

# A Study Of Teacher Trainees' Perception Of Inclusive Pedagogical Practices

Dr. Amar Singh<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. Ajeet Kumar Rai<sup>2</sup>, Prof. Anjali Bajpai<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Post-Doctoral Fellow (ICSSR), Faculty of Education (K.) BHU, Varanasi.

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education (K.) BHU, Varanasi.

<sup>3</sup>Professor, Faculty of Education (K.) BHU, Varanasi.

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## ABSTRACT

Inclusion is one of the foundational pillars of National Education Policy 2020 in India. Inclusion is a complex process. It demands theoretical reflections on its interpretation and aspects as well as the practical and behavioral translations of those interpretations. One of the key aspects is the pedagogical principles implied by the inclusion phenomenon. The pedagogical translation of inclusion leads to the origin of the term Inclusive Pedagogy. The term IP is of relatively recent origin that connotes the everyday classroom process characteristically epitomizing the principles of inclusion. The status of research studies related to IP is yet in its nascent stage and unsurprisingly the term is perceived differently by different stakeholders in education. This paper presents the report of a study conducted on teacher trainees to explore their perspectives on inclusive pedagogy. Following an inductive analysis of the qualitative data obtained through an open-ended questionnaire, the Teacher Trainees' perspectives are presented thematically. The findings are believed to develop insight into the comprehension of inclusion from the lens of pedagogy thereby enriching the literature on inclusive pedagogy. The findings are further considered to be relevant for the researchers interested in inquiry into the phenomenon.

**Keywords:** Inclusive Pedagogical Practices, Teacher Trainees, perspectives

## Introduction

The educational systems in post-independence India have ever been evolving under the auspices of the spirit of the Constitutional obligations of inclusive education. Articles 17 to 51 of the Indian constitution represent the educational aspirations of the nation and its commitment to the cause of education. as evident from articles in the written constitution of the nation. Specifically article 21A(Right to Education), Article 28 (1,2,3) (Freedom to attend religious instruction or religious worship in certain educational institutions), Article 29 (Protection of interests of minorities), Article 30 (Right to minorities to establish and administer educational institutions), Article 46 (Promotions of educational and economic interests of scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and other weaker sections are all reflections of the constitutional spirit towards inclusivity (Gupta, 2023). The constitutional obligation for inclusivity in education is vocally iterated in the New Education Policy. NEP-2020 vehemently asserts that inclusivity in education is represented as one of the pillars of the educational constitution of the nation.

However, the policy of inclusive education needs proper translations into the everyday proceedings of the educational situation in general and of the classrooms in particular since any policy is relevant in bringing about change to the extent to which it is translated into practice. Justifiably, then the aspiration expressed as the policy of inclusive education needs to be translated into action at all levels and across all aspects of education including pedagogy. The translation itself demands awareness about inclusive pedagogical practices as well as an attitudinal shift towards an inclusive pedagogy. Several studies have used the word inclusive pedagogy (Spratt & Florian, 2015; Lawrie, et, al, 2017; Seatter& Ceulemans, 2017; Florian & Beaton, 2018; Overtrup and Overtrup, 2018; Terrell, 2018; Morina, 2020; Sanger & Gleason, 2020 ). Different aspects of pedagogy are highlighted as markers for inclusion such as the nature and type of assessment tasks (Boud, 1995; Black and Williams, 1998; Floriana, 2008; Black and Williams, 2009; Bourke & Mentis, 2014;

Florian & Beaton, 2018), the design of learning such as universal learning design (Lawrie, et, al, 2017; Fornauf & Erickson, ?; Sanger, 2020 ). Teacher characteristics particularly the teachers' attitude are also highlighted as indicators of IP (Gale and Miles, 2013; Merrill, 2013; Seatter & Ceulemans, 2017). The term IP is however still in the making process. Further, there is a paucity of inquiry into the phenomenon of inclusive pedagogy particularly concerning the stakeholders' perspective. Assuming that further studies and their findings related to IP will help in the evolution of the concept of IP, it is relevant to explore the meaning of the phenomenon from different perspectives including those of the different stakeholders in education. The preservice teachers are the teachers of the future. It was considered important to explore how they perceive the phenomenon of IP, particularly when they are exposed to the concept of inclusive education across different courses in their educational program.

