# Professional Development for Student Teachers Focusing on Inclusive Education and Fostering Self-Determination

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**Abstract**

*Inclusive education is a pedagogical philosophy that emphasizes embracing and accommodating the diversity of learners within a single educational environment. It is about creating an atmosphere of acceptance, where every student feels valued and has access to the same educational opportunities. Professional development for student teachers, particularly in the realm of inclusive education, plays a pivotal role in shaping their ability to create inclusive and empowering learning environments. The concept of self-determination, which involves fostering Self-regulation, Self-realization, Autonomy and Psychological empowerment in students, is crucial in the context of inclusive education. The depth of understanding and application of self-determination skills may vary between student teachers with bachelors' and masters' degrees. In the study, the researchers utilized a simple random sampling technique. This method is considered unbiased and ensures that the selected sample is representative of the entire population. The researchers specifically examined the self-determination of student teacher in relation to their highest qualification. This means they wanted to understand how self-determination varied among student teacher based on whether they held a bachelors' degree or masters' degree. The findings of the study revealed that student teacher with a bachelor's degree demonstrated higher levels of self-determination compared to those with other qualifications. This suggests that there may be a correlation between the level of education and the degree of self-determination among student teacher. The study emphasized the importance of investigating the impact of professional development on self-determination, especially at different education levels. This exploration is crucial for understanding how teacher training programs can be improved to enhance the quality of inclusive education practices in schools. The study highlighted the potential impact of professional development on self-determination, indicating that higher education levels, such as obtaining a bachelor's degree, might contribute to increased levels of self-determination among student teacher.*

**Keywords:** Self-Determination, Self-Regulation, Self-Realization, Inclusive Education, Professional Development, Student-Teacher, Perspective Teacher.

## Introduction

As aspiring educators, understanding the principles of inclusive education and self-determination is crucial for creating inclusive and empowering learning environments. Let's explore these concepts in the context of journey as a student teacher. Inclusive education is a pedagogical philosophy that emphasizes embracing and accommodating the diversity of learners within a single educational environment. It is about creating an atmosphere of acceptance, where every student feels valued and has access to the same educational opportunities. Professional development for student teachers, particularly in the realm of inclusive education, plays a pivotal role in shaping their ability to create inclusive and empowering learning environments. The concept of self-determination, which involves fostering Self-regulation, Self-realization, Autonomy and Psychological empowerment in students, is crucial in the context of inclusive education. The depth of understanding and application of self-determination skills may vary between student teachers with bachelors' and masters' degrees.

Self-determination, in the context of education, refers to empowering students to take an active role in their own learning journey. As student teachers, you play a pivotal role in fostering the development of self-determination skills in student teachers. This involves encouraging them to make choices, set goals, and advocate for their needs. Recognizing and respecting the individual strengths and aspirations of each student is essential to promoting self-determination in the classroom.

At the bachelor's level, professional development for student teachers typically involves foundational training in inclusive education. This includes understanding diverse learning needs, implementing differentiated instruction, and managing inclusive classrooms. While student teachers at this level are exposed to the principles of inclusive education, the focus may be more on practical strategies and basic concepts.

Master's level programs offer a more advanced exploration of theoretical frameworks supporting inclusive education. Student teachers in master's programs may engage in discussions about pedagogical theories such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and delve into how these theories relate to fostering self-determination. Additionally, master's programs often emphasize research skills, program evaluation, and the development of leadership skills to champion inclusive education within educational communities.

Understanding the interconnection between inclusive education and self-determination is essential for student teachers. In an inclusive classroom, student teachers will be challenged to adapt their teaching methods to accommodate diverse needs. This adaptability aligns with the principles of self-determination, as empower students to take an active role in their learning. By promoting inclusivity, create an environment that naturally supports the development of self-determination skills. As students through their educational journey, witnessed firsthand how an inclusive approach enhances their confidence, sense of belonging, and ability to advocate for themselves. As student teachers embark on teaching experience, consider how these concepts can shape teaching philosophy. Embrace the opportunity to contribute to the development of inclusive and self-determined learners, recognizing the immense impact this can have on their educational experience and future success.

