

A STUDY ON THE SKILL OF TEACHER EDUCATORS OF WEST BENGAL FOR PREPARING TEACHERS FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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Abstract

Employing well developed quality teachers is essential for inclusive educational success, and the role of teacher educators emerge as that of supreme importance in this context. Teacher educators are entrusted with the crucial task of preparing student teachers and teachers to facilitate inclusion in their classrooms. *Educating Teachers for Diversity: Meeting the Challenge* (OECD 2010) identified a set of key themes that require further attention and discussion in the domain of teacher education for diversity. Among them was the importance of educating the teacher educators themselves. Yet there is a surprisingly sparse knowledge base on how teacher educators are themselves prepared. A teacher educator's professional skill is expected to be comprehensive, rich and extensive, both in terms of the specific subject matter taught and in relation to areas such as didactics, pedagogy and psychology. Many questions go unanswered even today, like what competences germane to teaching about teaching in inclusive settings do the teacher educators possess, what support is necessary in the professional development of teacher educators, i.e., the development of their skill, for preparing teachers for inclusive classrooms. Despite the basic nature of these questions, research literature to date does not provide satisfactory answers. The study aims at filling these gaps in our knowledge.

Key Words: competence, inclusive education, children with special needs, teacher educators, attitude.

Introduction

Employing well developed quality teachers is essential for inclusive educational success, and the role of teacher educators emerge as that of supreme importance in this context. Teacher educators are entrusted with the crucial task of preparing student teachers and teachers to facilitate inclusion in their classrooms. *Educating Teachers for Diversity: Meeting the Challenge* (OECD 2010) identified a set of key themes that require further attention and discussion in the domain of teacher education for diversity. Among them was the importance of educating the teacher educators themselves. Yet there is a surprisingly sparse knowledge base on

how teacher educators are themselves prepared. The limited evidence available suggests that in many countries there is minimal oversight on who can become teacher educators and that the required course of study is often ill-defined. Consequently, little is known about teacher educators and how Their skills are developed to teach with respect to diversity. All teacher educators must possess adequate skill in order to effectively develop teachers well equipped for addressing diversity and facilitating effective inclusion. In India the essential qualification for teacher educators, as specified by NCTE, is Master's degree [with 55% marks] with B.Ed. and M.Ed. with Ph.D. in any subject including Education, or M.A. in Education [with 55% marks] and/or Ph.D. in Education with B.Ed. The courses do emphasize teaching internship and practicum with a paper on Special education or Inclusive Education, which was optional in many universities of West Bengal until very recent revisions where it has been made mandatory. However, how far the students get proper guided exposure to inclusive settings and thereby evolve as competent teacher educators who get recruited in B.Ed. colleges or University departments and are entrusted with the responsibility of training school teachers competent for teaching in inclusive settings, is still a grey zone to be brought under the scanner.

Review of Related Literature

Within the contemporary inclusive classrooms, teachers face increased pressure as their roles diversify, compared to previous generations (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000; Clayton, 1996; Forlin, 1997; Long, 1995; McKinnon & Gordon, 1999; Paterson & Graham, 2000; Schloss, 1992). Teachers have varied in their responses to these challenges (Westwood & Graham, 2003). Mainstream teachers are now called upon to be sensitive to the variety of modern classrooms and to be able to rise to the challenge by adjusting their teaching styles in accordance with the multiplicity of learning styles they face (Peterson & Beloin, 1992). They are further required to be psychologically and practically prepared to take on the dynamic role of inclusive educator (Mullen, 2001), while being aware that making physical provision for students with disabilities is not as important as making attitudinal changes resulting in the removal of barriers to physical and educational access (Beattie, Anderson, & Antonak, 1997). Fritz & Miller (1995) found that inclusion was an impossible obstacle for some teachers despite having received training. Researchers note that teachers may resist inclusive practices on account of inadequate training (Gickling & Theobald, 1975; Heiman, 2001; Hines & Johnston, 1996; Minke, Bear, Deemer, & Griffin, 1996). Reiser, Stubbs, Myers, Lewis & Kumar (2013) in a report of the UNICEF REAP Project titled "Teacher Education for Children with Disabilities" cite The EADSNE review (2012) on teacher education for inclusion in Europe that revealed that teacher educators lacked "knowledge, understanding, commitment and experience" to teach about inclusive education and yet there is generally no formal induction for teacher educators, even though it requires very different skills from classroom teaching (pp.41-42). NCTE has identified 18 core competencies for teachers that has been highlighted by Professor Dave in his Introduction to NCTE's documents collectively titled Competency based and Commitment Oriented Teacher Education for Quality School Education (1998), a thorough reading of which reveals a sustained insistence on skills of Teachers for Professional and effective performance.

