
INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A CHALLENGE FOR CONTEMPORARY TEACHER EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN

Fauzia Khurshid

Post-Doctoral Fellow,
Department of Advanced Studies in Education, University of the Punjab,
Punjab, Pakistan.
Email: dr_f_khurshid@yahoo.com

Muhammad Shahid Farooq

Chairman,
Department of Advanced Studies in Education, University of the Punjab,
Punjab, Pakistan.
Email: Shahid.ier@pu.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

Present research was designed to explore the role of teacher education in the implementation of inclusive education practice at schools level. Major objectives of this research were to examine the current status of teachers' education in preparing skillful teachers for inclusive education and to determine the direction of teachers education for capacity building of teachers for inclusive settings. Since nature of the research was exploratory therefore, for the attainment of research objectives qualitative approach was used for the collection of data. Literature available in the field was reviewed and content analysis was performed to reach to attain the research objectives. Result revealed that although HEC recommended course on inclusive education in revised 2010 scheme of studies of teachers' education, but after passing 13 years only few universities are offering subject of inclusive education in BE.D Program (3 credit). It further revealed that breadth of the content of inclusive education course was not sufficient for training of prospective teachers (to handle needs to all students). Inclusive education in Pakistan is fundamental for the achieving of quality education due to the notion that all learners should have equal access to education irrespective of their abilities and disabilities. Challenges faced in inclusive education in Pakistan desires consideration by the stakeholders. Challenges pertaining to teachers' capacity building is vital; which can be addressed if academia sensitized properly. Since a few public sector universities have been teaching this subject at present therefore, it is recommended that HEC may take appropriate measure for implementation of schemes of studies of teacher education program in universities and degree awarding institutions. It is recommended that under the faculty

of education universities can offer M.Phil. and PhD in inclusive education by covering courses on inclusive education such as inclusive teacher education, inclusive classroom developments, inclusive schools theories and models of inclusive education. Knowledge of such courses would enhance teachers' capacity to cater the needs of special learners in inclusive settings.

KEYWORDS

Inclusive Education, Teacher Education in Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

Education is inclusive when all students, regardless of any challenges may place in age-appropriate general education classes of their own neighborhood schools to receive high-quality instruction, interventions and supports that enable them to meet success in the core curriculum (Bui, Quirk, Almazan, & Valenti, 2010; Alquraini & Gut, 2012). Successful inclusive education happens primarily through accepting, understanding, and attending to student differences and diversity, which can include physical, cognitive, academic, social and emotional touch. Introducing inclusive education is not saying that special need students *not ever* spend time out of regular education classes. Because sometimes they do go for counseling, speech or occupational therapy. Such goal could be the subordinating goal and main driving principle is to make all students welcome in mainstream system by accommodating school curriculum according to their specialized learning needs. In such context teachers, special education consultants and other staff members including parents are key stakeholders.

Teachers are vital part of education system, at present for the education of children with special needs and disabilities special education department is working at Federal and provincial levels separate directorate general of special education is working for the education and rehabilitation of children with disabilities and special needs. Teachers working in this setup equipped with desired skills and they are handling needs of special children in satisfactory manners. For the education of normal children at the same time separate schools are functioning where teachers are competent in skills and competencies which needed to teach children without any disability and handicaps. Kumwenda (2021) underlines that destructive mind can add ignorance, despair and subjective rationality. Proper teacher training can instigate and equip teachers with essential capability to manage inclusive teaching.

Forlin (2013) reported that teacher education can be tool through which effective teachers can be produced who could handle the learning needs of all learners. Without efficacious and talented teachers, appropriate pedagogy learning needs of all learners cannot be accommodated in one classroom and if teachers have affirmative approach towards inclusion and readiness to categorize curriculum to come across the diverse

learning needs of the students only then successful inclusion is possible in the mainstream education system.

Kumwenda (2021), Chataika, Kamchedzera reported that, real learning of students with special needs and disabilities cannot be possible without the availability of expert teachers. Proficient teachers are working in special schools where education of special children are imparted in a segregated setup. According to Itimu & Kopetz (2008) Kumwenda (2021) apart from teachers working in the special schools, the mainstream teachers have not received pre- service or in-service training to teach children with special needs and disabilities. Lack of teaching training is one of the major cause which is hampering execution of inclusive education in mainstream system of school education.

In a research Kamchedzera (2015) reported that to overcome the shortage of special education teachers, the government ought to assemble resource to train more special needs teachers for Malawian schools. To overcome these teachers should be educated and deployed in schools across the country. Ongoing in-service training should also be organized regularly to make sure that teachers are prepared with necessary skills to cater the needs of all.

