

**Special Needs Education (SNE) Program in Nepal: An Analysis  
Through Inclusive Education Lens at Tribhuvan University (TU)  
Central Department of Education**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
of Master of Education (Inclusive), Flinders University School of Education

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### *Acronym*

CWD	Children with Disabilities
EFA	Education for all
IE	Inclusive Education
SNE	Special Needs Education
TU	Tribhuvan University
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Education Fund

### ***Declaration***

I declare that:

This dissertation entitled: *Special Needs Education (SNE) Program in Nepal: An Analysis Through Inclusive Education Lens at Tribhuvan University (TU) Central Department of Education* presents work carried out by me and does not incorporate, without acknowledgement, any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university.

To the best of my knowledge, it does not contain any materials previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; and all substantive contributions by others to the work presented, including jointly authored publications, is clearly acknowledged.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

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### *Abstract*

This research study is an attempt to explore Tribhuvan University's Master of Special Need Education (SNE) program through an inclusive education lens, in devising preservice teachers to teach in inclusive classrooms for inclusive education in Nepal. The study uses interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology and semi-structured interviews from the department. The research revealed significant issues in execution of the program, including a sheer misalignment between program objectives and ethos of inclusive education, the effectiveness of the curriculum design and the employed pedagogical approaches. The participants brought into spotlight the significance of developing their professional aptitudes and their search for the active community engagement.

The faculties of SNE highlighted the challenges and prospectives of the department currently marred in minimal infrastructure, and lack of human resources. Amid this situation, the SNE program at TU has been struggling to serve its very primary purpose: development of capable human resource the preparation of preservice teachers for the effective and sustainable implementation of inclusive education in Nepal.

***Before I begin***

**A promethean- saga: from being to becoming!**

My crawling on  
gravel road  
and  
crawling in  
Roadless footsteps!  
dragging right leg.  
Perennial friction on the rough road  
my right toe  
bleeding Prometheus heart  
    most of the time  
    And the scar  
    on my right leg's toe  
    reminds me  
    "The persistence of memory"  
    like the melted clock  
    Converses  
    Salvador Dali with me  
    With my surreal dream  
    Dreaming like Dalian dream  
    Melted clock  
    with  
    persistence of memory  
    Reminding me of an untold misery and suffering of my life.  
Unbearable  
Torture,  
Tor-mentation  
My disability.  
Albeit my strength.  
Disability.  
    Stigma.  
Abhorrence.  
    Disgraced  
Thou  
    Arte,  
Zeal or Jileshan?  
Jileshan with zeal!  
    Is it my blunder to long for?  
    to yearn,  
    to soil,  
    to toil  
    And move ahead into my dream.  
The persistence of memory  
The melted clock  
The Salvador Dali  
And my longing,  
My belonging  
My promethean saga: from being to becoming!

*(Jileshan Saha, extracted from an autoethnographic of saga of a disabled student from Nepal).*

# Chapter 1: Introduction

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## 1.1. Introduction to the study

This chapter introduces inclusive education as a lens to analyse the special needs education program run by Tribhuvan University, Faculty of Education, Special Needs Education Department. The Special Needs education program is the only master's level program currently offered in Nepal that is aimed at preparing preservice teachers required to fulfill the national goal of Nepal to achieve inclusive educational practices in the classroom. This study applies qualitative research methodology, in particular, phenomenological exploration of experiences of faculties and document analysis as secondary data. After interviewing study participants Hermeneutic phenomenology has been applied to craft the thematic stories from the primary data which is later compared against the document analysis to draw the findings of the study.

## 1.2. Background

Inclusive education has been considered one of the most desired education strategies across the globe (Hayes & Bulat, 2017; Hayes et al., 2018; Slee & Tait, 2022). Inclusive education potentially creates an optimal opportunity for all diverse learning needs student groups, including children with disabilities (Garuba, 2003). Contextually, Nepal has been putting maximum effort into practising inclusive education (Regmi, 2019; Thapaliya, 2018). Inclusive education strives to deconstruct barriers to create an equitable learning opportunities by emphasising personalised teaching methods and resources for all students, including students with disabilities, subjugated and disadvantaged groups of children to attain optimal learning outcomes (Slee, 2018a; Wolbring & Nguyen, 2023). The global movement of *Education for All* brought excluded students into focus, enforcing governments, stakeholders of education to implement inclusive education across the globe (Holzer et al., 2015).

### ***Special and Inclusive Education in Nepal***

The discourse of Special Needs Education (SNE) was introduced in Nepal with the formation of the National Education Commission in 1966. After establishing the National Education Plan in 1971, the Special Education Council, under the Ministry of Education and Culture, began preparing resources for SNE (Thapaliya, 2018). Disability is stigmatised and considered taboo in Nepalese culture, leading to the slow progression and the gradual awareness of education for children with disabilities (Khanal, 2015; Maudslay, 2014; Singh, 2023).

The modern education system in Nepal has a short history, very much due to the prevalence of the familial Rana oligarchy that lasted a little over a century (the Rana regime is often dubbed as the dark age for the Nepalese education system) (Parajuli, 2019). Nevertheless, after the fall of the dictatorship, several academic institutions and students and teachers came into existence (Pherali, 2022). People established news associations, newspapers, and political parties, and engaged in different activities with unprecedented freedom. After the 1960s' *coup de tat* by the then King Mahendra, the new regime completely controlled the growth of educational development to tame the people's psyche and awareness to maintain the ad hoc situation for the education system for people who were marginalised, voiceless, subaltern and subjugated, including people with disabilities (Carney & Rappleye, 2011).

Albeit late, reformative initiatives were taking place. For example, Nepalese teachers were sent for training in the USA and India, and the establishment of schools for hearing and visually impaired students marked the initiation of SNE (CERID, 2004; Shiwakoti, 2022; Wolbring & Nguyen, 2023). Likewise, the 1998 High-Level National Education Committee emphasised disabled-friendly teaching learning ecology (Bhatta, 2021). Nepal's participation and commitment to international conventions, ratifications, and declarations (UNESCO, 1994, 2000) directed Nepal's process to special education coinciding with the global notion of inclusive and special needs education (CERID, 2004; Ghimire, 2005; Shahi, 2022). Similarly, the Constitution of Nepal 2015 (article 31, clause three) mentions that "every citizen shall have the right to free education for all, including children with diverse learning needs, regardless of their sociocultural background". On paper, at least, this

guaranteed inclusive education as a welcome approach in the Nepali education system (Thapaliya, 2018).

### ***Tribhuvan University in a Glance***

Nepal's largest academic institution, Tribhuvan University (TU), established in 1959, is a public university that offers over 1600 courses in nearly 300 programs across many disciplines reports (Bajracharya et al., 2019). Demographically, it is one of the largest in the world with over 367,427 students enrolled in private and public campuses under its affiliation in 2017/18 (Bajracharya et al., 2019; *Department of Special Needs Education*, 2015) & (Statista, 2023).

### ***The Faculty of Education (FOE)***

Recognising the absence of academic human resources, the *Basic Teacher Training Program* was introduced in 1947 (later called the College of Education as directed by the Nepal National Educational Planning Commission in 1954–1955). It was then reassigned as part of the National Education System Plan in 1971 and subsequently became the Faculty of Education (FOE) in 1982 under the recommendation of the Royal Commission on Higher Education. One of the most prominent faculties in T.U., FOE has cemented its role in leading the nation's educational development, with one of the most recent developments being the introduction of the SNE in 2015 (Central Department of Education's Department of Special Needs Education, 2023).

### ***Department of Special Needs Education***

The Department of Special Needs Education was introduced by T.U. in 2015. The department aims to promote inclusive education by preparing and producing qualified preservice teachers to meet the demands of the teachers to teach in an inclusive classroom setting (TUCDE, 2023). It empowers preservice teachers by catering to their differentiated learning needs, solving their challenges, and connecting with special education with timely evaluation and monitoring with widening input and extended helping hand (Shiwakoti, 2022; Singh, 2023). The department currently offers a master's degree in education with specialisation in SNE through 4 semesters (TUCDE, 2023).

Under the FOE, the Central Department of Education at T.U. introduced the (SNE) program in 2015, the only program of its kind in Nepal. SNE aims to prepare academic human resources to cater to

and meet the overwhelming demand for inclusive education teachers. The official website of T.U.'s SNE mentions its primary objective as preparing a specially trained teacher with the use of appropriate facilities, specialised methods and materials (*Department of Special Needs Education*, 2015).

Special needs education programs are by design developed to meet the demands of students within the disability spectrum and aim to address specific learning barriers by specific solutions, and thus, posits the program as a segregated approach (Slee, 2018b). In contrast, inclusive education is believed to create an egalitarian society of learners in any educational setting (Slee & Tait, 2022).

### **1.3. Aim of the study**

This study aims to analyse the Special Needs Education (SNE) program at TU through an inclusive education lens to examine its contribution to preparing preservice teachers who are capable of best inclusive practices in the subsequent inclusive classroom.

### **1.4. The Problem Underlying the Study**

Nepal has considered education to be a fundamental right since the 1970s. According to the Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development (CERID, 2004), Nepal has been a member of various global educational movements for inclusive education, such as the *World Conference on Education for All* in 1990. In the same year, Nepal's presence in UNESCO's Salamanca statement framework for action on the Special Education Declaration was monumental in the implementation and promotion of inclusive education in the country (Dawadi & Bissaker, 2020; UNESCO, 1994). A signatory member of the international education stakeholders, the promulgation of the Constitution of Nepal, 2015 (Constituent Assembly, 2015) enshrined inclusive education as a fundamental right for all. Despite all efforts from the government, however, the practice and implementation of inclusive education in Nepal remain under question (Regmi, 2019; Shahi, 2022; Shiwakoti, 2022). Opaque plans and policies, along with imported and imposed ideas by international donors have further aggravated the Nepalese education landscape (Maudslay, 2014). Moreover, the rhetoric and promise of quality education for all has been limited to slogans and manifestos on paper, and are yet to materialise, leaving thousands of school-going children without education.

Among several barriers, the lack of trained preservice teachers to implement inclusive education is a burning issue (Forlin, 2013; Sharma et al., 2013). Realising the essence of inclusive education and sensing the demand for trained and preservice teachers in the Nepalese education landscape, the oldest University of Nepal, Tribhuvan University, Central Department of Education introduced a master's program in Special Needs Education (TU, 2022). T.U. plays a crucial role in leading the overall development of education in the country by offering higher education degrees and specialised training (Gautam, 2016). However, there needs to be more evidence-informed practices in human resource development in the Nepalese academic ecosystem: particularly teachers with skills related to inclusion (Gautam, 2016; Mathema & Bista, 2006). From the 1970s to the late 1990s, there has been a significant gap in preservice teachers' preparation development, specifically among SNE teachers (Ghimire, 2005; Thapaliya, 2018). Until 2015, the situation remained the same. The effort of T.U. for the sake of SNE remains in question to this day. Whether or not it will be able to fill the gap in training methodologies is only theoretical; it has insufficient evaluation preparedness and inadequate preservice teacher training, which have been normalised in the Nepalese academia, and the need for skilled and qualified human resources to implement inclusive education is dire (Ghimire et al., 2023; Shahi, 2022; Sharma, 2019).

T.U.'s FOE has continued the SNE specialisation for the Master of Education to prepare preservice teachers for implementing inclusive education programs. Besides this there are no other literature claiming whether the current Master of Special Needs Education syllabus is, in fact, contributing to prepare teachers for inclusive education practices or not.

## **1.5. Research Question**

The research attempts to answer the following question about the issue of inclusive education: How does Tribhuvan University's Master of Special Needs Education program for preservice teachers address the preparation of implementation and practice in inclusive education in Nepal?

## **1.6. Research method and methodology**

Phenomenology is a methodology aimed at examining individuals' perspectives based on their lived experiences (Zahavi, 2018). It helps to unveil an in-depth understanding and outlook and explain expressive, unquantifiable, and nuances, including educational experiences (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). It equips one with an insightful point of view to face the complex challenges posed by the ever-dynamic educational issues (Selvi, 2012).

Phenomenology as a research tool enables refining our understanding of the intricacies of problems by exploring the lived experiences of teachers, stakeholders of education and policy makers in implementing inclusive education practices (Murdoch, 2019). By exposing the subjective realities and the notion of stakeholders, this methodology provides a precious insight into the elements that hinder the successful implementation of inclusive education practices.

The phenomenological research tool enables examination of the diverse contextual hindering elements within inclusive education in developing countries like Nepal. It examines the cultural values, community's perceptions and policy rhetoric. Deploying phenomenological approaches, researchers can dissect the intricacies of complex problems that bars the implementation of inclusive education as diving into contextually appropriate policies and mediation to find the amicable solution in consideration of cultural sensitivity.

In this study, semi-structured interviews have been used to collect primary data, followed by a document analysis based on the information available on the university website that was adapted as secondary data. Interview data was crafted as thematic crafted stories, and the secondary data was compared using an inclusive education lens.

## **1.7. Research Participants**

The Special Needs Education program is offered at the FOE, T.U. Faculty members of the programs are the only key informants in this research study. Owing to their firsthand experience, the faculties working in the SNE department were recruited as ideal research participants.



## **1.8. Recruitment of participants**

An email was sent to the T.U. Department of Education to coordinate the recruitment of participants with inclusion criteria as specific and a research information sheet. The nominated list of participants was arranged alphabetically, and only then were the interviews conducted. An information sheet and consent form were developed and provided to the participants before the interview, allowing them enough time to go through the document and make an informed decision about participation. Participants were requested to engage in the study voluntarily according to their will. Additionally, the participants were informed prior to the interview regarding their right to withdraw from the study. This approach is frequently used in the qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

## **1.9. Interview tool**

Semi-structured question guidelines were developed against study aims, including probing criteria. Questions were deployed to conduct in-depth interviews to enable the participants' understanding and their experience with the SNE program. I conducted one-on-one online interviews individually through online software. The answers to the questions were recorded (with prior written consent) during the interview.

## **1.10. Ethical considerations**

This research study was part of the Master of Education dissertation research coursework project, conducted abiding by ethical procedures. The application form for ethical approval was lodged to the Flinders University's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), and approval was obtained from the HREC prior to the commencement of this study (Langlois & Wadham). The guidelines of HREC were strictly followed to maintain the privacy of the interviewee's anonymity, keeping the spirit of academic integrity and ethical practices.

The Information sheet outlined the study's purpose, procedures, expected interview duration (45-60 minutes), and the voluntary nature of participation. The participants were informed that interviews would be conducted via video conferencing, recorded for transcription, and stored securely following ethical guidelines. Emphasis was placed on confidentiality, assuring that participant identities remain

anonymous in any publications resulting from the study. Clear information about the absence of direct benefits and potential sources of distress was communicated, accompanied by helpline contacts for support if needed. Participants had the option to refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study without any harm.

A consent form was accompanied by the information sheet, allowing participants to signify their agreement via email. Moreover, participants had the opportunity to receive research outcomes upon project completion, maintaining transparency and offering further engagement. Should participants have had any queries or concerns, they were provided information for direct communication with the research team and Flinders University's Research Ethics & Compliance Office, ensuring a supportive and ethical research environment.

### **1.11. Data safety and privacy**

The data was stored following the prescribed Ethics of Research Department of Flinders University on one-drive. The interview was conducted in English via video conferencing and was recorded for transcription and analysis. The participants had been notified that they would not be receiving any monetary benefits.

### **1.12. Significance of the study**

The research is potentially influential in identifying the preservice teachers' training gap, mainly to fulfill the human resources needed for inclusive education, as well as the role of SNE in preservice teacher training. In addition, this research enables SNE programs by providing evidence-informed literature. It potentially enhances SNE's role in quality preservice teacher development.

Overall, the research contributes to SNE's practice direction by providing evidence of how preservice teachers have been empowered by teaching at the university.

### **1.13. Limitations and delimitations**

#### ***Limitations***

Limitations of the study refers to a situation that is beyond the researcher's control (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018), and might affect the results or the approaches used for the interpretation of the data; hence, the limitations of this study. The research focused on the SNE department within Tribhuvan University, one of the largest universities in Nepal. This setting was reasonable for a more in-depth study, which was not feasible given the constraints. In-person interviews and observational data could have enriched the findings and provided a more nuanced understanding of the subject. However, due to logistical constraints, the study was limited to virtual interviews. Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insights but acknowledges that further, more expansive research is needed to elaborately explore the topic.

#### ***Delimitations***

This research was conducted within a specific environment: the master's program in Special Needs Education at Tribhuvan University. The study focused exclusively on inclusive and special education experts within the university. The time and location were fixed, which meant that the research did not account for previous developments in the inclusive education climate.

The study's population was limited to active professors from the Department of Special Needs Education who were solely devoted to the current program. This delimitation likely hindered the in-depth analysis of perspectives from other stakeholders. Additionally, the study employed syllabi and website content analysis as its primary techniques, excluding other sources of information such as student interviews, observation, and other forms of data collection.

### **1.14. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study aims to analyse the SNE program at TU through an inclusive education lens to examine its contribution to preparing preservice teachers who are capable of best inclusive practices in the subsequent inclusive classroom.

Marred with socio-cultural stigmas surrounding disability in Nepal, among other longstanding systemic and policy-level issues, the nation has faltered in its path to inclusive education (Dawadi & Bissaker, 2020; Khanal, 2015; Maudslay, 2014; Singh, 2023), despite having welcomed the discourse of Special Needs Education in 1966, and preparing resources for the same in 1971 (Thapaliya, 2018).

After well over four decades, Tribhuvan University, the largest and oldest university in Nepal (Bajracharya et al., 2019) commenced the Department of Special Needs Education under its Faculty of Education in 2015 in order to prepare and produce qualified preservice teachers to run inclusive classrooms.

The research has employed various methodologies, from first-hand data collection via interviews—and crafting stories from them—to second-hand data in the numerous literatures that have been called upon for a substantiated study of the issues.

Over the course of following chapters, the research will attempt to study the status quo of the Masters level SNE course designed for preparation and production of preservice teacher at TU (from its commencement to this date); where it excels, where it falters, and what can be done in order to better and enhance the SNE program at TU, an institute that spearheads the educational trajectory of the entire country.

