



**STUDY OF THE STATUS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN GOVERNMENT
SCHOOLS**

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INTRODUCTION

The history of education of persons with disabilities is a progression from segregation to integration, and now to inclusion as explained in the unit-1 of this block. The education of the disabled children in India is more than hundred years old, but our services are far from adequate. The past two decades has witnessed the mushrooming of inclusive education programmes. Inclusive education addresses the need to provide education to children with any kind of impairment. General educators, with assistance from professionals in special education, assume primary responsibility for students with disabilities. But in India we could not admit even 10% of educable children in the normal community. Different models in the integration are practiced in the country and some were successful but there was not a single model of perfection. The model should be based as per the need of Indian Culture and Heritage.

CONCEPT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Inclusion is a concept that sees children with disabilities as full time participants in and as members of their neighborhood schools and communities (Knight, 1999). Inclusive education, as an approach, seeks to address the learning needs of all children, youth and adults with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion. It implies all learners, young people - with or without disabilities being able to learn together through access to common pre-school provisions, schools and community educational setting with an appropriate network of support services. It aims at all stakeholders in the system such as learners, parents, community, teachers, administrators and policy makers to be comfortable with diversity and see it as a challenge rather than a problem.

Thus, providing equitable opportunities to student/Children with and without disabilities together, so that they receive effective educational services, with the required supplementary aids and support services in age-appropriate classes in their neighborhood schools is the called “Inclusive Education”.

PRINCIPLES OF INCLUSION

- All school personnel should display shared responsibility and support for all students
- The teachers should have the potential capacity to work within a collaborative framework to meet the unique needs of all individual students when given adequate training and supportive services
- The effect of disabilities on students varies from individual to individual and the implications for inclusion differ accordingly
- The family and social circumstances of a child is also crucial for deciding whether a child can be placed in an inclusive setting
- Each student should have the opportunity to experience meaningful challenges, exercise choice and responsibility, interact collaboratively with others, and be actively engaged in developmental, academic non-academic, inter and intrapersonal activities as part of the educational process
- Implementation of these principles depends upon continuous community support, broad planning, training and evaluation
- An adapted school environment is needed to suit the needs of every child with disability.

Inclusive schools perhaps are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities and achieving education for all.

Main features of Inclusive schools are equality, sense of belongingness /membership, respect for each other, need- based support and diversity. The key players are regular teachers, parents, Community, head masters, resource teachers, non disabled children, children with Special Needs and local Education Authorities like block Education Officers, District Education Officers. The Government of India is fully committed to the goal of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE). To facilitate UEE, the Parliament of India has passed the Constitutional (86th Amendment) Act, making free and compulsory elementary education a Fundamental Right, for all the children in the age group of 6-14 years through inclusion of the new Article 21A in Part III of the Constitution, as follows: ‘The State shall provide free and

compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine.’ This Amendment has given a new thrust to the education of Children with Special Needs (CWSN), as without their inclusion, the objective of UEE cannot be achieved. Hence, if Education for All is to be achieved, CWSN would have to be provided education.

GOOD PRACTICES FOR SUCCESSFUL INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

- The attitude that ‘inclusive education is not an alternative but an inevitability, if the dream of providing basic education to all children is to ever become a reality’ needs to be cultivated among all concerned professionals, grassroots workers, teachers and community members, especially in rural and remote areas.
- Links and bridges need to be built between special schools and inclusive education practices. Linkages also need to be established between community-based rehabilitation programmes and inclusive education.
- Public policies, supportive legislation and budgetary allocations should be based on prevalence of special education needs, and take into consideration the backlog created as a result of decades of neglect.
- Inclusion without ‘adequate’ preparation of general schools will not yield satisfactory results. It is essential that issues related to infrastructural facilities, curriculum modification and educational materials should be addressed.
- The 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 to work in an inclusive environment.
- Orientation training of policy-makers and education department officials, both at the state and block level, is essential. In addition, there is a need to develop on-site support systems for teachers. Grassroots workers, parents, special school teachers, para-teachers and other individuals.
- The existing handful of teacher trainers cannot reach the vast number of teachers working with children with disabilities in rural/remote areas. Alternatives such as training para-teachers, investing in pilot studies to develop tele-rehabilitation programmes, and exploring strategies for distance education.

