



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### CONTEXTUALIZING MENTORING IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: INSIGHTS FROM LITERATURE REVIEW

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#### Abstract

Diversities and differences can be a celebration and impeding at the same time. The shuttle widening departure between these two creates havoc in the lives of those marginalized and wanting to be included. Education is a great level player for the growth, development and well-being of diverse groups of marginalized communities. With the release of National Education Policy 2020 and draft Bluebook on National Mentoring Mission (NMM), it is crucial to have a closer look at mentoring and how it can be maximised for effective inclusive education. The current paper through literature reviews tries to understand and explores scope for mentoring to better professionally prepare pre-service teachers and explores opportunities for continuous professional development of in-service teachers for inclusive education. When teachers are welcoming and professionally trained, to cater to the needs and requirement of marginalized: be it students with special educational needs (SEN), a migrant and a child in refugee camp, or belonging to social-economically disadvantaged group (SEDG), the lives of excluded can be respected, dignity installed and be a celebration. The big question is- are our teachers conscious, aware and professionally trained enough, to hear the voices of the excluded learners.

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#### Introduction:-

The paradigm shift from special need education to inclusive education has been propelled by international documents (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1994; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2005; United Nations, 2006; United Nations General Assembly, 2015). Further reforms in inclusive education were brought by the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs (UNESCO, 1994).

Education is acknowledged as the greatest social equalizer. Children with disability for decades are one of the most marginalised sections excluded groups from education, without access to regular schools and this led to their further isolation, segregation and discrimination (Alieto & Caspillo, 2022). In India, the National Education Policy, 2020 (NEP-2020), recognised and prioritises the inclusion and equal participation of children with disability in early child care and education (ECCE) and in school system from the Foundational stage to higher education (para 6.10).

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The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act 2016 defines inclusive education as a 'system of education wherein students with and without disabilities learn together and the system of teaching and learning is suitably adapted to meet the learning needs of different types of students with disabilities. This policy (NEP-2020) is in complete harmony with all the provisions of the RPWD Act 2016 and completely endorses all its recommendations with respect to school education.

Currently, inclusive education is understood as an effort in any school system where all diverse groups of children whether children with or without disabilities or children with special educational needs (SENs), irrespective of their gender, class, caste, race, regional or economic background, are welcomed in the same local educational organizations (Yada et al., 2022) and also Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) by NEP-2020. Diverse children group can be broadly classified based on gender identities (male, female and transgender individuals), socio-cultural identities (eg. Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs, and minorities), geographical identities (eg. students from villages, small towns, and aspirational districts), disabilities (including learning disabilities), and socio-economic conditions (such as migrant communities, low-income households, children in vulnerable situations, victims of or children of victims of trafficking, orphans including child beggars in urban areas, and the urban poor) (Niti & Singh, 2021).

Considering education as a great social leveller, the role of teachers in inclusive education takes the central attention. Numerous studies across the world like in Australia (Woodcock & Nicoll, 2022), USA (Li & Ruppert, 2021), Canada (Throop Robinson et al., 2021), Sweden (Holmqvist & Lelinge, 2021), England (Warnes et al., 2022), Netherlands (Norwich et al., 2021), Spain (Carballo et al., 2021), Belgium (Griful-Freixenet et al., 2021), China (Monteiro et al., 2019), Ukraine, Qatar (Hassanein et al., 2021), Indonesia (Rasmitadila et al., 2021), Philippines (Alieto & Caspillo, 2022), Bhutan (Chhetri et al., 2020) and India (Bodhi et al., 2021) have reinforced the importance and need to have quality inclusive teachers, professionally trained with positive beliefs and attitude while catering to the learning needs of students from diverse marginalized groups.

Worldwide, mentoring has been used as a professional strategy to maximize the potentials of teachers to encourage, support and raise learning levels of the students. In educational setting, they have been used to better prepare preservice teachers during their school internships, in their induction process as newly qualified teachers and in their continuous professional development of in-service teachers.

The current paper through literature review, tries to address two important research questions.

1. What are the scopes of mentoring to better professionally prepare pre-service teachers and in continuous professional development of in-service teachers in the context of inclusive education and
2. Are our teachers conscious, aware and professionally trained enough, to hear the voices of the excluded learners.

The insights gained through the literature reviews are presented thematically followed with discussion and summing up with conclusion.

