Development and Prototype of the Training Module for Preparing Elementary School Teachers for Inclusive Education in Pakistan

1.	**Syeda Beenish Batool**	(Corresponding Author) Lecturer in Special Education, University of Education, Lahore, Pakistan
2.	**Shaista Syeda**	Assistant Professor, University of Education, Lahore, Pakistan
3.	**Nida Gul**	PhD Scholar, University of Management Technology, Lahore, Pakistan

Abstract

In Pakistan, children with disabilities are systematically excluded. Despite the government's best efforts, the majority of the youth (95%) do not have access to education, and only 5% attend schools. This massive gap implies that current schooling, which is based on a separated mentality and the charity model, is essentially incapable of bringing out-of-school children back to school. Furthermore, these children make up a third of the 20 million children who are not in school. It appears that national and international obligations will not be met until these youngsters are integrated into society. Internationally, the right-based approach is a feasible answer, and it is now gaining ground in Pakistan. Inclusion of the learners with disabilities requires trained professionals along with other supports. There is a need for an exhaustive study on preparation of a training module for teachers in order to prepare them to teach and include children with special needs in mainstream settings. The study was aimed at developing a training module for in-service teachers for catering children with disabilities in regular classrooms followed by the validation of the training module for in-service teachers to include the learners with disabilities in mainstream settings. The module was developed to improve the efficacy and capacity of elementary school teachers for including the learners with disabilities in regular classrooms. Classification of the training needs was made on the basis of the domains: knowledge, pedagogical principles (differentiated curriculum, diverse instructional techniques, multiple learning materials and resources and adapted assessment practices), student management, behavior modifications of the learners and community collaboration. It was concluded that the success of inclusion depends on professional development and appropriate training. Regular assistance is also necessary to maintain inclusive educational approaches in regular schools at primary level.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, In-service Teachers, In-service training, Prototype, Training Module

Introduction

Teachers find themselves deficient and inadequately prepared to deal with diversity and even don't change their teaching styles when the classroom becomes diverse (Mansikka & Holm, 2011). According to Mansikka and Holm (2011), teachers use the transmission approach of teaching rather than focusing on a pluralistic and inclusive practice. Teachers require training and a framework for a responsive teaching to facilitate the teaching learning process for diverse learners (Gay, 2010). According to several findings, teacher training for inclusion is important. Winzer and Mazurek (2011) implies that the general classroom teacher has a significant impact on the achievement of inclusive education. Fayez et,. al (2011) suggest that teachers have a limited awareness of practical skills related to inclusion.

Teachers training programs can play a significant role for preparing teachers to cater the needs of the learners with diversity. In this regard, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NACTE) can play a significant role by recommending institutions to incorporate courses related to the needs and pedagogical practices of diverse classrooms. It may equip teachers to come across the challenges of dealing with diversity in mainstream classrooms. Teachers and instructors are not trained enough to cope with diversity in the classroom. They emphasized the need for courses

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relevant to diversity in the training programmes. Due to lack of training, they face difficulties while working with diverse learners in school (Blanco & Jorrin, 2014).

Inclusive education is supported by the national and international declarations as a right based education. Pakistan has ratified SDGs and there are few inclusive schools which are not sufficient to cater the academic requirements of the children with special needs. It can only be possible if teachers are trained adequately to adopt the pedagogy and learning methods in the regular classrooms. Some institutions are working with regard to inclusive education in Pakistan. But still, it is a long way to go. Pakistan is the second largest country of having out of school children (Mughal, 2020).

Teachers in mainstream classes must be aware of the range of modern classrooms and be able to adapt their teaching techniques to the variety of learning styles in regular classrooms (Gargiulo et,. al, 2017). In order to accommodate students with impairments and learning issues, teachers must adapt or modify the substance of their classes, their methods of teaching, and classroom environment. Teachers come across more stress while dealing with diversity.

Previous studies have indicated that elementary school teachers had little experience, expertise, and discernment regarding different learning abilities (Lingeswaran, 2013; Shari & Vranda, 2016; Ghimire, 2017). Time, huge classes, and a lack of professional training focused on inclusive education are among the issues that impede the successful implementation of inclusive education (Materechera, 2020).

