

## **Integrated School Teachers' Experiences on Implementing Inclusive Education Policy of Nepal**

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### ***Abstract***

*This study entitled "Integrated School Teachers' Experiences on Implementing Inclusive Education Policy of Nepal" was carried out to investigate the experiences of integrated school teachers in implementing inclusive education policy of Nepal. The study had been carried out by selecting ten integrated schools of Kathmandu valley by convenience sampling method. Ten special education teachers and ten physical education teachers from each schools were selected by purposive sampling method. Semi-structured interview schedule was prepared and administered to the participants through telephonic interview. The interview questions were reviewed by a physical education and special education experts to maintain its reliability. The study found that teachers have been experiencing low self-awareness about educating students with disabilities. They also experienced serious lacking in their knowledge and skill in them and also their perceptions towards inclusion was immature. They want their school administration to be more responsible and active in developing inclusive culture inside the school and also urged to provide them the opportunities of their professional development through training and exposures.*

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**Key Words:** *Inclusion, policy, integrated, experience, education, professional, decision*

### **Introduction**

Policies are the important tools to meet needs and aspirations of the people of societies. Policies are also the decisions taken by the government or choice of the government to do or not to do the particular task (Cooper, Fusarelli & Randall, 2004). Policy formulation is the value laden process that authoritatively allocates the values in the societies. Teachers in the education system are the agents for implementing policies in the society thus establishing the values associated in the policies (Barbour, 2008). Every country in the world makes their own policies of to manage their educational affairs. Nepal is no exception for this and has formed policies on different sectors like education, security, foreign affairs, financing, etc. Special education policies are the examples of such policies which target the people

with disabilities and other people of the society. According to Heward (2012), the primary objectives of the special/inclusive education policies are to achieve educational goals by bringing positive changes in the teaching learning process. Thus, policies play important role in shaping the trend, quantity, and quality of education of the nation. Equal important lies in the competencies of teachers to deliver quality education as prescribed by the education policies (National Centre for Educational Development, 2072). Hence, the teachers are key agents particularly for implementing educational policies of the country with an intention of improving educational quality.

Providing Inclusive education for the students with disabilities is a highly burning issue in the contemporary world. The countries of the world have been expressing their commitments to provide quality education for the students with disabilities through various conventions, declarations and protocols. All the international and national policies have highlighted the roles and responsibilities of teachers for quality education. NCED (2072) stated that teachers should be aware of human rights, child rights, education for all and education as a fundamental right and they are expected to illustrate their behavior in accordance with existing laws, social values and norms. In this vein, teachers must be aware and knowledgeable of existing policies and prove themselves as an agent for changing society through implementing education policies in the schools. While translating policies into practice through curriculum implementation, teachers use teaching materials, resources, strategies and plans. In this regard, teachers are the primary agents who interact with the students to make them learning new ways and methods of living encompassing values and culture. Teachers interact with the students with the help of curriculum. Sometimes teachers feel some aspects of policies imposed through curriculum irrelevant for teaching learning. In this situation, teachers can refuse to implement or can substantially modify policies (Cooper et al., 2004) they dislike, such as curriculum reforms. These facts indicate that some policy implementers, teachers for example, may be unfamiliar about policy guidelines and sometimes they may not do those activities that are not intended by educational policy due to the lack of motivation (Liasidou, 2015). When the school teachers do not understand policy or do not want to conduct the instructional activities as per policy guidelines then educational program cannot be implemented effectively and efficiently.

### **Statement of Problem**

Teaching is the tri-polar process where there is an interaction among teacher, students and curriculum to achieve envisaged educational goals. In educational process, policies are inputs which provide the way about how the public aspirations are translated into educational goals and the way the goals are achieved (Neure, 2071). Therefore, teachers are at the center of educational process and can act as game changer in educational reform process. In Integrated school education, teachers have crucial to understand the students with disabilities and their educational rights. Integrated education teachers should know how to integrate the policies and existing curriculum to achieve the goal of quality education through inclusiveness. Since the historical journey of education for students with disabilities i.e. special education to inclusive education in Nepal is only for some decades. These days, there 32 special schools and 21 integrated schools are providing services for the students with disabilities in Nepal (Ministry of Education, 2074).

Teachers and schools have to take more responsibilities to implement curriculum in this era. To implement the curriculum in real practice, teachers have to be informed about the education policies and know instructional strategies to bring the intents of policies in classroom situations (Croll, Abbott, Broadfoot, Osborn, & Pollard, 1994). With the provision of substantial resources, it is expected that schools and teachers would have better opportunities to develop themselves professionally and manage classroom effectively. Therefore, the study posits the following research questions such as: Why teachers need to be aware of the educational policies? How such policies are implemented inside the school? and what are their roles and responsibilities of teachers on implementing policies?

