



PRE SERVICE TEACHERS ON THE THRESHOLD OF ENTERING THE ACTUAL CLASSROOM: ARE THEY REALLY PREPARED TO MANAGE THE CLASSROOM DIVERSITIES?

Abstract:

Indian classrooms mirror the vast diversity that is omnipresent in India ranging from religion, culture, ethnicity, languages, region, socioeconomic, status as well as gender among the many. More than ever now there is pressing need to have teachers who are not only aware of their own culture but also have explicit knowledge of their students' cultural background which they blend into the curriculum. Essentially in a multicultural country like India, teacher education programs shoulder the herculean task of not only preparing the would be teachers to be apt at teaching methodologies and classroom management but also to be able to comprehending and successfully work with students from culturally, linguistically, religiously and socially diverse backgrounds. To accomplish this goal, teacher educators need to develop a sound understanding of Pre-service teachers' level and nature of sensitivity toward diversity issues and of the factors that might impact these views. The present research focused on the attitude and beliefs of pre service teachers regarding diversity and gauged their preparedness to handle a multicultural classroom pre and post an intervention program on meaning, relevance of diversity, diversity in Indian classrooms as well as pedagogical strategies to address diversity. One Group Pre-test Post-test Design was adopted. The sample comprised of 40 first year B.Ed students of a particular Teacher Training Institutions in Mumbai. Purposive sampling technique was used. Tools used were Rating scale on Attitude towards Diversity and a semi structured questionnaire. Data Analysis was done in terms of frequency and percentages. The major findings of the study revealed that in pre-test most pre service teachers believed in suppressing, ignoring or being neutral towards diversity issues in classrooms while in post-test their responses were more towards handling diversities. The pre service teachers expected teacher training programs to make them more trained in pedagogies for a multicultural classrooms

Key words: diversity, multicultural classrooms, pre service teachers

Introduction

The most endearing and identifying feature of India is it being amongst the most multi-ethnic, multicultural, multi religion as well as multi linguistic nation in the world. Indian classrooms mirror the vast diversity that is omnipresent in India ranging from religion, culture, ethnicity, languages, region, socioeconomic, status as well as gender among the many. In a heterogeneous classroom with a student's mix of all diverse types it becomes absolutely necessary that children are taught not only to accept diversity but also respect and embrace its presence. Teachers hold the most pivotal position in this regard.

Multicultural Classrooms- A Feature of Most Indian Classrooms

As per Banks & Banks(1997, pg 435) Multiculturalism is a, "A philosophical position and movement that deems that the gender, ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity of a pluralistic society should be reflected in all of the institutionalized structures of educational institutions, including the staff, the

norms, and values, the curriculum, and the student body” Multiculturalism in this essence as per Elkind (2000) makes it clear that though differences are there amongst humans yet these do not grade one as better over the other. Hence multiculturalism can be viewed as more of reform movement (Banks, 1997) that intends to bring in concepts of equity and equality. The broader aims of multicultural education is to bring in amalgamations of cultures from all over and weave them in the content and pedagogy so as to attain its objective of reducing or eliminating biases and prejudices and bring forth an atmosphere of equity alongside with empowerment. To in reality bring forth and implement the concept of multicultural education in schools is a complex task as it requires involvement of not only multiple stakeholders but also requires structural and functional changes in overall policies of education of the country, the broader curriculum, the environment at education institutes and overall societal ideologies. (Banks, 1997; Menkart, 1999; Pullen, 2000). As per Erickson (1992), prejudices and misunderstandings can decrease amongst students in a multicultural class and it contributes in creating awareness about social inequalities that exist within society alongside with attempts to reduce these inequalities (Sleeter & Grant, 1987).