- The preparation of children—in the form of early childhood intervention before enrolment—is required. This would ensure that they do not drop out, are retained in schools, and compete equally with other children.
- In order to strengthen inclusive practices, networking between existing practitioners would be useful. Simultaneous implementation, and consistent monitoring, reinforcement and coordination between government departments and NGOs at national and state levels will promote inclusive practices.

Singh Deepshikh (2009), NUEPA states that India, being the largest democracy in the world, needs to be highly focused with the issues and constraints of Inclusive Education so that all the marginalized children may be able to fulfill their rights as citizens. Government needs to think that despite best intentions to promote inclusive education, why the result is still exclusion. The issues like socio-economic constraints, attitudes, curriculum, environment, language and communication, governance and human resource development should be given their due attention for enforcing better implementation. There is also a need of proper accountability mechanisms to check the policy implementation. There should be a network of regular monitoring and evaluation by external evaluators (to avoid report corruption) in order to ascertain whether the policy is indeed being implemented. Government officials should be trained at all levels for managing monitoring and evaluation systems and enforcing accountability as well as for conceptual awareness of inclusive education and disability.

The survey findings show that about 2.5-6% of the population is having disabilities, where about 98% of children with disabilities are not attending any type of educational institutions. The availability of the service provisions for these children (special or mainstream, government or NGO) is not in proportion to their number (as shown in survey findings).

Sangeeta Sakhuja (2004) mentions that, “Education for All” still remains a distant dream and for disabled, it is even more remote in India .A recent survey of the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) revealed that only 1.2 percent of the disabled in India has had any form of education. In its effort to have an all India school level survey , NCPEDP found that from the 89 schools, 34 did not have a single disabled student and unfortunately, 18 of them having a policy against giving admission. In India around 13-14% of all school children suffer from learning disorders. Unfortunately, most schools fail to lend a sympathetic ear to their problems .As a result; these children are branded as failures.

Teachers are more and more positive or optimistic about inclusion of students with disabilities (Avramidis et al 2000). However, the actual implementation of inclusion in classrooms confuses and worries teachers (Bradshaw et al, 2006, Avramidis et al 2000). For example, meeting the IEP requirements of students with disabilities was found the factors to produce a lack of confidence of teachers (Avramidis et al.2000). As a consequence, teachers may express acceptance but not be willing to make the adaptations and modifications necessary for successful inclusion. According to Sharma (1999), regular school teachers believe that students with disabilities require special needs which cannot be provided in regular classroom. Secondary teachers appear less accepting of education for students with disabilities in regular schools than elementary or primary school teachers (Larrivee et al. 1979; Cochran 1998; Smith 2000). One explanation given by Smith (2000) is the massive amount of materials secondary teachers are required to cover in the 50 to 60 minute class periods. The present research is specifically concerned with finding out the provision made, practices being followed and efforts being made in Government to make inclusive education a reality. The study intends to find out the extent to which the school provides a barrier free environment not only in physical terms but academically and socially as well. The study would be conducted only in three schools of Meerut district limited to needs of CWSN in general, without taking into consideration their specific disabilities in any detail.

The main objective of the study is to develop an understanding of various policies and provisions for educating CWSN; to find out the admission policies followed by these schools and the actual numbers of CWSN studying in these schools and to study the inclusive status of these schools in terms of their: Physical, Academic, and Social environment.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The Normative Survey method is used obtaining information about the current status of the phenomenon, to describe “what exists” with respect to variables or condition in a situation

The study would include the description of various policies and legislative frameworks relevant to children with disabilities, admission policy followed by the schools and the physical, Academic and social environment of the school with respect to CWSN. Three Schools that claim to be inclusive were selected by using Purposive sampling. A total of 10 teachers, two counselors, and 25 students identified as CWSN were selected from the sample school. Close

ended Questionnaires were given to CWSN to access the extent to which they find the school barrier free, in terms of: infrastructure, academic and social environment. Semi structured interviews of teachers and special educators were taken to know about the efforts they put in to remove the different types of barriers to make inclusion a success. Responses on these questionnaire and during interviews were collected for qualitative analysis to find out the trends in inclusive education.

ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATIONS OF DATA

Policies, practices and cultures followed by the inclusive schools had a direct relationship on community's access to school, admission process and procedures of the school, and facilitating the involvement of parents in school management etc. For inclusive education to happen change must happen both at policy level and at the practice and culture level. With the objective of influencing existing policies at a school (micro) level to support inclusion of all children within the school, several strategies were adopted to increase access to school, increasing access to information about admission process and policies, addressing gaps in implementation of the admission policy and facilitating involvement of parents. To promote inclusive practices and culture in the schools the strategies such as facilitating a supportive environment; facilitating more sensitivity and patience and facilitating inclusion in learning were adopted. The last strategy included further sub strategies such as direct work with children to facilitate inclusion of all children in learning, facilitating knowledge and skill building to address diversity in classes, facilitating active learning/maximizations of learning by active learning/maximizing learning by active, facilitating lesson planning for addressing diversity/lesson planning for addressing diversity, facilitating collaborative learning /collaborative learning , facilitating joyous learning /making learning fun /making learning fun/playground , facilitating encouraging self discipline/encouraging self discipline, and raising awareness about diversity.

Based on the understanding that inclusive education also meant that each and every child should be able to access quality education, attempts were made to ensure that no child was left out of school within the catchment areas of the school. The survey conducted in the catchment areas of the three selected MDS schools confirmed that many children remained out of school. The survey roughly covered an area of about ten kilometers and covered forty three thousand five hundred and fifty six households. A total of one thousand seven hundred and twenty eight out of school children were identified. Among these surveyed out of school children, two hundred

twelve out of school children approximately twelve percent of the total out of school children were found to be having disabilities.

However admitting children in large numbers in the age group of above six in Sarvodaya School was difficult. The identified children would have to appear for exams those were conducted by the Sarvodaya schools to admit children from class two onwards and the children identified did not have enough inputs to clear these exams. To overcome these hurdles younger children were admitted into MCD schools. Many parents were not happy with the solution as these MCD schools were not of good standard. Nevertheless they were persuaded to admit their children in these schools. Among the older group children the survey revealed that most of the older children were school drop-outs, either dropped out of the school, because they had no interest in going to school though their parents still wanted them to study or the school authorities would strike their names off the enrollment list, because they were absent from the school for more than six months, as they would go to their villages for long duration.

Access to information about admission process and policies

Lack of information and lack of awareness about admission processes and procedures among the community people would adversely affect the admission of a child in the school. During the school survey parents had shared that they usually did not have enough information about the admission process and procedures. Parents often fail to produce numerous documents required by the school authorities for giving admission to children. If children were not enrolled at the correct age it becomes difficult to get admission at a later age.

To disseminate information about the admission processes and procedures in the community, the research team organized many admission drives during the month of March in the community living around all the five schools. Pamphlets containing information about admission dates and papers required for registration and other provisions like reservations in schools were distributed. Door to door visits were made to inform people about admissions and also to groups of people gathered together, by using a megaphone. The information was disseminated to other potential resource persons like the Aanganwadi worker and the pradhans of various camps as well.

Addressing gaps in implementation of the admission policy

Parents were supported individually during registrations and admissions. Clarifications were frequently sought for parents from the principal and visits were made to the DDE for ensuring implementation of the stated policy by the school principal, with success.

Still many parents went back from school feeling helpless and disappointed at being unable to secure admission for their children.

