



INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

One of the greatest problems the world is facing today is the growing number of persons who are excluded from the meaningful partnership in the economic, social, political and cultural life of their communities. Such a society is neither efficient nor safe. Inclusive education can be seen as a stepping stone for a future inclusive society and it is a process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of all children, youth and adults through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities and reducing the exclusion within and from education. The growing in public awareness, the achievement in the technological advancement and the improved legislation in some countries have opened the way for better provision of education to children with disabilities. The integration of students with disabilities into the regular educational setting as regular class students has become the concern of educators, governments, and the society at large. But numerous factors continue to affect and regulate the development of inclusive education in India. A limited understanding of the concept disability, negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities and a hardened resistance to change are the major barriers impeding inclusive education. The present paper tries to highlight the scenario of inclusive education in India along with policies, legal framework and the role of teachers in inclusive setting. The study concludes that the implementation of inclusive education requires dedication and willingness on part of all stakeholders especially educators.

Keywords; *Inclusive education, disabled children, teachers role, challenges.*



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INTRODUCTION:

Historically we have two educational systems – one for students with disabilities (education in special schools) and one for everyone else (education in regular classrooms). The movement towards integration of students with disabilities into the regular classroom started in the second half of the twentieth century. The trend at present is to create one education system that values all students to devise a classroom that respects diversity. Diversity means valuing the differences between people and the ways in which those differences can contribute to a richer, more creative and more productive working environment. It includes race, ethnicity, gender, age religion disability sexual orientation and socio-economic condition. An inclusive school that welcomes all students irrespective of disability, community background, sexuality and ethnic background etc. Inclusive education is a process of enabling the all children to learn and participate effectively within the mainstream school systems. It does not segregate children who have different abilities or needs. This is in other

words, is to indicate the shift of thinking from an unnatural segregated setting towards supporting inclusive schools. Inclusion of pupil with learning differences involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies with a common vision that covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children.

Integration and inclusion are used by educators as synonyms but they are different and there is a paradigm shift from integrated education to inclusive education. The aim of integrated education is assimilation of children with diverse abilities into the existing classes and structures within a school and it emerged as a philosophical anti-thesis to segregation and it helps a child fit into a pre-existing model of schooling. Inclusive differs in that as it assumes that all children are a part of the regular school system from the very beginning of school. Inclusion demands high level of teaching competence and organizational changes aims at promoting effective learning that is very important for school. Even today, people consider any difference in learning as learning disability, impairment or handicap and treat them as victim or patients who need special care or special schools. Many children with disabilities do not get access to any kind of education. Rather, they are kept at home or are institutionalized because families do not get support from community in raising them or are made to feel ashamed (Stancis 2009). Majority of population still has difficulties to accept diversity. The stigma a pupil with learning differences experiences can be more detrimental and painful than the difference itself.

CONCEPT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Inclusive education is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all the learners. It involves restructuring the culture, policies and practices in schools so that they can respond to the diversity of students in their locality. For a school to be inclusive, the attitudes of everyone in the school, including administrators, teachers, and other students, are positive towards students with disabilities. Inclusive education means that all children, regardless of their ability level, are included in a mainstream classroom, or in the most appropriate or least restrictive environment (LRE), that students of all ability levels are taught as equals, and that teachers must adjust their curriculum and teaching methodologies so that all students benefit. This also avoids wasting resources, and “shattered hopes,” which often occurs in classrooms that are “one size fits all. Studies have shown that systems that are

truly inclusive reduce drop-out rates and repetition of grades, and have higher average levels of achievement; compared to systems that are not inclusive. People who believe in inclusive education believe that the education system is the impediment to learning for a child, and that every child is capable of learning.

The issues of inclusive education and its implication for education have been under scrutiny during the past thirty years. Today, societies have become concerned with ensuring the educational rights for all children in disregarding severity of disabilities into the regular educational setting as regular class students has become the concern of educators, governments and the society at large.(Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2005). However, the main challenge with integration/ inclusion is that mainstreaming has not been accompanied by changes in the organisation of the ordinary school, its curriculum and teaching and learning strategies. (UNESCO,2005;as cited by Jha,2002). This lack of organisational changes has proved to be one the major barriers to implementation of inclusive policies. There is a need for special education and general education to merge. Planning and management of education of children with special needs should aim at bringing about the changes in the educational system. Following are the policies and legislative frame work of our country for the betterment of education and inclusion.

