



A proposed Inclusion- Based Program to Develop EFL Student teachers' Performance and Attitudes

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A dissertation Submitted for the Degree of PhD in Education

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Abstract

Teachers are responsible for meeting the needs of increasingly diverse learners. Given their position as catalysts for educational change, teachers' positive attitudes towards inclusive education must be considered prerequisite to its success in Egyptian classrooms. The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of completing a program in inclusive education on pre-service teachers' beliefs and knowledge to teach in inclusive classrooms. The study used the one group pre-posttest design. Thirty EFL pre-service teachers from faculty of Education, Menoufia University were chosen to participate in the study. Instruments of the study included a pre-posttest, a pre-post observation scheme, a pre-post attitude scale and an inclusion-based program. Results showed that using the suggested program significantly improved the student teachers' performance and attitudes. The results of this study have implications both for teacher educators involved in preparing teachers for inclusive classrooms as well as researchers who are interested in using a new approach to evaluate impact of teacher training courses.

Key words: : Inclusion, special educational needs; inclusive pedagogy.

المخلص:

استهدفت الدراسة الحاليه البحث في تنميه مهارات التدريس داخل فصول الدمج باستخدام برنامج قائم علي الدمج لدي طلاب الفرقة الرابعة تعليم أساسي شعبه اللغة الإنجليزية حيث شارك ٣٠ طالب كمجموعه تجريبية من كلية التربية جامعة المنوفية. طبق اختبار معرفي وبطاقة ملاحظة و مقياس إتجاه علي الطلاب قبليا و بعديا، و اشارت النتائج الي تحسن الطلاب المشاركين في المجموعه التجريبية بعد دراستهم للبرنامج القائم علي الدمج.

Introduction:-

With a heightened awareness and increased need for students with disabilities to be educated alongside their nondisabled peers, there has been a progressive movement towards inclusive education. Inclusive education suggests that all students in a school, regardless of their ability or disability, become a part of the school community. The principles of inclusive education were made prominent as part of the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994). More recently, the United Nations General Comment No. 4 stressed the importance of the legally binding nature of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the call for quality inclusive education. Foreman (2017, P. 16) stated that " inclusive education is based on the principle that schools provide for the needs of all the children in the community, whatever their background, their ability or their disability".

Over the last two decades, Egypt has shown significant interest in and support for inclusive education, as evidenced by policy efforts, political discourse, and partial inclusion initiatives for students with mild disabilities. Following Egypt's endorsement of the CRPD (2007), the Egyptian Ministry of Education (MOE) issued a Ministerial Decree in 2008, updated in 2015, mandating the admission of students with mild disabilities in public and private schools that are configured and prepared to receive those students (Parnell,2018). Mild disabilities include vision and hearing disabilities, mild to moderate physical and mobility disabilities, and mild intellectual disabilities. Moreover, most recent National Strategic Plans for Pre-University Education in Egypt contain detailed targets, activities, and indicators for advancing inclusive education (MOE, 2008, MOE 2015). Specifically, the strategic plan for pre-university education in Egypt, 2014-2030 sets a strategic goal to ensure high-quality education for all learners with disabilities and inclusive education for learners with mild disabilities, with the aim of structurally and technically equipping 600 schools annually (MOE, 2015; UNESCO, 2016).

El-Koumy (2016) illustrated that several neuropsychologists and psychiatrist associations (e. g., Cortiella and Horowitz, 2014; Learning Disabilities Association of Alberta, 2010) agree that students with learning disabilities have average or above average cognitive ability, but they have neurologically-based disorders in one or more of the processes related to information processing such as perceiving, storing,

remembering, retrieving, and communicating information. These disorders manifest themselves in significant difficulties with listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. Specifically, they interfere with the acquisition and use of one or more of the following language skills: (1) oral communication (e.g., listening, speaking); (2) reading (e.g., decoding, comprehension); and (3) written language (e.g., spelling, written expression) (Tugba& Izci ,2018).

