



INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN INDIA – CONCEPT, NEED AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Inclusive Education (IE) is a new approach towards educating the children with disability and learning difficulties with that of normal ones within the same roof. It brings all students together in one classroom and community, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses in any area, and seeks to maximize the potential of all students. It is one of the most effective ways in which to promote an inclusive and tolerant society. It is known that 73 million children of primary school age were out of school in 2010, down from a high of over 110 million out-of-school children in the mid-1990s, according to new estimates by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). About Eighty percent of Indian population lives in rural areas without provision for special schools. It means, there are an estimated 8 million children out of school in India (MHRD 2009 statistics), many of whom are marginalised by dimensions such as poverty, gender, disability, and caste. Today, what are the needs and challenges for achieving the goal of inclusive education? How will an inclusive environment meet the needs of children with disabilities? How quality education can be effectively and efficiently delivered for all children? Therefore, inclusive schools have to address the needs of all children in every community and the central and state governments have to manage inclusive classrooms. Keeping in view these questions, this article discusses in detail the concept of inclusive education, including importance, challenges and measures to implement inclusive education in India.

Key words: *Inclusive Education, Children with special needs, Disabilities, Inclusion*



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Introduction

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

In almost every country, inclusive education has emerged as one of the most the dominant issues in the education. With the release of the Salamanca Statement in 1994 (UNESCO), a large number of developing countries started reformulating their policies to promote the inclusion of students with disabilities into mainstream schools. The researches show that teachers in inclusive

settings collaborate more and spend more time planning, learn new techniques from one another, participate in more professional development activities, show a greater willingness to change, and use a wider range of creative strategies to meet students' needs. All school going children, whether they are disabled or not, have the right to education as they are the future citizens of the country. Today it is widely accepted that inclusion maximizes the potential of the vast majority of students, ensures their rights, and is the preferred educational approach for the 21st century.

Concept of Inclusive Education

The principle of inclusive education was adopted at the “World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality” (Salamanca Statement, Spain 1994) and was restated at the World Education Forum (Dakar, Senegal 2000). The Statement solicits governments to give the highest priority to making education systems inclusive and adopt the principle of inclusive education as a matter of policy. The idea of inclusion is further supported by the United Nation’s Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for Person with Disability Proclaiming Participation and equality for all. Inclusive Education (IE) is defined as a process of addressing the diverse needs of all learners by reducing barriers to, and within the learning environment. It means attending the age appropriate class of the child’s local school, with individually tailored support (UNICEF 2007). Inclusive education is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners. At the Jometin World Conference (1990) in Thailand, the goals for 'Education for All' were set and it was proclaimed that every person (child, youth and adult) shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities which would meet their basic learning needs. Inclusion is an educational approach and philosophy that provides all students greater opportunities for academic and social achievement. This includes opportunities to participate in the full range of social, recreational, arts, sports, music, day care and afterschool care, extra-curricular, faith based, and all other activities.

In India, National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) joined hands with UNICEF and launched Project Integrated Education for Disabled Children (PIED) in the year 1987, to strengthen the integration of learners with disabilities into regular schools. In recent years, the concept of inclusive education has been broadened to encompass not only students with disabilities, but also all students who may be disadvantaged. This broader understanding of curriculum has paved the way for developing the National Curriculum Framework (NCF-2005) that reiterates the importance of including and retaining all children in

school through a programme that reaffirms the value of each child and enables all children to experience dignity and the confidence to learn.

Background of the Inclusive Education programme

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

This programme laid special emphasis on the integration of children with mild to moderate disabilities, in line with world trends, and became one of the GOI's largest flagship programmes of the time in terms of funding with 40,000 million rupees (approximately 740 million US dollars). SarvaShikshaAbhiyan (SSA) was launched to achieve the goal of Universalisation of Elementary Education in 2001, is one such initiative. Three important aspect of UEE are access, enrolment and retention of all children in 6-14 years of age. A zero rejection policy has been adopted under SSA, which ensures that every Child with Special Needs (CWSN), irrespective of the kind, category and degree of disability, is provided meaningful and quality education. National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 has laid down a clear context of inclusive education. In 2005, the Ministry of Human Resource Development implemented a National Action Plan for the inclusion in education of children and youth with disabilities. Furthermore, IEDC was revised and named 'Inclusive Education of the Disabled at the Secondary Stage' (IEDSS) in 2009-10 to provide assistance for the inclusive education of the disabled children at 9th and 10th classes. This scheme now subsumed under

RashtriyaMadhyamikShikshaAbhiyan(RMSA) from 2013. It is important to integrate these children into regular schools to help them socialise and build their confidence.