Objectives:

The proposed study has the following Objectives:

- i. To study the skill regarding inclusive education among urban and rural teacher educators.
- ii. To study the difference in skill regarding inclusive education between male and female teacher educators.
- iii. To study the difference in skill regarding inclusive education between teacher educators with M.Ed. and those with M.A. in education
- iv. To study the difference in skill regarding inclusive education between teacher educators who had studied Special Education as a compulsory or optional paper in B.Ed. or M.Ed. or M.A.(Education) and those teacher educators who had not studied Special Education in B.Ed., M.Ed. or M.A. (Education), the paper being optional in the course.
- v. To study the difference in skill regarding inclusive education between teacher educators who had done project on special education in M.Ed. and those who had done dissertation on special education in their M.A. [Education].
- vi. To study the difference in skill regarding inclusive education between teacher educators with personal experience with physically challenged children and those without any personal experience with physically challenged children.
- vii. To study the relation between a teacher educator's skill towards inclusive education and the institutional support in form of infrastructure and administrative encouragement that the educator receives. .

Hypotheses:

H₀₁: There is no significant mean difference in skill between male and female teacher educators

H₀₂: There is no significant mean difference in skill between urban and rural teacher educators

H₀₃: There is no significant mean difference in skill between teacher educators with MA. (Education), and their counterparts with M.Ed.

H₀₄: There is no significant mean difference in skill between teacher educators with PhD, and their counterparts without Ph.D.

H₀₅: There is no significant mean difference in skill between teacher educators with personal experience, and their counterparts without experience

H₀₆: There is no significant mean difference in skill between teacher educators with special paper, and their counterparts without special paper

H₀₇: There is no significant mean difference in skill between teacher educators with project/dissertation on special education, and their counterparts without project/dissertation on special education

H₀₈: There is no significant mean difference in skill between teacher educators with institutional support and their counterparts without institutional support

H₀₉: There is no significant mean difference in skill between rural male teacher educators and urban male teacher educators.

H₀₁₀: There is no significant mean difference in skill between rural female teacher educators and urban female teacher educators.

Delimitation of the Study: Skill for teaching physically and mentally challenged children were only considered in this study since addressing minority and otherwise marginalized children calls for a different kind of knowledge altogether that is difficult to be dealt with in the limited scope of a paper. The study has been done on the teacher educators of West Bengal a state that follows the NCTE norms in all respects of teacher education today.

Methodology: A combination of qualitative and quantitative method have been adopted in this study since the two are neither mutually exclusive nor interchangeable (i.e., one cannot merge methodologies with no concern for underlying assumptions), but are practically interactive places on a methodological continuum.

Sample: 400 teacher educators, both full time and contractual or part time, male and female, rural and urban from different public and private teacher education institutes of the state of West Bengal were selected randomly. Since it was not possible to cover each and every district of the state, representative districts from east, south, west and northern parts have been selected for the study.

Tool: 1 questionnaire and 1 interview schedule was prepared for the competency mentioned above. The tool regarding Skills was developed by the researcher in consultation with experts. The tool has **30 items. It has 5 dimensions, namely**

- a. Classroom Management [item 1-7]
- b. Time Management [item 8-14]
- c. Inclusive Instruction [item 15-25]
- d. Collaboration [item 26-27]
- e. Behaviour Management [item 28,29,30]

There are 7 items for the first dimension, 7 for the second, 10 for the third, 2 for the fourth and 2 for the fifth dimension, each with four options, namely “Agree”, “Strongly Agree”, “Disagree” and “Strongly Disagree”.

The tool has been tested for reliability and validity. The reliability index is 0.83 and the test retest reliability coefficient is 0.82 that establish the intrinsic validity of the scale.

Data Collection Technique: The questionnaire was personally administered to the teacher educators under assurance of confidentiality and explained wherever necessary. Some were also mailed to respondents and clarifications [if any] was done via telephonic conversation. Sufficient time was given to the respondents for responses well thought over.