The presented study was thus carried out to bridge the knowledge gap and enrich the understanding of the phenomenon of IPP in terms of the teacher trainee's perspective's.

### **Purposes of the Study**

The study was executed to develop insight into the teacher trainees' (students) perspective on IPP in terms of their perception of the IPP. Perspective refers to the perception of any phenomenon that is largely based on the perceivers' personal experiences and that is a part of their consciousness of the phenomenon. According to the Macmillan dictionary Perspective refers to personal experience related to a phenomenon (Macmillan, 2002) The purpose of the study was to explore the teacher trainees' perception of IPP based on their personal experiences.

### **Conceptualising Inclusive Pedagogical Practices**

Pedagogy connotes both the specific acts of teaching and learning as well as the teachers' beliefs, assumptions, and values related to teaching and learning (Alexander, 2013). Inclusion is a philosophical perspective rooted in the values of democracy and the participation of all (Singh, Rai & Bajpai, 2023). It is also interpreted as the process of ensuring the participation and engagement of all learners in the teaching-learning process irrespective of the differences that exist among them based on several criteria. The problem of inclusion in Education is a major highlight of NEP-2020. Expressing its concern over the marginalization of different groups of learner population, NEP (2020) coined a new term 'Socially Economically Disadvantaged Groups' (SEDGs). The use of the term SEDGs by NEP 2020 is a direct reflection of its conviction in the principle of inclusion and its ambition to use the word inclusion in its widest possible meaning. SEDGs refer to all marginalized groups of the population (based on gender, socio-cultural identities, geographical identities, disabilities, and socio-economic conditions) that are underrepresented in education.

Inclusive Pedagogy is a synthesis of inclusive practices (the specific teaching acts to prevent marginalization) and the value and belief regarding inclusion in the teaching-learning process. Inclusive pedagogy is considered a pedagogical approach that capitalizes on diversity. The socio-cultural perspective on learning proposes learning to take place in the complex of the individual's prior knowledge and their socio-cultural web of relations and interactions. Thus, an understanding of the relationship between the sociocultural milieu of students and their learning (Claxton, 2009; Spratt & Florian, 2015) is essential to grasp the diversity in the classroom and to count on all students as rich resources in the teaching-learning process.

As a pedagogical approach, Inclusive pedagogy (IP) aims to create a rich array of accessible experiences (Florian & Black-Williams, 2011). to increase the probability of all students' participation in the educational processes. It is a means to extend the "scope of ordinary schools so they can include a greater diversity of children" (Clark, Dyson, and Milward, 1995, p.

v) and "make learning accessible and welcoming to all students" through an emphasis on "equitable access to course materials" by all (Sanger, 2020, p.32-33). Procedurally IPP demands paying due attention to student diversity in instructional decisions and fostering an interpersonal relationship that embeds in teacher humility (Sanger, 2020). Student diversity needs to be taken care of in assessment-related decisions as well (Black, 2011) with a greater leverage to formative assessment. Addressing the students' diversity across all aspects of instruction fosters a sense of belongingness among the students and ensures active engagement in the teaching-learning process.

### **Method**

The purpose of the study was exploratory rather than arriving at some sort of generalization.

The target was to tap into the students' perceptions in a detailed way and develop further insight into the practice of IPP. Thus, a qualitative approach was followed and data was collected using an open-ended questionnaire administered to 98 undergraduate and postgraduate students in the Department of Education. The participants' description is presented in Table 1 below:

	Male	Female	Total
M.Ed/M.Ed Special(Visual Impairment) Students	19	23	28
B.Ed/B.Ed Special Students	22	20	30
Total	41	43	84

The questionnaire was administered as Google Forms in the period from June 2023 to July 2023. Post-screening a total of 84 response forms were found to be fit for further analysis after screening of each response form (Table 1). Partial response to the form was taken as the criteria for exclusion of the response forms during screening.