### **Methodology**

The study is based on the qualitative research paradigm and descriptive research design. Ten integrated schools of Kathmandu valley were selected by purposive sampling method. All the teachers of these ten schools were considered as the population of the study. The researchers selected 10 special and ten physical education teachers by the help of purposive sampling method. Thus, there were altogether 20 respondents for taking part in the study process. Semi-structured interview schedules for teachers were prepared and reliability of the research tools were ensured by consulting with an expert of special education working in Nepal. The interview schedules were administered so as to collect in-depth information on teachers' roles, responsibilities and experiences in implementing inclusive education policies through teaching learning process. Documents study was made to find the existing policies and provisions on educational provisions for the students with special educational needs. Documents were primarily the government plans and policies related to special education. Data triangulation was another way to ensure the reliability and validity of the instrument. All the information gathered in the research process were transcribed, sorted out, organized and analyzed in descriptive way. The collected data were edited, classified, categorized, and then themes were generated (Creswell, 2012). The themes were analyzed carefully to draw meaningful results.

### **Results and discussion**

Teachers are at the front to implement education policies. In this sense, their 'lived experiences' in implementing education has great meaning. The teachers and head teachers were very enthusiastic in sharing their experiences which are some positive and some are negative, some views are optimistic and some are pessimistic. However, their experiences provide impetus for implementing special education policies in the days to come. In the result, respondents were coded as "T1, T2, T3, T4..... etc.". The data gathered from the participants were categorized and sorted out to generate the following themes:

#### **Teachers' Awareness on Inclusive Education Policy**

Inclusive education policy carries the message that teachers are the most responsible persons to integrate children with disability in the regular classroom (Kearney & Kane, 2006). Most of the participants were found unaware about the existence of Inclusive Education Policy. Many of the teachers had heard about the existence of inclusive education policy of Nepal but have not seen or read it. A participant who taught in the same school for five years said: *"I have heard that there has been a new policy called "Inclusive Education Policy" but I have not found it yet. Actually, I*

*am searching for that*". From the above statement it is clear that front line policy implementers are still unknown about the policy which is being in the country for two years. Other teacher also had the similar statement: *"The policy document may be available in the internet, but I haven't seen it yet. Maybe I will find it later.* It is surprising that in this time, the time of information and technology, teachers are unaware of inclusive education policy. Teachers had expected from the concerned organization to inform them the policy on time. They expected to know policy through teacher training so that they could know every component of the policy.

### **Teachers' General Knowledge of Inclusive Education**

Teachers' general understanding of inclusive education implies great significance on implementing inclusive education policy. The effectiveness of policy implementation depends upon how far the teachers keep knowledge on the concept of inclusive education policy. Teacher provided an idea on the concept of inclusive education with narrow and limited views. This is an excerpt from one participant: *"Inclusive education is a process of teaching all the students in a same classroom whether they are abled or disabled, talented or dull, rich or poor etc."*. This statement reveals a narrow view on inclusive education. The participant's understanding is seen only to keep students at a place and teach in a traditional way. It is only keeping students together, and not more than that. Another participant said: *"Inclusive education is a type of education where disabled students study with other students and teachers are well known about how to teach them together"*. This statement also clearly provides the level of understanding about the concept of inclusive education. Teachers seem to have needed to provide training on inclusive education and inclusive education policy.

### **Teachers' Perceptions of Inclusive Practices**

Inclusion is a systematic process to reduce the barriers to learning and participation. Most of the teachers came up with the view that inclusion education appeared with a lot of challenges to teach students with disabilities together with normal students (Ainscow, 2012). Teachers said that they are helping students with disabilities without discriminating them compared to normal students. One of the teachers said:

*"I have never discriminated disabled student and normal students. I am giving equal time and love to all the students. Yes, it is difficult to teach disabled student as compared to other students. It would be better if such students are taught separately"*.

From this statement, teacher had will to teach children with disability in the schools under study. But the teacher did not know about how to teach student with disability inside a classroom along with their counterparts. In this context, another teacher said: *"I give a little extra time to the disabled student but it is difficult to provide enough attention to them due to limited time and a large number of students inside the classroom"*. The verbatim of the teacher indicates that despite of his willingness to teach student with special needs inside his classroom, he could not help the students well. This means that the teaching learning inside the classroom is not very effective. Hence, the perceptions of the teachers are just to include students with disability inside the classroom together with non-disabled peers.

### **Limitations in Administration and Management**

Participants had an opinion that due to administration limitations their efforts to practice inclusive education is affected. They opined that school administration does not have any means to identify

and screen children with special needs. It is suspicious that whether the school administration is aware about how to implement inclusive education in schools effectively. Teachers believe that school administration should take responsibilities to manage, negotiate and establish network for among the teachers, parents and school administration to help the students with special needs effectively. In this regard, one of the teacher said: *“We had discussion with the school administration several time about the problems of students with disabilities. But the administration did not manage saying lack of resources and skilled human resources”*. Teachers’ opinion is clear how school management are doing for students with disabilities. The teacher’s statement indicated that school administration has not been doing actively for systematic identifying, screening and diagnosing the students with disabilities.

