



Journal Homepage: -www.journalijar.com
**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
 ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)**

Article DOI:10.21474/IJAR01/5288
 DOI URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/5288>



RESEARCH ARTICLE

A STUDY ON THE ATTITUDE OF TEACHER EDUCATORS FOR PREPARING TEACHERS FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN WEST BENGAL.

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Manuscript Info

Manuscript History

Received: 26 June 2017
 Final Accepted: 28 July 2017
 Published: August 2017

Keywords:-

inclusive education, children with special needs, teacher educators, attitude.

Abstract

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. Unfortunately, a lack of research on the teacher educator preparation suggest that educational systems are falling short in a critical way, especially in the area of inclusive education. All teacher educators must possess a necessary positive mindset in order to effectively develop teachers well equipped for addressing diversity and facilitating effective inclusion, and yet no substantial work has been done to find out how far teacher educators are developed to this end. Many questions go unanswered even today, like the professional development of teacher educators for preparing teachers for inclusive classrooms, and what is the role of teacher educators as both consumers and producers of knowledge on inclusive education. 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. It has been done on 400 teacher educators of West Bengal, India.

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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. 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 they are prepared to teach in general, especially with respect to Inclusive Education. According to Smith (2005) in "*Teacher educators' professional knowledge; how does it differ from teachers' professional knowledge*", unlike teachers, who are mainly required to be good practitioners, teacher educators are expected to be self-aware and to reflect and articulate tacit knowledge of various practices and make it available to teachers-to-be, thus bridging theory and practice. Unfortunately, a lack of research on the teacher educator preparation suggest that educational systems are falling

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short in a critical way, especially in the area of inclusive education. All teacher educators must possess a necessary positive mindset in order to effectively develop teachers well equipped for addressing diversity and facilitating effective inclusion, and yet no substantial work has been done to find out how far teacher educators are developed to this end, especially in India.

Problem Statement:-

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] 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 as well as in the rest of the nation until very recent revisions where it has been made mandatory in the M.Ed. Level. However, how far the students are groomed as competent teacher educators with a positive attitude, 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:-

Mainstream teachers are 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 and they resist inclusive practices on account of inadequate training (Heiman, 2001; Hines & Johnston, 1996; Minke, Bear, Deemer, & Griffin, 1996). Recent work by the European Commission has suggested that agreement on the competences required to work as teacher educators are still rare in most of its member states (European Commission, 2010). 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 (pp.41-42). This point is highlighted by Forlin (2012) who states that it is unrealistic to expect teacher educators to use innovative approaches when they have had no preparation themselves (p.7).

Objectives:-

The proposed study has the following Objectives:

1. To study the attitude regarding inclusive education among urban and rural teacher educators.
2. To study the difference in attitude regarding inclusive education between male and female teacher educators.
3. To study the difference in attitude regarding inclusive education between teacher educators with M.Ed. and those with M.A. in Education and that between educators with and without Ph.D.
4. To study the difference in attitude 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.
5. To study the difference in attitude regarding inclusive education between teacher educators who had done project/dissertation on special education in M.Ed./M.A. [Education] and those who had not done so.
6. To study the difference in attitude regarding inclusive education between teacher educators with personal experience with challenged individuals and those without any personal experience
7. To study the relation between a teacher educator's attitude 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 attitude between male and female teacher educators.

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

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

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

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

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

H₀₇:- There is no significant mean difference in attitude 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 attitude between teacher educators with institutional support, and their counterparts without institutional support.