## Review of Related Studies

Anais Thibault Landry and Ashley Whillans conducted a comprehensive study in 2018 to investigate the relationship between workplace rewards and worker satisfaction using the Self-Determination Theory as a conceptual framework. The research aimed to investigate the relationship between employee satisfaction with workplace rewards and various outcomes such as

well-being, work satisfaction, intrinsic motivation, emotional commitment, workplace loyalty, and contribution. The study involved 5852 full-time workers from twelve different nations and utilized survey methodology with data analysis employing multiple regression and descriptive statistics. The study's findings suggest a strong connection between employee satisfaction with rewards and various psychological and organizational outcomes. Despite the tangible benefits offered to employees, the study emphasizes the significant impact of how these rewards make employees feel at work. This insight supports the understanding that the psychological dynamics surrounding workplace rewards play a crucial role in shaping employee performance and attitudes.

Jennifer L. Black conducted a study in 2009 with the main goal of investigating teacher and student perspectives on self-determination. The study focused on 33 eighth-grade students, with 12 having disabilities and 21 without disabilities. The instrument used for assessment was the Self-Determination Teacher Assessment Scale (SDTPS, 3rd edition), consisting of 30 items. Employing survey methodology, the study utilized both inferential and descriptive statistics to analyze the data. The study's noteworthy finding indicates that eighth-grade students with disabilities tend to evaluate their own level of self-determination more positively compared to the perceptions of both regular and special school teachers. The finding that students with disabilities tend to rate their self-determination higher than perceived by their teachers raises important questions about the alignment of teacher and student perspectives. The study suggests a need for further exploration and awareness-building among educators to better understand and support the self-determination of students, particularly those with disabilities.

## Research Questions

The study might address specific research questions such as:

- Do student teachers with higher qualifications demonstrate higher levels of self-determination?
- Are there significant differences in the dimensions of self-determination (Self-regulation, Self-realization, Autonomy and Psychological empowerment) based on the higher qualification of student teachers?

## Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study is to delve into the differences in self-determination and its dimensions among student-teachers, with a specific focus on the influence of their higher qualification. This objective sets the direction for the research and provides a clear goal for investigating the relationship between educational background and self-determination in the context of teacher education.

## Methodology

The survey instrument utilized in this research was collaboratively developed by the investigator with guidance from the research supervisor. The self-determination questionnaire employed in this study encompasses dimensions such as self-regulation, self-realization, autonomy, and psychological empowerment. The investigator personally designed the self-determination scale, incorporating 31 items along with demographic variables. The specific focus of the research was to understand individuals' control over their choices and lives through the lens of self-determination. Data collection involved surveying 1083 B.Ed. student-teachers selected through a random sampling technique. The participants were drawn from 14 Colleges of Education located in Chennai and its Metropolitan territorial region within the state of Tamil Nadu. The sampled Colleges of Education comprised Government, Government-aided, and Self-financing institutions.

## Analysis and Interpretation of the Data

H0 : There is no significant difference in Self-determination and its dimensions among Student-teachers with respect to Highest Qualification.

Professional development for student teachers focusing on inclusive education and self-determination is essential for preparing educators to meet the diverse needs of students. The difference in self-determination between student teachers with a bachelor's degree and those pursuing a master's degree can be significant, given the increased depth of knowledge and experience that typically comes with advanced education. Here's a breakdown of how professional development may differ for these two groups:

**Table**
**Critical ratio of Self-determination with respect to Highest Qualification**

| Self-determination and its dimensions | Highest Qualification | | | | df | t-value | p-value & Level of Significance |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Bache-lors' degree (N=596) | | Masters' degree (N=487) | | | | |
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | | | |
| Self-regulation | 28.949 | 3.792 | 28.483 | 3.691 | 1081 | 2.040 | P= 0.042 P<0.05 |
| Self-realization | 24.969 | 3.238 | 24.511 | 3.100 | 1081 | 2.356 | P=0.019 P<0.05 |
| Autonomy | 42.573 | 4.774 | 41.925 | 4.575 | 1081 | 2.264 | P=0.024 P<0.05 |
| Psychological Empowerment | 34.544 | 3.788 | 34.347 | 3.701 | 1081 | 1.099 | P= 0.272 P>0.05 |
| Overall Self determination | 131.035 | 13.499 | 129.266 | 12.737 | 1081 | 2.200 | P=0.024 P<0.05 |

Since the p value is less than 0.05 for Overall Self-determination and its dimensions Self-regulation, Self-realization and Autonomy, the Null hypothesis is rejected at 5% level of significance. Hence, there is significant difference in Overall Self-determination and its dimension Self-regulation, Self-realization and Autonomy among student teacher with respect to their Highest Qualification, favour bachelors' degree hold student teacher.

