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Pre-service teachers' self-efficacy towards classroom management and teaching practice in inclusive setting

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Abstract
The demand for inclusive education has resulted in an increase of research measuring teachers' self-efficacy. Developing pre-service teachers' efficacy belief prior to their entry into the teaching profession is an essential consideration. This study aims to investigate the self-efficacy belief of pre-service teachers towards inclusive classroom setting. In the realm of inclusive education, the study explored the self-efficacy of pre-service teachers to teach students having learning disabilities, to manage and organize inclusive classroom practices. The study utilizes a qualitative method for data collection. The respondents were 10 pre-service teachers enrolled in Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) program. The investigator has used thematic analytical approach to organize the qualitative data collected from semi-structured interviews. Findings indicate mastery experiences, vicarious experiences and social persuasion enhances teachers' self-efficacy to teach and manage inclusive classroom settings. The findings of the study have practical implication for policy maker to underline inclusive practice teaching in pre- and in-service teacher education course curricula. The results advance the knowledge of the sources that influence self-efficacy and have implications to support teachers at various phases of their professional careers.

Keywords: Classroom management, inclusive education, self-efficacy of pre-service teachers, teaching practice

Introduction
There has been constant encouragement for inclusion and a global commitment to promote education for all since the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) issued the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action in 1994. Inclusive education as defined "all students are welcomed, cared for, and equally valued, and are provided with fair and equitable learning, participation, and educational opportunities regardless of individual differences or students' unique characteristics, interests, abilities, and learning needs" (UNESCO, 1994, p.8) [17]. Further, inclusive education can "welcomes all students and supports them to learn, whoever they are and whatever their abilities or requirements, by ensuring that teaching and the curriculum, school buildings, classrooms, play areas, transport, and toilets are appropriate for all children at all levels" (UNICEF, 2017, p. 1) [19]. It acknowledges every child has distinct learning needs and strengths, and that educational systems must value and accommodate this diversity. More significantly, it must ensure that this can occur in mainstream education of students' local schools (Booth & Ainscow, 2011; UNESCO, 1994) [4, 17]. The Indian education has a great history of philosophy of inclusive education. Inclusive education in India have been emphasized in its policy perspectives. The National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 underlined for "the integration of physically and mentally challenged within the general community as equal partners, to prepare them for normal growth and to enable them to face life with courage and confidence". In Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) 2001, 'Zero Rejection Policy' was adopted to ensure quality education for children with special needs (CWSN). The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisaged inclusive and equitable education is essential to achieve an inclusive community living where all citizen can dream, thrive, and make contributions towards the nation. The policy also acknowledges the significance of establishing supportive mechanisms for Divyangs, or children with special needs, for enabling them to have quality education along with the normal child.

In addition, by signing the Salamanca Statement-1994, India pledged to ensure that all mainstreaming schools are accessible to students with disabilities by 2020.

Self-Efficacy: A Theoretical Framework

The self-efficacy construct was described in social learning theory developed by Albert Bandura. It refers to an individuals' ability "to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1986) [27]. Bandura identified four factors or sources that determines self-efficacy beliefs. These influencing sources are enactive mastery; verbal persuasion; vicarious experience; and the physiological and affective state (Bandura, 1986) [27]. The most influential source of efficacy belief is mastery experience or enactive mastery, refers to "gaining confidence and competence through direct personal experiences of success in performing a task or activity". Verbal persuasion is the process of improving people's confidence and motivating them to face difficulties by providing them positive feedback affirmations from others. As reported in literature, vicarious experience refers to "process of building confidence in one's ability to succeed by observing others successfully perform a task, particularly when the observer perceives similarities between themselves and the person they are observing". Physiological and affective state describes how physical and emotional factors, like stress, anxiety, or excitement, impact a person's confidence in their capacity of accomplishing a task; positive states can enhance self-efficacy, while negative states may weaken the same.

