



Inclusive Education in India- today and tomorrow

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Abstract:

Inclusive education denotes inclusion of all students learn together in the same classroom. It allows students with special needs to learn in mainstream classes alongside their peers which ensure an inclusive society. This paper intends to analyze the key concept of inclusive education, its significance and need along with the challenges that impede effective implementation in India. An effort has also been made to forward some measures to overcome the barriers. Analytical method of research has been adopted. Required data for the present study have been collected from the various secondary sources. It is expected that this endeavour would help the stakeholders to a certain extent.

Keywords: *Inclusive Education, Challenges, Children with special needs, Special Education*

1. Introduction

Inclusive Education (IE) is comparatively a new approach in Indian education scenario. Over the last five decades the Government of India has made constant and comprehensive endeavours towards education of children with disabilities. The Government launched the Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) scheme in December 1974, a centrally sponsored scheme which aimed to provide educational opportunities to Children with Special Needs (CWSN) in regular schools and to facilitate their achievement and retention. But if we look back minutely, we would see that while the previous policies talked about access and equity, it was in National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986 in its part IV under the section 'education for equality' that Education for women's equality, Education of scheduled castes/scheduled tribes and other backward sections, Minorities education and Education of the handicapped were dealt as separate sections with separate provisions. In 1980s the then Ministry of Welfare, Govt. of India, realized the crucial need of an institution to monitor and regulate the Human Resource Development (HRD) programmes in the field of disability rehabilitation. Till 1990s, ninety percent of India's estimated 40 million children in the age group four to sixteen years with physical and mental disabilities were being excluded from mainstream education. The Programme of Action (1992) stressed the need for integrating children with special needs with other groups. In late 90s (i.e. in 1997) the philosophy of inclusive education was added in District Primary Education Programme (DPEP). 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. Then, in 2009, the GOI takes an initiative through its 'Right to Education Act' which guarantees right to free and compulsory education to all children between ages six to fourteen. Most recent advancement is the New Education Policy-2020, which provides to all students, irrespective of their place of residence, a quality education system, with particular focus on historically marginalized, disadvantaged, and underrepresented groups. It proposes that education is a great leveler and is the best tool for achieving economic and social mobility, inclusion, and equality. It affirms that Initiatives must be in place to ensure that all students from such groups, despite inherent obstacles, are provided various targeted opportunities to enter and excel in the educational system. It groups all these groups and also new groups under this chapter to provide better access to quality education. Thus, inclusive education denotes all students, regardless of any challenges they may have, are placed in age-appropriate general education classes that are in their own neighbourhood schools to

receive high quality instruction, interventions, and supports that enable them to meet success in the core curriculum. The Salamanca Statement (Spain) in 1994 (UNESCO) states, 'School should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups.' According to Booth (1996), 'inclusive education is a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning and reducing exclusion from within and from education.' Michael F. Giangreco (1997) remarks, 'Inclusive education is a set of values, principles and practices that seek more effective and meaningful education for all students, regardless of whether they have exceptionality labels or not.' Inclusive education means including children with disabilities in regular classroom that have been designed for children without disabilities (Kugelmass, 2004). It is an educational practice based on the social premise of justice that advocates for equal access to educational opportunities for all children regardless of their physical, intellectual emotional or learning disability (Loreman et al, 2005). Thus, inclusive education is about presence, participation and achievement of all learners (Ainscow, 2005, Engelbrecht and Green, 2007). Differences among students could be related to disability, gender, size, colour or ethnicity and disability is just one of the differences and does not limit ones strength and abilities. Inclusive education recognizes that these differences are valuable and bring creativity and through them ideas are shared and experienced. In other words, inclusion is about transforming systems to be inclusive of everyone and not about inserting persons with disabilities into existing structures (UNICEF, 2009). Although the New Education Policy (2020) suggests many fundamental principles that will guide the education system at large, as well as the individual institutions within, the followings are the most relevant to inclusion of all children in education:

- Recognizing, identifying, and fostering the unique capabilities of each student, by sensitizing teachers as well as parents to promote each student's holistic development in both academic and non-academic spheres;
- Respect for diversity and respect for the local context in all curriculum, pedagogy, and policy, always keeping in mind that education is a concurrent subject;
- Full equity and inclusion as the cornerstone of all educational decisions to ensure that all students are able to thrive in the education system.

All the above stated studies have laid emphasis on that all school going children, whether they are disabled or not, have the right to education as they are the future citizens of the country. So, it makes very clear and acceptable to all of us that inclusion maximizes the potential of the vast majority of students, ensures their rights, and is the preferred educational approach for the 21st century.

1.1 Objectives

The major objectives of the present study are-

- 1.To analyze the need of inclusive education in the present-day education context.
- 2.To find out the major challenges for implementing inclusive education in India.
- 3.To put forward some remedial measures to overcome the barriers.