The students' paragraphs against each of the questions in the questionnaire were analyzed following Inductive Analysis (Yin, 2015) which involved identifying the relevant student statements, organizing data, identifying the themes, and reporting them as a narrative. Initially, the important excerpts that were meaningful and related to the concept of IPP from among the total students' responses to all the questions in the open-ended questionnaire were iteratively identified and presented in a tabular form. Following several rounds of iterations, the excerpts were then analyzed into different codes. The codes were then related to each other and the important themes were identified.

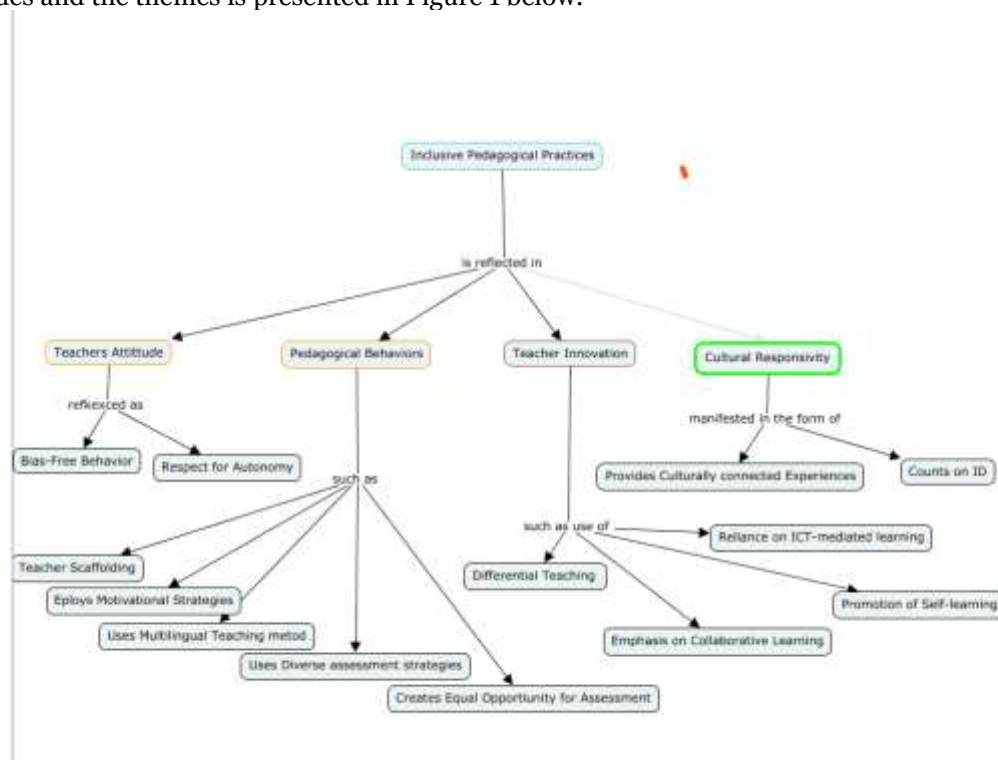
Twenty percent of the students' excerpts were also given to another researcher along with the indicators for each code. The excerpts were independently coded by the second researcher. The Kohen Kappa value for intercoder reliability was found to be 0.79 for the sample of excerpts and it was considered to be satisfactory.

