

DEVELOPING TEACHER COMPETENCY FOR
EDUCATING CHILDREN WITH
SPECIAL NEEDS FOR INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

Many studies have investigated the adequacy of the pre-service and in-service preparation of special education teachers but few studies have postulated the preparedness of general education teachers towards inclusive classrooms. Inclusion becomes a reality only in the hands of the teachers. Reviews on teacher competency for educating children with special needs were few. The authors investigated the impact of updating training programme in enhancing the specific competency required for teaching children with special needs in inclusive classrooms. The findings indicate that the training programme has enhanced the teacher's competency of educating children with special needs.

Key Terms: Teacher Competency, Inclusive Classrooms, Children with Special Needs.

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1. Introduction

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that 10% of any population is disabled (Thomas, 2005a). In addition, approximately 85% of the world's children under 15, live in developing countries are disabled. Education is a basic human right secured by the Universal Declaration for Human Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The educational scene in our country has undergone major change over the years, resulting in better provision of education and better educational practices. There is a paradigm shift from seclusion to inclusion; education of children of marginalized society is given more priority. UNESCO defines inclusive education as a process intended to respond to students' diversity by increasing their participation and reducing exclusion within and from education. It is related to the attendance, participation and achievement of all students, especially those who, due to different reasons, are excluded or at risk of being marginalized.

Inclusion involves access to high-quality education without discrimination of any kind, whether within or outside the school system. This requires an in-depth transformation of the education systems. Without inclusion, certain groups of students are likely to be excluded. Inclusion should be a guiding principle for educational policies and programs so that education can be for all and not only for the majority. Traditionally, the concept of inclusive education has been circumscribed to definitions concerning predominantly students with special needs; however the concept is evolving towards the notion that children and young people should have equivalent learning opportunities regardless of their cultural and/or social backgrounds or differences in abilities and capacities. While informing the processes of educational reform in both developing and developed countries, inclusive education can be seen as a main strategy of addressing the sources and consequences of exclusion within the holistic approach of EFA together with the understanding of education as a right. The ultimate goal of inclusive education is to facilitate and democratize learning environments and opportunities for all.

2. Statement of the Problem

The teacher has a pivotal role to play in the organization of the entire gamut of educational system and is the chief nodal agency in implementing inclusive education. The present day teacher preparation programme can hardly keep pace with the rapid changes of normal Inclusive classrooms. The concept of inclusive education can become a reality only when

the teachers are equipped to handle these children in the classrooms. The teachers are to be exposed and oriented to policy changes, new development in content, process, instructional strategies and value system for successful implementation of inclusive education. The present article is specifically intended to examine the teacher competency in inclusive classroom setup. Moreover, the authors investigated the effectiveness of updating training programme in the enhancement of competency of general teachers in mainstreaming the children with special needs.

3. Objectives of the Study

1. To enrich specific competencies required for teaching children with special needs.
2. To enhance performance skill of teachers through competency updating programme.
3. To study the effectiveness of updating training programme.

4. Need for the Study

- Reviews of researches established need for in-service education with enriched curricular inputs are very few.
- Studies on development of enriched in-service curricular inputs to enhance the competence of teachers for handling special children are very rare.

5. Significance of the Study

- If the findings of the study show that the enriched curricular inputs are effective, they can be used to train all the teachers of primary schools in India.
- Inclusive classrooms are effective only when teachers are equipped to effectively respond to learner's diversity by providing personalized education and support. Training in diversification of modes of instruction and pedagogy ensures quality inclusive education.
- The present study aims at improving the quality of classroom teaching of primary school teachers in Inclusive education.
- The Long term benefits expected from this study is to enhance the teacher's competency and to create a better academic climate in inclusive classroom.

6. Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are formulated in this study.

1. There is mean difference between the Pre-Test and Post-Test scores of the in-service teachers.
2. The enriched curricular inputs of competency updation training programme will significantly enhance the teaching competency of general teachers to educate children with special needs in inclusive classroom setup to mainstream them.

7. Method of Study

- The study is the combination of content analysis and experimental research to assess the effectiveness of teacher competency updating training programme for inclusive education.
- Content analysis was done to identify the curriculum inputs available in B.Ed. and D.T.Ed. Programmes. The training module of SSA was also assessed.
- Pre-test treatment post-test design was adopted to evaluate the impact of competency updating programme in teaching competency of in-service teachers of the training programme.
- For this study, single group Pre-Test treatment, Post-Test design was adopted.

8. Tools used in this Study

In the present study specific teaching competencies assessment scale validated by experts was used.

9. Sampling Size and Sampling Technique.

In this study, the population selections were teachers who work in inclusive setup in Tiruchirappalli District. The sample consists of 30 teachers who have children with special needs in their classrooms. As this is a specialized programme, Purposive Sampling Technique was adopted.

10. Limitation of the Study

Geographically, sample area selected was Tiruchirappalli district of Tamil Nadu State.

1. Due to time limit, the investigators could not survey all the schools of Tiruchirappalli.
2. The investigators restricted their research study only to in-service teachers working at inclusive setup.
3. The duration of the training programme was 10 days. (160 hrs.)

