



A study of inclusive policies and practices in physical education within universities across Maharashtra

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Abstract

The purpose of this descriptive study was to know the present status of inclusive physical education (IPE) policies and practices within the universities across the state of Maharashtra. For which, 5 universities from different regions of Maharashtra were selected using the simple random sampling technique. A status survey was conducted using a researcher designed structured interview, teachers questionnaire and students questionnaire and the responses towards IPE policies and practices were collected from the Head of the physical education (PE) department, the teaching staff of PE department and the students respectively. A qualitative analysis of the collected data was done, which was based on the positivity towards IPE policies and practices. It was concluded that concrete IPE policies and practices do not exist and the implementation of practices, if any, is done at a personal level at the B.P.Ed. and M.P.Ed. teacher training course.

Keywords: inclusive physical education, inclusive physical education policies and practices

Introduction

Over the past few years the concept of including students with disabilities into a general education classroom is widely being accepted in many countries. The consensus about the concept of inclusive education was found at the 48th session of the International Conference on Education in November 2008 (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2008) [35]. It was mentioned in the agreement that: “inclusive education is an ongoing process aimed at offering quality education for all, while respecting diversity and the different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of the students and communities” (UNESCO, 2008) [35]. It aims towards the elimination of discrimination in all forms. Inclusion simply means the increased participation of all students to meet their individual educational needs (Barton, 1998; DePauw & Doll-Tepper, 2000) [3, 9]. The implementation of inclusive educational practices allows a student with disability to attend school and receive education along with students without disabilities in a general education classroom (Hunt & McDonnell, 2007) [18]. This has given rise to issues related to inclusion which have become the focus of national and international policies on education (Armstrong, 1998) [2]. This trend has also been accelerated due to international commitments to inclusive education (UNESCO, 1994, 2008) [35]. The Indian Constitution on 26 November, 1949, clearly states in the Preamble that everyone has the right to equality of status and of opportunity. Article 41 of the Directive Principles of the Indian Constitution supports the right to work, education and public assistance in certain cases including disablement. Further in Article 45 it mentions the provision of free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years. Based on this, the Constitution (86th Amendment) Act

2002 has been enacted by the parliament making education a fundamental right of all children in the age group of 6-14 years. Moreover the 93rd Amendment to the Constitution of India (now renumbered as the 86th), passed by the Lok Sabha on November 28, 2001, makes it mandatory for the government to provide free and compulsory education to “all children of the age of 6-14 years”, with its preamble clarifying that “all” includes children with disabilities as well.

Like all other curriculum areas, inclusion of students with disabilities in physical education (PE) faces many challenges and opportunities. PE is a subject taken at the primary and secondary education, which is responsible for developing the psychomotor, affective, and cognitive domains of learning in a play or movement exploration setting (Anderson, 1989; Rink, 2009) [1]. Within the context of PE, the process of inclusion can be addressed in a number of ways (Fitzgerald, 2006) [13]. For example, The Planning Commission in 1971 included in its plan a programme for integrated education. The Government launched the Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) scheme in December 1974. It was a Centrally Sponsored Scheme aimed to provide educational opportunities to children with special needs (CWSN) in regular schools and to facilitate their achievement and retention. Under the scheme, hundred per cent financial assistance is provided for setting up resource centres, surveys and assessment of children with disabilities, purchase and production of instruction materials and training and orientation of teachers. The scope of the scheme includes pre-school training, counselling for the parents, and special training in skills for all kinds of disabilities. The scheme provides facilities in the form of books, stationery, uniforms, and allowances for transport, reader, escort etc. There was no consideration of difference in a general education classroom

with that of general physical education classroom which required a different approach and changes in teaching methodology with regards to inclusion of children with disabilities.

