

Promoting Social Inclusion in Education in TN Housing Board Slums through CSR - A Case Study

Dr Sangeetha Susan Punnen, MA (SW), PhD
Madras School of Social Work

Abstract

An interdisciplinary case study of students from Housing Board Societies of Tamil Nadu, studying in government schools reveals that inclusive education requires change in existing pedagogy. There is a significant gap between skills acquired at school and expected levels of learning in the primary and middle levels. Including the diversity needs of the marginalised who are mostly first generational learner,s requires additional support to master English and Mathematical concepts that cannot be mastered through rote learning. The entry of corporates in the education field has helped improve Inclusiveness significantly. Corporates especially IT firms are focused on bridging the gap between education and skill development to enable student's transition into job market. The study findings indicate that impacts of Social Exclusion can be minimized by active Public – Private partnerships through funding by Corporates through CSR resulting in development of the marginalised where the focus of learning is to provide them with skills to help them find success in the job market. It is observed that there is a changing perception of the role of education from the perspective of parents who look at education as a reliable source for the upliftment and development of their children. The true meaning of Social Inclusion is when education includes changes to the present pedagogy through skill development and mastery of concepts using educational tools promoted by NGO's in the growing field of after school centres.

Key words: Social Exclusion, marginalised communities, TN Housing Board, pedagogy changes, School Drop Outs, conceptual skills in English and Mathematics, NGOs in education, primary and middle school, Social Inclusion, CSR, Public - Partnerships, educational tools, tangible benefits

Changing perception of the role of education for the upliftment and development of the marginalised

India is seen as one of the fastest developing countries in the world. Indian families are embracing education as a magic wand, which will bridge the gap between jobs and success for the future generations. This rapid change in perception can be attributed to post 1991 government liberalisation reforms of the economy which has promoted industrialization and initiated a digital revolution.

The need for educated and skilled manpower has created an impetus for change in school education. This can be perceived even at the primary education level. In 1950, there were 22,36,00 primary and elementary schools and India now boasts more than 10,000,00 in 2005. (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay,2011)

Research Objectives :

- To study the factors that contribute to marginalised communities being socially excluded due to discriminatory practices.
- To explain the need for pedagogy changes in education at the elementary and primary school levels.
- To analyse the needs of stakeholders such as Parents, NGO and Children.
- To study the role of partnerships to bring planned change in the lives of marginalised children.

Social Exclusion in marginalised Communities

Key stakeholders are the parents who want their children to fulfil their dreams of an educated next generation. The dynamics of consumer society has touched the lives of the marginalised communities living in the slums of Tamil Nadu who dream of a better future through education. Housing Board Societies are communities of displaced or marginalised or discriminated families living together from predominant caste groups who avail the housing benefits provided by the government for their upliftment and development.

The ASER (Annual Status Education Report) in its survey points out that of all children in the age group 6-14, more than 99% are enrolled, but the majority lag behind in education outcomes. The European Commission definition of Social Exclusion as a process by which certain people are pushed to the fringes of Society and hindered from fully participating due to poverty, insufficient basic skills or discrimination (European Commission,2004,pg 12).

These families are subjected to impoverishment, exclusion and discrimination due to their belonging to lower caste communities. Unemployed migrants, single parents and families with many children are affected as they are not equipped to handle changing scenario where knowledge of English and Maths along with high school board marks add status and value.

The 69% reservation in education is unique to Tamil Nadu and has provided opportunities for growth of the socially excluded through educational opportunities in schools and colleges. John Rawls in his outline of a 'theory of justice' (Rawls, 1991) refers to it as the extent by which an individual has the possibility to convert his or her situation for the development of the self. The possibility of child to end up as a unproductive individual or not, is affected by conversion factors which vary from age, sex, education and health where education can play a transforming role.