- National edcation policy (1968)
- National policy on education (1986)
- Bahrul islam committee (1985)
- Programme of action MHRD (1990 & 1992)
- Centrally sponsored scheme of integrated scheme education for the disabled.(1974).
- Project Integrated education for the disabled.(1987)
- Rehabilitation council of India Act (1992).
- Persons with disabilities Act (1995)
- District primary Eduation programme (1994).
- Janshala (1998).
- National trust Act (1999).
- Action plan for inclusive Education of children and youth with Disabilities.(2005).
- Sarva shiksha Abhiyan.(2001).
- National policy for persons with Disabilities (2006).

FORMS OF INCLUSION

Physical Inclusion : that receives consistent promotion, support, and facilitation from the government. All the policies and regulations have made education free and compulsory for all children. No institution can deny admission to a child with disability on account of his/her disability. The universalisation of elementary education (UEE) focuses on enrolment, retention and achievement of all children.

Social inclusion: it is only happening in the sections of the society. In the lower socio-economic strata research studies have revealed that there is a greater acceptance of persons with disabilities with minimum expectation. Gradually the efforts are being made by educating people through direct instruction and media to bring attitudinal changes in the society.

Cognitive Inclusion : The educational institutions try out cognitive inclusion by allowing the children with special educational needs to study in general classrooms with non-disabled children. Cognitive inclusion is possible only if the subject matter is broken down into smaller learning units and teachers make sure that all the children to the expected level of mastery learn each of the micro units of a lesson. Each child is given equal opportunity to learn, understand, retain, and reproduce the information at an appropriate time and in appropriate manner.

PRINCIPLES OF INCLUSION

The UNESCO Salamanca Statement and Framework for action on Special Needs Education (1994) articulated and underlying principles on which inclusive Education is based.

- Every child has a fundamental right to education;
- Every child has a unique characteristics, abilities, interests, and learning needs;
- Education systems need to accommodate this diversity in student population;
- Those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools;
- Regular schools with inclusion orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all.

ROLE OF TEACHERS IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

It is a fact that regular schools and regular classroom environment often fails to accommodate the educational needs of many students, especially individuals with disability. This is the

reason that so many pupils with disabilities do not attend regular schools. Until regular schools have developed capacity to cater them; it is difficult to argue for inclusion. One of the major challenges to achieve this goal lies in the changing task of the regular classroom teacher (Jha2002). As Mastropieri & Scruggs (2004), reported the regular classroom teacher is responsible for any adaptation that may be necessary for students success in this environment; consequently, these teachers must have skills to develop and adapt curricula to meet individual needs. Necessary skills for the regular classroom teachers includes an understanding of how a disability affects the ability to learn academic skills or to adapt to social situation. The role of teacher in inclusive education is very crucial, the teacher have the ability to solve problems and take the advantage of children's individual interest and use their internal motivation for developing needed skills. He /she has the ability to make appropriate situations for each student regardless of the students capabilities. And he/she has the ability to determine how to modify assignments for the students, and how to design classroom activities. This teaching skills can be applied not just at the elementary or secondary level but at the college level as well. It means more activity based teaching rather than seat based teaching. Following are some roles which the teachers have to play in Inclusive education:

1. Teacher should take care about economically disadvantaged children and youth and be willing to work with them.
2. Teachers should accept, appreciate, and promote culturally specific characteristics of disabled children.
3. Teacher should help to improve minority students in their learning difficulties.
4. Teacher should promote best attributes of both genders in all classroom children.
5. Teachers should develop the skills in the selection of appropriate techniques to manage individual and group behaviour.
6. Teachers should know how to collect useful data for the diagnosis and how to refer a child to specialist.
7. Teachers should prefer individualised teaching whenever needed.
8. Teachers should be able to interact successfully with parents, sibling and other members of school community,
9. Teachers should be able to prepare special students as well as regular class for mainstreaming.

10. Teachers should observed the students behaviour in various settings which will help them in individual assessment.
11. Teachers should be able to established appropriate goals for the exeptional children.
12. Teacher should able to plan and impliment a variety of instructional techniques.
13. Teacher should be able to manage the resources which can be used for the instruction of disabled children.

Having these competencies teachers may bring development among the able and disabled chidren in inclusive schools. If teacher possess these role or competencies the ultimate goals of inclusive education will be attained.