Chataika, Kamchedzera, and Semphere (2017) conducted a study that discovered various challenges faced by regular primary school teachers in planning instructional strategies for inclusive classrooms in Lilongwe. Findings revealed that teachers faced various challenges including lack of knowledge, skills, inadequate training learning materials, large classes, inadequate time for planning, and assisting learners with special needs in the mainstream classes. Charema (2010) and Forlin (2013) observed inclusive education as a call of greater demands which also seems to be an umbrella against storm. Various policy documents have emerged over time which stresses the doctrines social justice, human rights and quality education for all. Regardless of that people were cognizant of the virtues of inclusive education in Pakistan but still there are numerous elements which affect its implementation at mainstream school system. There is a massive slit between the policy and work done on the ground. Although several factors are affecting the execution of inclusive education in Pakistan but in this research focused mainly on teacher education program, teacher in-service training, teaching skills, and teachers' to work in the inclusive education settings.

Applied Significance

Present research provide cherished facts about various preparedness of contemporary teacher education program to cater the challenges of inclusive education. Finding identify various gaps and core causes of teachers' negative attitude towards inclusive practices in the mainstream education system. Since teachers are not ready for

handling learners diversity in effective way in the mainstream settings. In today's contemporary world system of education cannot survive with dignity without inclusion of the children with special needs and disabilities. This task is vital, significant and noble in nature and requires preparation with reference to teachers training, school curriculum adaptations, inclusive teaching strategies and assessment. While preparation of skillful teachers is not hard it just desired modification in scheme of the studies of teachers education program but it can change the destiny of children with special needs disabilities, because extent of disability is very massive; more than 80% children with disabilities and special needs are out of school due to their non-access of special schools and mainstream school education system. Outcomes to this research may provide realization to HEC, universities and degree awarding institutions about dire needs of the partial revision of the existing schemes of the studies of teachers' education keeping in view the challenge of inclusive education. Finding of this research would also enable education system to be responsive to international commitment and fulfillment of SDGs as well.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Being a vital component of education system teachers ought to be prepared for task of inclusion. Inclusion in the region of education has mostly been implemented in developed countries, where abundant resources, teacher training motivation and dedication bound schools' administration to ensure all that learners are included in effectual learning, apart from of their individualized needs. Concept of inclusion or inclusive education is equally important for developing countries like Pakistan. It is equally important because through this education system can support and celebrate diversity of learners and it bestow all learners the potential of accomplishment by creating a milieu where children with special needs are not set apart and perceive as 'other'; they are component of the same group of learners. Inclusion indeed addresses pessimistic cultural misconceptions and attitudes about people with disabilities or those who are members of minority group at large.

This is hurting reality and anecdote of discrimination that despite of efforts for the formulation of a strategy of inclusive education (by school education department on inclusive education in 2019) children with disabilities are still unable to get admission in mainstream schools located in their neighborhood therefore, present study designed. Finding of present study would enable us to determine the role and responsibilities of various stakeholders i.e., donor agencies, school education department, literacy and non-formal education department, special department, primary and secondary health, teacher training institutions (Quaid academy), and community for the implementation of inclusive education in its desired spirit across Pakistan. As teacher training is a significant feature through which teacher those who are working in general and even in special education schools and center can be trained for professional tasks. Since

inclusive education has been acknowledged as a philosophy for winning objectivity, impartiality and quality education for all learners, irrespective to their abilities, disabilities, ethnicity, gender or other uniqueness but, despite the fact that inclusive education has been implemented successfully in numerous countries, some countries are still in the progression of the achievement of this goal.

Inclusive education requires that all school going students have equal learning opportunities regardless of whether someone has a disability or not. Inclusive education is one of the most neglected area of teacher education, although in education policy of 2017 it was aspired that by the end of 2025 50 % school would be inclusive which ought to open for the education of all children specifically children with special needs. It further agreed upon enrollment of 50% special children by 2025 and also allocated 5% separate budget for special education across Pakistan.

Due to several reasons policy could not be implemented in its true spirit, apparently due to poor communication system, weak administration, meager assessment tools, and financial irregularities, negative attitudes lack of political will, governance vacuity and unstable governments. The things could work better if these flaws timely point out by the sitting government and addressed amicably. Unfortunately, idea of inclusive education is still a dream in Pakistan. At present idea of inclusive education is at very initial stage even at Federal Govt. level. Few training courses imparted to the head of the institutions under the title of capacity building. Initiation of such sort of courses are first drop of rain in muggy weather. But successful inclusion desired more from the education system, since in the system of education school infrastructure and policies, teacher and teaching skills are very important in imparting education.

