



CHALLENGES, PROBLEMS AND CONSTRAINTS FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION : INDIAN CONTEXT

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INTRODUCTION :-India is a country of significant contrasts whose diverse and complex nature of problems can neither easily be described nor quantified. It boasts of the largest democracy in the world with a population of 1.33 billion representing 17.86 % of world population, 22 official languages, more than 850 spoken dialects, 4 major religions and more than 200 million school going children. This makes the Indian education system 2nd largest in the world. A kaleidoscope of caste, customs, language, dress, nutrition, economic status, education etc. are dominant features of the society.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION & INDIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM :- Inclusive education has been defined in various ways that addresses the learning needs of the differently abled children. Inclusive education is a new approach towards educating the children with disability and learning difficulties with that of normal children. It brings all the students together in one classroom as one community, regardless of their strength and weaknesses in any area and seeks to maximize the potential of all the students. It is one of the most potent weapons against the existing disparities and is the most effective way to build an inclusive and tolerant society.

The Indian education system has gone through substantial and radical changes since the 1990s. One of the goals of National Education Policy, 1986 was to integrate the handicapped with the general community at all levels as equal partners. The World declaration on Education For All adopted in 1990 gave further boost to the processes that already existed in India. The principle of inclusive education was adopted at World Conference on Special Needs Education : Access and Quality, at Salamanca, Spain in 1994. The Salamanca

Statement solicits governments to give highest priority in making education system inclusive and adopt it as a matter of policy. India, being a signatory of the statement has taken up inclusive education as a matter of education policy.

UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE: SEGREGATED, INTEGRATED & INCLUSIVE EDUCATION :-When students with disabilities learn separately from their peers in special schools or separate classrooms, segregated education takes place. It pinpoints the child with disability as the problem in the system and therefore they are given different curriculum and methods of testing. This separation in school often creates separation in other areas of life as well.

Integrated education is similar to Inclusive education but without any commitment to equity. It places students with disability and non-disability in a mainstream classroom with some adaptation and resources. However students are expected to fit in with pre-existing structures, attitudes and unaltered environment.

Inclusive education is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners. It pinpoints system as the problem, not the student. It involves restructuring the culture, policies and practices in schools so that they can respond to the diverse needs of their students. Experts believe that education system is the impediment to learning of a child, otherwise every child is capable of learning.

GOVT. POLICIES & CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION :-School education in India is a joint responsibility of the State govt. and Central govt. While state govt. is responsible for organization and structure of education, central govt. is responsible for quality of education. It is important to note that almost all of the initiatives by the govt. related to education of people with disabilities was undertaken in the last 4 decades.

1. Integrated Education for Disabled Children(IEDC) scheme 1974 was one of the earliest in this field. Its objective included retention of children with disabilities in the regular system for which govt. would provide financial assistance to schools.
2. In the 6th 5-year plan(1980-85), govt. considered education of children with disabilities as a priority.
3. The National Education Policy,1986 recommended a goal to integrate the handicapped within the general community, at all levels as equal partners to prepare them for normal growth.

These earlier efforts brought the issue of Inclusive Education to the forefront of national discourse in the 1990s. After signing the Salamanca Statement, govt. moved forward with exclusive policies on Inclusive Education.

4. Govt. of India implemented Dist. Primary Education Programme (DPEP) IN 1994-95 which laid special emphasis on children with mild and moderate disabilities.
5. In 1996 Persons With Disabilities(PWD) act was passed which put discrimination against persons with disabilities under the purview of law.

