

PalArch's Journal of Archaeology
of Egypt / Egyptology

INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES: A CASE STUDY OF UK EDUCATION AND TEACHER TRAINING SYSTEM

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**Anjum Naz, Abida Nasreen, Tariq Hussain, Khansa Imam, Inclusive Educational
Practices: A Case Study of UK Education and Teacher Training System-Palarch's
Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 18(4), ISSN 1567-214x**

Abstract

The Inclusion and diversity are the talk of the town since last two decades, nearly every country had included it in its policy documents, but the singularities are easy to understand but challenging to implicate. Some countries are successful in achieving the purposes of inclusion although many barriers are still their while some other countries specifically the developing nations are struggling to implement the effective strategies although having both policy support and theoretical knowledge. The major aim of the study was to explore UK education systems' inclusive practices with the help of practitioners i.e. teachers in order to suggest feasible guidelines to promote inclusion and diverse practice which now has been clearly linked with the good teaching practices. The identification of key

barriers, implication of basic teaching principles, revision of teacher training practices, translation of policy concerns into practical discourse are some practical steps which would prove effective to establish inclusive bias free classroom environment where everyone could feel respected and included.

1. Introduction and Literature Review

The perception institute (2014) defined inclusive teaching and learning in terms of active engagement and inclusion of all students in the classroom. The inclusive teacher includes everyone and treats all in a same manner irrespective of their age, gender, regional orientation and ethnic background. The aim of inclusive teaching is providing the non-discriminative environment to all students and creates equal learning opportunities.

The idea behind the inclusive teaching is to bridge the gaps of disability and accommodate all students who have varying backgrounds, needs and abilities in a same educational setting (Adams, 2006). The major feature of inclusive environment is a sense of being valued; teachers respect everyone without any biases and prejudice (SENDA 2001). The creation of inclusive environment is not an easy task, it requires a motivated approach, vast knowledge of diversity, range of students focused skill, an ability to initiate collaboration to ménage and maintain inclusive classrooms and aptitude of support and care (Hargreaves and Fullan, 1992). The policy support, legal authentication, integration of all available resources and engagement of all stake holders i.e. parents, schools' managers and community larders are required to design and implement inclusive plans in the schoolsfor the benefit of children.

The general practice of teachers and school administrators is not enough rather they need to arrange specialized arrangements to execute inclusive plans (Gibson, 2015) to accommodate both individual differences and learning disabilities.

The educational researcher has given a special attention to the topic of inclusive education in last two decades and had provide

empirical evidences of inclusive practices e.g. an improved critical thinking skills, tolerance and inculcation of empathy among students (Deci1991; Keiler, 2018). The educational experts in the field of inclusive education had recommended child focused teaching strategies e.g. cooperative learning, peer tutoring, differentiated instruction and activity based individualized instructions to make the teaching more inclusive.

The teachers' overall attitude, motivation, openness and aptitude to care are important considerable factors which could only be ensured by making some necessary changes in teacher training programs and curriculum (Banaji and Greenwald 2013).

The conduction of an inclusive lesson is a challenging task as teachers need to set aside all possible biases and invite all to participate by providing equitable opportunities and facilities (Warren, 2002). The personal background of teachers can influence them therefore during the teacher training, it is necessary to provide them an opportunity to observe expert teachers to learn how to be neutral and accommodate individual differences.

Steele (2010) enlisted the qualities of the inclusive teacher i.e. critical thinking ability, inclusive interactions, courage to raise questions and ethical conduct. An inclusive teacher promotes mutual respect, initiate interactions and share clear guidelines of conduct to follow democracy in the classroom. Teachers promote an impartiality and justice.

An inclusive lesson is analyzed by Warren (2002) who identified that openness is the key element, he further commented that during inclusive lesson all possible biases are dealt with wisdom and accommodated intelligentially. An open interactive environment and participation of all are visible effect of an inclusive lesson (Lancaster, 2014). Another very prominent feature of inclusive lesson is acceptance i.e. teacher allow to make mistakes and teach students to take a responsibility of the situation and contribute to correct them.

The challenges of inclusive environment are many but maintenance of openness is biggest as teacher need to ask a directive questions, both close ended and open ended to clarify the concept understudy but by only maintain neutral attitude (Livingston, 2014).