Teacher Education and Diversity

Teacher Education program have undergone a major pedagogical shift in recent years. This move has been furthered by enhancing the duration of teacher education program beginning 2015 and revamping the curriculum so as to prepare professional teachers who are sensitive to multiculturalism and are trained to handle the diversities in the classrooms in most efficient manner. Teacher professional preparation courses have introduced elements of diversity in the teacher education curriculum but what is of focal significance is that how far such preparatory courses go in terms of preparing future teachers who are apt in handling diversity. More than ever now there is pressing need to have teachers who are not only aware of their own culture but also have explicit knowledge of their students’ cultural background which they blend into the curriculum. This leads to converting the impersonal curriculum to a personal curriculum which caters to individual differences among students and provides them platform for realistic associations.

With teacher education programs becoming two years of duration, they now have to be more rigorous in establishing a multicultural education curriculum that addresses educational, social and economic equity. Tracing the roots of multicultural education one finds that it emerged in response to the educational needs of a society that continues to struggle with the realization that it is not monocultural but rather an amalgamation of many diverse cultures (Hanley, 1999) and it aims to accomplish plurality through education and social change. Gay (1994) had rightly pointed out that educators need to understand that it is important that all “teaching the culturally different is more process oriented than content oriented. Therefore pre service teachers should be trained to focus on developing and establishing more effective instructional relationships with students from different ethnic, cultural and racial backgrounds and this would in turn serve as a basis for improving educational opportunities and outcomes.

It is important for pre service teachers to anticipate the kinds of diversities that would be present in schools however the reality is that in their teacher preparation courses mostly they are not prepared to meet the expectations of their new and expanded roles (Hughes, 1996/1997). The teacher preparation courses do have content exclusively devoted to understanding and responding to diversities of all kinds in classrooms however they largely lack in providing training to use multicultural strategies and practices in classroom. The pre service teachers are given theoretical exposure regarding the diversities of all kids present in schools like religion, gender, region, culture, socioeconomic status, language, abilities etc yet in practical sense they are not oriented regarding how

these affect children's thoughts and behaviours. More so the would be teachers are not provided platforms to reflect on their assumptions, prejudices and biases regarding issues related to diversity.

As per De La Torre (1996) if pre service teachers who never questioned their own race, class privileges or beliefs, assume that inequality cannot be removed or overcome. Such teachers in their future roles are not equipped to deal with diversity in their classrooms. It is a matter of concern if pre service teachers enter into teaching field with such strongly rooted notions regarding diversity as such teachers in face of encountering any challenge in class regarding diversity or witnessing any inequality tend to accept it as a the norm and hence make least or no attempts to tackle these issues related to classroom diversity. Most teachers rather assume either apathetic attitude or neutral stance towards such challenges, both of which are very detrimental. As per Carpenter (2000) most pre service teachers have stereotypical beliefs about diversity along with a limited version of multicultural teaching. According to Ladson-Billings (2001) there is a growing need to prepare teachers for a culturally relevant pedagogy in order to teach culturally diverse student populations. In this regard Capella-Santana (2003) have supported that if teachers' have limited knowledge of the cultural background of students, it affects their ability to teach. Lee and Dallman(2008) found that when teachers enter in the academic environment they already have pre conceived notions about diversity parameters and these preconceived notions about diverse students affect their ability to effectively instruct diverse student populations (Gay,2002).Teacher education has the challenging task to prepare the teachers of the future and as per Melnick & Zeichner(1998) help all teachers whether novice or experienced to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions needed to work effectively with a diverse student population.

Rationale of the study

When students come to class they bring with them enormous heterogeneity ranging from their background, cultural identities, gender, racial and ethnic along with innumerable expectations, learning styles and approaches all of which influence the totality of educational experiences(Hixson, 1991). To teach this diverse group of students requires teachers that are not only well equipped with knowledge to deal with such diversities but are also with sufficient experience and skills that would make them suitable in the diverse classroom. It is pertinent to note that issues stemming from diversity, multiculturalism etc is not something that can be especially devoted space in the curriculum as individual topics.

