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Research Paper

Teacher Empowerment and Professional Development for Inclusive Classrooms

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ABSTRACT	Manuscript Info.
<p>The National Education Policy 2020 says that teachers should be trained to understand the needs of all students and to be able to teach in a way that includes everyone. Many teachers do not know how to do this, especially when it comes to students from different castes, classes, genders and abilities. This paper says that teachers need to be trained not only to teach in an inclusive way but also to understand how power and privilege affect what happens in the classroom. When teachers are well-trained and supported, they can be really powerful in creating change. They can make the classroom a place where all students feel welcome and valued. This study looked at how teachers can be motivated and supported to teach in a certain way. It found that when teachers are able to work and support each other, they are more likely to be successful. The study used interviews with 25 teachers and teacher educators from West Bengal to gather information. Thematic coding was employed to examine the challenges and strategies associated with inclusive teaching. The results of the study show that when teachers are empowered, they are better able to create classrooms. This happens when teachers can work and when they receive training that is relevant to their needs. The National Education Policy 2020 and teacher empowerment are closely linked. The National Education Policy 2020 and inclusive education are topics in India, and this study adds to our understanding of how teachers can be supported to create inclusive classrooms.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ ISSN No: 2584-184X ✓ Received: 06-10-2024 ✓ Accepted: 26-11-2024 ✓ Published: 30-11-2024 ✓ MRR:2(11):2024; 84-88 ✓ ©2024, All Rights Reserved. ✓ Peer Review Process: Yes ✓ Plagiarism Checked: Yes <p style="text-align: center;">How To Cite</p> <p>Debnath P. Teacher Empowerment and Professional Development for Inclusive Classrooms. Indian Journal of Modern Research and Reviews: 2024;2(11):84-88.</p>

KEYWORDS: Teacher empowerment, professional development, inclusive pedagogy, NEP 2020, reflective practice, thematic analysis, West Bengal

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is really important for individuals and society. Over the years, people have started to understand the value of education, which gives everyone an equal chance to learn, no matter what their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or cultural background is. Inclusive classrooms try to help students with disabilities, learning problems, and different learning styles within the regular school system. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation or UNESCO, says that inclusive education helps people take part, be treated fairly and appreciate diversity by

removing obstacles to learning and using approaches. Inclusive education is not about putting students in regular classrooms; it requires big changes in what we teach, how we teach, how we assess students and the whole school culture. Teachers are the key to making education work. What teachers think, know, and believe is really important. Sadly, many teachers do not feel confident in handling learning needs because they lack training and support. So, helping teachers become more confident and trained has become crucial for inclusive education to succeed.

When we talk about empowering teachers, we mean giving them the freedom to make decisions, being confident in their work and having control over what they teach. Teachers who are empowered are more likely to try things, work with their colleagues, and help students. On the other hand, professional development is about helping teachers get better at their jobs through training, workshops, mentoring and learning from each other. These things help teachers grow and become more confident in their work. Education and teacher empowerment are closely linked, and both are necessary for students to get the best education possible.

In the Indian scenario, inclusive education is faced with a number of challenges. For example, there is overcrowding in many schools. There is also a lack of support for special education. There are also disparities between rural and urban schools. For example, teachers in rural schools lack training and support. For women teachers, there are also socio-cultural challenges. These affect teacher empowerment and development.

For example, in West Bengal, schools vary greatly in terms of infrastructure and socio-economic conditions. Hence, teacher empowerment assumes great significance. This study looks to understand how teachers in West Bengal feel about learning and growing as professionals in their communities. So this study is about the lived experiences of teachers in West Bengal.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Sharma, A., & Angadi, G. (2025). Studied "Equitable and Inclusive Education through Continuous Professional Development of Teachers". The objective of the study was to explore how continuous professional development (CPD) enhances teachers' capacity to implement equitable and inclusive practices in Indian classrooms. Methodology used: Critical synthesis of 28 empirical and theoretical studies related to professional development and teacher preparation for inclusive education across India. The findings of the study indicate that CPD frameworks are associated with improved teacher preparedness, more inclusive policies, and greater access to technology-enhanced training.

Chaudhary, M., & Chaudhary, V. K. (2025). Studied "Teacher Preparedness and Professional Development for Inclusive Classrooms." *The objectives of the study were to examine global and Indian evidence on teacher preparedness, professional development, and barriers to inclusion; identify trends and policy implications.* Methodology used a systematic literature review of empirical research, policy documents, and theoretical contributions from the last decade. The findings of the study indicate that structured pre-service and in-service PD and collaborative practices are recommended.

Datta, R., & Mete, J. (2024). Studied "Inclusive education practices for fostering creativity in West Bengal." The objectives of the study were to explore inclusive education strategies in West Bengal that foster learner creativity and identify teacher and system-level enablers/barriers. Methodology used: Qualitative analysis of inclusive practice

implementations in West Bengal schools with literature backing. The findings of the study indicate that meaningful policy action, quality teacher training, infrastructure support, and community involvement are critical for inclusive practices; emphasis on Individualised Education Plans (IEPs) enhances creativity.