CHALLENGES IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

One of the educational options that is receiving increasing attention is meeting the needs of students with disabilities in the regular classroom. Years of research have contributed to our knowledge of how to successfully include students with disabilities in general education classes. (Ainscow, 1999, cited in Armstrong, 2003). Inclusion does not refer to fixed state or set of criteria to be used as a blue print. But seeks to challenge deficit thinking and practice which are still ingrained and too often lead many to believe that some pupils have to be dealt with in separate way. Each child has a vital contribution to make to society. The explosion growth of private schools in recent years in India, in both urban and rural areas is seen by many to be a result of dissatisfaction with poor quality education provision in government schools. However, the private schools which have been voluntarily implementing Inclusive education are mostly found in urban areas demonstrating the geographical inequalities so prevalent in the Indian context. In addition to these private schools require to pay the fees, this inclusive education is not accessible to all, and so somewhat exclusive although some admit bright children from deprived background as a charitable gesture.

The range of challenges confronting the school system while including with diverse abilities and from diverse background s have to be met by creating children cantered pedagogy which capable of successfully educating all children and hence the reality in Indian focuses the need of Inclusive Education.

The challenges of Inclusive Education are to meet the special needs of all children with and without disabilities. (Das , 1999). Inclusive Education is not a soft process: it requires a lot of struggle and commitment to overcome all the types of barriers mainly attitudinal and social.

(Das, 1999). It has been argued that for inclusive education to be meaning full , school must organised 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 curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies , resources use and partnership with their communities (UNESCO, 1994). Institutions of higher education in many places do not have training programmes for regular teachers for the students with disability and adapted curricula. Karna(1999), specifically suggested that the lack of relevant facilities and materials is a major challenge to the implementation of effective inclusive education in many places.

The Salamanca Statemet and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education indicated, a well structured funding arrangement is desirable for meeting the cost of providing adequate educational services for students with disability in inclusive schools. However, inadequate financial provision remains one to the major obstacles to the implementation of the meaningful programme such as inclusive education in many countries. This idea is also reflected by Das (1999) as money is a constraint to run inclusive education programme.

Generally, teachers training programmes, adapted curriculum, teachers attitudes, materials and equipments provision and financial sources are among the frontiers of challenges in the implementation of inclusive education. Particularly attitude of teachers remains the ultimate challenge since it is influenced by the presence of all the other factors.

CONCLUSION

Inclusion of children with special education needs has become a matter of priority in many countries around the world. It is no doubt that reforms towards inclusion of children with diverse needs continues across the globe. The implementation of inclusive education requires dedication and willingness on part of all stakeholders especially educators. Every educator must be aware of the concept of inclusion. Sensitization towards inclusion is need of the hour. Inclusion of children with special needs is essentially the responsibility of the regular education system. Yet, special education professionals, parents, of children with special needs as well as parents of non disabled peer groups, students without disabilities and community as a whole have to be empowered for inclusive education to be successful. Further, there is a need of barrier free environment and suitable transport to reach to school. Above all sensitization of administrators, adaptations in curriculum, evaluation procedures

and teacher preparation to enhance their competencies in teaching children with special needs.

SUGGESTIONS

1. Our government has taken a number of initiatives to improve the enrolment, retention and achievement of children with disabilities. There is a need to establish inter-linked and collaborations among various organisations to prevent overlapping, duplication and contradictions in programme implementation.
2. Most of services for children with special needs are concentrated in urban areas and big cities or close to district headquarters. The majority of children with disabilities who live in rural areas do not get benefit from these services. There is need to -established inclusive schools in rural areas.
3. Due to absence of consistent data on the magnitude and educational status of disabled children, it is very difficult to understand the nature of the problem, and to make realistic intervention.
4. Community involvement and partnerships between government agencies and NGOs had been instrumental in promoting inclusive education.
5. Many regular schools have a large number of children in each classroom and few teachers,. As a consequence of this, many teachers are reluctant to work with children with disabilities. They consider it an additional workload.
6. The curriculum lacks the required flexibility to cater to the needs of children with disabilities. There are limited developmentally appropriate teaching learning materials for children both with and without disabilities. The teaching –learning needs of children in a limited way.
7. Families do not have enough information the support system in the disability which the child is suffering from. This often leads to a sense of hopelessness. Early identification and intervention initiatives sensitise parents and community members to the education of disabled children.
8. The training of general teachers at pre-service levels should address the issues of education of disabled children, so that teacher are better equipped to work in an inclusive environment.

9. There is a need to develop outside support systems for teachers. Grassroots workers, parents, special schoolteachers, Para teachers and other individuals can be shown how to provide required support.

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