

Teacher Training Programmes for Inclusive Education: A Review

¹Dr. Saroj kumari, ²Neha Singh

¹Assistant professor Education Department Mahalakshmi college for girls Duhai (Ghaziabad).

²Student (M.Ed.) Mahalakshmi college for girls Duhai(Ghaziabad).

Email - sarojgahlot84@gmail.com

Abstract: Inclusive education prioritizes the provision of fair learning opportunities for all students, regardless of their abilities, disabilities, or socio-cultural backgrounds. Educators are pivotal in the effective execution of inclusive practices, rendering teacher training programs a vital element of inclusive education systems. This review study investigates teacher training programs for inclusive education with the objective of evaluating their scope, effectiveness, and challenges. The review utilizes national and international research studies, policy documents, and reports pertaining to both pre-service and in-service teacher education. The study emphasizes that successful teacher training programs concentrate on cultivating inclusive pedagogical skills, fostering positive attitudes towards learner diversity, promoting collaborative practices, and enhancing competencies in assessment and classroom management. The review further indicates that although policy frameworks robustly endorse inclusive education, numerous teachers still encounter obstacles such as insufficient training duration, limited practical experience, a lack of specialized resources, and inadequate follow-up support. In the Indian context, discrepancies remain between policy directives and classroom realities, especially in rural and resource-limited environments. The findings indicate that ongoing professional development, the incorporation of inclusive education elements into teacher education curricula, and institutional backing are crucial for enhancing teacher readiness. The review concludes that well-structured and sustained teacher training programs are essential for fostering inclusive classrooms and achieving the overarching objectives of equity and quality in education. The study provides valuable insights for policymakers, teacher educators, and practitioners to improve teacher training methodologies for inclusive education.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Inclusive education has become a worldwide educational priority, highlighting the entitlement of every learner to receive quality education in mainstream school environments, irrespective of physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or cultural differences. The philosophy of inclusion is based on the principles of equity, social justice, and respect for diversity, with the goal of establishing learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of all students. In this framework, teachers assume a crucial role in converting inclusive policies into practical classroom applications. As a result, teacher training programs have emerged as an essential element in the effective execution of inclusive education. Teacher training for inclusive education aims to prepare educators with the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to effectively address learner diversity. Both pre-service and in-service training programs are structured to cultivate competencies such as differentiated instruction, classroom management, assessment modifications, and the application of assistive technologies. These programs also stress the importance of fostering positive teacher attitudes, collaborating with special educators, parents, and community organizations, as well as understanding the legal and policy frameworks that pertain to inclusion. Well-organized training equips teachers to adequately meet the academic and socio-emotional needs of students with disabilities and other marginalized groups.

In the Indian context, inclusive education has gained traction through various policy initiatives and legislative measures, such as the Right to Education Act and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act. However, despite these efforts, research shows that many educators feel inadequately equipped to manage inclusive classrooms due to limited training, lack of practical experience, and insufficient ongoing professional support. This discrepancy between policy objectives and classroom implementation underscores the necessity for a thorough evaluation of current teacher training programmes. Consequently, the current review study intends to investigate teacher training programmes for inclusive education by assessing their structure, content, effectiveness, and challenges. By synthesizing findings from both national and international research, this paper aims to pinpoint best practices, identify gaps, and propose future directions for enhancing teacher preparation. Such a review is crucial for guiding policymakers, teacher educators, and practitioners dedicated to developing inclusive and equitable education systems.

2. CONCEPT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:

Inclusive education denotes an educational methodology that guarantees all students, irrespective of their abilities, backgrounds, or disabilities, are educated together in the same classrooms. This approach prioritizes equal opportunities for every learner, including those with disabilities, and centers on the strengths of the learners rather than their limitations. As stated by UNESCO, it involves a process of recognizing and addressing the varied needs of all learners by enhancing their participation in learning, cultural activities, and community engagement.