11. Development of the training package

- Initially, the existing B.Ed. and D.Ted. curriculum was analyzed and it was found that only few theoretical information about disabilities is included in the curriculum
- Then the existing competencies of teachers to educate children with special needs were assessed through the above mentioned tools.
- The training needs of teachers were analyzed.
- Finally, the additional competencies required for teacher updating for inclusive classrooms was identified.
- The modules were prepared based on content and need analysis. The enriched competencies updating training modules were validated by a team of experts.

12. Implementing the modules

After the Pre-Test was administered, the enriched curriculum inputs were implemented for a period of ten days.

The Modules were designed as:

1. Introduction to disabilities
2. Educational needs of children with special needs
3. Psychological needs of children with special needs
4. Instructional adaptations for teaching children with special needs.
5. Infrastructure accommodations needed for educating children with special needs.
6. Parent counseling.

Modules were administered simultaneously and field visit to special schools were arranged. Post-Test was administered after a period of one month.

13. Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Descriptive and Differential statistics:

- In the descriptive analysis, the mean and standard deviation were calculated for all the Pre-Test and post test scores to determine the central tendencies and dispersion of variables.
- Correlated 't' test values were computed to test the difference between the scores of Pre-Test and post test mean scores among the variables.

Hypothesis: 1

There will be significant improvement in the teaching competence of teachers after the implementation of the training programme

Mean and SD of pre-post test on assessment of teaching competence

Sl.No	Content knowledge	n	Mean	S.D	't'
1.	Pre-Test	30	45.23	23.56	9.01*
2.	Post-Test	30	79.06	17.48	

*significant at 0.05 level

The above table reveals that there exists significant difference between Pre-Test and Post-Test mean scores and the 't' value is significant at 0.05 level of the participants in teaching competence of the participants

Hypothesis: 2

There exists significant difference between the mean scores and 't' value scores of participants with respect to gender and domicile

Sl.No	Gender	N	Mean		S.D		't'
			pre	post	pre	post	
1	Male	7	36.7	89.57	28.2	9.67	5.45
2	female	23	47.8	75.86	22.02	18.21	8.92

*significant at 0.05 level

Sl.No	Domicile	N	Mean		S.D		't'
			pre	post	pre	post	
1	Rural	16	62.06	90.43	20.3	18.12	4.87*
2	urban	14	26.00	66.07	4.24	15.22	9.77*

*significant at 0.05 level

The table shows that the obtained 't' value is significant at 0.05 level and hence it is concluded that teaching competency of both male and female teachers and teachers from rural and urban background has enhanced by the training programme.

Difference between Groups

Summary of 't' value between mean values of different categories

Category	Mean value		't'
	Type 1	Type 2	
Female & Male Teachers	56.15	59.36	0.38**
Urban and Rural	46.04	66.41	3.03*

*significant at 0.05 level

** Not significant

Regarding the mean scores and 't' value of teachers with reference to gender, the obtained value is not significant. This implies that there exists no difference among the male and female teacher's performance scores of teaching competency.

- The mean and 't' value between teachers from rural and urban domicile is not significant. Thus domicile plays a vital role in the performance of teachers.

14. Major Findings of the Study

The updating training programme has significantly enhanced the teaching competency of in-service teachers to educate children with special needs in inclusive classroom.

Discussion

- The present study showed that updating programme will enhance the teaching competency of general teachers to educate children with special needs in inclusive classrooms.
- The administration of the training programme inputs prepared after content and curricular analysis enhanced the specific competence of teachers.
- Such training programme will be more motivating for the teachers to support inclusion and engage in more innovative teaching methodologies in normal classrooms.

- In many studies, the need for competence enhancement was stressed whereas in the present study, a scientific comprehensive teaching competency updating programme is prepared, including all the components of teaching techniques to enhance the teaching competence of participants.
- Based on the findings, the investigator recommends giving more emphasis on inclusive education policies and instructional strategies in teacher education curriculum and in-service training programme to achieve better, effective and desirable inclusive education classroom.

15. Educational Implications

- The present study has showed that the need-based in-service programme improve the competencies required for educating special children among the in-service teachers.
- Therefore, efforts should be made to include incorporate more inputs in teacher education curriculum. Need survey to be conducted such as needs of special children, teachers and parents and those of institutions and in all the areas of in-service and pre-service training.
- Inter-disciplinary and multi disciplinary competencies at various levels of education may be identified and developed, based on this study.

16. Conclusion

Inclusive education requires the diversification of modes of instruction and teaching practices to effective and engage the special and normal students in the learning process and to promote diversity, example, Interdisciplinary team worth, collaborative teaching, peer tutoring and specialized support from teacher resource centre.

In this frame work, teachers can be seen as the cornerstones of inclusive education. Teacher training both in-service and pre-service should reflect this. Teacher education programmes should provide room for inclusive education, interms of special internship, mobility programmes, and inclusive pedagogy and equip them to effectively respond to learner's difficulty by providing personalized education and support.

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