



EDUCATING TEACHERS TO BE FACILITATORS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education can be made possible and successful only with the active initiative and positive attitude of the teachers. The success of this entire process of inclusion depends largely on the general climate they establish within the classroom to make children with disability feel accepted, confident and achieve their academic and social potentials. It is therefore important to sensitize teachers towards needs of children with disability. The curriculum of teacher education has to play a major role in this aspect. This paper focuses on the curriculum implemented to educate student teachers. Not only theoretical knowledge but real life experiences should also be provided to them to achieve lasting change of attitudes. An attempt has been made to understand how teachers can be motivated in this endeavour to ensure successful inclusion of children with special needs.

KEYWORDS : Attitude, Curriculum, Inclusive education.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusion does not only mean placing a child experiencing a disability in a mainstream classroom. Placement within a regular classroom is just the first step towards inclusive education. Inclusive Education does not merely entail providing access into mainstream school for pupils experiencing disability. It is not about bringing to an end an unacceptable system of segregated provision and dumping those pupils in a mainstream system which does not approve of them. It involves removing barriers in the classroom and school so that students of all ability levels are included in the same lesson. Inclusive education strives to ensure participation of all children and young people and the removal of all forms of exclusionary practice. It involves a change in the existing school systems in terms of physical factors, curriculum aspects, teaching expectations and styles and leadership roles. Inclusive schools are the most effective means of combating discriminating 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. (UNESCO, 1994, p. xi)

Inclusive schools are meant to be places where students with disabilities are respected for who they are and are considered active participants. They are provided with additional support according to their needs so that they can succeed in their lives. Research shows that children who experience disability who are included into mainstream educational settings demonstrate better academic and vocational outcomes when compared to children who are educated in segregated settings. (De Graaf, G. Van Hove, G. & Haveman, M., 2013, pp. 21-38). Segregating children into 'special needs' and 'mainstream' schools prevent equal access to social and curricular opportunities and labels children. (UNCRPD, 2008; UNESCO, 1994) Along with other physical and infrastructural factors, implementation of inclusive education involves positive attitude towards inclusion and disability most importantly among the teachers, administrators and policy planners. An attitude is "a relatively enduring organization of beliefs, feelings, and behavioral tendencies towards socially significant objects, groups, events or symbols." (Hogg & Vaughan, 2005, p. 150) The beliefs and notions held by the class teachers and what they do in the classroom are to a great extent responsible in shaping the quality of instruction that students with and without disabilities receive and thus assume a pivotal role in ensuring success of any inclusion programme. This qualitative study was undertaken to investigate into the importance of positive attitude of teachers to ensure successful inclusion of children with special needs.

NEED OF THE STUDY

Like any other Western country India has also gradually shifted from a system of segregated schooling to integrated and inclusive schooling. On 1st October, 2007 India ratified the United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). This Convention was seen as a significant step towards the paradigm shift in attitude from charity and welfare to rights and empowerment of pupils with disabilities. Being a signatory to this Convention, India remains committed to building an enabling environment so that all persons with

disabilities are able to enjoy their rights equally with others and realize their full potential. Equal access to education empowers people with disabilities to be independent and contributing members of an inclusive, barrier-free society.

The diverse needs of the learners and the quest to make schools more learner-friendly require regular and special education teachers to consult and collaborate with one another as well as with family and community in order to develop effective strategies, teaching and learning within inclusive setups. (Jelas, 2000)

A study conducted by Avramidis and Norwich (2002) found that teachers' attitudes were strongly influenced by the nature and severity of the disabling condition presented to them and less by teacher related variables. Further, educational environment related variables, such as the availability of physical and human support were consistently found to be associated with attitude to inclusion. Teachers who perceive themselves as confident enough to include students with disabilities in their classrooms appear to hold more positive attitudes towards inclusive education (Avramidis et al., 2004). In addition, previous experiences in educating students with disabilities may allow the teachers to view inclusive educational practices more positively.

