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Competency Framework for Inclusive Teacher Education

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Abstract: Achieving inclusive education depends significantly on preparing all teachers to effectively teach children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. Although many teacher education programs offer introductory courses on inclusive education, these efforts often fall short of enabling teachers to fully understand, believe in, and practice inclusion. A comprehensive desk review of national and international normative and empirical literature was conducted to develop a competency framework that identifies essential teacher competencies, gaps in current preparation, and evidence-based practices that strengthen inclusion. The review highlights three core domains, knowledge, skills, and dispositions, as foundational for preparing teachers to meet diverse learner needs. The resulting framework can guide curriculum reform, support accreditation processes, and integrate inclusive practices across teacher education programs. It serves both as an evaluative tool and a resource for improving program design, ensuring alignment between teacher preparation and the competencies required for effective inclusive education.

Suggested Keywords: *inclusive education, teacher preparation, teacher education reform, inclusive pedagogy*

Purpose: *To bridge this gap, there is an urgent need to revisit existing curricula and foster stronger values, dispositions, and competencies in educators through robust school partnerships. In response, this study undertook a comprehensive desk review of national and international normative and empirical literature.*

1. Background

Education of children with disabilities has undergone a significant paradigm shift, from segregation, to integration, and more recently, to inclusion within mainstream educational contexts. The conceptualisation of inclusive education began in the United States in the 1970s with the aim of enabling students with disabilities to attend mainstream schools. With the incorporation of this approach into international policy frameworks, the idea expanded globally in the 1990s (Kalyanpur, 2014). In India, the last two decades have seen a growing national policy impetus that has raised awareness and encouraged education systems to implement inclusive education grounded in human rights, dignity, and equal opportunities.

Globally, the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994), Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (United Nations, 2006), and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) collectively call for acknowledgment, attention, and a global commitment to inclusion. These developments have significantly influenced schooling opportunities for children with disabilities. However, distortions in implementation across contexts reveal persistent challenges in mainstream education systems (Singal, 2019). A critical analysis of inclusive education practices highlights inadequate teacher preparation as one of the key barriers to effectively including children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms(Mullick, Ahmmed & Sharma, 2014; UNESCO, 2019).

Prominent theories (Ajzen, 1991; Shulman & Shulman, 2004) emphasise that teachers require commitment, ability, knowledge, and pedagogic competence to make a meaningful difference in classrooms. UNESCO's definition of inclusive education underscores its pedagogical intent, describing it as "a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through inclusive practices in learning, cultures and communities and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children" (UNESCO, 2005). The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act , 2016, similarly defines inclusive education as " a system of education wherein students with and without disability learn together and the system of teaching and learning is suitably adapted to meet the learning needs of different types of students with disabilities" (G overnment of India , 2016) .

Although this vision of inclusive education is transformative, research on teacher education programs in India highlights concerns related to teacher motivation and perceptions, limitations in curriculum design, and insufficient preparation for teaching in diverse classrooms (Kalyanpur , 2019; Sharma, 2025; Singal, 2014; UNESCO, 2019) . There is also limited research on how teachers are prepared for inclusive and special education, making it essential to revisit teacher education programs and ensure that curricula are responsive to societal needs and delivered by capacitated and empowered teacher educators (Ramchand, 202 1).

To contribute sustainably to the knowledge and practice of inclusive education , particularly for children with disabilities , it is important to identify a competency framework that can critically analyse teacher education curricula and assess teacher preparation needs. This policy - practice brief provides an overview of the process used to develop such a competency framework f or supporting teacher education programmes to prepare teachers for inclusive education.

2. Purpose

One of the critical factors for achieving inclusive education is the preparation of all teachers to teach children with disabilities within mainstream settings. Teacher education plays an essential role in equipping teachers with the knowledge and skills required to do so. Although most teacher education programs include a course intended to build foundational understanding of inclusive education, such as understanding needs and abilities of children, and pedagogic skills, these efforts have not sufficiently enabled teachers to believe in, understand, and practise inclusion in their classrooms (Miller et al., 2022). Despite ongoing attempts to strengthen teacher preparation for inclusive education, there remains a need to revisit existing curricula and promote stronger values, dispositions, and competencies for teaching diverse groups of students throughrobust partnerships with schools (Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Sayed et al., 2026).

In response to this need, a desk review of normative and empirical literature on teacher preparation for inclusive education was undertaken to develop a competency framework. The review included national and international publications to identify key teacher competencies, gaps in teacher education programs, and evidence from policies and practices that support effective inclusive education.

3. Objectives

The overarching purpose of the competency framework is to provide a critical analysis of teacher education curricula with respect to the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. The literature review also sought to develop a frame of reference that can contribute to both systemic and classroomlevel preparation of teachers. The key themes of the framework highlight essential competencies for inclusive teaching and is intended to throw light on the:

1. the needs for teacher education,
2. the gaps in teacher preparation, and
3. the curricular reforms required to support inclusive education.