Over time, more research studies have emerged about the process of inclusive PE, and in the past five years there has been an increase in the amount of research on inclusion of students with disabilities in PE. These studies are broader in scope and in their perspectives than their predecessors. For example, several studies have used a quasiexperimental approach to examine the use of peer tutoring for facilitating inclusion in PE (e.g., Klavina, 2008) [21]. Seymour, Reid, and Bloom (2009) [31] utilised a qualitative research method to examine the nature and extent of friendships between students with and without disabilities within inclusive PE settings. In the review by Block and Obrusnikova (2007) [31], a total 22 of the 75 articles have been published after 2005, which was the most recent year included in their study. These studies provided a better understanding of what is needed to facilitate inclusion within the PE context. However, there is a need to compile, organise, and analyse more recently published studies. There is also a need to analyse the focus areas of these studies in order to examine the development of research about inclusive PE. Identifying more refined categories of the research areas could improve our understanding of the phenomenon of inclusion in PE. Block and Obrusnikova described the coding process they used to select the research focus areas. However, it is important to establish the reliability and validity of the coding in these studies as well as those that attempt to identify research categories.

The work reported in this article was focussed on studying the present status of the inclusions made in physical education at the university level with regards to teacher training courses in physical education. A qualitative data analysis method was used to develop a careful interpretation of the research focus areas. Inclusive PE or inclusion in PE in this study refers to the inclusion of students with disabilities within the PE curricula or contexts. The main purpose of this study was to analyse the present status of Inclusive PE policies and practices within the Universities across Maharashtra and propose recommendations for future actions to be taken in this regard.

Methodology

Participants

Out of the 14 non-agricultural State Universities from the state of Maharashtra, 6 universities that have a department of PE, running at least a M.P.Ed. course, were considered to be the population for the study. The simple random sampling technique (Best and Kahn, 2006) [37] was used to select the sample for the study, who were all the HOD's, teaching staff and the students of 5 universities (Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune; Mumbai University, Mumbai; Sant Gadge Baba Amravati University, Amravati; Swami Ramanand Teerth Marathwada Nanded University, Nanded and Babasaheb Ambedkar University, Aurangabad) which were selected out of 6 that were considered to be the population for the study.

Tools for Data Collection and the Procedure of the Study

In order to collect the data for this descriptive study, a survey method was used where, a researcher designed structured interview was used to collect the responses of the HOD's and researcher designed questionnaires for teaching staff and the students were used to collect the responses from the teaching staff and students of the department respectively. The items of the interview and the two questionnaires for teaching staff and students were based on present IPE policies and practices followed in the department, incorporation and implementation of IPE policies or practices in the curriculum in any form, provisions for IPE policies and practices in the admission procedure for the B.P.Ed./M.P.Ed. course, provisions for IPE policies and practices in the infrastructure of the department. To establish the validity and reliability of the tools, a pilot study was conducted and the necessary modifications were done along with the alterations suggested by 5 experts in the field of physical education and general education collectively. The HOD's were then interviewed and the responses from the teaching staff and students were collected after being given a brief introduction about the study. The collected data was then qualitatively analysed and the conclusions were drawn.

Results

The interview responses of the HOD's were summed up based on the present status of IPE at their respective departments which were as follows:

As there does not exist a set policy & practice with regards to IPE, there does not exist a mission or vision for incorporating IPE in the B.P.ED/M.P.ED course.

With regards to education for all concept considering the fact that majority of B.P.ED/M.P.ED students work at school level, it is important that these students be taught the teaching methodology with regards to IPE, which is done at a personal level by the course teachers if the unite is not included in the curriculum, and the values of social equality can be imbibed in them.

With regards to Inclusion of IPE at B.P.ED/M.P.ED course there does not exist any differently abled students for the course as the admission criteria which includes fitness testing & intellectual testing is not designed for the intake of such students. Hence for the inclusion of such students at B.P.ED/M.P.ED course, first the admission process needs to be changed, which can then be followed by the designing of the infrastructure accordingly as the infrastructure now, mostly does not assist such students.

As this is the present scenario & considering the thought of developing concrete policies and practices it should also be considered that once the students finish their B.P.ED/M.P.ED course, as professionals they will mostly come across a normal population, may be a few at school level. As instructors of professionals in this field it will not be expected of them to be differently abled.