With teacher education programs becoming two years of duration, they now have to be more rigorous in establishing a multicultural education curriculum that addresses educational, social and economic equity. Tracing the roots of multicultural education one finds that it emerged in response to the educational needs of a society that continues to struggle with the realization that it is not mono cultural but rather an amalgamation of many diverse cultures (Hanley, 1999) and it aims to accomplish plurality through education and social change. Gay (1994) had rightly pointed out that educators need to understand that it is important that all "teaching the culturally different is more process oriented than content oriented. Therefore pre service teachers should be trained to focus on developing and establishing more effective instructional relationships with students from different ethnic, cultural and racial backgrounds and this would in turn serve as a basis for improving educational opportunities and outcomes.

The B.Ed Curriculum has this lacuna of treating these issues as spate entities in the curriculum for which a theoretical overview is presented and later teacher trainees are examined theoretically. It fails to take into cognizance the complexity that a simple word diversity brings forth and hence fails to

incorporate the concepts and ideologies in every aspect of not only syllabus for teacher training but also practicum, and everything that goes in schools in terms of the broader umbrella of curriculum. Teachers must note these discrepancies and bring information into the classroom that will give students of all backgrounds representation, familiarity, and understanding of the course content. Teachers must also ensure that multicultural ideology is incorporated into every aspect of the curriculum.

Methodology

The present research has used the experimental design which allows the researcher to establish a relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variables. One Group Pre-test Post-test Design was adopted

Variables of the Study

Independent Variable: In the present research, an intervention program focusing on diversity in classrooms was the independent variable.

Dependent Variable: In the present research, attitude of pre service teachers towards diversity was the independent variables.

Objectives of the Study

1. To ascertain the pretest attitude of pre-service teachers regarding student diversity.
2. To ascertain the pretest teacher efficacy scores of pre-service teachers at the entry level.
3. To implement the training program for preparing pre service teachers to teach diverse students
4. To compare the pre- posttest attitude of pre-service teachers regarding student diversity.

Intervention

As a part of the intervention, the following sessions were held for the selected sample so as to orient them towards meaning, relevance of diversity, diversity in Indian classrooms as well as pedagogical strategies to address diversity. These sessions were also instrumental in making the student teachers explore their own beliefs and opinion as well as stand points regarding diversity

| Sr. No. | Issue | Activities |
|---------|---|--|
| 1. | Classroom Diversity – issues and challenges | Group discussion, critical analysis of cases |
| 2. | Diversity in Indian classroom and Role of teachers | Critical reflection on cases |
| 3. | Celebrating diversity | Discussion platforms |
| 4. | Unity in Diversity | Dramatization |
| 5. | Diversity at workplace | Dramatization |
| 6. | Diversity- the Act of thinking independently together | Dramatization |

Sample of the Study: comprised of 40 first year B.Ed students of a particular Teacher Training Institutions in Mumbai. Purposive sampling technique was used.

Tools of the Study

1. Rating scale on Attitude towards Diversity -was developed by the researcher and consisted of 18 statements which had to be rated on a 3 point scale of agree, unsure and disagree. The statements focused on perceptions held by pre service teachers regarding diversity as well as their preparedness to deal with diversity

2. Semi structured questionnaire - It consisted of 4 semi structured questions developed by researcher which focused on the stances that would be adopted by these would be teachers for dealing with diversity, their overall attitude towards diversity as well as their own experiences regarding issues arising out of diversity.

Data Analysis was done in terms of frequency and percentages

MAJOR FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Attitude towards diversity of pre service teachers

- Majority of the student teachers (85%) in the pre-test believed that a teacher has to curb the religious differences and issues related to it if they crop up in the class. However in posttest following the intervention, the percentage declined to almost half (57%) indicating that to some extent the perceptions and attitudes of the sample did show some changes.
- The student teachers in the pre-test were mixed in their opinion regarding whether too much diversity reduces educational standards however post test showed that most of them (85%) disregarded diversity to be in any ways bringing down quality of education.
- In the pre-test almost a majority agreed that a teacher has to make student feel they are same, in the post test there was a complete switch in the perception as the stance adopted was that a teacher need not make all students feel the same.
- There was a major transformation in the attitude of student teachers regarding whether teacher was supposed to be neutral as in pre-test majority(85%) were in favour while with post-test , almost all (91%) disagreed.
- Majority of the teacher's student teachers in pre-test said that a teacher has to stress on boys and girls being equal while majority (75%) in post-test said that a teacher need not keep asserting the equality among the genders.
- Regarding if a teacher should make the students discard their nonscientific alternative beliefs, 92% students disagreed as compared to 56% in pre-test who agreed.

