

TEACHER EDUCATION FOR INCLUSION: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

The issue of inclusion is a crucial consideration in education and there have been increasing demands in recent years for schools to provide equality of opportunity for all pupils. However, the reality of providing for inclusion in many faceted settings such as schools is a complex issue, as indeed is the provision of education for inclusion. The main objective of this paper is to identify challenges encountered by teachers in managing inclusive classrooms and to throw light on the qualities and competencies that a teacher must possess for achieving successful inclusion. A majority of teachers were not trained on how to teach in an inclusive class. Mainstream teachers generally lacked confidence when they attempted to include students with disabilities into classes. However, the literature indicates that with proper training and resources and effective learning environment, inclusion can be a practically feasible. The educational environment is commonly recognised as a pivotal factor in the promotion of desirable values in young people. We must develop teachers who are self consciously aware of the values implicit in how they interact with special pupils and how they fulfil their professional role. Quality, equality and equity concepts are essential aspects in the implementation process of inclusion in teacher Preparation Programmes. To sum up, this present article outlines challenges facing in the implications of teacher education for inclusion, reflections on teacher education for inclusion and critically evaluates the process of implementation of teacher preparation programme.

Keywords: Inclusion, Inclusive Education, Special Education, Teacher Preparation Programme

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Introduction

Inclusion promotes 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/ behavioral problems, family background, ethnicity, giftedness, migrants, poverty, hearing or visual impairment, language delay, among others.

Underlying the process of inclusion is the assumption that the general classroom teacher has certain knowledge and understanding about the needs of different learners, teaching techniques and curriculum strategies. Florian and Rouse (2009) state: '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). This is a big challenge for all but; it is an opportunity to advance the school as a change factor that promotes dialogue and participation, making possible well-being through an education of quality for all without exception, for the commitment of the community. Studies suggest (e.g. Sanders and Horn, 1998) that the quality of the teacher contributes more to learner achievement than any other factor, including class size, class composition, or background. The need for 'high quality' teachers equipped to meet the needs of all learners becomes evident to provide not only equal opportunities for all, but also education for an inclusive society. Reynolds (2001) says that it is the knowledge, beliefs and values of the teacher that are brought to bear in creating an effective learning environment for pupils, making the teacher a critical influence in education for inclusion and the development of the inclusive school.

Teacher educators not only have the role of supporting student teachers' learning about teaching, but as stated above, they also model the role of the teacher. The teacher education profession is unique. We can understand it by an example i.e., 'During doctor 's profession teaching , doctors do not serve as role models for the actual practice of the profession i.e., they do not treat their students. But Teacher educators, conversely, whether intentionally or not, teach their students as well as teach about teaching' . It is a fact, every educational system in the world needs to improve and work towards the best results. It has lot of educational challenges, combined with socially and economically complicated contexts.

The challenges facing in the implementation of Inclusive Education

The mission to achieve inclusive education is a extensive and speckled one, on which challenges and opportunities will arise. Government cannot realistically expect to toggle overnight from special or integrated approach to inclusive education. Special or integrated initiatives and inclusive schools can work side-by-side as governments work towards the proper inclusion of all children (in line with

human rights principles) within mainstream education systems over time. Ideally these identical approaches will update one another, with wisdom achieved from each informing the development of further plan. Special schools may play role of handy resource centres for inclusive schools by providing equipment and helping to develop skilled teachers.