A systematic literature review on self-efficacy of teachers in inclusive settings in Indonesia and other developing Asian countries discovered a link between teaching efficacy and attitudes of teachers toward inclusive education, with prior training providing valuable assets in improving both aspects and ensuring the implementation of inclusion (Kristiana & Hendriani, 2018). Teachers training programs improve the efficacy of teachers for teaching students with special needs (Corona et,. al 2017).

Without prior preparation from the teachers, tackling inclusive classrooms is difficult. It is critical to use inclusive pedagogy and to continue to learn. All teachers should be able to utilize good pedagogical approaches with all pupils (Palomino, 2017). The preparation given to teachers is insufficient to teach in an inclusive classroom. As a result, teacher education programmes should include an inclusive education aspect in their curricula (Uzair ul Hassan et,. al, 2015).

Teachers lack proper knowledge of learning difficulties and do not know what to do when they are confronted with such issues. Since they didn't have any learning disability courses during their course of their career. Governments and institutes should arrange extensive training sessions or formal instructor programmes that cover some of these characteristics, such as diagnosing and recognizing students with learning problems (Alahmadi & El Keshky, 2019).

There are no in-service training programmes for teacher educators to teach about inclusive education. Teachers continue to be significantly biased toward understanding inclusive education theory without having the opportunity to practice and acquire confidence with the teaching strategies required to accommodate different learners. It is recommended that the continuous in-service training courses for teachers in inclusive education should be expanded. Thus, teacher preparation at the pre-service level and ongoing development at the in-service level are critical concerns (Bansal, 2016).

In a recent report, Sharma et,. al (2013) explored multiple issues related to teacher education and inclusion in Pakistan. As a result of the lack of clear policy guidelines or regulations at the national level for the systematic adjustment of teacher training programmes, inclusion is simply emerging in the region. In order to adapt inclusive education practices, there is a huge disparity between provinces, urban and rural populations in terms of offering pedagogical practices and appropriate opportunities of professional development. There is no formal teacher education programme in the country that expressly advocates for the inclusion of disabled children.

Significance of the Study

The study is beneficial for the in-service teachers working in mainstream settings to get a comprehensive training module to make inclusion of learners with special needs in the mainstream classroom. Moreover, children with disabilities will get an equitable education in a regular classroom. Findings of the study may help to widen the vision of the stakeholders of the teachers' training institutions and board of studies in developing and designing the programs for prospective teachers. It may facilitate them to put emphasis not only on providing quality education but also the production of prospective teachers according to current trends and demands.

Objectives of the Study

Following are the objectives of the study:

1.   To develop a training module for in-service teachers to accommodate children with disabilities in regular classrooms.
2.   To validate the effectiveness of the training module through prototype.

Methodology

The study was aimed at developing a training module for in-service school teachers for the inclusion of the learners with disabilities. A training module was developed and the following steps were taken:

Training Need Assessment

The module was developed by taking into account the findings of the previous studies and results collected through surveys in the first part of the research. The survey helped the researcher to identify the areas or gaps where the training is required. The areas identified were classroom management, students' engagement, instructional strategies, assessment practices, and collaboration for the inclusion of the learners with disabilities. The module was developed to improve the efficacy and capacity of elementary school teachers for including the learners with disabilities in regular classrooms.

Classification of the Training Needs

Classification of the training needs was made on the basis of the following domains: knowledge, pedagogical principles (differentiated curriculum, diverse instructional techniques, multiple learning materials and resources and adapted assessment practices), student management, behavior modifications of the learners and community collaboration.

Development of the Training Module

The purpose of the module was to provide a foundation for training on inclusive education that is grounded in a human rights-based approach. Teachers are the most important change agents and essential for social inclusion and promotion of participation and learning for all children.

The module was designed to be adaptable to different training settings, at different points in time of a teacher's professional career. The contents and activities were flexible enough to adjust the modules to be used with teacher students, during the inception phase, for continuing professional development, and for the education of teacher educators or mentors. To meet the needs of different participants, a number of different methodologies are used, including group work, role plays, photo activities, and discussions. The content and activities in the training module are adapted from a number of sources, listed in the references section of the module.

Validation of the Module

The validation of the proposed module was made by four experts in the field. The experts were selected who have the vast experience of research in the field of special education and inclusive education. They were the representative of academia and have carried out studies in the field of special education and inclusive education.