### **Situating Mentoring in the Context of Inclusive Education**

A study in Kenya, examined the experiences of mentor teachers and their colleagues after attending three days of professional training in the context of early literacy instruction and using literacy software program (ABRA) through qualitative study. Their study identified barriers to adoption and integration of the ABRA software in elementary school context. They are like: barriers associated with infrastructure and access to technology, challenges integrating the pedagogy of the software within the constraints of the existing curriculum, support for program continuation, adoption and fostering teacher's professional development. They also stressed the need to address the cultural norms to support accessibility of the software (Wood et al., 2022).

An Indonesian study explored the opinion of general teachers regarding the role of universities in mentoring programs for inclusive elementary schools. Their findings highlighted mainly two themes, like, university involvement and inclusive resource centres. The role of university was articulated in terms of developing effective instruction system and provision of human resources (quality inclusive teachers), competent in implementing inclusive education in an inclusive elementary school setups (Rasmitadila et al., 2021).

In an Ukrainian study, a team of researchers tried to explore the prospects for the development of inclusive education using mentoring method especially in post-pandemic situation. The study was situated in a general

educational institution where the participating respondents had experiences with providing educational and rehabilitation service to people with disabilities. The study strongly advocated for the rights of people with disabilities in their quest to learning and to create a universal design in educational institution, to increase teacher quality to provide high-quality services for people with disabilities (Myroslav et al., 2020).

All the above recent studies confirm the need and significance of using mentoring as strategy to enhance the professional development capacities of inclusive teachers. These teachers then, can better serve the learning and supportive needs of the children with various disabilities, through digital integration. The situation was worse during pandemic situation, and the challenge continues post COVID situation to meet the learning needs of the students with educational needs (SEN). The role of university to better prepare competent inclusive teachers with knowledge and practice, to better handle inclusive instructional competencies are highlighted.

In educational setting, mentoring has been used to enhance the professional experiences of pre-service teachers. The theoretical pedagogical knowledge learned at university course would equip them to use them in real, complex, and classroom situations (Aydm & Ok, 2022; Karathanos-Aguilar & Ervin-Kassab, 2022; Lynn & Nguyen, 2020; Moorhouse & Harfitt, 2021). Similarly, mentoring supports newly qualified/ beginning teachers (Aarts et al., 2020; Ewing, 2021; Tonna, 2019) during their induction, to welcome into the school work culture and teacher community, to remain in the profession and continue to enhance the students' learning. Equally, mentoring had been conceived and operationalized for continuous professional development of inservice teachers and creating learning communities at school (Efron, 2012; Hairon, 2020; Stanulis et al., 2019).

### **Defining and Meaning Making of Inclusion**

The way inclusion is defined, the perspective of its meaning takes its shape. Studies have traced inclusion being defined having four different dimensions. The placement definition indicates, mainstreaming inclusive education and usually denotes the place of education. The second definition implies the need of students with disabilities or in need of special support, of their social and educational needs. The third dimension is linked with the second but it reflects the concerns of all diverse student groups. The fourth dimension is related to the creation of learning and support communities at schools. So, the importance of the meaning shapes the perspective of how inclusive education is visioned and contextualised (Nilholm, 2021). Inclusive education had concretized the concept that the education of students with special needs is based on rights and entitlement and not as an act of privilege or charity (Scanlon et al., 2022). Therefore, inclusive education should be supported and encouraged by all means.

Inclusion mostly tends to denote the inclusion of students with special educational needs or battling with the issue to disability but growing literatures on inclusion tend to be inclusive in terms of their meaning. Growing literatures are focusing to include all diverse forms of marginalized groups. Inclusive education is currently understood as an effort in any school system where all diverse groups of children, including those with disabilities and students with special educational needs (SENs) and SEDGs, are welcomed in the same local educational organisations. In order to serve all students in every community, inclusive schools must meet their needs (Mendenhall et al., 2021; Niti & Singh, 2021).

### **Inclusive Teachers' Belief, Attitude and Opinion**

Referring to literatures on students with special educational need, the teacher's attitudes towards inclusive education have been a popular research topic (Chhetri et al., 2020; Ismailos et al., 2022; Opoku et al., 2021; Sharma et al., 2019). Teachers are an important part of the teaching-learning community in implementing inclusive education. It may be so perhaps due to negative attitudes of teachers (Mendenhall et al., 2021) and slow implementation of inclusive education on ground (Yada et al., 2022). A qualitative study in Bhutan, explored teachers' views on preparing teachers for inclusive education. In its preliminary stage of implementing inclusive education, found that education for all, needs to address teachers' willingness to include inclusiveness in their classrooms (Chhetri et al., 2020).