2. Method and materials:

As the present study is an analytical one in nature, so analytical method of research has been adopted. All the required data for the study have been collected from the secondary sources such as books, journals, policy documents, newspaper and internet.

3. Discussion

3.1 Inclusive education-why?

At present, inclusive education in almost every country has emerged as one of the most dominant issues and a matter of serious concern to all the educationists, psychologists, social scientists, policy makers,

researchers and other stakeholders. Various efforts have been made internationally so as to include children with disabilities in the educational mainstream. UNESCO (1994) rightly observes that regular schools with an inclusive orientation are most effective in combating discriminatory attitudes, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all. Moreover, the foreword of UNICEF (2003), focused on inclusive education in India, estimates that 70% of children with disabilities, including those with mild mental retardation, can attend regular schools provided the environment is designed to be accessible and the institution is willing to accommodate them. Researches show that inclusion in the classroom is paramount as it fosters an environment that facilitates improved skills and higher achievement for all students, regardless of their abilities or learning needs. It promotes equal opportunities for students with and without disabilities to participate in collaborative learning experiences, which fosters academic growth and the development of vital social skills. Furthermore, inclusive education enables students with disabilities to access the same curriculum as their peers, often leading to higher academic achievements. With appropriate accommodations and support, students with disabilities can actively engage in learning, enhancing their understanding of the subject matter and fostering academic growth. The growing body of research has shown that children do better academically when in inclusive settings and inclusion provides opportunities to develop relationships. Some worth mentioning benefits are developing friendships; improve communication and social skills, personal principles, comfort level with people who have special needs, and caring classroom environments. Thus, it makes us clear that inclusion is important in education because it ensures that all students have equal opportunities to learn and succeed, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds. It acknowledges that all children can learn and that every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs. It is one of the most effective ways to promote an inclusive and tolerant society. That is why we need inclusive education today and tomorrow.

3.2 Major Challenges of Inclusive Education in India

India as the 7th largest country in the world witness vast and varied perspectives in terms of its land, population, religion, culture etc. According to an official estimate, India is the world's second most populated country having 1,210 million people after China (Census of India, 2011). It has 17% of the global population and 20% of the world's out-of-school children in which the disabled population constitutes 2.21% which was 2.13% in census, 2001 data. Rural (2.24%) residents are more as compared to urban (2.21%) ones as in 2001 data. Percentage of disabled persons in India has increased both in rural and urban areas during the last decade. However, UNICEF's Report on the Status of Disability in India (2000) states that there are around 30 million children in India suffering from some form of disability. 10% of the world's population lives with a disability and 80% of these people with disabilities live in developing countries. But 75% of people with disabilities live in rural areas in India. The government of India since its independence has made an effort to develop plans and policies that are inclusive of individuals with disabilities, however, the implementation of these policies has not produced an inclusive educational system. For example, if we look into the last two decades, we see that despite of the inclusive education component undertaken on a mission mode by Sarva Siksha Abhijan (SSA) and Rastriya Madyamik Siksha Abhijan (RMSA) and the provision of 3% reservation of children with disabilities under the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995, disabled children have not been able to make great strides in education. NCERT has released the 8th All India School Education Survey (AISES) and results concerning schooling facilities for children with disabilities are shocking to say the least. Out of total 58,76,273 teachers, only 1.32% (80,942) teachers have received any kind of training in inclusive education. Out of total schools in the country, only 10% has handrails, 4% has adapted labs, and 8% has adapted toilets. No wonder that over the time period from 2002 to 2009, the number of disabled students decreased- the most drastic decrease of 68.05% is that of orthopedically disabled students. There are lots of barriers which hinder effective implementation of inclusive education in India. Some major challenges are-

1. Social and Attitudinal barrier: Due to various social factors prevailing in our society like caste, colour and creed problems like social exclusion, untouchability etc. are still arising which lead to social discrimination. Attitude and behavior of many parents and the community towards the students with special needs are not positive. On the other hand, children with disabilities are often the targets of

taunting and bullying from their peers without disabilities. Such negative attitudes and social discrimination create barriers to inclusion. As a consequence, it hinders effective implementation of inclusive education.