For this reason, mainstream classroom teachers are responsible for accommodating an increasingly diverse group of learners, some of whom might previously have been educated in segregated settings (Florian, 2017). Given their prime position in helping or hindering inclusive education, general educators' attitudes are crucial (Stemberger & Kiswarday, 2017). As student populations continue to become more diverse, so do the needs and abilities of the learners. Therefore, with inclusion changing not only what teachers teach but also how they teach, there has become a need for teachers to have the knowledge and experience to be able to effectively teach diverse learners using inclusive practices (Foreman & Arthur-Kelly, 2017, P.10).

It is important to mention that with the increased demand for inclusive instructional practices to be implemented in general education school settings also comes the necessity for teacher preparation programs that essentially prepare teachers to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities. Just as important, with all students now being held to higher academic standards, teacher preparation programs must ensure that general and special education teachers are adequately prepared in both course and field work to readily meet such diverse needs (Goddard& Evans, 2018, P.130). Therefore, it is essential that teachers be provided with relevant content and practice from which applicable experiences can develop during teacher preparation that can be transferred into classroom application (Ali, 2018).

One of the most perplexing predicaments of teacher education is the lack of preparation to work with students with disabilities that most teachers, have upon entering the classroom (Hunter-Johnson, Newton, & Cambridge- Johnson, 2014; Miller, 2015; Florian, 2017). In fact, Sharma and Jacobs (2016) stated that many teachers feel unprepared to deal with diverse learners during their first years in the classroom and

indicate that they have little or no experience working with students with disabilities.

It is also noted that beginning teachers bring with them a history of preconceived ideas or beliefs and practices from their personal lives and experiences, as well as attitudes and problems related to teaching all students (Tango & Beutel , 2017). In order to redirect these preconceptions, teachers must be afforded the opportunity to acquire the skills and wisdom to develop more inclusive pedagogy knowledge at the pre-service and in-service level. Unfortunately, the implementation of some inclusive policies, practices and procedures have yielded barriers to educate all students equally, which affects the desired end result of positive attitudes and behavior towards inclusive practices (Forlin, Earle, Loreman& Sharma, 2011).

In connection with these areas, lack of confidence and knowledge of disabilities influences the attitudes with which teachers initially enter institutions of higher education (IHE) (Forlin, et. al, 2011, P.55). Parnell (2018) acknowledged that in teaching students with disabilities, teachers' sense of self- efficacy (e.g., ability) is an essential component of teacher preparedness that influences their attitude toward inclusion. Just as important, teachers' beliefs and practices are influenced by: (a) coursework, (b) field experience, (c) support, (d) collaboration, (e) personal experiences, and (g) policies and procedures, all of which may have an impact on how inclusion is viewed by teachers during teacher preparation. Because so many barriers hinder the successful implementation of inclusion, it is important to discuss what is both needed and expected of teachers during their preparation programs to better assist teachers as they transition from theory (i.e., preparation) to practice (i.e., classroom).

A combination of societal, systemic, and pedagogical barriers contributes to low enrollment and quality participation of students with disabilities in inclusive schools in Egypt (Alkhateeb et. al, 2016; Gaad, 2010; Ghoneim, 2014). However, as with a many developing countries, a paucity of accurate information and research-based data on inclusion exists in Egypt making it difficult to draw definitive conclusions regarding context-specific barriers (Ali, 2018). Thus, the following barriers were derived from the limited number of publications citing barriers to inclusive education in Egypt or Arab countries, more

generally. Identified barriers to inclusive education include 1) negative attitudes and a lack of awareness on inclusive education across stakeholders, 2) limited teacher and specialist/leader preparation and training, 3) physical inaccessibility of schools and learning content (i.e., resource related), 4) fragmented systems and supports and a 5) lack of comprehensive, aligned legislation and policy frameworks backed by rules and regulations to ensure compliance (Abdelhameed, 2010; Alkhateeb et. al, 2016; Gaad, 2010; Ghoneim, 2014).