Data Analysis: The data was tested for normal distribution and t-test was applied to the data collected. T-Test was applied on the scores obtained by teachers to test the following null hypotheses against corresponding alternative hypotheses:

[In the case of Alternative hypothesis, the hypothesis is specified as H_{xy} , where x denotes alternative number and y denotes the test number corresponding to the alternative hypotheses. Eg: H_{23} denotes alternative hypothesis for alternative hypothesis 2 for test number 3 or the third test as shown in the sequence below]

Null Hypothesis	Alternative Hypothesis 1	Alternative Hypothesis 2
Factor 1 – Gender		
H ₀₁ : There is no difference in skill between male and female teacher educators	H ₁₁ : Skill of male teacher educators is better than females	H ₂₁ : Skill of female teacher educators is better than males
Factor 2 – Location		
H ₀₂ : There is no difference in skill between urban and rural teacher educators	H ₁₂ : Skill of male urban teacher educators is better than rural counterparts	H ₂₂ : Skill of rural teacher educators is better than urban counterparts
Factor 3 – Master Degree (MA. in Education, or, M.Ed.)		
H ₀₃ : There is no difference in skill between teacher educators with MA. (Education), and their counterparts with M.Ed.	H ₁₃ : Skill of teacher educators with MA. (Education) is better than their counterparts with M.Ed.	H ₂₃ : Skill of teacher educators with M.Ed. is better than their counterparts with MA. (Education)
Factor 4 – PhD		
H ₀₄ : There is no difference in skill between teacher educators with PhD, and their counterparts without PhD	H ₁₄ : Skill of teacher educators with PhD is better than their counterparts without PhD	H ₂₄ : Skill of teacher educators without PhD is better than their counterparts with PhD
Factor 5 – Personal Experience		
H ₀₅ : There is no difference in skill between teacher educators with personal experience, and their counterparts without experience	H ₁₅ : Skill of teacher educators with personal experience is better than their counterparts without experience	H ₂₅ : Skill of teacher educators without personal experience is better than their counterparts with experience
Factor 6 – Special Paper		
H ₀₆ : There is no difference in skill between teacher educators with special paper, and their counterparts without special paper	H ₁₆ : Skill of teacher educators with special paper is better than their counterparts without special paper	H ₂₆ : Skill of teacher educators without special paper is better than their counterparts with special paper
Factor 7 – Project/Dissertation		
H ₀₇ : There is no difference in skill between teacher educators with project/dissertation, and their counterparts without project/dissertation	H ₁₇ : Skill of teacher educators with project/dissertation is better than their counterparts without project/dissertation	H ₂₇ : Skill of teacher educators without project/dissertation is better than their counterparts with project/dissertation
Factor 8 – Institutional Support		
H ₀₈ : There is no difference in skill between teacher educators with institutional support, and their counterparts without institutional support	H ₁₈ : Skill of teacher educators with institutional support is better than their counterparts without institutional support	H ₂₈ : Skill of teacher educators without institutional support is better than their counterparts with institutional support

For each of the above hypotheses, we compute the value of t statistic as follows:-

Let x_1 and x_2 denote the scores of the two sets.

$x_1(\text{mean})$ and $x_2(\text{mean})$ are sample means from the two sets. n_1 and n_2 are the sample sizes of the two sets.

t statistic is computed as follows:

$$t = (x_1(\text{mean}) - x_2(\text{mean})) / (s \times N)$$

$$N = \text{square root } (1/n_1 + 1/n_2)$$

$$s = \text{square root } ((X_1+X_2) / (n_1+n_2-2))$$

$$X_1 = \sum x_1^2 - n_1 (x_1(\text{mean}))^2$$

$$X_2 = \sum x_2^2 - n_2 (x_2(\text{mean}))^2$$

Tabulated value of t at 1% & 0.5% confidence levels are noted as follows;-

$$t_{0.01,\infty} = 2.326, t_{0.005,\infty} = 2.576$$

Please note that degrees of freedom (n_1+n_2-2), for the sample sizes corresponding to each of the hypotheses are greater than 120 (please refer to n_1 and n_2 values in Annexures I to VI). In Table 12 of *Biometrika Tables for Statisticians, Vol. I*, degrees of freedom greater than 120 is marked as infinity (∞). Hence we have noted tabulated t values with degrees of freedom as ∞ .