On the part of both teachers and parents, we face some challenges about depressing mind-sets and conduct and can fight with these challenges by raising awareness of human rights in communities and illustrating and publishing optimistic examples of disabled children succeeding in inclusive education and in life beyond school as a result. We can support disabled children to express their ambitions, goals, what they want to achieve in their life and participate in planning processes, as well as promoting action research and critical pedagogy amongst teachers. Another major challenge to inclusive education in our country is lack of funding. UNESCO (2009) stated that funding is a major constraint to the practice of inclusion. It requires, resource teachers, special teachers, specialists and additional classrooms for teaching children with disabilities in general education classrooms and to support student needs. More funds are needed for coordinating services and offering individual supports to children with special needs that many schools do not have. Therefore, insufficient financial support can hamper ongoing professional development that helps keep specialists and classroom teachers updated on the best practices. However, some major barriers are serious shortage of educational resources; lack of schools, inadequate facilities, and lack of teachers and shortage of professionally trained qualified staff, lack of modern learning/instructional materials. Another challenge is really very difficult to meet that most of the policy makers do not understand the concept of inclusive education. So it would be not easy to implement this wonderful part of education. Not having a potent strategy to hold the functioning of inclusive education programme is one more challenge facing this part of education.

The shortage of resources like classrooms, desks, textbooks, talking books for the blind, Braille machines for the blind and building of school constructed using ramp to facilitate the movements of students with physical disabilities is a powerful barrier in the way of inclusive education. Then there is another issue of failure to hold the latest assistive technology as most schools still use obsolete technology to do even office work. They even cannot afford computer based assistive technology for their students with special Educational needs such as large prints, on screen reading, compact discs, and also talking calculators. These problems are evident in the decrepit structures used as classrooms which cannot cater for the lame students and also the poor construction strategies used by designers of some facilities in some schools which include the library, laboratory, classrooms and toilets.

Thus we can say that there are two types of challenges in front of successful inclusion. They can be internal as well as external. Internal challenges includes attitude of parents, teachers and policy makers, inappropriate curriculum, untrained teachers, organization of the education system. While external challenge includes location of schools, enrolment, Social stigmatization, Economical condition. If we teachers, parents, administrators and policy makers join hands to hands then definitely we can meet all the challenges.

Reflections on Teacher Education for Inclusion

Inclusion requires a large vision and specific competencies for all teachers. Now the teachers need to know that diversity is present in the classroom, and that they should attend to learners with a range of diverse needs. In this frame, it is imperative to prepare teachers for inclusion in all curricular plans for pre-service teachers, also for teachers in services, with the following expertise skills:

- **Researcher.** Always searches for explanations about their educative reality, has intellectual skills to propose diverse hypothesis, solve problems, generate innovation, and face challenges in the education field.
 - **Strategic.** Is a professional with strong self- regulation, skills for planning, guiding and assessing, not only their own intellectual resources about the learning of curricular issues but also in their performance as a teacher. Always has an attitude to learn and improve. Faces uncertainty with creativity.
 - **Flexible.** Always moves towards the future, in spite of their difficult situations, by making healthy adjustments against adversity.
- The knowledge, skills and attitudes for all inclusion teachers must emphasize that the purpose of all teacher interventions is the students' learning. They also need to have high expectations for all (inclusive vision), develop inclusive projects including diverse teaching strategies and support systems (inclusive practices) and participate in a collective work (inclusive language).

