

Practices to Promote Inclusive Education in Regular Teacher Training Programme

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Abstract: *Inclusive Education means all children have the right to education that caters to the extent possible to their individual needs. This involves mainstreaming children with special needs in to regular classroom settings by allowing them to study together with their typically developed peers. To support inclusive education system three areas must be considered: 1. The attitudes of regular teacher and other education staff. 2. Pre-service training programs to ensure the future teachers enter the profession with skills and content. 3. In-service training programme to improve the abilities of the existing teachers. In the study investigated by Vijetha and Prithi (ARF project 2010-2011), "Attitudes of pre-service educators towards Inclusive Education" indicated that pre-service educators were favorable towards inclusion of children with special needs, but were doubtful about their own skills and knowledge in handling children with special needs in classroom situations. The present study investigated teacher educator's attitudes, concerns and also their practices about Inclusive Education in their respective colleges such as B.Ed, D.Ed and Nursery teacher training centres in Mysore. The main objective of the study is to find out the major steps taken up to promote Inclusive Education in Teacher Training programmes. The results imply that even though teacher educators are inclined towards Inclusive education they expressed their apprehensions about their own teacher trainees gaining fundamental knowledge and skills of inclusive education as an integral part of their curricula as it is not a compulsory subject.*

Key words: *Inclusive Education, Regular Teacher Training Programmes*

I. INTRODUCTION

Earlier days it was believed that "teachers are born, teaching is an art". With growing technology and development there are many innovations, researches, practices in the field of teacher education, general education and also in other relevant fields, the belief got modified as 'teacher can be trained to teach'. We are in the era of 21st century where world is running behind the technology, equalization, inclusion, right to information and right to education. To boost up the latest trends and recent requirements, school system has to provide relevant knowledge and experience to the children without any barriers to children irrespective of status, religion, region, caste, gender and disability. Many government policies, programmes are there to support the education of the children. A latest practice in the education system of our country is "Universalisation of Elementary Education".

In India many programmes are being implemented to make the elementary education universal. And one such program is Inclusive Education under the heading of "Sarva shiksha abhiyan (SSA)". SSA has 'ZERO REJECTION policy' with main goal of free and compulsory education for one and all under one roof. Likewise, Inclusive education has been internationally recognized as a philosophy for attaining equity, justice and quality education for all children, especially those who have been traditionally excluded from mainstream education for reasons of disability, ethnicity, gender or other characteristics. *Inclusive education is defined by UNESCO (2005) as a process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of all learners by increasing participation in learning and reducing exclusion within and from education.* Inclusive education is based on notion that

school should, without question, provide for the needs of all students, whatever their level of ability or disability.

As far as inclusion for children with special needs is concerned, it is not just giving the admission to the children with special needs in regular classrooms, but it is the need of adapting regular classrooms to meet the requirements of special children including teachers training programs. As a part of teacher training programs, three essential components for capacity building in inclusive education which needs attention are 1. Increase awareness and attitudinal change through Advocacy, 2. Create a Future of Trained Professionals: Pre-Service Training,

3. Build on Existing Human Resources: In-Service Training and Professional Development (CRS 2010).

While developing human resources to support an inclusive education system three areas must be considered: the attitudes of teachers, education staff and pre-service training programs to help ensure that future generations of teachers enter the profession with the skills and knowledge to work in an inclusive environment. While pre-service teacher training in inclusive education should be available for all levels of education (pre-school, primary and secondary). The curriculum of the teacher training programme in all three levels of education is more effective component not only for teaching children with special needs as well as for children without special needs. India has been following philosophy of inclusive education since 2000 by supporting the international recommendations by UNESCO to include content on inclusion as part of teacher training programs (UNESCO, 1994).

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In preparing teachers for inclusive classroom the curriculum of the teacher training programme at various level has to support the inclusive education by providing the fundamental knowledge and skills on inclusive education, such as understanding needs and abilities of children with special needs and pedagogic skills such as instructional accommodation and activity differentiation should be provided widely to teacher trainees along with the attitude and concerns of the teacher educators. Usually, preschool and primary school teachers receive general training in the key subjects of language, mathematics, natural and social sciences, while training for secondary teachers requires more in-depth specialized knowledge of a variety of specific academic disciplines. Preschool and primary school children are usually taught by a single teacher or a small group of teachers. As far as philosophy of inclusive education is concerned a teacher in inclusive classrooms has to have additional skills like teaching strategies in handling children with special needs. Hence, to support the notion of inclusive education, the present study has been taken up to investigate the present practices of regular teacher training educators as a part of teacher training programs towards inclusive education at Mysore. Educational practices in the various regular teacher training programmes are examined by considering the three major parameters of the training programmes: *a. Attitudes of teacher educators towards inclusive education. b. Concern of teacher educators towards inclusive education. c. Actual practices in terms of theory and practical followed by teacher educators in various teacher training programmes.*

Objectives of the study:

- To find out the **attitudes and concerns** of teacher educators in regular secondary teacher training programmes towards Inclusive Education.
- To find out the **actual practices** of inclusive education in regular teacher training programmes.