3. IMPORTANCE OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM:

Inclusive education is a principle that has become increasingly significant within the educational framework, emphasizing the integration of all students, irrespective of their abilities, into a shared learning environment. This methodology fosters equity and contributes to the establishment of a more just and equal society. The significance of inclusive education is apparent in various dimensions, such as enhancing the quality of education, nurturing students' social and emotional competencies, and fostering a more conducive learning atmosphere. A key element of inclusive education is classroom management and its influence on fostering a positive classroom environment. Potera highlights that effective classroom management is essential in cultivating an atmosphere where all students feel included and supported, thereby facilitating more successful learning outcomes (Potera, 2024). This is particularly crucial for students with special needs, who frequently encounter numerous obstacles in a conventional educational setting. Mehmeti further underscores the necessity of inclusive standards in education, examining how the curricula at the Faculty of Education must align with these standards to guarantee equitable education for every student.

4. CHALLENGES IN TEACHER TRAINING FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:

The implementation of inclusive education poses various challenges for teacher training programs in different contexts. A substantial amount of literature underscores the complex nature of these challenges, which encompass insufficient training, negative attitudes, and a lack of resources. One of the main challenges identified is the absence of adequate training for teachers concerning inclusive education. Numerous studies reveal that teachers frequently feel unprepared to apply inclusive practices due to insufficient training during their pre-service education. For example, Shadreck points out that in Zimbabwe, a significant number of teachers view themselves as unprepared for inclusive education, attributing this to a deficiency in appropriate training, which in turn affects their confidence and attitudes towards inclusion. Likewise, Villalobos et al. stress that teachers often lack the essential knowledge and skills to effectively implement inclusive education policies, resulting in feelings of unpreparedness (Villalobos, Martín, & Wyman, 2017). This perspective is supported by Kurniawati et al., who claim that teachers' readiness to support students with special educational needs (SEN) is closely related to the quality of their training. Furthermore, teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education play a crucial role in its successful implementation. Research conducted by Boer et al. indicates that teachers' attitudes are vital for the effective integration of students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms (Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011). Negative attitudes may arise from inadequate training, as highlighted by Van Reusen et al., who discovered that teachers lacking training in inclusive practices often experience challenges in their implementation.

5. PRE-SERVICE TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS:

Pre-service teacher preparation programs play a vital role in equipping individuals who wish to pursue a career in teaching. These programs generally consist of a blend of academic coursework, practical experiences, and mentorship to guarantee that candidates are adequately prepared for the demands of the teaching profession. Below are some significant elements of these programs:

Coursework: Candidates are often required to complete foundational courses in subjects such as classroom management, pedagogy, human development, and content specific to their teaching area. For instance, the Pre-Service Preparation Program at Teachers College of San Joaquin mandates 9 units of in-person coursework that addresses various facets of the teaching profession, with a particular focus on understanding the requirements of English learners.

Practicum Experiences: Practical teaching experiences are an essential component of pre-service programs. Candidates usually participate in classroom observations and student teaching, which enables them to apply theoretical concepts in actual classroom environments. This hands-on aspect helps to connect theory with practice, ensuring that future educators can effectively manage classrooms and engage their students.

Mentorship and Support: Numerous programs include mentorship from seasoned educators, offering guidance and assistance as candidates transition into their teaching careers. This mentorship is vital for aiding new teachers in navigating the complexities of the classroom and in developing their professional identities.

6. IN-SERVICE TEACHER TRAINING:

State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow, along with its units and District Education and Training Institutes (DIET), conducts a variety of training programs and workshops aimed at enhancing the capabilities of educational administrators, DIET faculty, and Principals/Headmasters of Secondary, Upper Primary, and Primary Schools. The training sessions primarily focus on specific subjects and skills. Participants are educated and trained on contemporary educational policies and programs, pedagogical methods, and classroom management through these workshops and training sessions. Master trainers at the district level receive training at the state level. Subsequently, these district-level master trainers are responsible for training block-level master trainers within their districts. These master trainers then provide instruction to teachers. The training is structured around specific training modules. The main training programs under the in-service training initiatives include:

- Capacity Building Training
- Leadership Training for Officials and Principals
- Subject-based Trainings (Science, Mathematics, English, Hindi, Sanskrit, Social Science)
- Need-based Trainings
- Early Grade Reading (EGR) (Primary level)
- Early Numeracy (Primary level)
- Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation Training (Primary and Upper Primary level)
- Health and Hygiene Training (Upper Primary level)
- Inclusive Education Training (Primary and Upper Primary level)
- Online Course Enhancing Teacher Education Through OER (for DIETs Faculty, Teachers, and BTC Trainees)
- Training for Madrasa/Maktab Teachers
- Master Trainer's Training on Environmental Studies
- Art/Craft, Puppetry, and Music Training
- Yoga Training

Alignment with Standards: Successful pre-service programs ensure that their curriculum aligns with national teaching standards, emphasizing critical skills such as foundational literacy and numeracy. This alignment guarantees that graduates are prepared to address the diverse needs of their students and positively influence their learning outcomes.