## **Chapter 2: Literature**

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### **2.1. Introduction**

Inclusive education is a high priority in the global education context to address the diverse needs of education and learning differences among marginalised subsets of the population (Ainscow, 2020). Global leaders of inclusive education are constantly working on developing theories and practices, and low-income countries are on the same footing despite resource constraints and other challenges (Forlin, 2013; Garuba, 2003). In this research study, I explore the incorporation of inclusive education program in one of the oldest universities of Nepal - TU. I attempt to dissect the Masters of Special Need Education (SNE) program from an inclusive education lens to scrutinise whether the program serves the goal of preparing preservice teachers, human resources needed for the inclusive education practices.

As part of the document analysis, this literature review includes a theoretical perspective of inclusive and special needs education, the global context, and the regional and country context of inclusive education practices. The final section of this literature review is specific to the SNE program of TU.

### **2.2. Background of Inclusive Education**

Before the global conversation on inclusive education started, the situation for children and persons from marginalised communities was dire, with no policies in place that secured their educational attainment and them barely being counted in the educational ecology (Ainscow, 2020; Garuba, 2003). It was only in 1945 that the UN endorsed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Among other fundamental rights guaranteed, Article 26 of the declaration ensured that everyone had the right to education, regardless of gender, caste, culture, ethnicity, or religion (Kisanji, 1999). The Right to

Education was the underpinning principle of the declaration, which turned out to be a milestone in the discourse of inclusive education (Lee Dr, 2013).

Similarly, the 1970s saw a significant policy introduced to educate children with disabilities in regular educational settings (Clough & Corbett, 2000). In 1994, the transformative point came from the Salamanca Conference, which birthed the notion of inclusive education. This educational paradigm, born in Salamanca, Spain, is considered an inclusive approach to education. Inclusive education ensures every child's right to a quality education in a child-friendly environment, and caters to diverse needs based on culture, caste, language, gender, geography, disability, poverty, and other difficulties, without inhibitions and biases (UNESCO, 1994, 2000; UNICEF, 2003; Vaux et al., 2006).

In light of this new initiative, to accomplish the goal of inclusive education, the global academia started designing tertiary-level courses to produce qualified and trained human resources (Chambers & Forlin, 2021; Garuba, 2003; Sharma et al., 2013). These courses, developed by renowned educational institutions, emphasised the production of not just academic human resources such as educators and instructors but also a broader and more diverse range of human resources that included administrative and managerial positions, researchers, and non-academic staff, among others. Soon, other developing countries followed suit (Acedo et al., 2009; Singh, 2023; Zhang et al., 2021).

### **2.3. Global Inclusive Education Landscape**

To make education more accessible and equitable, in the early 21st century, the global educational community embarked on a transformative journey to form Universal Primary Education (UPE) as a collective global guide by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This collective effort stands against educational exclusion, emanating a crucial growth over the past decade in accessing quality education globally (Anderson & Boyle, 2015; CERID, 2004).

Despite these commendable strides, a stark reality remains – globally, nearly 57 million children of primary school age are deprived of the essential opportunity to learn due to various forms of disabilities (Clough & Corbett, 2000). Children with disabilities have historically been among the most subjugated and marginalised groups in educational ecology (Banks et al., 2019; Davis, 2016).

Around 93 million children under the age of 14 have no access to quality education due to their prescribed disability. In total, 5.1 per cent of the world's child population live with 'moderate or severe disabilities,' of which 13 million are suffering from severe disabilities. The commonality is that they have all been barred from fundamental rights, including those to education (Cera, 2015; Regmi, 2019; Vlachou & Papananou, 2018).

However, there are countries that have achieved remarkable progress on these fronts. The US Department of Education notes that a wide range of students with disabilities has been included in at least 80% of the day in the general education classroom. In different states, that number varies between 83.6% and 36.9%. Such a range also exists for individual disability groups (Hossain, 2012). The passage of the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* (EAHCA) in 1975 later modified into the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) of 2004 (Hossain, 2012). In the context of the US, particular education practices have evolved into integrated education and have reached inclusive education practice in the everyday school system.

In a broader context, to ensure that no one is left behind from the good of education, the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 signified a stepping stone in the global dedication to universal education by enshrining the *Right to Education* as a fundamental right of children.

Inclusion of children with disabilities (CWD) or students with special needs education (SNE) in regular schooling is another crucial achievement that has happened across the globe in the last forty years (Mitchell & Sutherland, 2020; Muscutt, 2020).

International declarations such as UNESCO, 1994, Salamanca, UN Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC), UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) (Johnson, 2013) and the another equally significant *Dakar Framework for Action for Education for all* (UNESCO, 2000) have had remarkable impact on ensuring the inclusion of students with Disability in the inclusive education ecology (Scanlon & Doyle, 2022). These historic commitments have been advocating and playing an alchemist role in the implementation of inclusive Education and access in creating access and equitable to provide *Education for All* (EFA), including fulfilment of human resources (Scanlon & Doyle, 2022; UNESCO, 1994; UNICEF, 2003).

The right to education for persons and children with disability was only strengthened by the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD), which entered into force in 2008 and gained support from 145 signatories' countries (Hayes & Bulat, 2017; Shiwakoti, 2022; UNICEF, 2003). This Convention ensured that children with disabilities were included in the general education system. It also highlights the compulsion to provide reasonable accommodation to cater to the individual needs of every student. It ensures that students with disabilities receive the support they need in the regular education curriculum to have successful learning with their full engagement (Lovett, 2021).

Furthermore, Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goal 2030 underlies the need to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and encourage lifelong learning opportunities for everyone, which reflects the spirit of those clauses, which is further reinforced by the slogan leaving no one behind (Smith et al., 2020; Snoddon & Murray, 2023).

## **2.4. South Asian Scenario on Inclusive Education**

The South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is comprised of eight countries in South Asia: Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Maldives, and Afghanistan (the latest to join the bloc) (Miles & Singal, 2010; Mitchell & Sutherland, 2020; Mullick et al., 2014). Since 1982, SAARC countries have worked together to enhance human resources in various industries, including sports, the arts, education, and culture among others.

Most of these countries face similar hindrances in primary education: low student enrolment, high school-dropout rates, and recurrent classes (Mullick et al., 2014). From elementary to secondary level, schools need more infrastructure and basic amenities needed to achieve the common goal of the education environment. To combat educational hindrances, the 12th SAARC Summit 1997 ensured their commitment to free education for students aged 6-14. In 2008, SAARC and UNESCO agreed to an MOU to support 'Education for All' (EFA), a collective goal outlined in the SAARC Development agenda. Inclusive and quality education have been prioritised, leading to an increased diversity evolution (Mullick et al., 2014) as well as a growth in the demand for trained teachers to teach in inclusive classrooms (Dawadi & Bissaker, 2020; Dhakal, 2019; Singal, 2019).



## **2.5. Inclusive Education in Nepal**

The concept of inclusivity is relatively nascent in the Nepali educational landscape. It stemmed in the early nineties from the Special Needs Education programs, Basic and Primary Education Program (BPEP) I and BPEP II. These programs were unique, in that, terms such as ‘special education’ and ‘special need education’ were employed during BPEP I and BPEP II, respectively. Despite this terminological shift, the program remained essentially unchanged regarding practice and content. The Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development (CERID, 2004) reported that the transformation towards inclusive education gained momentum with the EFA initiative that promoted the integration of all children (including conventionally marginalised groups) into mainstream educational settings (Niure & Shrestha, 2022; Pokharel, 2022; Regmi, 2019).

When Nepal's national literacy rate in 2001 stood at 52%, only 31.8% of individuals with disabilities of the total population had received any education (UNICEF, 2003). Further research conducted in eight districts of Nepal where inclusive education pilot programs were implemented revealed a substantial knowledge and skills gap among teachers regarding the practical implementation of inclusive education. Teachers struggled to identify the needs of individual children and needed more capacity and training to create individualised education plans. Schools involved in the pilot programs also needed more infrastructure to adapt to inclusive education (Lamichhane, 2013; Lamsal, 2021). Consequently, the Department of Inclusive Education at the District Education Office recognised the need for teacher training and incentives but needed to monitor the impact of these interventions (CERID, 2004; Shiwakoti, 2022; Thapaliya, 2018).

## **2.6. Education for All (EFA)**

Inclusive education in Nepal went on to gain prominence through the Education for All (EFA) initiative. Under this framework, children were categorised as ‘disabled,’ ‘disadvantaged,’ and ‘marginalised’. This classification encompassed various groups, including those with visual impairment, hearing impairment, children with disabilities, and learning differences, emphasising the importance of inclusive education (Vaux et al., 2006).

According to the Human Rights Report of 2018, Nepal was home to at least 207,000 children with disabilities at the time of the survey, and UNICEF's findings in 2016 revealed that approximately 15,000 to 56,000 children aged 5 to 12 with disabilities were not attending school, constituting 30.6% of the total (Thapaliya, 2016). Moreover, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations (UN), Nepal has between 60,000 and 180,000 children aged 5 to 14 with some form of disability. These statistics only indicate the dire necessity of inclusive education that does not marginalise any student, irrespective of their status or background (Thapaliya, 2016).

## **2.7. Inclusive Education Programs; Legal Framework**

The governing bodies for education in Nepal have also emphasised efforts to implement inclusive education, which has materialised in several policies and initiatives that actively serve as guiding principles. Notable among these are the Education Act of 1971, the *National Policy and Plan of Action on Disability* in 2006, the *Special Education Policy* introduced in 1996, the *Inclusive Education and Development Plan* spanning from 1997 to 2002, and the *Education Policy* of 2017 (Shiwakoti, 2022). While these policies have framed the trajectory of inclusive education in Nepal, they face critical challenges regarding implementation and execution sustainability (Shahi, 2022).

The introduction of democracy in Nepal in 1951 set the stage for the desired education for all. Nepal went on to adopt the *National Education System Plan* in 1971, marking the first systematic effort to devise policies favouring education for people with disabilities. More notable milestones include the establishment of schools dedicated to students with hearing impairment, the formation of the Nepal Blind and Disabled Association, and the creation of the Nirmal Child Development Centre for children with learning disabilities, among others (Regmi, 2019).

## **2.8. Challenges and Prospects of Inclusive Education**

Much of the Nepali populace remains unaware about the science behind disabilities and pin it to superstitious beliefs. Inequitable access to quality education is exacerbated by social stigmas and cultural beliefs surrounding disabilities in Nepal, impeding both academic and social development (Dawadi & Bissaker, 2020).

Despite the government's commitment to inclusive education, significant challenges persist. Inadequate infrastructure, limited resources, and insufficient teacher training contribute to a substantial gap between policy intentions and practical implementation. According to a 2015 report by the Ministry of Education, 5% of students in Nepal have disabilities, and yet many still face obstacles in accessing primary education (Pokharel, 2022; Regmi, 2019; Vaux et al., 2006).

However, as identified by (Lamsal, 2021), the lack of trained teachers in Nepal limits the quality and effectiveness of inclusive education initiatives. There is also a lack of academic programs that offer courses that specialise in special needs, with TU the only university in the entire country offering a Master of Education in Special Needs Education to fill the gap in human resources, which has been, albeit slowly, moving ahead (Lamsal, 2021; Pradhan, 2018).

The challenges in implementing inclusive education in Nepal are multifaceted. Shortages of inclusive education schools, resourceless classrooms, and an insufficient number of preservice trained and qualified teachers, particularly for students with severe disabilities, present significant challenges. As a result, greater funding and support are required to enhance inclusive education, materialise inclusive education for every child and actualise the vision of education for all (Nketsia, 2017; Singal, 2019; Singh, 2023; Wolbring & Nguyen, 2023).

## **2.9. Tribhuvan University's Faculty of Education**

Nepal first began its journey of professional teacher preparation development with the establishment of the Basic Teacher Training Program in 1947. It was later turned into a college of education in response to the suggestion made by the Nepal National Educational Planning Commission (NNEPC) in 1954–1955. The project addressed the urgent need for teachers and their professional training. The College of Education (COE) emerged as the pioneering institution for preparing teachers for primary and secondary schools. The Institute of Education was renamed as part of the National Education System Plan in 1971, and the Faculty of Education (FOE) was elevated in 1982 based on recommendations of the Royal Commission on Higher Education (Bajracharya et al., 2019; Bhatta, 2021).

FOE is one of the most prominent faculties at TU. The faculty has, since its establishment, dedicated itself to the preparation, training, and catering of human resources and educational professionals needed to develop qualified teachers, trainers, planners, researchers, and designers, among others (Subedi, 2017). As a state-run institution, it plays a crucial role in directing the trajectory of the nation's educational development alongside and with the help of Nepal's Ministry of Education (Bhatta, 2021).

The faculty's Department of Special Needs Education was established in 2015 to promote inclusive education to meet the high demands of professionals in the inclusive education sector and create a harmonious environment for children with disabilities and those from disadvantaged and marginalised groups. It allows empowering students with a wider variety of demands whilst breaking the problems connected with special education by monitoring and evaluating with diversifying care and input (TU, 2022).

Stumbling blocks remain regarding the program's scope, accessibility for higher education, and materialising theory into practice. However, the department provides a wide range of approaches for quality education with a Master of Education curriculum and a One-year B.Ed. Course, which is based on practical education (Gautam, 2016; Ghimire, 2005). It has collaborated with Changwon University and worldwide initiatives to stand by extending its solidarity with education competency, trying hard to maintain an ever-changing climate of inclusive education, expanding relationships and fostering independence in these difficulties. Nevertheless, SNE needs help to fulfil its commitment to preserving the quality of inclusive education serving Nepal's diverse community (*Department of Special Needs Education*, 2015).

Moreover, while a degree in special needs education is not a requirement for practising inclusive practices in classrooms, short-term training for teachers is crucial in achieving the desired inclusive environment. To provide this training, one must be qualified in terms of Special Education Needs; therefore, the introduction of SNE by TU's FOE. The lack of institutes providing courses on Special Needs is one of the biggest reasons for the scarce human resources required to implement inclusive practices in classrooms (Dawadi & Bissaker, 2020; Gautam, 2016). The presence of a single campus throughout the nation offering the program, as well as the acute shortage of academic human

resources in the same department, shows how poorly equipped the nation is to implement inclusive education in classrooms (*Department of Special Needs Education, 2015*).

## **2.10. Teachers' preparation in Developed Countries**

According to the Stanford Centre for Opportunity Policy in Education Research (2010), the secret of the development of developed countries is their investment in teachers' preparation. Their 'guru mantra' is to invest in teachers' professional growth and produce the finest minds. That is why teachers' professional growth yields the best educational outcomes. Burgeoning literature exhibits a powerful effect on teacher's knowledge and skills enhanced because of their professional development (Zhang et al., 2021). He talks about mainly three key factors are significant: "recruiting highly qualified individuals to become teachers, ensuring their continuous development as effective instructors, and delivering high-quality instruction for every student" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010, p. 3). In the finest-performing countries, teacher support systems are marked by universal, government-funded, and comprehensive teacher education programs, including extensive clinical training and coursework. In Japan, *kenkyuu jugyou* (research lessons) are a vital part of the learning culture (Mitchell & Sutherland, 2020). Every teacher mandatorily gives the best possible lesson plan, which shows a roadmap to achieve a specific goal in partnership with other colleagues (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010).

## **2.11. Teachers' preparation in Nepal**

Following the international footprints, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has prioritised teacher training to develop pedagogical skills and foster students' outcomes (CERID, 2004) with policy and plans to produce a competent human resource from tertiary to higher education teacher preparation to achieve the national goal of the education, which is also, imperative to forming students' holistic personality (Upadhyay, 2018). Also, teachers are respected in the Nepalese cultural arena and consulted for crucial matters in rural areas (Gautam, 2016). That is why teachers' preparation is the prime concern of any government to achieve the goal of education (Bajracharya et al., 2019).

The Faculty of Education (FOE) at Tribhuvan University has yielded thousands of graduates; nevertheless, a research report conducted by the FOE has a disappointing result (Gautam, 2016).

"There is no evidence to be assured that FOE campuses have the institutional capacity to provide high-quality teacher education that the education system of the country requires" (Gautam, FOE 1998, as cited in Bista, 2002, p. 10). Nepal caters several qualifications for teachers, ranging from primary education, secondary level, and informal degrees. However, barely any research on preservice teacher preparation effectiveness has been done, and even the present education system hardly aligns with curriculum implementation (Upadhyay, 2018).

## **2.12. Document analysis of Master's Program: Special Needs Education**

The Faculty of Education's (FOE) Special Needs Education (SNE) program is devoted to the preparation of skilled and qualified academicians and education professionals who can teach classes for students with special needs (Joshi, 2016). SNE is one of the over 15 specialisations courses offered by TU's FOE. A two-year master's program is divided into 4 semesters. It carries 69 credit hours, comprising core courses, and seventeen specialisation courses including teaching practice and thesis writing. The core courses are compulsory. Each core course carries 3 credit hours (34.78%) total. Similarly, four courses are offered in the first, second and third semester each. In the fourth semester, one elective course carrying 3 credit hours offered. The specialisation and the elective course blending makes 39 credit hours (56.52%). Teaching practice and educational planning and management in the fourth semester carries 3 credit hours (4.34%). The thesis offered in the fourth semester carries 3 credit hours (4.34%) (*Department of Special Needs Education, 2015*).

## **2.13. Semester Wise curriculum Analysis**

### ***SN. Ed. 515: Fundamental of Special Needs and Inclusive Education***

Students enrolled in the program are taught four topics directly related to special needs education in the first semester. Firstly, the *fundamentals of special needs and inclusive education* course covers the history, classifications, and policies regarding disabilities, and explores early identification and intervention strategies (Nilsen, 2017).

contexts: course, *socialization and communication skills* focus on developing interpersonal skills of the prospective preservice teachers and understanding developmental contexts; and *the psychology*

*of individual differences* course provides an elaborate theoretical foundation for understanding the distinct characteristics of learners, emphasizing self-esteem and using diverse instructional techniques. The fourth and last topic of the semester, *learning diversity and disability in inclusive classrooms*, covers the understanding of diversity and disability (*Department of Special Needs Education*, 2015).

The semester is carried out through a mix of lectures, individual study, and project work along with internal and external assessments (*Department of Special Needs Education*, 2015). Those topics are specifically oriented towards preparing preservice teachers for special needs education (Lifshitz\* et al., 2004).

#### ***SN. Ed. 525 Education for Children with visual impairment***

Similarly, the second semester continues with four topics, beginning with *education for children with visual impairments*, which examines the anatomy and physiology of the eye, historical educational developments, and curriculum adaptations for visually impaired students (Mendonça et al., 2021).