Roy, S. (2017). Studied "A study on the attitude of teacher educators for preparing teachers for inclusive education in West Bengal." The objectives of the study were to assess the attitudes of teacher educators towards preparing teachers for inclusive education in West Bengal. Methodology used: Descriptive analysis of teacher educators' perceptions and preparedness strategies in West Bengal colleges. The findings of the study indicate that Many teacher educators lack specific training or reflective practices necessary for preparing teachers for inclusive classrooms, indicating a need for more robust pre-service inclusive training.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- i. To explore the understanding of teachers and teacher educators about inclusive education;
- ii. To identify the challenges faced by teachers and teacher educators in the implementation of inclusive classrooms;
- iii. To explore the impact of teacher development on inclusive classrooms;
- iv. To analyse the impact of teacher empowerment on inclusive classrooms;
- v. To formulate recommendations based on the context.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- i. What is the understanding of teachers and teacher educators about inclusive education in West Bengal?
- ii. What are the challenges faced by teachers and teacher educators in the implementation of inclusive classrooms?
- iii. What impact does teacher development have on inclusive classrooms?
- iv. In what way does teacher empowerment impact inclusive classrooms?
- v. What strategies are adopted for the promotion of inclusive classrooms?

5. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A qualitative research design based on an interpretive philosophy of research was employed to study the lived experiences of the participants.

Sampling

The researcher used Purposive sampling of 25 participants:

- 18 school teachers from primary and secondary schools
- 7 teacher educators from B.Ed. institutions

The participants were from schools that were located in urban and semi-urban areas of West Bengal.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants, with the interviews lasting between 45 and 60 minutes. The questions were based on:

- ❖ Definition of inclusive education
- ❖ Experiences of teaching diverse learners
- ❖ Exposure to professional development
- ❖ Support and autonomy in the institution
- ❖ Strategies employed for inclusion

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted following the six-phase approach as recommended by Braun & Clarke (2006). Manual coding was used to ensure that the researcher was immersed in the data.

- **Trustworthiness:**
 - ✓ Member checking was conducted to ensure credibility.
 - ✓ Peer debriefing was conducted to ensure reliability.
 - ✓ Reflexive journaling was conducted to ensure researcher bias was eliminated.
- **Ethical Considerations:**
 - ✓ Participants gave consent to the research. Participants remained anonymous, and the research was conducted on a confidential basis.

6. FINDING OF THE STUDY

Thematic analysis produced five main themes and various sub-themes. The findings reveal the interrelationship between teacher empowerment and development and their systemic limitations. Each theme has both systemic and adaptive dimensions.

Theme 1: Evolving but Limited Conceptualisations of Inclusion

While participants' understanding of the terminology of inclusive education was sound, their conceptual understanding was limited.

1.1 Inclusion as Disability Integration

School teachers' understanding of inclusion is mostly centred on the inclusion of students with physical and intellectual disabilities. Diversity, which includes linguistic diversity, socio-economic disadvantage, gender, and first-generation students, is not as frequently mentioned.

"We think inclusion means admitting children with disabilities to normal classrooms. Other differences are part of regular teaching."

On the other hand, teacher educators' understanding of inclusion was broader and referred to diversity and equity.

1.2 Moral Commitment versus Pedagogical Preparedness

While participants were morally committed to the concept of inclusion, their pedagogical preparedness was low.

School teachers' responses included "We try our best" and "We adjust somehow" to indicate their commitment to inclusion.

It appears that the understanding of inclusion is more from a humanitarian point of view rather than a methodologically developed understanding.

Theme 2: Limitations of Structural and Institutional Factors

Structural factors played an important role in shaping inclusive implementation.

2.1 Large Class Sizes and Time Constraints

Teachers were required to teach 60-70 students in a class. Differentiated instruction is "practically impossible."

Time constraints to finish the syllabus meant that the teachers did not have time to concentrate on individual students.

2.2 Examination-Oriented Culture

Examinations administered by the board were a major concern for teachers. Success was defined in terms of results in board examinations.

"If we focus too much on individual adaptation, syllabus completion suffers."

2.3 Limited Support Infrastructure

Teachers in schools lacked:

- Special educators
- Resource rooms
- Assistive devices
- Counselling facilities

Teachers felt isolated in dealing with students who needed support.

Theme 3: Professional Development – Fragmented and Theoretical

Professional development activities have been described as fragmented and theoretical.

3.1 Workshops-Centric Model

The majority of the participants have been exposed to short-term workshops sponsored by the government. However, the workshops have been described as:

- Lecture-based
- One-time events
- Without practical demonstrations

What teachers wanted was mentoring in the classroom rather than theoretical sessions.