Therefore, regarding to policy, legislative mandates under " No Child Left Behind" expect teachers to be knowledgeable about collaboration, as well as capable of demonstrating it when entering the teaching profession (Miller, 2015). In order to meet the demands of the 21st century, teacher preparation programs need to orchestrate extensive in-depth training and opportunities for field- experiences in order for teacher candidates to acquire the confidence, knowledge, and skill base needed to effectively work with parents and other professionals as they prepare for the future (Tango & Beutel, 2017, P.67). However, it has been reported that skills and techniques teachers learn and practice in college classrooms, are neither always maintained over time, nor do these skills transfer to actual classrooms and students (Goddard & Evans, 2018, P. 133).

Statement of the problem

As the concept of inclusion continues to be embraced in Egyptian general education school settings, the need for more efficient and effective EFL teachers becomes essential to the implementation of inclusive practices. However, EFL student teachers (4th year students, Basic Ed. Section) do not have knowledge and skills that enables them to teach primary school pupils where there are L.D pupils effectively. So, the current study attempts to develop EFL pre-service teachers' performance and attitudes towards inclusion through an inclusion-based program.

Questions of the study:

This study attempted to provide answers to the following main question:

- What is the effect of an inclusion- based program on developing EFL student teachers' performance and their attitudes?

This main question has the following sub- questions:

1. What is the knowledge-based EFL student teachers should possess?
2. What are the skills EFL student teachers need to deal with students in inclusion classes?
3. How do EFL student teachers feel towards inclusion in teacher-preparation program?
4. What are the features of the inclusion-based program devoted to enhancing EFL student teachers' knowledge, skills and attitudes?
5. To what extent has the inclusion- based program an affect on enhancing EFL student teachers' skills, knowledge, skills and attitudes?

Hypotheses of the study

1. There are statistically significant mean differences between the study group's mean scores on the cognitive (component) pre-post-test in favor of the post test.
2. There are statistically significant mean differences between the study group's mean scores on the observation scheme of EFL student teacher' teaching skills before and after treatment in favor of the post treatment.
3. There is significant relationship between the study group's scores on the cognitive (component) test and observation skills in post treatment.
4. There are statistically significant mean differences between the study group's scores on the pre-post administrations of attitude scale in favor of the post administration.

Methodology

Research Design

The researcher used the one group pre-post-test quasi-experimental design for examining the effectiveness of inclusion- based program in enhancing EFL student teachers' inclusive practices and attitudes towards inclusion.

Participants of the study:

The participants of this study included 30 EFL pre-service teachers (4th year students, Basic Ed. Section). They were pre-post tested and observed using the instruments of the study.

The instruments and material of the study:

- 1) An EFL pre-service teachers' knowledge pre-posttest about inclusion and its practices
- 2) An observation scheme
- 3) An EFL pre-service teachers' attitudes scale towards including students with disabilities in general education classrooms in Egypt.
- 4) An inclusion-based program

Aim of the study:

The current study aimed at enhancing EFL pre-service teachers' knowledge and skills of inclusive practices and their attitudes towards inclusion through an inclusion- based program.

Delimitation of the study:

The current study is delimited to:

- 1) Only 30 EFL pre-service teachers at faculty of Education, Shebin-El Koum, Menoufia University.
- 2) Some differentiated methods and Instruction student teachers can use to accommodate students with learning disabilities e.g. universal design for learning, adaptation, early intervention, direct instruction, assistive technologies and formative assessment.
- 3) The first and second semesters of the academic year 2020/2021

Results of the study:

After the present study was conducted, the 't' test was used for analyzing the data obtained. The present study revealed the following results:

1. EFL student teachers' knowledge about the inclusive education and its practices was developed after intervention as there were statistically significant differences between the study groups'

mean scores on the cognitive (component) pre-post-test in favor of the post test.

**Table (1):
Descriptive Statistics of the pre-posttest of cognitive(component) test**

	Implementation	N	M.	S.D	Minimum score	Maximum score	Total score
Cognitive test	Pre test	30	101.10	7.09	90	120	220
	Post test	30	189.17	9.26	175	205	

EFL student teachers' performance in classrooms was developed after the intervention as there were statistically significant differences between the study group's mean scores on the observation scheme of EFL student teachers' teaching skills before and after intervention in favor of the post intervention.