7. THE ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN SUPPORTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:

Educational institutions are essential in fostering inclusive education by enacting policies and practices that guarantee equal access and participation for every student, irrespective of their abilities or disabilities. Below are some fundamental responsibilities of educational institutions in this context:

- **Adopting inclusive policies:** Educational institutions ought to integrate the principles of inclusive education into their policies and practices to cultivate a welcoming atmosphere for all students.
- **Providing necessary resources:** They must supply the essential resources, including specialized classrooms, support services, and accessible learning materials, to meet the diverse needs of all students.
- **Training and professional development:** Educational institutions should prioritize the training and professional development of teachers and staff to improve their capabilities in establishing inclusive classrooms and assisting students with disabilities.
- **Promoting a positive attitude:** They should encourage a positive perspective towards diversity and inclusivity within their institutions, fostering a culture of respect and understanding among all students.
- **Collaborating with stakeholders:** Educational institutions need to work together with parents, community members, and other stakeholders to ensure that inclusive education is a collective objective and is executed effectively.

By fulfilling these responsibilities, educational institutions can enhance a more inclusive and equitable educational system that serves all students and advances social justice and equality.

8. GOVERNMENT POLICIES FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:

India achieved independence from Britain in 1947, and inclusive education is enshrined in India's constitution as a fundamental right for all citizens. It is crucial to distinguish between constitutional rights and state policies along with their legal ramifications. Rights are enumerated in the constitution; they are absolute and fully enforceable. State policies, however, are entirely subjective and vary from state to state. Part IX, Article 45 of the Constitution asserts, "The state shall Endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years." The importance of Article 45 was reaffirmed in 1993 through the Supreme Court's Unnikrishnan judgment, commonly referred to as the case

“Unnikrishnan vs. the state of Andhra Pradesh.” In this ruling, the court determined that Article 45 must be interpreted alongside Article 21 of the constitution, which states that “No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.” By necessitating the concurrent reading of these two articles, elementary education is now deemed essential for life and personal liberty in India. A clause was incorporated into India’s constitution to this effect; however, it was not included until December 2002. The 86th amendment to the constitution, section 21A, stipulates, “The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine.” While many regarded this amendment as a positive development, others criticized the age limitations. Furthermore, there were concerns that the nature of education (inclusive, segregated, or otherwise) should be explicitly defined within the legislation. The 1960s represented a significant transformation in the organization and funding of special education in India. The Ministry of Education underwent a division, resulting in the establishment of a new entity known as the Ministry of Social Welfare. This Ministry was tasked with addressing the needs of the “weak and vulnerable” segments of society. Their primary focus was on rehabilitation rather than education. Rather than enhancing the existing education system, the Ministry of Social Welfare started allocating grants to nonprofit organizations that offered educational services for children with disabilities, which inadvertently hindered the inclusion of these children in the public or mainstream educational sectors. The division of these two ministries has never been reversed and continues to exist today.

9. POLICY CHANGES IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:

- University Education Commission or Radhakrishnan Commission (Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan), 1948-49
- Secondary Education Commission (Dr. Lakshmanswami Mudaliar), 1952-53
- Education Commission (Dr. D.S. Kothari), 1964-66
- Education in Concurrent List, 1976 (42nd Constitutional Amendment)
- National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986 - Child-Centred Approach
- Program of Action (POA), National Policy on Education (revised) -1992
- National Policy on Education 2016 (draft) -T.S.R. Subramaniam Committee Report (2016)
- National Education Policy 2019 (draft)- Dr. K. Kasturirangan Committee Report (2019).

