

In-service Training Programmes Related to Inclusive Education: Perspectives of Elementary School Teachers

P. Ponnusamy*
Smitha Sankar**

Abstract

Expertise of teachers is considered to be a very important factor in implementing their academic inputs in the educational system and motivating students to become useful members of the society. In-service training programmes, especially, in inclusive education, support the teachers handling children with special needs and to overcome the challenges in their field. The purpose of this study is to investigate the reflections of elementary school teachers on designing and implementation of the in-service training programmes related to inclusive education. The required data were collected from the 305 elementary school teachers randomly selected from the state of Kerala in India. The main finding of the study reveals that majority of elementary school teachers viewed that the in-service training programmes related to inclusive education were at a satisfactory level.

Key Words: *Elementary education, inclusive education, in-service programmes, perception, and school teachers*

Introduction

With reference to Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) and the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), many European countries have worked out the policies and practices to promote inclusive education (Arcidiacono and Baucal, 2020). Mainstreaming the children with special needs into regular schools is the motto of implementing the inclusive education policy. Due to the unclear and diverse understanding of researchers, policy makers, and teacher educators on inclusive education, many countries are facing several challenges

in implementation of inclusive education policies (Van Mieghem et al., 2018; Kivirand et al., 2020). The concept of inclusion for all means that all children irrespective of their diverse needs should have the opportunity to learn together (Leijen, et al., 2021). At the school level, inclusive education refers to a learning process that includes all types of learners, regardless of their abilities, gender, or ethnic background, and helps them grow into dignified individuals with a greater understanding of one another's differences, which aids them in subsequent successful partnerships in societal contributions (UNESCO, 1994; Sreeja, 2016; Felder, 2019).

* Assistant Professor, Department of Education, The Gandhigram Rural Institute (Deemed to be University), Dindigul, Tamil Nadu, E-mail- pponnusamy56@gmail.com

**Lecturer, District Institute of Education and Training (DIET), Kottayam, Kerala, India
E-mail – smithasatheesh@gmail.com

It aims to ensure that students with diverse needs and preferences such as the students with disabilities can have equal opportunities in accessing learning resources, services and experiences in general (Florian & Linklater, 2010).

Inclusive education is not only the alternative measures for children with special needs but also a scientific well planned strategy for their overall development (Sanjeev & Kumar, 2007). Inclusive education must go far beyond mere physical placement of students with disabilities in general classrooms and should engross schools meeting the needs of all their students within common, but flexible environment and activities (Skrtic, 1991). There is need for serious planning and efforts in order to achieve the goals of inclusivity and leadership roles will have to change in the existing school system in terms of physical factors, curriculum aspects, teaching expectations and styles (Singh & Agarwal, 2015). In India, the government has initiated many promotional activities in the line of inclusive education in the past four decades and yet there is a lack of supportive leadership at the school level. Many administrators especially those at privately managed schools, succumb to academic and performance pressures and neglect the education of disadvantaged groups, including those with disabilities (Sharma & Das, 2015). Further the school teachers face challenges in their classroom setting in accommodating the children with special needs. There is a need to equip the general classroom teachers to handle the inclusive classroom settings since the inclusive education demands that a teacher be flexible, creative, innovative, and well-trained (Mohanty, 2008). Hence, empowering the teachers through in-service training programmes with more practical exposure, booklets about disabilities and handbooks for teachers help them to have a positive attitude towards handling students with diverse abilities (Subedi, 2015; Prabavathy, 2016; Forlin & Sin, 2017).

In-service training is a practice whereby school teachers enhance their teaching skills and make use of it in solving their professional challenges. It is every individual's belief that they have the skills and knowledge to improve a situation in which they operate (Maeroff 1988; Short et al. 1994). In-service training has been studied in relation to job satisfaction (Bogler & Nir, 2012; Rinehart & Short, 1993), participation in decision-making (Gruber & Trickett, 1987; White, 1992), commitment (Wu & Short, 1996), conflict (Johnson & Short, 1998), instructional practice and student academic achievements (Lyons et al., 2013). A research report of Sweetland & Hoy, (2000), highlighted that in-service training is more powerful when it is focused on intensifying teacher professionalism and empowering teachers has its greatest influence on student accomplishment when the prominence is on the core technology of teaching and learning in schools. So in-service training is apparent as a vital aspect that affects school efficacy (Wall & Rinehart, 1998; Ahrari, et al., 2021). With this background, this study was conducted to elicit the perceptions of elementary school teachers on the usefulness of in-service training programmes related to inclusive education with the following objectives.

Objectives of the Study

- To analyze the perspectives of elementary school teachers on usefulness of in-service training programmes related to inclusive education in Kerala, a State of India;
- To compare the perceptions of elementary school teachers on different components of in-service training programmes related to inclusive education with reference to school levels: lower and upper primary; school management: government and government aided; and gender: male and female; and
- To study the inter relationship between the perceptions of elementary school

teachers in different components of teacher empowerment programmes related to inclusive education.