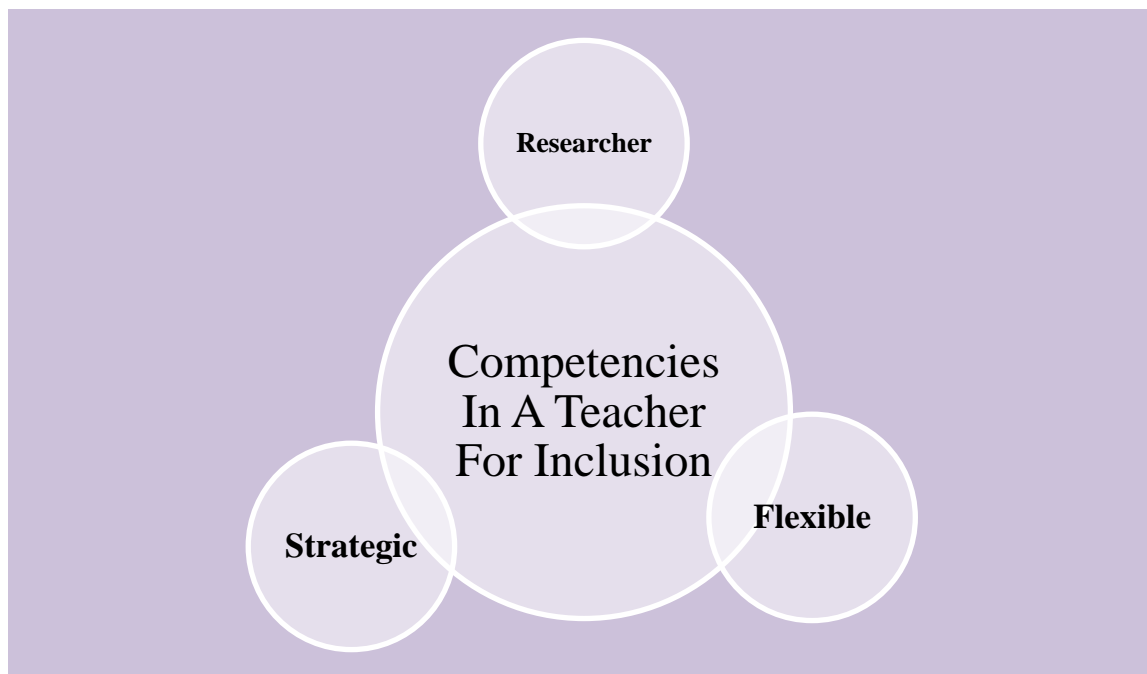


Fig.1: Specific Competencies in Teachers

The author identifies three chief educational aspects that every teacher needs to be inclusive: **Equality**; promoting the same opportunities for all, **Quality**; offering functional and meaningful learning and **Equity**; responding to special educational needs.

The process of Implementation

Teachers are the key to success in inclusion. Following are the seven essential components for Teacher Preparation Programmes.

I. The Inclusive Teacher is a professional in education with a strong commitment to his/her community. The Teacher Preparation Programme should include subjects with **high social and community content** because they need to be sensitive to the needs of students and the environment; It is important to recognize the school as a point of encounter among different people, it promotes agreements among all the members of the community and meaningful relationships among the components that impact the learning of the students by removing barriers, promoting high expectations and a positive environment characterized by continuous improvement and values. The dialogue,

participation and collaboration allow full awareness to all as a community and, in consequence ensure successful experiences in inclusion. For this reason the teachers need to be involved.

II. The Inclusive Teacher recognizes individual differences and implements learning strategies for all. The educational intervention is oriented to diversity and promotes learning strategies for all (equality), for quite a few and for only one (equity). These are other essential aspects in the teacher Preparation Programmes. Quality, equality and equity concepts should be translated into specific actions of educative interventions. Bondy et al. (2007) stress that teacher educators must employ diverse approaches to learning for their students. As teacher education students ultimately will become teachers of diverse learners, teacher educators must be explicit about this aspect of teaching and learning.

In order to illustrate the individual differences in the classroom, the authors follow a three-dimensional observation. Every inclusive teacher needs to move among these three realities in his/her classroom – seeing his/herself as being like all others, also like some others and finally, in some ways unique. This idea allows co-teaching or concurrent participation. Inclusion promotes co-operation in the classroom. We believe this representation helps us to understand the diversity concept as well.

In inclusive education, the school and classrooms are very dynamic and have a lot of interactions and roles. The exchange and experience enrich individuality. Diverse contexts indicate diverse relationship and interactions.