Literature Review

Numerous studies have examined teachers' attitudes about inclusive education in relation to their self-efficacy belief. Existing studies confirmed that teachers having high self-efficacy tends to have more positive attitude towards inclusive education and have a lower likelihood of excluding students from diverse class (Ozokcu, 2017; Savolainen, *et al*., 2020; Woodcock & Jones, 2020; as cited in Woodcock *et al*., 2022) [12, 14, 21]. Higher self-efficacy teachers also had positive attitude on inclusive education to deal with students having special needs. Similarly, a significant positive correlation was found between teacher's self-efficacy and their attitude towards mainstreaming of children having disabilities (Thapliyal, 2024) [16]. Lack of trust in own abilities to manage the classroom and to motivate the students for learning in inclusive environment is an important concern in teacher education. In literature, it is empirically studied that pre-service teachers working in early childhood education were insufficient in the field of inclusive education. Additionally, teachers with low self-efficacy were having lowest emotional support level, collective efficacy, and collegial collaboration in inclusive education (Mudhar *et al*., 2024) [11]. In Indonesian context, studies reported a moderate level of self-efficacy among most of the pre-service teachers to implement inclusive education (Damayanti *et al*., 2022) [5]. Pre-service teachers who received training in special education, having knowledge of disability legislation, teaching and personal experience with disability demonstrated higher self-efficacy level in special education setting (Sharma, Shaukat & Furlonge, 2015) [15]. Teachers having high self-efficacy adopted a more holistic and inclusive understanding of students' needs in relation to the professional development than the teachers having low self-efficacy belief (Woodcock & Hardy, 2023) [20]. Previous studies have investigated that self-efficacy in instructions; efficacy in collaboration and efficacy belief in managing behaviour were the considerable factors for implementing inclusive classroom in Finland context (Yada *et al*., 2021) [23].

The role of teachers and their competencies must be taken into account when addressing inclusion and inclusive education in schools. One of the most important factors for effective implementation of inclusive practices in educational setting is teachers' self-efficacy (Kiel *et al*., 2020) [8]. It is assumed that high self-efficacy of pre-service teachers can be positive reinforced to develop specific teaching skills and practices to deal with special students. Considering the fact that studies on pre-service teachers' teaching self-efficacy towards inclusive education are becoming increasingly important in the field of research for shaping teacher education practices; there is a lack of such studies in Indian setting. Investigating the efficacy belief of pre-service teachers towards inclusive teaching and classroom management, during the initial stage of teacher training can have practical implications in the field of teacher education. This study aimed to identify the sources of self-efficacy in pre-service teachers who have engaged in inclusive classrooms teachings during field experiences. Considering the empirical gap in exiting body of knowledge, following research questions have been formulated.

1. How do pre-service teachers evaluate the sources contributing their self-efficacy towards teaching in inclusive classroom setting?
2. How do pre-service teachers evaluate the sources contributing their self-efficacy towards classroom management in inclusive setting?

Materials and Methods

The study aimed to investigate the influential sources of teaching and classroom management self-efficacy among pre-service teachers. 10 pre-service teachers enrolled in two-year Bachelor of Elementary Education (B.Ed.), voluntarily participated for group interview. Institutional and departmental approval was gained from Head and Principal. Data was collected only from those pre-service teachers who have completed the internship teaching practice in schools. The sample group of pre-service teachers was heterogeneous in terms of gender, stream and age. To identify the sources contributing self-efficacy, open-ended interviews were conducted in the class. The reciprocal interaction between field investigator and participants facilitated the data collection to explore the sources of self-efficacy. During interview, the investigator has recorded the meaningful explanations of the trainee teachers. Every piece of information provided by the participants was anonymized. Inductive analysis was carried out to categorize the interview data.

Results

Participants responses were categorized across the sources of self-efficacy i.e. mastery experiences, vicarious experiences and social persuasion. An examination of the data collected from the interviews provided the following findings.

Self-Efficacy and Inclusive Classroom Teaching

While assessing self-efficacy in teaching practice, 10 pre-service teachers responded to the interview question. The narrations of the participants regarding their self-efficacy in teaching, specifically teaching students with special needs is listed below:

"I feel assured in my teaching skills when I notice that students can respond to my questions. It reassures me that I have the potential to be an effective teacher. When students say, 'Yes, I get it', it motivates me to continue teaching with enthusiasm".

"Observing my father, a dedicated teacher for primary students, and seeing how much his students enjoyed his lessons has inspired me to pursue teaching. His effectiveness motivates me to become a great teacher after my B.Ed. and boosts confidence in my teaching abilities during internship".

"While doing my internship, I observed lessons conducted by experienced teachers, which strengthened my belief that I can teach just as efficiently as they do".

Describe your self-efficacy in regards to teaching students with special needs.

"I have strong desire to teach students with special needs, but I'm concerned about my ability to create an inclusive learning environment, particularly for those with visual and hearing impairments" (Participant 3).