Changes at a pedagogy level at schools is an indicator of true Inclusiveness in Education

Education today is a profitable business and this reflects in the ever increasing elite schools and growing demand for private education to meet the unmet needs as the increasing population's education needs cannot be fulfilled by government schools alone. This throws the interesting challenge of pedagogy. Tamil Nadu is unique as the Dravidian political movements emphasised the promotion of Tamil language to use of Hindi as the national language of India.

The positive after effects of British Colonism has ensured that English education continues to be decisive for social and individual possibilities of development beyond clerical jobs. Students in primary and elementary levels are unable to undertake simple mathematical concepts like division, percentage and multiplication during random evaluation. The lack of English speaking skills and basic mathematical concepts has only contributed to Social Exclusion.

The prevailing caste system ensured that education was restricted to certain communities who were mostly considered forward castes. The educated Indian soon took up clerical jobs in the administration services and pursued careers in railways, courts, plantations etc. Yet the lower castes who were never provided education opportunities for generations together were deprived of these benefits across many generations. This gap is of great significance as development of the post Independent India is dependent on development of the poor and vulnerable groups and their ability to catch up on the human development indices with those who were socially included.

Interview findings with Stakeholders and other Beneficiaries

The children residing in the TN Slum boards are predominantly studying in local government schools where Tamil is the medium of instruction. The Samachar Kalvi syllabus introduced by the TN government is comparatively very easy for students to undertake as the emphasis is on rote learning and memorisation. Evaluation has been simplified to enable the weaker sections of society compete with private education.

Subjects like English are taught and evaluated through memorisation, rote learning and answers can be written from guides and question banks. Students therefore score very high marks if they reproduce the key words as per the answer key provided to evaluators. Liberal marking has made life easy but has brought to light the perils of incorrect pedagogy tools in education. Students score very high marks in English but are unable to speak or write English sentences on their own without grammatical errors.

Uneducated parents cannot help their wards develop these skills as English is not the language of conversation at homes. This is a vicious cycle. School Drop outs in senior classes can be attributed to failure to understand basic concepts in English and Maths. In the absence of parental support combined with

financial insecurity, creates a vicious cycle where social exclusion in one generation continues to impact inclusion of the next generation in the Indian development story.

English is often taught as a skill for writing and evaluation in schools is not focused on correct speaking skills. So children who have no access to role models who converse in English fail to learn or acquire spoken English skills. So learning English as a writing skill alone does not equip students from government schools to face the real world outside where speaking skills determine social and job skills.

Another challenge in pedagogy is failure to address English speaking with reference to local language accents. The speaking skills betray the community culture, local slangs and student's are not equipped to overcome these shortcomings.

Schools have classrooms with around 45 to 50 children taught by a single teacher. There is focus on group learning and teachers do not have the time and skills to pay individual attention. Identifying weaknesses on an individual level is not possible. Improving the strengths of the learning concept for Maths and English Skills are tracked from an overall learning level. Student progress is monitored from a documentation perspective in the form of report cards that do not provide the qualitative indicators for development and progress.

So children when they move to higher classes do not have the foundation required to succeed in middle and higher schools. This brings to focus the inclusiveness of marginalised communities through education by ensuring that education for all includes ensures that student needs are addressed at primary levels to equip them to succeed at higher education classes in schools.

Success at school level is a good predictor of students who persevere when learning becomes complex. Poor Performance in schools propels the weaker students to drop out of schools to pursue financial liabilities. Some of them are drop outs who indulge in antisocial life which further perpetuates a life of inequality and social exclusion. Hence education can be a catalyst to help children of underprivileged be provided with tools to enable them to come out of poverty and find a way to enter the social world of acceptance and inclusion.

Sustained interest in learning also depends on student self-esteem and confidence to overcome learning challenges. The ability to master English skills motivates students to pursue careers that were once beyond the reach of their backward communities.

Partnerships through CSR

The entry of corporates in the education field has helped improve Inclusiveness significantly.

Corporates especially IT firms are focused on skill development. Some of them have introduced “digitalisation” by setting up IT educational centres. Digital learning act as tools to bridge the gap between those who have and the have not’s with regards to digital learning through donation of computers and free internet access. Corporates are impacting pedagogy by organizing and funding training of faculty through skill development initiatives so that more digital tools can be used in classrooms.