Need and Importance of Inclusive Education

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

The most important function of friendships is to make people feel cared for, loved, and safe. In an inclusive educational setting, low-achieving students are able to get extra help even though they did not qualify for special education. Classmates of students with disabilities also experience growth in social cognition, often can become more aware of the needs of others in inclusive classrooms. An interesting side effect is that these parents report that they also feel more comfortable with people with special needs because of their children's experiences. Students with disabilities can create long-lasting friendships that would not be otherwise possible, and these friendships can give them the skills to navigate social relationships later on in life.

Challenges to implement Inclusive Education in India

In India the number of the disabled people is so large, their problems so complex, available resources so scarce and social attitudes so damaging. The road to achieving inclusive education is a long and varied one, on which challenges and opportunities will arise. India is a multi-lingual, multi-cultural, multi-religious country, and its people are stratified along sharp socio-economic and caste lines. With an estimated 1,210 million people, India is the world's second most populated country after China. It has 17 percent of the global population and 20 percent of the world's out-of-school children. The aim of inclusion is to bring support to the students. The key

purpose has become more challenging as schools accommodate students with increasingly diverse backgrounds and abilities. According to official estimates from the Census of India (Government of India, 2011), the number of people with disabilities in the country is 26 million, or roughly 2.1% of the total population. 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 has created numerous policies around special education since the country's independence. There could be many challenges for educating children with disabilities in regular classrooms. These challenges could emanate from scarcity of adequate human and material resources, negative attitudes of teachers and community, non-disabled peers and their parents. Although the Government of India has attempted to create policies that are inclusive for people with disabilities, their implementation efforts have not resulted in an inclusive system of education. Moreover, the number of students dropping out of school is getting higher, especially in poverty-stricken areas. Students are forced to leave school due to their parents' poor economic condition, and to work to help their parents make ends meet. This leads to the growing number of child laborers, which in turn leads to physical and psychological disabilities. There are particular challenges around negative attitudes and behaviour, on the part of both teachers and parents, in relation to the ability of disabled children to learn. Another serious challenge is the fact that most disabled people are still excluded from equal access to mainstream education.

Large class sizes present another challenge for the implementation of inclusive education in the Indian context. Das, Kuyini and Desai (2013) examined the current skill levels of regular primary and secondary school teachers in Delhi, India in order to teach students with disabilities in inclusive education settings. They reported that nearly 70% of the regular school teachers had neither received training in special education nor had any experience teaching students with disabilities. Further, 87% of the teachers did not have access to support services in their classrooms. According to Sixth AllIndia Educational Survey (NCERT, 1998) about 20 million out of India's 200 million school-aged children (6–14 years) require special needs education. While the national average for gross enrolment in school is over 90 per cent, less than five per cent of children with disabilities are in schools. Acceptance by peers provides a much greater challenge for children with disabilities. Children with disabilities are

often an easy target for being teased and bullied by their non-disabled peers. A large number of children with disabilities live in families with income significantly below the poverty level.

Most of school personnel in India are not trained to design and implement educational programs for students with disabilities in regular schools. Most teacher training programs in India do not have a unit on disability studies (Myreddi& Narayan, 2000). The majority of schools in India are poorly designed and few are equipped to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities. It is also worth noting that there are challenges around procuring and resourcing for assistive devices. Despite various efforts for inclusive education in India, about 94% of children with disabilities didn't receive any educational services. Over and above some of these challenges that India shares with other developing countries are some distinctive features that will make the implementation of educational reform particularly difficult. The commitment of the Government of India to Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) cannot be fully achieved without taking care of special educational needs of the physically and mentally challenged children. Inclusion is becoming a cant and doing the rounds in education circles but there are still a lot of cobwebs surrounding it.

