



INCLUSIVE TEACHER EDUCATION IN INDIA AND ABROAD: A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY

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Abstract

The contemporary education system has been significantly influenced by the philosophy of inclusion. It emphasizes the accommodation of diverse learners under the same umbrella of regular schools and their meaningful learning. This study aims to examine the global scenario of inclusive teacher education. For this purpose, the study proceeds with two objectives: to analyze the differences between the latest curriculum frameworks of the 2-year Bachelor of Education(B.Ed.) and Bachelor of Education-Special Education(B.Ed.Spl.Ed.) programmes in India from the perspective of inclusive education, and to explore globally the programmes, initiatives, problems and prospects related to inclusive teacher education. The study employs document analysis to review both curriculum frameworks and a narrative review for an in-depth analysis of the related literature. The findings show that inclusive education has been integrated into the B.Ed. curriculum framework, but it is mostly limited to theoretical aspects, whereas the B.Ed.Spl.Ed. curriculum framework emphasizes not only theoretical but also practical aspects in addressing students' special needs. The study also reveals that most general teachers lack adequate pedagogical knowledge, the necessary skills, and the confidence to teach students with special needs. In addition, there is a lack of collaboration between general and special educators in fostering inclusive education. The importance of inclusive teacher education has been recognized by several countries, but there remains a significant disparity between high-income and low-income countries in terms of access and quality. In many countries, policies have emphasized inclusive teacher education, but the link between teacher education and inclusive education has not been appropriately established. The study highlights that to achieve the goal of inclusive education, teacher education programmes must be strengthened with both theoretical knowledge and practical skills for inclusion.

Keywords: *inclusive education, teacher education, inclusive teacher education*

Introduction

Developing an educational system that accommodates all students in nearby schools is necessary for inclusion. Fundamentally, inclusion signifies a change in our perceptions that guide us to address the diverse needs of students rather than making efforts to fit



students with special needs into a fixed educational system. It upholds the notion that every child has the right to an education that addresses his or her individual needs. Inclusion is also associated with the idea of social justice, which emphasises the protection of children's rights and is supported by international policy frameworks, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Salamanca Statement (1994). By offering a variety of ways for students to learn, inclusive teaching embraces the diversity in classrooms today. Rouse and Florian (2012) argued that inclusive pedagogy is "an approach to teaching and learning that represents a shift in thinking about teaching and learning from that which works for most learners along with something 'different or additional' for those who experience difficulties, to an approach to teaching and learning that involves the creation of a rich learning environment characterized by lessons and learning opportunities that are sufficiently made available to everyone so that all are able to participate in classroom life"(p. 18). Contemporary education systems demand that teachers possess the skills and motivation to integrate differently abled learners and learners from disadvantaged backgrounds into regular classrooms (Lewis and Bagree, 2013). Teachers must learn about and engage in inclusive education practices throughout their initial teacher education in order to acquire the knowledge, experience, and confidence necessary to work in an inclusive classroom. Florian and Rouse (2009) noted, "The task of initial teacher education is to prepare people to enter a profession which accepts individual and collective responsibility for improving the learning and participation of all children" (p. 596). Besides initial or pre-service teacher education programmes, in-service teacher education programmes are very important for fostering inclusive education. Therefore, keeping in mind the continuous changes in challenges and the evolution of knowledge fields, opportunities for continuous in-service teacher education throughout their careers should be provided. The Teachers Matter, published by the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (2005), explains how the role of a teacher has become gradually complex. Teachers are now expected not only to be sensitive to gender and cultural issues but also to be able to address the diverse needs of learners from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Moreover, they are required to take initiatives to promote social values. In addition, teachers are expected to integrate emerging technologies into their pedagogy and stay up to date with evolving knowledge fields.

Objectives of the Study

- i. To analyze the differences between the latest curriculum frameworks of the 2-year B.Ed. and B.Ed.Spl.Ed. in India from the perspective of inclusive education.
- ii. To explore programmes, initiatives, problems and prospects for inclusive teacher education in India and abroad.