Research questions:

- Are the attitudes and concerns of teacher educators of regular secondary teacher training programmes favorable towards inclusive education?
- Is the secondary teacher training program includes theory and practical aspects related to Inclusive education?

II. METHOD

Research Design:

The present study was primarily a descriptive survey type of research involving systematic way of collecting data through questionnaire.

Sample:

The sample is selected from the teacher training colleges at secondary level in Mysore. Purposive sampling technique was used to select teacher educators for the study from 15 Teacher training colleges in Mysore city. And the sample size comprised of 50 teacher educators.

Description of the Tool:

By considering the three major parameters of the training programmes: attitudes of teacher educators towards inclusive education, concerns of teacher educators towards inclusive education, actual practices in terms of theory and practical followed by teacher educators in various teacher training programmes, a questionnaire was prepared to collect the data. The prepared questionnaire was validated by 5 professionals in the field of special education. As per their suggestions modifications were made and final questionnaire was prepared. Final questionnaire had three sections. First section consisted demographic information. Second section consisted of twenty statements in the form five point rating scale. And finally third section consisted of seven descriptive types of questions.

Collection of data and analysis:

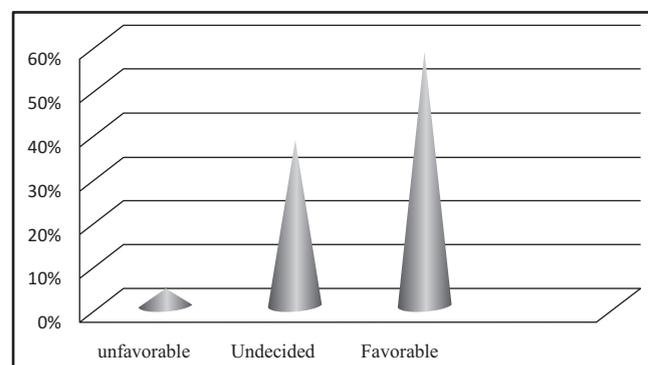
Prior permission was sought from the Principals of respective Teacher training colleges to administer the questionnaire among the teacher educators. Researcher distributed 50 questionnaires to all the teacher educators in respective teacher training colleges. After a week's time, questionnaire was collected back personally by the researcher. Both Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data was done. In the questionnaire, second section is quantitatively analyzed on the basis of 5 point rating scale indicating SA: Strongly Agree (5), A: Agree (4), NS: Not sure (3), D: Disagree (2), SD: Strongly disagree (1). And the third section in the questionnaire is qualitatively analyzed.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The main purpose of this study was to determine the attitudes and concerns of teacher educators towards inclusive education. And also to find out the actual practices of inclusive education in regular teacher training programmes.

The following is the data collected from 50 teacher educators from 15 B.Ed colleges. The Quantitative analysis of the data is as follows:

Scores	Particulars	Number of Teacher educators	Percentage
< 40	Unfavorable attitudes	2	4
40-70	Undecided	19	38
70-100	Favorable attitudes	29	58
Total		50	100%



Graph 1. Scores of B.Ed teacher educators on questionnaire.

As can be seen from the table, overall teacher educators responded favorably towards inclusive education with regards to the inclusion of children with special needs. It should be noted that studies reviewed over several decades have concluded that teachers' attitudes are one of the most crucial variables in the success of inclusive education (Chow & Winzer, 1992; Hayes & Gunn, 1988; Williams & Algozine, 1977).

In the study investigated by Vijetha and Prithi (ARF project 2010-2011), "*Attitudes of pre-service educators towards Inclusive Education*" indicated that pre-service educators were favorable towards inclusion of children with special needs, but were doubtful about their own skills and knowledge in handling children with special needs in classroom situations.

The favorable response 58 % towards inclusive education should be viewed with excitement as it appears that inclusive education is perceived as a progressive option. And the reason behind could be their willingness to accept new challenges. And the remaining 4% and 38% revealing unfavorable attitudes and undecided respectively needs attention and measures have to be taken to remove apprehensions about inclusive education.

Teacher training programme is the main domain to create inclusive education atmosphere among the regular teachers and mainstream educational settings. Inclusive education is based on notion that school should, without question, provide for the needs of all students, whatever their level of ability or disability. This means that students with disabilities are educated in the company of their regular age peers in a regular school and classroom and provided with instructions that effectively and efficiently meet their educational needs.