Moreover, along with attitudes, teachers' self-efficacy is seen as a crucial element for the successful implementation of a good educational system (Ismailos et al., 2022). For inclusive education implementation, the attitudes and beliefs of university faculties play a significant role in influencing the teaching pedagogy around inclusive education (Carballo et al., 2021; Márquez & Melero-Aguilar, 2021; Moriña & Orozco, 2021). Faculties' attitude and beliefs influence their contribution in the teacher preparation process.

Wide research evidences show views, opinions and attitude of pre-service teachers affect their perspective towards inclusive education, influencing their teaching and transactions in inclusive schools in future (Alieto & Caspillo, 2022; Braun, 2022; Ismailos et al., 2022). Moreover, in line with attitudes, teachers' self-efficacy is seen as a crucial element for the successful implementation of a good educational system (Carrington et al., 2019). If teachers' self-efficacy is related to their attitudes, that may open a door to gradually changing attitudes in a positive direction and, thus, improve the possibilities for inclusive education (Hassanein et al., 2021). Furthermore, findings from a study revealed that teachers' self-efficacy has a significant relationship with teachers' attributes (Alieto & Caspillo, 2022). This is backed by a cross-sectional survey conducted with 204 academicians and scholars from India. Results revealed that teachers' attitudes had a positive and significant association with intention to incorporate inclusive education (Bodhi et al., 2021).

### **Theories Explaining Inclusive Education Practices**

Co-teaching has been suggested as a within-classroom educational approach to create more inclusive classrooms but the data confirming outcome is not clear. While several knowledge contributions have been made in research about inclusive education, there is still lack of theories about how to make schools and classrooms inclusive when inclusion is understood as involving all pupils (Nilholm, 2021).

The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) provides a valuable framework to understand the relationship between attitude and behaviour. TPB extends the theory of reasoned action by attempting to predict certain behaviours, attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural controls. TPB predicts that it is more likely for an individual to perform a behaviour if each component is favourable. Specifically, TPB contends that behavioural intention is determined by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural controls (Hassanein et al., 2021; Opoku et al., 2021).

The benefits of training faculties at university level increasing their knowledge about disability, support and barriers encountered by the students, available resources in the university and educational approaches such as inclusive education and universal design for learning, are well evidenced (Carballo et al., 2021). Universal design for learning (UDL) model has also been used to predict the performance of pre-service teachers' practices in creating inclusive educational environments. The main constructs of this UDL model are growth mindset about learning, self-efficacy to implement inclusion and self-regulation and motivation for teaching (Griful-Freixenet et al., 2021).

Researches on exploring the development of inclusive education using mentoring strategies have felt the need to create a universal design for learning in any educational institution. It supports to increase the qualifications of university based personnels, for providing high-quality services for people with disability and other psychological and physiological rehabilitations services, especially in post pandemic situation (Myroslav et al., 2020).

The Indian experience of professional development programme design focussing on equipping 107 in-service teachers like the general educators, special educators, school leaders, and counsellors, adapted the use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The professional training outcome appreciated the hands-on strategies and contextually relevant resources that were made available at no additional cost. The UDL model highlighted the need to create and share Open Education Resources (OERs) that all teachers could contribute to and extend the scope of professional development programmes to provide follow-up supports (Misquitta & Joshi, 2022).

### **Preparing Pre-Service Teachers for Inclusive Education**

In pursuit to support inclusive education, researches have focussed on the importance to prepare pre-service teachers to have positive and favourable professional experience in promoting and creating inclusive and supporting learning environment for diverse students with disabilities along with those having learning difficulties (Chhetri et al., 2020; Griful-Freixenet et al., 2021; Ismailos et al., 2022; Makoele & Burmistrova, 2021). Preservice teacher education programs with sound theoretical component and an applied dimension through field experiences are encouraged. The opportunities to engage meaningfully with people with disabilities in real context, preservice teachers' knowledge and competencies gets enhanced. Preparing pre-service teachers to teach with "standard" teaching skills in ways that meet the needs of all learners within inclusive frameworks are desired (Hassanein et al., 2021).