Facilitating involvement of Parents

It was suggested that monthly parent- teacher meetings should be organized to discuss various issues with parents. Although teachers in all the schools agreed to organize parent, teacher meetings some teachers however raised doubts about the ability of illiterate parents in helping their own children in their studies. While some other teachers felt that no parent would turn up for these meetings. The most appropriate time for holding PTMs was chosen in order to ensure maximum participation from parents and changed the timings of PTMs based on the suggestions given by teachers. Through printed circulars or visiting the houses of the children in Primary classes, the parents were informed about the PTM. The attendance in all the three schools was much more than the teachers were expecting. Teachers shared the performance of the students with the parents. There were certain instances, where teachers were not happy with the PTMs. Teachers during the PTMs raised issues about cleanliness, regularity, timings of the last working day and punctuality to be followed by children etc. Teachers suggested that parents could meet the teachers in the morning or afternoon when they come to drop or pickup their wards from the school, instead of trying to meet teachers during school hours and there disturbing the whole class. Parents complained that students were not treated well by the teachers and even monitors bullied other children and their conduct should be checked.

To promote inclusive practices and culture in the main stream demonstration schools

Facilitating a supportive environment

Attempts were made to create a space for dialogue and discussions between teachers and principal-towards building more positive relations. Shy children were encouraged to make friends with other children by asking their classmates to have lunch with them or play with them. Children were discouraged from teasing and laughing at children who had disabilities by creating sensitivity about the issue amongst the class during class intervention. The team also tried to discourage teachers commenting about children and pointing at the weaknesses of children.

Facilitating sensitivity and patience

Various efforts were made to make teachers realize that children are sensitive and need to be respected as individuals. The team had shared with the teachers the importance of feeling- touch and feeling-tone. Support was provided to individual children who were facing difficulties in the

classrooms.

Teachers were encouraged to provide a welcoming environment for class first students in order to make the first day in the school a pleasant experience. The team suggested to have some introductory games, poems and storytelling on the first day of the school. The team also suggested to encourage children to draw something on a piece of paper, teachers then would display those drawings along with the name of the child on the notice board or on the wall. Teachers agreed to create an environment so that children would feel comfortable. In schools where teachers cooperated in this program, the class atmosphere became absolutely light and children were comfortable in their new environments. In school three the teacher agreed to do an introduction activity with the children as suggested by the facilitator and was surprised to see how children enjoyed telling other's names. Most teachers expressed their inability to implement the program by citing various reasons.

Facilitating inclusion in learning

Confirming exclusion from learning

Diagnostic tests were conducted to assess the degree of exclusion faced by the children from the teaching process.

Inclusion of all children in learning and activities

The team asked the class teachers to make a list of students who were at the letter recognition level and then they would observe the children and work with them. Similarly the team also identified students whose concepts were not clear and was regularly made observations and worked with them. Sometimes project members taught the class and realized that half of the class did not understand the concept. Teams also made interventions in the areas of hygiene, for instance the teams asked children to clip their nails and explained to them the importance of maintaining hygiene.

Assessments and observations about children's levels of learning were made to further work with individual children; concepts were explained directly to children, through individual instructions, children who had difficulty in reading were given help during the classes. Different seating arrangements were suggested to encourage the weaker children sit in the front two rows of the class, allowing the teacher to pay more attention to these children. Weaker children were asked to come to the blackboard and gave them an opportunity to answer in the class.

Summer camps were organized. Children who were weaker were encouraged to take on tasks

which they found difficult. Besides helping the weaker children to learn by themselves, other children were also encouraged to help them. Children were encouraged to ask questions to their teachers and do self-evaluation by encouraging children to correct mistakes of each group. Children often came to the team members asking to explain something they didn't understand. Teachers were under pressure to finish the syllabus. The outcomes of this intervention have been too little to have any impact on children.

The team also worked on the creative thinking by encouraging them to make stories using words that were learnt during the day. In Maths the team started with number concept and place value, then went on to introduce addition and multiplication tables. The facilitators focused on teaching the four basic operations like addition, subtraction, multiplication and division and also application of these four operations.