Methodology

This comprehensive study employs a review-based approach through document analysis (Bowen, 2009) and narrative literature review (Baumeister & Leary, 1997) to explore inclusive teacher education in India and abroad from multiple perspectives. To address the first objective, document analysis was adopted as a systematic method to analyze and understand the differences between the curriculum frameworks of B.Ed. and B.Ed.Spl.Ed. For the second objective, a narrative literature review was conducted to locate and interpret existing studies pertinent to the objective. Relevant studies were primarily identified through Google Scholar. To ensure comprehensive coverage, additional studies were located through backward and forward citation tracking. Policy documents and reports relevant to the objectives of the study were retrieved from official websites and systematically analyzed not only to substantiate but also to comprehend the direction towards inclusive teacher education. The keywords used to search the relevant articles are “inclusive teacher education,” “inclusive education,” “inclusive pedagogy,” “teacher education,” and “teacher preparedness for inclusion.” Only peer-reviewed articles written in English were screened in multiple phases based on the objectives and conceptual clarity. Finally, 22 studies were selected for a narrative literature review.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Adopting document analysis and narrative review, the data have been analyzed, interpreted and presented objective-wise.

The Difference between the Latest Curriculum Frameworks of B.Ed. and B.Ed.Spl.Ed. in India from the Perspective of Inclusive Education

To understand the difference between the latest curriculum frameworks of B.Ed. and B.Ed. Spl.Ed., the researcher has first focused on the curriculum framework of the NCTE Two-Year B.Ed. programme developed by NCTE (2014). The NCTE B.Ed. programme comprises three broad curricular areas –“Perspectives in Education,” “Curriculum and Pedagogic Studies,” and “Engagement with the Field” (NCTE, 2014). “Perspectives in Education,” the first curricular area among the three broad curricular areas, covers the following courses: “Childhood and Growing,” “Contemporary India and Education,” “Learning and Teaching,” “Gender, School and Society,” “Knowledge and Curriculum,” and “Creating an Inclusive School” (NCTE, 2014). Following Booth and Ainscow’s *Index for Inclusion* (2002), ‘Creating an Inclusive School’ has set an objective to understand the ‘culture, policies and practices’ that are very important for the creation of an inclusive school. This course has aimed to present an understanding of the definition of disability and inclusion. The course has focused on different models of disability and has attempted to identify the challenges to learning and participation. It has been



proposed that the course will highlight the inclusive components outlined in the *Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education* (UNESCO, 2009). Field tasks have been prescribed for the student-teachers to make them aware of the changing narratives and definitions of ability and disability, the perceptions of learning and achievement in policies and documents, and the challenges of learning and participation in schools, and to enable them to help educational institutions with inclusion (NCTE, 2014).

The main aim of the B.Ed.Spl.Ed. is to develop special educators who will be able to teach differently abled students in various settings. To address the aim of inclusive education, the curriculum framework of this teacher education programme has been designed to make knowledgeable, competent and skilful teachers to teach effectively not only differently abled students but also all other students. The curriculum framework has given importance to the development of conceptual understanding of provisions for inclusive education, the nature of differently abled students, and their educational needs. The B.Ed.Spl.Ed. programme has been structured with six courses—four theoretical and two practical: “Theory: Core courses,” “Theory: Cross Disability & Inclusive Education courses (including optional courses),” “Theory: Disability Specialization Courses,” “Theory: Enhancing Professional Capacities (EPC) /Professional Development Courses,” “Practical related to disability,” and “Field Engagement /School Internship” (RCI, 2015). These six main courses have been divided into multiple courses. “Pedagogy of Teaching” is one of the important core courses from the lens of inclusive teacher education, as it has been designed with special reference to disability. “Cross Disability and Inclusion” has introduced inclusive education, sensory disabilities, neurodevelopmental disabilities, locomotor and multiple disabilities, and offered skill-based optional courses to address specific and/or cross-disability and inclusion. The primary objective of ‘Disability Specialization Courses’—“Assessment and Identification of Needs,” “Curriculum Designing,” “Adaptation and Evaluation,” “Intervention and Teaching Strategies,” “Technology and Disability,” and “Psycho Social and Family Issues”—is to develop specialized teacher for “autism spectrum disorders,” “hearing impairment,” “learning disability,” “mental retardation /intellectual disability,” “multiple disabilities,” and “visual impairment.” For the enhancement of professional capacities, the curriculum has prescribed three courses—“Reading and Reflecting on Texts”, “Drama and Art in Education, and “Basic Research & Basic Statistics”—in relation to disabilities. Besides these, the curriculum has prescribed field engagement and an internship in a disability special school and an inclusive school (RCI, 2015).