### **Skills and Knowledge Limitations**

Teachers having inclusive skills and knowledge provides them the status of inclusive education teacher in regular schools. Skills, knowledge and disposition for understanding and addressing the needs of children with disabilities are crucial to be a teacher for special, or integrated schools. The study result revealed that there are several teachers who do not have desired skills and knowledge. They have general qualification just as other teachers do. They accepted that they lack proper skills and knowledge for teaching in an inclusive classroom. One of the teacher said:

*“Not only me, if you see, there are many teachers like me who do have subject specific qualification and training but do not have any training or experiences of teaching in integrated classrooms. You know the system of education in Nepal, how much burden does a subject teacher have. My concern is to be perfect and confident in my own subject and I did the same. But how can I know the science of teaching and how to treat disabled students separately since I have not received any training or other instructions yet? Other teachers are also doing the same ..... (Laughter), what to do, we don’t have other suitable options”*.

From the above statement it is noticeable that teacher recruitment process in integrated schools is without specific norms. General school teachers are sent to the integrated schools and when they encounter students with disabilities inside the classroom, they are confused on how to address such students. This is the case in other schools too. Another teacher told her experience as: *“When I entered the classroom full of normal and disabled students together, I was in complete confusion about how to begin teaching. Later on, I am habituated with them. Although, I haven’t taken any formal training for managing and teaching such an integrated classroom”*. The statement represents many of such teachers who are teaching in integrated schools of Nepal. Teachers’ performance also reflects their traits in the workplace which can be easily seen inside the classroom. There are handful number of people in the country who have qualification in special education and are yet to be recruited in the schools.

### **Pre-service Training and Professional Development Opportunities**

Teacher preparation or teacher professional development refers to a process of preparing teachers to take on board the disabled alongside their non-disabled peers in the same classroom through inclusionary practices (Acedo, 2008). This is how teachers develop their competencies i.e. knowledge and skills on several areas to practice the concept of inclusion effectively inside a

classroom. In Nepal, teacher preparation is generally done by providing pre-service and in-service training to teachers. Teachers of study area not provided such training on appropriate scale. One of the teacher said:

*“As pre-service training, I did in teaching practice during my college life as requirement of the degree. As in-service training I had taken a package of teacher training which was related to my subject I teach, and not concerned with the pedagogy and psychology for the students with disabilities”.* The response of the teacher shows that teachers are not equipped with the practical skills of handling an integrated classroom in an inclusive way. Therefore, teachers felt they lacked self-confidence in teaching in an integrated classroom effectively addressing needs of all students. In the same vein, other teachers stated: *“Teachers like me who teach in integrated classroom deserve a lot of training for effective teaching. Pre and in-service training is also essential for our professional development. We need to participate in seminars, workshops related to inclusive education. Sending a teacher to a school is not enough for quality education, teachers’ capacity also should be developed”.*

Teacher’s above statement indicates how schools of Nepal are going through and how the inclusive education practice has been carried out. Right teacher with appropriate qualification and their regular training and professional development opportunities is required to enhance the learning in an integrated classroom.

### **Discussion of the Result**

An effective teaching learning is possible only when teachers are motivated and are highly professional in their duties. Teachers’ positive experiences in the school is another condition for making better inclusive environment. The study revealed that teachers’ awareness on inclusive education policy was found low which is disturbing. Teachers have to sight the inclusive education policy because they will get the official message about what they are asked to do and what are the things that they have to consider (Kearney & Kane, 2006). Therefore, it is important for teachers to see the policy documents because their role for inclusive practices in school is generally outlined (Florian, 2008). The finding revealed that teachers had a lot of variegated responses regarding the concept of inclusive education. Their opinions were like half understanding of inclusive education which is not sufficient to practice inclusive education. They did not get the point of departure of special education to inclusive education (Valeo, 2009) because their notion of inclusion was more related to special education than inclusive education. Teachers also stated that there is some limitation to practice inclusion due to administration of school. School should take initiation to develop a culture of inclusion and manage to identify and screen the students with disabilities. It is equally important to manage resources in the school (Farrel, 2012). The lack of skills and knowledge was also reflected during response of the participants. In order to make inclusive education successful, teachers should have adequate knowledge on its philosophies, principles, theories, and practices (Deku & Ackah Jnr, 2012). Therefore, skills and knowledge limitations put the practices in constraints considerably in the development of inclusionary practice. The skills and knowledge of a teacher is the product of his own efforts and training he/she receives from the external sources. Generally pre-service training, in-service training, and refresher courses are provided in Nepal (NCED, 2066 B.S.). Teachers of the study area complained about their deprivation from such type of training in inclusive

education area. Therefore, the study has highlighted that lack of professional development has been the significant constraint for effective implementation of inclusive education policy in Nepal.

### **Conclusion**

Teachers of integrated schools of Nepal revealed their experiences regarding implementing inclusive education policy in their respective schools. Study was focused on finding teachers' experiences in some selected area like awareness, and knowledge and skills to practice inclusive education, teachers' perception, professional development and management aspects of the schools. Teachers' awareness was found low, their skills and knowledge are inadequate for implementing inclusive education policy. Their perceptions towards students with disabilities mostly positive whereas the school management had some limitations. The professional development of the teachers is not properly planned and administered due to which implementing inclusive education policy has been challenged.

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