



CHALLENGES IN PREPARING TEACHERS FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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Abstract

Inclusive education stands for improvement of schools in all dimensions to address the educational needs of all children. Recommendations to send children with disabilities to mainstream schools were first made in the Sargent Report in 1944, and again in 1964 by the Kothari Commission. Despite this, the change has been slow, with segregation in special schools dominating the scene until recently. There is no need of reinforcing the fact that teacher education remains a very weak link with respect to equipping teachers to be prepared for an inclusive classroom environment. As a result teacher education programs have made attempts to incorporate inclusive education as part of their curricula. The teacher education diplomas and degrees offer "Education of children with special needs" as an optional subject, in order to prepare teachers to identify and diagnose disability. The challenges and prospects in India are elucidated in the present paper.

Keywords: *Inclusive education, challenges, holistic perspective.*



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Introduction

There are an estimated 25 million children out of school in India many of whom are marginalized by factors such as poverty, gender, disability, caste, religion etc. Therefore undoubtedly the idea of inclusive education is certainly highly relevant to our current condition, where differences in religion, faith, gender, ethnicity and ability are often seen as a threat rather than a source of richness and diversity. Inclusive education stands for improvement of schools in all dimensions to address the educational needs of all children.

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 seeks to address the learning needs of all children with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion. It implies all learners – 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. This is possible only in flexible education system that assimilates the needs of diverse range of learners and adapts itself to meet these needs. Inclusion is not an experiment to be tested but a value to be

followed. All the children whether they are disabled or not have the right to education as they are the future citizens of the country. In the prevailing Indian situation resources are insufficient even to provide quality mainstream schools for common children, it is unethical and impracticable to put children with special needs to test or to prove anything in a research study to live and learn in the mainstream of school and community. The principle of inclusive education was adopted at the “World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality” (Salamanca, Spain 1994) and was restated at the World Education Forum (Dakar, Senegal 2000).

The 1995 Persons with Disability Act (PDA) states that disabled children should be educated in integrated settings where possible, although it seems that the lack of implementation may be due to there being no enforcement agency for this legislation. Despite the promotion of inclusive education, govt. documents focus on inclusive education as being about including children with disabilities in the education system, but not specifically the mainstream (2005a). However, inclusion in the education system is not the same as inclusion in the mainstream. It is however arguable that special education is in fact regarded as superior in India due to its preferred status and that it is inclusion in the mainstream that is currently seen as the resource – constrained inferior alternative. However the limited coverage of mainly urban-based, impairment specific special schools in India may result in the exclusion of children with disabilities who do not fit the categories of their institutions or who live in rural areas. Inclusive education may be the only way of facilitating educational access for these children.

A focus on physical access to school, rather than access to curriculum and equal treatment once in the classroom is an additional barrier to inclusion, possibly resulting in dropout. too argues that government policy focus on resources and physical access (e.g. distribution of aids and appliances), or infrastructure such as ramps in schools, and the notion of social justice through equal distribution of benefit, seems to be more about inputs, not processes like pedagogy, curriculum or attitudes. It is this focus which results in selection of the relatively few-“Easy to accommodate children” with mild or moderate disabilities that do not need too much specialist assistance. This apparently selective inclusion, with children being ‘prepared’ in order to be ‘ready’ for the mainstream (NIEPA, 2003) seems to give inclusive education an exclusive favour, although this may be because homogeneity in the classroom can be perceived as an essential prerequisite to enable good teaching. This appears to directly contradict the understanding of inclusive education as a concept which is all about embracing

diversity in the classroom. Despite islands of govt. programme success, disability budgets remain under used (Thomas, 2005), and reserved jobs unfilled. These are sure signs of sporadic implementation of inclusive education, as is the persistently low percentage of children with disabilities being in school

Inclusive Education in Developing Countries

Inclusive education is defined by UNESCO as a process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of all learners by increasing participation in learning and reducing exclusion within and from education. This means that all children have the right to a quality education that caters, to the extent possible, to their individual needs. Some countries have been successful in promoting inclusive education practices and policies that remove barriers and create conditions which enable all children to learn. However, in poorer developing countries, the process of creating an inclusive system is more difficult. Factors such as lack of available funding, administrative and policy level support, and trained personnel pose challenges that can slow down progress. As a result of these difficulties, some countries may choose to begin the process by first focusing on one group of children with the long-term goal of eventually including all excluded groups

Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) Action Plan:

An outline of MHRD action plan is presented below: National Policy for Persons with disabilities

- To complement and supplement IEDC and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan programmes in the movement from integration to inclusion.
- Enrolment and retention of all children with disabilities in the mainstream education system. (Free and compulsory education from 0 to 14 under draft Bill/free education 0 to 18 years under PWD Act).
- Providing need based educational and other support in mainstream schools to children in order to develop their learning and abilities, through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource and partnership with their communities.
- Support higher and vocational education through proper implementation of the existing reservation quota in all educational institutions and creation of barrier free learning environments.
- Disability focused research and interventions in universities and educational institutions.