Expectations from Pre service Teacher Training Programs

- The post test results showed an increase in percentage of student teachers (76%) who want more training from teacher training institutes regarding handling and dealing with classroom with amalgamation of different cultures
- The posttest analysis showed that thee student teachers were much more laden with techniques to bring in different cultures into classrooms as well deal with students from different religions
- Regarding the professional education course having presented teacher trainees with techniques for effectively teaching children whose national and/or racial background differs from their own, the percentage of those who agreed rose from 56% in pretest to 78% in

posttest indicating that the intervention and exposure as well as dialogue, discussions on matters related to diversity did enhance the knowledge of the student teachers.

- In posttest, 78% students said that the teacher training course has helped them communicate with students from diverse background
- There was slight decrease from pre-test(73%) to post test(36%) regarding the extent to which the teacher training had provided knowledge to be able to locate and evaluate culturally diverse materials. In post-test, 64% disagreed regarding that teacher training had adequately prepared them indicating that there are many areas in which the teacher education programs have to be revamped and restructured.
- A majority of the students (88%) in post-test considered themselves to be sufficiently prepared to teach students about different cultures as well as deal with those who are culturally different.

Pre Service Teachers Adjustment Patterns

- Regarding the conflict of opinions due to differences in what teacher says and what their religion, family, culture, it was found that 64 % of the student teachers said that in such a conflicting situation they usually adjusted their belief pattern to follow both. 17% reported that they believed what their family, culture, religion said while 11% believed what was taught in schools
- Student teachers stance for a heterogeneous class reflected majority of them would not discriminate amongst students in their class but rather treat them as same.
- Most of teacher trainees (around85%) responded that teacher training course had to a large extent equipped them with a knowhow of a diverse class, the expectations from it, pedagogical strategies and had prepared them to effectively to deal with a multicultural classroom with diversities of all kinds.
- All the student teachers agreed that classroom diversity in no way hampers learning

Discussion

As per Budde (2012), diversity' is a vital conception that claims an appropriate consideration of differences regarding culture, gender, or aptitudes. Teachers hence play an important role in considering appropriately relevant differences either created by society or by their own selves. Like the present research, findings of many researches have indicated that when probed regarding what diversity signified, most pre-service teachers tend to visualize and define it in terms of issues of ethnicity and race (e.g. Byrnes and Kiger, 1989; Hansman et al. 1999; Larke, 1990; Shultz et al. 1996) indicating the extremely narrow focus and conceptualization. With such limited conceptions, the expectations to do justice to addressing diversity in the most suitable manner seem to be farfetched. Diversity is far more wide and includes additional important issues such as gender, socio-economic status, ability, religion and language amongst others (Pohan and Aguilar, 2001). Most of the pre service teachers seemed oblivious of the vastness of the term 'diversity' and what all it covered.

Much of the research work has been concentrating a great deal on how the kind of beliefs that the teachers have about diversity do inevitably affect their expectations from diverse students and their academic performance. Researches like Klieme and Hartig,(2008) and Reusser et al.,(2011) have again pointed out that the teachers' beliefs are crucial for dealing effectively with diverse students. Pre-service teachers have negative or neutral attitudes toward diversity (Hansman et al., 1999; Larke, 1990). As per Kagan(1992) and Pohan(1996) attitudes and beliefs are not easily altered. Positive

attitudes on the part of educators and students will hopefully lead to the development of respect and appreciation of ethnically diverse groups (Davidman & Davidman, 1994). When students learn to appreciate one another based on the unique contributions each one can bring to the classroom, effective cooperation that stimulates learning will result.