The second course of the semester, *education for the deaf and hard of hearing* equips students with research skills and strategies for educating hearing-impaired students, covering topics like communication options and early intervention; the *assessment of children with special needs* course aims to develop practical assessment skills and methodologies, with attention to evaluation of cognitive, behavioural, and sensory impairments. The last course of the semester, *theories and practices of behaviour modification* provides a comprehensive understanding of behaviour management techniques, emphasizing Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and inclusive educational practices (*Department of Special Needs Education*, 2015) (Sanches-Ferreira et al., 2014).

#### ***SN.Ed.535 Instructional Techniques for Special Needs and Inclusive Education***

In the third semester, students are introduced to *instructional techniques for special needs and inclusive education*, focusing on learner-centred approaches and assistive technologies to create inclusive learning environments (Kam et al., 2004).

Second, the *education for children with multiple disabilities* course teaches students to manage and adapt educational plans for individuals with multiple disabilities, covering everyday skills and support services (Shurr & Bouck, 2013).

The *assistive technology in special needs education* course focuses on integrating assistive technologies into the educational landscape, enhancing learning experiences through practical application. The final topic, *emotional, behavioural, and autism spectrum disorders*, prepares students to work with diverse learners experiencing these disorders, covering assessment, diagnosis, and classroom management techniques (Holzer et al., 2015; Rusconi & Squillaci, 2023; Shurr & Bouck, 2013; Wolbring & Nguyen, 2023). All those topics support for build a curriculum that orients to the special needs education as well as inclusive education preservice teachers preparation (*Department of Special Needs Education*, 2015).

The fourth semester the detailed curriculum for the fourth semester is still in progress, according to the dean of Faculty of Education, Chitra Bahadur Budhathoki (Personal Communication, researcher, August 2023). However, as per the conversation with them, SNE has been taken as a process of inclusive education offered in the education department (*Department of Special Needs Education*, 2015; Millward & Dyson, 2000).

## **2.14. Conclusion**

Inclusive education is a global phenomenon that is believed to cater to the diverse needs of education (Artiles & Dyson, 2005). In the same spirit, Nepal stands firmly, extending her solidarity in the global pursuit of universal primary education, gradually materialising the aim of inclusive education in the Nepalese education ecology, which is a commendable effort. A signatory of global educational movements, Nepal struggles to translate their words into action when it comes to inclusive education.

This study, therefore, besides being an exploratory one, begs to identify why Nepal has continually faltered in implementing and practicing inclusive education despite having a clear, documented plan: the Department of Special Needs. The challenges remain diverse, ranging from policy failure to lack of clear objectives and priorities, and the inability to attract students into the department who would go on to become qualified human resources in the form of preservice teachers. The literature



highlights the dire need to bolster institutional capability to ensure excellent teacher education, fulfilling the research gap in Nepal's teachers' preparation for inclusive Education (Sharma et al., 2013; Shiwakoti, 2022) via the commitment of all relevant stakeholders.

## Chapter 3: Methodology and Data Analysis Process

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### 3.1. Introduction:

The chosen approach in this qualitative research project is hermeneutic phenomenology, employing a semi-structured interview tool. The study aims to analyse the Special Needs Education (SNE) program in Nepal through the lens of inclusive education, utilising both interviews and document analysis. To analyse the primary interview data, I have utilised hermeneutic phenomenology story crafting method. This tool is used to comprehend the intricacies of language used in the interview (Crowther et al., 2017). It creates meaning from the text and is used as a tool for the interpretation of any text, or transcribed interviews, a process which is referred to as the Hermeneutic interpretation of meaning-making (Crowther et al., 2017). That is why, the process of creating and crafting stories from interviews necessitates the intricate use of interpretation tools— methodological interpretation and decoding texts, with prominence on theoretical concepts, thematic investigation, and practical handling of the data. This approach enables researchers to reveal in-depth interpretations and create more intricate and discerning stories. Using narrative texts during research interviews can greatly improve understanding and yield vital insights into the hidden interview text (Freeman, 2007).

### 3.2. Research method and methodology

For this research, phenomenology with semi-structured interviews has been employed as the ideal medium. The methodology of phenomenology aims to scrutinise individuals' perspectives based on their lived experiences (Zahavi, 2018). It helps to reveal an in-depth understanding and outlook and explain inexplicable expressiveness, sophisticated nuances, including educational experience (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). It equips us with an insightful point of view to face the complex challenges posed by ever-changing educational issues (Selvi, 2012). Phenomenology as a research tool enables refining our understanding of the intricacies of problems by exploring the lived experiences of teachers, education stakeholders, and policymakers in implementing inclusive education practices (Murdoch, 2019). By exposing the subjective realities and the notion of stakeholders, this methodology provides an insight into the elements of blockages that hinder the

successful implementation of inclusive education practices (Van Manen, 2016). The hermeneutic phenomenological research tool enables the examination of the diverse contexts that bar the elements of inclusive education from evolving in developing countries like Nepal; it examines cultural values, community perceptions, and policy rhetoric (Crotty, 1998). Using the phenomenological approach, I dissect the details of difficult problems that obstruct the practice of inclusive education. I do this by exploring contextually appropriate policies and using mediation to find a collective solution that takes cultural sensitivity into account (Van Manen, 2016).

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect primary data, and a document analysis based on the information available on the university website was utilised as secondary data. The primary and secondary data were triangulated against the national inclusive education goals specified by the Government of Nepal. The questionnaires for semi-structured interviews were focused on the experiences of the faculties in line with fulfilling inclusive education goals (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

### **3.3. Justification for Chosen Methodology**

Owing to the nature of this research, one of the qualitative research methods was called upon (Creswell & Poth, 2016). To achieve the objective of the research i.e. to review the SNE course from the perspective of inclusive education lens by covering the experiences of the faculties directly involved with the course in preparation of the preservice teachers. This is clearly a phenomenological aspect of the research which can only be possible with qualitative research methodology (Creswell & Clark, 2017).

This research project focused on gathering firsthand information from the faculty members as the primary data source. The study examined Nepal's SNE program using semi-structured interviews that were conducted via video conference with four teachers from the Special Needs Education department at Tribhuvan University's Central Department of Education.

The interviewees for this study were distant from the researcher: an issue which was remedied by the use of modern technology, i.e. video conferencing, an appropriate method to undertake a research of this nature (Moises Jr, 2020).

Upon obtaining ethical clearance for the research, I emailed the T.U. Department of Education to coordinate the recruitment of participants. This communication included details of participation and inclusion criteria along with a research information sheet. The list of participants was organised alphabetically, and the interviews commenced once the interview time was scheduled with individual participants' mutual agreement.

### **3.4. Research Design**

#### ***Relevance to the study***

This research is vital in identifying and addressing gaps in preservice teacher training, with a particular focus on meeting the human resource demand for inclusive education goals of the Nepalese government. This study examines the role of special needs education (SNE) in preservice teacher training, offers critical insights into how SNE programs can be improved and made more effective. It not only highlights the existing gaps in the status quo, but also offers evidence-informed literature that can be used to enhance SNE programs, thereby ensuring that future teachers are better prepared to meet the diverse needs of all students by ensuring real inclusion.

This study highlights the importance of SNE in the development of preservice teachers. By showcasing the impact of university teaching on empowering preservice teachers, the research provides valuable evidence of how effective SNE practices can lead to better-prepared educators. This is crucial for promoting inclusive educational cultures and ensuring that all students receive the support they need to succeed.

In addition to highlighting research gaps, this study plays a significant role in shaping future policies related to preservice teacher preparation. By providing research-based recommendations, the study helps inform policy decisions that can lead to more effective and pragmatic teacher training programs, which further ensures that the next generation of teachers is well-equipped to foster inclusive teaching-learning environments, ultimately contributing to a more equitable and just educational system.

Overall, this research attempts to make an important contribution to inclusive education and preservice teacher preparation and in enhancing in-service teachers teaching quality by providing evidence that supports the development of best inclusive teaching practices and policies.

### ***Research Questions***

This research attempted to answer the following question about the issue of inclusive Education:

How does Tribhuvan University's Master of Special Needs Education program for preservice teachers address the preparation of implementation and practice in inclusive Education in Nepal?

The study extrapolated, explored and examined the teacher's experience of teaching students of Special Needs Education programs for potential preservice teachers while addressing the preparation of implementation and practice in inclusive education. It examined the efficacy and reason behind teacher education programs in practising inclusive education.

Also, it evaluated the program's alignment with inclusive education norms to see the preparedness of the prospective teachers to practise inclusivity in their everyday teaching locale. Moreover, it sought to bring into spotlight the gap in the current inclusive education dialogue by evaluating teachers' preparedness, aiming to contribute to the global dialogue on inclusive education implementation.

Hence, this research benefitted Special Needs Education's practice direction by generating evidence of how preservice teachers have been empowered by teaching at a University in Nepal. It highlighted the research gaps and helped to promote inclusive educational cultures, particularly in preservice teacher preparation and building and shaping future policies through research-based preservice teacher preparation. This research enabled SNE programs by providing evidence-informed literature, in other words, how, after graduating the Master of Special Needs Education, the potential teachers would teach students inclusively in the classroom.

### ***Participant Selection***

Participants for this research study were recruited based on predetermined inclusion criteria, involving four teaching staff members from Tribhuvan University's (TU) Faculty of Education and the Department of Special Needs Education (SNE). The research was conducted exclusively within

TU's Faculty of Education and SNE department, and only current teaching professionals who voluntarily agreed to participate were included. Initially, a request for collaboration to identify potential participants was emailed to the Head of the Department (HOD) of SNE. This email included an HREC letter (Appendix A), a participant information sheet and consent form (Appendix B), and a question guideline (Appendix C).

After establishing a formal channel of communication via email, those who responded and opted to participate were sent an invitation with detailed information about the research study and the relevant documents. This process was carried out after obtaining ethics approval from Flinders University's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), under project number 6832, and after ensuring proper communication with TU's Faculty of Education and SNE department.

Throughout the study, ethical procedures were strictly abided by, with participants' consent in writing, and by maintaining ethical acceptability (Creswell, 2012). This methodical approach ensured a clear, organised, and ethical recruitment process for the study.

### ***Criteria for selection***

Four staff members from TU's Faculty of Education and Department of Special Needs Education were included in the participation criteria. The research location is exclusively within T.U.'s Faculty of Education and Department of Special Needs Education staff.

### ***Recruitment process***

All participants were approached via email. The process began with the researcher receiving expressions of interest from potential participants, ensuring the involvement of interested faculty members. A list of interested participants was compiled and arranged alphabetically. Participants were contacted via email based on their availability. They signed and returned the consent form, clearly indicating their available times for the interview. An information sheet and consent form were provided to participants before the interview, allowing them sufficient time to review the documents and make an informed decision. A research information sheet in plain English was also developed to recruit participants and disseminate project information. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time and were assured of the confidentiality of their information.

**Interview Scheduling:**

After reading the participant information sheet and agreeing to participate by signing and sending an electronic consent form, the researcher organized a mutually convenient interview schedule with each participant.

**Ensuring Inclusion Criteria:**

Participants were assessed based on inclusion criteria to ensure a balance of experience. Those participants who matched the inclusion criteria and had mutually convenient times for the interview were included in the study. Participants who were not needed were thanked for their interest in the research and informed via email. This structured recruitment process ensured that participants were selected methodically, provided with all necessary information, and participated in a voluntary and ethically sound manner (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

### **3.5. Data Safety and privacy**

In this research study, participants' withdrawal was ensured without any loss or discomfort, which is a crucial step in ethical research conduct (Gordon & Prohaska, 2006). Throughout the study, participants were repeatedly informed, both verbally and in writing, of their absolute right to withdraw at any stage without consequences. This approach aimed to maintain a supportive and respectful environment, reaffirming participants' decisions and ensuring their comfort and the safety of the data they shared throughout the withdrawal process.

### **3.6. Data Collection Methods**

The objectives of the study guided the precise crafting of guiding principles for semi-structured questions, which incorporated probing criteria for effective data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2016). These questions formed the basis for conducting comprehensive, in-depth interviews aimed at gaining insights into participants' understanding and experiences with the Special Needs Education (SNE) program. I chose to conduct one-on-one online interviews via video conferencing as the preferred method. This approach offered advantages in terms of ease, cost-effectiveness, and accessibility, ensuring that individuals from Nepal participated based on their availability.

This method facilitated the effective sharing of experiences, enriching our understanding of the research topic (Creswell & Poth, 2016). During the interview process, I directly recorded the participants' responses to the questions. Additionally, I recorded the interviews for reference and accuracy with the participant's consent. I conducted the interviews in colloquial English to enhance communication. To preserve accuracy and authenticity, the recorded interviews underwent verbatim transcription and typing. Prior to the analysis, participants had the opportunity to review their transcriptions, ensuring the precise capture of their opinion (Creswell & Poth, 2016). A comprehensive consent form was provided to participants, clearly outlining their rights to withdraw from the interview at any point (Creswell & Poth, 2016), and a written consent from each participant, signifying their voluntary and informed participation in the research was received. Then I requested participants sign, and send an electronic copy, and to retain a copy of the consent form for their records, to ensure transparency and ethical conduct throughout the research process (Sedgwick & Spiers, 2009).

### **3.7. Interviews: structure, process and justification**

I developed semi-structured question guidelines based on the study aims, which included probing criteria. Then I developed a questionnaire to conduct in-depth interviews to get the participants' understanding and their experience with the SNE program. I conducted a one-on-one online interview individually (Sedgwick & Spiers, 2009), which was recorded with the participant's consent in the Flinders University's secure devices.

Four faculty teachers from TU's Special Needs Education department participated in the interview. I conducted the interview using a semi-structured method to obtain a wide view of inclusive education. Due to the flexible nature of this technic participants expressed their experiences and ideas on the topic candidly. They answered all the questions asked in the interview. The questions were curated and categorised into two groups: general and inclusive education methods, and the second one mainly focused on the preservice teacher's preparation. The questions examined multiple facets of the SNE of the master's course, and delved into the genealogy of the course, its goals, structure of the curriculum, pedagogy, opportunities for professional development, problems and challenges, achievements, and support from stakeholders, along with community development.



A semi-structured interview methodology was deployed to facilitate a holistic comprehension of the program's efficacy by equipping prospective teachers for inclusive classroom practices in Nepal. This strategy aligned with the hermeneutic phenomenological study design, and pursued the lived experiences and perspectives of the educators (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). To ensure the reliability and accuracy of the data analysis I carefully recorded other interviews using Microsoft Teams and successively transcribed them verbatim.

Throughout the study, I securely stored the collected information on a password-protected computer using the Flinders University server. Unless otherwise indicated, I de-identified any identifiable data for data storage purposes. Then I transferred and stored all data at Flinders University following the announcement of the results. The university protocols related to data storage period states that all data would be securely destroyed after 12 months.

In this research project, preserving the confidentiality and privacy of participants' data was kept in mind and worked on based on critical ethical considerations. This approach offered advantages in terms of ease, cost-effectiveness, and accessibility, ensuring that all individuals from Nepal participated based on their availability. This method facilitated the effective sharing of experiences, enriching our understanding of the research topic (Creswell & Poth, 2016). During the interview process, participants responded to the questions that were directly recorded on the computer. Additionally, I recorded the interviews for reference and accuracy with the participant's consent. I conducted the interviews in English, and the recorded data was transcribed verbatim. Prior to the analysis, participants had the opportunity to review their transcriptions, ensuring the precise capture of their opinions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). I provided participants with a comprehensive consent form, which clearly outlining their rights to withdraw from the interview at any point. Also, I actively sought written consent from each participant, identifying their voluntary and informed participation in the research. Then I requested participants to sign, send an electronic copy, and retain a copy of the consent form for their records, ensuring transparency and ethical conduct throughout the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

### **3.8. Document Analysis: selection criteria and sources need to work from here**

I conducted data management and analysis to extract meaningful insights from the collected data (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Video-conferencing interviews were recorded on computers, utilising Microsoft Teams as one of Flinders University's trusted licensed software. I assigned a unique code to each participant to uphold their privacy, and used these codes as tags in the analysis of document (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The primary data was derived from interviews and documents available on the education department's website, specifically related to special needs education, from which, stories were crafted using hermeneutic interpretive phenomenology. This story-crafting inductive method was employed to code the gathered data, starting with the extrapolation of initial interview transcripts and the information materials from the website (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Throughout this crafting process, themes emerged as more data was crafted, and recurring ideas, experiences and concepts were recognized and acknowledged. The primary aim of this study was to allow the participants' experiences to guide the development of themes, ensuring a rich and contextually relevant crafted stories used in interpretation of the data (Creswell & Clark, 2017). By deploying this methodological tool, the research attempted to capture the unique experiences of special needs education teachers, gaining a deeper understanding of their experiences within the academic course.

As a researcher, I'm responsible for conducting interviews, observations, and transcriptions, and was committed to executing the research meaningfully. In this research process, the chief investigator played an instrumental role in guiding and supervising the research to ensure the rigour and quality of the analysis. This approach was designed to guarantee findings that are well-supported, and aligned with the research objectives (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

This research study critically analysed the syllabus of TU Faculty of Education's curriculum of M.Ed. First, Second and Third Semester (2021) Special Needs Education programs document, along with information available on the website of the university. The resources were critical in the meaning-making process in conjunction with the hermeneutic phenomenological story crafting and document analysis of the research.

### **3.9. Story Crafting Using Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

The term hermeneutics, derives its name from the Greek God and messenger ‘Hermes’, and is referred to as the art of interpretation (Crowther et al., 2017). Hermeneutics is also considered a scientific method of study backed by creative skill, wisdom, and practice needed for interpretation (Van Manen, 2016). Interpretation of literature demands an innate ability to comprehend the quality of the complexities of languages, and hermeneutic interpretation of meaning-making is of great assistance in the due process (Crowther et al., 2017).

The process of drawing and extracting stories from interviews demands a similarly intricate use of interpretive tools, i.e. crafting stories from the interview, with prominence on theoretical concepts, thematic investigation, and practical handling. This approach enables researchers to reveal in-depth interpretations and to create more genuine and discerning stories from the interviewees. Using narrative texts verbatim during research interviews can greatly improve understanding and yield vital insights into, among other disciplines, inclusive education (Freeman, 2007).

