



## Occupational Stressors and Coping Strategies of Teachers with Special Reference to Inclusive Education

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### ABSTRACT

*This thematic paper focuses on occupational stressors and coping strategies of teachers in inclusive educational set up. Inclusive education is gaining popularity now-a-days. There are children, with individual differences i.e., average, below average, above average, gifted, slow learners, and children with disabilities as a part of the school community (Forlin, 2001). It is observed that, it is becoming difficult for the regular teachers to deal with these different types of students in inclusive schools. It is always good if the special teacher can prepare different strategic methods of teaching for the above inclusive group of children. But it is also observed that such teachers are found very scarce. At this juncture, it is evinced that both regular and special teachers experience occupational stress and adapt various coping strategies to overcome their occupational stress. There are various occupational stressors which induce stress among both teachers. They are organisational stressors, professional stressors, Interpersonal interaction stressors and instructional stressors. They also adapt various coping strategies such as developing a sense of humor, concentrating on other interests outside schools, seeking help from other teachers, doing meditation & yoga, doing Physical exercise and altering the stressful situations etc.*

### KEYWORDS :

#### Introduction

Inclusive education is a pairing of philosophy and pedagogical practices that allow each student to feel respected, confident and safe so he or she can learn and develop to his or her full potential. It is based on a system of values and beliefs centered on the needs & interests of the student, which promotes social cohesion, belongingness and active participation in learning, a complete school experience, and positive interactions with peers and others in the school community.

These values and beliefs will be shared by schools and communities. Inclusive education put into practice within school communities that value diversity and nurture the well being and quality of learning of each of their members. Inclusive education is carried out through a range of public and community programs and services available to all students. Inclusive education is the foundation for ensuring an inclusive society

#### Inclusive Education

“Teaching that takes into account the increasing range of differences between pupils is often called inclusive education” (Leeman and Voman, 2001). Inclusion in education has been defined as ‘increasing the participation of students in, and reducing their exclusion from the cultures, curricula and communities of local schools’ (Booth and Ainscow 2007).

Inclusive education differs from previously held notions of integration and mainstreaming, which tended to be concerned principally with disability and special educational needs and implied learners changing or becoming ready for or deserving of accommodation by the mainstream. By contrast, inclusion is about the child’s right to participate and school duty to accept child. Inclusion rejects the use of special schools or classrooms to separate students with disabilities from students without disabilities. A premium is placed upon full participation by students with disabilities and upon respect for their social, civil, and educational rights. Inclusion gives students with disabilities skills they can use in and out of the classroom. It recognizes and responds to the diverse needs of the students, accommodating different teaching learning styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resources use and partnerships with the communities (Sujathamalini, 2010).

Inclusive education is gaining popularity now-a-days. There are chil-

dren, with individual differences i.e., average, below average, above average, gifted, slow learners, with all their strengths and weaknesses, as a part of the school community (Forlin, 2001). It is observed that, it is becoming difficult for the regular teacher to deal with these different types of students at the same time in inclusive schools. It is always good if the special teacher can prepare different strategic methods of teaching for the above inclusive group of children. But it is also observed that such teachers are found very scarce. Special and regular school teachers require multi talents and should play diversified roles to handle these children. This process has to cross away lot of hurdles or factors while flying out to reach the unreached such as parental involvement, teachers attitude, rigid curriculum/methods, lack of assistive & adaptive devices, inaccessible environment etc., as depicted in the diagram below.



**Fig.1 - Factors affecting implementation of Inclusive Education**

As the inclusive concept is new and the teachers working such schools are not well oriented with this inclusive procedures which resulted in lot of problems and bewilderment in their job responsibilities. This resulted in occupational stress within teachers to cater to

the needs of the diverse group of learners in inclusive schools (Forlin, Charis, 2001).

Occupational Stress is a term refers to ongoing stress related to workplace. It is a physical or psychological disorder associated with an occupational environment and manifested in symptoms such as extreme anxiety, or tension, or cramps, headaches, or digestion problems. Sometime the stress also acts as a motivator to the individual to strive for excellence. It is a pressure experienced by the responsibilities assigned in their duty. Such pressure is highly experienced by the teachers working in the inclusive schools with diverse group of learners.