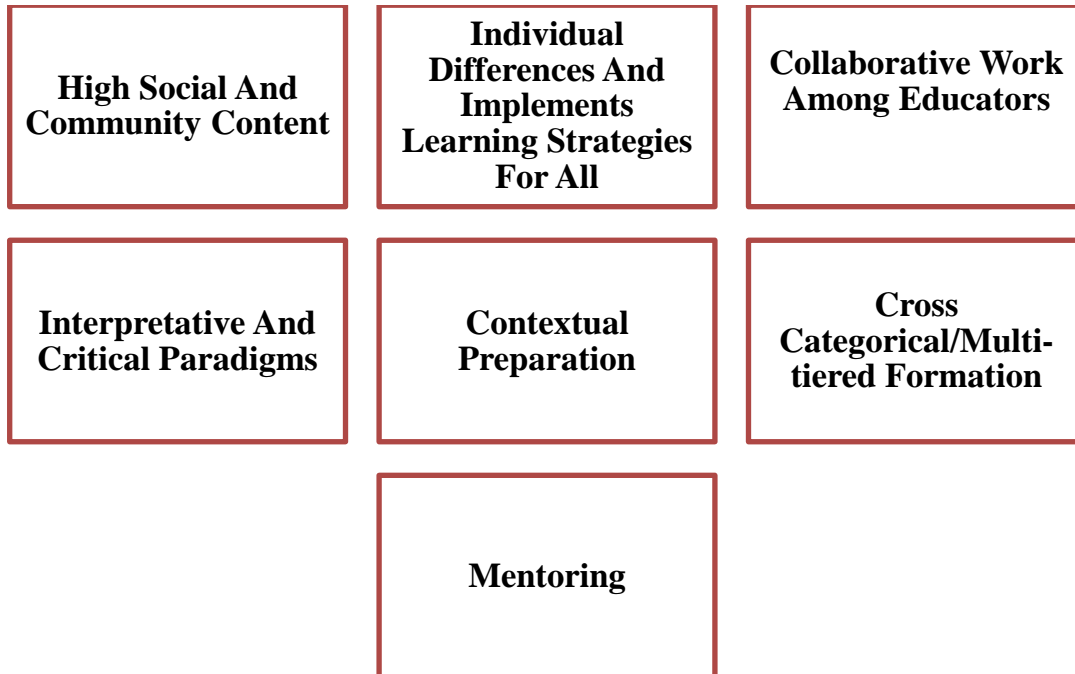


Fig.2: Process of Implementation

III. The collaborative work among educators, facilitates inclusion and needs to be promoted in the Teacher Preparation Programme. Successful collaborations happen when teachers work together to share the workload instead of doubling their efforts. From the delegation of tasks, teachers are also able to learn more from each other as they come back together to review and assemble their separate assignments into a cohesive lesson plan. The authors believe that inclusion is funded on a collective of teachers, a team sharing knowledge, making decisions, solving problems together and generating actions in order to improve the school and to increase the learning for all. In consequence, the collaborative work is a source of dialogue, co-teaching and updating. Information on the process of collaborative work now follows.

The Institution of Higher Education that trains teachers in special education promotes collaborative work in all faculties. Nowadays learning this way is invaluable and considered as a fundamental component on inclusive education.

IV. All programmes for pre-service teachers and in-service teachers must be based on the **interpretative and critical paradigms**. Allowing encounter with others, and the collective and interpretive insight into environments and circumstances and the development of research activities are fundamental. The inclusive teacher must have strong skills in action research methods. This paradigm generates conditions for dialogue and collaboration. The dialogue needed for relationships and the essence of collaboration is the recognition of uniqueness.

V. Contextual Preparation. Connecting with the educational services, allowing identification of diversity as an enriching element has three great steps outlined below. For teachers to promote inclusive education, their training should link directly with the educational services in so called contextual professional practice. This approach, in our experience, must be presented to all throughout the training process structuring with multi-directional flow between theoretical and experiences close to educational field. Three important views are anticipated:

a) Analyzing own school experience by future teachers.

This period of time is essential. Each future teacher should discuss his/her own experience as a student, analyze emotions and be aware of school and pedagogical theory made by teachers, allowing them to ‘see’ those components that were previously ‘hidden’ such as school’s culture, school’s type, teachers, uses and customs that marked the dynamic school and the values that predominated, characterizing the experiences from other angles and points of view. It certainly requires time to work individually and collectively, interchange coincidences and differences of experiences. We can include this time in the first and second semesters of teacher education programs.

b) Approach to various contexts of school children.