From the Indian context, conceptions, perceptions and practices of inclusive education in five schools across different districts of Karnataka was studied with a closer look of the classroom practices and perspectives of teachers. This research was contextualised over past three decades- the enrolment in elementary education

had increased due to support and promotion by government policies and programmes, which facilitated the inclusion of children from disadvantaged groups, including children with disabilities. However, findings showed teachers struggling to make inclusive education a reality. Teachers were found with little conceptual understanding and methodological awareness about how to make schools inclusive. This study highlighted the need to make the vision of inclusive education in sync with robust systemic support in teacher education program, to build competencies of in-service teachers, in supporting inclusive classroom practices (Ramchand, 2021).

### **Professional Development of In-service Teachers on Inclusive Education**

Providing supporting learning environment and psychological support to children with disability and students with special education need, the need to have professionally qualified and competent teachers holds prime importance (Gale et al., 2022; Holmqvist & Lelling, 2021; Klibthong & Agbenyega, 2020; Li & Ruppar, 2021; Scanlon et al., 2022). Various researchers around the world have reiterated the fact to contextualise the professional development programmes to well suit the local needs of the in-service teachers in an inclusive environment operating from rights and entitlement perspectives (Ackah-Jnr & Francis R., 2020; Throop Robinson et al., 2021).

From the perspective of Indian study, examining perceptions and practices of mainstream teachers in rural government schools in three districts of Haryana revealed teachers struggling in their classrooms to meet the needs of diverse students and children with disabilities, experiences further exclusionary practices. Teachers were unwilling and reluctant to take responsibility for the learning of children with disabilities and expressed concerns about their own preparedness, while highlighting the lack of effective and appropriate support structures. In this context, the pressing need for effective teacher professional development opportunities and other support structures, to provide quality education gets emphasized (Taneja-Johansson et al., 2021).

In another study in India with 107 practising teachers, a six-month Professional Development Programme (PDP) designed with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, to support inclusion of students with disabilities showed positive outcomes. At the end of the programme, the in-service teachers were able to apply a range of classroom strategies including attention grabbers, energisers, classroom management, and reading fluency strategies in their classrooms. Participating teachers most appreciated the hands-on strategies and contextually relevant resources that were made available at no additional cost in PDP. This experience highlights the need to create and share open education resources (OERs), extend the scope of PD programmes to provide follow-up support (Misquitta & Joshi, 2022).

From a comparative study, of provision and access to inclusive education for children with disabilities in city and village setup in Telangana state revealed, teacher's willingness to support inclusive education. However, the existence of disparity between the availability of professional support services in rural setting and metropolitan city was evident. Definitely, the lack of training and professional development opportunities has been perceived to be a major obstacle to the progress of inclusive education. This study emphasized the need and relevance of professional development of teachers and other professionals, in rural areas (Rose et al., 2021).

### **Strategies of Effective Implementation of Inclusive Education**

Collating strategies from the existing literatures on inclusive education across different nations, reveal key strategies and characteristic which supports in the effective implementation of inclusive education. For effective implementation of inclusive education, four building blocks like the teacher, collaboration, organisation and motivation (TCOM) pyramid (Maapola-Thobejane, 2022) is key. For successful implementation of inclusive education different aspects like the school leadership, teacher functions, the initial teacher training of pre-service teachers, continuous professional development of in-service teachers, networking within learning communities and collaboration plays a vital role (Gale et al., 2022). To promote high-quality inclusive education implementation, in a contextual setting with cultural sensitivity, it is important to consider both global quality and inclusion quality together and not in isolation with each other (Love & Horn, 2021).

Reforms by different countries have prioritised the need to implement inclusive education. However, they battle with several barriers like inadequate teacher preparation, stigma and negative attitudes towards people with disabilities and limited engagement with local leaders and key stakeholders. Identifying and addressing these potential barriers with a collaborative approach holds key for creating supportive and inclusive environment with students with disabilities including learning disabilities (Sharma et al., 2019). Studies have documented the benefits of quality implementation of inclusive education and social inclusion (Kefallinou et al., 2020), and efforts made to

use mentoring strategies to suitably reposition the support and promote inclusive education in post COVID situation (Myroslav et al., 2020).

### **Discussion:-**

With reference to insights gained from the above literature reviews, efforts to answer the framed research questions are made.

*Research Question 1:* Exploring the scope of mentoring to better professionally prepare pre-service teachers and in continuous professional development of in-service teachers for inclusive education.

