



TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVES ON THE CHALLENGES OF INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

Inclusive education has become one of the major educational policy of the government and measures have been adopted for providing high quality education to the differently abled children in a normal classroom setting in almost all levels of education. The revised B. Ed curriculum in tune with NCTE guidelines also emphasise inclusive education and a major thrust is given to equip prospective teachers in dealing the differently abled learners in an inclusive classroom. Here arise a challenge for the teachers on the pedagogical issues that are likely to occur while practicing inclusive education and the present study is to find out those challenges. A survey has been conducted among the teacher educators of Kerala University and the results indicate that teacher educators are not confident in inclusive education practices and opined that they need first-hand experience in this aspect and also are willing to seek assistance from trained personnel in transacting the curriculum. Some teachers expressed their doubt regarding the overemphasis on a minority group at the expense of major. The study implies the need for better awareness for teachers for achieving quality education for the diverse learners and providing equality of educational opportunities as envisaged by the Indian constitution.

Keywords: *Inclusive education, differently abled children, pedagogical issues, Indian constitution.*



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Introduction

Education for all irrespective of any differences among the learners have been accepted globally and the normal classrooms are shifted to inclusive classrooms. Rule 6 of the UN Standard Rules for Persons with Disabilities states: 'States should recognize the principle of equal primary, secondary and tertiary educational opportunities for children, youth and adults with disabilities in integrated settings. They should ensure that the education of persons with disabilities is an integral part of the educational system. General education authorities are responsible for the education of persons with disabilities in integrated settings.'

Education for persons with disabilities should form an integral part of national educational planning, curriculum development and school organization.'

Inclusive Education

Inclusive education as a system must be flexible to adapt to the changing needs of the students and also student friendly. Its principle should be education of all students in the regular classroom whenever possible. The need for flexibility must be reflected in the methods and materials used to give these children the widest possible access to the regular curriculum. As far as the kind of strategies and policies needed, the initialisation must be suitable for the individual child.

Inclusive education services allow children with disabilities to undertake their education with the nurturing facilities of family irrespective of any disparities. The education incorporating the services of school and family is an important component of their personal development. The normal development of a disabled child must be in an uninterrupted manner which otherwise would have been far reaching consequences than the disability itself.

Inclusive education envisages to eradicate all kinds of barriers and bring maximum learning to the needy. It emphasises quality and equity education for all, without any type of barrier or exclusion, including those who may be potentially marginalized due to disability, gender, emotional/ behavioural problems, family background, ethnicity, giftedness, migrants, poverty, hearing or visual impairment, language delay, among others.

The inclusive education will not be successful if we undermine the role of parents. They have to be involved in all decision making concerning the development of the child. A joint partnership of parents and teachers in the education of students with disabilities is the most important function of inclusive education, which would strengthen the education of these children in multiple dimensions.

It cannot be overruled the practical difficulties that have to be overcome before starting the formal education of the differently abled children especially in the inclusive settings. There must be proper arrangements, co-ordinated unconventional initiatives for meeting the requirements of the students. The role of peer group is another important factor that can help in overcoming the problems of disabled students as the schoolmates can be valuable partners in helping these children.

Policy and reality

The facilitation of regular school system to the disabled children is challenging and difficult. If it is not properly done, the concept and practice of inclusion and mainstreaming can be a 'dumping'. In many contexts, there exists a gap between the expected and the real

classroom situation in the inclusive education. Hence there must be measures to provide interventions for enabling the general teachers with special skills to address the needs and capacities of all children irrespective of any disability. Provisions must be for making the general curriculum, methods of teaching, assessment practices and learning material selection for satisfying the diverse learners and ensuring the quality education for all. The emphasis must be given to provide a comprehensive, collaborative and holistic approach to make inclusive education more worthwhile.

Whenever the curriculum for all is concerned, it should be child centred, flexible with respect to curriculum and teaching learning strategies, experiential and implemented with the support of parents.

Need and significance of the study

Considering the relevance of inclusive education for providing high quality education to the differently abled children in a normal classroom setting, equipping teachers for meeting this end is a challenging task to the teacher educators. The revised B. Ed curriculum in tune with NCTE guidelines emphasises inclusive education and a major thrust is given to equip prospective teachers in dealing the differently abled learners in an inclusive classroom. While interacting with teacher educators, many of them are in a confusion about how training in inclusive educational practices can be effectively implemented and on the pedagogical issues that are likely to occur. The present study is an attempt to find out the issues and challenges perceived by teacher educators regarding this aspect.

Objectives

1. To study the difficulties of teacher educators in transacting the new B.Ed curriculum in respect of inclusive education
2. To discuss the changes to be incorporated in teacher education in the context of inclusive education

Methodology

The study uses the survey method on a sample of 50 teacher educators of Kerala University, who are teaching core papers. The data was collected during a curriculum orientation programme using a questionnaire and analysed qualitatively.