**Table (2):
Descriptive Statistics of the pre-posttest of EFL student teachers' teaching skills.**

Skill	Implementation	N	M.	S.D	Minimum score	Maximum score	Total score
Set induction	Pre	30	6.67	1.40	5	10	15
	Post	30	14.07	0.83	12	15	
Presentation	Pre	30	20.07	2.00	17	23	48
	Post	30	43.43	1.52	40	45	
Practice	Pre	30	12.8	2.2	9	16	27

		0	0	2			
	Post	3 0	24.7 7	1.2 2	22	27	
Evaluating pupils	Pre	3 0	7.23	1.6 5	5	10	15
	Post	3 0	13.1 0	0.8 0	12	15	
EFL student teacher' teaching skills	Pre	3 0	46.7 7	4.8 0	36	55	105
	Post	3 0	95.3 7	2.7 0	90	100	

2. There was significant positive relationship between the study group's scores on the cognitive (component) test and those of observation scheme after intervention.

Table (3): Pearson Correlation coefficient for the cognitive (component) test and the observation scheme

Skill	Correlation with cognitive (component) test			Importance
	Pearson Correlation (r)	Sig.	R2	
Set induction	0.52	Significant at (0.01)	0.27	Large
Presentation	0.61	Significant at (0.01)	0.37	Large
Practice	0.54	Significant at (0.01)	0.29	Large
Evaluating pupils	0.49	Significant at (0.01)	0.24	Large
Teaching skills	0.55	Significant at (0.01)	0.30	Large

3. EFL student teachers' attitudes towards teaching in inclusive classrooms were developed intervention as there were statistically

significant mean differences between the study group's scores on the pre-post administrations of attitude scale in favor of the post administration.

Table (4): Descriptive Statistics of the pre-post administrations scores of attitude scale .

	Implementation	N	M	S.D	Minimum score	Maximum score	Score
Attitude scale	Pre	30	85.40	3.47	80	95	150
	Post	30	130.67	7.40	120	140	

Discussion

The present study investigated the effectiveness of using an inclusive -based program in developing EFL pre-service teachers' performance and their attitudes towards inclusion. The findings of the study were encouraging as they showed that there were statistically significant differences between the means of the participants' scores on the pre-post administrations of the cognitive test, observation scheme and attitude scale in favor of the post.

1) Cognitive test results

Student teachers' knowledge (cognitive component) in pre testing revealed that they lack the knowledge that enable them to have good inclusive practices in EFL classes. This is consistent with Alkhateeb et al (2016) who found that pre-service teachers have limited knowledge about inclusive education . In a similar way, Rouhani et. al. (2016) revealed their participants had lack of confidence in teaching children with disabilities because of their insufficient knowledge about inclusive education.

Post testing revealed that there was a significant increase in participants' knowledge in inclusive practices scores where the mean was 101.10 in pre-testing and 189.17 in post testing. This reflects that EFL student teachers did not have enough expertise and skills for teaching students with learning difficulties before intervention.

Fortunately student teachers' knowledge increased after intervention when the means became 189.17 in post-testing. This reflects that the increase in student teachers' knowledge in post testing may have positive effects in their practice in EFL inclusive classes.

2) Findings related to the observation scheme

Observing EFL student teachers' mean scores before intervention was 46.77. This was due to their lack of knowledge concerning what inclusion is and how their practices could be improved. After intervention, their teaching performance developed where the mean reached 95.37. Such improvement and development was due to the following factors:

- a) Program objectives and content(sessions) were clear and smart
- b) The orientation session familiarized student teachers with the goals and objectives of the program.
- c) the key components in each of the seven sessions that might have contributed in shaping participants' beliefs.
- d) The participants were constantly reminded to find strengths of rather than weaknesses of students that they will be teaching in their classrooms
- e) Participants were introduced to understand that inclusion requires changing the school culture and teaching practices rather than changing the student to fit the system.
- f) In the final sessions, participants were introduced to teaching strategies that have been found to be effective in inclusive classrooms.
- g) The researcher used varied and interesting tasks and activities relevant to student-teachers in order to engage them in these activities.
- h) The researcher used formative assessment techniques and verbal persuasion feedback in the form of positive statement before, while and after performing the activities to help them gain confidence.

