Social Inclusion among Prospective Teachers at Secondary Level

Abstract submitted by

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Education is a process of human enlightenment and empowerment for the achievement of a better and higher quality of life. By recognizing the potentiality of education, every society has committed to the universalisation of education with an aim of providing 'Quality Education for All'. Inclusive teacher education is regarded as an approach to transform and reform the education system in order to meet the learning needs of all children as an effective strategy for achieving 'Education for All'. Providing quality education for all students in inclusive setting has been identified as the most challenging issues in education (Putnam, et al.1995; Ferguson, 1995). Though teachers are trying to attain this, there is a growing awareness that gender and cultural equity is not always achieved. To be ready for future, we must prepare teachers who can teach in settings that are inclusive, meeting the needs of all children. Inclusive education as an ideology has been defined as the acceptance of all pupils in the regular education system that is being taught within a common framework. In such a situation the teacher should perform multiple roles with varied competencies. This necessitates building competencies of regular teachers to deal with diverse population of students and learn pedagogical strategies that facilitate learning of all students in their classroom. Teaching pre-service teachers to anticipate and prepare for diverse populations of students in inclusive setting can be possible in many ways.

National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 called for a different model for teacher education in order to make teacher education setting more inclusive. This requires identifying the strategies for overcoming the barriers to full participation for individuals and groups which experience discrimination and marginalisation. Social inclusion is strengthened when hitherto uncovered and excluded population is brought into the mainstream of the social structure. In order to meet the requirements of NCF 2005, we must prepare teachers who are inclusive in their mental set up and who can meet the needs of all students. Preparing teachers at the pre-service level to teach in inclusive setting is essential if our schools are to truly teach all students in inclusive setting. In such a situation this study examines whether the prospective teachers are inclusive in their

mental set up. That means, 'do inclusion rather than exclusivity characterize the teachers of future?'

Objective

The objective of the study is to find out whether inclusiveness among future teachers is dependent on their community and economic status.

Method

Sample

The study was conducted on a representative sample of 214 future-teachers studying under University of Calicut, belonging to seven classroom groups who have nearly completed their B.Ed degree.

Tool and Technique

Sociometric technique was employed to probe the affiliations among classmates for each type of activity. The tool consisting of three questions dealing with three types of activities related to the domains viz., cognitive, affective and psychomotor. The students are asked to write the names of two classmates that they are selected for each activity mentioned in the question. Chi-square test was used to find out the interdependence of the variables.

Analysis

The collected data from the seven optional classroom groups were analyzed and student teachers' preference of selection of their classmates for each type of activity is graphically represented using sociogram. Its purpose is to discover group structures and the relation of any one person to the group as a whole.

a) Based on community

After preparing the sociograms for each classroom group, members in the core and periphery group were identified. On the basis of community, the samples were classified in to two groups viz., backward classes and others. Then, the numbers of members in the core and periphery group based on their community were counted. Finally, numbers of members in the core and periphery group in all the seven classroom groups were summed to obtain the members in the core and periphery group based on their community. The details are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of members in the core and periphery group based on their community

Category	Core group	Periphery group
Backward class	11	24
General class	89	90

The chi-square test of independence between inclusiveness and community of future teachers (3.92,p<.05) reveals that inclusiveness among future teachers and their community are dependent. Membership in the core of class is social class dependent. Prospective teachers' preference from among their peers, those who belongs to classes other than backward ones and the backward classes tend to belong to the periphery of even among a group of future teachers. Future teacher communities too tend be characterized by exclusivity than inclusiveness. The socially excluded category may have feelings of isolation and low self-esteem and are usually very cognizant of the fact that everyone else in the class is superior than they are.

b) Based on socio-economic status

On the basis of economic status, the sample were classified in to two groups viz., economically weaker sections and others. Sociograms were prepared for each classroom groups and count the number of members both in core and periphery group based on their economic status. The numbers of members in the core and periphery group in all the seven classroom groups were summed to obtain the members in the core and periphery group based on their community. The details are given in Table2.

Table 1. Number of members in the core and periphery group based on their economic status

Category	Core group	Periphery group
Economically weaker class	16	36
others	76	86

The chi-square test of independence between inclusiveness and economic status of future teachers (4.01,p<.05) suggests that inclusiveness among future teachers are dependent on the economic status. This implies that economically weaker sections are excluded from the core group. That is, the measurement of social inclusion is weighted towards economic factors.

Conclusion

Results show that, among the future teachers, socially and economically backward students tend to be excluded from the inner core of the classroom group. Social acceptance of the socially and economically backward members is weaker among prospective teachers. Teachers themselves have not learned to practice inclusive philosophy. Classrooms are a mix of genders and cultures, but not always equitable for all to learn. The teacher education program have taken steps to sensitize the future teachers and made them to feel comfortable while interacting with people outside their community and are able to see them as equal and socially inclusive members of society. The findings calls for a new curriculum model consisting of, co-operative learning, collaborative planning, multi-level teaching, group process skills and collaborative evaluation which helps teachers in developing and implementing education in more inclusive settings.

Cooperative learning provides a structured approach to help the prospective teachers get along and learn to collaborate with others on common goals. By incorporating the elements of interdependence, face-to-face interaction, individual accountability, social skills and group processing skills, teachers will foster a team-oriented culture which will ensure student success. With the right guidance, a teacher can motivate the future students to work as a team and to respect each other whenever it comes to offering ideas. In a highly interactive environment, the team members learn principles, make decisions and maintain a positive social environment. Collaborative planning provides opportunities for teachers to work together with the future teachers irrespective of their backwardness and inspire each one of them as an active member of that group. When we are using multi level teaching, the prospective teachers learn to work well in a group and they develop a strong relationship with their peers without considering their backwardness.

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