At the end of summer camp, feedback was sought from all the students about the camp, about the facilitators and their method of teaching. After a little hesitation, children gave their feedback. On the last day of the camp, the diagnostic test was repeated with the students so as to see if there was any improvement in their levels. The format of the test was similar to the one given at the beginning of the camp. The students were given participation certificates to encourage them to attend more of such workshops

Facilitating knowledge and skill building to address diversity in classes

Teachers' Training: Teachers were introduced to the concepts and teaching methodologies such as activity based teaching, planning, phases of learning, diversity, learning styles, collaborative learning, ground rules, learning styles and the learning pyramid etc

The five days training modules were organized for assistants and the upper primary teachers of the five schools. The modules were based on the needs expressed as well as elicited from the teachers during various meetings and daily interventions. The topics covered under the modules emphasized the fundamental concept and methodologies which were required for making a class inclusive. The 'Anekta mein Ekta' trainings conducted for teachers reflected on evaluating the effectiveness of their teaching and whether they were able to reach out to each child. The focus was on what children were learning or would learn rather than just teaching. Life skills were also covered in the training.

Ongoing Support in Class: This was done by giving them ideas and suggestions in different areas of intervention, clarifying doubts, reinforcing and explaining concepts discussed during

trainings, sharing teaching strategies for different concept. It was equally important to relate teaching objectives with the learning outcomes of the children.

Facilitating active learning

To maximize students' learning, teaching methodologies such as learning by doing and activity-based learning were encouraged. Teachers were suggested to take up activities like quizzes, building a word ladder, making a English to Hindi dictionary, etc. Similar activities were suggested for maths and social studies also. On Children's Day, two Bal Sabhas were organized by combining Class first, second and third and Class fourth and fifth. Children sang songs, recited poems and shared jokes among themselves. To encourage teachers to practice activity based teaching, sometimes learning materials worksheets were prepared and given to teachers on the spot to explain the concepts. The teachers revised the syllabus in the same way that they had taught.

Facilitating Lesson planning for addressing diversity

Attempts were made to plan lessons with teachers as it was emphasized that in an inclusive class pre planning was essential to reach out to every child. Initially teachers were asked to prepare their plans for the day and then for the week.

Facilitating Collaborative Learning

It was generally observed that students were made to work mostly alone and eighty two percent of the children stated they sat separately and did their own work. During interventions there was an emphasis on learning together in classrooms. Teacher was made aware about group processes and its related aspects, wherein ultimately students would take on the responsibility of their group members. This would instill values of collaboration, participation and helping each other. Suggestions like making weaker and brighter children sitting together and making partners among children who would support each other in studying at home also were given to teachers.

As it was sometimes difficult to change the seating arrangement groups were made based on rows. Some of the students still tended to do their work individually. Children were not familiar in working in groups and the team states that sharing ideas, space and material was alien to them.

Facilitating joyous learning

Intervention activities also focused on modeling strategies and activities for making learning enjoyable to children. Thus drawing, singing songs, poems, playing Antakshri and storytelling activities were conducted frequently. Action poems like Chidiya Ghar, Hara Samundar and games

like Boogie-Woogie, Pepsi clap, Tomorrow Holiday Ek ke peechhe ek kala chor, racing, Pepsi fizz, and Pepsi clap were some of the favorites of the children and they would often ask the team to repeat them. Games which helped children have fun and learn concepts as well word-building exercise, concept of circles, left and right directions, were often played. Fun activities like stories, poems, and songs were often used to bring order to the class. Playing these games with teachers allowed them to model a less authoritative role of a teacher.

Encouraging self discipline

Class management strategies were often combined with teaching strategies to settle the class if a story was being told, it would include words which they had studied in the lesson. To control the noise in the class, group captains were appointed and groups were given marks for maintaining silence and discipline. Benches were rearranged to make more space in the classroom and were organized in such a manner that the teacher could approach all the students. Ground rules were formulated such as they had to make sure to visit the toilet and for drinking water during the break and before coming to class. However in case of emergency, they were permitted to visit toilet even during the class hours. Children would always quickly make a line to leave the class and would fight to stand in the front.

Raising awareness about diversity

Various opportunities were provided besides the group trainings to increase awareness about diversity and about the children with disabilities. Students were sensitized that they would help him/her in coming and going out to classroom but at their school's toilet there are steps, he / she would have a problem.

