



CHALLENGES, PROBLEMS AND CONSTRAINTS IN IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSION: INDIA CONCERN

Dr. Subhedar Bhagyashri Prabhakarrao

Assistant Professor, Govt. College of Education, Parbhani

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 is Inclusive Education?, what are the challenges for achieving the goal of inclusive education? What are the policies concerning education of children with disabilities? What are the problems of Inclusive Education in India? What are the suggestions to overcome the problems? Keeping in view these questions, this article discusses in detail the concept of inclusive education, including importance, challenges, problems and constraints to implement inclusive education in India.

Keywords: *Inclusive Education, Challenges, Problems, Constraints, Suggestions*



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▪ What is Inclusive Education?

“Inclusive Education is defined as a learning environment that promotes the full personal, academic and professional development of all learners irrespective of race, class, colour, gender, disability, sexual preference, learning styles and language”

.(NCSNET,1997,South Africa)

Inclusive Education is based on the principle that schools should provide for all children regardless of any perceived difference, disability or other social, cultural and linguistic difference. The diverse needs of these learners and the quest to make schools more learning – friendly requires regular and special education teachers to consult and collaborate

with one another as well as with family and community in order to develop effective strategies, teaching and learning (Jelas, 2010)

▪ **Policies Concerning Education of Children With Disabilities**

The Constitution of India and the educational policies envisaged in post-independent India reflect perseverance and commitment to the fulfilment of UEE. The Constitution states that 'free and compulsory education should be provided for all children until they complete the age of 14 years'. The first education commission in India (Kothari Commission, 1964–66) addressed issues of access and participation by all. It stressed a common school system open to all children irrespective of caste, gender, community, religion, economic condition and social status.

In 1968, the National Education Policy followed the commission's recommendations and suggested the expansion of educational facilities for physically and mentally handicapped children and the development of an 'integrated programme' enabling handicapped children to study in regular schools.

Two decades later, the National Policy on Education (NPE) (1986) stressed the 'removal of disparities' in education, while attending to the specific needs of those who had been denied equality so far (MHRD, 1986).

In 1987, to fulfil the provisions for disabled children in the NPE, the government launched the Project for Integrated Education Development (PIED). According to the NPE, 'the indicators of integration are that handicapped people who enjoy the same rights as the rest; have opportunities for growth and development in environmental conditions available to the rest; have access to the quality of life like any other citizen; and are treated as equal partners in the community.'

The programme of action outlined measures to implement the policy including massive in-service training programmes for teachers; an orientation programme for administrators; the development of supervisory expertise in resource institutions for school education at the district and block level; and provision of incentives such as supply of aids, appliances, textbooks and school uniforms.

The NPE underwent modifications in 1992 (MHRD, 1992). It made an ambitious commitment to universal enrolment by the end of the Ninth Five-Year Plan for both categories of disabled children: those who could be educated in general primary school, and those who needed to be educated in special schools or special classes in general schools. It also called for the reorientation of pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes.

The NPE (1986) and revised NPE (1992) are the guiding policies at all levels. The most notable pedagogical recommendation is as follows.

‘Curriculum flexibility is of special significance for these children. Special needs for these children will be met if child-centred education is practiced. Child-to-child help in education of the children with disabilities is an effective resource in view of large classes and multi-grade teaching.’

The Equal Opportunities and Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 1996 called for the education of children with disabilities up to the age of 18 years in an appropriate environment.

▪ **Problems of Inclusive Education in India :**

Inclusive education is a binding and priority for Govt. of India. However, a wide gap in policy and practice of inclusive education. There are number of barriers that hinder proper practice of inclusive education in our country.

1. Skills of teachers
2. Attitude towards inclusion and disability among teachers, administrators, parents, peers and policy planners
3. Lack of awareness about children with disabilities among general teachers
4. School environment including difficulties in physical access
5. Support services
6. Family collaboration
7. ICT availability

▪ **Challenges in Implementation of Inclusion :**

▪ **Challenges at macro level :**

One of the most significant challenges at macro level that seems to have affected the progress of the country is how disability is defined and understood in the country. Understanding disability Albert (2004) stated that, the actions we take to address barriers faced by disability largely depend on how we understand disability. Although disability is defined in many ways, two models which predominately feature in the literature are the individual model and the social model. The individual model is also known as the medical or deficit model (Albert, 2004). Within this model disability is seen to reside within an individual, and can be explained in medical terms.

The social model, meanwhile, defines disability as caused by barriers that society creates for an individual. Society thus needs to change its practices to meet the individual's needs. There is some merit in the social model compared to the medical model. In India, it

seems the individual or medical model is predominant, and there is evidence of this stance even at the highest level. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is mainly responsible for the welfare of people with disability. It defines a person with a disability as someone with a condition that falls into one of the following categories: locomotor, visual, hearing, speech or mental (GOI, 2005). The medical model has permeated almost all policy and legislative documents. For example, among the most significant national legislation on disability, the PWD Act (1995) defines a person with disability as: “a person suffering from not less than forty per cent of any disability as certified by a medical authority” (any hospital or institution, specified for the purposes of this Act by notification by the appropriate Government). As per the act “Disability” means – (i) Blindness; (ii) Low vision; (iii) Leprosy-cured; (iv) Hearing impairment; (v) Loco motor disability; (vi) Mental retardation; (vii) Mental illness’ (GOI, 2011, p. x). Changing policy and legislation requires a significant paradigm shift. Rather than seeing problems residing within an individual, policy makers need to understand that providing high-quality education to children with disabilities (CWD) is a systemic issue (UNESCO, 2005). It is the system’s responsibility to provide high-quality education for all. Policy makers and implementers also need to understand that providing high-quality education to CWD is most likely to result in better services for all students, not just CWD (Peters, 2004). It may, therefore, be necessary to redraft policies and make necessary amendments to the Acts so that the necessary paradigm shift is evident in policies in which the problem is currently seen as residing within an individual (Peters, 2004; UNESCO, 2005).