Government Plan and Programmes:

The National Education Commission (1964-66): The inaugural education commission in India, commonly referred to as the Kothari Commission, initiated the discussion on handicapped children in the chapter titled ‘Towards Equalization of Educational Opportunities’ within its report, echoing sentiments similar to those found in the 1944 postwar report. ‘Very little has been accomplished in this area thus far... any significant enhancement in the situation does not appear to be feasible in the near future... there is much we could learn from the educationally advanced nations. It was clearly supportive of integrating the education of handicapped individuals into the broader education system. The commission recommended that educational resources be made available to four specific categories: the blind, the deaf, the orthopedically handicapped, and those with mental retardation.

National Education Policy (1968): In 1968, the National Education Policy adhered to the commission’s suggestions and advocated for the expansion of educational resources for both physically and mentally handicapped children, as well as the establishment of an ‘Integrated Programme’ that would allow handicapped children to attend regular schools. Eight years later, in 1974, a scheme for the integrated education of disabled children, known as the IEDC, was launched by the welfare ministry.

National Policy on Education, (1986): Two decades later, the NPE (MHRD, 1986a) has been steering the educational framework in India, under its overarching goals of ‘education for equality,’ proposed the following initiatives for the education of individuals with disabilities:

- Where feasible, the education of children with motor disabilities and other mild impairments will be integrated with that of their peers.
- Special schools equipped with hostels will be established, wherever possible, at district headquarters for children with severe disabilities.
- Sufficient provisions will be made to offer vocational training to individuals with disabilities.
- Teacher training programs will be restructured, particularly for primary educators, to address the unique challenges faced by children with disabilities, and
- Efforts by volunteers to promote the education of individuals with disabilities will be supported in every possible way.

Baharul Islam Committee (1988): The committee incorporated education into the Draft Legislation. It stated that the state should strive to provide free and universal elementary education to children with physical and mental disabilities.

Additionally, the state shall offer support for their education and training at secondary and higher levels. It also highlighted the importance of promoting integrated education and the continuation of residential education.

Programme of Action (1990, MHRD): The Programme of Action (POA, MHRD, 1990) delineated the strategies to execute the policy, which included extensive in-service training programs for educators, orientation sessions for administrators, the development of supervisory skills in resource institutions for school education at district and block levels, and the provision of incentives such as aids, appliances, textbooks, and school uniforms.

Programme of Action (1992, MHRD): The NPE/POA 1986 was revised, leading to the formulation of a new POA in 1992. The 1992 POA made a bold commitment to achieve universal enrollment by the conclusion of the Ninth Plan for both groups of children:

Project Integrated Education for the Disabled (PIED) : The National Council for Educational Research and Training initiated PIED in 1987 with financial backing from UNICEF, which facilitated the creation of instructional materials, training of staff, community mobilization, parent training, and project coordination in remote, rural, and challenging locations. Additionally, it provided assistance for the identification and assessment of children with disabilities, the establishment of resource rooms, the provision of aids and appliances, and allowances for children with disabilities.

Rehabilitation Council of India Act 1992: The Rehabilitation Council of India was established by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in 1992 to regulate the training of rehabilitation professionals, maintain a Central Rehabilitation register, and address related matters, marking a significant step in the right direction. It offers a regulatory framework for the development of human resources in this field. Various courses have already been initiated for visually impaired individuals. Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act 1995, In order to implement the declaration on the Full Participation and Equality of People with Disabilities in the Asian and Pacific Region, the Parliament passed the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act 1995, which took effect on February 7, 1996. The Act mandates that the appropriate governments and local authorities ensure that every child with a disability has access to free education in a suitable environment until they reach the age of eighteen.

10. CONCLUSION:

Teacher training programmes focused on inclusive education are crucial in equipping educators to address the varied learning requirements of all students, including those with disabilities, learning challenges, and diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. These programmes are designed to enhance teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for fostering an inclusive and supportive classroom atmosphere. Through both pre-service and in-service training, educators gain insights into inclusive policies, child-centered teaching methods, differentiated instruction, and the application of assistive technologies. The training also highlights the importance of collaboration with special educators, parents, and the community to effectively support learners. A significant aspect of these programmes is the sensitization towards diversity, equity, and the appreciation of individual differences. Well-structured teacher training enables educators to recognize learning obstacles, modify curriculum and assessment strategies, and encourage the active involvement of all students. Consequently, effective teacher training programmes are vital for the successful execution of inclusive education and for guaranteeing quality education for every child.

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