is oriented to diversity and promotes learning strategies for all (equality) for quite a few and for only one (equity). These are other essential aspects in the teacher preparation Programmes. Quality, equality, and equity concepts should be translated into specific actions of educative interventions.
- The collaborative work among educators facilitates inclusion and needs to be promoted in the Teacher Preparation Programme. All pre-service teachers should know and develop skills in this way because.

The teacher learns when teaching and the students teach when they learn.

Everyone assumes tasks of leadership because we assume as protagonists.

- Outcomes increase when we make synergy and identity is strengthened when we make joint decisions, shaping teams in the resolution of problems, allowing everyone to learn or re-learn social skills.
- The results begin when we work together because no body, will do it for us whatever we must to do, let's do!
- The economic resources are a result of collaborative work and not a condition.
- Heterogeneity provides a great richness.
- Collaboration boosts accountability and recognition processes in all communities.

CONCLUSIONS

Hence, Inclusive education practices involve restructuring the culture, policies, and practices in schools so that the stakeholders can respond to the diversity of students in their locality. For a school to be inclusive, the attitudes of everyone

in the school, including administrators, teachers, and other students, are positive towards students with disabilities. Inclusive education means that all children, regardless of their ability level, are included in a mainstream classroom, or in the most appropriate or least restrictive environment (LRE), that students of all ability levels are taught as equals, and that teachers must adjust their curriculum and teaching methodologies so that all students benefit. This also avoids wasting resources, and “shattered hopes, which often occurs in classrooms that are “one size fits all. Studies have shown that systems that are truly inclusive reduce drop-out rates and repetition of grades, and have higher average levels of achievement, compared to systems that are not inclusive. People who believe in inclusive education believe that the education system is the impediment to learning for a child and that every child is capable of learning.

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