

**TEACHER EDUCATION AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: AN OVERVIEW****Pranabesh Bhunia<sup>1</sup>, Manoj Kumar Mahato<sup>2</sup>, Piyali Chakraborty<sup>2</sup>, Indrani Basu<sup>3</sup>  
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**\*Corresponding Author email id:** mituaswb@gmail.com**Abstract**

The right to education is universal and expands to all children, youth and adults with or without disabilities. When a disabled child does get the opportunity to receive a quality education, doors are opened. Education enables them to secure other rights throughout their lifetime, fostering better access to jobs, health and other services. Education enables the individual to have a valued role in the community. The presence of learners with disabilities and special educational needs in regular education presents enormous pedagogical challenges for education systems around the world. 21st century education systems have a clear need for teachers who are sufficiently competent and motivated to know how to include children with disabilities (and those from other marginalized groups) in all classrooms. In order to develop the skills, experience and confidence to be inclusive of all children, teachers need to learn about and practice inclusive education. Teachers must be competent enough to recognize different educational needs of the disabled students and use appropriate teaching strategy. Teacher education has a crucial role to play in ensuring that classroom teachers are prepared for the challenges of educating all students with disabilities. The challenge becomes acute with students with invisible disabilities. This paper discusses the need of trained teachers to make inclusive education a reality and the role of teacher education.

**Keywords:** inclusive education, teacher education, invisible disabilities, diversity, valued roles

**Introduction:**

Current trends in education are moving toward more inclusive educational experiences for children with disabilities, alternative learning styles, and differentiated instructional practices to support all students to succeed [1]. So that implies that all teachers and classrooms must be equipped with the supports needed for children with special needs (CWSN). Education in general and post-secondary education in particular, is a predictor of gainful employment in meaningful occupations, opening opportunities for career development, hence for quality of life [2].

Teachers are often simply not trained or supported to teach children with disabilities, which makes these children among the most marginalized in terms of educational opportunity and attainment. That means these students are not being given the chance to become empowered as individuals and support their communities. Education enables the individual to have a valued role in the community. So when students cannot access education they fail to develop a valued role in society. They miss out on the opportunities that an educated person can get.

Many countries do not have enough teachers, let alone enough teachers who have received sufficiently high quality pre- and in-service training and access to continuing professional development. The lack of well-prepared and motivated teachers impacts on the enrolment, participation and achievement of all children – but can be particularly detrimental to the education of children from marginalized groups, who may need some extra encouragement or assistance to reach their educational potential.

Children with disabilities are one of the most excluded groups in education. Universal school design, adapted learning materials, and better data are all crucial. However, the key to effective learning lies especially with teachers. Accommodating diverse learning needs lies at the heart of inclusive education. 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:**

The right to education is universal and expands to all children, youth and adults with or without disabilities. When a disabled child does get the opportunity to receive a quality education, doors are opened. This enables them to secure other rights throughout their lifetime, fostering better access to jobs, health and other services. For education to play this role as ‘an enabling right’, it must be of high quality, available equitably, built to tackle discrimination and allow each child to flourish according to their own talents and interests [3]. Education paves the way for individuals with disabilities to gain a valued role in society. Inclusion embodies ‘how’ the education system can accommodate children with diverse learning needs [4], constituting the promotion, where feasible, the processes of achievement, acceptance and participation in mainstream school classrooms of children with diverse learning needs [5].

Lipsky and Gartner in 1996 defined inclusion as "the provision of services to students with disabilities, including those with severe impairments, in the neighborhood school, in age-appropriate general education classes, with the necessary support services and supplementary aids (for the child or the teacher) both to assure the child's success - academic, behavioral, and social - and to prepare the child to participate as a full and contributing member of the society [6]." A significant aspect in the above definition is often lost while trying to incorporate inclusive education viz. “with the necessary support services and supplementary aids (for the child or the teacher) both to assure the child's success.” Support services for different types of disability will vary. Furthermore these support systems may vary from student to student with disability.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) [7] characterizes as ‘Inclusion is a process. It is not a single goal but an ongoing effort to find ever better ways to address the needs of children in a classroom. Inclusion acknowledges that human differences are normal and that not all children learn in the same manner. Tailoring

instruction to meet individual student needs is at the heart of inclusive education, and it has become the foundation of most current pedagogical approaches’.

### **Role of teacher in Inclusive education**

The presence of learners with disabilities and special educational needs in regular education presents enormous pedagogical challenges for education systems around the world. It has been variously stated that inclusive education systems develop schools based on a child-centered pedagogy capable of successfully educating all children [8, 7].

