

Training Teachers for inclusion: Initiatives taken by a university department

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Background

The Salamanca Statement on the education of children with special needs and other international declarations emphasize the need for inclusive education as a strategy for achieving Education for all. Inclusive Education is human right; children have the right to learn together, they should not be discriminated because of their disability or learning difficulty. Children learn better academically and socially in an integrated environment.

A revolt against institutionalization of children with special needs through various forms of special education surfaced in 1970s. It was argued that special education led to permanent isolation of individual with special needs. The United Nations has played a key role in building up a global movement on the Education for All (EFA). It states

Everyone has the right to education and education shall be directed to the full development of human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedom. The convention on the Right of the Child (1989) reiterated that all children have the right to receive the kind of education that does not discriminate on the basis of disability, ethnicity, religion, language, gender, capabilities and so on.

There has been a worldwide movement to include marginalized children in the ordinary school system and the UNESCO is a major flag holder in this movement. As a result, all member states are responding to the international declarations. Pakistan is actively pursuing the achievement of the targets in the Dakar Framework for Action, through the EFA Wing of the Ministry of Education.

The United Nations declared 1983-1992 as the Decade of the Disabled. It was considered necessary for Pakistan to formulate a national policy to tackle the problems of children with special needs. A national policy was prepared in 1986 that was further improved in 1988 and 1998. A separate directorate was established to run model special education institutions throughout the country. The National Institute of Special Education was established to provide in-service training to teachers of special schools. Initial focus of special education was on the education of hearing impaired, visually impaired, mentally retarded and physically handicapped students. However, person with special needs are often marginalized due to traditional beliefs and negative attitudes by society and therefore development is slow.

The special education provision was started with following aims:

- To enable persons with special needs to develop their full potential and create awareness among families and communities on the needs and potential of persons with special needs.
- For person with special needs to have equal opportunities in and access to education, vocational training, employment and rehabilitation services and live without discrimination

Challenges and Opportunities for Inclusive Education in Pakistan.

The administrative segregation for the provision of the basic education at federal level is a major obstacle for taking policy initiatives in inclusive education. The decision-makers at various levels lack sufficient background knowledge and skills to initiate or implement inclusive education. The majority of studies conducted on the attitudes of school teachers in Pakistan about inclusive education indicate that these teachers are willing to include special needs children in their schools if they are provided with training and teaching resources. Some private schools have started inclusion without changing the infrastructure of school. The common barriers faced by children with special needs are environmental barriers, and attitudinal barriers. The teachers of private schools are not sufficiently trained to create inclusive classrooms through adaptations of curriculum and instructions. The teaching and learning resources required for inclusive education are not available at federal, provincial or district level. (Hammed, 2003.)

Preparation of Future Teachers

The concept of inclusion promotes acceptance of all students and willingness to restructure the school environment, curriculum and teaching strategies in response to the needs of children with special needs. Future teachers should realize that each child is unique and they should be willing to educate them. Teacher education programs must be redesigned and re-conceptualized to meet the future demands.

According to Whitworth, future teacher are prepared to be able to (a) understand and appreciate diversity in their students (b) adapt to change according to needs and challenges (c) develop flexibility and creativity in problem solving. This requires (1) collaborative teaching (2) techniques and strategies and (3) collaborative experiences.

Teachers training is critical to the success of inclusive school programs. There are several teacher training institutions established to fulfill the needs of trained teachers of special education in Pakistan. Courses at MA level in special education are held in Karachi University, Punjab University and Allama Iqbal Open University where the students seek new techniques of teaching in special education. After the establishment Special Education Departments in Universities, the deficiency of trained teachers has recovered to some extent. The National Policy of Special Education (1998) had stated following objectives of teachers training:

1. All teacher training colleges should be required to include a special education element in all B.Ed classes and M.Ed classes. Postgraduate courses for master of education in special education should be undertaken by the Allama Iqbal Open University and the University in all the provincial headquarters.
2. The national institute for handicapped will undertake to co-ordinate in-service training for social welfare workers, medical and paramedical staff working in the areas of special education.

Introduction of the Department

The Department of Special Education was established in January 1990 as a federal government project. This was a great milestone in the history of the University, as this department was the pioneer postgraduate seat of learning in the field of special education in Punjab. To date, the Department of Special Education has produced 415 teachers, who are contributing to national development by rendering valuable services both at national and international levels. The department is located within University of the Punjab, Quaid-e-Azam Campus, Lahore. The physical facility consists of lecture rooms, a seminar room, an audiology lab, a computer lab, a library and an instructional material lab. The constituent

institutes of the department are Sohail Iftikhar Research Institute, Punjab University Educational Testing Service, Child Welfare Centre for Special Needs, Guidance and Counseling Centre for Persons with Special Needs and the Digital Card Printing Unit. The

department caters for the educational needs of special students by providing qualified teachers and consultants with Master's and Ph.D. degrees in special education. The Department functions as an independent academic unit in the Faculty of Education, University of the Punjab, Lahore.

