

Self-Efficacy of Pre-Service Special Education Teachers Towards Cross-Disabilities

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Abstract

In inclusive education, special education teachers have to deal with children with various disabilities. In the light of this, the researcher made an attempt to explore how well-equipped pre-service teachers, who are groomed at teachers training institutes, think they are to work with children with various disabilities. This qualitative study is confined to pre-service special education teachers in Delhi only. The researcher took a sample of 30 pre-service teachers. To gather data, the researcher developed a questionnaire along with employing the technique of document analysis. According to the research findings, the participants were being offered specialization in one disability. Moreover, they reported their inability to cater to the individual needs of children with other disabilities (or cross disabilities). The study recommended that comprehensive chapter/unit on cross disabilities should be incorporated in the curriculum so that pre-service teachers could be made aware of and be equipped with interventions required by children with other disabilities.

Keywords: *Inclusive Education, Special Education Teacher, Cross-Disabilities*

Introduction:

This is an era of inclusive education where each child, including children with special needs (CWSN), is to be empowered with education. It helps people make adjustments in their environment. Education helps initiate upward movement in the social structure (which includes CWSN as well) by bringing equality among them (Bhatia & Ahmed, 2016). According to Horace Mann (1848), “Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men – the balance-wheel of the social machinery”.

The journey of inclusive education was not so easy, especially for CWSN. There was a time when they used to face exclusion from society; they were given horrified punishment like chaining, left on hills, to die, locked away, and so on. This inhuman treatment continued for long. With the passage of time, society started believing the

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philosophy of “every individual is precious” and recognizing the potential of persons with disabilities. It was only in 1555, a Spanish monk Pedro Ponce de Leon (1520-1584) had set up a segregated institution for hearing handicapped. In India, the first special school (for the deaf) was established in Mumbai (erstwhile Bombay) in the year 1884.

The journey of the persons with disabilities for the right to education had started in 1948 when the United Nations (UN) had adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. There were many stopovers in the journey before it finally reached from the “segregation” to the “inclusion to be the norm (1994)”. Among the major developments before the “inclusion to be the norm” included the Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons (1971), the Declaration on the Rights of the Disabled Persons (1975), the World Program of Action Concerning Disabled Persons (1982), UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the World Declaration on Education for All (1990), and the UN Standard Rules (1993). It was only in 1994, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), a specialized agency of the UN, had published the Salamanca Statement, a declaration on the education of disabled children which called for “inclusion to be the norm”. The statement affirms, “Those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child-centered-pedagogy capable of meeting these needs”.

These developments had largely made a positive impact on India’s education system, mainly because India was a signatory nation to a number of global declarations such as the Salamanca Statement. Various declarations made on global platforms during late 1980s and early 1990s were among the main factors behind the three landmark legislations passed in India--the Rehabilitation Council of India Act (1992), the Persons with Disability (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Right and Full Participation) Act (1995) and the National Trust (for the welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities) Act (1999). The Rehabilitation Council of India Act was largely concerned with development of manpower for the rehabilitation of people with disability. The Persons with Disability Act emphasizes the need to provide free education to all children in an appropriate environment till they are 18 years old. The objective of National Trust Act is to provide total care to those having autism, mental retardation, and cerebral palsy.

Further, the Dakar Framework for Action has adopted world’s declaration on “Education for All” in 2000. Responding to that, India has started Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), an ambitious program seeking education for all which ensures that every child, irrespective of disability, is provided education in an appropriate environment. The SSA has adopted

zero rejection policy and has a target of eight years of elementary schooling for all children, including children with disabilities in the age group of 6-14 years. The same provisions had received legal sanctity under the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE), which was passed on August 26, 2009 and implemented from April 1, 2010.