Teaching is considered as an important occupation with high responsibilities and commitments and the role played by teacher is very important in the scenario of education. Teachers play a diversified role within the class room and outside the class room. A class room is considered as a miniature society representing different types of pupils with difference in abilities and disabilities. It is therefore, the duty of the teacher to provide learning experience suited to all types of children to achieve better outcome and all round development of the child. It is very essential that teacher should be aware about the suitable teaching approaches and theories to provide suitable learning environment for a heterogeneous group of learners. Several studies have been undertaken to study the teachers' roles and responsibilities in an inclusive schools. Some studies have also been carried out to find out the stressors and coping strategies of teachers in inclusive schools. Antoniou, Alexander-Stamatios et.,al (2009) investigated the specific work related stressors affecting special educational needs teachers in Greece and the coping strategies applied by them. The results identified five key stressors loading mainly onto the domains of working conditions, work load and organizational problems which appear to have an impact on teachers of special educational needs students in Greece. Platsidou, Maria and Agaliotis, Joannis (2008) studied the burnout, job satisfaction and Instructional Assignment-related Sources of Stress in Greek Special Education Teachers. The results indicated that the teachers reported average to low levels of burnout. They reported moderately high levels of satisfaction with their job, the principal, and the school organization as a whole. They also reported average satisfaction with work conditions and low satisfaction with prospects of promotion and pay. Four factors were identified on the job related stress factors: teaching in a multi-category classrooms, programme organization and implementation, assessment of students, and collaborations with other special education experts and parents. Forlin, Chris (1996) questioned inclusion – Is it stressful for teachers. The researcher involved 225 regular primary school teachers and 42 principals in Western Australia found that the inclusion of a child with a mild intellectual disability significantly increased the educator's appraisal of stress severity. Forlin, Chris (1998) investigated the ways in which Australian regular class teachers cope during inclusive education and the specific issues which are stressful for them. The study was undertaken in primary schools in Queensland, Australia, during 1997. The discussion with the teachers focused on aspects of inclusion that regular class teachers found stressful and the ways in which they coped with the difficulties they encountered, the availability and usefulness of support structures, and the benefits obtained. The top four stressful issues included teacher accountability for the child's educational outcomes, the child physically attacking others, obtaining funding, and reduced ability to teach other students. Effec-

tive coping strategies were maintaining a sense of humour, making a plan of action and following it, and discussing the situation with specialist personnel. Forlin, Charis (2001) identified the potential stressors for regular class teachers in inclusion. Source of stress included their perceived competence, their concern that the education of the majority of students not be affected, and the behaviour of the child with disabilities. Gyimah, Emmanuel et al. (2008) investigated the emotional reactions to inclusion of Ghanaian Mainstream Teachers. The analysis involved five bi-polar emotional reactions; namely anxious/relaxed; encouraged / discouraged; confident / diffident; satisfied/dissatisfied; self-assured/worried. The results confirmed that in teaching children with special needs in the mainstream, teachers experienced psychological stress. On the basis of the findings, suggestions for more information about special needs education, supply of resources and inter-agency collaboration were made.

Teachers working in inclusive school settings set back in their work situation when there is too much demand and over expectations of the job in inclusive classroom, lack of facilities for inclusion to carry out the teachers' professional responsibilities, lack of clarity on the teacher's roles and responsibilities in an inclusive classroom, conflict on the policy vision of inclusion with realities of daily teachers' professional life, lack of flexibility in organisation of inclusive class, lack of flexibility in using creative methods for inclusive class, school leader's attitude and behaviour of authorities towards inclusion, lack of recognition from the school leaders for the job well done by the teachers in an inclusive classroom, lack of effective management in the school for inclusion, lack of cooperation from school leaders for inclusion, pressure for individual attention in inclusive classroom, lack of evaluation procedures for students in inclusive classroom, pressure of sharing responsibilities between special and regular class teachers, too much time for preparing individualised education plan (IEP) for all students in inclusive classroom, lack of knowledge to design Individualised education plan (IEP), too much time on development of curricular adaptations and materials, lack of special education training to meet the demands of the inclusive class, lack of opportunities for professional enhancement in the form of participating in professional meetings/seminars/ conference related to inclusion, working hours allotment for instruction in inclusive class, difficulty in evolving the methods to meet the needs of a diversified special needs students in inclusive classroom, frequent feeling of mental and physical discomfort that impair the working relationship with the school leaders in the school and too much expectation from the parents of children with special needs. The above issues create stress on teachers to accept and deliver inclusive classroom responsibilities. It can lift the teachers' mood, increase their energy, and make them to feel stressed in their work situation.

But as the concept of inclusion is gaining momentum an in depth analysis is warranted in to find out the coping strategies to reduce the stress factors to implement inclusion successfully. It is very essential to explore the occupational stressors of teachers and necessary coping strategies to enhance the academic achievement of the children with special needs in inclusive set up. The coping strategies will make the teachers to develop better insight to reduce their occupational stress and the ways and means to improve scholastic achievement and core intelligences of the diverse group of children in inclusive schools.

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