The teacher training program and teacher trainers' attitude and commitment are necessary to inculcate inclusive behavior in the prospective teachers. The provision of continuous assistance and role modeling are best approaches to train teachers (Gibson, 2015). Further provision of rationalized knowledge and procedures of inclusive education are the responsibilities of teacher training institutes. The teacher training institutes can promote the inclusive practices by training a teacher to use blended approaches and demonstrating a skill to accommodate learning disabilities and differences effectively (Keiler, 2018).

Hockings (2010) discussed that role of teacher training institutes can be enhanced by facilitating them with updated training practices e.g. promotion of team teaching, rationalization of individualized instruction and promotion of integrated approaches and bounties of this would be clear understanding and recognition of inabilities and disabilities which consequently improve both skill and attitude of teachers necessary for creating inclusive classroom.

The learning of students is directly dependent on the teaching strategy of the teachers although there are many other factors e.g. intellect, students' background and potential. The ability of teachers to use collaborative approaches, team teaching and interactive technology had a visible impact on the learning of the students (Massey, 2013), and help them to understand and accommodate diversity and differences with open heart (Lin and Scherz, 2014).

Another important responsibility of the teacher is to motivate the students to understand their needs and needs of their classmates, which would enable them to support each other. Reay, David and Ball (2005) had argued that motivated attitude of the students is the outcome of effective strategies of the teacher. Woolfolk (2013)

elaborated that the selection of resources, activities planned, opportunities provided and largely the attitude of the teachers determine the extent of inclusion in the classroom. The teachers' enthusiasm can stimulate the student's motivation of equitable participation and consequentially improve their learning too.

The nature, potential, attitude and background of the learners is different in every classroom, some learners can be motivated easily while for some other teachers need to invest more energy and effort (Bartolo, 2010), an effective teacher utilize all his knowledge and skill to manage the diversity and maintain the interest of learners in the lesson. The use of multimedia, technology blended teaching methodologies and potential of students can make the lesson both interesting and engaging (Cummins, 1986). The natural, impulsive and predisposition of a teacher has been recognized as a contributing factor to enhance student's motivation (Schon, 2002) and participation.

Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995), argued that it is a challenge to engage all learners consistently. However, a teacher can give a due recognition to the factor of interest and use innovative problem solving and inquisitive approach to enhance the curiosity of the learners.

1.1.Challenges of inclusive education for developing countries:

The one key barrier is lack of commitment and availability of effective leadership support. The engagement of national and local community is necessary who can provide necessary support to the parents of disadvantaged children who in turn help their children and teachers (OECD, 2012). The commitment and guided training of teachers also be helpful to remove the barriers.

Another key barrier is finance. The UNESCO (2009) recommends that a country should spend 6% of their GNP on education to provide adequate resources and infrastructure to schools and teachers. While additional funding is also needed to achieve the quality indicators of inclusive education.

The legislative support and policies documentation are not enough for the ensuring the inclusion of students because the policies and collaborative directions are not translated into actual classroom practices.

In Pakistan and other developing countries, there are special schools present for disabled children, which are segregation, and sometimes if special students are sent into mainstream units they are kept separate which is also segregation. The support for the special children is not enough to include them in a mainstream which leads to integration i.e. needs of the children are not fulfilled. The main reasons are underfunding, competition in schools, and pressure of exams result (Kleitman, Gibson, 2011).

The lack of training and awareness of teachers is another major cause of non-inclusive environment in developing countries; the teachers are trained for fulfilling 'special educational needs' in a separate institute known as special education departments. Another heart-breaking fact is that inclusive pedagogy is defined against economic and social reproduction establishments, and provides a sweeping trial to the discriminatory, exclusionary and classified position of academic process.

2. Objectives of The Study:

The main aims of the study are to investigate the strategies used in UK schools to promote the inclusive education and accommodate diversity. The main questions addressed were:

1. How UK education system is endorsing inclusive education?
2. What strategies are being used so far to accommodate diverse cultural background of the students and promote inclusion?

3. How teachers are being trained to achieve the objective of 'inclusive education' in UK schools.

It is a very obvious fact that the potential of schools of developing countries and economic conditions are not comparable to the UK but there are many lessons which can be learned and strategies which can be adapted without spending a penny which could be a baby step and an origination of the inclusive environment in schools. For this very purpose another significant aim of the study was to investigate some guidelines which could feasibly be adapted and implemented in schools of developing countries.