Pursuits of inclusive education has been acknowledged unanimously across the globe around last three decades, after Salamanca Statement, 1994. Afterwards, notion of inclusive education has been promoted more through convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD ,2006) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG, 2015) according to which inclusive education has become a basic human right which is neither optional nor privilege. Developed countries of the world are running system of inclusive education but in Pakistan situation is very distressing. Throughout the country access of children with special needs and disabilities to mainstream schools is not easy. In this context many factors are seems to be responsible but role of teacher education is also on the top.

In Pakistan inclusive education is relatively uncommon area of teacher education program, yet essential in accomplishing the dream of education for all. Therefore, present study plan to determine the role of teacher education in the successful implementation of inclusive education at schools level. Findings of the present

research would enable academia to uncluttered the new possibilities through which major obstacle/ blockhead hampering the access of children with special needs to schools can be removed forever.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the current status of teacher's education in preparing skillful teachers for inclusive education.
2. To determine to direction of teacher's education for capacity building of teachers for inclusive settings.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What skills are being offered to prospective teachers for handling the needs of children with special needs keeping in view the inclusive education?
2. What sort of changes are required for the capacity building of teachers in the context to inclusive settings?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Since nature of the research in exploratory therefore, for the attainment of research objectives qualitative approach was used for the collection of data. Since first objective was to examine the current status of teachers' education in preparing skillful teachers for inclusive education. For this purpose module of inclusive education included in the scheme of studies of Teachers education program B. ED /B.S. ED developed by HEC and scheme of studies offered in the various private and public sector universities and degree awarding institutions were examined through content analysis.

In 2010 Higher education commission revised scheme of studies of teacher education program. B.Ed. 4-year program for elementary and secondary education and introduced Associate Degree in education 2 years. Duration of this teachers Education Program was 4 years, it comprised of 8 semesters and duration of 1 semester 16 to 18-weeks. In addition to this proposed course load per-semester was of 15-18 credits.

The structure of schemes is as under

HEC in revised schemes of studies recommended only one 3 credit hours course on inclusive education in semester VII of B.Ed. program. Total 6 unit proposed for this, detail of proposed content is as under:

UNIT 1: An Overview of Child Development

UNIT 2: An Introduction to Special Needs

UNIT 3: Approaches to the Education of Children with Special Needs channelizing
Through relevant statutory bodies of the universities.

UNIT 4: Assessing Children with Special Needs

UNIT 5: Curriculum Adaptations and Teaching Strategies

UNIT 6: Collaboration and Teamwork for School Improvement

Analysis of the content revealed that while developing outline of inclusive education, focus was on given on the conceptual aspect related with special needs and disabilities but operational and technical details of handling children with special needs and disabilities seem lacking. Next step was to examine the inclusion of the course of inclusive education in the scheme of the studies of the teacher's education program (B. ED B.S. ED) of various public and private sector universities.

DATA ANALYSIS**Review of Scheme of studies**

In order to examine the course/ subject of inclusive education in the scheme of studies of Teachers Education Program (B. ED B.S. ED) offered by various public and private sector universities and degree awarding institutions, schemes of studies followed by these universities were examined thoroughly.

Second objective was to determine the direction of teachers' education for capacity building of teachers for inclusive settings. For this purpose a panel of 5 university teachers having specialization in the field of inclusive education was requested participate in the focus group discussion and examine the existing status of inclusive education and recommend breath of the component of inclusive education in teacher education program. They also desired to delineate courses which are important for teachers' education at B.Ed. level.

Discussion started with this that at present the concept of inclusive education undermined in the teacher education program of Pakistan. Since Government is determined for the implementation of inclusive education in Pakistan because inclusion is fundamental for the achieving of quality education for all, due to the notion that all learners should have equal access to education irrespective of their abilities and disabilities. Following questions were discussed in the focus group discussion:

1. Are you satisfied with the existing curriculum of teacher education in complying the challenges of inclusive education?
2. What sort of courses are required to promote inclusive education among prospective teachers/ professionals in the field of education?
3. For understanding of the mechanism of inclusive practices what sort of courses could be included in teacher education at various level?
4. What are the major barriers in the launching comprehensive specialization in inclusive education?
5. What remedies can be used to overcome barriers of inclusive teacher education?