The admission of differently abled students is not suggested at the B.P.ED/M.P.ED course, but it has to be, then the entire admission process needs to be redesigned with regards to fitness testing & intellectual testing, and a totally new curriculum focusing on IPE can be made mandatory at the

B.P.Ed level & a specialization in this area can be perused at the masters level along with a large scope for research.

Based on the subjective responses of the teachers there was nothing substantial in the present status of IPE followed at the M.P.Ed. course, but all had positive suggestions with regards to future incorporation of IPE policies and practices.

The vision of having an IPE policy was very positive; the implementation though was done at personal level with teaching practical/theory lesson.

As there are no concrete SOP's for implementing IPE policies, the implementation depended upon a physically/intellectually challenged student being admitted to the course and on personal levels.

There are various challenges such as, Lack of confidence, Physical strength, poor self-concept, Social acceptance, specifically trained teachers.

No initiative has been taken so far, but existence of IPE policies and practices may provide opportunities in future.

No personal research goals and objectives exist towards IPE policies and students, but existence of set IPE policies and practices may provide opportunity to inculcate a positive attitude and teaching method to the Pre-Service teachers.

Set IPE policies and practices do not exist and at the moment there was no requirement for personal improvisations to be made in the teaching process, as there were no physically/intellectually challenged students admitted to the course.

A unit on teaching IPE could be made compulsory in the curriculum, teacher's orientation and training programmes could be arranged.

There was no need to undertake any activities to develop IPE practices as there didn't exist an differently abled student through the course, but in-case such student exists, the teaching learning process could be improvised with regards to the maximum capacity with which the student could participate.

The Pre-Service PE teachers could be encouraged by asking them to gain information about the various competitions a differently abled student can compete in and the various sports training techniques to develop such athletes could be taught and various research in this field can be accomplished. Not much research work has been accomplished in this area, but set policies and practices could give an opportunity for further research to be conducted in this area.

No department was constructed with a view to be disabled friendly, but a thought would be given in future extension plans.

As there were no students with any disability admitted to the M.P.Ed. course, the data was collected from the students with reference to a student with disability admitted to the M.P.Ed. course. Their responses were categorised in percentage based on how positive they feel about the factors of the questionnaire with regards to a differently abled student admitted to the M.P.Ed. course.

57.78% students were positive about Student Admission process and Financial aid/Scholarship Effectiveness

32.45% students were aware about the IPE practices implemented at their department.

77.78% students felt that the facilities for learning at the department would assist a student with disability.

71.11% students felt that the campus support services would assist a student with disability.

59.84% students felt that the services provided to the students would assist a student with disability.

79.53% students felt that the library services provided would assist a student with disability.

Discussion, Major Findings and Recommendations

The findings of this study revealed that though there exist a strong background with regards to inclusive education in India, there are no provisions made for distinguishing IPE from Inclusive Education. There does not exist any set policies and practices with regards to IPE, teaching methodology of IPE is included in the form of an optional unit in the curriculum, or is not included at all, there are no provisions made in the admission process for inclusion of a differently abled student for the B.P.Ed./M.P.Ed. course, the department infrastructure and facilities are not disabled friendly as there are no differently abled students admitted for the B.P.Ed./M.P.Ed. course. As there are separate teacher training courses for PE, it is necessary that these teachers be trained in IPE. To attain this objective there needs to be set policies and practices involving curriculum restructuring. Orientation programmes and workshops for Inservice PE teachers and all the stakeholders. The critical stakeholders in creating an inclusive school are the Teachers, parents, students, and administrators (Hunt & McDonnell, 2007) [52]. Focussing on the PE context specifically the perspective of inservice and preservice teachers, teacher education providers, students without disabilities, and parents of students with disabilities was considered.