This consists of visiting previously selected schools, taking part in observation activities and educational practices. After assessing the educational context, it is important to develop instruments of work, observation guides, questionnaires, interviews and to make teams to

provide all aspects for implementation of the planned approaches. Then future teachers should present their experiences in the classroom.

As a result of these activities, each student should make a record of all and check research to support their actions. They are accompanied by an experienced teacher at all time. Certainly, they should include diverse environments, contexts, and educational services that characterize the educational system.

c) Professional practices in real environments.

In the teacher's training, the student must remain for a long period of time, in a school under the guidance of a teacher. This teacher must exert mentoring activities, to enrich their teaching experience with the knowledge of a mentor who attends and promotes inclusion activities.

At this time, the Faculty holds an agreement with diverse educational centers. Partnerships with the training institutions for teachers and schools are necessary. This enriching experience also enables the development of educational research in the corresponding professional options. This type of professional practice can be included in last two semesters of TEPs.

VI. Multi-stage Pattern. Diversity needs a global and common vision; philosophy, values, legal frame, language and shared knowledge as learning theories, special educational needs, support systems, educational intervention; tactics for large and small groups and individuality, tutoring and curricular adjustments. Inclusive education must characterize all training teacher programs, offering skills and common benchmarks for everyone regardless of education level to be entered (e.g. Primary, Secondary and High Education). This versatile training enables various teachers, regardless of their field or level of training, to collaborate and participate in the diversity of educational contexts together. The common vision of philosophy of inclusion and legal frameworks enables an education for all with quality and equity, educational policy that promotes attention to diversity.

Student's possibilities and support systems must be emphasized, with a clear vision that all children can learn. In this way the school needs to prevent the obstructions and restrictions for learning that could marginalize children and young people from their potential. There must be enlightening attention to diversity practices that may comprise tactics for large or small groups and one-on-one mentoring, curricular adjustments, alternative support systems, diversity assessment actions, collaboration with other professionals and co-teaching, trans-disciplinary action among others. They are essential for the development of the professional skills of attention to diversity.

VII. Mentoring. Teaching is simultaneously one of the hardest and one of the most rewarding jobs in the world. New teachers must join with experienced teachers at least during the first two years. This includes dialogue sessions, reviews of situations, decision-making arrangements and work plans.

The new teacher needs counseling and mentoring actions to strengthen his/her skills as an inclusive teacher. It looks as it is necessary to guarantee the best results in the first years of teaching work. Many education systems face the phenomenon of 'burnout' among their teachers, often causing the desertion of the teaching task, or loss of enthusiasm and commitment. This is a dire loss to any education system or country.

Conclusions

To be concluded, the inclusive teacher should be accompanied in his early professional development by a mentor. The profile for the inclusive teacher should be like that the he is a professional educator committed to his/her community, who must be aware of individual differences and considers them in his/her educational intervention actions. S/he must take part in collective teaching because it is crucial for collaboration and to face the challenge of diversity. The inclusive teacher by their multi-stage pattern must have a holistic educational view with strong skills and experience in order to participate in diverse contexts. Eunice, Nyangia and Orodho (2015) recommended on the

basis of their study that the Government through the Ministry of education should put in place adequate and appropriate physical and human resources to enhance the implementation of special needs education curriculum. Inclusion has been incorporated into almost every educational system, but we still need to learn and understand the real meaning of Education for All with quality and equity and recognize the fundamental role of teachers in the advancement of social justice, human rights, and opportunities for welfare. Each one of us needs to face the challenges in order to consolidate inclusion for the benefit of our community.

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IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) Volume 20, Issue 4, Ver. VI (Apr. 2015), PP 39-50 e-ISSN: 2279-0837, p-ISSN: 2279-0845. www.iosrjournals.org

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