Programmes, Initiatives, Problems and Prospects for Inclusive Teacher Education in India

After reviewing the relevant studies on inclusive teacher education in India, it has been found that problems and prospects are an integral part of programmes and initiatives. The



most challenging issue in implementing inclusive education in our country is that teachers are not prepared, as they have not been trained to design programmes for students with special needs and implement them in regular classrooms. In the curriculum of B.Ed. programme, inclusive education does not have much importance, and some universities offer inclusive education as an optional subject. The universities that offer inclusive education give importance merely to theoretical knowledge. Pre-service teachers rarely get the opportunity to teach in special and integrated settings, but they need to be sent for school experience programmes in such schools where inclusion has been established not only as a philosophy but also in practice (Bansal, 2016). And prospective teachers complete B.Ed. with inadequate training to teach students with special needs (Sanjeev, 2013; Bansal, 2016). As inclusive education is not an integral part of B.Ed. curriculum, pre-service teachers develop the concept that children with special needs can only be taught by special educators (Singal, 2005). They are far from understanding the required knowledge and skills to be a competent teacher for inclusive education. They face problems identifying the needs and abilities of special needs learners. Teachers are unable to apply appropriate pedagogy which should address the need, ability and interest of every learner (Bansal, 2016). For the successful implementation of inclusive education, teacher education and school leadership are very important factors (Ainscow, 2007), but the findings of many studies have indicated that the standard of teacher education programmes in India differs hugely, and they address the inclusion of children with special needs from a narrow perspective. In some studies, pre-service teachers' positive attitude towards inclusion has been found, but they do not feel confident or equipped to teach students with special needs due to the dearth of teaching-learning resources and their knowledge and skills for making a classroom inclusive. Joshi (2020) conducted a study on B.Ed. students during school experience programmes in government and private schools of Delhi to understand challenges faced by pre-service teachers and reforms needed in teacher education for the implementation of inclusive education. It has been found that the majority of the pre-service teachers are slightly ready to teach differently abled children, but the ray of hope is that some of them are confident about their readiness to teach such students. It has also emerged from another study that most of them are not ready to apply specific strategy, instructional strategy and methodology in order to adjust their lesson to the needs of the students with special needs (Kumari et al., 2019). A study was conducted to determine the readiness of regular school teachers in Delhi. It was found that seventy per cent of them neither had any training nor had experience to teach students with special needs (Das et al., 2013). To address this problem, general education teachers and special educators need to work together, but they do so minimally, and they perceive that special educators should take responsibility for teaching the students with special needs. There is no doubt about the fact that teacher educators have a significant role in preparing prospective teachers to



adapt to the changing environment of a future classroom (Clement, 2010). But most of the teacher educators are not outfitted with inclusive education (Bansal, 2016).

For the professional development of in-service teachers and to address the need for inclusive education, a modular in-service inclusive teacher training system was developed. The objective of that system was to make the structure of the education process more flexible. Knowledge, intellectual qualities, understanding of the teaching-learning process, professional skills and transferability of skills are very important to design a module. Under the Bihar Education Project, more than six modules were developed. Some of them are Pahal, Samarath, Ujala III, Sampreshan, Anterdrishiti, etc. (Sanjeev, 2013). The Government of India has tried to take some imperative steps which might be helpful to translate the vision of inclusion into ground reality. For quality education of all learners, the New Education Policy (2020) has emphasized reviewing teacher education programmes from the perspective of inclusive education. To make an effective inclusive classroom, there is a need to change the approaches of teacher education, which will give more focus on the practical part of inclusive education (Joshi, 2020).