Delimitation of the Study:-

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, 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:-

A standardized tool titled TASTIE –SA [Teacher Attitude Scale towards Inclusive Education] developed by Sood & Anand of Harprasad Institute of Behavioral Studies was adopted for the survey with slight modifications in the response options and certain modifications made on the basis of need of the present study after in-depth analysis of previous research studies and critical discussions with experts. The tool thus modified had 48 questions with the response options altered from 'yes'/'no' type to 'Strongly Agree', / 'agree'/'Disagree' and 'Strongly Disagree'. Values of 4,3,2 and 1 were ascribed to the 'Strongly Agree', / 'agree'/'Disagree' and 'Strongly Disagree' options respectively. The five broad areas of the attitude scale so modified are:

1. Psychological/Behavioral Aspects of Inclusive Education
2. Social and Parents-Related Aspects of Inclusive Education
3. Personal Experience and Exposure/Knowledge related Aspects of Inclusive Education
4. Curricular and Co-curricular Aspects of Inclusive Education
5. Administrative Aspects of Inclusive Education

The modified self-administering and self-reporting questionnaire with these aspects was a two point scale. The questions were translated into Bengali for the benefit of the teachers and a few questions were added. The tool was tested for reliability and validity. The reliability of the scale was established by – (a) Test-retest Method and (b) Internal Consistency of the scale. The product moment correlation 'r', that is the reliability index, was 0.82. Thus the scale was found to be reliable. Item validity was established since only those items with t-value of 1.75 or above were retained in the final form of the scale. The intrinsic validity for the scale was ascertained by ensuring internal consistency of the scale through product moment correlation method. The test retest reliability coefficient of 0.82 established the intrinsic validity of the scale.

An interview schedule was prepared for the qualitative analysis.

Data Collection Technique:-

The questionnaires were personally administered to the teacher educators under assurance of confidentiality and explained wherever necessary. Some were also mailed to respondents. Sufficient time was given to the respondents for thoughtful responses. Telephonic conversation was allowed for any clarification or discussions. The data so obtained was analyzed using suitable software. The data obtained from the interview was analyzed to discern the teacher educators' perception of inclusive education and any possible relation between their years of teaching experience and their perception.

Data Analysis:-The sample scores were tested for normality and then t-test was applied to the data collected. T-Test was applied on the scores obtained by teacher educators 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
1 – Gender		
H_{01} : There is no difference in attitude between male and female teacher educators	H_{11} : Attitude of male teacher educators is better than females	H_{21} : Attitude of female teacher educators is better than males
2 – Location		
H_{02} : There is no difference in attitude between male and female teacher educators	H_{12} : Attitude of urban teacher educators is better than rural counterparts	H_{22} : Attitude of rural teacher educators is better than urban counterparts
3 – Master Degree (MA. in Education, or, M.Ed.)		
H_{03} : There is no difference in attitude between teacher educators with MA. (Education), and their counterparts with M.Ed..	H_{13} : Attitude of teacher educators with MA. (Education) is better than their counterparts with M.Ed.	H_{23} : Attitude of teacher educators with M.Ed. is better than their counterparts with MA. (Education)
4 – PhD		
H_{04} : There is no difference in attitude between teacher educators with Ph.D., and their counterparts without Ph.D.	H_{14} : Attitude of teacher educators with PhD is better than their counterparts without Ph.D.	H_{24} : Attitude of teacher educators without PhD is better than their counterparts with Ph.D.
5 – Personal Experience		
H_{05} : There is no difference in attitude between teacher educators with personal experience, and their counterparts without experience	H_{15} : Attitude of teacher educators with personal experience is better than their counterparts without experience	H_{25} : Attitude of teacher educators without personal experience is better than their counterparts with experience
6 – Special Paper		
H_{06} : There is no difference in attitude between teacher educators with special paper, and their counterparts without special paper	H_{16} : Attitude of teacher educators with special paper is better than their counterparts without special paper	H_{26} : Attitude of teacher educators without special paper is better than their counterparts with special paper
7 – Project/Dissertation on Inclusive or Special Education		
H_{07} : There is no difference in attitude between teacher educators with project/dissertation on special education, and their counterparts without project/dissertation on special education	H_{17} : Attitude of teacher educators with project/dissertation on special education is better than their counterparts without project/dissertation on special education	H_{27} : Attitude of teacher educators without project/dissertation on special education is better than their counterparts with project/dissertation on special education.
8 – Institutional Support		
H_{08} : There is no difference in attitude between teacher educators with institutional support, and their counterparts without institutional support	H_{18} : Attitude of teacher educators with institutional support is better than their counterparts without institutional support	H_{28} : Attitude 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.