A hermeneutic framework evaluates interview narratives to comprehend and create meaning. It generates three levels of interpretation:

- a) Crafting stories from the interview
- b) Identifying fundamental patterns in stories.
- c) Interpreting implications from the narrator’s theoretical understanding.

Researchers utilise hermeneutic interpretation in analysing how various components in interview transcripts relate to the whole text, which assists in discovering its meaning (Crowther et al., 2017).

Freeman (2007) states that hermeneutic interpretive phenomenology illuminates qualitative research and stories, opening new avenues of exploration by breaking down the interview transcripts into stories based on the understanding and living of the participants into the interview text.

Crawford et al. (2012) state that hermeneutic phenomenology uses data to illustrate several intrinsic interpretations of events. Furthermore, it effectively immerses the reader/listener in fresh and distinct viewpoints.

However, an extra dependence on test can hamper productivity and disguise genuine priorities, that can create a conflict in pursuit of truth. Researchers, while using hermeneutic phenomenology, do not take it as the sole strategy for dealing with data or a single interpretation of the facts, and rather deploy numerous methods for managing data to support idea to embrace flexible approaches and the potential of creating new levels of comprehension and analysis as narratives are heard, read, shared, and analysed (Spier, 2016; Van Manen, 2016).

Due to the nature of this study, I utilised interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology as my main methodological approach to create stories from interviews, drawing from the philosophical ideas of Heidegger and Gadamer (Spier, 2016; Van Manen, 2016).

To achieve this, the interviews were recorded in audio format and then transcribed verbatim to preserve the richness of the participants' narratives. The data analysis process began with a careful examination of the transcripts, which were reviewed multiple times to gain a fundamental understanding of the content. This iterative process ensures that the nuances and complexities of the participants' stories are captured and interpreted accurately (Crowther et al., 2017).

Through this approach, I created twenty-five detailed and meaningful crafted stories that reflect the participants' perspectives and provide valuable insights into their experiences in the Tribhuvan University's Central Department of Education's special needs education program. (Crowther et al., 2017). This approach helped me enhance the understanding of the subject matter and ensured that the interpretation was grounded in the participants' own words and experiences.

I crafted narrative stories in the research based on hermeneutic phenomenology, as the method helped comprehending and making sense of the actual experiences of individuals. I began with familiarisation of the context, after which I actively engaged with the transcripts to understand the content and context better. Then, I analysed major statements, extracting insightful remarks from the interview that relate to the participant's experiences and ideas about the SNE program (Crowther et al., 2017).

In this technique, crafted stories from the interview evolve into wider perceptions that restrict major parts of the Special Needs Education curriculum's effectiveness in preparing prospective teachers to sustainably execute inclusive education in Nepal. The themes are developed from the crafted stories

after visiting, repeating and revising, and again reading the crafted stories (Crowther et al., 2017). Another crucial factor to ensure was crafting stories from the verbatim data that represent the fundamental characteristics in the interview.

I interpreted the message expressed by the subjects in accordance with hermeneutic rules to create comprehensive narratives without altering the originality of the statement given by the participant.

With a glance at what is possibly the closest to a “first-hand” experience, crafted stories, aided by interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology, helped improve my holistic understanding of inclusive learning in the SNE Masters course (Crowther et al., 2017). SNE Masters course (Crowther et al., 2017).

### **3.10. Conclusion**

This chapter describes tools and method that were employed in conducting the overall research: from the use of interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology to the justification of its use, the ethical consideration and process, as well as the selection of the interview subjects, employing a semi-structured interview tool.

To analyse the primary interview data, the hermeneutic phenomenology story crafting method has been used. This tool is used to comprehend the intricacies of the language used in the interviews conducted of four teaching staff members from Tribhuvan University's (TU) Faculty of Education and the Department of Special Needs Education (SNE). The recruited participants for this research study were based on predetermined inclusion criteria. I developed semi-structured question guidelines based on the study aims and probing criteria. Then I deployed questions to conduct in-depth interviews to get the participants' understanding and their experience with the SNE program. Video-conferencing interviews were recorded on computers, utilising Microsoft Teams as one of Flinders University's trusted licensed software. The output generated from the interviews were then crafted into thematic stories, which when analysed, contributed to the overall understanding of the SNE program contribution in preservice teachers' preparation needed for the implementation of inclusive education in the classroom.

The crafted stories also gave us an insight into the SNE curriculum and pedagogy used to prepare service teachers for inclusive education programs, and disclosed the systemic challenges prevailing in the department, such as lack of human resources, inaccessible basic infrastructures, absence of disability friendly toilets, and sheer lack of literature pertaining to disability, among others.

## Chapter 4: Findings

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### 4.1. Introduction:

In this chapter I “read, re-read, reflected, and pondered” over crafted stories for substantial time to identify and disclose themes for analysis of the crafted stories (Spier, 2016; Van Manen, 2016). Based on interpretative hermeneutic phenomenology, the following sections explore and present the major themes extracted from the crafted stories, which are drawn from the interview and document analysis (Van Manen, 2016). I present the findings from the interviews of faculties of the Special Needs Education (SNE) program.

Diving into several aspects of the program, I explored its diverse nature, from the evolution of SNE, to the current challenges in curricula implementation. In the crafting process, I have assessed whether or not the curriculum is updated in accordance with stakeholders’ engagement and student feedback; whether or not it has adapted amid resources scarcity, fostering resilience and creativity among preservice teachers. I have also attempted to highlight the pedagogical approaches and professional development techniques adapted for inclusive teaching. After that I conducted interpretive hermeneutic analysis of the SNE programs’ curriculum 2017 (Crowther et al., 2017), whose findings highlight the practical and experiential learning gap between theoretical and practical application of the overall program designed for preparation of preservice teachers. In a nutshell, the findings of this study provide a wider synopsis of the strengths and weakness, amidst hints of growth of the program, and the struggle in pragmatic adaptation and implementation of the course.

### 4.2. Participants

Four participants were involved in the study. While all the participants are from the department of Special Needs Education (SNE) of TU, identifiable data has not been included in the document adhering to ethics. Albeit, I have quoted from the interview verbatim. And the reason behind is more detail information in the transcripts are more informative of nuances of practices. All the participants belong to the same teaching fraternity; however, they carry their diverse learnings and experience in

practice of special needs education and inclusive education. Interestingly, all the participants have had international exposure in the field of special needs education and inclusive education practices ranging from South Korea to European institutions. All the participants are male and represent the upper stratum of the Nepali society; no female (or other) faculty, or members from the lower strata were present in the entire program department, showcasing a stark absence of diversity: an irony, considering the title of one of the programs being inclusive education (*Department of Special Needs Education*, 2015). Furthermore, the SNE program at the Faculty of Education of Tribhuvan University is the only academic program of its kind in the entire country, rendering no scope for recruitment participants from a wider range of population.

### **4.3. Major themes drawn from the crafted stories**

Major themes are discussed below, and they were identified as:

- Establishment and Overview of the Course
- Approach to Inclusive Education
- Curriculum Design for Teacher Preparation
- Pedagogical Approaches for Inclusive Teaching
- Professional Development for Inclusive Teaching practices
- Challenges and Solutions in Delivering Inclusive Education
- Feedback Mechanisms and Course Adaptations

#### ***Establishment and Overview of the Course***

In 2015, the Faculty of Education at Tribhuvan University (TU) established a master's course in Special Needs Education in partnership with Changwon National University under the LUPIC project. This indicated an important development in Nepal's special needs education field. The program runs smoothly within a scant resource, and interestingly, there are just two permanent full-time teaching staff. And one of them is now pursuing his PhD studies overseas. The only teacher with his full tenure and tenacity, he carries out multiple tasks, ranging from teaching to managing everyday administrative tasks which is what can be termed a *one man army*: the Head of Department (HOD), conducting lectures, and ensuring quality everyday classroom teaching amid limited



resources. The establishment of SNE shows the determination and dedication of the faculties in institutionalising SNE into inclusive education to quench the thirst for knowledge.

When asked a question about its establishment the participants had a mixed feeling about it. Participant P001 recalled his struggle in maintaining the course because of the challenge lies in the department. He says:

The faculty is running with many hardships and difficulties because of lack of human resources. There are only two people as a permanent lecturer and one of them is in Norway Oslo, pursuing his PhD degree. In the faculty, I am handling all the things all alone as a Head of the Department, teachers, office assistant, everything. Everything I am doing here, and this is the history behind the establishment of this department. And regarding the course, it is a master's in special education. (P001, Interview, March 2024)

P002 highlights the challenges in implementation of the course because of the sociocultural belief. He gives religious religion:

Due to a religious belief and parents are not interested in their study. Parents are busy in their own work. They don't come to school and don't participate in outreach. There is no assistance at home. There is also problem in collaboration between school and other communities. More time, money, and endeavours needed to be put into the program to make students feel appreciated and feel encouraged to study. (P002, Interview, March 2024)

The same question was responded by P003 in a different manner. The SNE program was established in 2015 but transformed into inclusive education later. It is a paradigm shift. But in terms of the teachers understanding towards the inclusivity sound different. He says:

Inclusive program I mean the program from that point of view, the Tribhuvan universities, this (SNE) program overall going on well. Still there is dilemma what to do to promote the special need education from university from policy makers from these stakeholders, still there is a problem, in terms of understanding or conceptualizing the SNE program in the Tribhuvan University. (P003, Interview, March 2024)

But P004 share an anecdote related to establishment of the SNE and its shift into inclusivity. He says:

When I was pursuing my PhD in South Korea, a leading university project for international cooperation, from Changwon National University, a professor was interested to support in Nepal to establish special needs education. The Korean Government and Changwon National University prepared a program to establish a special needs education in master's program at TU Nepal that project is called LUPIC first leading university project for international cooperation, LUPIC in short form.

The special needs education is integrated into inclusive education, and the general education and special needs education. That type of philosophies is practicing in Nepal, but inclusive education is not only for the children with disability and normal children. It is also related to the marginalised disadvantages and unprivileged. But in the context of Nepal, the inclusive education is practiced just only the integration of General curriculum and I special need curriculum. (P004, Interview, March 2024)

The findings reveal that the establishment of special needs education and its transformation into inclusive education is an evolutionary process influenced by the global educational trend.

The master's program at Tribhuvan University (TU), Special Needs Education (SNE) has been gradually growing and exhibiting towards inclusivity due to the dedicated and visionary educational leadership of the program amid the resource scarcity and many other systemic challenges. One of the founding members, leadership, and collaboration with Changwon National University have supported the program. It is growing in line with global cooperation and can change the systemic challenges. The evolutionary transformation reflects the broader educational and societal movement towards inclusion. Thus, it indicates the transformative power of education in equitable learning environment is crucial, and motivating individuals who make a difference in the overall educational climate.

### ***Approach to Inclusive Education***

It is difficult to integrate SNE into inclusive education operation. The reason behind difficulty in implementation is there are three categories of schools: special, integrated, and inclusive education but these schools are not able to practice inclusivity fully. The ineffective operation of policies and the dilemma in teaching autism spectrum students have created a stir among teachers disbalancing inclusive education policies.

When asked about approaches to inclusive education. P001 delivered a long monologue:

SNE cannot be integrated into inclusive education. And here are no inclusive institutions until today because they could not meet the parameters of inclusion or inclusive education. Special schools are still running these days despite the new inclusive education policies are in implementation. Also, the entire education system is going towards inclusion because I am in the Ministry of Education, or CEHRD (Centre for Education Human Resource Development). There used to be a Special Education Unit. Later it is, upgraded to education division/branch, which is, now, called inclusive education section. Many education policies are oriented towards inclusive education, but they are in very much dilemma on how to conduct schools which are running for those students with disabilities specially for those autism spectrum disorders disability. It has become a very cross cutting issue also like the balancing the policy and that is why it is going to be a challenging task while implementing in the classroom.

(P001, Interview, March 2024)

The same question is responded by P002 in a different way. He says:

the university master's program recognizes the students' diversity individual differences. So, the instructional approaches and techniques or methodologies to say they are organized. As for the

theoretical development, you know that are practiced across the globe and the master's course has adopted, the common practice and methodologies approaches, which are being used? (P001, Interview, March 2024)

P003 believes that the program has recognised the diverse needs of students, and the teachers are prepared to empathise with the diverse needs of students and teach them according to their need so that they will be able to complete their study.

P004 so far approach is concerned it is all about the need. He further said:

The need for the foundation of this approach lies in Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). It is modified instruction to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities. Preservice teachers are oriented toward interactive learning methods for example peer learning, cooperative learning and hands-on activities, and active participation techniques are included. (P004, Interview, March 2024)

The findings reveal that SNE cannot be integrated into inclusive education. Nevertheless, special schools continue to operate under the same old policies, even as new inclusive education policies are rolled out. The overarching educational landscape is shifting towards inclusivity, as evidenced by structural changes within the Ministry of Education and the Centre for Education Human Resource Development (CEHRD).

However, there is a huge gap between policy and its implementation in practice, with the schools failing to meet the criteria of inclusive education. The policy formulation doesn't look active, so the implementation of inclusive education remains in a limbo.

The current education practices for autism, for instance, has complicated the full implementation of inclusivity in practice.

### ***Curriculum Design for Teacher Preparation***

At TU, the SNE program is an evolving educational approach—from a special education practice to an inclusive and integrated one. Initially, the SNE course was intended for specialised education. Now, it has been transforming into an inclusive front, keeping in pace with contemporary educational practices to prepare educators to practice inclusivity. The preservice teachers are prepared providing theoretical knowledge and practical experiences through coursework, practicum activities and thesis writing.

When asked about the curriculum design for preservice teacher preparation process, P001 replied:

The SNE curriculum was initially focused to special needs education students. Later it accommodated based on the contemporary inclusive education perspectives. The SNE course introduces theoretical ideas of disability and special needs education, with thirteen subjects and 69 credit hours of practicum activities and thesis writing. The course is designed to prepare prospective teachers to teach in inclusive classrooms, involving hands-on activities such as field studies, research, project works and case studies. Students are allocated supervisors. Student must present their final report on the practicum. The course trains students for the marketplace and further studies. (P001, Interview, March 2024)

P002 pointed that the curriculum should change according to time and context but not based on the prescription of the international donors and the education agents:

In Nepal, the law related to the rights of persons with disabilities has recognized ten types of disabilities by the recent Disability Act. Based on these disabilities, our curriculum has been designed to address the uniqueness of a person with a specific disability as well as multiple disabilities. Still, there are some shortcomings in our curriculum. I think it is not more practical. University doesn't have its own lab school. That's why we need to go other schools for practices and this part has some limitation and lacking making our curriculum more practicable applicable. (P002, Interview, March 2024)

Responding the question of curriculum whether aimed to prepare preservice teacher preparation participant three had opinions similar to that of participant one:

At Tribhuvan University, when student involves in master programs, they must go through the 69 credits, I mean 69 credits. After completing 69 credits, they are eligible to receive their degree. Out of those courses, four courses are the specialization courses in inclusive education, which was called SNE programs, previously. Two courses are the core courses in the first semester and in the same way second semester, there are four courses in terms of the major and the two courses are core courses and in the third semester there are/ is also four specialization courses and two core courses.

In the 4th semester, there is one specialization of course, and one core courses and one is teaching practicum that carries the three credit and finally Student has to write a thesis paper and that carries the six-credit hour including all of these 69 credit hours. That prepares preservice teacher to meet the inclusive education demand rising every day in the market. (P003, Interview, March 2024)

And participant four highlighted the transformation of curriculum from SNE to inclusive education, he said in the short span of just ten years the curriculum was revised thrice:

Many subject experts have been contributing to this committee. Those curriculum experts jointly sit in for the meeting. They identify educational need of Nepalese society. They decide which type of curriculum is appropriate. They prepare subject title and assign the two persons for one course. I jointly prepare the course with another subject expert. We organise subject committee meeting and discuss, revise, visit and revisit the topic. Norwegian Government has funded for this curriculum preparation process. This is how we are transforming curriculum to preparer preservice teacher for inclusive education. (P004, Interview, March 2024)

The findings shows that SNE curriculum is in the verge of transformation. Nevertheless, it is slow to adapt inclusivity in practice. Theoretically, students are oriented towards inclusivity from special

needs education perspective but in practice, it is hollow. The shift of the SNE curriculum from purely special needs focus to an inclusive orientation is happening because of the global movement that is inclusivity in education. This change is not only administrative. It is deeply ideological, challenging the existing “exclusivist” practices that have historically segregated based on ability of the students to inclusivity.

### ***Pedagogical Approaches for Inclusive Teaching***

Pedagogy is a way of achieving learning goal of students. It's a way of communicating to students in the classroom. In other words, pedagogy is blending of teaching method, learning activity and assessment process. To achieve the desired goal teacher and student work with the course content. Universal design learning with the support of ICT in classroom enhances learning of students and it motivates them to get engaged among each other. Learning happens collaboratively in playful manner. When asked about pedagogical approaches one participant philosophised his idea:

Pedagogy is philosophy of teaching. Our course, as other universities believe that students have diverse learning needs, and they can progress according to their diverse learning styles. And they can progress in appropriate environment if the class is delivered based on the tailored instructions. So, pedagogy believes that students with any forms of disability can progress in learning. The most preferable approach is universal design for learning techniques. Some scholars coined the term, it's a technique. (P002, Interview, March 2024)

Participant four explained theoretically what pedagogy meant. Missing the crux how it is practiced in the absence of lab and designed classroom for students with disability. He said:

Pedagogical strategy is slightly different from the General strategy. Individualized education plan IEP is also prepared in the Bachelors and master's program for the student. They practice to the individualized education plan, UDL model is also effective to teach in the inclusive education classroom. But in the case of special education and the special needs education, there must be a specific technique and strategy which is related to the disability specific for blind one type of specific pedagogical technique is needed.