Results and discussion

1. The data collected was in three major aspects like, strategies, role of teacher and the challenges.

a. Strategies

As the inclusive education classroom is a different experience to the prospective teachers, a thorough orientation and training in the implementation of inclusive approach should be made and the respondents identified the differences of traditional approach and inclusive approach in a comprehensive manner. The traditional approach provides education in a collective manner without giving much importance to the diversity in classrooms and inclusive classrooms are found to be more individualised in teaching, learning and evaluation and also more adaptive to the diverse learners. The teacher should be more adaptive to the inclusive classroom with the right attitude, skill and professionalism to be successful in the inclusive education practices.

b. Role of teacher

The teacher educators expressed their ideas regarding the changed role of teacher in the context of inclusive education. Majority have suggested the need for commitment, social responsibility and professionalism in every aspect. They have opined that the inclusive teacher should be having the characteristics as:

- A professional who is committed to his community, able to cater to the individual differences, a team builder, a collaborative professional, a creative explorer and a skilled leader in implementing required interventions.
- A holistic person having multi-tasking skills to meet the challenges of diverse learning needs in classrooms.
- A strong willingness to transform into multiple roles to achieve the aim of education of ALL with quality and equity.
- A trend setter in the advancement of social justice and equal opportunities for welfare.

Hence it is recommended that the teacher education should address the key roles that the future teachers have to exercise and equip them for that.

c. Challenges

The results showed that teacher educators anticipate the problems that may arise during the different phases of the course

- **Unfamiliarity with the inclusive practices.** Some teachers have not been exposed to special needs classrooms and this can be a disadvantage. Educators need to coordinate efforts and understand the needs of the classroom in terms of developing skills and lesson plans.

- **Including all students in all activities.** Inclusive classrooms should provide the environment for various kinds of learning experiences to all students. Teachers have to know and understand the nature of classroom communication and encourage participation among learners. Lack of sufficient training in the nature of classroom interaction with diverse learners in the most adaptive manner adds to severity of the problem.
- **Educating the diverse learners:** inclusive classroom may have children of different abilities in physical, intellectual, emotional and social. The children may have learning disabilities, impairments, language delays or ADD. Attending and educating all these in the most appropriate method can be challenging, particularly if the student teacher ratio is high. It also emphasises the need for special education training for teachers.
- **Insufficient learning materials.** Learning materials for meeting the needs of all kinds of learning disabled students is another challenge that many of the teachers have pointed out. .
- **Community and parental role:** A joint effort of school, community, and parents is an inevitable component in the better education of differently abled. Many a times it is a difficult task on the part of teachers to have a pro-active role to integrate the cooperation of the parents, community and school.
- **Lack of time:** Better inclusive education should be in multi dimensions and the teachers may find it difficult to collaborate the different persons to the benefit of diverse learners. The education in this aspect need a lot of time and patience which need to be addressed.
- **Coordinating therapies.** Some time it is required to adopt therapeutic interventions and such kind of teacher education may pose many challenges in the smooth conduct of the course. Attending therapy sessions can be beneficial to the differently abled and the coordination of these activities is a challenge as the other students may suffer. However, this becomes a challenge in planning day to day activities and keeping all students engaged and learning.
- **Practice teaching:** One of the serious issue is that the student teachers should have first-hand experience in the context of inclusive classroom and it may be a challenge to find out the right centres that offer such experience within the time frame of the regular practice teaching.

Many teachers expressed their enthusiasm and commitment for the practice of inclusive education in spite of these challenges and a better exposure and orientation is recommended by a majority.

2. Teacher education for inclusion

The study also reveals that the teacher education should undergo modifications in the context of inclusive education. The teacher should be having different roles and the respondents expressed their views and suggestions regarding the changes to be brought in the teacher education.

The teacher should have large competencies to identify diversity, incorporate ideas to educate them creatively, solve problems, personal skills like self regulation, attitude to experiment and find solutions , healthy relationships and coping skills.

The teacher needs to be inclusive with respect to equality, quality and equity and offer equal opportunities to all in the most effective manner. Teachers are the key to success in implementing inclusive practices.

A strong commitment to his community is an essential quality as the school is a basic unit of society. Teacher should take initiative in promoting a positive learning environment characterised by continuous improvement and cooperation.

The cooperation and collaboration of the stakeholders may enhance the quality of inclusive education. It should be a team activity in planning, decision making, solving problems and generation policies for improving the practice and meeting the goals of education for ALL. The programmes can be based on interpretative insight into environments and and the development of research activities should be the basis. Inclusive teacher should have strong skills in action research.

Theory and practice must be interconnected in dealing with diverse learners. Professional practice in contextual situations is to be emphasised. The teachers are to be trained in real environments. The teacher can use mentoring activities so as to enrich their experiences, skills and knowledge for inclusive education practices.

New teachers should be encouraged to associate with experienced teachers to promote dialogue, reviews, decision-making and work plans and assignments as a shared responsibility.

Conclusion

Inclusive education must be able to recognize individuality and should address the special needs of all pupils. Every child have the right to be educated and exclusion on any

basis is the violation of human rights. Therefore the schools must be equipped for providing education to all.

Every inclusive teacher have to be unique in one sense and common in another sense. Inclusion promotes individuality and co-operation in the classroom. Inclusive classrooms takes a lot of training, patience and compassion on the part of the teachers. Because fully inclusive classrooms have students across the different educational and developmental spectrum, it becomes a challenge for the teacher to harmonise all the activities to serve all the students.

The findings of the study revealed that there is an acute shortage of teaching and learning resources to cater for learning disability and students in inclusive settings. The findings also revealed that the teachers lacked the required training and qualifications required to handle students with learning disabilities. The study also went on to establish that the environment required in order to make it conducive enough for educating the future teachers to equip in inclusive education.

The study recommends that authorities should consider increasing the availability of workshops and conference for teachers who require better knowledge, skills, attitude and professionalism for dealing students with learning disabilities in inclusive settings.

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