Current research on inclusive education have contextualised mentoring to explore the role of university to better prepare future teachers in terms of enhancing their belief, attitude and professionally equipping them with skill of adapting their instructional practices to support in creation of positive learning environment (Rasmitadila et al., 2021). Taking note of experiences of mentor teachers after attending professional development trainings focussing on early literacy instruction and using software program, supported mentors to identify barriers and access to technology and seeking for continuous professional development through mentoring process was evident (Wood et al., 2022). The bitter experiences of teaching and learning loses during the pandemic lockdown time, has forced inclusive teachers and education institutions, to take support of mentoring as a strategy to enhance the teacher quality and to provide high-quality services to people with disability (Myroslav et al., 2020).

In initial teacher education institutions, mentoring as a professional enhancement approach has growingly been used to maximise the potential of pre-service teachers. Mentoring has also been used widely, to support novice or newly qualified teachers to blend with the teaching community of work (School) and in their continuous professional enhancement. Veteran inservice teachers on the other hand, have taken the role of school-based mentors to the pre-service teachers during their school internship. The NEP 2020 emphasizing the need for quality teachers, have advocated the use of mentoring to support teachers especially in preparing early childhood and care and education (ECCE) teachers, being mentor to students who are out of school or dropped out of school or belong to Socially-Economically Disadvantaged Group (SEDG). In sync with NEP 2020, bluebook on National Mentoring Mission, a draft version is currently shared in public domain to receive feedbacks and suggestions to finalise the document. In India, mentoring is integrated in national policy and mentoring is emphasized. This opens great potentials to maximize its use, to promote, support and make inclusive education a successful intervention. It has potentials in cutting down isolation, exclusion, discrimination of students belonging to diverse marginalized groups along with students with learning disabilities.

*Research Question 2:* Are our teachers conscious, aware and professional trained enough, to hear the voices of excluded learners?

Literatures on teachers working in inclusive schools have evidenced the prevalence of teacher's willingness to transact in an inclusive classroom with self-efficacy and positive attitude. Study in Bulgaria with 922 kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion had been studied across three dimensions (cognitive, affective and behavioural), their concerns and self-efficacy. The study found that teachers when given training, their positive attitudes toward inclusion across the three mentioned dimensions significantly improved (Scanlon et al., 2022).

From the experience of qualitative study conducted in Ghana to explore professional readiness of in-service teachers and their implementation of their learning in early childhood setting, emphasized the need to continuously engage in both formal and informal professional development activities to enhance their readiness, efficacy, competence and preparedness for inclusive education (Ackah-Jnr & Francis R., 2020).

Due to reform and promotion of implementation of inclusive education, teacher trainings to support inclusive education were carried out in Bhutan. A case study research on Bhutanese experiences, reported teachers' readiness to implement inclusive education and the findings were presented in four different key areas like: education for all, identifying barriers, supporting policy and positive attitudes towards inclusion (Chhetri et al., 2020).

In this backdrop, when teachers are willing and made ready through different professional development programs, the positive support can influence in the better service provision by the teacher to address the educational needs to

marginalized children including children with learning difficulties. (Gale et al., 2022; Gierczyk & Hornby, 2021; Maapola-Thobejane, 2022)

### Conclusion:-

Across the globe, the Salamanca Statement and other international documents have provided the strongest impetus for drawing attention to the education of some of the most marginalised groups. The paradigm shift in the approach to inclusive education from right and entitlement perspective receiving education, in which all diverse group of students are learning under one institution, is a leap step to break the factors of exclusion, isolation and discrimination. Growing number of researches have taken account of teacher's beliefs, attitudes, opinions and their perspectives, to understand how teacher's belief and attitude influence their instructional practices in complex and demanding classroom settings.

For effective implementation of inclusive education what matters most is teachers' belief, their attitude and perception, of university faculties, of pre-service teachers learning to teach and in-service teachers, in their practices. Education is a powerful tool to support growth, development and wellbeing of an individual. The role of teachers and their competencies play a significant role to meet the educational needs of diverse groups of marginalized learners including students with special education needs (SEN). In this endeavour, the strategic use of mentoring in inclusive education to better professional prepare the preservice teachers, newly qualified teachers and inservice teachers play pivotal role. Alongside, the competencies of university faculties play significant role since they influence the learning of preservice teachers at university course.

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