### Findings and Discussion

The purpose of the study was to develop insight into the student's perspective on inclusive pedagogical practices. The data (open-ended responses obtained from the students) were analyzed. The data was in the form of participants' expression of what they think are important components of an inclusive pedagogical practice. The codes and themes are summarized in Table 2 below:

SN	Theme	Codes	Frequency of participants	Response Frequency
A.	Attitude towards Students	Respect for Autonomy	17	25
		Bias-Free Behaviour	38	54
		Subtotal		79
B.	Pedagogical Behaviour	Teacher Scaffolding	10	17
		Employs Motivational Strategies	19	34
		Uses multilingual teaching method	18	31
		Uses Diverse assessment strategies	23	41
		Subtotal		123
C.	Cultural Responsivity	Cultural Responsivity	31	45
		Subtotal		45
D.	Innovativeness	Differential Teaching	19	33
		Emphasise Collaborative Learning	17	20
		Promotes Self-learning	13	16
		ICT-mediated learning	7	10
		Subtotal		79
	Total Excerpts			326

The analysis in the Table shows that the students view IPP as a complex phenomenon involving different characteristics and actions of the teachers. The student's response was categorized into **ten (10) codes** that were further analyzed, related to each other, and clubbed into **four (04) broader themes** to create a narrative for the student's perception of IPP. A concept map of the narrative that emerged inductively from the codes and the themes is presented in Figure 1 below.



The thematic analysis revealed that the teacher-trainee perception is built upon four major themes viz. Teachers' attitudes, Pedagogical behaviours, Innovations, and Cultural-Responsivity.

#### a. Attitude

A total of seventy-nine (79) excerpts were categorized in this theme. The students perceive that the teachers' attitudes are important prerequisites for Inclusive pedagogical practices. Attitude towards students was considered as a prominent teacher character for Inclusive pedagogy. The teacher needs to have faith in the students and manifest a positive attitude towards their students. The teachers' attitude was further found to be described by the participants in terms of three important teacher behaviours viz.

- *Respect for Autonomy*: Seventeen (17) students referred to this behaviour and twenty-five (25) excerpts were identified in the analysis. The participants considered that the teacher needs to acknowledge individuality and have faith in the capabilities of the individual student. Such teacher behaviour was considered by the participants to foster a sense of among the students in the teaching Learning Process and get the opportunity to express their choices. For example, respondent PT6 said that the teacher's respect for autonomy is exhibited when the teacher makes the student feel "free to ask their queries". Another participant (PT23) said that:

PT23: *A teacher should provide maximum opportunity to facilitate students' voice .....autonomy and independence .....*

- *Bias-Free Behaviour*: fifty-four (54) excerpts obtained from thirty-eight (38) participants were categorized into this code. The participants expressed the teachers' ability to be attentive to all students and provide equal opportunities for engagement in the teaching-learning process as per their needs. A bias-free behaviour is reflected in the teacher's attention and response towards all groups of students by the teachers irrespective of any discrimination based on gender, socio-cultural identities, geographical identities, disabilities, and socioeconomic conditions. One of the participants said:

PT3: *Inclusive pedagogical practices ...[is]... equitable or equality-focused teachingmethod ..... The educators create a learning environment where all students.....have equal opportunities to learn.*

PT17: *Teacher should not be prejudiced....and biased .....should keep in mind thebackground of the students"*

#### B. Pedagogical Behavior

A total of one hundred twenty-three (123) excerpts were categorized into this theme. The participants considered the pedagogical behavior as a reflection of the teachers' support in learning in the form of

scaffolding, motivational strategies, using different languages, and different assessment strategies. The theme was derived from four codes described below:

**Teacher scaffolding:** seventeen (17) excerpts obtained from ten (10) participants were categorized into this code. Teacher scaffolding was considered as the prima facie one of the most important teacher behaviors in IPP. Teacher scaffolding was considered as the teacher's support and facilitation of learning as per the needs and learning style of the students. The participant expressed their views as:

PT13: .....active participation of all types of students by using constructivism approach ...

PT9: .....provide platform for self-learning.....[every ]students has their own pace of achieving things.....