Inservice Teachers

To ensure that students with disabilities who are included in general PE have meaningful learning experiences it is important that the PE teachers' have a positive attitudes toward IPE (Block & Obrusnikova, 2007) [5]. Some of the studies found that the attitudes of PE teachers varied when it came to teaching students with mild disabilities and teaching students with severe disabilities (Rizzo & Vispoel, 1991; Block & Rizzo, 1995; Duchane & French, 1998; Conatser *et al.*, 2000; Conatser, Block, & Gansneder, 2002) [29, 6, 11, 8, 7]. The type of disability also influenced the attitudes of PE teachers. It was found that the teachers had more positive attitudes toward teaching students with learning disabilities than teaching those with physical and behavioural disorders (Rizzo & Vispoel, 1991; Obrusnikova, 2008) [29, 25]. Female teachers were found to have more favourable attitudes (Conatser *et al.*, 2000;) [8], along with teachers having more experience with students with disabilities (Rizzo & Vispoel, 1991; Block & Rizzo, 1995; Tripp & Rizzo, 2006) [29, 6, 34], teachers with more academic preparation (Block & Rizzo, 1995; Tripp & Rizzo, 2006; Klavina, 2008) [6, 34, 21], and teachers with higher perceived competence (Conatser *et al.*, 2002;; Rizzo & Vispoel, 1991; Tripp & Rizzo, 2006; Block & Rizzo, 1995; Obrusnikova, 2008) [7, 29, 34, 6, 25]. Hodge *et al.* (2003) [17] reported that teachers were positively disposed to inclusion as an educational philosophy, although they had different outcomes with respect to achieving successful inclusion and encountered challenges while attempting to

establish inclusive practice. Although research on teachers' attitudes towards teaching students with disabilities in general PE is beginning to grow, more qualitative research is needed to examine teachers' perceptions and their influencing factors relevant to effective inclusive practices.

Preservice Teachers

Preservice teachers have different educational and experiential backgrounds than those who are already in the field and have reported mixed feelings about teaching students with disabilities (Rizzo & Kirkendall, 1995) [28]. Several studies used a non-experimental design to identify the variables associated with preservice teachers' positive and negative attitudes (Downs & Williams, 1994; Duchane, Leung, & Coulter-Kern, 2008; Folsom-Meek, Nearing, Groteluschen, & Krampf, 1999; Hodge & Jansma, 2000; Hutzler, Zach, & Gafni, 2005; Kowalski & Rizzo, 1996; Rizzo & Kirkendall, 1995; Schmidt-Gotz, Doll-Tepper, & Lienert, 1994; Stewart, 1991) [10, 12, 14, 16, 20, 2228, 30]. Similar to the results of studies aimed at examining the attitudes of inservice PE teachers, positive attitudes of preservice PE teachers were found to be associated with female teachers (Downs & Williams, 1994; Duchane *et al.*, 2008; Folsom-Meek *et al.*, 1999; Hutzler *et al.*, 2005) [10, 14, 20], teachers with higher self-perceptions of their competence (Hodge & Jansma, 2000; Hodge, Tannehill, & Kluge, 2003; Kowalski & Rizzo, 1996; Schmidt-Gotz *et al.*) [16, 17, 122, 30], those with more years in college or university (Hutzler *et al.*, 2005) [20], and teachers who majored in PE Teaching Education (Gursel, 2007) [15].

Teacher Education Providers

Vickerman (2007) [36] used a qualitative method to examine the perspectives of teacher training providers who delivered undergraduate and/or postgraduate secondary PE courses in England with regards to the training of PE teachers for the inclusion of students with disabilities. Results showed that teacher educators supported IPE, although there was an inconsistency in the amount of time spent addressing this issue and the nature of curricular content. He suggested that while it is important that individual teacher trainers adopt their own curricula and prepare PE teachers for including students with disabilities in ways they consider relevant and appropriate, it is also essential to recognise and draw upon good practice and successful approaches to deliver these outcomes.