Values of t statistic (rounded off to 3 decimal places) computed by the formula mentioned above, are summarized in the table below:-

Test #	Set represented by variable x1	Set represented by variable x2	$x_1(\text{mean})$	$x_2(\text{mean})$	n_1	n_2	X_1	X_2	T
1	male	female	27.10769231	27.35121951	195	205	2268.738462	2440.712195	-0.708
2	urban	rural	27.19791667	27.26442308	192	208	2470.479167	2244.456731	-0.193
3	M.A. (Education)	M.Ed.	27.19191919	27.27227723	198	202	2228.707071	2486.024752	-0.233
4	With PhD	Without PhD	26.96694215	27.34767025	121	279	1287.867769	3415.275986	-1.017
5	With personal experience	Without personal experience	27.02564103	27.3647541	156	244	1603.897436	3100.536885	-0.962
6	With special paper	Without special paper	27.26106195	27.1954023	226	174	2473.597345	2241.356322	0.189
7	With project/dissertation	Without project/dissertation	26.57142857	27.40822785	84	316	1062.571429	3606.338608	-1.99
8	With institutional support	Without institutional support	27.71428571	27.16524217	49	351	466	4236.415954	1.047

The inferences are summarized in the table below -

Hypothesis	Computed t value	Observation	Inference
H_{01}	-0.708	$ \text{Computed } t < t_{0.005,\infty}$	H_{02} is accepted
H_{02}	-0.193	$ \text{Computed } t < t_{0.005,\infty}$	H_{05} is accepted
H_{03}	-0.233	$ \text{Computed } t < t_{0.005,\infty}$	H_{08} is accepted
H_{04}	-1.017	$ \text{Computed } t < t_{0.005,\infty}$	H_{011} is accepted
H_{05}	-0.962	$ \text{Computed } t < t_{0.005,\infty}$	H_{014} is accepted
H_{06}	0.189	$ \text{Computed } t < t_{0.005,\infty}$	H_{017} is accepted
H_{07}	-1.99	$ \text{Computed } t < t_{0.005,\infty}$	H_{20} is accepted
H_{08}	1.047	$ \text{Computed } t < t_{0.005,\infty}$	H_{23} is accepted

Discussion:

From the above analysis it is seen that teacher educators themselves are being groomed through courses that contribute little to their development of skill towards inclusive education. Lack of significant difference in skill between teacher educators with a degree in liberal arts like M.A. in Education or a professional degree like M.Ed. clearly shows that either of these courses fail to prepare competent teacher educators who can groom competent teachers to practice in inclusive settings. Higher degrees like Ph.D. in Education too is found to be redundant. The special paper that was optional in many universities of West Bengal too is found to have influenced the theoretical knowledge of the teacher educators to some extent though a theoretical understanding of the special needs related issues fail to impart confidence or skill to a teacher educator. The practicum suggested even in the revised M.Ed. curriculum in the state, as per NCTE guidelines, remains a grey zone with no teacher education college or university department developing a clear contour of plan of action for would be teacher educators to get a systematic, practical and effective exposure to teaching children with special needs. Again, from the analysis above it is seen that gender and habitat exercises no significant difference in skill of teacher educators. Interestingly it is seen that personal experience is crucial in developing skill as evident from the analysis that shows that teacher educators who has done a project or dissertation on any disability related issue or on inclusive education and thus got exposure to inclusive settings and the disabled learners, had better skill for addressing needs of learners with disability in regular classrooms. In the same vein, educators with personal experience in form of relation to any disabled person in the family, community or friends were found to have better skill towards inclusive education. In informal discussions done with the help of the interview schedule, the educators responded that institutional infrastructure like ramps or assistive technology was good, especially for NCTE or NAAC visits, but failed to explain how these help the trainee teachers to get prepared for teaching children with special needs. None of the educators without prior experience showed interest in conducting workshops on disability issues for the professional development of trainee teachers.

Conclusion:

An inclusive society is a burning necessity and not a dream in the modern world torn apart by hatred, exclusion and exploitation. This ideal society would get perpetually deferred if school education fails to get aligned to the inclusive agenda. Policies and regulations can never suffice for true inclusive practices. The practicing teacher is the most important factor for creating and nurturing an inclusive environment among the future citizens of a nation and the teacher educator who is entrusted with the development of the teachers is thus primarily responsible to set the ball rolling. The study reveals the knowledge gap and loop-holes in the development of teacher educators themselves. The study points out the importance of a well-planned and systematic exposure to inclusive settings for development of requisite positive attitude in the teacher educators. Financial allocation for research in this area is needed to open up new horizons for a peaceful inclusive world.

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