A number of other policies were also announced and laws were enacted by the govt. of India subsequently. SarvaSikshaAbhiyan has a policy of Zero Rejection on the basis of disability. In 2005, Union HRD Ministry implemented a national action plan for children and youth with disabilities. Furthermore govt. of India implemented the Right to Education(RTE) act in 2009 to make education a fundamental right in the age group 6-14. RTE is also a legal weapon towards making education inclusive. IEDC was revised in 2009 and named Inclusive Education of the Disabled at the Secondary Stage (IEDSS). This scheme provides another 4 years of free education to the students with disabilities after they complete 8 years of free education under RTE Act. Recently CBSE has set up an inclusion panel for children with special needs. It will act as facilitator for promoting inclusive education at school and in neighbourhoods. Very recently on 16/12/2016 Parliament passed the Rights of Persons With Disabilities bill which replaced the earlier PWD of 1994. The provision of this act are more stringent than the earlier one. It stipulates 2 years imprisonment and a maximum of 5 lac fine for discriminating against differently able persons.

With these policies and acts govt. of India has demonstrated that it is committed to equalizing educational opportunities to all children including those with disabilities. But how much of these commitments have translated into reality warrants careful examination.

PROBLEMS, CONSTRAINTS & CHALLENGES :- The 2011 census identifies the population with disabilities in India at 26.8 million. As per a recent UNICEF report children with disabilities count for one third of total children who are out of school. In developing countries including India, the numbers are more staggering, accounting for more than 80% of out of school children. Out of 2.9 million children with disabilities in India, 1.4 million are out of school which includes 9,90,000 dropouts. Armed with all the policies and laws govt. of India had launched Education for All by 2015. But the above figures reveal a dismal picture of the outcomes that the policy initiatives had aimed to achieve. Why the progress towards the goal of Inclusive Education in India is so poor? Let's discuss the problems, constraints and challenges.

PROBLEMS :- India has the dubious record of having more than 15% of total out of school students in the world. The sheer size of the population makes task of the govt. quite formidable to bring them back into school. Apart from the size the needs of the out of school students is quite diverse in terms of culture, tradition, social and economic needs. This has been aptly described by Baquer and Sharma in their book “ Disability: Challenges vs Responses”. Commenting on the PWD act of 1994 they have written “ In a country like India, the number of disabled are so large, their problems so complex, available resources so scarce and social attitude so damaging, it is only legislation which can eventually bring about a substantial change in a uniform manner. Although legislation cannot alone radically change the fabric of the society in a short span of time, it can nevertheless, increase accessibility of the disabled to education and employment’. Even after 2 decades of enactment of PWD act, large scale discrimination against disables still persists. Therefore govt. replaced it with the more stringent Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. Unless, normal people learn to treat the people with disabilities as equal, inclusive education for all in India is still a far cry.

COSTRAINTS :- As per 2011 census majority of the 26.8 million disable population in India reside in rural areas. Out of 2.9 disable children, more than 71% reside in rural India. Poverty, unemployment, income disparity, orthodoxy in culture and tradition etc. live side by side in rural areas. The mentioned constraints are so big that it restricts majority of the students with disabilities to get formal education. Secondly there are still hundreds of villages in rural areas which don't have even a primary school. How a student with disability can go to a faraway place to get education? This acts as a big constraint. But more than anything, social attitude in rural area is quite damaging. Students with disabilities are subjected to social seclusion and are not allowed to share the classroom with normal students. Discrimination in the name of customs, caste, culture and tradition pose a major hurdle in the govt. initiative of inclusive education to all.

CHALLENGES :- Constitutional provisions with new amendments are there, stringent laws are in place, policies are in plenty, efforts of govt. agencies, NGOs and other stakeholders are there as per guidelines of International Agencies, but still the results of inclusion are abysmally low, even after 25 years of India signing the Salamanca Statement. What are the reasons? Where are we lacking? Are we prepared for the challenges? Such questions are bound to arise. We are going to discuss the key challenges which are most likely to have contributed to the dismal record of India in implementing inclusive education.

1. Understanding Disability:- One of the most significant challenge that seem to have affected the process of inclusive education is how disability is defined and understood in India.

