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TEACHERS AS AN AGENTS OF INCLUSION: EXPLORING THEIR ROLES AND PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES IN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS

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Abstract:

Education is the fundamental human rights for all. It is not just for some portions of society rather for all citizen irrespective of caste, gender, culture, religion, social background and their learning difficulties. However; the emergence of the concept of inclusive education tries to make education accessible, equitable and inclusive for all learners by ensuring the equal opportunities and meaningful participation. Being the midpoint of education system, the teachers play an important role in inclusive education. They must possess certain competencies for ensuring inclusive education. In this present paper, the investigator highlights the roles and responsibilities of teachers in inclusive education. The study also highlights the essential professional competencies required by teachers to effectively implement inclusive education and address the diverse learning needs of students. The conclusion of the paper thereby offering a foundation for future planning and development of teacher education programmes to strengthen inclusive educational practices.

Key terms: Inclusive Education, Teachers' Roles, Teachers' Responsibilities, Professional Competencies, Teacher Education, Diversity, Inclusive Classroom, Equitable Learning.

INTRODUCTION:

Education is considered as one of the fundamental rights for all citizen over the world. Education is not just a structure system of knowledge but also a process that help in developing innate potential of all human being. It is recognized as the weapon for social transformation. In recent years, Inclusive education has earned worldwide attention to ensure the equitable, accessible and quality education to all. Inclusive education is not merely placing all students in a school but also, it is all about providing optimum learning opportunities for their all-round development and ensuring the active participation of all learners irrespective of their socio-economic status, caste, disabilities, gender, culture, religion and their learning difficulties etc. The main priority of inclusive education is to ensure that all learners can access education and get benefit without any discrimination concerning their disabilities, background and abilities etc. According to UNESCO (2026), inclusion means that schools will be diverse and that there will be no barriers to ensure active participation of students in the teaching-learning process. According to the Salamanca Statement every child has unique characteristics, interests,

abilities, and learning needs; therefore, educational systems should be designed to accommodate this diversity through inclusive and child-centered approaches (UNESCO, 1994).

The Indian constitution also provides different provisions to ensure equality among all and provide educational opportunities to all learners. For implementing the any educational programme, the role of the teachers is vital. Through accepting and acknowledging the position of teachers in inclusive education, we can begin to make educational systems that are more inclusive and equitable, and put each learner in the best position to succeed.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Education is not only privilege for a selected group of society; rather it is the basic need for all irrespective of abilities, background etc. In earlier time; it was noticed that many of individuals deprived and experienced discrimination based on their differences. And they were not provided with equal opportunities to participate educational processes. However; the emergence of the idea of inclusive education helps in changing the primitive attitude and ensuring that every learner receive appropriate support to learn. Being the central part of education teacher's roles and responsibilities are irreplaceable especially in creating an inclusive classroom. The present study is significant as it highlights the multifaceted roles and responsibilities of teachers in fostering mutual respect, acceptance, cooperation, and a sense of belonging among learners while minimizing discrimination, prejudice, and exclusion. Furthermore; the study helps to explore the professional competencies required by teachers to create an inclusive classroom environment that recognizes, respects and accommodates learners' diverse needs and individual differences.

The findings of the present study are important in guiding the future planning and development of teacher education programmes by providing understandings of the essential competencies, roles and responsibilities that teachers need to attain and perform to create an inclusive learning environment. It may help teacher education institutions incorporate relevant knowledge, skills, attitudes and professional competencies into their programmes so that prospective and practicing teachers are better prepared to address learners' diverse needs and promote inclusive education.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. Explore the role of teachers in promoting inclusive classroom environment
2. Examine the professional competencies required for effective teaching
3. Major challenges faced by teachers in implementing inclusive classroom practices.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The method of this study is based on qualitative research approach. This paper has utilized the analytical method and secondary sources of data.

DISCUSSION ON OBJECTIVE NO. 1

The teaching profession is one of the most respectful professions all over the world. He is not just a transmitter of curricular content; but also, he plays his tremendous role as a guide, friend, philosopher, facilitator, evaluator, motivator for the learners. Along with that he plays a crucial role in creating inclusive environment for all the learners. The roles are mentioned as below-

i.Identification of children who need supports

The Teachers play the vital role in identification of children who need special support by observing their behaviour, social interaction, communication skills, learning abilities and classroom participation.

ii.Communicate with parent for nurturing transparency

The teachers communicate with parents or guardian about the potentialities, abilities, difficulties, strengths, challenges of their children. This partnership helps in developing mutual understanding, respect and trust. It helps in creating an inclusive and transparent learning environment.

iii. Organizing collaborative activities

The teachers initiate for planning different collaborative activities like group project, group discussion involving all learners; that helps in interaction among the learner which help in sharing ideas, realizing value of team work, appreciating each other works.

iv.Respect individual differences

Before attempting to change the attitude of others regarding the individual differences the teachers need to examine their own attitude. The teachers must respect individual differences among the learners, accept their diversity and work on praising one another learner for being different.

v.Addressing discrimination and bullying issues

The teachers help learners by giving the chances for addressing the issues like someone feel rejection, bullying, discrimination, segregation or excluded, left out based on their individual differences, Socio-economic back ground, caste, gender, skin color and learning difficulties etc.