4. Method

A multistep process was used to conduct the desk review, drawing on the methodological framework proposed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005). The review included journal articles, policy documents, and reports from standard academic databases. Both normative and empirical papers were included, and the publication period was limited to 2008-2020, with one exception, a 1999 publication repeatedly cited across the selected literature was also included in this review. Articles that did not primarily focus on teacher preparation for inclusive education were excluded, resulting in a final sample of 65 articles. These were reviewed and coded to extract information about key competencies required for teacher preparation in inclusive education. Each article was mapped onto the three overarching themes, and subthemes were identified from this categorisation. These were analysed by a team of four researchers to eliminate repetitions and remove competencies unique to specific contexts. The draft framework was presented to six experts in inclusion and special education in India, whose feedback confirmed its relevance.

5. Analysis

Of the 65 articles reviewed, most literature originated from the Global North, particularly the United States and Scotland, with fewer contributions from the United Kingdom and Canada. Reports from international agencies such as UNICEF, UNESCO, the World Bank, and the European Agency formed a substantial portion of the normative literature. Literature from the Global South was limited but tended to be more empirical. Most Indian literature was normative.

The literature revealed three core domains as critical for informing teacher preparation for inclusive education: knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Each of the core domains can be further broken down into subdomains for analytical clarity, each representing essential competencies for inclusive teaching (see Table 1).

Table 1: Competency Framework for Inclusive Education

Domains	Sub-domains	Competencies
Knowledge	Theoretical knowledge	on the philosophy of inclusion rooted in the social model of disability and rights perspective
		on the theories of teaching and learning (cognitive, social, developmental), human diversity, growth and development and learning styles
	Legal knowledge	of international and national provisions that are relevant to make classrooms more inclusive
	Technological knowledge	on the components and capabilities of various technologies and the different ways in which they can be used in teaching and learning settings to provide access for diverse needs of learners
	Pedagogical knowledge	on pedagogic practices which are culturally responsive, evidence-based, and provide multiple methods of representation, engagement, action and expression
	Contextual knowledge	on the historical background of inclusive education, underpinning societal and ethical norms of inclusive schools, context of the learners' background
	Professional knowledge	on the role and responsibilities of an inclusive teacher
Skills	Collaboration skills	for social interactions with stakeholders to create and participate in supportive learning communities
	Communication skills	to appropriately communicate using different techniques and variations according to the learner needs
	Technological skills	to adequately use technological tools for enhancing learning opportunities to all learners
	Practical skills	to use research and evidence of inclusive education in practice, participate in teacher learning communities
	Pedagogical skills	to apply inclusive pedagogical strategies for curricular goals, lesson planning, classroom management, instructional methods and assessments
	Professional skills	to be decision-makers, critical thinkers and reflective practitioners who adapt and improve as per the need, and motivate learners
Dispositions	Values and beliefs	acknowledgement of learner diversity and acceptance of inclusive education as a responsibility
		uphold empathy, respect, cultural sensitivity and compassion towards the needs of all learners
		approach inclusion with a focus on meeting diverse needs of learners by moving away from practices that are steeped in stigma associated with labelling some learners as different
	Attitudes	adopt a strengths-based perspective and ecological systems approach towards classroom diversity
		maintain responsibility, critical sensibility, perseverance, resilience and ethical judgement towards inclusive education
		have self-efficacy, confidence and advocacy for inclusive education

The competency framework derived from the literature is premised on the understanding that effective inclusive practice requires a coherent integration of knowledge, skills, and dispositions,that collectively shape inclusive practices in the classrooms. The knowledge domain can enable the teachers to understand and interpret learner diversity within the larger purpose of inclusive schooling; the skills domain can help teachers to operationalise and put their knowledge into practice; and the dispositions domain can help teacher develop appropriate attitudinal and ethical orientations that are necessary for building a commitment to inclusion. Although teacher preparation for inclusive practice cannot be reduced to isolated competencies, the literature points to the need for a dynamic integration of these domains and competencies. It also underscores the need for teacher preparation programs to cultivate a holistic set of competencies through theoretical coursework, practicum experiences, and reflective engagement with issues of equity and diversity.

This framework also aligns to an extent with the National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) in India which categorises teacher competencies into Core Values and Ethics, Knowledge and Practice, and Professional Growth and Development (NCTE, 2023). The competencies listed under the three domains, knowledge, skills and dispositions, align closely with the first two categories of the NPST, while those specifically listed under the skills domain overlap with the Professional Growth and Development category of the NPST. An analysis of the National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE) (NCTE, 2009) against the competency framework indicated a high degree of convergence, with approximately 95 percent of the identified competencies reflected in the NCFTE. This suggests that this framework can be used to design teacher preparation programs and evaluate existing curricula.

Using the Framework

The competency framework discussed in this brief was used to analyse teacher education curricula and to develop a survey questionnaire for assessing student teachers' knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to inclusive education. However, the framework can be used in different ways. It can be used to integrate inclusive practices across teacher education courses or guide curriculum revision and accreditation standards. It can serve not only as an evaluative tool but also as a resource for strengthening program design and aligning teacher preparation with the competencies required for inclusive education.

Given that the competencies can be demonstrated primarily through classroom practices, appropriate observation and assessment tools would need to be developed to evaluate attainment of specific competences among teachers. This could be done through collective efforts among teacher educators along with practising teachers through practitioner research and collaborative reflections. However, using the framework as an accountability tool, similar to national professional standards, would undermine its purpose. It is intended to support reflective, context-responsive teacher preparation rather than impose top-down accountability.

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