These far-reaching opinions and outlooks toward diversity are important to look for. If teachers are to be more responsive to the unique needs of diverse students, they must examine their beliefs regarding diversity and develop a more professional understanding of how their attitudes can influence their interactions with students. In order for teachers to be comfortable and geared to meet the challenges of a multicultural classrooms they have to first confront their own apprehensions, assumptions, prejudices and beliefs a regarding issues, which they are certain to encounter.

Before coming for teacher training, the students have gone through graduation and post-graduation systems which rarely touch upon any diversity issue; hence the exposure of the pre service teachers is very restricted. A much forgotten premise her is the fact that while the teacher training programs assess the trainees at entry level regarding their content knowledge and pedagogical soundness as well as language competencies, there is no mechanisms to assess their beliefs, adjustment patterns, the social cultural disconnects and the level of their sensitivity toward diversity issues and of the factors that might impact these views.

While the curriculum to some extent does offer them glimpses of multicultural aspects, diverse learning abilities, sociological divides, ethnic and caste related systems, gender issues etc, yet these courses are merely focusing on enhancing their knowledge, skills and not their overall dispositions towards diversity thereby neglecting the crucial focus that largely the beliefs and dispositions one hold mediates knowledge and action (Bandura, 1982). As per Ladson-Billings (2004), the role of teacher education programs is to give such intercultural experiences that enable the pre-service trainees to develop an understanding and appreciation of cultures other than their own and to possess the necessary skills that allow them the opportunity to function in culturally diverse societies. As per Larke (1990) if the educators are not sensitive to the needs of minority students then it results in them being unaware of the cultural conflicts. These cultural conflicts can later become barriers in the learning processes of minority students. It is therefore important the as teachers, one must first reflect and understand their own attitudes and beliefs and ensure that they are in tune with the principles of multicultural education (Perkins & Gomez, 1993)

Significance of the Study

This study is important for several reasons.

First, the dearth of research on diversity in the Indian context indicates a need to contribute to a body of knowledge in this area. Secondly the field of education can benefit from this research because teacher education program will prepare their pre-service teachers to actually think and feel about diversity when planning curriculum and learning experiences.

Implications for Practitioners: the training for dealing with diverse students would help the pre service teachers to acquire knowledge and skills necessary to promote social equity, develop cultural awareness, and provide the best educative environment for all students in the future jobs.

Implications for Teacher Education: This study would contribute in analyzing the extent to which the new teacher education curriculum is successful in identifying any observed deficiencies of teacher education programs according to the responses of pre service teachers in their preparation to teach diverse student populations.

Implications for Schools: Create a climate for learning where diversity is recognized, respected and appreciated. Provide for training of the in-service teachers periodically to develop and enhance their multicultural perspective to the subject content of the curriculum and use instructional techniques and strategies that address diversity.

Implications for Research: the findings of this study can lead to many further researches done in this area using different variables. Experimental studies on a vast population can be done. Researches can be done to develop theoretical perspective regarding Diversity as well as evolution of pedagogical practices that support diversity.

Conclusion

More than ever now with an increased duration, the teacher education programs are faced bigger challenge of establishing a multicultural education curriculum that addresses educational, social, and economic equity. As per Sheets (2000) teacher education programs cannot continue to graduate students lacking the knowledge, dispositions, and skills needed to teach students within certain contexts. In this sense the onus shifts predominantly to teacher training programs to train them to address diversity. In this regard studies very well point suggest that the more extensively pre service teachers are exposed to certain diversity issues in teacher education courses, the more in-depth they construct different concepts of and sensitivity to diversity issues. This also reflected in the present study as it was observed that the pre service teachers underwent huge transformations rights from the way they conceptualized diversity to means of addressing or acknowledging to even encountering their own beliefs regarding diversity. Though of course learners in India are not new to diversified culture still the fundamental goal of all teacher training programs has to be on effectively preparing teachers to successfully work with students from culturally, linguistically, religiously and socially diverse backgrounds.

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Dr Pooja Birwatkar
Assistant Professor
K J Somaiya College of Education
Mumbai

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