Regular classes began in the Department of Special Education in March 1991. Evening (Self supporting) classes began in 1999, and Ph.D. classes began in 2001. In addition the department organizes Audiology courses, Speech therapy and many other courses along with seminars on various topics and themes.

The Agenda of the Department of Special Education

1. To train competent and self motivated professionals in the field of special education.
2. To act as a national resource centre for the production and dissemination of information about inclusive education.
3. To carry out research in special needs inclusive education, rehabilitation and development of persons with special needs.

Revising and Improving the Existing Curriculum

The Department has introduced a new scheme of studies in 2002 based on 66 credit hrs.

- It has preparatory courses of 39 credit hrs.
- Specialization courses/within disability of 9 credit hrs.
- Student teaching practice of 12 credit hrs.
- Master's research project of 6 credit hrs.

New Courses

The following courses were introduced for the first time:

1. Foundations of Special Education.
2. Curriculum Adaptations for Special Needs.
3. Exceptional Children in Regular Classrooms.
4. Production of Resource Materials in Multimedia.
5. Teaching of Reading and Writing.

Redesigning Teaching Practice

A sandwich program for student teaching practice was introduced in 2004. The following aspects of teaching were design to support the overall goals:

- Twelve credit hrs are fixed for teaching practice.
- Three credit hrs are offered in first semester for:
 - School visit report.
 - Student case studies.
 - Pre-teaching
 - Classroom observations. (Inclusive/Special Schools)

During this time period, students become familiar with disability, instructional techniques and technology available in the classrooms.

- Six credit hrs are offered in third semester for group teaching.
- Student teachers are expected to teach for at least eight weeks.

- The preparation and submission of lesson plan is an important responsibility for student teachers.
- Lesson plan formats are established collaboratively by the supervisor and student teacher.
- Lesson plans includes curricular domain area, instructional objectives, techniques and materials, lesson procedure and anticipated major parts of the instructional sessions and assessment of learning.

The IEP: Planning and Implementation

All students are required to prepare and implement an Individualized Educational Plan.

IEP portfolio consist of:

- Case history and medical record.
- Individualized educational plan.
- Proceeding of an IEP Committee.
- Pre-test and post test record.
- Instructional planning and termination report.

A Lab for the Faculty

In order to provide direct experience to the faculty of the department, 5 seats are reserved for persons with disabilities in the Masters Program. This is about 12% of the total students. As a result, the concept of inclusive education has become very clear. The faculty is fully sensitized towards the needs of a diversified classroom.

Reflection of School Supervisor's on Teaching Practice

A survey was conducted to have school supervisor's views about teaching practice. Twenty seven school supervisors of were asked to fill the questionnaire which was consist of 18 statements.

Responses of Schools' Supervisors

1. Majority of respondents (77.8%) said that pupil teachers are well aware of children with special needs before internship.
2. Majority of respondents (77.8%) said that the duration of teaching and visitation (4 months) is adequate for practical experiences.
3. Majority of respondents (85.2%) said that pupil teachers compile classroom observations both in qualitative and quantitative terms.
4. Majority of respondents (88.9%) said that of lessons for group teaching is appropriate.
5. Majority of respondents (88.9%) said that pupil teacher meet with cooperating teachers and share plans prior to implementation.
6. Majority of respondents (96.3%) said that pupil teachers prepare and submit daily lesson plans.
7. Majority of respondents (85.2%) said that pupil teachers establish logical sequences of instructions during planning.
8. Majority of respondents (92.6%) said that pupil teachers establish supportive and cooperative learning environment.
9. Majority of respondents (96.3%) said that pupil teachers adapt lesson to meet student's needs.
10. Majority of respondents (92.6%) said that pupil teachers provide a variety in instructions.
11. Majority of respondents (96.3%) said that pupil teachers produce qualitative instructional material for classroom instructions.
12. Majority of respondents (81.5%) said that pupil teachers assess and monitor student progress regularly.
13. Majority of respondents (88.9%) said that pupil teachers follow school policies and practices such as school discipline, arrival and departure time etc.
14. Majority of respondents (85.8%) said that pupil teachers are supervised by university teachers on regular basis.
15. Majority of respondents (85.2%) said that pupil teachers compile case history for IEP portfolio.
16. Majority of respondents (77.8%) said that pupil teachers assess all academic area of children with special needs for IEP.
17. Majority of respondents (85.2%) said that pupil teachers conduct IEP meeting and prepared proceeding of IEP committee.
18. Majority of respondents (81.5%) said that IEP has significance effect on the educational achievement of children with special needs.

Future Challenges.

The Department has made some achievements. However, there are challenges in initiating and implementing teacher training in special needs education in Pakistan. These include:

- Lack of buildings to expand and meet new challenges.
- An acute shortage of professionals holding Ph.D. degrees.
- No exchange program for faculty members' development.
- Shortage of financial support for Ph.D. and Masters students.
- Lack of facilities and financial support to students with disabilities at higher education level.

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