\bar{x}_1 (mean) and \bar{x}_2 (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;-

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

It may be noted that degrees of freedom ($n_1 + n_2 - 2$), for the sample sizes corresponding to each of the hypotheses are greater than 120 (n_1 and n_2 as in the table given below). 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)

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-attitude	Male	female	26.4974359	26.77073171	195	205	2598.748718	3152.22439	-0.719
2-attitude	Urban	rural	26.80208333	26.48557692	192	208	2818.479167	2929.956731	0.832
3-attitude	M.A. (Education)	M.Ed.	26.66666667	26.60891089	198	202	3072	2686.10396	0.152
4-attitude	With PhD	Without PhD	26.80165289	26.56630824	121	279	1115.239669	4638.523297	0.569
5-attitude	With personal experience	Without personal experience	28.07692308	25.71721311	156	244	2143.076923	3085.487705	6.351
6-attitude	With special paper	Without special paper	26.71238938	26.54022989	226	174	1982.30531	3773.218391	0.449
7-attitude	With project /dissertation	Without project /dissertation	26.16666667	26.76265823	84	316	1289.666667	4445.199367	-1.279
8-attitude	With institutional support	Without institutional support	27.44897959	26.52421652	49	351	696.122449	5025.54416	1.599

The inferences are summarized in the table below :-

Hypothesis	Computed	Observation	Inference
H_{01}	-0.719	$ \text{Computed } t < t_{0.005, \infty}$	H_{01} is accepted
H_{02}	0.832	$ \text{Computed } t < t_{0.005, \infty}$	H_{02} is accepted
H_{03}	0.152	$ \text{Computed } t < t_{0.005, \infty}$	H_{03} is accepted

H ₀₄	0.569	Computed t < t _{0.005,∞}	H ₀₄ is accepted
H ₀₅	6.351	Computed t > t _{0.005,∞}	H ₀₅ is rejected
H ₀₆	0.449	Computed t < t _{0.005,∞}	H ₀₆ is accepted
H ₀₇	-1.279	Computed t < t _{0.005,∞}	H ₀₇ is accepted
H ₀₈	1.5999	Computed t < t _{0.005,∞}	H ₀₈ is accepted

Interview Schedule:-

An analysis of the data collected from the interview schedule revealed that years of teaching experience did not affect a teacher educator's attitude towards inclusive education. 82% of the teacher educators opined that a special paper in the curriculum was enough for making the trainees aware of disability issues and 86% revealed ignorance about other diversity issues. 65% of them also felt that inclusion of such topics in the teacher education curriculum were actually adding extra and unnecessary load to the teacher education course. About 70% of the teacher educators were reluctant to join any course or training for professional development in dealing with diversity, especially disability in regular classroom settings, unless some financial benefit was associated with such training or courses. About 80% teacher educators revealed ignorance about recent researches, policies and provisions for pupils with special needs. 90% of the teacher educators failed to give concrete or clear outline of ways of fostering a climate receptive to diversity in the department, the curriculum, staff meetings, printed materials, initiatives etc. 90% also failed to provide a clear plan of action in the next two years to further their development in competency for addressing diversity.

Discussion:-

From the above analysis it is seen that teacher educators themselves are being groomed through courses that contribute little to their development of attitude towards inclusive education. Lack of significant difference in attitude 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. too is found to be redundant. 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 attitude of teacher educators. Interestingly it is seen that personal experience is crucial in developing attitude as evident from the analysis since educators with personal experience in form of relation to any challenged person in the family, community or friends were found to have better attitude towards inclusive education. The analysis of the Interview too revealed the importance of personal experience for developing confidence, empathy, skill and a sound knowledge in an educator. Infrastructural facilities or a co-operative management were found to have no significant influence on the teacher educators. It was endorsed by the interview responses too where it was found that only the educators who already had a positive attitude about inclusive education could benefit from such facilities. The ones without prior experience responded that such infrastructure 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.

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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