Programmes, Initiatives, Problems and Prospects for Inclusive Teacher Education Abroad

To understand the recent picture of inclusive teacher education abroad, a policy paper of UNESCO (2020) paved the path. According to the Global Education Monitoring Report-2020, it is claimed by 61% of 168 countries that they offer teacher education for inclusion. The accessibility of such a kind of teacher education varies by a country's income level. In nations with limited resources, where many educators are not even trained in accordance with national standards, providing inclusive teacher education is significantly more challenging (Education International, 2018). It is reported in a survey conducted in ten largely low-income sub-Saharan African countries that only 8% teachers of class-II and class-VI had undergone in-service teacher education for inclusion (PASEC, 2015). In contrast, Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2018 conducted across 49 high and upper-middle-income nations, reported that among lower secondary teachers, 35% had received training to teach in multicultural and multilingual classrooms during their pre-service teacher education, while 22% had been offered such training through their professional development programmes in the year prior to the survey (OECD, 2019; Schleicher, 2019). To foster inclusive education, teachers need more training. TALIS 2018 reported that 25% of teachers indicated a need for training to teach students with special needs, and this number is over 50% in Brazil, Colombia and Mexico. Additionally, 15% of teachers expressed a need for training in personalized learning, and this rises to over 40% in Japan and Vietnam.



It is important to keep in mind how inclusive education is defined by different countries, as this has not been addressed similarly in their policy and law documents. Only 10% of 196 countries have referred all learners for inclusion in their inclusive education or general laws. One third of them have mentioned teacher education. In Chile, the National System of Teacher Professional Development was developed by the School Inclusion Law to make teachers more competent for meaningful inclusion (UNESCO, 2020). In Colombia, Decree 1421 of 2017 defines inclusive education as “a permanent process that recognizes, values and responds in a relevant way to the diversity of characteristics, interests, possibilities and expectations of girls, boys, adolescents, youth and adults” entails “internal teacher training processes with an inclusive education approach” (Ministry of National Education, 2017). France makes Law 2019-791 for the development of inclusive education and plans a 60-hour initial training programme to continue teachers’ professional development according to the national standard that would help to familiarize with school students’ diverse situations. The content of teacher education on inclusion has not been specified by any of these laws. Teacher training and inclusive education have been mentioned, but the link between them is not explicit. For example, it has been mentioned in the Education Code of the Republic of Moldova that continuous training, which will be regulated by the government, is compulsory for teachers throughout their service life, but training is not referred to in Chapter VI, where inclusive education is focused (Republic of Moldova Government, 2014).

The inclusive education policy of Ghana aims to include inclusive education in all pre-service training programmes to make teachers more competent to comprehend the needs of all the students and to teach accordingly. It also aims to train teachers about initial assessment to identify learning difficulties and make an enabling environment (Government of Ghana, 2015). Inclusive education policies of Malta (MEYR, 2019) aim to equip teachers to deal with students from diverse groups with the support of universal design for learning. Sub-Saharan Africa is the second largest in addressing inclusion-related plans. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, inclusive teacher education modules have been integrated into the initial teacher training programme by the Education and Training Sector Strategy 2016–2025 (Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2016).

Inclusive training programmes have been included in the educational planning of more than one in three nations in Oceania and Eastern and Southeast Asia. Comparatively few nations in Northern Africa, Western Asia, Central and Southern Asia, and Northern Africa have included inclusive teacher training. To address the diverse learning needs of students, including girls, children with special needs, and pupils from ethnic minorities, the Lao People's Democratic Republic Education Sector Development Plan (2016–2020) intends to develop an in-service teacher education programme focusing on inclusive



education and pedagogical skills (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2016). Establishing teacher professional development programmes based on child-centred and active learning strategies, formative assessment for differentiation, and inclusive education to address every student's learning requirement is the goal of Nepal's School Sector Development Plan 2016–2023 (Government of Nepal, 2016).