"I find it tough to plan lessons that meet the unique needs of every student in my class. That's why I think having support from a special educator would really help me out".

"I'm uncertain about my ability to effectively teach students with learning disabilities. To successfully instruct students with special needs, educators must create a tailored learning environment that leverages available school resources. However, I'm concerned that I may not be able to do so.

"Honestly, I have concerns about my ability to effectively teach students with learning disabilities or special needs. Special education teachers have a unique role that requires adapting materials to meet diverse student needs. To better prepare us for inclusive classrooms, I think the B.Ed. program should provide training on inclusive practices during our internship teaching".

"Before teaching students with special needs, I think it is essential to gain hands-on experience in the field. I believe that practical experience will help me develop the confidence and skills needed to effectively teach and manage a special education class".

"I don't think I have the experience or skills to teach students with special needs effectively. Teaching students with learning disabilities is a challenge, I'm not sure I'm ready for, and I am lacking in confidence".

The responses of participants were organized in broad themes or influencing sources of self-efficacy. Participants reported that self-efficacy in teaching practice is developed by verbal feedback from the students. It emphasizes the importance of social persuasion in developing self-efficacy in teaching. Some pre-service teachers underlined the importance of vicarious experience for self-efficacy in teaching. While assessing efficacy belief in teaching students with special needs, most of the participants having low self-efficacy reported that they were not confident about their teaching abilities for inclusive classroom setting. They have stated the need of filed experience and support from special teacher educator to teach students with special needs.

Self-Efficacy and Inclusive Classroom Management

Out of 10, four pre-service teachers responded to the interview question i.e. self-efficacy in classroom management. The response of the participants is described below:

"In my opinion, teachers need to create an engaging classroom environment through interactive activities and games to capture students' attention. I'm confident in my ability to manage a class effectively and make learning enjoyable for my students."

"For me, creating a connection with students is key to successful teaching. When students feel comfortable, they are more likely to open up and ask questions. I believe I can establish a friendly and supportive relationship with my students, making it easier to manage the class and to facilitate teaching-learning".

"Capturing students' attention is a crucial part of teaching. To keep them engaged, I focus on sparking their interest and using visual aids to make lessons more interactive. I often ask questions to encourage participation and maintain their focus. I am confident that my strategies enable me to effectively manage the class".

"I struggle with classroom management. Despite my efforts, maintaining discipline has been a challenge for me. I find it difficult to effectively manage a class".

Regarding self-efficacy in classroom management, three participants conveyed that they can manage the class effectively. Pre-service trainee having a low level of efficacy belief stated that classroom management is a challenging task in teaching practice.

Discussion

The study observed that mastery experiences, vicarious experiences and social persuasion enhances teachers' self-efficacy to teach and manage inclusive classroom settings. In literature, the most prevalent source of efficacy belief, according to empirical research, is enactive mastery experience, followed by social persuasions and vicarious experiences. The role of physiological and affective state in developing pre-service teachers' self-efficacy for inclusive practice was not identified under present study. Hence, the findings of the present study align with past literature (Bandura, 1986; Gale *et al*., 2021) [27, 6]. This study revealed that practice teaching contributes for the development of self-efficacy in teaching students having disabilities in inclusive setting and teacher educators can focus more on practicum experiences in teacher education. Considering the importance of social persuasion, teacher educators can enhance teaching self-efficacy and positive attitude towards inclusive classroom environment.

Conclusion

This study observed the role of mastery experience in enhancing self-efficacy of pre-service teachers that might contribute to their real professional setting in future. Policymakers in teacher education programmes can ensure effective practice teaching and training support to enable pre-service teachers to deal with real-life inclusive educational settings. This research adds to the exiting body of literature that mastery experiences, vicarious experiences and social persuasion enhances teachers' self-efficacy to

teach and manage inclusive classroom setting. Additionally, providing pre-service teachers professional development opportunities in the areas of classroom management and student engagement could significantly enhance their efficacy belief in those areas. To improve pre-service teachers' self-efficacy for classroom management, instructional practices, and student engagement, the design of coursework in teacher education could be modified. This study advances the theoretical understanding of sources of teachers' self-efficacy beliefs in the field teacher education. In conclusion, by considering the small sample as limitation; further research can investigate teachers' self-efficacy in inclusive education to contribute the exiting literature. Researcher can focus on investigating the effectiveness of long-term practice teaching to cultivate high efficacious teachers.

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