Methodology of Research

Both qualitative and quantitative designs were used to explore the viewpoints of elementary school teachers on in-service training programmes related to inclusive education. For this purpose, the researchers used the survey method to collect the needed data from teachers of Kottayam, Pathinamthitta and Idukki districts of Kerala State in India.

The sample of 305 elementary school teachers was selected randomly from 35 primary school and 30 upper primary schools. Among them, 149 (48.85%) were primary school teachers and 156 (51.15%) were upper primary school teachers. Further, there were 139 (45.57%) teachers from government schools; 166 (54.43%) were from private aided schools; and 155 (50.82%) were male teachers and 150 (49.18%) female teachers.

To collect the required data, the researchers used the Teacher Perception Scale on inclusive education in-service training programmes at elementary school level. The scale has been developed by the researchers in Malayalam and English language version. It is a Likert Scale constructed with all standardization procedures and consists of five subscales, namely, training pre-arrangement, training content relevance, training strategy approach, training programme follow-up, and training usefulness to teachers. Each subscale includes 10 statements, and all statement items are set against a five-point rating from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Each subscale has a maximum score of 50, and the teacher perception scores in the composite scale (max. score 250) calculated from all 50 items represent their level of

perception on inclusive education in-service training programmes. The validation of the study tool was carried out by using face validity and the reliability of the tool was found by using the test and retest method. The correlation co-efficient values found from reliability test are 0.81 for composite scale; 0.78 for the training pre-arrangement; 0.73 for the training content relevancy; 0.73 for the training strategy approach; 0.75 for the training programme follow-up; and 0.77 for the training usefulness to teachers respectively. These reliability scores indicate that the tool with its five subscales is highly reliable for use in research studies.

Results of Research

Based on the teachers' perception scores, the perceptions on inclusive education in-service training programmes were classified into three categories — poor in-service training programmes; satisfactory in-service training programmes and good in-service training programmes. If the perception scores were above one standard deviation from the mean score (Mean + SD), then it is assumed that teachers' observation on in-service training programmes of inclusive education is at a *Good* level. Likewise, if the perception scores were below one standard deviation from the mean score (Mean - SD), then it is assumed that teachers' observation on in-service training programmes of inclusive education is at a *Poor* level. The scores between Mean + SD and Mean - SD were considered that teachers' observation on in-service training programmes of inclusive education is at a *Satisfactory* level. The obtained mean and standard deviation scores of sample in teacher perception scale are 138.36 and 17.57 respectively. The following table describes the perception levels of sample on in-service training programmes conducted in the state of Kerala in India, which were related to inclusive education.

Table 1**Perception levels of Elementary School Teachers on In-service Training Programmes related to Inclusive Education**

Perception on in-service training	Poor level (Mean-SD)	Satisfactory level (middle range)	Good level (Mean + SD)
N	39	220	46
%	12.79	72.13	15.08

Among the selected 305 elementary school teachers, 15.08 per cent of the positively opined and they agreed that the in-service training programmes related to inclusive education conducted were *Good*; 12.79 per cent of them had a negative opinion and viewed that the in-service training

programmes were *Poor*, and 72.13 per cent thought that in-service training programmes related to inclusive education conducted in the state were at *Satisfactory* level. The following table shows the mean scores of the elementary school teachers in five subscales of Teacher Perception Scale.

Table 2**Mean Scores of Elementary School Teachers in Teacher Perception Scale**

S.No.	Sub-Scales	N	Mean	Strong/ Weak	Reason
1	Training Pre-Arrangement (TPA)	305	27.77	Strong	> GM
2	Training Content Relevancy (TCR)	305	26.99	Weak	< GM
3	Training Strategy Approach (TSA)	305	30.11	Strong	> GM
4	Training Programme – Follow up (TPF)	305	27.46	Weak	< GM
5	Training Usefulness to Teachers (TUT)	305	26.04	Weak	< GM
Grand Mean - GM (Mean Score of Means)		305	27.67		

The above data shows that

- The Grand mean score of the elementary school teachers in all five sub-scales of Teacher Perception Scale on in-service training programme of inclusive education is 27.67.
- The mean score of elementary school teachers in teacher perception sub-scale: Training Pre-arrangement (TPA) is 27.77

and it is greater than the grand mean score of sub-scales. This indicates that teachers' observation on the Training Pre-arrangement in in-service training programme of inclusive education is *Strong*.

- The mean score of elementary school teachers in teacher perception sub-scale: Training Content Relevancy (TCR) is

26.99 and it is less than the grand mean score of sub-scales. This indicates that teachers' observation on the Training Content Relevancy in in-service training programme of inclusive education is *Weak*.

- The mean score of elementary school teachers in teacher perception sub-scale: Training Strategy Approach (TSA) is 30.11 and it is greater than the grand mean score of sub-scales. This indicates that teachers' observation on the Training Strategy Approach in in-service training programme of inclusive education is *Strong*.
- The mean score of elementary school teachers in teacher perception sub-scale: Training Programme Follow-up (TPF) is 27.46 and it is less than the grand mean score of sub-scales. This indicates that teachers' observation on the Training Programme Follow-up in in-service training programme of inclusive education is *Weak*.
- The mean score of elementary school teachers in teacher perception sub-scale: Training Usefulness to Teachers (TUT) is 26.04 and it is less than the grand mean score of sub-scales. This indicates that teachers' observation on the Training Usefulness to Teachers in in-service training programme of inclusive education is *Weak*.