Findings

1. The curriculum framework of B.Ed. includes inclusive education but is mainly limited to theory, whereas the curriculum framework of B.Ed.Spl.Ed. has given importance to both theory in detail and practical training for inclusion.
2. The B.Ed. Students do not get adequate opportunity to become familiar with inclusive classrooms.
3. There is a perception among most general educators that teaching students with special needs is the duty of special educators only.
4. Most general teachers do not have adequate pedagogical knowledge, the necessary skills, and the confidence to teach students with special needs.
5. Several policies have given importance to inclusive teacher education, but the scenario of implementation is not satisfactory.
6. Collaboration between general teachers and special educators plays a vital role in fostering inclusive education, but there is a lack of collaboration between them.
7. Access to inclusive teacher education varies from country to country. Most countries have to walk miles to meet the needs of inclusive teacher education. However, high-income countries are offering better inclusive teacher education programmes compared to low-income countries.
8. In several countries, policies have not presented the linkage between inclusive education and teacher education appropriately, but this connection is very important for inclusive teacher education.

Discussion

The study has revealed a gap between theory and practice for inclusive teacher education, specifically in the general B.Ed. programme of India. Inclusion is included formally in the curriculum framework of the B.Ed. programme, but it is mainly theoretical, and this programme cannot erase the earlier concerns that general teacher education programmes fail to make a bridge between the philosophy of inclusive education and classroom practice (Florian & Rouse, 2009; Bansal, 2016). In contrast, the curriculum framework of the B.Ed.Spl.Ed. has emphasized not only theory but also practical aspects to address the diverse needs of the students with special needs. The B.Ed.Spl.Ed. programme, through



its competency-based approach, highlights the fact that practical experience is important to develop teacher efficacy. It has emerged from the findings that most general educators are not confident in teaching students with special needs due to their lack of preparedness. This issue aligns with several studies reflecting that lack of proper training, scarcity of resources, and deficient exposure for the students with special needs create hindrances for teachers to apply inclusive strategies efficiently (Das et al., 2013; Kumari et al., 2019). In addition, the prejudiced notion of the most general educators creates barriers for the translation of inclusive philosophy into the classroom. They perceive that teaching students with special needs is the primary responsibility of the special educators. It is evident that collaborative efforts are important to address the diverse learning needs, but the lack of collaboration between general and special educators creates restrictions to fostering an inclusive culture in an institution (Ainscow, 2007). The study reveals the gap between policy intentions and implementations on an international level. Many countries have incorporated inclusive education in their policy, but have not made a clear linkage between teacher education and inclusive education, and this scenario is also reflected in the observation of UNESCO (2020), which indicates the ambiguity in terms of implementation of the inclusive policies. Additionally, the differences between high- and low-income countries regarding accessibility and quality of inclusive teacher education highlight the disparities in terms of availability of resources, exposure to practical experience, and capacity-building facilities. These findings emphasize the transformation in the approaches of teacher education. Teacher education needs to be transformed from theory to inclusive practice, and this practice should be collaborative and must be aligned with policies. Furthermore, as this study is review-based, empirical studies need to be conducted to improve context-specific strategies for the development of inclusive teacher education.

Conclusion

The study highlights that the importance of inclusive teacher education has been recognized by several countries, but teachers have not been prepared effectively. The disparity between theoretical knowledge and practical preparedness has been exposed by analyzing the differences between the curriculum frameworks of B.Ed. and B.Ed.Spl.Ed. And this disparity affects teachers' confidence in dealing with the diverse learning needs. The findings also point out the systemic challenges—inadequate training, less collaboration, and gaps in policy implementation—that exist both in India and abroad. These challenges create barriers in fostering inclusive education as a meaningful practice rather than merely policy recommendations. For the improvement of the field, the study emphasizes the necessity of the development of inclusive teacher education through practical activities, collaboration, and the reduction of the gap between policy and practice. These areas need to be addressed intensively for the development of confident



and competent teachers who will be able to teach the students with special needs efficiently. Further empirical research needs to be conducted to develop context-specific strategies that will enrich inclusive teacher education and school education as well.

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