One technique is not fit for other. For example, deaf student is not related to the intellectual disability Student. For blind student braille is essential for deaf is student sign language is essential for intellectual disability. Students learn by playing and learning by interaction is essential. So many types of teaching strategy and pedagogical strategy is in practice at Tribhuvan University. (P004, Interview, March 2024)

One of the participants candidly accepts that in the absence of appropriate learning environment any pedagogy becomes useless. He said:

Theoretically, we know what we must do but we use appropriate pedagogy This inclusive practice is interpreted by preservice teachers through the creation of adjustable lesson plans, in

combination with multisensory methods, and the utilisation of differentiated learning to tailor their methodologies to the specific instructional method for each learner. With the support of ICT and the practice of UDL, preservice teachers feel enhanced their capacity to recognise differences. (P004, Interview, March 2024)

The findings reveal that Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an approach to support preservice teachers to perceive their classrooms as environments in which obstacles to learning may be removed via the implementation of ideas that are flexible and adaptable. In Universal Design for Learning (UDL) inclusion is a lived experience, wherein the various needs and capacities of students are addressed while teaching in the classroom. Only the use of ICT can enhance UDL pedagogy effectively. In the absence of basic infrastructure like lab, assistive technology and access to classroom obstruct it.

### ***Professional Development for Inclusive Teaching practices***

Continuous professional growth of any field is crucial. SNE course acknowledges, it is necessary to equip teachers with diverse needs of the students to meet the dynamic nature of educational needs and practices. The teacher plays crucial roles in achieving the goal of inclusive education.

In this context, respondent one said:

We have designed the course that will form a strong theoretical foundation of the students. They start from the introduction of disability and special needs education. This course is heavily inclined towards preparing prospective teachers to teach in the inclusive classroom. To achieve the intended goal, preservice teachers (students) must do a case study. They should study organization that provide services to students with disabilities. After that students must present their final report on the practicum based on their interest specific disability area. (P001, Interview, March 2024)

Another respondent added:

You see, experienter knows that what experiencing is. Dancer knows what dancing is. Those persons how would who doesn't dance, how he knows about the dancing. So, continuous professional growth is completely a personal choice. He knows what he must do and how he does. It happens spontaneously. (P003, Interview, March 2024)

Respondent three mentioned:

In Nepali context, inclusive education master's program has internship. One subject that belongs to the 6th credit hour, the three credit hour, the three-credit hour related to the inclusive type and three credit hour is also related to the children with disability. This course covers prepare the report. How many children disability is studying in the high school. (P004, Interview, March 2024)

Another participant mentioned that the preservice teachers are provided professional development opportunity as per the need of the teacher. He said:

Keeping updated with global educational practices and inclusive teaching notions ensures that educators are not only well-prepared at the outset but also persistent to develop and adapt throughout their careers. This is an imperative step in ever-evolving educational practices to foster and enhance inclusive education practices in Nepalese educational landscape. (P002, Interview, March 2024)

The findings reveal that master's degree in Inclusive education at TU creates an internship opportunity to prepare preservice teacher to deal with children with disabilities prior to teaching them. It is required preservice teachers to have a skill of various kinds of report writing skills in high schools, for which they are exposed to internship and, they are supported in practicum classes. Also, preservice teachers are goal oriented, so they learn and practice if they needed skills. It is a gradual process, too.

### ***Challenges and Solutions in Delivering Inclusive Education***

Inclusive education is full of challenges such as licensing policy, and challenges created because of untimely shift from SNE to inclusive education, among others. In response to what kinds of challenges teachers have been facing while delivering inclusive education, a participant mentioned:

The first challenge is related to the infrastructure as being the expert of inclusive education. Disability Resource Centre is essential in university level, it would be better to receive knowledge related to disability assistive devices they familiar with assistive devices. It is very easy to familiarize yourself with technology, technical ideas and so on.

And the second challenge. It is difficult to receive the inclusive education expert. It is difficult to receive experts to teach in the inclusive education in the class. The same teacher taught in the far Western University. Same taught in the Tribhuvan University, same teacher taught in the Purvanchal University in online mode, but in the physical mode it is very difficult to teach in face-to-face mode, but Tribhuvan University Master's program prepared some the human resource to the school and some to university level now the challenge is gradually decreasing. (P004, Interview, March 2024)

Another respondent added:

Obviously, we have many challenges regarding delivering the content to the students about the inclusive education. As I have already mentioned that several teachers in the department have left. Very few numbers of teaching staffs are not enough to cover all the syllabus or the subjects. We have hired teachers from outside. But payment for the teachers is a very lengthy procedure and difficult to manage it on time. Other things are about special education /SNE, people, generally, think that this subject is mainly for disabled people that's why most of the students are disabilities. Also, teachers cultural and religious understanding towards disability has hampered in delivering inclusive education. Teachers must be trained for inclusivity and its way to practice in everyday teaching practices. (P003, Interview, March 2024)

The next respondent tersely said:

Students with disability should be taught in the separate classroom. In this way of teaching teachers can give more time that makes student learn. Because they feel that they are counted as some important student. It motivates them to study more. I don't know but I think like this. In

inclusive classroom, many types of students sit on the same bench. Unknowingly, disabled students feel demotivated and dominated and they stop learning. (P002, Interview, March 2024)

Another teacher responded who has studied in foreign university strongly believes that students with disability should not be in inclusive classroom. Rather they should be taught in special class with special attention. Inclusion is not for them. He also believes that due to poor sociocultural upbringings of the teachers have slowed them their understanding towards education for students with disability. He firmly believes:

we have three deaf students from second semester, and I think in first semester there are out of twenty student's, half of the students are visually impaired.

I ask them: How come you are here.

They say: We know that this course is dedicated to disability, so we are here.

And I reply to them: No this is your wrong notion. And like I'm not a disabled person but I have studied this course. Students are wrongly orientated about the course.

There are varieties of students in our department. For example, for deafness, not only hard of hearings but totally deaf students. And the visual impaired. How can we teach them in one class? (P001, Interview, March 2024)

The findings reveal that even though, these teachers have studied in international university. Some of them have conducted research. They have been teaching in the classroom. They have been practicing inclusive education as consultant. But their understanding and mentality is narrow and confined into religious and cultural perspectives against students with disability. Despite the misreading of special education, and sheer lack of qualified teachers along with infrastructures, the devoted teachers of SNE persist in providing, a nurturing classroom setting with their innovative strategies by using those meagre educational materials. Graduates have been braving challenges with their knowledge and skills, and, wherever viable, making significant contributions to the inclusive ecology. They solve these challenges by using available materials like EUPG book and NVDA software. Despite of the fact that empty building with big wishful dreams don't materialise the goal of providing education for all.

TU has only produced human resources who have neither worked in community disability centre nor observed and seen how things take place for people with disability. But they are ready to teach students with disability along with other marginalised and voiceless students.



### ***Feedback Mechanisms and Course Adaptations***

Gathering feedback from student is crucial to maintain the flow of teaching to assess the learning outcome of the student. An honest and critical feedback from student paves a clear roadmap in achieving students learning goal. When asked about culture of feedback collection in SNE, Participant three candidly said:

Particularly, we don't have culture of feedback gathering from students. Even the people, who have special needs education background, they don't prioritise in student feedback. Tribhuvan Universities from upper levels or mechanism, they prepare the courses. They invite us as faculties. So, it's better to say that academics, administration is not much functional for feedback collection from students because the students are not highly prioritized. (P003, Interview, March 2024)

Another respondent said:

First, university develops the course by adopting a due process, before developing the contents, we hold discussions with the stockholders' perspectives, towards need of the courses. We take some feedback, references from workshops regarding the course and then we start developing the course contents. (P001, Interview, March 2024)

The next participant had different opinion:

Overall Special education is positive. However, there are some professional development issues, for example, there is no licensing system. If students don't have a license, they can't compete for the inclusive education teaching profession. And this is a professional issue. And we are trying to resolve this issue. I think this is the only issue.

The inclusive education or special needs education in Nepal is new area. For this new area/program there are many funding opportunities for this program. So, I think within 10 years, we have revised our course three times you know. And it happened because of student's feedback. And we are trying to adopt best practices in our overall SNE program as well. (P002, Interview, March 2024)

Furthermore, another respondent believes that feedback collection happens in their "informal meetings, outings and picnics". He mentioned:

No, no, no.

Sometimes we arrange the conference, we collect the feedback above from the conference. Sometimes we arrange round table discussion. At that time, we collect the feedback from arranging gathering program, picnic program. We discuss openly at that time. From that way we collect the feedback. Sometimes Norwegian professor came in Nepal. They take the interview face to face interview today, Student and Koren professor, who is funding in program they also take face to face interview. And face to face conversation program. That that way we are collecting the feedback from that student. (P002, Interview, March 2024)

The findings reveal that Nepali academia doesn't practice feedback collection formally and systematically, and in the rare occurrences that it does happen, they take place informally, and as a formality rather than a necessary mechanism. It also depends upon a teacher's perception and there

is not any feedback collection system. SNE rarely gathers students' feedback. This results in the program remaining static, with no adaptation to meet the necessity of the students, and in a larger context, fails to deliver the promises of inclusive education. This leads to a huge gap between inclusive education principles, practical implementation, and market demand. As a result, preservice SNE teachers face market challenges, as people unfamiliar with best inclusive practices fail to recognize the value of the subject and the potential impact it has on people with disability.

Although the program emphasises the importance of student input and specialized training, the educational system lacks the infrastructure needed to incorporate these elements effectively. The feedback revealed that due to lack of licensing system, preservice teachers have been barred from practicing their learning from their location. Furthermore, the absence of strong preservice teachers' feedback mechanisms presents a clear challenge. Students are the primary stakeholders in any education system, and their firsthand experiences provide valuable insights into the program's strengths and weaknesses. However, curriculum development and teaching methods fail to consider their voices.

Thus, the education system neither fully meets students' needs nor provides adjustments to the program. And the program lacks students' input, leading to curricula missing crucial improvements. Service challenges for SNE graduates further exhibit this disconnect. These preservice teachers receive specialized training in inclusive education, but the teaching service commissions fail to define roles for teachers with SNE backgrounds. Graduates struggle to secure positions that fully utilize their skills due to this lack of role clarity.

#### **4.4 Partnership with Community and Stakeholders**

The SNE inclusive education course offered at TU is the product of international partnership with South Korea University LUPIC and NORHED. The Master's course in Special Needs Education at Tribhuvan University was firstly started in 2015 in collaboration with Changwon National University of South Korea. It has a project called LUPIC (Leading University Project for International Cooperation). Since, then the department is running for master's degree Special Needs Education and almost thirty students have graduated from here. Later in 2022, the same course has been shifted to inclusive education in collaboration and funding support from Norwegian education project

NORHED. While TU has gone above and beyond in acquiring international education collaborations beyond borders, there is no partnership or collaboration with local schools and institutions, nor with any disability related service sectors.

The Government has failed to draft any rules and responsibility for the betterment of inclusive education specifically in Nepal, resulting in a program that looks ideal on paper. When asked about collaboration Participant one said:

We generally develop curricula, assignments for students to go to the community to collect data to connect students with community. They do their work up to third semester and forth semester. Then, they go to community's inclusive schools to collect data for their report writing. They prepare several reports based on their practical work. There are lots of things to do. But the only issue is how much the department can do it? There are lots of rooms to engage students in community and other works.

But we do not have partnership with community and local schools. We orient our students for the change when the government wants to change or develop general schools into inclusive schools. We, in university ensure implementation of change by producing needed human resources. And We also advocate for policy formulation for inclusive education. (P001, Interview, March 2024)

The same question was responded hesitatingly by a respondent. He said:

Partnership with local community and school is a very big but interesting question. The SNE master programs in Nepali context, is running without any collaborative approaches and involvement or engagement with local stakeholders. It would be better to engage stakeholders to enhance inclusive education practice. But in practice, we don't have that system nor have any local community engagement system to support the inclusive education because it is higher level education. It could be better to engage the local community, but till date we don't have any sort of practice of engaging local community, either. Personally, I as a faculty engage in the local community to conduct special education classes somewhere else in Kathmandu. (P003, Interview, March 2024)

But another respondent reported that there is a huge success story of collaboration between SNE and local community centre. He said:

Yes, the real practice of local partnership is seen in Biratnagar metropolitan city. Five students are studying Bachelors' program in Purvanchal University. The local government support to the Purvanchal University. Biratnagar Metropolitan City provide scholarship for five students. They support in the admission fee in the semester, the yearly fee, and likewise in Midwestern University the municipality supported their reading materials who are studying special needs education and inclusive education. After completing their special need education inclusive education, there will be appropriate human resource for our local government. So, we must Support them. This support is provided only in Biratnagar metropolitan City, but not practiced in other parts of Nepal. So, I don't think it is a significant collaboration in local level for the betterment of the inclusive educational development and its promotion in society.

As I have already said. There is not a single educational institution. In Nepal, the government is trying to build inclusive school. Some enquiries are sent to ING's funding too. But they support in development of human resource.

Now the trend is to the development of human resource, so it's related to the disability sector in Nepal. UNICEF, World Bank ADB provide scholarship for the preparation of the human resources. (P004, Interview, March 2024)

While the question was asked in relation to students with disability and the SNE program at TU, the respondent deviated to an entirely different topic, citing an entirely different context. There is insignificant local support provided to the university for data collection and for some mediation with community. So far, the huge success of the course lies only on scholarship, support and international donors' generosity. In Nepalese context, of late, it is observed that people rely on donor agents to do even the barest of minimums, such as building an accessible toilet, let alone disability-friendly infrastructure. And if this issue is raised seriously, the person either will be trolled, tarnished and they will be humiliated. That is why people also refrain from negative people so that they can contribute positively encouraging for the betterment of the inclusive education. The local communities' support, governmental involvement, and international organisations' support and guidance to collaborate in determining to foster and sustain inclusive education. Afterall inclusive education guarantees equitable and accessible learning environments for all students.

#### **4.5 Key findings drawn from crafted stories and document analysis**

In 2015, the Faculty of Education at Tribhuvan University (TU) started a master's course in Special Needs Education in partnership with Changwon National University under the LUPIC project, underlining the significance of international collaboration in the process of educational development in underdeveloped countries, and underscored the program's commitment to inclusion.

Nearly a decade in, the program continues to run with scant infrastructures and resources and remains thoroughly understaffed—one of the permanent founding members, for instance, performs both academic, administrative, and managerial duties. Other faculties too, adjust ensure that learning takes place despite ill-managed resources.

To meet the goal of inclusive education, in 2022, the curriculum was reformed to align with the ethos of global inclusive education trends that stand for equity and diversity and aimed to stand for resilience and inclusivity to prepare prospective preservice teachers in the enrolled students.

However, reliance on foreign models without acquaintance with the Nepali locale has left the program looming in quest of attaining the inclusive education goals.

Dialogues with stakeholders—ministries and educational organisations to promote inclusive education regarding discussions aimed to align policies and practices with inclusive education philosophy that support education for all have proved futile.

The program is at present awaiting approval for an inclusive education master plan: a crucial step towards achieving the necessary structural changes to support inclusive education.

Nepalese education systems—including special, integrated, and comprehensive schools, often clash with inclusive education principles. This is why the implementation of inclusive education policies faces challenge, particularly for students with autism spectrum disorders. This disparities between existing educational systems and inclusive principles invites for systemic reforms to include diverse students better.

Another key hindrance of the program is the absence of a feedback mechanism. The department has not developed any systematic way of collecting students' feedback, barring the crucial, continuous refinement of the curriculum which is still at nascence.

The rare, little meaningful engagements with stakeholders to ensure high educational standards are limited only to informal interactions and are seldom recorded and are even less action oriented.

Experiential learning takes place in the community, and is a key component of the SNE program, with community-based assignments designed to prepare students to fit into real-world challenges. Despite the departments' best efforts at community engagement, there has been little reception from the community, owing largely to the lack of "interest" or priority from the governing authorities. Moreover, the graduated teachers lack credibility as the government has failed to do even the bare minimum of recognising them by not providing a certified license: a common practice for preservice teachers elsewhere across the globe.

This gap is only further widened by the longstanding sociocultural stigmas associated with disability in the locale (Dawadi & Bissaker, 2020) and should be addressed at the earliest for more robust community partnerships to improve the practical learning experiences of students.

The university encounters difficulty to balance special and inclusive education within a complex policy environment—there is little demand for inclusive teachers owing to lack of awareness about inclusive education, aided by ad hoc lackadaisical policies. This inconsistency exposes the educational systematic contradictions; where the need for inclusive practices is recognised, but structural support remains as it used to be.

The department practices Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in their pedagogical approaches.

UDL uses adaptive learning processes and flexible teaching strategies and creates inclusive classrooms where every student can participate fully. This approach guarantees in creation of a learning environment. It is accessible and supportive for all students, by addressing their individual differences and promoting a collaborative learning space.

This, however, contradicts drastically from what respondent P002 and P001 say regarding inclusive classrooms. They univocally agreed that students with disability were simply not meant to be in the same classroom, and instead endorsed segregated classrooms, stating:

Students with disability should be taught in the separate classroom. In this way of teaching teachers can give more time that makes student learn. Because they feel that they are counted as some important student. It motivates them to study more. I don't know but I think like this. In inclusive classroom, many types of students sit on the same bench. Unknowingly, disabled students feel demotivated and dominated and they stop learning.

With little enthusiasm from teachers in incorporating students with disability in the classroom, very little can be expected to materialise from the usage of UDL. This only further exacerbates the lack of first-hand experience the students are likely to encounter in classrooms, that are not inclusive.

And similar notion is shared by stakeholders and authorities alike. This shows a massive gap between the ambition of Nepal's path to inclusive education and actual implementation. And I was left wondering, if the very faculty who is a key member of the SNE program feels this way, how are they going to train the preservice teachers the soft skills such as compassion and empathy, among others, essential for ensuring quality inclusive education?

In Nepalese context, the findings show holistic outreach activities and stakeholder's collaboration are limited. And yet again, another recurring challenge resurfaces, the policies that are marred with

potholes, and obstruct the implementation of inclusive education. In regard to education policies, P001 had the following to say:

Many education policies are oriented towards inclusive education, but they are in very much dilemma on how to conduct schools which are running for those students with disabilities specially for those autism spectrum disorders disability. It has become a very cross cutting issue also like the balancing the policy and that is why it is going to be a challenging task while implementing in the classroom.

This goes on to reveal the stark reality of inclusive education in Nepal: it has been prepared without prior planning.

The concerned stakeholders needed a “tokenism” program to show that something of its kind existed, and they did so without consulting disability experts, or with little collaboration with organisations working in the grassroot level of Nepal for people with disability. Were the planning and mapping of the program in place, maybe, things would have been different.

The main purpose of the SNE program is to create and cultivate a learning environment for all students, including students with disabilities, to have an educational culture that values and addresses every student's unique needs by emphasising empathy and inclusivity.