Students without Disabilities

Several studies used a non-experimental design to identify the variables associated with positive and negative attitudes of students without disabilities (Block, 1995; Hutzler & Levi, 2008; Lockhart, Frence, & Gench, 1998; Loovis & Loovis, 1997; Panagiotou, Evaggelinou, Doulkeridou, Mouratidou, & Koidou, 2008; Slininger, Sherrill, & Jankowski, 2000; Tripp, French, & Sherrill, 1995) [4, 19, 23, 24, 26, 32, 33]. The positive attitudes were associated with female students (Block, 1995; Panagiotou *et al.*, 2008; Slininger *et al.*, 2000; Tripp *et al.*, 1995) [4, 26, 32, 33] and with those who had experiences with a family member or close friend with a disability (Block, 1995) [4], while negative attitudes were associated with those who had an unstructured previous exposure to students with disabilities (Hutzler & Levi, 2008) [18] and those with higher

grade levels.

Parents of Students with Disabilities

Ann and Goodwin examined the perspectives of parents of students with disabilities on their children's PE, the mothers' roles in the schools, and the importance of the individual education programme in home and school communication. Results showed that the mothers valued their children's participation in PE and provided instrumental support to the teachers and teaching associates. They also valued sport as an avenue for developing sport-specific skills, which in turn enriched the children's school experience. However, the mothers were concerned about the barriers to their children's participation, including safety concerns, equipment and wheelchair accessibility, and instructional support. The study lent empirical support for the need for collaboration between home, school, and the sport community for individuals with disabilities. More research is required to explore the perspectives of parents of students with and without disabilities in order to obtain a better understanding of the experiences of students with disabilities in IPE.

Based on the reviews discussed above we clearly understand that to bring about a change in the existing IPE, we first need to focus on establishing set policies and practices to be followed at the teacher training level, for any alterations in the curriculum, teaching methodology/system, infrastructure and facilities, admission process, there first needs to be set policies and practices provided to universities by the university governing authorities/bodies. A compulsory unit on methodology of teaching IPE should be included in the curriculum at the B.P.Ed. level and the specialization in this area can be pursued at the M.P.Ed. level along with a large scope for research. Whether or not provisions need to be made for inclusion at the teacher training course should be given a thought with regards to future professional scenario. If inclusion of a student with disabilities needs to be done at the B.P.Ed./M.P.Ed. course level, then new guidelines are needed for the entire admission process with regards to fitness and intellectual testing along with orientation and training sessions on methodology of teaching IPE for existing teacher training teaching staff. The infrastructure can be redesigned once set IPE policies and practices are provided to the university. More research is needed to determine the factors that affect the social experiences of students and promote social interaction in IPE (e.g., the availability of more training or programmes to help build awareness, understanding and cooperation among students).

Conclusion

From this study it was concluded that, as there does not exist a set policies and practices with regards to IPE, there does not exist a set mission or a vision for incorporating IPE in the B.P.ED/M.P.ED course. With regards to the education for all concept considering the fact that majority of B.P.ED/M.P.ED students work at the school level, it is important that these students be taught the teaching methodology with regards to IPE. This at the moment is done at a personal level by the course teachers if the unit is not included in the curriculum, just so that the values of social equality can be imbibed in the students.

With regards to Inclusion of IPE at B.P.ED/M.P.ED course, there does not exist any differently abled students for the course as the admission criteria which consists fitness and intellectual testing is not designed for the intake of such students. Hence for the inclusion of such students at B.P.ED/M.P.ED course, first the admission process needs to be changed, which can then be followed by the designing of the infrastructure accordingly as the infrastructure now, mostly does not assist such students.

As this is the present scenario and considering the thought of developing concrete policies and practices, it should also be considered that once the students finish their B.P.ED/M.P.ED course, as professionals they will mostly come across a population mostly without any disabilities unless a few at the school level. As instructors or professionals in this field it will not be expected of them to be differently abled.

A totally new part in the curriculum focusing on IPE can be made mandatory at the B.P.ED level and a specialization in this area can be perused at the masters' level along with a large scope for research. The admission of differently abled students is not suggested at the B.P.ED/M.P.ED course, but if it has to be, then the entire admission process needs to be redesigned with regards to fitness and intellectual testing.

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