**Motivational Strategies:** thirty-four (34) excerpts obtained from nineteen (19) participants were categorized into this code. The teacher trainees explained that the teachers are supportive of students' learning when they use different **motivational strategies** for the students. Motivation is considered as important in IPP as evident from the following excerpts:

PT22: ...encouragement and guidance for learning is important.....[they] learn better with little guidance and more encouragement in each step of their [learning].

PT17: Give them [the students] equal liberty and encourage every student to talk about their needs and share their opinions in the classroom so that those needs can be... taken care of.

**Multilingual Teaching** Thirty-one (31) excerpts obtained from eighteen (18) participants were categorized into this code. Multilingual teaching is considered yet another important aspect of IPP. The participants believed that the use of multilingual teaching increased the probability of reaching out to all students. They expressed themselves as:

PT02: [Multilingual teaching] will be most useful for inclusive pedagogical practices... has multiple benefits.....giving them [learners] an academic advantage and improving their employment prospects.

PT07: ..... strategies are designed to not only acknowledge diversity but also include.....celebrate it to help all students achieve success in academics and beyond.

**Diverse Assessment Techniques:** Forty-one (41) excerpts obtained from twenty-three (23) participants were categorized into this code... The participants highlighted the use of diverse techniques of assessment in the classroom. Diversity in assessment techniques such as open book exams, quizzes, projects, etc. was perceived as important in making the class inclusive. Additionally, a supportive teacher is viewed as one who believes in using a multitude of assessment techniques in their classroom. For instance, the participants said :

PT14: Assessment is in a continuous form.... includes different types like ..... written work, quizzes, projects, assignments, etc.

PT11: .....reduce the number of summative assessments and increase the number of formative assessments..... [and] consider alternative assessment methods....open book exams, shorter exams, etc...

### C. Cultural Responsivity

A total of forty-five (45) excerpts from thirty-one (31) participants were categorized in this theme. The teachers need to be culturally sensitive to respond to the student's cultural needs. For the trainees, cultural responsivity further refers to the teacher's ability to identify individual differences arising due to their cultural background and mold their instructional strategies accordingly. Thus a teacher to use IPP is one who can respond to the different language backgrounds of the learner and can provide instruction in multiple languages. The participants expressed their views as:

PT15: Useof a multilingual approach while providing lectures or learning materials for different cultural students.

PT10: There are materials available in quite diverse and in all platforms, so the teacher should create AWARENESS among students about different types of materials...[as per]...their needs, Similarly, a culturally responsive teacher using IPP needs to identify examples and references from the socio-cultural background (8/12) of the students and use them in their classrooms. Code asserts

PT19: Respect diversity and every student gets their pace to develop their ability without thinking about their culture or any other background.

The participants believed that the teachers need to be sensitive towards the socio-cultural background of the students. For example, the teachers need to identify examples and illustrations from their background.

PT12: ...design a comprehensive curriculum with representations from different cultures and ethnicities and using examples from different backgrounds and ethnicities.

PT18: By knowing your students holistically you can see the individual strengths they bring to the classroom environment and honour and build on their prior knowledge.

### D. Instructional Innovation

The participants viewed IPP as a function of the instructional and pedagogical innovations of the teacher. IPP, according to the participants, includes responding to every individual student's needs. Addressing the instructional needs of individual students requires a blend of different approaches in an innovative way taking into account the contextual factors. The theme of instructional innovation was based on the following codes obtained from participants' excerpts:



*Differential Instruction:* The code was inductively obtained through 33 excerpts from 19 participants. The participants expressed the idea of differential instruction as a way to bring about innovativeness in their pedagogical practice. The following excerpts show the participant's views:

*PT15: ..... [teacher] need to have a variety of instructional material which can be useful for different types of learners.....like the divyaang students.*

*PT02: A teacher should provide maximum opportunity to all types of students to express their thoughts and emotions by engaging in different classroom-based diverse constructive activities based on role-play, group discussion, and peer tutorials.*

*Collaborative Learning:* This code was obtained through (20) excerpts from (17) participants. The participants expressed Collaborative learning as their favourite example in presenting their perception of Innovative instruction as is evident from the following excerpts:

*PT10: .... students should work among their peers to boost their confidence in and out and also contribute in the holistic development of their abilities" (PT10).*

*PT01: ....provide space for self-learning.....[Each student].. have their own pace of achieving things so provide them the time and space [that] help them to learn effectively.*

*PT25: .....sensitive environment.....encouraging .....[and] independence for self learning.*

*Self Learning:* This code was analyzed from (16) excerpts of (13) students. Self-learning was considered an essential skill in the present-day scenario. It was also considered as an innovation in instruction and the participants advocate the facilitation of self-learning by the teachers. The following excerpts reflect the position:

*ICT-mediated learning:* This code was based on (10) excerpts from (7) participants. ICT was viewed by the participants as an important tool for teachers to achieve innovation in instructional practices for inclusiveness. The following excerpts express the view:

*PT24: Teachers should adopt technology-mediated teaching to reach out to all student's needs. ....l materials in the form of PDF, Audio, Video any other innovative way to make his teaching understandable and joyful.*

*PT20: Use of Inclusive techno-pedagogy for pedagogical practices in the classrooms*

### **Concluding Remarks:**

Inclusive Pedagogy with its three foundational pillars of knowledge, attitude and practice is the need of the time. It is the way to fulfill the aspirations expressed by National Education Policy-2020. Inclusive Pedagogy is believed to prevent marginalization. However, it is easier to recommend than to achieve change. The most significant barrier identified for the development of inclusive pedagogy is the consensus on the account of IPP (Waitoller & Artiles, 2013). The need to explore the meaning of the term IPP from different perspectives prompted this study.

The study explored the undergraduate and postgraduate students' perspectives on IPP. The findings of the study show that the students view IPP largely as a function of the teacher's characteristics. More specifically they viewed diversity in instruction mediated by the principles of universal learning and facilitated by ICT as an important consideration

Finally, the realization of inclusive pedagogy in actual classroom situations demands the creation of a rich empirical knowledge base related to the various conceptual and practical aspects of inclusive pedagogical practices particularly when the idea of inclusive pedagogy in its broader sense is of relatively recent origin. The present study adds to the literature already existing (Clark, Dyson and Milward, 1995; Boud, 1995; Black and Williams, 1998 ; Scott et al., 2003; Shields, 2000; Tiwari, 2005; Evans, 2007; Hart, Drummond, and McIntyre, 2007; Ryan and Rottman, 2007; Laura & Pitman, 2007; Ainscow & Miles, 2008; Florian, 2008; Black and Williams, 2009; Jonsson, 2011; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Alexander, 2013; Gale and Miles, 2013; Merrill, 2013; Waitoller & Artiles, 2013; Bourke & Mentis, 2014; Meyer et al, 2014; Claxton, 2009; Spratt & Florian, 2015; Lawrie, et, al, 2017; Seatter & Ceulemans, 2017 ; Florian & Beaton, 2018; Overtrup and Overtrup, 2018; Terrell, 2018; Morina, 2020; Sanger & Gleason, 2020 ) with a focus on different perspectives such as use of assessment tasks as elements of inclusive pedagogy (Boud, 1995; Black and Williams, 1998 ; Floriana, 2008; Black and Williams, 2009; Bourke & Mentis, 2014; Florian & Beaton, 2018), universal learning design (Lawrie, et, al, 2017; Fornauf & Erickson, ?; Sanger, 2020 ), teachers attitude (Gale and Miles, 2013; Merrill, 2013; Seatter & Ceulemans, 2017), more studies are needed in the Indian context to further consolidate the new pedagogical approach.

The students' perspectives were not explored in earlier studies. This study presents a summary of the different views on IPP from students' perspectives. Particularly it highlighted the importance attached to teacher characteristics by the students while thinking about IPP. The finding is of practical significance for future studies in conceptualizing IPP and for the national agencies in devising training programs for teachers with a focus on IPP.

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