There is an education revolution in Tamil Nadu Housing Board Societies. A number of NGO’s are supporting building of teacher communities within the housing colonies to provide after school support in education. These centres follow the tuition centre concept or a learning centre concept. The difference between the two is that value based learning or skill learning or earning by doing is emphasised in learning centres. They focus on improving skills of the student and helps them succeed at school.

Funding of teaching materials, supporting infrastructure needs while setting up of learning centres, developing learning material and evaluation tools to monitor progress of student learning curve is key to success of learning centres.

Corporates startups in the field of elearning ensure learning is available at a pace and location suitable to learner over a wide variety of subjects. Partnership with NGO’s to set up “after school centres” that focus on enhancing learning skills that promote students towards academic excellence.

Findings related to Social impact post interviews during Social Audit

The researcher mainly interviewed students, parents and teachers from housing colonies in TN Housing Board areas like Kotturpuram, Teynampet, Saidapet, Chemmanchery, Choolai, where established NGO’s were running centres supported by CSR funding. The field of study focused on those centres which were running for two to three years.

Inclusiveness Education has a positive impact when NGO’s get involved in developing concept based learning and evaluation techniques that promote structured learning of conceptual skills. Developing teacher aid tools for instruction, monitoring, control and evaluation facilitate actual learning of English and mathematical concepts at primary and middle school.

Another challenge is identifying teachers from the same community and developing their teaching skills so that they can be appropriate role models. The correct pedagogy tools need to be identified to equip teachers to help them identify students who are unable to grasp simple and complex maths concepts. The foundation for interest towards subjects is closely related to mastery of subjects, teaching skills, role modelling by teacher and least but the most important is expectation and praise from teachers. A skilled teacher is more successful in the classroom than one who is not trained.

CSR partnerships provide funding, volunteers and recognition of teacher effort. This can significantly influence education for the marginalised as government by itself cannot achieve UN goals such as education for all. Inclusive education includes personal mastery through development of interpersonal and communication skills.

Education skills and inclusion of value based learning focuses on character building that enables students to succeed at school and prepares them for success at the workplace. Values like teambuilding, leadership, determination, self-control are focused during character development classes which are organised on weekends.

Evaluation not focused on marks but mastery of concepts equips students with skills to enable them to succeed at school and reduces dropouts. A lot of graphs and charts are part of the evaluation tools that record student knowledge and mastery of the concepts. Steady progress of the learning concepts from simple to complex are recorded on evaluation charts for each student. This serves as a communication tool between teacher, student and parent for monitoring student progress.

English speaking skills builds self - confidence in students and prepares them for entry to the job market. Stakeholders such as parents, NGO's government and school administration when working in partnership can truly help achieve the universal goal of "Education for All" in Tamil Nadu.

Conclusion:

Public-Private CSR Partnerships with focus on creation of educational tools to facilitate tutors and schools can bring fundamental change to students of housing board colonies. Thus inclusive education can address the concerns of the socially excluded affected by historical discrimination. This can be achieved by building and promoting use of educational tools that address the diversity needs of students studying in TN government schools.

The need of the hour is enrichment of the learning process which brings tangible benefits to students, parents, teachers and school administrators. These case studies can be used by school administrators to bring about a fundamental policy shift – moving away from exclusion to inclusion of the needs of the marginalised while developing government policies in CSR and education in Tamil Nadu.

References:

Rawls,J(1999).A theory of Justice. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts,(Revised Edition)

Govinda R Bandyopadhyay,M(2011) Access to elementary education in India Analytic Overview.in Govind,R., Who goes to School? Oxford University Press New Delhi

Singh.K(2005) Global Education Report to UNESCO of the International Commission for the Twenty first century.

Ghosh,S.C(2013) the History of Education in Modern India1757-20129(4th Edition),New Delhi, Orient, Black Swan