3. Research Methodology:

The research is qualitative in nature and phenomenological design was followed. The researcher used original statements of the participants to explore the actual experience of teachers and teacher educators to illuminate the phenomena of inclusive education. The literature support was used to explore the indicators of inclusive education and loosely structured interview protocol was developed based on well recognized indicators of inclusive education to explore the current scenario of UK schools. Further some open-ended questions were asked to find the special strategies used to sensitize the teachers to follow the inclusive practices. The teachers were asked to enlist and suggest feasible strategies which could be implemented effortlessly in schools of developing countries, which are lagging behind or failed to implement inclusive practices in their schools.

The accessible population of the study was the school teachers who have Qualified Teacher Standard (QTS) status and have a five-year experience of teaching in schools of England. Researcher contacted head teachers of secondary schools of London via email and requested to nominate the teachers who could willingly participate in the study. The informed consent was taken and researcher got positive response and contact details of volunteers from the 34 head teachers.

This study was conducted in April 2020 when London was under first lockdown restrictions, therefore researcher decided to use the zoom video calling app to conduct virtual face to face interviews with teachers. Zoom link was shared with the participants after setting the agreed date and time of interview. The average time spent on each interview was 45 minutes approximately, 30 minutes were allocated to ask questions about inclusive indicators and their teacher training perspective, in last 15 minutes researcher initiated the discussion about the feasibility of inclusive practices in specific reference of developing countries and recorded the responses of the participant, which were later transcribed, coded and consolidated using thematic analysis.

4. Research Findings and Discussion:

The findings of the research studies are organized in three sections, each one is addressing the research objectives separately. The discussion and literature support are included to build and support the arguments and conclusions.

4.1. UK Teacher Training System and Inclusion

The data was collected from different materials i.e. official documents, observation notes and interviews. Alexiadou & Essex (2015) stated that achieving inclusion in teacher education depends upon the teaching pedagogies. UK education system aimed to prepare teachers who can deal with diversity of students and promote inclusive practice (Menter et.al., 2010). The UK government since 2010 had considered simplistic ideas of teacher education (White Paper “The Importance of Teaching”, 2010), and deliberated to pursuing effective practice for teacher education (Beach & Bagley, 2013). The competences of the teachers had included a range of policy paradigms, not all of which are conducive to an inclusive, socially just education (Gerrard & Farrell, 2014).

The teacher education ‘*The Inclusive Practice Project*’ supported by the Scottish government i.e. connecting the structural features of teacher education to issues of social justice and educational equality’ is a good example, and hence develop teacher education courses that articulate an ‘inclusive pedagogy’ (Florian et.al., 2010:712; Rouse & Florian, 2012)

In UK, inclusion is an expectation in teacher education, although sometimes teachers specifically new teachers find it very difficult to understand inclusion (DeLuca, 2012; O’Neill et.al. 2009; Sosuet.al. 2010). The concept of ‘inclusion’ is one of the supplest signifiers of the last two decades UNESCO (2009). UK and EU had initiated a campaign to combat ‘exclusion’ because of their liberal philosophical orientation, which signifies that the disadvantaged group plight can be improved by uplifting the educational equitable standards (Alexiadou, 2002).

Kyriacou, et.al. (2013) suggest that the inclusion in a school could enable young people to break the social and emotional barriers of the society. The teacher educators need to adopt the pedagogy which can address individual differences and empower learners through transformative learning (Sharon & Vaughn, 2015)

Teacher education experts need to examine their practices to engage learners in all their cultural, lingual and ethnic diversity (Allan, 2010; Cochran-Smith, 2004). This task is not easy for teacher education, but teacher education system of UK is changing to cope with the challenges of inclusion and diversity (Shain, 2013).

The teacher training in UK is having two contexts; one is University-led while the other is school led. Teacher need to achieve a Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), for the purpose prospective teachers follow a postgraduate course in education or they may follow a contemporary route i.e. completing a Bachelor with an inbuilt QTS

course, which is one-year program provides a foundation knowledge and initial teacher training.

The teacher training program has both academic and vocational element and have a close link with partner schools to achieve the major aims of the course i.e. development of knowledge, skills and reflective practice of prospective teachers. It is mandatory for the learners to spend 120 days in schools, attend workshops, lectures, and demonstration and discussion sessions in universities.

The teacher training course was unequivocally designed around the ideas of 'inclusion' and 'diversity' in 2012; wider aspects of inclusion and diversity were included in curriculum (van Bruggen, 2010:54). Another provision of meeting the thirty-three (33) National Standards was also introduced one of which is exclusively related to diversity, inclusive practice and equality. The teacher trainers efficiently responded and initiated 'best sharing practice' in which teacher educators conducted sessions, produced posters, conducted researches and hosted presentations from the teachers of local schools. Interactive resources were developed along with traditional teaching practices.

