

Inclusion of the Students through Inclusive Education: Challenges and Opportunities in India

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Abstract:

Inclusive Education is an immerging approach towards educating the students with disabilities and learning difficulties with that of normal ones within the same environment. It brings all students together in one classroom and community, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses in any stream, and seeks to maximize the potential of all students. It is one of the most effective ways in which to promote an inclusion and integral society. According to new estimates by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) it was shown that more than 70 million children of primary school age were out of school in duration of 2009-10, down from a high of over 110 million out-of-school children in the mid-1990s. About Eighty percent of Indian population lives in rural areas without provision for special school system. As per MHRD 2009 statistics there are an estimated 8 million children is out of school in India many of whom are marginalized by dimensions such as poverty, gender, disability, and caste. The fundamental principle of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Inclusive schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curriculum, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resources used and partnerships with their society and communities. There should be an understanding of the society about the support and services to match the continuum of special needs encountered in every school. In this paper the writer had discussed Inclusion of the Students in India with some observable Challenges and Opportunities.

Key words: Inclusion, Inclusive Education, UNESCO, MHRD.

Introduction:

Inclusive Education in the context of the goals of Education for all is a complex and immerging issue, and no coherent approach is evident in the literature. First, at a basic level of policy, unlike health and labor markets, disability is seen as an array of issues crossing health, education, social welfare, employment sectors, etc. As a result, policy development in relation to individuals with disabilities faces challenges to avoid fragmented, uneven, and difficult -to-access services. Second, Inclusive Education may be implemented at different levels, embrace different goals, and be based on different motives, reflect different classifications of special education needs, and provide services in different contexts. For example,

six levels of Inclusive Education are as: physical, terminological, administrative, social, curricular and psychological. Inclusive education has been defined in various ways that address the learning needs of the differently abled children. The efforts of the Government of India over the last five decades have been towards providing a comprehensive range of services towards education of children with disabilities. In 1974, the centrally sponsored scheme for Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) was introduced to provide equal opportunities to children with disabilities in general schools and facilitate their retention. The government initiatives in the area of inclusive education can be traced back to National Educational Policy, 1986, which recommended, as a goal, 'to integrate the handicapped with the general community at all levels as equal partners, to prepare them for normal growth and to enable them to face life with courage and confidence'. The World Declaration on Education for All adopted in 1990 gave further boost to the various processes already set in the country. The Rehabilitation Council of India Act 1992 initiated a training programme for the development of professionals to respond to the needs of students with disabilities. The National Policy for Persons with Disability, 2006, which attempts to clarify the framework under which the state, civil society and private sector must operate in order to ensure a dignified life for persons with disability and support for their caretakers. Most recent advancement is the Right of Children for Free and Compulsory Education (2009) which guarantees right to free and compulsory education to all children between ages six to fourteen. For education for a child with disability, the act has to be read in conjunction with Chapter V of the Persons with Disability Act, 1995. Chapter V of the PWD Act ensures that every child with disability is entitled to a free education up to the age of 18 years. Keeping in view, Govt. of India had accelerated the new scheme of Inclusive Education to achieve the target of Education for All (EFA) by 2010. Inclusion is an effort to make sure that diverse learner – those with disabilities, different languages and cultures, different homes and family lives, different interests and ways of learning. Inclusive Education denotes that all children irrespective of their strengths and weaknesses will be part of the mainstream education. It is clear that education policy in India has gradually increased the focus on children and adults with special needs, and that inclusive education in regular schools has become a primary policy objective.

Concept of Inclusive Education

The principle of inclusive education was adopted at the “World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality” (Salamanca Statement, Spain 1994) and was restated at the World Education Forum (Dakar, Senegal 2000). The Statement solicits governments to give the highest priority to making education systems inclusive and adopt the principle of inclusive education as a matter of policy. The idea of inclusion is further supported by the United Nations’ Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for Person with Disability Proclaiming Participation and equality for all. Inclusive Education (IE) is defined as a process of addressing the diverse needs of all learners by reducing barriers to, and within the learning environment. It means attending the age appropriate class of the child’s local school, with individually

tailored support (UNICEF 2007). Inclusive education is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners. At the Jometin World Conference (1990) in Thailand, the goals for 'Education for All' were set and it was proclaimed that every person (child, youth and adult) shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities which would meet their basic learning needs. Inclusion is an educational approach and philosophy that provides all students greater opportunities for academic and social achievement. This includes opportunities to participate in the full range of social, recreational, arts, sports, music, day care and afterschool care, extra-curricular, faith based, and all other activities.