Question 1 asked about the satisfaction of the group of the experts about existing curriculum of teacher education in complying the challenges of inclusive education. For this course outlines of three public sector universities examined keeping in view the challenges of inclusive education in handling the diverse learning needs of the students with special needs and disabilities. Since at present three universities named as University of Peshawar, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University and Urdu University Karachi are teaching course of inclusive education in the teacher education program. After detailed analysis of the schemes of studies of teacher education program by experts extensiveness of content of course of inclusive education determined with reference to practical aspects of inclusive pedagogy, inclusive curriculum, assistive devices and inclusive assessment. Content of inclusive education with reference to practical aspects of inclusive pedagogy, inclusive curriculum, assistive devices, and inclusive assessment. Main objectives set for this course include, definition of inclusive education, recognition of the nature of inclusion in education, understanding the difference between inclusive and special education. All experts were totally dissatisfied with existing teachers education program with reference to the challenges of inclusion because only conceptual and theoretical knowledge imparted to students through this course. One course of 3 credit hour without teaching practice seems to be insufficient.

Question 2 asked was about courses required for skillful teaching in inclusive setting for prospective teachers / professionals in the field of education.

For this purpose a detailed analysis was carried out about the existing literature available in the field. Experts of the view that all types of content is important which could enable teachers to cater the unique needs of the learners in inclusive setting. There is urgent need to improve this area through induction of various course which could cater the individualized needs of the learners with special needs and disabilities. Unanimously it was decided for prospective teachers' training about inclusive education must equally focus on theory and practice.

Question 3 is for understanding of the mechanism of inclusive practices what sort of courses could be included in teacher education at various level?

In response to above question experts believed that pursuit of inclusive education is suffering at the moment due to the reason that processes and procedures of inclusion never included in the preserves or in-service teachers education program.

After detailed deliberation semester wise course breakdown prepared for the inclusion in the contemporary scheme of the studies of teacher education program:

Table 1: Proposed Courses in Scheme of the Studies of Teacher Education Program:

S.No	Semester	Course Content	CH
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1	1 Semester	Theories and models of inclusive education	3+1 credits hours
2	2 Semester	Inclusive teacher education: Diversity and inclusion	3+1 credits hours
3	3 Semester	Inclusive schools: Transformation needed at school and classroom level	3+1 credits hours
4	4 Semester	Curriculum development and Inclusive pedagogy	3+1 credits hours

Table no 1 contains the detail of the proposed course for capacity building of teachers' education program for inclusive education perspective. Such courses enable teachers to develop their skills for handling students diversity effectively.

In addition to this under the faculty of education universities can offer M.Phil. and PhD in inclusive education by introducing in depth courses on inclusive education, introduction of inclusive education at M. Phil and PhD level would enhance teachers' capacity to cater the needs of prospective teachers in more vibrant way.

Question 4 based on major barriers in the launching comprehensive specialization in inclusive education?

In response to above question it was analyzed that although awareness of inclusive education is common in relevant academia but due to ill prepared teachers this task has not yet been encouraged. At present teachers overall have negative attitude above inclusive education because they think it is task of special education department. Special education department is performing its obligatory duties for the education and training of children with special needs and disabilities but scope of special education department is not vast in comparison with spread of disability. Therefore, inclusive education is only way through which without putting extra cost of establishing schools and hiring separate teachers, children with mild to moderate disabilities can be accommodated. So, teachers' preparedness is the prerequisite after that enough resource ought to be required by the school education department (physical resources on equitably basis.) for the commencement of inclusive education in mainstream schools.

Question 5: What remedies can be used to overcome barriers of inclusive teacher education?

While discussing this question it was pointed out that major barrier is of lack of determination by various stakeholders. There is a need to develop accountability for the implementation of the education policy in its true letter and spirits. Consistency in the policy is also required with a vibrant time bounded monitoring mechanism. There is need to develop culture of inclusion in our societies and there is a need to form various associations for awareness of inclusive education. There is a need to develop

some workable strategy in collaboration with various stakeholders for implementation of inclusive education by identifying gaps hindering the execution of inclusive education in present schools. For removal of gaps commitment on the part of political leadership is required so education can become access for children with special needs and disabilities.

Since at present curriculum of mainstream schools is not receptive to needs of children with special needs and disabilities Teachers are untrained for the inclusive practices, head teachers are having not welcoming attitude. Resolving complications in the executing of the inclusive education in Pakistan should be given the consideration as it worth of. It ought to be a priority of the political leadership so access of the children with special needs and disabilities can be possible to mainstream school system with trained and skillful teachers.

In addition to this for the removal of hindrances all stakeholders of the education like school education Department, literacy Department, special education department and Academia and degree awarding institutions may work together and paly their due roles by devising guidelines under which teacher education program could be revamped for smooth inclusion.

