

Socio-cultural Influence on Teachers' Preparedness for Inclusive Education: A Mixed Methods Study in the Nepalese Context

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Abstract : Despite being on the global education reform agenda for over two decades, interpretations and practices of inclusive education vary widely across the world. In Nepal, similar to many other developing countries, inclusive education is still an emerging concept and limited research is available to date in relation to how inclusive education is conceptualized and implemented here. Moreover, very little is known about how teachers who are at the frontline of providing inclusive education understand this concept and how well they are prepared to teach inclusively. This study addresses this research gap by investigating an overarching research question, 'How prepared are Nepalese teachers to practice inclusive pedagogy?' Different societies and cultures may have different interpretations of the concepts of diversity and inclusion. Acknowledging that such contextual differences influence how these issues are addressed, such as preparing teachers for providing inclusive education, this study has investigated the research questions using a sociocultural conceptual framework. A sequential mixed-method research design involved quantitative data from 203 survey responses collected in the first phase, followed by qualitative data in the second phase collected through semi-structured interviews with teachers. Descriptive analysis of the quantitative data and reflexive thematic analysis of the qualitative data revealed a narrow understanding of inclusive education in the participating Nepalese teachers with limited preparedness for implementing inclusive pedagogy. Their interpretation of inclusion substantially included the need for non-discrimination and the provision of equal opportunities. This interpretation was found to be influenced by the social context where a lack of a deep understanding of human diversity was reported, leading to discriminatory attitudes and practices. In addition, common norms established in society that experiencing privileges or disadvantages was normal for diverse groups of people appeared to have led to limited efforts to enhance teachers' understanding of and preparedness for inclusive education. This study has significant implications, not only in the Nepalese context but globally, for reform in policies and practices and for strengthening the teacher education and professional development system to promote inclusion in education. In addition, the significance of this research lies in highlighting the importance of further context-specific research in this area to ensure inclusive education in a real sense by valuing socio-cultural differences.

Keywords : inclusive education, inclusive pedagogy, sociocultural context, teacher preparation

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