In India, National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) joined hands with UNICEF and launched Project Integrated Education for Disabled Children (PIED) in the year 1987, to strengthen the integration of learners with disabilities into regular schools. In recent years, the concept of inclusive education has been broadened to encompass not only students with disabilities, but also all students who may be disadvantaged.

Background of the Inclusive Education programme

The government of India is constitutionally committed to ensuring the right of every child to basic education. The Government of India has created numerous policies around special education since the country's independence in 1947. One of the earliest formal initiatives undertaken by the GOI was the Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) scheme of 1974 (NCERT, 2011). The Kothari Commission (1966) which highlighted the importance of educating children with disabilities during the post-independence period (Pandey 2006). In 1980s the then ministry of Welfare, Govt. of India, realized the crucial need of an institution to monitor and regulate the HRD programmes in the field of disability rehabilitation. Till 1990s, ninety percent of India's estimated 40 million children in the age group- four-sixteen years with physical and mental disabilities are being excluded from mainstream education. The National Policy on Education, 1986 (NPE, 1986), and the Programme of Action (1992) stresses the need for integrating children with special needs with other groups. The Government of India implemented the District Primary Education Project (DPEP) in 1994–95. In late 90s (i.e. in 1997) the philosophy of inclusive education is added in District Primary Education Programme (DPEP).

Three important aspect of UEE are access, enrolment and retention of all children in 6-14 years of age. A zero rejection policy has been adopted under SSA, which ensures that every Child with Special Needs (CWSN), irrespective of the kind, category and degree of disability, is provided meaningful and quality education. National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 has laid down a clear context of inclusive education. In 2005, the Ministry of Human Resource Development implemented a National Action Plan for the inclusion in education of children and youth with disabilities. Furthermore, IEDC was revised and

named „Inclusive Education of the Disabled at the Secondary Stage“ (IEDSS) in 2009-10 to provide assistance for the inclusive education of the disabled children at 9th and 10th classes.

Need and Importance of Inclusive Education

There have been efforts internationally to include children with disabilities in the educational mainstream. In order to achieve truly inclusive education, we need to think about and incorporate children with special needs into regular schools. Especially, because these kids face some sort of barriers to learning and participation in the classroom. As general education classrooms include more and more diverse students, teachers realize the value of accepting each student as unique. In effective inclusive programs, teachers adapt activities to include all students, even though their individual goals may be different. We have learned that inclusive education is a better way to help all students succeed. Researches show that most students learn and perform better when exposed to the richness of the general education curriculum. The growing body of research has shown that children do better academically when in inclusive settings and Inclusion provides opportunities to develop relationships. Some of the benefits include: friendships, social skills, personal principles, comfort level with people who have special needs, and caring classroom environments.

Critical issues in Inclusive Education

The literature on Inclusive Education makes clear that system levels (macro, meso, micro) and their dimensions of inputs, processes, outcomes, external factors, are interrelated and context -dependent. Taken as a whole, this review provides fertile ground for policy/practice implications to address next steps. Numerous comprehensive policy recommendations and frameworks for action have been developed—both general and specific to SEN learners—in relation to Millennium Development Goals. This review cannot begin to articulate Inclusive Education policy recommendations in the detail that these documents offer. In fact, it would be presumptuous for a single author to undertake this task.

This particular discussion does, however, illuminate several critical policy/practice issues and their implications concerning Inclusive Education. Typically, policy relevant to Inclusive Education begins with a declaration (e.g., the Salamanca Statement) or convention (e.g., Convention on the Rights of the Child) and follows with a Framework for Action or Implementation Handbook (CRC). In between declarations and frameworks lies a broad terrain of policy/practice critical to implementing Inclusive Education.

Policy/practice can be characterized as a struggle that takes different forms and is exercised at different levels by social actors with different objectives and under different conditions and power relations. Nine critical issues have been identified: (1) Decentralization, (2) Finance/Resource Allocation, (3) Access and Participation, (4) Pre-service Teacher Training and In-Service Professional Development, (5) Universal Human Rights and IE Policy/Legislation, (6) School Restructuring and Whole-School Reform, (7) Identification and Placement, (8) Assessment, Accountability, Efficiency and Effectiveness, and (9) Building Capacity and Sustainability through NGO, Community, and Multi- Sector Participation. Each

issue is analyzed in terms of its potential for facilitating or inhibiting Inclusive Education; e.g., the policy forms and the actions of decision-makers who ultimately enact policy related to these issues determine their potentials. Specific policy implications are discussed that derive from this analysis, and they should be useful to educators and policy-makers.

