



INCLUSIVE EDUCATION – PROBLEMS, ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Inclusive education (IE) is one of the most effective ways in which to promote an inclusive and tolerant society. It is a new approach towards educating the children with disability and learning difficulties with that of normal ones within the same roof. It tries to address the learning needs of all children with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion. Our education system involves the changing of school cultures that are deeply embedded with exclusively beliefs and values that need to be eradicated lest they remain a challenge to Inclusive Education. 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). In this, 32 million or 53% of the 61 million out-of-school children were girls. Private survey by Pratham, done for HRD ministry, India had put out-of-school children at 4.3%. It means, there are an estimated 8 million children out of school in India (MHRD 2009 statistics), many of whom are marginalized by dimensions such as poverty, gender, disability, and caste. While many educational programmes have attempted to reach out to these previously excluded children, those with disabilities. Indeed there is no other way to provide education to 36 million disabled children. 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 caregivers. 78 percent of Indian population lives in rural areas without provision for special schools. Therefore, inclusive schools have to address the needs of all children in every community to train their teachers to manage inclusive classrooms.

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



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Introduction

Inclusive education (IE) has been defined at various ways that addresses the learning needs of the differently abled children. Indian Society is naturally more inclusive than segregationist

in nature. Inclusive education means that schools 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 (UNESCO, 2003: p4). It is defined as a process of addressing the diverse needs of all learners by reducing barriers to, and within the learning environment. The efforts of the Government of India over the last two and a half decades have been towards providing comprehensive range of services towards education of children with disabilities. 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'. It is known that about 8 million children are out of school in India (MHRD 2009 statistics). The World Declaration on Education for All adopted in 1990 gave further boost to the various processes already set in motion 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 Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994) adopted by the World Conference on Special Needs Education paved the way for inclusive education.

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. Inclusive Education denotes that all children irrespective of their strengths and weaknesses will be part of the mainstream education. It means removing all barriers to provide education for all children. Inclusive education is for all, irrespective of any social community, caste, class, gender and (dis-)ability of the child. 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. 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

Inclusive education is a growing concept, which is continually expanding to achieve the target of Education for All. 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 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. In India, National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) joined hands with UNICEF and launched Project Integrated Education for Disabled Children (PIED) in 1987, to strengthen the integration of learners with disabilities into regular schools. The Kothari Commission (1966) which highlighted the importance of educating children with disabilities during the post-independence period. 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, (NCERT, 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. In order to achieve truly inclusive education, we need to think about and incorporate children with special needs into regular schools.

The government of India is constitutionally committed to ensuring the right of every child to basic education. The Government of India implemented the District Primary Education Project (DPEP) in 1994–95. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), launched in 2001, is one such initiative (GOI, 2005). SSA had a policy of ‘zero rejection’ and mandated that no child with special needs could be neglected or denied enrolment on the basis of a disability. 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, in 2009 IEDC was revised and named ‘Inclusive Education of the Disabled at the Secondary Stage’ (IEDSS). It can be safely assumed that achieving the Education for All (EFA) targets and Millennium Development Goals will be impossible without improving access to and quality of education for children with disabilities.

Challenges to implement Inclusive Education in India

India is a multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-religious country and its people are stratified along sharp socio-economic and caste lines. 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. The idea of unveiling inclusive education is certainly highly relevant to our current conditions, where differences in religion, faith, gender, ethnicity and ability are often seen as a threat rather than a source of richness and diversity. The Government of India has created numerous policies around special education since the country's independence in 1947. The Sixth All India Educational Survey (NCERT, 1998) reports that out of India's 200 million school aged children (6–14 years), 20 million 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. 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. With an estimated 1,027 million people, India is the world's second most populated country. 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.

National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 has laid down a clear context of inclusive education. 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, other estimates suggest that this number may be as high as 30–35 million (Office of the Chief Commissioner of Persons with Disabilities, 2003; Mitchell and Desai, 2005; Singh, 2001). 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. Nearly 71% of the regular school teachers had neither received training in special education nor had any experience teaching students with disabilities. Further, 86% of the teachers did not have access to support services in their classrooms.

There are particular challenges around negative attitudes and behaviour, on the part of both educators and parents, in relation to the ability of disabled children to learn. Despite various efforts for inclusive education in India, about 94% of children with disabilities didn't receive any educational services. 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. A large number of children with disabilities live in families with income significantly below the

poverty level. 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. According to Rao (1990), while disability causes poverty, it is also possible that in a country like India, poverty causes disability. It is also worth noting that there are challenges around procuring and resourcing for assistive devices.

Few Suggestions for implementing Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is about the participation of ALL children and young people and the removal of all forms of exclusionary practice. The Government of India needs to bridge the gaps in their education system to build a strong system of inclusive education. So, there are following measures for better implementation of inclusive education in India.

1. The Right to Education (RTE) must apply to all. State and central Governments should recognize the importance of a broadened concept of inclusive education that addresses the diverse needs of all learners.
2. Inclusive education can be implemented only if its principles are taken into account in the policy-making process. Its principle should be education in the regular classroom whenever possible.
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. This need for 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. 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.
7. 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.

8. Training for teachers should be sustained and ongoing. It should most importantly focus on attitudinal change.
9. Other components should also be included such as appointment of special education teachers, allowances for general teachers for teaching such children, teacher training, orientation of school administrators, establishment of resource room, providing barrier free environment, etc.
10. To implement the current concept of inclusive education, pre-school teachers should have in-service training on disabilities, and future training courses should include education of children with disabilities.
11. Differently abled children should be treated equally as the normal children and instead of looking them in sympathy their talents and abilities should be recognized for their self-respect and welfare of the society.
12. Families with children without disabilities should develop relationships with families with children with disabilities and be able to make a contribution.

Conclusion

Right to Education Act- 2009 ensures education to all children irrespective of their caste, religion, ability, and so on. The process of redefining inclusive education and developing a more applicable approach to the Indian context has taken time. It is essential to build an inclusive society through an inclusive approach. In doing so, however, we have challenged commonly held beliefs and developed a new set of core assumptions. Society has come a long way since the days when special needs students were segregated in separate schools or simply fell through the cracks. 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. 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. Inclusive education clearly has the potential to improve teaching and learning processes for all children, as well as fulfilling their rights. 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.

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