vi.Flexible approach in evaluation

The teachers adopt flexible and diversified approach in evaluation to accommodate all the diverse learning needs, abilities and interest of learners. According to the learners need teachers provide alternative options in evaluation process, provide additional time when required, used varied assessment techniques etc.

vii.Create homebase environment

The teachers create an inclusive and safe environment where all learners can feel supportive and welcoming. Alongside all learner can access adequate classroom arrangements and materials. The teacher helps to promote a respectful and openhearted inclusive environment to all learner.

viii. Practice Inclusive Behavior

The teachers are the role model for the all; who demonstrate inclusive behavior, respects all learners, be kind, show empathy, try to work together with each other. The teachers help in promoting tolerance, mutual respect, and acceptance among learners by fostering cooperation, positive interaction.

ix.Curriculum adaptation

The teachers plan for personal assistance for support of the children with special needs, and resource allocation according to the need of the learners. The teachers make appropriate adjustments in learning content, teaching methods, instructional materials and other classroom activities to ensure that every learner can access and participate meaningfully in the teaching-learning process.

x.Feedback

The teachers provide regular individualized feedback to the all learners about their abilities and progress. The teachers focus on recognizing learner's areas of strengths. The feedback should supportive and free from discrimination.

DISCUSSION ON OBJECTIVE NO. 2

In the contemporary educational landscape, addressing the diverse learning needs, abilities, backgrounds and individual differences of learners within an inclusive classroom have emerged as a significant challenge to the teachers. It demands in enhancing professional competencies and pedagogical preparedness among teachers. Being the central part of education system teachers have to deal with emerging challenges in the inclusive classroom. The teachers should have competence, skill, ability, knowledge, understanding and attitude to tackle the challenges, perform and handle the responsibilities altruistically. The competencies are mentioned as below-

- **Knowledge about diversity**

The teachers should possess the knowledge of diversity among the learners. They must have positive attitude towards diverse leaner, preparedness of handling the diverse classroom. They must respect all diverse learners; recognize diversity is a natural and valuable aspect of classroom.

- **Utilization of digital resources**,

The teachers should know the proper utilization of teaching learning materials and digital resources. According to the felt difficulty of the students like who feels reading difficulty, writing difficulty, the teachers need to need know uses of assistive technology. Appropriate integration of digital resources makes inclusive education more accessible and effective. Therefore; the teachers should need more digital pedagogy.

- **Self-efficacy in inclusive practices**

The teachers should feel confident that they can overcome all challenges in an inclusive classroom. They should confident about their ability to manage diverse classroom situation, adopt appropriate techniques and ensure meaningful participation of the all learners.

- **Use of inclusive strategies**

Teachers should possess the ability to select and implement appropriate inclusive teaching strategies to address the diverse abilities, learning styles, interests, and educational needs of students. They should adopt flexible, learner-centred, and participatory approaches that ensure equal opportunities for learning and meaningful classroom engagement.

- **Respect for Cultural Diversity**

Teachers should determine awareness and sensitivity towards the diverse cultural, linguistic, religious and social backgrounds of learners. They should respect and value cultural differences and ensure that their teaching practices, classroom interactions and learning materials do not promote cultural bias, stereotypes, or discrimination. Teachers should create a classroom environment where every learner feels respected, accepted, and valued, irrespective of their cultural background.

- **Awareness of Discrimination and Inclusive Attitudes**

Teachers should possess an understanding of different forms of discrimination, prejudice, bias, and exclusion; which may occur in an educational setting. They should recognise biased practices and critically examine attitudes that justify unequal treatment of learners. Teachers should actively challenge discriminatory practices and promote acceptance, dignity and equal participation among all students.

- **Competence in planning, integrating inclusive content, methods and assessment**

The teachers should possess the competency of planning and organizing teaching learning activities by integrating inclusive contents which ensure the development of all learners. They should ensure that the

curricular content, teaching approaches and evaluation techniques accommodate the diverse interests, backgrounds, and learning needs of students. Teachers should adopt learner-centric and different approaches to ensure active participation, and meaningful learning experiences for all. The teachers accommodate learning by changing the content, process, and product that delivers information to the individual student tailored to their learning needs (Seikh, 2024). Teachers should adopt adjustable Individual Education Plan, flexible grouping, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), multimodal instruction, and scaffolding to accommodate diverse learning needs, promote active participation, and ensure equitable learning opportunities for all students in inclusive classrooms.

CONCLUSION

An inclusive school can be called as successful only when all students feel they are valued. Through the responsive roles played by teachers all learners feel truly a part of the school community. They must respect all learners by adjusting school system according to their needs. Therefore; it is important to plan teacher education programme for creating future teacher; so that they become competent enough to manage inclusive classroom altruistically.

In conclusion, the effective execution of inclusive education requires more than teachers' competencies; it also demands adequate professional training, institutional support, suitable resources, and a positive attitude towards learner diversity. Addressing challenges such as huge class sizes, insufficient expert support, biased attitudes, and cultural obstacles is essential to creating accessible, equitable, and supportive learning environments. Therefore, establishing teacher preparation and providing a supportive educational framework are crucial for rendering the principles of inclusive education into meaningful classroom practices.

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