While TU’s curriculum focuses on classroom design and experiential learning enhances preservice teachers' understanding of inclusive practices, and is a commendable step, they have thoroughly failed to imbue the ethos of inclusive education.

## **4.6 Conclusion**

SNE at TU is trying to overcome scant resources while struggling in preparing preservice teacher, human resources needed for the enhancement of inclusive educational practice. A misinterpretation about special education that prevails in Nepalese everyday cultural and educational parlance is addressed by the SNE. How, a program evolves towards inclusivity through strong leadership, international collaboration, and continuous curriculum refinement, that reflects and encompasses a broader educational and societal movement. The focus on experiential learning, educational stakeholder engagement, and the use of adaptive teaching strategies points out the importance of empathy, creativity, and collaboration to create an inclusive ideal educational learning environment for all types of students including unapologetically to students with disability.

There is however a lot to do, and a lot of errors to amend: from the very introduction of the program to tackling the prevailing challenges. An instance is of how the teachers believe that “students with disability (mainly in case with autism spectrum) do not belong in the same classroom as it hinders their learning outcomes”; the same teacher defended the value stating that they are preparing teachers to teach students with disability: reflecting a hint of saviorism.

This boils down the SNE program to a concerning question: how is the program, whose teachers bar disabled students from studying in the same program, going to fix the status of students with disability in Nepal?



## Chapter 5: Discussion

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### 5.1. Introduction

The preservice teacher preparation process is a complex and challenging task, even in developed countries across the globe. It is multiplying the difficulty in a poor resource context. In this study, preservice teacher preparation in Nepal has been reviewed through primary data collection, interviewing faculties and document analysis to see how this process been taken place. The Nepalese education policy is moving towards inclusive education at large. However, the priority of Nepalese government in teacher preparation program seems to be a low priority.

The chapter begins with a discussion of findings from interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology thematic stories crafted from the raw interviews of the participants, document analysis of the two-year master's program on Special Needs Education (SNE) and the faculty contribution in teacher preparation for SNE, followed by a semester-wise discussion of the curriculum, and concludes with the analysis of SNE's alignment with inclusive education practices discussion forwarded.

Further, the study dives into the curricula of the Master of Education in Special Needs designed to prepare (pre-service) teachers and empower (in-service) teachers with essential pedagogical skills. The discussion shall further broaden into finding whether the introduction of SNE in the department fills the gap in teachers' knowledge, skills, and qualifications to practise the ethos of inclusive education in their everyday teaching profession.

### 5.2. Student Feedback: Translating Theory into Inclusive Classroom Practices

The analysis of TU's SNE master's program displays innumerable critical aspects of possible improvement. Firstly, the integration of student feedback into curriculum updates exhibits the significance of aligning with practical classroom learning experiences. Theoretically, teachers might say that they collect students' feedback to update the curriculum in SNE at TU. SNE at TU rarely, if ever, collects students' feedback (only after graduation), and even that is done in informal settings

such as “outings and picnics” (as stated by P004), rather than a systematised manner. In doing so, it fails to adapt the curriculum accordingly. It is necessary to collect feedback from potential preservice teachers to update the curriculum to better prepare preservice teachers (Voss & Bufkin, 2011). The integration of feedback collected from the work experience from early childhood teacher preparation programs improves the quality and boosts preservice teachers’ confidence and skills while teaching in special needs education classrooms.

Frey et al. (2012) stress integrating feedback collected from students into updating curriculum to prepare service teachers to teach in inclusive classrooms as well as to improve inclusive education learning, a process that SNE critically needs, but has not practiced. Important research was conducted on collaboration for the development of teachers' education programs, integrating major pedagogical content with specific needs education approaches. In this approach, co-teaching based on the feedback from potential preservice teachers is stressed (Kamens et al., 2000).

Tan and Amrhein (2019) conducted a mixed-methods study to find the impact of inclusive education and stressed that it is extremely important for an inclusive teacher training program for the preservice teachers to boost their confidence as well as morale to make teaching-learning happen with equity. The feedback enhances the self-efficacy of the preservice teacher. That is why it also emphasizes collecting feedback and updating the course as per the experiential learning of the students and gaining practical mastery to enhance the performance of the teachers in the inclusive teaching classroom (Tan & Amrhein, 2019).

The practical exposure while preparing preservice teachers in a real sense makes them positively enthused with confidence, because of their skills and cultural competence to handle any kind of situation while teaching in an inclusive classroom setting or even in a special needs’ classroom. In this regard, a comparative study conducted in Canada and Germany for the preparation of preservice teachers showed that practical experience in the form of mentoring and professional development of teachers for inclusive instructional strategy is more essential (Tan & Amrhein, 2019). For this, the Canadian program highlighted hands-on experience via practicum as well as mentoring that contributed to boosting confidence to increasing their performance (Specht et al., 2022). This is why

it is necessary to implement practical exposure and training for inclusive education potential practitioners to make learning equal and filled with equity.

Faculties of the SNE program, however, do not believe in teaching students with disability in the same classroom to avoid discrepancies in the learning outcomes of the students: a contradiction from the very purpose of inclusive settings.

### **5.3. Curriculum Design for Teachers' Preparation**

Burgeoning literature calls for the democratisation of educational planning that reflects a wider perspective towards equitable and inclusive education (Tan & Amrhein, 2019). The inclusion of stakeholders to design curriculum makes it implementable and accountable among stakeholders being robust and owned in an inclusive classroom practicing community and it also becomes equitable and accessible. This process enables and makes it equitable for education stakeholders in educational implementation based on the planning (Tan & Amrhein, 2019). There is, however, a failure to identify the correct stakeholder in context of the SNE program at TU, Nepal's sole academic program in the field. Instead of working on the grassroots to identify the needs of students with disability and the status of people with disability, they have resorted to finding donors to carry out even the simplest of activities, such as building accessible toilet facilities for students with disability (Dawadi & Bissaker, 2020). This leads to a lack of understanding in the status quo of the disabled, and the subsequent literature, if produced, is bare and inadequate, thus, leading to a curriculum that is more of a tokenism mouthpiece than it is a practical solution for a real-life social issue.

In Spain, education planners involved preservice teachers to recognise and find a viable solution to the problem too. This eased them to recognise the barriers in preservice teachers' preparation. They also spotlighted resource gaps and methodological finds to finalise the curriculum. The result of this engagement of the stakeholders in curriculum designing for teachers' preparation became fruitful (Sánchez et al., 2019). Another similar example can be traced back to the Department of Nursing and Health Studies at the Manukau Institute of Technology in New Zealand collectively operated together with healthcare stakeholders to prepare a suitable curriculum for the preservice teachers to teach them. They designed the curriculum collaboratively to address the specific gap found in the

healthcare conditions. The democratization of the curriculum-making process spotlights the importance of the engagement of stakeholders to have a workable, implementable curriculum needed for preservice teacher preparation (Keogh et al., 2010).

Furthermore, the reformation of the curriculum in Indonesia has stressed the decentralisation of an exclusive curriculum to make it inclusive and one to cater to equitable and balanced education (Mukminin et al., 2019). In this reformation included integrating feedback from students and potential teachers to ensure the curriculum generalizability that included the values and worldviews of the marginalized, subaltern voiceless groups of people. It was mainly focused on catering to the diverse needs of students (Mukminin et al., 2019). In the same vein, Kingston University has implemented an Inclusive Curriculum Framework to enhance the accessibility of equity and quality in education for all including students with disabilities and marginalised. This necessitated the implementation of institutional modifications. It also involved all education stakeholders to own the diversity in the process of obtaining knowledge (McDuff et al., 2020).

Another equally significant instance can be established citing an example of Malaysian higher education practitioners. They did emphasise the implication of creating an ideal learning ecology, suitably adaptable to the needs of diverse students. The authors, (Awang-Hashim et al., 2019), have righteously emphasized having an inclusive evaluation, inspiring tactic, and culturally attuned and responsive pedagogy to handle the multiplied expectations that prevail in classroom diversity (Gautam, 2016). Vietnam implemented the notion of decentralization in curriculum-making by calling for local governments and schools to achieve the desired goal. This process enhanced educational programs in line with the national framework. Acknowledging the diverse nature of the demand of diverse students, it addressed it and fostered educational equity and equality (Huynh, 2022).

These examples highlight the dire need to include the stakeholders in the creation of a transformed curriculum that is efficient curriculum and an educational plan to cater to the distinct requirements of the students that foster equity in the SNE at TU.

#### **5.4. UDL: Pedagogical Approaches for Inclusive Teaching**

Different literatures suggest that the use of UDL empower teachers supporting them to create inclusive classrooms (Dalton et al., 2012; McKenzie & Dalton, 2020; Sholanke et al., 2018). So that they can promote empathy and adaptability. This approach aligns with research that the implementation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in special needs and inclusive classrooms in poor countries with low income can yield equal learning outcomes. By promoting equity and equal opportunities for all students with disabilities. All students, regardless of ability, can effectively access and benefit from the curriculum because of the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). It includes innumerable ways of representation—expression, and participation. In South Africa, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) has been accepted as an important key to supporting inclusive education strategies.

This research study is conducted to connect policy instructions and classroom implementation by catering teachers based on everyday parlance and framework (McKenzie & Dalton, 2020). Workshops held in South Africa have shown that teaching Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to preservice teachers and therapists can successfully promote changes in the curriculum. Only introducing UDL in the semester of SNE at TU can't implement the use of UDL to enhance accessibility and fairness in education for the diverse needs of learning requirements (Dalton et al., 2012) for the effective use of UDL. Teachers must be dedicated to learning, implement and update according to the diverse needs of students.

Furthermore, another, a meta-analysis of UDL's efficiency illustrates its ability to boost educational outcomes for all students by being proactive in handling diverse needs within the classroom ecology (Capp, 2017). Likewise in Kuwait, teachers understand UDL, but additional instruction is needed to satisfy the distinct requirements of all students. Thus, comes the demand for continuous professional growth to use the UDL successfully (Almumen, 2020). In a similar vein, a study conducted at Covenant University in Nigeria indicated that while essential Universal Design for Learning (UDL) elements have been applied, an additional step is necessary to completely comply with the criteria of inclusive education (Sholanke et al., 2018). These instances exemplify the multidimensional use of UDL in establishing an inclusive and equitable educational environment to meet the distinct needs

of all students across poor countries like Nepal. The burgeoning literature suggests that UDL enhances student engagement and learning outcomes by addressing diverse needs. So might be the case with SNE at TU. Participant one highlighted the impact of UDL:

Insufficient training materials, obsolete teaching aids, and limited support staff hinder educators' efforts to practice differentiated instruction effectively (P001, Interview March 2024)

There is limited equipment and resources needed to effective practice of the SNE to inclusive. But in the absence of those materials, it prevents the implementation of comprehensive strategies like Universal Design for Learning (UDL). It forces teachers to compromise on adjusting lesson plans that meet diverse learning needs. (P002, Interview, March 2024)

Several studies highlight the importance of planning curriculum keeping an eye on the education market (Muleya et al., 2020). But in Nepalese context, there is a huge gap between the inclusive education provided to prepare preservice teachers by the SNE program and the efficacy of Nepalese education industry to employ its graduates.

Many graduates end up in teaching mainstream schools despite their comprehensive knowledge and skills of SNE. That is why it is necessary to align educational training with market needs to increase the employability outcome (Jaramillo, 2012). Studies suggest that aligning educational programs with market demands can enhance graduates' job opportunities. Graduates' success in the job market amplifies program's journey. Efforts to promote inclusive education, highlighting the need for advocacy, innovation, and bridging the gap between the education and employment sectors have been the priority of the course (Muleya et al., 2020). The graduates are capable enough to meet the demands of the job market however, the market has not ripened yet to include all the graduates, who are ready to serve the demands of the market (Almaleh et al., 2019).

To solve the disparity between inclusive education through Special Needs Education programs and the preparedness of the Nepali education market to employ graduates, a creative way should be in priority. Matching educational programs with market needs may dramatically enhance job prospects for graduates. Research shows educational congruence optimizes workforce readiness and boosts employment rates by providing students with relevant skills. Individual learning plans, or ILPs, can be utilised in the US to link academic endeavours with industry demands. As a result, all students, including students with disabilities, should have job opportunities (Phelps et al., 2011; Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997). A methodology specifically developed to align university curricula with the

requirements of employment markets has demonstrated a systematic and continuous evaluation of market needs. Also, updates to the curriculum can successfully bridge the gap in skills, resulting in a higher rate of job placement (Almaleh et al., 2019).

Extra measures can bridge this gap to foster partnerships with employers and enhance hands-on instruction. A study on Doctor of Education (PhD) programs found that curriculum development partnerships between academic institutions and businesses can enhance graduates' readiness for the workforce. This is achieved through incorporating practical knowledge specific to the industry into academic programs (Underdahl et al., 2023). PBL (project-based learning) in engineering education has shown promise in developing students' skills to meet the dynamic demands of the profession. This approach prioritizes the resolution of problems, collaboration, and tangible implementation of knowledge (Senay, 2015). One of the finest practices in special education for improving employment prospects for young people with disabilities is the integration of occupational skills training with functionally focused curricula. This underscores the importance of synchronizing educational material with tangible and marketable abilities (Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997). These techniques prioritize continuous engagement with industry stakeholders and hands-on, practical training to guarantee that educational programs remain current and effective in meeting market demands.

### **5.5. Chasing Challenges—cherishing half-baked cookies!**

A thorough document analysis and the participant's observation along with a serious mention by each of the participants in this research implicitly indicated inadequate implementation of the program. The program faces serious problems due to a lack of faculties and inadequate infrastructure. These limitations undermine the program's credibility to provide comprehensive training and support to the potential teachers and students they teach. A plethora of research indicates that sufficient resources and qualified teachers essential for the success of educational programs.

Implementing innovative and well-thought-out strategies is crucial for addressing the constraints of limited faculty and technology in special needs and inclusive educational institutions in economically developing countries. Empirical data indicates that the effective execution of inclusive learning (IE) is contingent upon various aspects, such as adequate resources, proficient personnel, and supportive

legislation. The development of inclusive education in underdeveloped nations has considerable hurdles, including the lack of support services, critical supplies, and insufficient personnel training programs. Enacting legislation that supports and allows inclusive education efforts is essential to tackle these problems. Moreover, the funding for these efforts should be substantially augmented (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002).

A successful approach is to promote partnerships between academic institutions, regional administrations, and global organizations to pool resources and expertise. The development of South Africa's inclusive education system required government intervention through the enhancement and reorganization of the general curriculum to accommodate the diverse needs of students. The development of South Africa's inclusive education system required government intervention through the enhancement and reorganization of the general curriculum to accommodate the diverse needs of students. According to Lomofsky and Lazarus (2001) the need of government support and deliberate planning is a must (Ainscow & César, 2006). That is why, it is equally important to prioritize the training and continuous professional growth of teachers. Unqualified teachers who are unskilled and less qualified should not be allowed to implement inclusive education in Kenya. Research conducted by (Ogadho et al., 2015) proposed that teachers should go through regular examinations and training to hone the necessary skills and develop the life-learning attitudes needed to teach children with special needs.

That is why it is urgently needed to reform the SNE and deploy sufficient resources and teachers for the effective implementation of inclusive education running in the name of Special needs education at TU's faculty of SNE.

## **5.6. Collaborative Approaches to Enhance Inclusive Education**

The effective implementation of inclusive education for students with special needs demands a robust community partnership and continual professional development (Razalli et al., 2020). Different studies show that for this reason various NGOs and INGOs can play a crucial role, particularly in resource-limited settings like Nepal. Effective approaches and international cooperation are critical in enhancing inclusive education. For instance, in Malaysia, the collaboration between special needs



education teachers and mainstream teachers has transformed inclusive education spotlighting knowledge, attitudes, and willingness (Razalli et al., 2020). Similarly another study on effective inclusive teacher education, involving research-oriented collaborations, has proven more effective than on-the-job training models (Robinson, 2017).

In Mozambique, teachers highlighted the need for better resources, training, and public policies to support inclusive education (Franco, 2023). In South Africa, effective inclusive education led collaborative efforts among educational stakeholders and enough teacher training amid scant resources (Adewumi & Mosito, 2019). So, strengthening collaboration with NGOs and INGOs, along with continuous professional development and international cooperation, is essential to implement and grow inclusive education. The collaboration with South Korea LUPIC and the Norway NORHED for the current program is an example of international cooperation for the establishment of SEN to Inclusive education is function amid the chaotic educational environment (*Department of Special Needs Education*, n.d.; TU, 2022). These proven methods can aid Nepal in meeting its special needs education ambition, amid the resources crunch.

## **5.7. Document and Curriculum Analysis**

The curriculum content of the SNE spotlights a contradiction between the principles of Special Needs Education (SNE) and Inclusive Education. The SNE specialisation, which focuses on preparing human resources, preservice teachers' preparation and other staff to assist children and students with special needs, exhibits significant promise.

This course offers extensive guidance on how teachers can proficiently support children with special needs, covering both theoretical and practical elements (McCoy et al., 2012; Millward & Dyson, 2000). This course not only teaches a comprehensive grasp of special needs but also thoroughly assesses the most urgent difficulties that teachers may face and provides practical strategies to address them. Ironically, the program's vulnerability stems from its tendency to prioritize the teacher's perspective over the learner's perspective (Algraigay & Boyle, 2017).