- Review implementation of existing programmes, provisions to identify factors leading to success or failure of the drive towards enrolment and retention of children with disabilities in mainstream educational settings. Address administrative issues arising out of review.
- Generating awareness in the general community, activists and persons working in the field of education and more specifically among parents and children that the disabled have full rights to appropriate education in mainstream schools and that it is the duty of those involved in administration at every level including schools to ensure that they have access to education.
- Ensure enrolment and intervention for all children with special needs in the age group 0-6 years in Early Childhood Care and Education Programs.
- Facilitate free and compulsory elementary education for children with special needs in the age group 6-14 (extendable to 18 yrs.) in mainstream education settings currently under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) (SSA is a governmental program shared by both union and state governments for achieving universal elementary education in India by 2010) .
- Facilities for transition of young persons with disability wishing to pursue secondary education.
- Ensuring physical access of children and youth with disabilities in schools and educational institutions by enforcing the requirement for provisions of universal design in buildings and provide support in transportation.
- Development of national norms for Inclusive Education, to set standards of implementation, training, monitoring and evaluation for the program.
- Provide inputs in all pre-service and in-service training for mainstream and special education teachers to enable them to work with children with disability in an inclusive education system.
- Appropriate Resource Services support through appointment of special educators, rehab professionals, provision of resource rooms etc., to support mainstream schoolteachers in the classrooms.
- Put in place an effective communication and delivery system for specific delivery of TLM, aids and appliances, hardware/software.
- Participation in sports, co-curricular activities, to promote all round ability development.

- Ensuring physical access for young persons with disabilities (18 plus age group) in all colleges and educational institutions by enforcing the requirement for provisions of universal design in buildings and provide support in transportation.

Teacher Education Programmes

There is no need of reinforcing the fact that teacher education remains a very weak link with respect to equipping teachers to be prepared for an inclusive classroom environment. The teacher education diplomas and degrees offer “Education of children with special needs” as an optional subject, in order to prepare teachers to identify and diagnose disability. However it gives them a holistic perspective with respect to dealing with diversity or challenge negative attitudes. This reinforces the ‘difference’ of children with disabilities who, some believe, can only be taught by teachers qualified specifically for them. Although, it is ultimately teacher treatment of students in the classroom, rather than the training per se, that would reinforce this difference. Interestingly, distrust in both the special and mainstream education systems leads some parents to keep children with disabilities at home for fear of their abuse or neglect in the classroom; which may then be interpreted by teachers as a lack of community interest in education for their children, as demonstrated in the PROBE Report (PROBE,1999). There is evidence to suggest that many teachers do not feel equipped to teach children with disabilities and complain that they need more time to instruct these students. Many government programmes have included a teacher training component in an attempt to instigate institutional change. However, a ‘special needs’ focus and a lack of training for management, combined with didactic training methodology do little to alter the classroom. The poor quality educational provision in many schools is reflected in the fact that many govt. job reservations for adults with disabilities remain unfilled. It is more likely to be directly related to the fact that very few children with disabilities get to, or stay in, school that there is a lack qualified, let alone confident candidates.

Pre requisites for inclusion:

Inclusion is a complex issue. The curriculum is a powerful tool (Swann, 1988) . There are three pre requisites for inclusion:

- a) The preparation of the child
- b) The preparation of the receiving schools,
- c) The preparation of parents, but it could not be achieved without,
- d) The preparation of the teachers.

- a. **The preparation of the child:** Some children with special needs may require some prior training before they are placed in a regular school. Special educators made available for the purpose can provide such training and thereafter CWSN may be admitted in mainstream schools. States of Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh have conducted exclusive residential bridge course for CWSN to prepare them for regular schools but in rest of the states it is not yet to be done..
- b. **The preparation of receiving schools:** Some mainstream secondary schools may be selected and developed as “Model Inclusive School” on priority basis. First of all barrier-free access to CWSN are made in all such institutions. Effort should be taken to provide disabled-friendly facilities in these schools. Development of innovative designs to provide an enabling environment for CWSN should also be made in these schools as a part of preparation programme
- c. **The preparation of parents:** It has been seen that the parents/guardians of CWSN generally face problems, both social and psychological resulting into marginalisation and exclusion of CWSN in mainstream schools. Hence, it is important to undertake widespread awareness among the people especially parents of CWSN. They should be counsel so that they may prepare themselves to send his/her ward to mainstream schools. The preparation of the child: Some children with special needs may require some prior training before they are placed in a regular school. Special educators made available for the purpose can provide such training and thereafter CWSN may be admitted in mainstream schools. States of Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh have conducted exclusive residential bridge course for CWSN to prepare them for regular schools but in rest of the states it is not yet to be done..
- d. **The preparation of teachers:** In India teacher training in special education is imparted through both face-to-face and distance mode.