- i) The program gave student teachers more chances to know how to use the assistive technologies effectively in teaching L.D students.

3- Finding related to attitude scale

Findings from this study indicated that pre-service teachers have negative attitudes toward inclusion of students with special needs before treatment. One reason for the negative attitudes of pre-service teachers in this study could be that they were not informed that students with special needs would be included better in general education classrooms, and that, as general educators, they would be responsible for teaching these students in their classrooms. This is because expanding inclusive services is a relatively new governmental policy and the public schools are the major providers of the educational services in Egypt.

The vast majority of pre-service teachers have not had the opportunity to be involved in discussions or debates about inclusive education for students with disabilities. Moreover, many teacher educators and researchers might not have heard about the changes that have been made at the Ministry of Education because of the notable disconnect between educational institutions in Egypt. This is reflected in the lack of research in the area of inclusion and the absence of inclusive strategies in pre-service teachers' preparation programs.

There was a significant increase in participants' attitudes to inclusion scores after intervention (Pre stage $M = 85.40$, Post stage $M = 130.17$). For the majority of survey items, responses indicated neutral to positive attitudes towards inclusion. This echoes findings throughout the relevant literature (Forlin et al, 2012; Sharma & Nuttal, 2016; Aldabas, 2019). It is important to note, however, that many studies in this field have focused on a change in attitudes of primary and secondary teachers across a single unit of study (Sharma 2012; Miller 2015).

Conclusions:

The movement toward inclusive education has challenged teacher educators to provide new knowledge and skills to preservice teachers. Therefore, the findings of this study should provide insights for faculty

and developers of teacher preparation programs for inclusion. Based on the finding of the present study, the following conclusions are important:

- 1- It is important to include LD pupils and/or students in classes in general and EFL classes in particular
- 2- Raising student-teachers' awareness and knowledge in inclusive practices is important and a pre-requisite for effective performance.
- 3- Inclusion-based programs should be more planned to and implemented in EFL student teachers' courses at faculties of Education
- 4- Students' overall confidence level and attitudes are important affective factors to be in teacher preparation programs.
- 5- Inclusion of students with disabilities not only requires providing adequate support to students in class but it also requires providing necessary support to classroom teachers. This support is even more important for newly trained teachers.
- 6- Good practice of inclusion should be in the various stages, namely set induction and warm-up, presentation, practice and evaluation.
- 7- During presentation and practice EFL teachers should use the various methods and techniques that work better with LD pupils and /or students.
- 8- EFL teachers should use assistive technologies that help include all pupils and/or students.
- 9- In the practice stage, teachers should encourage student-centered activities and tasks in which LD pupils and/ or students should work in pair as well as group work activities and learn from each other.

- 10- EFL teachers should close and evaluate students' learning in inclusive classrooms to make sure that objectives are achieved by the end of the lesson.

Recommendations

From the previously mentioned, the following can be recommended:

- Inclusive education should move beyond physical placement but paying attention to other aspects of schooling such as curriculum, pedagogy supports and so on
- With increased implementation of inclusive education in schools, teacher educators have been challenged to redesign their programs to prepare preservice teachers for educating students with special needs within the general classroom.
- Teacher preparation programs should carefully consider the combination of coursework and direct experiences when designing their inclusion training programs.
- Curriculum of teacher training programmes should be redesigned incorporating inclusive pedagogy in an embedded approach, not as a separate chapter. Subject based training modules should also include inclusive teaching-learning and assessment strategies. Special educators should be involved as resource persons while bringing these changes to get the technical knowledge support.
- more emphasis should be placed on providing preservice teachers with experiences to further their knowledge and skills for dealing with difficult student behavior
- Designers of field experiences should consider including an explicit requirement for preservice teachers to engage in one on one, or small group experiences with students that have been identified as having special educational needs.

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