Prototype of the Module

In the final step, the field validation of the training module was made by testing the prototype. A school was selected and the teachers of the school were selected to provide the training according to the training module and through field validation, the module was tested. The prototype of the training module was conducted in a public sector school, situated in a village in Tehsil Bhalwal, district Sargodha. The school was selected from the rural area of Punjab because the teachers who belong to remote areas seek less opportunities of any sort of training as compared to the teachers who work in schools in the urban areas. Furthermore, a considerable percentage of children with disabilities live in the rural areas of Pakistan where they experience exclusion due to lack of awareness among teachers, and parents. Moreover, schools in rural areas are less resourceful as far as infrastructure and facilities are concerned. Additionally, the principal and teaching staff of the respective school were willing to extend their full cooperation for the completion of the researcher's task when the objectives of the study were communicated to them.

Fortunately, permission to conduct a prototype for training of the elementary school teachers was granted by the principal. The principal arranged a staff meeting with the researcher and the purpose of conducting the training sessions was conveyed to all eleven participants. Moreover, their concerns regarding training were also addressed to their satisfaction. They were ensured about the anonymity of the participants and confidentiality of their feedback. They were also ensured that their

identity will not be disclosed. All participants / teachers provided the written consent to the researcher to conduct the prototype or field validation of the training module. The purpose of developing the module for teachers was to provide them with basic training on inclusive education. Teachers are deemed to be the most important change agents and their role is extremely important for social inclusion and ensuring promotion of participation and learning for all children with and without disabilities. The training module on inclusive education was provided to all attendees and was referred to throughout the training sessions. To address the needs of different participants, a variety of methodologies were used during the training sessions, including group work, role play, activities, and discussions. The training session allowed participants time for inquiry and offered attendees the opportunities to interact with one another during the activities. The module was divided into twelve training sessions. Each session comprised handouts, PowerPoint presentations, a number of activities with specific learning objectives, attendance sheets and feedback forms.

A schedule to conduct training sessions was proposed after mutual understanding and collaboration of principal, and researcher. Participants were divided into two groups and each group was accommodated keeping in view the available time slots without affecting their time timetable and other school activities.

Twelve sessions were conducted by the researcher and training was conducted for six days a week (Monday to Saturday). The duration of each session was two hours. A feedback form was developed and after completion of each session, feedback forms were distributed among the participants and collected by the researcher. Questions, followed by discussion were answered and welcomed at any point during the sessions.

Table

Training Module Program

Weeks	Units	Segments
1	Friday: Unit 1 Inclusion of the Learners with Disabilities	Definitions of the important terms, defining disabilities, disability awareness, models of disabilities,
	Saturday: Unit 1 Inclusion of the Learners with Disabilities	Children with special needs, child as a problem / system as a problem, categories of disabilities by IDEA, Inclusive education, national and international regulations on IE, barriers of IE
2	Monday: Unit 2 Instructional Strategies	Using efficient teaching strategies, teaching children who have special needs, Cooperative learning,
	Tuesday: Unit 2 Instructional Strategies	inclusive curriculum and learning material, UDL, response to intervention, IEP
	Wednesday: Unit 3 Classroom Management	Classroom management strategies, learners centered approach, acceptable language about disability, encouraging learners
	Thursday: Unit 3 Classroom Management	Teaching and management strategies for learners with special needs, Positive discipline
	Friday: Unit 3 Classroom Management	Have a proper classroom setting and make your classroom accessible
	Saturday: Unit 4 students' engagement	Emotional engagement, active and participatory learning
3	Monday: Unit 4 students' engagement	Making science, mathematics, and language meaningful for all, managing an active and inclusive classroom
	Tuesday: Unit 5 Alternative assessment practices	Portfolio/ sample of students work, rubrics, checklists and rating scales
	Wednesday: Unit 5 Alternative assessment practices	Task analysis, grading adaptations
	Thursday: Unit 6 Collaboration	Professional collaboration, developing relationship with parents and community