Prospects of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is a developmental approach seeking to address the learning needs of all children, youth and adults with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion. An increasing number of publications, policy papers, workshops etc. have supported the ideology of inclusion. Some organizations and people, however, doubt whether the ordinary classroom can provide quality education for disabled children. This debate has been on, ever since people began to voice their reservation against

old segregated institutions and in turn raised their concern for equality of disabled children. These concerns must be taken seriously and dispelled by showing examples of positive experiences, which clearly demonstrate that inclusive education most definitely addresses quality issues in education. The major goal of inclusive education is the Flagship goal. Recognizing the right to education, the Flagship seeks to unite all EFA partners in their efforts to provide access to quality education for every child, youth and adult with a disability. The Flagship has been formed by an alliance of diverse organizations, including global disability organizations, international developmental agencies, intergovernmental agencies, and experts in the field of special and inclusive education. In order to reach this goal, the flagship will:

- Have the full participation of persons with disabilities and families in the design of all Flagship activities.
- Promote the full participation of persons with disabilities and families in the development of policies and guidelines related to the education of persons with disabilities at local, national, regional and global levels.
- Seek to ensure that all governmental entities, donors and NGOs endorse the universal right to education for all children, youth and adults with a disability.
- Act as a catalyst to fully incorporate the Flagship goal into national plans of action and regional policies.
- Seek to ensure that the EFA monitoring process includes specific quantitative and qualitative statistics and indicators related to persons with disabilities and documentation of resources allocated to the implementation of EFA for these individuals.
- Identify and disseminate effective practices and stimulate research and studies related to the Flagship goal to include such areas as:
 - Quality teacher education
 - Curriculum and pedagogy
 - School organization including adequate accessible facilities
 - Aids and appropriate materials many countries have developed programs, which promote equality of opportunity by allocating specific funds to areas of social and

economic need. If inclusion is to be successful, the following parameters need to be taken care of:

- Encouragement provided by the community for including children with disabilities in local schools
- Readiness of the general education system to accept responsibility for education of children with disabilities
- Willingness of parents of children with disabilities to send their wards to local schools
- General classroom teachers to be equipped to manage the education of children with disabilities
- Enrolment rate of children with disabilities at least 1% with that of nondisabled children.
- Retention of children with disabilities in schools.
- Availability of support from peer group to children with disabilities and vice-versa in teaching learning processes.
- Comparable achievement of children with disabilities in curricular and co-curricular activities as par with their capabilities.
- Availability of specialist teacher support, if possible to the regular classroom teachers.

Thus, we as teachers, parents, teacher-educators etc., have to facilitate the implementation of inclusive education not only as a program but also as an ideology- an ideology based on the principles of human rights approach wherein stress is laid on giving importance to the individual and respecting his/her potentiality in the teaching learning process.

An Inclusive Teacher Preparation Model

One of the greatest barriers to achieving this goal is the preparation teachers receive at the pre service level. Several researchers have noted the lack of professional training in inclusive techniques and practices for general and special education teachers. If teacher education programs are to prepare educators to be successful in the classrooms of the future they must re conceptualize and redesign their approach to pre service preparation of teachers.

Techniques and Strategies for Inclusive Education

Several researchers (Baker and Zigmond, 1990; Schumm and Vaughn, 1995; Giancreco, Dennis, Cloninger, Edelman, and Schattman, 1993) have noted the lack of professional training in inclusive techniques and practices for general and special education teachers. A tremendous amount of money is spent on in service training to give teachers instructional skills to teach students with diverse needs. These resources could

be directed elsewhere if teachers could emerge from their pre service training already possessing those skills. Pre service preparation should address appropriate accommodations in curriculum, instructional activities and evaluation procedures, the modification of materials, and the effective identification, development and utilization of resources. In addition, the pre service program should prepare teachers to use various types of instructional arrangements such as multi-level teaching, cooperative learning and peer tutoring. The third component of an inclusive teacher preparation model relates to Collaborative Experiences. The two previous components apply primarily to the classroom. This component relates to the field based experiences of the prospective teacher.

To Prepare Teachers for Inclusive Educational Settings

- 1) Instruction in the components of collaborative teaching;
- 2) Instruction in teaching strategies for inclusive settings;
- 3) Practicum experiences in inclusive settings;
- 4) Modelling of collaborative teaching by university professors;
- 5) Collaboration with practicing teachers regarding needed skills and experiences
- 6) Utilization of experts and specialists on inclusive practices via distance learning;
- 7) The development of web-based courses;
- 8) The development of a support network for new teachers in inclusive setting

Three Essential Components for Capacity Building in Inclusive Education

1. Increase Awareness and Attitudinal Change through Advocacy
2. Create a Future of Trained Professionals: Pre-Service Training
3. Build on Existing Human Resources: In-Service Training and Professional Development

And also there should be a, criteria for selection of teachers.

- Have positive attitudes towards children with disabilities
- Hold good qualifications and pedagogical performance records
- Be confirmed as long-term resources for schools and districts by local education authorities
- Demonstrate good collaboration and communication skills
- Have good skills as a trainer and facilitator
- Have a sound professional reputation
- Possess good counselling skills.

Conclusion

Preparing teachers at the pre service level to teach in inclusive settings is essential if our schools are to truly teach all students in inclusive, collaborative, and diverse settings. To accomplish that we must start designing and building an atmosphere of collaboration and inclusiveness at the pre service level, as well as practices that demonstrate to prospective teachers the possibilities and promise of an inclusive world,

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