The teacher education system and teacher trainers took the responsibility to cope with the challenges of diversity in local schools and made it national priority (Alexiadou, 2001). The school established 'Inclusion Unit' for addressing the learning difficulties of the students. The participants of the study explained the role of Inclusion unit and stated *'that it is specifically designed to help and support students stress and problems including anger.'*

The notion of good teaching is now being linked with inclusive teaching i.e. respecting all individual differences, following democracy and providing equitable opportunities to all.

Teacher trainers promotes gradual independence or prospective teachers from tutors by providing them an opportunity to apply

knowledge in diverse situations and emphasized on basic principles of good teaching i.e. demonstration of knowledge effectively in multiple ways e.g. audio, visual and written formats, repetitions and reviewing frequently, use of effective communications skills and recurrent praise even on small achievements. One participant who was a special education teacher (case # 19) said, *'if teaching strategy and style is fair for SEN children that would definitely be fair enough for all learners.*

4.2.UK Education System Strategies to Accommodate Diversity

The recorded zoom video meetings were recorded and later transcribed. The key terms identification leads researcher to consolidate themes around quality indicators of inclusive education strategies used in UK schools to promote inclusive practices quoted by the experts regarding following areas i.e. curriculum, classroom communication, learning environment, community engagement, learning materials and child care practices.

4.2.1 Curriculum

The curriculum developing agencies and teachers considered three major things children's interests, make it relevant to local culture and cognitive level of students (Raffo & Gunter, 2008). The participants of the study confirmed that curriculum is focusing on child interest and appropriate for their cognitive development (Case # 3, 7, 9, 15, 19)but some elements of local culture are missing which is being left on the teacher skills, who is responsible to communicate it in keeping in view contextual element (case # 5 & 11).

4.2.2. Classroom Communication:

The use of mother tongue and friendly environment is important for early years (Shapiro, 2000). All participants strongly agreed and confirmed that the significance of medium of instruction is massive and followed in UK education system, English for native

speakers is proving good but sometimes a problem for the children of emigrant specifically those immigrants who migrated at their teens or later. The schools are providing friendly environment to children especially at primary level (case # 1, 2, 9, 10, 13, 17).

4.2.3. Learning Environment

An important factor of inclusive education is classroom environment, which should have to be bias free, safe and inclusive in its every aspect (Thomson, Hall & Jones, 2010). The infrastructure such as furniture design, durability and access should be equally managed. The availability of basic facility such as sanitation, water and food are also important part of classroom environment. The participants agreed that the schools in UK are having all basic facilities which are customized keeping in view the cultural and physical diversity. One teacher illustrated *'in my school, the sanitation, food and water facility are customized and multi-faith room is accommodating all religions collectively'*. (Case # 6)

4.2.4. Child Care and Wellbeing

The networking with community services e.g. counselors, general physicians and special education services departments is recommended to ensure the wellbeing of the children (Lorman, Forlin & Sharma, 2014), the participants of the study quoted the names of the departments e.g. NHS, Local Council, Child counsellors service department, who are working with a school for the well-being of the children. One teacher explained the role of partner agencies and stated *'National Children Bureau supports us to implement whole school approach to improve the mental health and wellbeing by conducting awareness sessions and equipping us with relevant resources'* (case # 4).

The recognition of signs and symptoms of disability is a responsibility of parents, school and community. The early diagnose

and availability of appropriate recovery therapies could be beneficial for student therefore, schools in UK are giving extra attention and are using effective strategies and resources to diagnose the disability at early stage(HCEC (House of Commons Education Committee, 2012).

4.2.5. Community Engagement

The schools or teacher cannot work in isolation without community support. The motivated parents and community can play a key role to ensure all children in school and to address key barriers to learning and participation. The school can sensitize both parents and community by conducting awareness sessions (Hallam, Ireson, 2007).

One participant teacher (case # 3) described the family engagement in UK schools and explained i.e. *'family's impact on children's engagement has been recognized, schools are able to engage parents and community groups to raise the academic standards and to narrow the gap between children belongs to different social classes e.g. poor, middle class and rich'*.

Another participant (case # 2) enlisted the benefits of the community engagement and stated *'parents engagement makes the challenging tasks such as transitions easy, as they can encourage and motivate their children effectively, a positive relationship with school, child and parents/ careers leads to improvements in the behavior of a child specifically in those situations when parents time and skill could compliment the teacher's skills'*.