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

There were several supporting factors which helped the child with disability to continue in a regular school. 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. Schools today need to be creative and responsive places, where collaboration among teachers leads to effective problem solving, shared learning, and a cooperative, welcoming school environment. Innovative school and classroom practices are required if education is to serve all students, including those with disabilities, in an effective way. Through participation and learning in the general education classroom, students with

disabilities will have the opportunity to take their place as contributing citizens of communities.

The inclusive schools which have been included in this study have showed initiative in taking on the challenge. All the three schools in this study have provided supportive mechanisms for their enrolled students with disabilities. The categories of support which have emerged from the analysis are academic, physical, psychological and parental support in the school. I have included the parental support within the school support system as this support was an integral part of the inclusive educational system in all the inclusive schools.

The schools have recognized this support and count on it for maximizing the educational experience of children with disabilities studying in the school. All the principals mentioned that the parents had to be involved as they have proved to be the 'best partners' in providing education to their children.

Academic Support

The concept of 'supports' within classrooms is a particularly critical one and refashions inclusion as "supported education" (Snell and Drake 1994). They include accommodations and modifications to enhance learning and acceptance in the regular educational system. All children included in the study had spent at least two years in the school which suggest that the schools were responsive to their needs and were providing facilities to ensure continuity.

One of the schools prepares 'Individualized Education Plan' for each of its children with disabilities. The illustrated IEP had five components, language and writing skills, number concepts and operations, science, general learning and inclusive activities. This particular IEP was developed for a 'slow learner'. In each of the sections curriculum is laid out in consultation with the Principal, parents and regular teacher by the resource teacher. An IEP is prepared for all children with disabilities studying in the school.

The IEP is the blueprint of the curriculum which is followed for the child with disability by the resource teachers. The teaching and evaluations are based on the learning on the child on those defined areas. The schools make the 'writer' available to the children who may need their help. The 'writers' were usually children from lower grades who volunteer their services. Most schools had a policy to give extra time for children with disabilities to complete their examination. In most cases the children with disabilities required personnel supports to allow them to benefit from placement in the inclusive settings in addition to instructional supports. All the inclusive schools had a resource room for students with special needs with at least one

resource teacher. The research studies by Lingard (1994) and Martson (1996) show that a combination of resource and regular classroom teaching results in improved educational progress for students with mild disabilities. I perceived the 'Resource Rooms' to be the cornerstone of inclusion in private inclusive schools of Delhi. They were the 'alibis' of inclusion, their presence meant that the school was open to enrol children with disabilities. Almost all children need remedial teaching and the schools have made a provision of a resource room.

Resource Teachers and Resource Rooms

Thus, where the responsibility of children with disabilities was shared between the resource teacher and the counsellor, the resource teachers did not complain about excessive workload. Also, the resource room was not only meant for children with disabilities as other non-disabled children with behavioural and emotional problems frequented the resource room to attend sessions with the counsellor. This pointed towards the need for school counsellors in the inclusive settings where they could effectively address the psychological needs of all children.

Parental Support

Parents also need to be involved in the education of their children, especially because they can provide the best source of information about their child's particular needs (Hornby, 1995:23). The home-school partnerships are widely accepted as important for success of inclusion for children with disabilities (Strickland & Turnbull 1990; Lewis 1992; Hayes 1998). Parents provide a wealth of information about the child which the school could efficiently utilize for enhancing the education process (Hayes 1998).

CONCLUSIONS

The combination of appropriate steps along with the process will lead to bringing about desired changes successfully. The move towards inclusive education may be a road with major hurdles but it is a not a road which cannot be travelled. The sustaining factor in this entire journey has been the beliefs and values with which the journey began. Inclusive education may take on different meanings for the different schools. Inclusion in schools will appear chaotic and only a deeper observation and understanding of the processes in the class or school may lead to a sense of order behind the chaos. In an inclusive school diversity and differences become a part of everyday life of the school. It will be about each and every child and thus about children first and

will require collaborative efforts between agencies that at present might be working separately or in isolation.

The school has a larger role to play in inclusion, its policies, culture and environment must support inclusion. The creation of this environment involves support from stakeholders within school. How the school helps in developing the right attitude amongst regular teachers, peers and parents of non-disabled children is crucial to understand.

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