3.2 Lack of Follow-Up and Reflective Mechanisms

There was no monitoring and follow-up after the workshops. This was seen to be a hindrance.

3.3 Positive Experiences in Collaborative Settings

Some participants who have been exposed to peer discussion groups and mentoring have found this to be effective.

Theme 4: Teacher Empowerment – a Multi-Dimensional Concept

Empowerment was identified as a key mediator between policy and practice.

4.1 Autonomy in Pedagogical Adjustment

Teachers who had autonomy to adapt pedagogy or assessment approaches were more likely to implement inclusive approaches.

4.2 Involving in the Decision-Making process

Teachers who experienced and were involved in decision-making through committees or policy-making were more inclined to develop inclusive strategies.

4.3 Psychological Empowerment

Teachers reported a sense of empowerment when:

- They experienced recognition for their work
- The school administration was supportive of teachers
- Collaboration among teachers was encouraged

Empowerment was a very psychological construct.

Theme 5: Grassroots Strategies for Inclusion

Despite the limitations, teachers displayed adaptive strategies.

5.1 Peer Tutoring and Cooperative Learning

Teachers applied peer-assisted teaching strategies to help struggling learners without any kind of stigmatisation.

5.2 Contextual Teaching Aids

Low-cost teaching aids, visual aids, and the use of stories were employed to assist learners of different needs.

5.3 Parent Collaboration

Some teachers used informal communication with parents of children who needed support, thereby addressing the lack of formal counselling.

5.4 Informal Professional Networks

Teachers used WhatsApp groups to communicate and implement inclusive approaches in teaching.

7. DISCUSSION

The results provide insights into the intricate relationships between empowerment, professional development, and inclusive practice in West Bengal.

Conceptual Gaps and Teacher Preparation

Despite teachers' ideological support for inclusion, gaps in conceptual understanding undermine its practical application. This is consistent with previous studies that suggested that awareness of theoretical understanding does not necessarily lead to a transformation in practice (Sharma & Sokal, 2016). The disparity between teacher educators' conceptual understanding and teachers' understanding points to a potential deficiency in experiential approaches in teacher preparation.

Structural Barriers and Disconnect between Policy and Practice

The current study points to a significant disconnect between inclusive policy requirements and actual realities in schools. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act(2009) and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act

(2016), and other legislative guidelines, emphasise the importance of inclusive approaches in schools, but the lack of infrastructure acts as an obstacle to implementing inclusive approaches in schools.

The need to achieve through an examination system creates a dilemma for teachers, where they are required to choose between their ideological commitment and performance needs.

Professional Development: From Transmission to Transformation

Like Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), the study here provides evidence to support the following essential characteristics of professional development for effective implementation:

- Sustained over time
- Practice-based
- Collaborative
- Context-sensitive

The workshop approach does not bring about behavioural changes, but professional learning communities enable reflective practice and collaborative problem-solving.

Empowerment as a Psychological and Structural Agency.

There are two types of empowerments:

1. Psychological empowerment: professional identity and self-efficacy.
2. Structural empowerment: institutional involvement and decision-making authority.

Schools that had participatory leadership had an enabling environment for inclusive approaches. For schools with a rigid administrative hierarchy, teachers were reluctant to innovate. So, empowerment is the link between professional development and inclusive implementation.

Grassroots Innovation as a Compensatory Mechanism.

The adaptive strategies of teachers reflect their resilience but also point to the gaps in the system, where peer tutoring acts as a compensatory mechanism.

This is laudable, but it cannot replace the actual investment in the system.

Theoretical Contribution

This study contributes to the inclusive education literature by:

- Integrating empowerment theory with inclusive pedagogy.
- Focusing on a geographical area in West Bengal.
- Highlighting the mediating role of school leadership.

This study contributes to the qualitative literature in India by focusing on the voice of teachers.

8. CONCLUSION

This research also reinforces the idea that the development of inclusive education in West Bengal is not only a product of policy prescriptions but also a complex interplay between teacher empowerment and professional development. Teachers have a strong commitment to inclusive principles. However, the efficient implementation of inclusive education is hampered by the limitations placed on the educational

system, including huge class numbers, test pressure, inadequate infrastructure, and fragmented training. Only when professional development is contextual, ongoing, and collaborative will it be successful. It is not possible to be effective through one-off training sessions. Teacher empowerment is one of the key catalysts for inclusive education. If teachers are empowered, that is, they are given autonomy and trust by the management, inclusive education is possible. However, the hierarchical structure and examination pressures hinder inclusive education.

The research also suggests the following:

- Alignment between policy and infrastructural support.
- The need for a participatory school management style.
- The need for a long-term professional learning community.
- Teacher education reform with a focus on professional practice.

In general, systemic transformation is more important than merely following policy recommendations. In West Bengal, providing inclusive education depends on teacher empowerment.

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