When it comes to providing education to the children with disabilities, technology proves to be a boon for this noble cause. “For people without disabilities, technology makes things easier. For people with disabilities, technology makes things possible (Bryant & Bryant, 2003 cited by Bhatia & Ahmed, 2016)”. Given the increasing role of technology, a lot of emphasis has been given on the application of “assistive devices” in the PWD Act, 1995, which was further strengthened with new terms such as “aids and appliances” and “support services” under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). It was further highlighted in the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (2006) and the Right to Education Act (2009). These terms such as assistive devices, aids and appliances, and support services collectively constitute the term “assistive technology (AT)” which refers to both assistive devices as well as assistive services.

The PWD Act provides legal sanctity to seven types of disabilities, such as blindness, low vision, leprosy-cured, hearing impairment, loco motor disability, mental retardation, and mental illness, whereas the NTA covers Autism, Cerebral Palsy, and Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities. Given the fact that there exists individual difference, individual needs or requirements also vary. Therefore, the formula of “one-size-fits-all” does not apply to the application of assistive technology while dealing with children with disabilities. Every disability requires the use of specific type of assistive devices. It is important that a multiple of factors are carefully considered before deciding which one best suits the needs of persons with disabilities. This is the time where role of a teacher assumes significance.

“All of today's educators must have adequate technology knowledge and skills to serve the increasing number of students with disabilities who participate in inclusive general education classrooms” (Wagner, et.al, 2006). The National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE, 2009) says “that a teacher needs to be prepared in relation to the needs and demands arising in the school context...the learner and the learning process. Since all sorts of children, including those having disabilities, are provided education in the same classroom, it becomes a challenging task for the teacher to address the individual needs of each student in the diverse classrooms. Though the time is limited for a teacher in the classroom, it is vital for the teacher to go for the assistive technologies

which will not only save time but also helps cater to the diverse needs of the classroom. For that, a teacher must be having positive attitude towards assistive technologies along with knowledge and skills required to use such technologies effectively and efficiently.”

The quality of teacher depends upon the soundness of pre-service teacher education programs. A well-trained teaching staff would be effective in dealing with children with special needs. And the journey of well-trained teaching staff starts from the teacher education institutes where future teachers (pre-service teachers) are groomed, trained, and developed to effectively deal with special children. Various teacher education institutes are offering B.Ed. program (special education) with specialization in one disability. For example, New Delhi-based Jamia Millia Islamia (a central university) runs B.Ed. (Special Education) program with specialization in “visual impairment” and “learning disabilities”. The course is designed with major focus on one disability (the area of specialization), whereas other disabilities (or cross disabilities) find little space and attention in the course structure. Therefore, the researcher in the present study made an attempt to study the self-efficacy of pre-service special education teachers towards cross-disabilities.

Research Design, Setting, and Participants

In the present study, a qualitative approach was followed to study the self-efficacy of pre-service special education teachers towards cross-disabilities. The study was conducted at Jamia Millia Islamia. Sample size was 30 participants. Out of 30 participants, 15 were pursuing B.Ed. (special education) program with specialization in “visual impairment” while the rest were of “learning disabilities” specialization.

Tool and Technique

In order to achieve the research objective, the researcher has analyzed course curriculum of B.Ed. Special Education Program. After that, the researcher framed some of the questions which were later incorporated in the questionnaire, covering various dimensions.

Analysis and Discussion

From Table 1 given below, it is clear that the maximum number of participants (15) had interaction with visually impaired children (both low vision and blind), while 13 respondents opined that they dealt with mentally retarded children (only mild and moderate). As many as 12 participants reported to have interacted with autistic children during their teaching practice, whereas 6 respondents faced hearing impaired as well as

learning disabled/slow learners. Four participants have had interaction with physically challenged and children with cerebral palsy.

Table 1. Interaction with special children during teaching practice

Disability	Frequency
Visual Impaired	15
Hearing Impaired	6
Mentally Retarded (Mind & Moderate)	13
Learning Disabled/Slow Learner	6
Autistic	12
Cerebral Palsy	4
Physically Challenged	4

Thus, visual impairment had the maximum rate of prevalence, which was followed by mental retardation (mild and moderate) and autism. Hearing impairment and learning disabilities/slow learners jointly share fourth place.