Challenges to implement Inclusive Education in India

In India the number of the disabled people is so large, their problems so complex, available resources so scarce and social attitudes so damaging. The road to achieving inclusive education is a long and varied one, on which challenges and opportunities will arise. India is a multi-lingual, multi-cultural, multi-religious country, and its people are stratified along sharp socio-economic and caste lines. With an estimated 1,210 million people, India is the world's second most populated country after China.

Inclusive education helps the disabled child to develop a sense of pride in their work because they actually feel like they accomplished something. We know that Albert Einstein was learning disabled but still managed to become the greatest mind of the 20th century. Educating children with disabilities alongside their non-disabled peers is considered one of the better ways to provide education to the population in India (Shah, 2005, Shah et al., 2014). The Government of India needs to bridge the gaps in their education system to build a strong system of inclusive education in the country. So, there are following measures for better implementation of Inclusive Education in India. (Singh, 2014)

- The preparation of teachers for rural special education programmes should be planned differently, as the aim of these programmes would be to integrate disabled persons in their own environment and community.
- As a system, inclusive education should be flexible. Its flexibility must be reflected in the methods and materials used to give these children the widest possible access to the regular curriculum.
- A school-based support team should develop strategies for the whole school to meet the needs of learners with special educational needs. This team should also be a resource for teachers experiencing problems in their classrooms.
- The school has the primary responsibility for helping children learn alongside their typically developing peers. An inclusive school must enable education structures, systems and methodologies to meet the needs of all children, particularly those who face the greatest barriers to achieving their right to education.
- Parents have a right to be involved in all decision-making concerning their child. They should be seen as partners in the education process. Where there is such co-operation, parents have been found to be very important resources for the teachers and the schools.

- Bringing special children into mainstream requires adjustments that schools need to make in advance. Transport facilities should be altered, so that these children can move around with relative ease. Architecturally, there should be ramps and wheelchair access constructed in service areas such as toilets.
- Student-oriented components, such as medical and educational assessment, books and stationery, uniforms, transport allowance, reader allowance and stipend for girls, support services, assistive devices, boarding the lodging facility, therapeutic services, teaching learning materials, etc should provide according to need of the students.
- Differently abled children should be treated equally as the normal children and instead of looking them in sympathy their talents and abilities should be recognised for their self-respect and welfare of the society.
- Necessary school supplies such as audio learning or textbooks in Braille should be made available. Suitable modification to examination system may be required, so as to eliminate pure mathematical and logical assessments.

In a report for UNICEF, Bengt Lindqvist, the United Nations Special Reporter on Human Rights and Disability, provided the following challenge: “A dominant problem in the disability field is the lack of access to education for both children and adults with disabilities. As education is a fundamental right for all, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and protected through various international conventions, this is a very serious problem. In a majority of countries, there is a dramatic difference in the educational opportunities provided for disabled children and those provided for non-disabled children. It will simply not be possible to realize the goal of Education for All if we do not achieve a complete change in the situation.”¹ Addressing this widely recognized need for change, the Dakar Framework for Action adopted a World Declaration on Education for All in 2000 which affirmed the notion of education as a fundamental right and established the new millennium goal to provide every girl and boy with primary school education by 2015. EFA also clearly identified Inclusive Education as one of the key strategies to address issues of marginalization and exclusion. “Inclusion was seen as the fundamental philosophy throughout UNESCO’s programs and the guiding principle for the development of EFA” (UNESCO, 2002: p. 17).

The terms ‘special education’ and students with ‘special education needs’ are widely used in the literature. However, as Ballard points out, ‘special’ makes an unnecessary distinction. Lynch (2001) supports this point and warns that the term SEN should be used with caution. Lynch argues that the term may perpetuate the binary divide between ‘ordinary’ and ‘special’ students and systems. Second, the label may present a

barrier to the development of inclusive practice, and it is not very helpful in pinpointing the educational difficulties of the learner. Third, the label tends to put the burden on the learner and a focus on individual deficits, rather than the characteristics of the school and environment and therefore excuse schools from change

Conclusion

Right to Education Act 2009 ensures education to all children irrespective of their caste, religion, ability, and so on. It is essential to build an inclusive society through an inclusive approach. In doing so, we have challenged commonly held beliefs and developed a new set of core assumptions. Inclusion is more than a method of educating students with disabilities. It stresses that each child, regardless of the intensity and severity of his or her disabilities, is a valued member of society and is capable of participating in that society. A good inclusive education is one that allows all the students to participate in all aspects of classroom equally or close to equal. To meet the challenges, the involvement and cooperation of educators, parents, and community leaders is vital for the creation of better and more inclusive schools.

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