Although disability is defined in many ways, the two most accepted models are Individual model and Social model. Individual or medical model states that disability resides within the individual and can be explained in medical terms. On the other hand Social model defines disability as barrier caused by the society for an individual. Society needs to change its practices as per individual's needs. Though social model seems to have more merit, sadly medical model is more predominant in India. As UNESCO states, rather than seeing problems residing within an individual, policy makers should understand that providing high quality education to children with disabilities (CWD) is most likely to result in better services for all.

It is necessary to redraft the policies and acts to make the paradigm shift from the earlier ones which see the problem of disability as residing within an individual.

Conceptualising Inclusive Education :- A UNESCO report states, " An inclusive inclusive education system can only be created if ordinary schools become more inclusive"- otherwise speaking, if they become better at educating all children in their communities. In India inclusive education is mainly seen as the education of students with disabilities in regular school. As per a study by Singhal and Rouse, inclusive education is only a linguistic shift in India and is taken more as a Western Concept rather than an indigenous one. Even govt. documents have often used the term inclusive education interchangeably with integrated education.

The ambiguity must be cleared from the minds of all the stakeholders so that no problem arises while implementing the govt. policies on inclusive education.

Teacher Education :- Lack of teacher education is a major barrier to inclusive education in India. Currently, B-ED programmes are exposed to education of children with disabilities through one or two theory based subjects. Previously these courses were offered as optional subjects, only recently they have been made compulsory. This is an indication that within teacher education programmes, education of children with disabilities is not seen as the primary responsibility of regular school teachers. Isn't it a pity that, unintentionally our teacher's programmes are preparing teachers for exclusion rather than inclusion? These programmes must be reformed at the national level to prepare good teachers to impart inclusive education.

Lack of Resources :- The resources and infrastructure for inclusive education includes basic facilities such as ramps, adequate lighting, wheelchairs etc. to enable a child with disability to attend a mainstream school. Such challenges are far greater in rural areas. In addition there is severe shortage of special education teachers, physical therapists and teacher aides etc. Large class sizes also pose a big problem to inclusive education which requires individual attention.

Teaching Practices :- The entire success of inclusive education hinges on the classroom teacher's ability to differentiate instructions and provide modifications to students with disabilities. However studies have shown that teachers in India lack this critical skill. A majority of teachers use large group instructions as a dominant form. This barrier severely limits educational opportunities for a student with disability to receive appropriate education.

Lack of Support by Administrators:- Successful inclusion programmes require supportive leadership and mentoring at school level. Most of the administrators, especially in privately managed schools, succumb to the academic success rates and neglect the education of disadvantaged groups which includes students with disabilities. Leave alone inclusive education, children with disabilities were not even allowed admission in these schools. But things have changed positively with the implementation of RTE Act. However, unless there is an attitudinal change, no policy or law will succeed.

CONCLUSION :-Inclusive Education is still at a nascent stage of conceptualization and implementation in India. The fact that it is being discussed, debated and in few places implemented, demonstrates the willingness of a nation to adapt to the new concept. Visionary leadership of the policy makers and redefined role for the classroom teachers are two key elements of Inclusive Education. Collaboration, synchronization and best practices among all the stake holders are very important to make it successful. So long as the aim to achieve education for a majority of children takes precedence over meeting the needs of children with disabilities, inclusive education will continue to be sporadic and painfully slow.

India is a huge country with extreme diversity in terms of caste, customs, language, religion, access to resources etc. With such diversity, one method may succeed in one state whereas it may fail in another state. Therefore we have large number of policies to suit everyone. But the most important is mindset- mindset of political leaders, policy makers, teacher educators and all other stakeholders. They need to understand that disability is more of a social and human rights issue than a medical issue. Providing education to children with disability should not be seen as a charitable issue, it's rather a systemic issue. We need partnership over partisanship to solve manmade problems. India's much ambitious quest of Education for All can only succeed if we do away with the terms like Segregated education, Integrated

education, Inclusive education and merge them all into the term Education. Inclusive education should be a way to provide high quality education to all, not just to children with disabilities. Only then we will be able to make an open, friendly and dynamic society in India.

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