Teachers play a significant role in making education more inclusive, through their approach to learners, the methods and materials they use, their ability to welcome diversity and see it as strength, and their capacity to adapt and respond to challenges and diverse learning needs. The inclusive teacher recognizes individual differences and implements learning strategies for all. 21st century education systems have a clear need for teachers who are sufficiently competent and motivated to know how to include children with disabilities (and those from other marginalized groups) in all classrooms. In order to develop the skills, experience and confidence to be inclusive of all children, teachers need to learn about and practice inclusive education during initial teacher preparation. It is therefore vital that teacher education prepares teachers to be inclusive – not just by teaching them the theory of inclusive education, but by equipping them with the practical skills they need to identify barriers to access, participation and learning, to be reflective, critical thinkers and problem-solvers, and to actively challenge discrimination. Originating from the Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education [7], which Ainscow and Cesar in 2006 referred to as “the most significant international document that has ever appeared in the field of special education” (p.231), inclusive education received widespread recognition across the world [9].

### **Challenges of teachers in inclusive education system**

In India ‘The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016’ replaces the ‘Persons with Disabilities Act 1995’. The number of disabilities listed rises from seven in the 1995 Act through 19 in the 2014 bill to 21 after the amendments, including acid attack and Parkinson’s disease. Several among them are invisible disabilities. The policy of inclusion is often difficult to implement because teachers are not sufficiently well prepared and supported to work in inclusive environment. In the syllabi for Teacher Education it becomes quite difficult to provide in depth information of so many types of disabilities and the different teaching styles best suited for each type.

New teachers in the mainstream school very often no idea how to handle the students with disabilities; whose educational challenges may range from learning deficits to behavioral disturbance disorders. The teachers face lot of problems in transferring what is learnt in training to actual diverse classroom learning situation this might be happening due to the mismatch between the teacher training curriculum and the schools realities. Pre-service teacher education often fails to prepare student teachers to teach in inclusive classrooms [10].

Teachers must be competent enough to recognize different educational needs of the disabled students and use appropriate teaching strategy. Teacher education has a crucial role to play in ensuring that classroom teachers are prepared for the challenges of educating all students with disabilities. It is imperative to prepare teachers for inclusion in all curricular plans for pre-service teachers and also for teachers in services. Students with disabilities have been increasingly receiving special education services in general education classroom [11].

### **Pre-service teacher education**

The pre-service teacher training degree programs needs to incorporate many changes like making inclusive pedagogy a significant part of the pedagogy courses, student teaching in inclusive classrooms, visit to special schools, learning to work in collaboration with other professionals and fellow colleagues and addressing special needs in group setting instead of one to one mode after pulling the child with special needs out of the regular classroom [12]. Although pre-service teachers come to teacher education programs with enthusiasm and beliefs in liberal education [13], previous research indicated that, as they progress in teacher education programs, they do not feel adequately prepared to teach students with special needs in general education classrooms [14].

The pre-service teacher education degree course or B.Ed. is one of the most sought after pre-service professional course. Pre-service teacher education degree courses prepare an individual for working as a:

- Subject teacher for teaching English, Hindi, Mathematics, Lie Sciences, Social sciences etc. after completing B. Ed
- Special education teacher for talking care of special educational needs of students who have difficulty in seeing, speaking, hearing, social interaction etc, after completing B. Ed. special education or Diploma in Special Education.
- Physical education teacher after completing Bachelor in Physical Education (B. P. Ed).

All the three types of professionals, i.e., the subject teachers, the special teachers and the physical education teachers are required to work in collaboration in the same work setting, the regular school.

In an inclusive school, the special educator works hand in hand with regular teachers so that special educational needs are met within the school premises itself. The regular teacher is ready to modify the teaching learning content as per the suggestions and advice of the special educator and parents whereas the special teacher works in close collaboration with the regular teacher to meet the academic goals of Children with Special Needs (CWSN) and other learners. A special educator in an inclusive school is a resource person for the school and has the important job of networking with other staff in administration, other teaching staff and nonteaching staff. A very important job of the special educator is to advocate for the children with disability. Advocate means to ensure the children's participation in school events and celebrating the children's success. It is imperative to prepare teachers for inclusion in all curricular plans for pre-service teachers and also for teachers in services.

Teachers are the ones entrusted with the task of making inclusion a reality. The policy of inclusion is often difficult to implement because teachers are not sufficiently well prepared and supported to work in inclusive environment. The challenge becomes acute with students with invisible disabilities.

#### **Invisible disabilities:**

Invisible disabilities are the most common type of disability among college students. For example, students with auditory processing disorders, learning disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and/or psychiatric disabilities, may request accommodations even though they do not appear to have a disability. There are numerous other hidden or invisible disabilities such as a heart condition, Chronic Fatigue

Syndrome, Fibromyalgia, and Seizure Disorder. Learning disorders viz. dyslexia, Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, Dyscalculia, and Dyspraxia and/or psychiatric disabilities like Bipolar disorder, schizophrenia among students could result in unusual behaviours. The behaviours displayed by the students could be because of the inherent disability in the student and the lack of appropriate support in the classroom. Students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) often demonstrate unusual and challenging behaviours and they do not always respond to methods of discipline employed in the classroom environment.