Table 2. Familiarity of pre-service special education teachers with assistive technology

Assistive Technology	Frequency
Braille/Braille Slate	10
Taylor Frame	5
Abacus	4
Software (JAWS)	8
Punching Machine	7
White Cane/Smart Cane	4
Audio-Visual Books	2
Stylus	2
Tactile Map	1

Table 2 clearly reflects the fact that pre-service special education teachers were familiar with only those assistive technologies which were either used by visually impaired or learning-disabled children. As many as 10 participants reported that they were comfortable with Braille/Braille Slate (used by the visually impaired), whereas 8 respondents opined that they knew how to use software such as JAWS (useful for the learning disabled). Seven participants said they knew how to use punching machine, while 5 respondents expressed confidence in using Taylor Frame. As many as 4 participants knew how to use abacus and white cane/smart cane, whereas 2 respondents were aware of audio-visual books or talking books and stylus. Only 1 participant was

equipped with skill required for using tactile map. Thus, a majority of participants were either familiar with assistive technology required for visually impaired or learning disabled.

Table 3. Perception regarding pre-service teachers' preparedness

Statements	Positive (%)	Neutral (%)	Negative (%)
I am aware of AT required for cross disabilities	25.00-	6.25	68.75
I can implement AT into my instruction	71.87	3.12	25.00

Table 3 given above clearly showed that despite pursuing special education courses, 68.75% of respondents participated in the research study categorically said that they were not aware of AT required for cross disabilities (excluding their specializations), mainly due to shortcomings lying in the course curriculum. The course curriculum is simply limited to definitions, classification, and characteristics of these cross disabilities. It does not mention the kind of assistive technologies required to deal with these cross disabilities.

Analyzing the course curriculum, it was found that the B.Ed. special curriculum provides exposure of cross disabilities such as hearing impairment, intellectual disability, autism, cerebral palsy, amputees, polio, spina bifida, epilepsy, muscular dystrophy, and leprosy cured. However, it is simply limited to definitions, classification, and characteristics of these cross disabilities. It does not mention the kind of assistive technologies required to deal with these cross disabilities.

Findings of the Study

1. The participants reported to have interacted with as many as seven kinds of disabilities in classroom during their teaching practice, with visual impairment having the maximum rate of prevalence followed by mental retardation (mild and moderate) and autism.
2. A majority of participants reported they were either familiar with assistive technology required for visually impaired or learning disabled, the course curriculum is only focused on assistive technologies required for the visually impaired and the learning disabled, the two specializations that the institution currently offers.

3. Despite pursuing special education courses, 68.75% of respondents categorically said that they were not aware of AT required for cross disabilities, mainly due to shortcomings lying in the course curriculum. The course curriculum is simply limited to definitions, classification, and characteristics of these cross disabilities. It does not mention the kind of assistive technologies required to deal with these cross disabilities.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the present research study revealed that a majority of pre-service teachers were not feeling competent enough to deal with cross disabilities as the course curriculum is simply limited to definitions, classification, and characteristics of these cross disabilities. The course design is only focused on ATs required for the visually impaired and the learning disabled.

Implications of the Study:

1. In the wake of variety of existing disabilities, only 4-5 disabilities were witnessed by the participants in classroom during teaching practice. Therefore, it is recommended to launch a mass campaign to raise awareness among people about disabilities, along with strengthening the screening process being followed by the school system so that more and more disabled could be identified and provided with the required services.
2. As a majority of pre-service teachers perceived that they were unable to employ AT required for cross disabilities, it is the need of the hour especially in the current era of inclusion that comprehensive chapter/unit on cross disability should be incorporated in the curriculum so that pre-service teachers could be made aware of not only features and ATs required by their respective areas of disability, but of other disabilities (cross disabilities) as well.
3. To improve training of special education programs, practical training must be provided to use assistive technology and that too by trained teaching staff.

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