One course offered in the third semester, Instructional Techniques for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, specifically emphasizes learner-centric concepts. The effort required to tackle the lack of

skilled personnel and encourage inclusive practices in schools is a subject of significant concern (Bajracharya et al., 2019; Gautam, 2016; Upadhyay, 2018). Credit where it's due, the program does attempt to acknowledge inclusivity (Hanks, 2011). However, it does so only as a singular unit throughout the program instead of a holistic approach (Hanks, 2011). Little has been mentioned about the mix of students with special needs in a classroom with their typical colleagues (Pinto et al., 2019). The university has also done very little in terms of promotion and communication of the program (Karki, 2015). The content of the curriculum aside, the lack of human resources in the FOE is a sheer example of how the program was borne out of obligatory duties rather than accountable educational practice. In a response to the question of overview of Special Needs Education:

And in our faculty, it is running with very many hardships and difficulties because of lack of human resources. Because only two people are here as a permanent lecturer and one of them is in Norway Oslo, pursuing his PhD degree. Here I am alone handling all the things here as a Head of the Department, teachers, office assistant, everything. Everything I'm doing here, and this is the history behind the establishment of this department. And regarding the course, it's a master's in special education. (P001, Interview, March 2024)

The lackadaisical attitude of TU, the largest university in the country, as well as a state-run institution, in terms of inclusive education and the rights of people with disability, is a stark contradiction to all the international conventions and initiatives that the country is a part of (Karki, 2015). While SNE does struggle to cater education to the marginalised and voiceless group of students otherwise deprived of what has been deemed their fundamental right, it does not adhere to the principles of inclusion (Florian, 2008). The primary idea of inclusion is that every student deserves a quality education irrelevant of their status, or their physical and learning differences (Slee & Tait, 2022). SNE does just the opposite by separating them from their typical peers (Göransson et al., 2022). Special needs education programs are designed specifically to meet the demands of students with disability spectrum and aim to address specific learning barriers with specific solutions, and thus, posits the program as a segregated approach (Brown-Chidsey, 2023; Sharma & Dunay, 2016; Slee & Tait, 2022).

TU's SNE program, minus the organisational instability, is a brilliantly designed program. It however fails in terms of inclusive education, and this can be perceived as a collective failure of the FOE and TU. SNE cannot cater to inclusive needs, as it is simply not designed to do so. In SNE, inclusive education is just a fraction of the curriculum. However, as the institution that directs the trajectory of

educational development of the nation, the onus is on TU to design and deliver something more promising in terms of inclusion: a program that promises quality education to all, to students from all walks of life, without compromising the progress of another student (Ghimire, 2005; Maharjan et al., 2018; Sharma et al., 2019). The overview of the SNE program suggests a comprehensive academic design that caters to developing teachers with the skills required to teach students with disabilities (*Department of Special Needs Education*, 2015). The program, however, does not equip them with the skills required to teach in an inclusive setting.

While the global academia strives for “Education for All”, which Nepal, as a nation, supports too, TU’s SNE is an example of how not to take things ahead in terms of inclusion and needs thorough revision if it is to remain the unitary program dedicated to inclusive practices in the educational arena of Nepal (Joshi, 2016; Maudslay, 2014).

## **5.8. Conclusion**

The SNE program aims to produce skilled human resources and education professionals qualified to teaching students with special needs (Joshi, 2016). Nevertheless, they are filled with a lack of possibilities in catering quality education for all including students with disability (Graham, 2020). The crafted story also highlights the opportunity for the improvement of the program. Amid the tension between possibilities and challenges, the SNE is evolving to be inclusive (Slee, 2018b). The SNE is evolving in meeting those challenges. Collaboration for inclusive education for the greater good is taking place. At the same time, it has been caught between shaping inclusion in curriculum dilemmas. Despite of challenges, the faculties claim the use of innovative teaching method introducing UDL and working on addressing students' feedback. There are other problems i.e. community engagement and infrastructural challenges on the way of empowering students with disability. Yet the SNE faculty claims that they are on the verge inclusive educational paradigm shift (Masuku, 2021). Policy challenges, licensing problems along with other lack of teaching faculties are burning issues.

Furthermore, the course seems to be caught between the ambiguous theoretical understanding of inclusive education and special needs education. To work with inclusive education, TU’s FOE must

work more holistically in clarifying conceptual understanding between SEN and Inclusive education. Only then can the human resources be prepared and produced to compete in the global education arena. Also, the human resources needed for the pre-service teacher's preparation looks critically low, subsequently leading to the lower number of campuses offering the course, and therefore, the low number of students in the program. Overall, SNE is marching towards the preparation of preservice teachers needed for the special needs' education practice: a rejected notion across the globe (*Department of Special Needs Education*, 2015; Kauffman & Hornby, 2020). The FOE can work on bridging the gap between SEN and Inclusive Education by clarifying the principles based on international practices and offering a revised program that caters to the Nepali educational needs in the spectrum of inclusion (Kauffman & Hornby, 2020).

Moreover, the course looks like in an indecisive state regarding the ambiguous theoretical differentiation between inclusive education and special needs education. To adhere to the inclusive education notion, the Faculty of Education at TU should adopt a more holistic approach to improve the conceptual comprehension of the correlation between special educational needs (SEN) and inclusive education (Kolbina et al., 2023). Human resources can effectively contribute to the global education arena only when they have undergone sufficient preparation and development.

Furthermore, there is a significant shortage of teachers needed to train prospective teachers. As a result, the course is now offered at a reduced number of campuses, leading to a decline in student enrolment in the program. Overall, the faculty of special needs education (SNE) is progressing towards training future potential teachers for the betterment of the program. Globally, special needs education is seen as an obsolete idea (*Department of Special Needs Education*, 2015), yet the SNE is marching ahead in preparing preservice teachers needed for effective inclusive classroom practices.

Instead of simply dealing with the nomenclature of the programs, the FOE also must work to establish a link between SEN and Inclusive Education by precisely delineating the ideas according to international benchmarks and offering an up-to-date curriculum that caters to Nepal's unique educational needs in terms of inclusion and develop a pragmatic and contextual preparation of preservice teachers for inclusive education.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion and Implications

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### 6.1. Introduction:

This chapter intends to circle back to the kernel of the conversation—the efficacy of T.U.'s Master of Education in Special Needs Education program in preparing preservice teachers to teach in inclusive classrooms for inclusive education in Nepal—by drawing on the ideas and discussions put forth in the preceding chapters. The recommendation section first highlights major concerns regarding the program's journey from special needs education to inclusive education adaptation, and then proceeds to make suggestions to further improve the program. The conclusion then articulates the synopsis of the paper and attempts to tie up any loose ends.

### 6.2. Research summary

This study has captured some of the faculty's experience through the interviews, the essence of curricula, including website contents of SNE TU's master's program in preservice teacher preparation needed for the inclusive classroom teaching practices. Next, the study examined whether the curricula are continuously improving through stakeholders' engagement and student feedback. The findings highlighted the practical and experiential learning aspects used for bridging the gap between theory and practice, the challenges of the faculty while preparing the preservice teachers' preparation and the ways they handle the situation. Below is a synopsis of the findings in relation to the research question of the study: How does Tribhuvan University's Master of Special Needs Education program for preservice teachers address the preparation of implementation and practice in inclusive education in Nepal?

While the research study participants are working hard to prepare preservice teachers amid scant resources—which is commendable—there is a sheer gap between the theoretical and practical approach stemming out of varying problems ranging from lack of policies, poorly designed curriculum, lackadaisical approach of the government, and the absence of a check and balance mechanism.

To achieve the preservice teacher's preparation goal, the SNE department is trying hard to fill the gap of teachers' knowledge, skills and qualification to practise the ethos of inclusive education in their everyday teaching profession. The SNE program has evolved towards inclusivity only through a "change in the name of the program", when it should have been backed by strong leadership, international collaboration, and continuous curriculum refinement, that reflects and encompasses a broader educational and societal movements. The department, bar one or two faculty, lacks focus on experiential learning, educational stakeholder engagement and the use of adaptive teaching strategies. This points out the importance of empathy, creativity, and collaboration to create an inclusive ideal educational learning environment for all types of students including students with disabilities: something which is absent in all fronts at the SNE program of TU.

### **6.3. Recommendations**

As put forward in the findings of Chapter Four and document analysis of Tribhuvan University's SNE program, little effort has been made to inculcate inclusive education in the program, and that is largely due to the very nature of SNE as an academic course. The raw data of interview tries to show that they have been trying hard to be inclusive. "In fact, we are inclusive" strongly says one of the participants but the document analysis shows the opposite. What further deepens the concern is that SNE is the unitary program that comes any close to inclusive education, and even in the little that has been talked about the latter, there is a lot missing. The paper thus suggests the following recommendations to the FOE:

- restructure of SNE to incorporate inclusive education
- introduction of evidence-based teaching learning practices
- promotion of the program and ease of access
- local governing bodies for action
- prepare teachers for implementing inclusive education

### **6.4. Restructure of SNE to incorporate Inclusive Education**

The kernel of the problem with the curriculum is its lack of inclusive educational content. The examination of inclusive education has been focused on special needs Education (SNE), rather than being loomed as a comprehensive strategy. The foundation of SNE (Special Needs Education) must

prioritize the notion that all children should have equal access to quality education, regardless of their differences, and without any form of segregation. SNE students efficiently separate themselves from their normal peers. The program should thus, strive to include inclusive education not just as a part of the course, but as an overall objective of the program (Mathema, 2007). Global academia is marching towards a more equitable educational environment, and the introduction of SNE at a time like this is thoroughly counterproductive. The faculty should thus, instead, work on establishing inclusive education as the primary objective along with SNE (Mathema, 2007).

### **6.5. Introduction of Evidence Based Teaching Learning Practices**

The outline of TU's SNE program suggests an underwhelming level of student-centred methods. The students, who are potential preservice teachers, learn little through the curriculum about how they can adopt best inclusive practices in a classroom, as much of the program is premediated and stagnant in terms of curriculum content and the pedagogy used to deliver the content.

The program should opt to include evidence-informed practices learning as it helps teachers be more inquisitive and experiential learning basis in terms of accommodating students from all walks of life. This should also support them overcome possible hardships in classroom when they join the workforce as in-service teachers, as well as empower them by enabling them to build on the literature concerning inclusive education and SNE, thus, aiding forthcoming batches of candidates (Gautam, 2016; Maharjan et al., 2018).

### **6.6. Promotion of the Program, revamping of the department and Ease of Access**

The university as an institution should make significant strides to better the availability of program across the nation.

Currently, with only one constituent campus offering the program for the entire nation, it is only natural that the student number is so low. Furthermore, as a nascent program, it has little to no professional homegrown teachers. The faculty should adopt an alternative approach to attract more professionals who can aid the program and help revitalize it.

The complex hierarchical system of hiring teachers should be made less daunting so that more people can apply voluntarily, and this can subsequently even attract students (Subedi, 2017).

### **6.7. Call Local Governing Bodies for Action**

As the prominent educational institution in Nepal, TU ought to urge government authorities to ensure that schools and educational institutions afford equitable opportunities for training to all individuals. Implementing inclusive approaches in both private and public schools is crucial for stimulating greater student enrolment and active participation in their studies, regardless of their individual peculiarities. This approach is essential to guarantee equitable access to high-quality education. This comprises the setting up of physical frameworks, educational materials, professional development for teachers, and other interconnected components, such as the deployment of sufficient professionals in the department to begin with.

### **6.8. Prepare Teachers for the Implementation of Inclusive Education**

The preparation of preservice teachers for the SNE alone will not avail in implementation of inclusive education practices in classroom. Attainment of inclusive education aligning with the ethos of inclusion in the classroom demands evidence-informed practices in classroom practices throughout the nation. The department should create teacher planning projects to achieve this goal. FOE should also extensively apply the notion of inclusive education in not just SNE but also other departments through which it offers the degree of education. This is the first step the department of SNE should take to implement in interdepartmental everyday business.

This inculcates the normalisation of inclusive education in all preservice teachers rather than making it seem like an alien concept limited to the SNE department, subserviently supporting the system to practice in ad hoc bases. It is essential to ensure that students with special needs feel welcome in every classroom and not just in classes that are built to basically separate them from the others (Aryal, 2017).



## 6.9. Future Research

Research in Inclusive education has been vogue across the globe, of late. From the super developed countries to countries reeling under educational challenges are into this education research industry. However, literature surrounding inclusive education in Nepal highlights the stark gap in Nepali research ecology (Kunwar & Adhikari, 2023).

There is an urgency for research in promotion and development of inclusive education in Nepalese academia. Future research may also explore ways to engage teachers in the research process. The findings compiled in this paper are a hermeneutic phenomenology crafted stories from raw interview data and the thematic document analysis study of available document direct interaction with the SNE education faculties.

In this context, research on disability inclusive education practices and community engagement are scarce among Nepali education researcher community. Hence, it's time to focus researchers' lens on inclusive education research to produce literature and contribute to inclusive education practices to promote and support in theory development and to encourage experiential teaching and learning by generating evidence and extending academic hands in research. This research area looks inviting for international collaborative research at the national and local level, as there is no evidence produced as such at this research location.

Nepal is striding from special needs education to inclusive education practices and promotion to fill the gap of qualified, skilled human resources is needed for nourishing inclusive education practices. That's why the researchers should vie their research lens into this area.

Moreover, researchers from resourceful countries and low resources countries like Nepal can exchange their research experiences to promote this knowledge industry. Participatory research among teachers, and faculties can be included to do further research. Similarly, in the context of participatory curriculum development practices and gaps, a thorough analysis can be done to produce evidence and contribute to this area, too.

While the majority of research is mainly focused on teaching learning practices i.e., teaching foreign languages, and issues related to classroom practices, scant literature is available on teachers'

professional development and prospective through research and evidence-informed classroom practices (Pun, 2020). Likewise, little research has been taken place, mainly focused on policy level, carrying out unclear idea, definition based on the local level of inclusivity. (Joshi, 2016; Paliokosta & Blandford, 2010; Shahi, 2022; Sharma et al., 2013).

Moreover, the lived experience of a person with disability and the lived experience of teachers can also be investigated for the betterment and promotion of inclusive education in Nepal. A possible topic for further study can be Empowering Inclusive Education: Insights from the Lived Experiences of Teachers with Disabilities in Nepal, or Inclusive Education Theory and Current Practices of inclusive education from South Asian context also can be an area worth probing, leading to other possible avenues of research education in Nepal (Bentley-Williams et al., 2017; Paliokosta & Blandford, 2010). Other possible research might include a similar research study between the initial stages of the Australian Inclusive Education practices and the current Nepali inclusive education status in quest of a model of inclusive education that the latter can adopt or develop.

Moreover, as a novice research student, I envision a huge potential in research between Australian and Nepali researchers to collaborate in promotion and further investigation on how Australian indigenous and aboriginals have been empowered through inclusive education and possible replication among indigenous people of Nepal, such as the *Tharu*, *Chepang*, among others (Glover et al., 2015). These cultural minorities are on the verge of extinction due to cultural appropriation and the apathetic government sentiment towards these marginalized, subaltern, and voiceless groups of people. Between Nepal and countries like Australia including other countries which have produced indigenous literature and research.

This study has opened a new avenue for further discussion and research for the betterment of the department, and for the greater good of the people with marginalised and students with disabilities. This study, *Special Needs Education (SNE) program: An Analysis Through Inclusive Education Lens at Tribhuvan University (TU) Central Department of Education* has hence, opened a wider debate and an in-depth study of the SNE program in the future. This study invites for a wide range of investigations—collecting data from lived experience of students, teachers who meet in a classroom daily. The potential research can be conducted collecting wide range of data from stakeholders—

parents, teachers, educators, policy makers, and faculty to collect wide range of data to find a literature on inclusive education and the experiences of the preservice teachers and in-service teachers experience to benefit the inclusive education ecology.

# Appendix A : 6832 Ethics Approval Notice (23 Feb 2024)

23 February 2024



## HUMAN ETHICS LOW RISK PANEL APPROVAL NOTICE

Dear Dr Bev Rogers,

The below proposed project has been **approved** on the basis of the information contained in the application and its attachments.

**Project No:**

6832

**Project Title:**

Special Needs Education (SNE) Program in Nepal: An Analysis Through Inclusive Education Lens at Tribhuvan University (TU) Central Department of Education

**Chief Investigator:**

Dr Bev Rogers

**Approval Date:** 23/02/2024

**Expiry Date:** 30/06/2024

**Approved Co-Investigator/s:**

Mr. Jilleshan Saha

The following documents have been approved:

File Name	Date	Version
Question Guidelines final	22/12/2023	word
Introductory email for collaboration to recruit participants	27/01/2024	word
HREC - Information Sheet and Consent Form Template Feb_JS_BR	22/02/2024	Final

*Please note: For all research projects wishing to recruit Flinders University students as participants, approval needs to be sought from the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching Innovation), Professor Michelle Picard. To seek approval, please provide a copy of the Ethics approval for the project and a copy of the project application (including Participant Information and Consent Forms, advertising materials and questionnaires etc.) to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching Innovation) via [michelle.picard@flinders.edu.au](mailto:michelle.picard@flinders.edu.au).*

### RESPONSIBILITIES OF RESEARCHERS AND SUPERVISORS

#### 1. Participant Documentation

Please note that it is the responsibility of researchers and supervisors, in the case of student projects, to ensure that:

- all participant documents are checked for spelling, grammatical, numbering and formatting errors. The Committee does not accept any responsibility for the above mentioned errors.
- the Flinders University logo is included on all participant documentation (e.g., letters of Introduction, information Sheets, consent forms, debriefing information and questionnaires – with the exception of purchased research tools) and the current Flinders University letterhead is included in the header of all letters of introduction. The Flinders University international logo/letterhead should be used and documentation should contain international dialling codes for all telephone and fax numbers listed for all research to be conducted overseas.
- the HREC contact details, listed below, are included in the footer of all letters of introduction and information sheets.

*This research project has been approved by Flinders University's Human Research Ethics Committee (Project ID 6832). If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact Flinders University's Research Ethics & Compliance Office via telephone on 08 8201 2543 or by email [human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au](mailto:human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au).*

## 2. Annual Progress / Final Reports

In order to comply with the monitoring requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* an annual progress report must be submitted each year on the approval anniversary date for the duration of the ethics approval using the HREC Annual/Final Report Form available online via the ResearchNow Ethics & Biosafety system.

**Please note** that no data collection can be undertaken after the ethics approval expiry date listed at the top of this notice. If data is collected after expiry, it will not be covered in terms of ethics. It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that annual progress reports are submitted on time; and that no data is collected after ethics has expired.

If the project is completed *before* ethics approval has expired please ensure a final report is submitted immediately. If ethics approval for your project expires please either submit (1) a final report; or (2) an extension of time request.

## 3. Modifications to Project

Modifications to the project must not proceed until approval has been obtained from the Ethics Committee. Such proposed changes / modifications include:

- change of project title;
- change to research team (e.g., additions, removals, researchers and supervisors)
- changes to research objectives;
- changes to research protocol;
- changes to participant recruitment methods;
- changes / additions to source(s) of participants;
- changes of procedures used to seek informed consent;
- changes to reimbursements provided to participants;
- changes to information / documents to be given to potential participants;
- changes to research tools (e.g., survey, interview questions, focus group questions etc);
- extensions of time (i.e. to extend the period of ethics approval past current expiry date).