DISCUSSION

Teachers play significant role in the imparting education; understandably they are teaching for educating, they may change life of their students if fully prepared about role expectations. Role of teachers becomes even more significant when discussed with reference to their preparedness for inclusive education practices. In order to handle the students' diversity teachers' need proper education and training. Findings revealed that at present teacher education program of our country is not ready to prepare teachers for inclusive setup, therefore, its desired reforms in teacher education program so to instill training and skills in prospective teachers.

As pointed out Gale and etl. (2021) educational system has been administered by several types of policies and plans which focuses on inclusive education. Though, numerous researchers have also exposed that recognized establishments are often roughly attached and operational essentials are only roughly connected to each other and formal structures are generally constantly violated (Hawkins and James).

Even though inclusive education has long been subject of concern across nation, for past many years focus of the research was on the exploration of various barriers due to which it was not fully implemented in school education. Intend of the teacher education program is to produce high-quality of teachers who could handle the challenges of teaching in effective manner. Although in the education policy of 2017

inclusive education emphasized, but after passing many years it has not yet been implemented in its true letters and spirits.

Gaps persist even though large-scale legislative changes occur at the federal levels. Present research was designed to determine the role of academia in successful implementation of inclusive education through imparting effective teacher training program. In the context of school education, inclusive education purists are thwarted due to a number of factors, research in this context revealed lacking of trained teachers in school education. In addition to this, teacher also have negative attitude towards inclusion. One of the main reasons of this is this lack of knowledge and expertise to handle the educational needs of children with disabilities and special needs. In this context revamping of teacher education program through focusing on inclusive education training of teachers about inclusive teaching methodology, embracing a mentoring teaching, collaboration with special educators' education, and practicums in the field can bring desired changes in prospective teachers.

For this foremost step is to include this course at all level of teachers' education program so competencies can be inculcated in prospective teachers by imparting knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes anticipated to turn as responsive teacher for all kind of learners. While preparing teachers for inclusive education setting it is important to understand that mere knowledge of inclusive education is not sufficient information it is equally significant to indoctrinate competency in teachers to build a reverential mainstream classroom ethos that continued students with assorted learning needs. In addition to this expertise in student-centered teaching methods also required that might empower teachers for designing of individualized learning plans for children with special needs and disabilities rather than demanding those to apt in with typical higher-grade desires. Long term professional training and short-term professional training could be planned by focusing on various interventions for the successful implementation of inclusive education in mainstream classrooms for prospective and in-service teachers. There is an urgent need to bring transformations in the teacher education programs offered by various universities and degree awarding institutions. It ought to be integral part of teacher education to prospective teachers about their role as inclusive teachers who could able to accept all learners with vigor to deliver his or her best in while imparting education with normal peers.

Findings of the research call for the need of the formation of up-to-date accreditation standards for teacher education program. In this regards national Accreditation council for teacher Education NCATE. NCATE may modify accreditation standards of teacher education program, by setting standard through which output skilled and seasoned prospective teachers can be produced who may able to cater the learning needs of all students irrespective to their abilities and disabilities.

At present teacher education program is very weak to handle the challenges of inclusive education. Though HEC given scheme of studies includes 3 credit hours course on inclusive education but even leading universities of the Pakistan are not teaching this course in teachers' education at Bachelors level. Quest of inclusive education is anguish at the moment due to the reason that processes and procedures of inclusion never included in the preserves or in-service teachers education program. Only a few universities are offering this course in teachers' education program but outlines seems insufficient to trained teachers for the implementation of inclusive education task in practical sense. Teachers working in the mainstream system are not ready for this task due to which they hold negative attitude towards inclusive education. Therefore, there is a dire need to revamp teacher education by keeping in view inclusive education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As at present limited public sector universities are offering this subject in teachers' education program therefore, HEC may take suitable measure for execution of schemes of studies of teacher education program by keeping in the challenges of inclusion.

HEC has proposed only 3 credit hours course for the teaching of inclusive education which seems not to be sufficient to train teachers for this challenging task. It is therefore, recommended that HEC may be revise its scheme of studies partially by keeping in view inclusion and include at least 4 courses dealing with practical aspects of inclusive education.

At present course of inclusive education is not aligned with teaching practice it is therefore, recommended that this course may be aligned with 1-hour teaching practice in inclusive setting (teaching practice of 1 credit hour at each semester).

It is recommended that at MS and PhD in inclusive education may be started in the Department of Education of the private and public sector universities.

Since teacher training can certainly influence teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, teachers' knowledge, strategies and information about handling children of various disabilities can built their self-efficacy. Therefore, there is a dire need to review pre-service and in-service teachers' trainings from inclusive education point of view.

There is also a need to develop collaboration for effective inclusion by the involvement of different various holders representing HEC, Academia, Degree awarding intuitions, School education department and Special education.

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