Supporters of inclusion have argued that students with SEN can and should be educated in the mainstream education classroom with the provision of supplementary aids and services (Lipsky & Gartner, 1989).

It is generally agreed that in order to be effective, the demands of educating students with special educational needs alongside their non-disabled peers should be met. To meet the educational needs of the Special children in inclusive classroom teacher attitudes is one of the factors which influencing. Attitude and concern about the inclusive education can be developed by empowering the teacher educators towards inclusive education and also strengthening the curriculum and regular practices in the teacher training program.

An understanding of attitudes and concerns of these teacher educators is essential for curriculum planning and in-service and pre-service training programs and could have a significant impact on current and future educational policies, program planning and funding decisions.

Further the third section of the questionnaire reveals the responses of teacher educators to seven questions which were asked to them. They were descriptive in nature. The questions and responses for each question from the teacher educators are as follows. Out of 50 teacher educators, only 37 responded. The consolidated descriptive answers of the teacher educators are discussed below.

1. Do you accept the concept of Inclusive education? If Yes, Give reasons, If No, Give reasons.

For this question, it was encouraging that majority of the teacher educators are favorable towards the concept of Inclusive education, they felt that equal opportunity should be given to children with special needs in the mainstream society. But there were few who clearly denied the concept of inclusive education in Indian context. They feel that the concept of inclusive education is highly impossible as they cannot believe that children with special needs can study along with other typically developing children in regular classrooms. This is also indicated by Smith (2000), when teachers are first confronted with the prospect of integrating students with disabilities, they tend to be somewhat negative and uncertain about their own ability to cope, and they often point to lack of personal experience and relevant training.

2. Do you feel that regular teacher training programmes are inadequate to promote Inclusive Education? If yes, please mention below.

For this question, most of the teacher educators expressed that the present regular teacher training programme what they are following is not adequate to promote the Inclusive education.

3. Did you attend any training programs (Short term/Long term) to educate teacher trainees in terms of Inclusive education?

Few have responded that they have attended short term training. Remaining expressed that they have not even attended any short term training about Inclusive Education.

4. What are the theoretical aspects you teach to your teacher trainees related to inclusive education?

Majority of the participants felt that they do not have enough knowledge and skills about inclusive education as their curriculum included very limited knowledge about special education or inclusive education.

5. What are the practices being followed by you to promote Inclusive education among teacher trainees as a part of Teacher training programme in your Institute?

Almost everybody mentioned that they will not follow any particular practices as such to promote Inclusive education as part of teacher training programme.

6. Do you take your trainees for practice teaching sessions to any Inclusive school? If yes, please mention.

Everybody mentioned that they will not take their trainees for practice teaching sessions to any Inclusive school.

7. What type of training would you like to have before teaching your trainees about Inclusive Education?

It was surprising to note that majority of the participants were not sure of which type of training they would need to gain knowledge about Inclusive education and children with special needs. According to Blamires (1999), a prerequisite for any change will be a willingness on the part of teachers to expend the necessary time and effort to plan, teach and organize in different ways to accommodate students' differences and unique needs.

IV. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. Due to paucity of time, sample size selected for the study is very limited.
2. Only teacher training programmes at secondary level (i.e. B.Ed.) has been considered for the present study.
3. Only B.Ed colleges of Mysore city are considered for the study.

V. CONCLUSION

Ultimately, success of Inclusive Education depends upon the training programs and man power who are involved in training programs at various levels.

India has been following the Philosophy of Inclusive Education since 2000, but actual success is yet to be achieved. Teacher education programmes and teacher educators are the essential components who are the means to promote Inclusive education in the present education system.

The present study revealed that teacher educators have favorable attitudes and concerns about inclusive education towards the education of children with special needs. But, they are not having adequately theoretical knowledge and practical skills to impart knowledge to their respective trainees in handling children with special needs in Inclusive set ups. Therefore, it is compulsory for teacher educators to undergo training about inclusive education. This in turn will help them to impart the necessary skills to their trainees.

If teacher education programme and teacher educators are essential factors, theoretical knowledge and practical exposure to teacher educators has to be enriched towards Inclusive education and also curriculum followed in the regular teacher training programmes of different levels has to be modified as per the needs of Inclusive setup in the present education system.

As per the responses given by the participants in the present study it can be observed that majority of them not at all clear about the concept of Inclusive education, some of them are totally against it. In this regard more and more enrichment and empowerment programmes for in-service educators about inclusive education are need of the day. In the same way, curriculum modification of training programmes of school teachers as well as teacher educators has to be modified in favor of Inclusive Education.

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