Conceptualising inclusive education 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, 60 Support for Learning · Volume 30 · Number 1 · 2015 © 2015 NASEN 2005). It seems the way in which inclusive education is defined and understood may be another critical challenge in providing quality education to children with disabilities. There are wide variations in how ‘inclusive education’ is defined and operationalized; terms such as ‘integrated education’ and ‘inclusive education’ are frequently used interchangeably. Singal (2005b) is of the view that inclusive education is largely adopted from the international discourse and has not been engaged within the Indian context.

▪ **Challenges at micro level :**

India’s unique challenges and characteristics, such as low levels of economic infrastructure and literacy and its unique cultural and social background, are daunting obstacles to the implementation of inclusive education. On the one hand, the educational

system is influenced by prevailing societal perceptions and governmental policies; on the other, it propounds a specific value system and social order. In India, sectoral challenges to inclusive education can be understood and discussed in the context of socio-economic and cultural issues, governmental and policy issues and educational and capacity-building issues. All of these have an effect on the planning, organisation and management of inclusive schooling (Bhatnagar and Das, 2013). We will focus our discussion on barriers at the school level, however; namely, lack of resources, absence of supportive leadership and lack of requisite teaching practices. Lack of resources The literature has consistently indicated that an overwhelming majority of schools in India lack the necessary physical resources to implement inclusive education (Bhan and Rodricks, 2012; Bhatnagar and Das, 2013; Shah et al., 2014; Sharma © 2015 NASEN Support for Learning · Volume 30 · Number 1 · 2015 63 et al., 2009). These resources include basic facilities such as ramps, adequate lighting and availability of wheelchairs, among other physical resources needed for a child to attend a mainstream school. Such challenges are greater for schools located in rural areas and those located in distant, hilly terrains. In addition to a lack of these required physical resources, there is a severe shortage of required personnel such as special education teachers, teacher aides, related service professionals (speech and language therapist, physical therapist and occupational therapist) and other school professionals (Shah, 2005). In the absence of such key professionals, inclusion endeavours turn out to be no more than ‘child dumping’ in many instances. According to the Ministry of Human Resource Development, in 2007 there were only 6,678 resource teachers employed under SSA – a minuscule amount, given the number of students with disabilities in the country. Unnikrishnan (2010) argued that in certain situations where professionals are present, they are not in fact trained to work in an inclusive setting. Many of these professionals include special education teachers who have been trained in the clinical model, for example by working with a child in a one-on-one setting. Meeting the needs of children with disabilities in an inclusive environment therefore presents a significant challenge for these professionals. Large class sizes present another challenge for the implementation of inclusive education in the Indian context. According to the Government of India’s own accounts (SarvaSiksha Abhiyan,2000, Evaluation Report, 2010), class sizes of 40 students or more are widespread in states such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. This, compounded by a lack of trained professionals, severely limits the ability of regular school teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Reducing class size may not be a solution; preparing teachers to teach in large classes and using existing resources to address the barrier of large class sizes is necessary. Teaching practices The entire

premise of inclusive education hinges on classroom teachers' ability to differentiate instruction and provide necessary modifications for students with disabilities. However, a number of authors (Shah, 2005; Unnikrishnan, 2010) have pointed out that regular schoolteachers in India lack familiarity with these critical skills. In addition, a vast majority of the teachers utilize large-group and didactic instruction as a dominant form of instructional delivery. The literature is clear about the limited benefits for students with disabilities when such methods are used predominantly (Shah, 2005). This barrier therefore severely limits the educational opportunities for a child with a disability to receive an appropriate education in India.

Lack of supportive leadership Successful inclusion programmes requires supportive leadership at the school level. Although there is limited literature available on administrators' support for inclusion in the Indian context, it can be said that many administrators, especially those at privately managed schools, succumb to academic and test-score pressures and neglect the education of disadvantaged groups, including those with disabilities. This is evident from the low levels of enrolment of children with disabilities in these schools, in spite of the government's efforts to promote inclusion in the past four decades. Up until the implementation of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act or Right to Education Act (2009), many children with disabilities were denied even admission to their neighbourhood public school, let alone the provision of inclusive education. This is still taking place in schools across India. School leadership and management is, however, under close scrutiny by the government for any denial of educational rights of children with disabilities (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2009).

▪ **Suggestions to overcome the problems :**

- To develop an educational system which can properly respond to all the needs of all children in school?
- The separate teacher education programs for regular and special education do not equip teachers with an integrated knowledge of the expected roles, functions and responsibilities to meet the diversity of learning needs in the classroom. To develop a " Whole faculty approach" in facilitating an inclusive pre-service teacher education curriculum embedded across all discipline areas.

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