2. Lack of sufficient infrastructural facilities: A large number of students who commute to school find insufficient physical facilities both inside and outside the school building like handrails, wheelchair ramps, disability friendly toilets, and magnified sign boards, playgrounds, parks and transportation.
3. Unskilled and untrained teachers: One of the major obstacles of well-implemented inclusive education is lack of experienced, trained, skillful, dynamic and enthusiastic teachers in the school who are teaching the students with special needs. Many difficulties arise in many times out of these teachers who can never meet the psychological needs of the disabled students.
4. Lack of adequate fund: Provision of sufficient fund is the backbone for any kind of plan and programme to be made successful. But there is a lack of adequate fund and resources such as assistive technology and accessible facilities to support special education in India. This can make it difficult to provide children with disabilities with the support they need to learn and grow.
5. Communication gap: Improper communication between and among the different stakeholders such as teachers, students, parents, administrators, community and policy makers is another crucial problem which discourages effective implementation of inclusive education in India.
6. Lack of disable-friendly curriculum: An inclusive curriculum always allows for diversity of content, material, ideas and methods of assessment. It involves purposefully, integrating perspectives that expand and enhance the canon, both within individual papers and across the whole course. But, in the Indian education scenario curriculum prepared for learners of different stages of education are not suitable for the learners with disabilities.

3.3 Measures to overcome the barriers

Inclusive education not only develops the individuality but also promotes the social value of equality among learners. Inclusive setting provides a sense of belongingness, a better-quality education for all children and is instrumental in changing discriminatory attitudes. 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). Unless and until to develop the sense of 'we feeling' among the all students irrespective of differences, an inclusive educational setting in true sense can never be expected. NEP 2020 is in complete consonance with the provisions of the RPWD Act 2016 and endorses all its recommendations with regard to school education considering inclusive education as a system of education wherein students with and without disabilities learn together and the system of teaching and learning is suitably adapted to meet the learning needs of different types of students with disabilities. For better implementation of Inclusive Education in India some measures are as follows:

- Education is a fundamental right to all children. Therefore, the slogan 'Education for all' need to be made effective in real sense. Equal educational opportunity to all children in the inclusive educational setting must be ensured at any cost.
- Basic archeological and infrastructural facilities building of ramps, railings, disability friendly toilets, parks, playgrounds etc. should be provided by the schools to the children with special needs. An effective communication and delivery system for specific delivery of teaching-learning material, aids and appliances, hardware, software etc. must be provided. Thus, schools should use variety of innovative practices to get children involved and participating in learning processes.
- Flexibility is the key point of inclusive education. As a system, inclusive education should always be flexible and dynamic in terms of accessibility, methodology of teaching and learning, curriculum, examination, evaluation and academic environment.
- Parents and other family members alongside disabled children need to be trained by the professional experts so that they may provide a healthy social environment which is gender-sensitive and child-friendly. Furthermore, they to be involved in all decision-making concerning their child. They should be seen as important resources for the teachers and the schools in particular and indispensable partners in the entire education process as whole.

- For effective implement of inclusive education, the role of community can never be ignored. Community should humanize education by promoting awareness, acceptance and feasible techniques for inclusive education. Linkages also need to be established between community-based rehabilitation programmes and inclusive education. Community involvement and partnerships between government agencies and NGOs will act as an instrumental in promoting inclusive education.
- All stakeholders should keep an eye towards timely provision of student-oriented components such as educational assessment, books and stationery, uniforms, transport allowance, reader allowance and stipend for girls, support services, assistive devices, boarding the lodging facility, therapeutic and other medical services, teaching-learning materials etc the needy students.
- Establishing adequate number of resource centres and promoting research to improve learning for differently able children might be another important measures for successful implementation of inclusive education in India.
- Training for sensitization towards disability and inclusion issues, and how to converge efforts for effective implementation of programmes, are of important concerns. The intensive training of general teachers at pre-service and in-service levels should address the issue of education of children with disabilities, so that teachers are better equipped with positive attitudes to work in an inclusive environment.

4. Conclusion

Education is the birth right of every child. The Government of India has taken many steps to make minimum education access to all children irrespective of caste, colour, religion, language and so on. Present time demands an inclusive society through an inclusive approach. Inclusive education is a powerful concept and a driving force for positive change in society, shaping a brighter and more accepting future for all. A good inclusive education is one that allows all the students to participate in all aspects of classroom equally or close to equal. The success of inclusive education depends on many factors like community support, high quality teaching-learning materials and appropriate assistive devices, suitable modifications in the curriculum and examination system, training professionals and staff, attitudinal changes among the stakeholders, transportation facilities and provision of scholarships to learners etc. It is need of the hour to overcome all the barriers that hinder effective implementation of inclusive education in our country. Of course, the Government of India has considered this matter seriously which is reflected clearly in the New Education Policy- 2020. NEP 2020 emphasizes upon inculcating Inclusive educational structure and inclusive educational culture in our school education system through infrastructural support and by making corresponding changes in curriculum incorporating materials on human values such as respect for all persons, empathy, tolerance, human rights, gender equality, non-violence, global citizenship, inclusion, and equity. It calls upon the stakeholders to overcome the barriers and remove biases and stereotypes through sensitization programme. Thus, to conclude it can be said that including children with disabilities in education is a challenging task and needs a mass community mobilization and involvement and above all provision of appropriate responses to wide spectrum of learning needs of special children in both formal and non-formal settings.

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