A feedback form was used to explore the impact of the training module at the end of the session. Eleven teachers submitted the feedback forms. The feedback form constituted both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Every participant read eleven closed-ended questions and rated their answers on a Likert-type scale from one to four (1 = strongly disagree, to 4 = strongly agree).
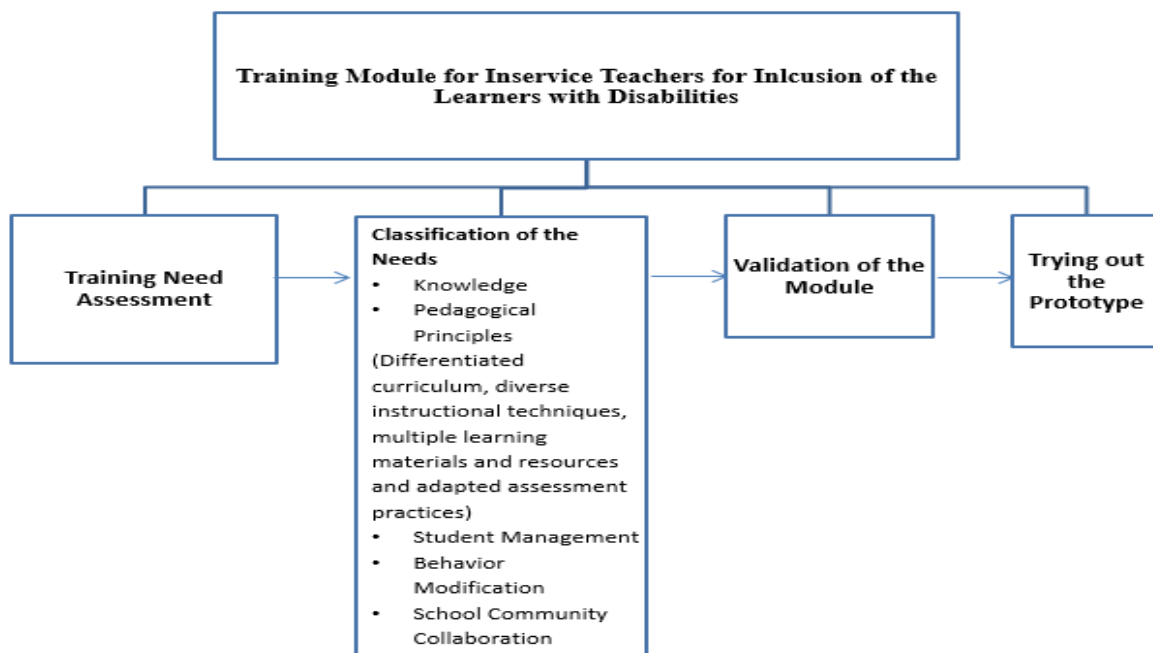
Module framework is as follows:

Figure: Module Framework

Results of the Prototype

The training module on inclusive education was provided to all attendees and was referred to throughout the training sessions. To address the needs of different participants, a variety of methodologies were used during the training sessions, including group work, role play, activities, and discussions. Each session comprised handouts, PowerPoint presentations, a number of activities with specific learning objectives, attendance sheets and feedback forms.

A feedback form was developed and after completion of each session, feedback forms were distributed among the participants and collected by the researcher. Questions, followed by discussion were answered and welcomed at any point during the sessions.

After the end of training, a feedback form was used to explore the impact of the training module. There were eleven teachers who completed the feedback forms. The feedback form consisted of closed- ended and open-ended questions. Every participant read eleven closed-ended questions and rated their answers on a Likert-type scale from one to four (1 = strongly disagree, to 4 = strongly agree).

The participants were of the view that training sessions were very effective and the information was imparted quite effectively. It enhanced their understanding and they ended up with proficiency of necessary skills required to promote inclusion in regular classrooms. One of the participants stated that:

"There was not anything which I could say was least useful during sessions, I had a lot of opportunities to learn during the training sessions."

Another participant said*: "Learnt different things regarding disability and the inclusion of the children with disabilities in mainstream settings after accommodating their needs."*

The participants found the training session informative. All the activities in the module aroused their interest and promoted interaction to identify the problems, and suggest solutions to the expected challenges of inclusive classrooms. All the participants appreciated that the techniques and methods introduced to teach in inclusive classrooms were practical in nature and can be implemented and made use of with limited resources keeping in view the available staff and infrastructure one of the participants reported:

"I found everything useful and practical looking forward to implementing these ideas."