Since the p value is greater than 0.05 for the dimension Psychological Empowerment, the Null hypothesis is accepted at 5% level of significance. There is no significant difference in dimension Psychological Empowerment among student teacher with respect to their Highest Qualification.

## Discussion

The depth of understanding and application of self-determination skills may indeed differ between student teachers with Bachelors' and Masters' Degrees. Conducting rigorous research in these areas can contribute to our understanding of how professional development shapes inclusive practices and self-determination skills among educators at different educational levels as discussed below :-

## Bachelor's Degree Student Teachers
### Foundational Concepts
- Inclusive Education: Focus on introducing foundational concepts of inclusive education. Provide an understanding of diverse learning needs, and strategies for creating an inclusive classroom environment.
- Basic Self-Determination Skills: Introduce fundamental self-determination skills, such as goal-setting, decision-making, and self-advocacy. Emphasize the importance of fostering autonomy in students.

### Practical Strategies
- Differentiated Instruction Techniques: Provide practical strategies for implementing differentiated instruction, recognizing diverse learning styles, and adapting teaching methods accordingly.
- Inclusive Classroom Management: Offer insights into inclusive classroom management, addressing behavioral needs and promoting positive relationships.

### Technology Integration
- Basic Assistive Technologies: Introduce basic assistive technologies and digital resources that support inclusive practices. Emphasize accessibility and inclusivity in technology use.

### Cultural Competence
- Foundational Cultural Competence: Address the basics of cultural competence, fostering an awareness of diverse cultural backgrounds within the classroom.

## Master's Degree Student Teachers
### Advanced Theoretical Frameworks
- In-Depth Exploration of Inclusive Education Theories: Delve deeper into theoretical frameworks supporting inclusive education. Explore advanced concepts related to Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and other pedagogical theories.
- Advanced Self-Determination Theories: Explore advanced theories related to self-determination, delving into the psychological aspects that contribute to fostering autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

### Research and Evaluation
- Research in Inclusive Education: Engage in research methodologies related to inclusive education, allowing master's degree student teachers to contribute to the academic understanding of inclusive practices.
- Program Evaluation: Develop skills in evaluating inclusive education programs, ensuring a critical analysis of their effectiveness.

### Leadership and Collaboration
- Leadership in Inclusive Education: Equip master's degree student teachers with leadership skills to champion inclusive practices within their educational communities.
- Collaboration with Stakeholders: Emphasize the importance of collaboration with parents, special education professionals, and community stakeholders to create a holistic inclusive environment.

### Technology Integration and Innovation
- Advanced Technology Integration: Explore advanced assistive technologies and innovative digital resources. Encourage the development of technology-based solutions that cater to diverse learning needs.

## Cultural Competence and Global Perspectives

- Advanced Cultural Competence: Deepen cultural competence skills, addressing advanced topics related to diversity and inclusion. Consider global perspectives and prepare educators to navigate a culturally diverse educational landscape.

## Reflective Practice

- Advanced Reflective Practices: Cultivate advanced reflective practices, encouraging master's degree student teachers to critically analyze their teaching methods and continuously improve their inclusive practices.

## Cross-Cutting Themes for both Bachelors' and Masters' Degree Level

## Legal and Ethical Considerations

- Understanding Legislation: Ensure both groups understand the legal and ethical considerations related to inclusive education, including laws governing special education and disability accommodations.

## Continuous Professional Development

- Lifelong Learning Skills: Instill a commitment to continuous professional development, encouraging educators at all levels to stay informed about new research and evolving best practices.

## Conclusion

While there is a general understanding that advanced education may deepen an educator's understanding of inclusive education and self-determination, more specific research is needed to draw concrete conclusions. Investigating the impact of professional development on self-determination at different education levels can contribute to the ongoing improvement of teacher training programs, ultimately enhancing the quality of inclusive education practices in schools.

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