Research indicates that teachers who hold negative attitude towards inclusion tend to employ less effective instructional strategies, which results in increasingly poor performances of students with disabilities including in regular education classrooms (Nutter, 2011). Furthermore, researchers also argue that negative attitudes held by teachers may be a significant barrier to the effective implementation of inclusive education (Glazzard, 2011).

Teachers, therefore have to be psychologically prepared to teach a class comprising of students with disabilities. They have to be equipped not only to teach but also to understand needs of children with disability. It is important for teachers to view differences among children as resources for learning and not as an impediment.

Academic and social achievement of all students, especially those with disabilities depend to a great extent on the attitude of teachers and the general climate they establish in the classroom. The National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986 rightly pointed out that, "the status of the teacher reflects the socio-cultural ethos of the society; it is said that no people can rise above the level of the teachers."

Teachers who do not have a positive attitude will consider inclusion to be a burden on them. A number of studies found that general education teachers are not supportive of inclusion. Hammond and Ingalls (2003), for example, concluded that most of the teachers did not support inclusion, albeit their schools had inclusive programs. Burke and Sutherland (2004) found similar results where in-service teachers' attitudes toward inclusion were negative. Other studies found that general education teachers are less supportive of inclusion (Armstrong, Armstrong, Lynch, & Severin, 2005; De Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2010; De Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011). Rakap and Kaczmarek (2010) investigated Turkish general education teachers

working in public elementary schools regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities in their classrooms and their readiness to include students with severe learning disabilities. The results indicated that the teachers had negative attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities into regular education classrooms.

What is required from teachers is a positive attitude towards children with disabilities. Children with special needs do not need their sympathy. Instead, a supportive and a confident teacher would help them in realizing their potential. Teachers have to be confident about their potential and should have an optimum level of expectation from children with disability.

Training and education provided to student teachers does not help them in developing the skills required for implementing inclusive education. Majority of the teachers are not trained in special education, neither do they have any experience in teaching students with disabilities. It is important to provide them with atleast the basic knowledge so that along with resource persons they can ensure a climate conducive for education of children with disability. With the surge in the population of children with disability, number of teachers is not sufficient. Only resource persons and special education teachers are not enough. Regular school teachers have to be made aware of the needs of children with disability so that they accept these students readily in their classrooms.

NEED OF INTEGRATED TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM

The teacher education programme provides separate courses for those who want to teach in regular schools and those who want to teach in Special Schools. However, this arrangement of separate teacher education programs for regular and special education do not help in equipping teachers with an integrated knowledge of the expected roles, functions and responsibilities to meet the diversity of learning needs in the classroom. There is an inevitable need for a new paradigm for the preparation of teachers.

There exists the need for teacher educators of regular and special education at all levels of teacher education to develop a "whole faculty approach" in facilitating an inclusive pre-service teacher education curriculum embedded across all discipline areas (Jelas, 2010).

The curriculum followed to teach student teachers needs modification in order to foster a positive attitude towards children with disabilities. The prevalent curriculum includes topics of study broadly under foundations of education, curriculum, pedagogy and school inter nship. Only a few chapters on types of disability and inclusive education are included in the syllabus of study. These topics are sufficient only to provide theoretical information with no practical bias. Only providing information is not sufficient to achieve lasting change of attitude towards people with disabilities (Hassanein, 2015). They have to be sensitized towards the needs of children with disability.

CONCLUSION

Restructuring of the curricula will be more helpful in supporting teachers. There should be more time for preparing the educational activities, decreasing the number of students in one class, creating and developing opportunities for interactive partnerships between teachers, students, support teachers and parents and so on. The reform of the curriculum should be accompanied with a proper training for teachers regarding their knowledge of inclusion and its principles. The difficulties are inherent to any change or reform, but it is necessary to develop an educational system which can properly respond to all the needs, characteristics and individual differences of all children in school (Unianu, 2012).

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