Another one claimed: *"Being a teacher the instructional strategies like UDL, RTI discussed in the sessions will be very helpful for me in the classroom".*

They further added that there were ample opportunities for interaction with one another during training sessions which provide them the opportunity to learn with the experiences and

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reflections of one another. The participants found training sessions interactive and engaging. They exchanged their experiences and shared their reflection regarding inclusion and found it interesting, informative, beneficial. It was a great learning opportunity for them and they agreed that these training sessions may be made a regular part of their academic and professional life to keep them updated and resourceful. One of the participants shared her views:

"The trainer was very interactive and we learned new concepts and it was very valuable, productive, and fruitful to attend the training."

Another one stated that*: "All the topics were covered in an engaging manner."*

The participants were fully aware of the learning objectives of the training module in general and sessions in particular. They demonstrated keen interest in the activities and were deeply involved in accomplishing the objectives and goals of the training module. All the participants found the language simple and delivery of each session effective. It was useful and easy to understand with simple vocabulary. All the instructions were clearly conveyed and all the participants were aware of the purpose of the training. Instructions were conveyed verbally using both channels i.e. Oral and written. One of the participants expressed her views:

"Each day of the training was replete with the treasure of knowledge and information."

The required time for each activity/session was conveyed earlier and each session was completed in the given time. Time slots were given importance keeping in view the schedule/time table of all participants. The sole aim of each session was to give each participant ample time and opportunity to contribute to the discussion and make it learner centered, enjoyable, engaging, interactive, and motivating. They also found the trainer friendly and sessions were conducted efficiently. All the participants were of the view that delivery of training sessions was effective and sessions were engaging, motivating, and promoted encouragement. One of the participants stated that:

"It was an active learning environment during the sessions."

In the light of the feedback of the participants, and their responses they found each session interesting, enjoyable, and useful. They also felt the need to arrange training for school teachers for grading adaptations and alternative assessment procedures. They were of the view that training has given them exposure and an opportunity to verbalize their problems. They also opined that further training should be arranged for professional development of the school teachers. One of the participants expressed herself:

"I would like to have a future training on grading adaptations for inclusion."

Overall training session was a fruitful exercise for researchers as well as participants to suggest ways to improve pedagogical practices in an inclusive setup and prepare in-service teachers to work in an inclusive environment.

Discussion and Conclusion

An inclusive learning environment is one that accommodates all students, regardless of gender, race, socioeconomic status, or special educational needs (Chen & Chiu, 2015). This study has attempted to develop and prototype the training module for in-service for inclusive education. On the basis of the field validation of the training module, it was concluded that the success of inclusion depends on professional development and appropriate training. Regular assistance is also necessary to maintain inclusive educational approaches in regular schools at primary level. Training needs should be made on the basis of the following domains: knowledge, pedagogical principles like differentiated curriculum, diverse instructional techniques, multiple learning materials, and resources and adapted assessment practices, student management, behavior modifications of the learners, and community collaboration. These findings may be valuable in stressing the importance of teacher training programs in Pakistan toward successful inclusive practices.

In the light of the field validation of the training module, it was concluded that professional development of instructors is indispensable in creating an effective inclusive environment. Providing teachers with a learning-centered perspective and a range of inclusive pedagogical approaches through professional growth may assist them in putting inclusive strategies into practices (Schmid, Gillian-Daniel, Kraemer, & Kueppers, 2016). According to the findings of the study, teachers are becoming more aware of the need for inclusion and an equitable learning environment as a result of professional development. Eleven participants took part in the prototype of the training module and the efforts made by their facilitator to continue assisting teachers in adapting their instructional techniques to accord with inclusive pedagogy. According to Doktor (2010) collaboration with

universities can help bridge the gap between pedagogical practices and classrooms. The collaborations can be beneficial by introducing and modeling techniques in differentiation, co-teaching, and response to instruction. Practicing teachers are generally inexperienced and lack the specialized coursework to serve all students (Doktor, 2010). Existing preservice programs are inadequately preparing instructors to implement effective instructional strategies for students with disabilities. These educators require more training and information irrespective of what they learned in their respective training programmes. It is essential that educators have the skills and knowledge necessary to provide interventions while working with students with special needs in a classroom setting. Professional training is the key area of concern. Training can enhance the self-efficacy of in-service teachers. The significance of training teachers is fundamental in this regard.

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