Few measures for implementing Inclusive Education

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

1. The Right to Education (RTE) must apply to all citizens of India. State and central Governments as well as all the other social actors should recognize the importance of a broadened concept of inclusive education that addresses the diverse needs of all learners.
2. A policy of inclusion needs to be implemented in all schools and throughout Indian education system (NCF, 2005). Schools need to become centers that prepare children for life and ensure that all children, especially the differently abled children from marginalized sections, and children in difficult circumstances get the maximum benefit of this critical area of education.

3. The preparation of teachers for rural special education programmes should be planned differently, as the aim of these programmes would be to integrate disabled persons in their own environment and community.
4. As a system, inclusive education should be flexible. Its flexibility must be reflected in the methods and materials used to give these children the widest possible access to the regular curriculum.
5. A school-based support team should develop strategies for the whole school to meet the needs of learners with special educational needs. This team should also be a resource for teachers experiencing problems in their classrooms.
6. 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.
7. Parents have a right to be involved in all decision-making concerning their child. They should be seen as partners in the education process. Where there is such co-operation, parents have been found to be very important resources for the teachers and the schools.
8. Bringing special children into mainstream requires adjustments that schools need to make in advance. Transport facilities should be altered, so that these children can move around with relative ease. Architecturally, there should be ramps and wheelchair access constructed in service areas such as toilets.
9. Student-oriented components, such as medical and educational assessment, books and stationery, uniforms, transport allowance, reader allowance and stipend for girls, support services, assistive devices, boarding the lodging facility, therapeutic services, teaching learning materials, etc should provide according to need of the students.
10. Differently abled children should be treated equally as the normal children and instead of looking them in sympathy their talents and abilities should be recognised for their self-respect and welfare of the society.
11. Necessary school supplies such as audio learning or textbooks in Braille should be made available. Suitable modification to examination system may be required, so as to eliminate pure mathematical and logical assessments.

12. Teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education could be formed and developed in the context of an educational system which can provide some specific conditions in order to have a good practice in this field.
13. Families with children without disabilities should develop relationships with families with children with disabilities and be able to make a contribution.
14. In-service training programmes of two to three weeks' duration for general educators and special educators in all the disabilities and in specific areas of disability should arrange to effectively teach children with disabilities.
15. Those schools that are committed to taking in children with special needs, then teachers must attend workshops in order to be adjusted to the child's needs.
16. Periodic evaluation of the training programmes and constant updating to meet the challenges of changing trends in special education should be part of the planning of teacher preparation.
17. Inclusion should not be the sole responsibility of the specific class teacher. Everybody should be involved and take responsibility. Training for teachers should be sustained and ongoing. It should most importantly focus on attitudinal change.
18. The reform of the curriculum should be made in parallel with a proper training for teachers regarding their knowledge of inclusion and its principles. The curriculum for each of the above programmes should be carefully developed by an expert group which includes practising special teachers.

Conclusion

Right to Education Act 2009 ensures education to all children irrespective of their caste, religion, ability, and so on. It is essential to build an inclusive society through an inclusive approach. In doing so, we have challenged commonly held beliefs and developed a new set of core assumptions. Inclusion is more than a method of educating students with disabilities. It stresses that each child, regardless of the intensity and severity of his or her disabilities, is a valued member of society and is capable of participating in that society. A good inclusive education is one that allows all the students to participate in all aspects of classroom equally or close to equal. To meet the challenges, the involvement and cooperation of educators, parents, and community leaders is vital for the creation of better and more inclusive schools. The Government of India is trying to improve its education system focusing on the inclusive approach. The challenges can be overcome by raising awareness of human rights in communities and publicising positive examples of disabled children and adults succeeding in inclusive education

and in life beyond school as a result. We need to develop an inclusive design of learning to make the education joyful for all children so that the education for them is welcoming, learner friendly and beneficial and they feel as a part of it not apart from it. Therefore, Inclusion arose as a good solution to the question of how to educate these children more effectively.

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