The following table shows the comparison of mean scores of the lower primary and upper primary school teachers in general and also in sub-scales of Teacher Perception Scale. The above data shows the comparative results of teacher perception scores of primary and upper primary school teachers with respect to their mean and standard deviation scores both in total scale and also in sub-scales. The mean scores of the primary and upper primary school teachers in total teacher perception scale on in-service training programme of inclusive education are 134.91 and 141.66 which indicates that the teachers at upper primary level observed that the in-service training programme of inclusive education better than that of lower primary level teachers. Also, the calculated 't' value ($=3.42 > 1.96$) and p-value ($0.00 < 0.05$) indicate that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of lower and upper primary school teachers in teacher perception scale. Hence it is concluded that *there is a significant difference between the perceptions of lower primary and upper primary school teachers on in-service training programme of inclusive education*. Further, the table results indicate that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of lower and upper primary school teachers in all sub-scales excluding Training

Table 3

Mean and Standard Deviation Scores of Lower and Upper Primary School Teachers in Teacher Perception Scale

School		TPA	TCR	TSA	TPF	TUT	In Total
Lower Primary	N	149	149	149	149	149	149
	Mean	27.59	25.43	28.68	26.58	26.62	134.91
	SD	4.88	4.66	6.10	6.81	6.621	15.29
Upper Primary	N	156	156	156	156	156	156
	Mean	27.94	28.47	31.48	28.29	25.47	141.66
	SD	4.92	4.41	7.89	7.07	2.76	18.97
t' value		0.63	5.85	3.48	2.51	2.07	3.43
p-value		0.53	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.04	0.00

Pre-Arrangement (TPA) since their calculated 't' value of mean scores are greater than the table 't' value and p-values are less than 0.05. The interaction analysis of elementary school

teachers' perception scores in composite scale with respect to gender and school management are analysed by applying the *Two Way ANOVA*.

Table 4

Analysis of Variance of Elementary School Teachers' Perception Scores in Composite Scale - Two Way ANOVA

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Gender (A)	5975.58	1	5975.58	25.29	0.00
Management (B)	831.95	1	831.95	3.52	0.06
A x B	14110.55	1	14110.55	59.73	0.00
Within	71109.02	301	236.24		
Total	93844.33	304			

* Significant at 0.05 level

Table 4, A - represents *Gender* and B represents the *School Management* such as government and government-aided. The table data results show that the gender ($F = 25.29$; $p = 0.00$), and nature of school ($F = 3.52$; $p = 0.06$) and it means that there is an impact of gender on in-service training programme of inclusive education since the corresponding p-values are greater than 0.05; but there is no impact of nature of school on the perceptions of elementary school teachers.

Discussion

The main finding of study reveals that majority of elementary school teachers viewed the in-service training programmes related to inclusive education were at *satisfactory* level and it coincides with the findings of Parsad, Lewis and Farris (2008); and Kivirand et al., (2021); but contradicts with the study result of Sumaiya Khanam Chowdhury and Mirza Md. Hasan (2013). The selected elementary school teachers viewed that the training content relevancy, training follow-up activity and training usefulness components of in-service training programmes related to inclusive education were weak; but training pre-arrangement and

training strategy approach components were strong. Also, the study results explored that there was a significant difference between the perceptions of teachers from primary and upper primary level schools whereas there was no significant difference between the perceptions of teachers with reference to their school management on the perception of teachers on inclusive education in-service training program. Further, the study result on gender analysis revealed that there was a gender impact on perception of teachers on in-service training programmes and it is contradictory to the research findings of Loughran (2007) and Corey Ray Gardenhour (2008) who found that there was no statistically significant difference between male and female teachers and gender did not play a part in the relevance.

Conclusion

Every individual in the universe is unique and have to enhance the learning competences in educational system for the beneficial of survival in the society. Educational access and opportunities alone fulfil the needs for the survival throughout the life span of the individuals. Education is a platform for the individuals to realize their innate

potentials and channelize them properly. Teachers and school systems should ensure the access, equity and quality in education. For empowering the student learners, the teachers should empower themselves in their teaching profession. The teachers should be equipped in handling all types of student learners in the classroom environment. In all classroom environments, we could see the students with different abilities and challenges. Inclusion of special needy children in the regular school system is the need of the hour due to the implementation of Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Act 2009 in the country. Handling the students with special needs to the teachers,

especially, at elementary schools is a great challenge. Adequate knowledge, exposures and experiences are needed by the teachers for managing and implementing academic tasks among the students in inclusive schools. Hence, to make the teachers at elementary level empowered in handling the students at inclusive schools, they should be provided enough knowledge in handling students in an inclusive education system and accordingly the administrators of teacher education departments must plan the training programmes properly with field experts and implement them with the support of experienced resource persons.

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