To notify the Committee of any proposed modifications to the project please submit a Modification Request Form available online via the ResearchNow Ethics & Biosafety system. Please note that extension of time requests should be submitted prior to the Ethics Approval Expiry Date listed on this notice.

## 4. Adverse Events and/or Complaints

Researchers should advise the Research Ethics, Integrity & Compliance Office immediately if:

- any complaints regarding the research are received;
- a serious or unexpected adverse event occurs that affects participants;
- an unforeseen event occurs that may affect the ethical acceptability of the project.

Yours sincerely,

Camilla Dorian

on behalf of

Human Research Ethics Low Risk Panel  
Research Development and Support  
[human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au](mailto:human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au)

Flinders University

Sturt Road, Bedford Park, South Australia, 5042  
GPO Box 2100, Adelaide, South Australia, 5001

**Flinders University's Human Research Ethics Committee is constituted in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research and registered with the NHMRC (EC00194).**

## Appendix B : Introductory Email for Collaboration

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### **Introductory email for collaboration to recruit participants.**

#### **Subject: Request to collaborate on Research Participants Recruitment**

Dear .....,  
Faculty of Education,  
Department of Special Needs Education (SEN)  
Tribhuvan University,  
Kirtipur, Nepal

Dear Sir/ Ma'am

My name is Jileshan Saha. I am a student at Flinders University in South Australia, pursuing a Master of Inclusive Education. This study is part of the Research Component of Coursework Project of master's degree: Master of Education program.

#### **Description of the study**

The project, entitled Special Needs Education (SNE) program in Nepal: An Analysis Through Inclusive Education Lens at Tribhuvan University (TU) Central Department of Education. This study aims to examine the Special Needs Education (SNE)'s contribution to prepare prospective teachers to deliver inclusive education in Nepal. The study uses people's (TU SNE, Faculties) perception, experience as primary information for this study. In addition, the course content offered for the master's degree students (prospective teachers) will be analysed using document analysis technique. Further, appropriate information available regarding SNE on the website and contemporary literature will be reviewed for the study as secondary information. After gathering that information analysis will be done to draw the conclusion.

In this regard, I am reaching out to the faculty of education with a sincere request for collaboration. We seek support in disseminating research information and, more specifically, recruiting participants for this study (4 people needed for the research). Your support in this endeavor would be precious – if you can let us know by 11<sup>th</sup> March.

I sincerely thank you for considering our request, and I look forward to the possibility of collaboration with the Faculty of Education, Department of Special Needs Education on this important research initiative. Please note an information sheet has been attached with consent form. We would appreciate you sending this to a pool of people from which four might consider participating. If you have any questions or would like more details, please do not hesitate to contact the research team on the following address:

#### **Investigators:**

Dr. Bev Rogers, teacher, and Education Specialist  
College of Education, Psychology and Social Sciences  
Flinders University  
[bev.rogers@flinders.edu.au](mailto:bev.rogers@flinders.edu.au)

**Co-investigator:**

Jileshan Saha

Master of Inclusive Education 2024 batch

College of Education, Psychology and Social Work

Flinders University, Sturt Road, Bedford Park, SA 5042

ID number: 2285196

[Saha0058@flinders.edu.au](mailto:Saha0058@flinders.edu.au)

WhatsApp: +61450097618

Warm regards

Jileshan Saha



# Appendix C : Participant Information Sheet /Consent Form



Dr Bev Rogers  
College of Education, Psychology and  
Social Work  
Education Building  
Flinders Drive, Bedford Park SA 5042  
GPO Box 2100  
Adelaide SA 5001  
bev.rogers@flinders.edu.au  
Web <http://www.flinders.edu.au/>  
CRICOS Provider No. 00114A

## PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM

**Title: Special Needs Education (SNE) program in Nepal: An Analysis Through Inclusive Education Lens at Tribhuvan University (TU) Central Department of Education**

### Chief Investigator

Dr. Bev Rogers  
Lecturer, College of Education Psychology and Social Work  
Flinders University  
Ph: + 61 8 82013445  
[bev.rogers@flinders.edu.au](mailto:bev.rogers@flinders.edu.au)

### Co-Investigator

Jileshan Saha Master's student at College of Education Psychology and Social Work  
Flinders University. [Saha0058@flinders.edu.au](mailto:Saha0058@flinders.edu.au) Ph: +61 450097618

### Hello and namaste!

My name is Jileshan Saha. I am a student at Flinders University pursuing a Master of Inclusive Education. This study is part of the Research Component of Coursework Project of master's degree: Master of Education program. You are invited to participate in this study. Please read this information sheet in full before deciding whether you are willing to participate in this research. If you would like further information about any aspect of this project, you are invited to speak to me, or chief investigator listed above.

### Description of the study

The project, entitled 'Special Needs Education (SNE) program in Nepal: An Analysis Through Inclusive Education Lens at Tribhuvan University (TU) Central Department of Education. This study aims to examine the Special Needs Education (SNE)'s contribution to prepare prospective teachers to deliver inclusive education in Nepal. The study uses people's (TU SNE, Faculties) perception, experience as primary information for this study. In addition, the course content offered for the master's degree students (prospective teachers) will be analysed using document analysis technique. Further, appropriate information available regarding SNE on the website and contemporary literature will be reviewed for the study as secondary information. After gathering those information analysis will be done to draw the conclusion.

### Purpose of the study

This project aims to examine the Special Needs Education (SNE) program through an inclusive education lens to explore the contribution to preparing preservice teachers to deliver inclusive education.

**Benefits of the study**

The evidence generated through the study may contribute to improve preservice teachers' preparation in Nepal for the effective implementation of inclusive education.

**Participant involvement and potential risks**

If you agree to participate in the research study, you will be asked to attend a virtual Microsoft Team one-on-one interview with a researcher that will be audio recorded. The interview will take approximately 45–60 minutes. You will be asked to respond to questions regarding your experience / views about Special Needs Education (SNE) Program in Nepal.

This research interview questions do not involve any harmful or mentally distressing questions. Nevertheless, if you experience distress from participating in this study, please inform the research team immediately. It might help to talk to someone you trust about what you are going through. You can also contact the following services for support:

**Crisis/Suicide/Hotlines in Nepal**

Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation - Nepal operates the National Suicide Prevention helpline in Nepal to provide service from 8 am to 8 pm.

Tel: 1166

<https://www.therapyroute.com/article/suicide-hotlines-and-crisis-lines-in-nepal>

**TUTH Suicide Hotline**

TU Teaching Hospital provides a 24-hour helpline service to anyone suffering from mental health problems.

Tel: 16600121600

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extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/<https://groups.oist.jp/system/files/Nepal.pdf>

**Withdrawal Rights**

The participation is entirely voluntary. After signing the consent form you will sit for the online interview. However, you may, without any consequences, withdraw to take part in this research study. If you want to participate but later change your mind before completing the interview, the interview will be stopped. If you have any concerns about your withdrawal rights, please contact Dr Bev Rogers (Chief Investigator) listed above to discuss to have your data removed from the study or you just refuse to answer any questions at any time. Any data collected up to the point of your withdrawal will be securely destroyed.

**Confidentiality and Privacy**

Only researchers listed on this form have access to the individual information provided by you. Researchers will take all possible steps to ensure privacy and confidentiality. The name of the interviewee will be kept safely without disclosing their identity. To ensure anonymity the consent form of the participant will be stored separately. The research outcomes will be presented in this research project. Nevertheless, if this research is published you will not be named, and your individual information will not be identifiable in any research publication.

Please provide your consent to this by ticking the appropriate box on the Consent Form.

One to one video conference with participants will be done through Microsoft Teams. The transcription will be done by the researchers to ensure quality of transcription. A transcribed copy of the interview will be provided to the participant for their final review and confirmation of their views.

**Data Storage**

The information collected will be stored securely on a password protected computer and/or Flinders University server throughout the study. Any identifiable data will be de-identified for data storage purposes unless indicated otherwise. All data will be securely transferred to and stored at Flinders University for five years after publication of the results. Following the required data storage period, all data will be securely destroyed according to university protocols.

**How will I receive feedback?**

Researcher will ensure that participants will have opportunities first of reviewing their interview transcribed copy to enable them to verify the accuracy of their opinion and providing another chance to add or delete some information Second, on project completion, a short summary of the outcomes will be provided to all participants via email.

**Ethics Committee Approval**

The project has been approved by Flinders University's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC project 6832).

**Queries and Concerns**

Queries or concerns regarding the research can be directed to the research team. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the Flinders University's Research Ethics and Compliance Office team either via telephone (08) 8201 2543 or by emailing the Office via [human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au](mailto:human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au).

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet which is yours to keep.

If you accept our invitation to be involved, you will find a consent form below. The form is interactive, and you can tick the appropriate box clearly. Once you click the box, the dialogue box will open. Please click, the "checked" option. After that please save a copy of the document and send it back attaching in the email.

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### Electronic Consent Form

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**Title: Special Needs Education (SNE) program in Nepal: An Analysis Through Inclusive Education Lens at Tribhuvan University (TU) Central Department of Education (6832).**

#### Consent Statement

- ☐ I have read and understood the information about the research, and I understand I am being asked to provide informed consent to participate in this research study. I understand that I can contact the research team if I have further questions about this research study.
- ☐ I am not aware of any condition that would prevent my participation, and I agree to participate in this project.
- ☐ I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time during the study.
- ☐ I understand that I can contact Flinders University's Research Ethics and Compliance Office if I have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this study.
- ☐ I understand that my involvement is confidential, and that the information collected may be published. I understand that I will not be identified in any research products.
- ☐ I understand that the information collected may be published in this research only and that my identity may not be revealed.
- ☐ I also understand that this data **will be used** for this research study only.

I further consent to:

- ☐ participating in an interview
- ☐ having my information video recorded
- ☐ my data and information being used in this project.

Yours sincerely



**Dr Bev Rogers** (she/her)

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Lecturer in Educational Leadership and Management 2014-2023  
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## Appendix D : Interview Questions Guidelines

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### Semi-structure questions guidelines

1. Can you provide an overview of the SNE Masters Course at Tribhuvan University?
2. How would you describe the university's approach to Inclusive Education within the SNE Masters Course?
3. How is the SNE curriculum designed to prepare teachers for Inclusive Education?
4. What pedagogical methods are emphasised in the SNE Masters Course to prepare teachers for inclusive classrooms?
5. How does the program support ongoing professional development for teachers to stay current with inclusive teaching practices?
6. Can you share any challenges in delivering Inclusive Education content within the SNE Masters Course?
7. How has the faculty addressed these challenges, and what solutions have been implemented?
8. Could you provide examples of successful outcomes from graduates who have undergone the SNE Masters Course, particularly in implementing Inclusive Education practices?
9. How do you gather student feedback regarding the effectiveness of Inclusive Education components in the course? (Any changes? Have any adaptations or changes been made to the course based on feedback or evolving educational needs?)
10. How does the SNE Masters Course engage with the local community/Stakeholders to enhance Inclusive Education practices? (Are there partnerships with schools or organisations focusing on inclusive education practices?)

## Appendix E : Crafted Stories

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### Example of an extract from an interview transcript, followed by a crafted story derived from this extract

~~In the case of [At] Tribhuvan University, there is a subject committee, named Inclusive Education Subject Committee under the Faculty of Education is working in Tribhuvan University. And there have many more experts related to the Tribhuvan university. One of them is this to me Rabintra Shiwakoti is one of one of the PhD expert is doing the PhD special inclusive education policy and Dhruba Neure who did his PhD in curriculum differentiation. He is the chairman of Inclusive Education subject committee, likewise Krishna Bahadur Thapa are working in Sano Thimi campus. He did his PhD from from Greek and Namraj Neupane Department of Education Inclusive Education. He is the chief of Inclusive Education Department.~~

~~He also did his PhD from South Korea. And Vasudev Kafle who have done his PhD from? Uh from uh.~~

~~Banaras Hindu Bishwavidhyalay and likewise Kamal Pokhrel did his PhD from Australian University and also Divya Dawadi did PhD from Australia and Vishwabala Thapa, she did her PhD from Kathmandu University and Baburam Dhungana is also working in the ministry line.~~

~~He did his PhD from South Korea and one of the Regmi Narayan Prasad Regmi did his PhD from Germany.~~

~~Now he's he was working in the Prime Minister Office. Now he's working in the Federal Ministry of Federal affair. So Birendra Pokhrel also did his PhD in in special needs education.~~

~~Uh, so we have many more now. Many more experts are available in Nepal.~~

~~They jointly sit in the meeting and their identify, the need and desire and need of the Nepalese society. Which type of curriculum is appropriate for What types of curriculum is needed they manage the subject title, they prepare the subject title and they assign the two person for one course I jointly to person prepare the course and. I came to the meeting and discuss, revise, revisit again, visit, and revisit. Norwegian Government, also funded in this curriculum preparation process. LUPIC is also so interested to funding to [the] prepare[ation of] the curriculum, and not only that Tribhuvan University Itself funded to finalize the curriculum of their [the] bachelors or that's masters are MPhil and PhD program.~~

#### Crafted story from the interview

At Tribhuvan University, there is a subject committee, named Inclusive Education Subject Committee under the Faculty of Education is working. Many subject experts have been contributing to this committee. Those experts jointly sit in for the meeting. They identify educational need of Nepalese society. They decide which type of curriculum is appropriate. They prepare subject title and assign the two persons for one course. I jointly prepare the course with another subject expert. We organise subject committee meeting and discuss, revise, visit and revisit the topic. Norwegian Government has funded for this curriculum preparation process. LUPIC, the South Korean Project is also interested to funding to prepare the curriculum. Not only international funding but Tribhuvan University also has funded to finalize the curriculum of bachelor's, master's, MPhil and PhD program. What pedagogical methods are used in the SNE Masters course to prepare teachers for inclusive classroom.

Pedagogical strategy is slightly different from the General strategy. Individualized education plan IEP is also prepared in the Bachelors and master's program for the student. They practice to the individualized education plan, UDL model is also effective to teach in the inclusive education classroom. But in the case of special education and the special needs education, there must be a specific technique and strategy which is related to the disability specific for blind one type of specific pedagogical technique is needed.

One technique is not fit for other. For example, deaf student is not related to the intellectual disability Student. For blind student braille is essential for deaf is student sign language is essential for intellectual disability. Students learn by playing and learning by interaction is essential. So many types of teaching strategy and pedagogical strategy is in practice at Tribhuvan University.

## **List of crafted story titles from participants**

### **Crafted Stories from Participant One**

- Story 1: Origin of SNE: Baptising into Inclusive Education
- Story 2: Approaches to inclusive education: dilemma in operation
- Story 3: Curriculum design for preservice teachers' preparation for inclusive education
- Story 4: Professional development for ongoing teachers
- Story 5: Challenges and solutions in delivering inclusive education
- Story 6: Success story of SNE; advocating for licensing system
- Story 7: Gathering feedback to adapt the inclusive education practices
- Story 8: Seeking partnership from local community education stakeholders

### **Crafted stories from Participant Two**

- Story 1: Origin of SNE: Empowering Students with Disability
- Story 2: A pedagogical approach for inclusive practice within SNE: Using ICT and UDL
- Story 3: Curriculum designed to prepare teachers for inclusive education
- Story 4: Collecting students feedback for ongoing teachers' professional development, advocacy for licensing
- Story 5: Success story in implementing inclusive education practices

### **Crafted stories from Participant Three**

- Story 1: From SNE to Inclusive Education: Dilemma in Understanding
- Story 2: SNE Curriculum designed to prepare teachers for Inclusive education: a paradigm shift
- Story 3: Pedagogy and the use of UDL in SNE to prepare preservice teachers for inclusive learning
- Story 4: Professional development: teachers' attitude towards disability
- Story 5: Challenges and solutions in delivering inclusive education within SNE
- Story 6: No student feedback collection system for effectiveness of inclusive education
- Story 7: No Partnerships with local communities and schools for inclusive education practice

### **Crafted stories from participant Four**

Story 1: From special needs' education (SNE) to Inclusive education: an international educational influence

Story 2: Pedagogy and curriculum: Preservice teachers' preparation for inclusive education practices

Story 3: Professional development opportunities for preservice teacher's preparation

Story 4: Challenges and solutions in delivering inclusive education

Story 5: Building Local to Global (Glocal) collaboration to enhance inclusive education



## Appendix F : M.Ed. Overall Course Structure

**Table 1** *Overall Course Structure*

Semesters	Core Courses and Credit Hours		Specialization Courses and Credit Hours				Teaching Practice and Credit Hours	Thesis /Project work	Total Credits
	Course I	Course II	Course I	Course II	Course III	Course IV	-	-	
I.	3	3	3	3	3	3	-	-	18
II.	3	3	3	3	3	3	-	-	18
III.	3	3	3	3	3	3	-	-	18
IV.	3	3	3		-	-	3	3	15
Total	24		39				3	3	69

## Appendix G : Special Needs Education (Course Structure)

**Table 19** *Special Need Education*

Semesters	Course Codes and titles	Credit hours	Nature of Courses
First	SN.Ed.515: Fundamentals of Special Needs and Inclusive Education	3	Theory
	SN Ed. 516: Socialization and Communication Skills	3	Theory
	SN. Ed. 517: Psychology of Individual Differences	3	Theory
	SN. Ed. 518: Learning Diversity and Disability in Inclusive Classroom	3	Theory
Second	SN. Ed. 525 Education for children with Visual Impairment	3	Theory
	SN. Ed. 526 Education for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing	3	Theory
	SN. Ed. 527 A assessment of students with Special Needs	3	Theory
	SN. Ed. 528 Theories and Practices of Behavior Modification	3	Theory
Third	SN. Ed. 535 Instructional Techniques for Special Needs and Inclusive Education	3	Theory
	SN. Ed. 536 Education for Children with Multiple Disabilities	3	Theory
	SN. Ed. 537 Assistive Technology in Special Needs Education	3	Theory
	SN. Ed. 538 Emotional, Behavioral and Autism Spectrum Disorders	3	Theory
Fourth	SN. Ed. 545 Sports and Recreational Activities (Th+Pr) Or SN.Ed. 546 Learning Diversities and Disabilities in Inclusive Classroom	3	Theory
Total		39	

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