The effective engagement of parents and community will enhance the school's standards and reputation in the community.

4.2.6. Learning Materials

The free access to variable format curriculum is significant to ensure participation, the schools in UK, provides a free access to the

learning resources. All participants teachers confirmed that their schools are providing all worksheets and books to the students. The learning material is available on the google classrooms, at Teams and Google Meets etc. teachers are used to send the material via email too. Moodle and Cloud pages are used to personalize the materials class wise.

4.2.7. Teachers

The role of teachers in planning, creating and monitoring the classroom environment is massive. The participant teachers enlisted the following roles which they are playing to make their classes more inclusive; (a) planning lesson keeping in view both abilities and capacities of their students, (b) using a variety of methodologies to accommodate individual differences. (c) Using differentiated instructional techniques, (d) illustrating in a contextual scenario and (e) using a multiple technologies, audio, video, images and simulations.

4.3. UK Educational Practical Strategies for Promoting Inclusion in the classroom

In teaching sessions being inclusive means, respecting the diversity of students, enabling them to participate and ensuring that diverse needs of the learner are fulfilled and barriers of learning must be removed. There is no room for discrimination against students directly or indirectly. The age, race, gender, religion, regional background and disability are possible areas of discrimination. Feasible strategies recommended and used in UK to make classroom inclusive are as follows:

4.3.1. Strategies to follow before first teaching session:

It is important to get knowledge about students and their special needs. Plan some adjustments if necessary. Familiarize yourself with

available resources and facilities and set ground rules, share with students and ask for suggestions after explaining the benefits of inclusive environment e.g. group discussion would be beneficial to build critical thinking. The teaching materials preparation is another challenge, it is good to plan ahead and ensure that all teaching materials is available to students in the form of handouts, course books or power point presentations. Some guidelines for making teaching materials inclusive are; use of legible fonts, high contrast text and background colors. The teachers own biases are another important consideration; therefore, teachers should be able to be neutral with class. The practical issues e.g. visual impairment and wheelchairs considerations should be known to teachers before first session (case # 5, 7, 11, 14, and 17).

4.3.2. Presentation of content:

The use of interactive ways, objects, images and videos could be more engaging and accessible for students. The student's encouragement would increase their engagement. The diversity of teaching techniques e.g. group work, peer learning and discussions and assessment techniques e.g. written test, verbal explanation and students' presentations could be used to ensure participation of every student (case # 1, 4, 5, 9, 12, 16, 18, 20).

4.3.3. Monitoring Progress:

The monitoring of progress is important element to observe the extent of success. The attendance trend, student's participation rate and learning progress are some indicators of inclusive teaching environment. The student's feedback and their opinions could be another source of information for teachers which can be effectively use to monitor progress.

5. Conclusion: *Lessons for Developing Nations*

The empirical evidences, discussions with the teachers and overview of the teacher training system of UK disclosed a reality that teacher education is a key factor in promoting inclusive practices within education system at all levels. The inclusive pedagogies can be learnt and effectively implemented (Smyth et.al. 2008:81).

It is true financial support is needed but the academic process revision, inculcation of inclusive pedagogies and change of attitude are most important factors (EADSNE, 2010). The teacher training content if revised intellectually to demonstrate practical implication and case studies it would enable teachers to plan differentiated instructional material. All participants of the study confirmed that their teacher training enables them to develop resources and plan individualized instructions to address the diversity in the classroom.

The conversation about inclusion is not enough only the practical implication of effective practices can break the learning barriers. Teacher trainers' need to change the practice and increase the practical aspects of training, promote reflective practices and invite prospective teachers to design differentiated and individualized instruction under their guidance and include diverse practices in every training session to demonstrate practicability of the concept effectively.

The main advice for the struggling nations e.g. developing countries is to support transformative culture and move forward from the abstract level by translating theories into practice in their local context. Build up communities of experts and learners who can conduct researches to explore local scenario and suggest ways to initiate inclusive practice. The locally suitable and culturally sensitive practices can lead to the construction of implacable inclusive practices (Cochran-Smith, 2004: 46).

6. Recommendations

In nut shell, the sensitivity about age, gender, and other discriminating elements is needed. Therefore, awareness about diversity and responsiveness to students' diverse needs, student focused teaching skill and motivation to meet the needs of students is recommended which could initiate and maintain inclusive environment in the classroom.

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