To address the educational needs of learners having invisible Disability, like Learning disability or autism, it is essential to ensure timely identification, assessment and providing reasonable accommodations. It is widely recognized that students with ASD require attitudinal and social support to be truly integrated into a general education classroom [15]. Students with learning disabilities often learn differently than their peers. Each student with a learning disability may need different types of accommodations, services, and/or supports based on what area(s) of learning is affected by the disability. Students with learning disabilities may have difficulties with some of the following:

- Reading comprehension
- Processing speed
- Written expression
- Oral expression
- Mathematics
- Auditory processing
- Visual processing
- Abstract reasoning
- Visual spatial skills

### **Dealing with invisible disabilities in the classroom:**

The inclusion of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in inclusive classroom can be particularly challenging for teachers and teachers need to be properly trained and prepared to face such challenges. This is often not due to the lack of intent or understanding. But often disability awareness is not a regular in depth component of teacher-training courses, leaving teachers ill-equipped to manage disability. Students with invisible disabilities often pose the greatest challenge for teachers. Teachers require professional development that addresses their concerns in order to be effective in improving the pedagogical experiences of both children with ASD and their typically developing counterparts [16]. Research examining teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards Inclusive Education reveal that often teachers experience frustration, fear, anger and lack of confidence regarding their ability to meet the needs of all their pupils [17, 18]. The teachers often face challenging situations.

Some examples of challenging situations in a classroom where students can be:-

- Silent or may threaten, interrupt, argue or swear
- Can act clingy or refuse contact
- May fail to attend classes, or be frequently absent from school
- May fail to observe rules or be disruptive, destructive, aggressive or violent.
- Are often unable or unwilling to work without direct supervision.
- Are restless and unable to concentrate.

- Are often unable and/or unwilling to complete tasks and follow instructions.
- Generally behave unusually.
- May respond in an extreme fashion to a variety of social, personal, emotional or physical circumstances.
- Have low self-image, anxiety, depression or withdrawal.
- May show resentment, vindictiveness or defiance.

Students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and learning disability in educational institutions have no external markers that will aid in identification. It is only by observing their learning style and behavior that teachers will be able to come to a conclusion. As ASD is a spectrum disorder no two students will be alike and their supports would vary too [19]. Sometimes visual supports are present for students with autism in schools especially primary level education. Often these essential are not provided in high school and college. It must be kept in mind that reasonable accommodations and supports should be provided to students throughout their life as education is a lifelong process. Students with invisible disabilities in higher education often fail to get adequate support from teachers and peers alike [20].

Owing to the placement of children with ASD in mainstream classrooms, teachers are obligated to successfully and effectively include these children often with a limited or an absence of guidelines and training [21, 22].

### **Importance of quality Teacher Education**

Teacher education is the key to making inclusive education systems possible. Research worldwide has established that Pre-service teacher education has a positive impact on improving teachers' knowledge of disabilities, knowledge of inclusive pedagogical approaches, attitudes toward disabilities, and self-efficacy for creating inclusive settings [23 - 26]. Previous research has established that teachers are key players in support for inclusion [27]. But teachers may start to use different techniques of teaching only when the disability of the student is ascertained. So it is imperative to provide practical exposure to the trainee teachers. If trainee teachers were to spend some weeks in a special needs school as part of their curriculum they would gain an insight to identify children with special needs (CWSNs). Likewise if trainee teachers pursuing special B. Ed spend some weeks in a mainstream school the experience would be enriching. The in service teachers should have a means to update their knowledge and hone their skills by means of refresher courses, workshops etc.

### **Conclusion:**

The teachers can bring about a change in attitude by her/his skill and own behaviour, towards the student with disability. It is imperative to prepare teachers for inclusion in all curricular plans for pre-service teachers and also for teachers in services. Teacher education is viewed to be pivotal in developing the affirmative attitudes and skills required for successful inclusion, with formal educational training being identified as one of the main factors that promote an inclusive attitude [28]. Just as no two students are exactly alike; no two students learn in exactly the same way [29].

Everyone has preferred way of learning which needs to be kept in mind while teaching children in an inclusive class. By changing from a deficit orientation to a diversity perspective, and by creating positive ecosystems within which students with learning differences can learn according to their strengths rather than their weaknesses, we can help these students become who they are truly meant to be [30]. Teachers and other school staff



need to be familiar with the various modifications of classroom instruction that can be used to ensure that all children, including those with disabilities (both visible and invisible), can learn and reach their fullest potential.

For inclusive education to succeed, it is vitally important that teachers, principals and other education stakeholders maintain a positive attitude towards inclusion. They must be firmly convinced of the benefits that inclusive practices bring to all children. Even if inclusive education is mandated by law, it will never succeed without the enthusiastic support of its practitioners. Successful inclusive education happens primarily through accepting, understanding, and attending to student differences and diversity, which can include physical, cognitive, academic, social, and emotional.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this work.

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