

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN INDIA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT: Inclusive Education denotes that all children irrespective of their strengths and weaknesses will be part of the mainstream education. The feeling of belongingness among all community members – teachers, students and other functionaries is developed through inclusive education. Inclusive education is for all, irrespective of any social community, caste, class gender and (dis-) ability of the child. This is a world where 120 million children are not enrolled in primary school. There are an estimated 30 million children out of school in India (MHRD statistics, cited in World Bank), many of whom are marginalized by dimensions such as poverty, gender, disability, and caste. Many educational programmes have attempted to reach out to these previously excluded children, but those with disabilities are often forgotten, emphasizing their invisible status in a rigidly categorized society. 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. The major support for inclusive education came from the 1994 World conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca, Spain which emphasized that: Schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. Thus inclusive education is an approach that ensures the presence, participation and achievement of all students. In this paper an attempt has been made to discuss the issues relating to the challenges and prospects of inclusive education in India. The paper analyses the issues and constraints faced by the stakeholders involved. This is followed by discussion of the implications for the future of inclusive educational for the children of India.

Keywords: Inclusive education, challenges, prospects, approach

Acronyms

EFA	Education for all
IE	Inclusive Education
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisations
UEE	Universalization of elementary education
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a powerful instrument of social change, and often initiates upward movement in the social structure. Thereby, helping to bridge the gap between the different sections of society. The educational scene in the country has undergone major change over the years, resulting in better provision of education and better educational practices. The inclusion of children with special needs in educational settings has become a primary service option since the adoption of the UNESCO's Salamanca statement and framework for action of special needs education (UNESCO, 1994)⁴¹. Although inclusion may mean different things to different people, it is generally believed to mean the extent to which a school or community welcomes children with special needs as full members of the group and values them for the contribution which they make. The children actively belong to, are welcomed by and participated in a mainstream school and community (Farrel,2004)¹⁷. Thus, inclusive education is about presence, participation and achievement of all learners (Ainscow, 2005, Engelbrecht and Green, 2007). Inclusive education means including children with disabilities in regular classroom that have been designed for children without disabilities (Kugelmass, 2004)²¹. It is an educational practice based on the social premise of justice that advocates for equal access to educational opportunities for all children regardless of their physical, intellectual emotional or learning disability (Loreman et al, 2005)²². Inclusive education is an endeavour to recognize and take into account the sameness of learners while at the same time paying due regard to differences and diversity among individuals concerned (Norwich, 1996). Lipsky and Gartner (1997) feel that inclusive education is not a reform of special education. It is the convergence of the need to restructure the public education system to meet the needs of a changing society. They go on to saying that it is a system by which both typical students as well as students with special needs accrue benefits. The premise of their thoughts states that inclusive education is not merely a characteristic of a democratic society, it is essential to it. It is an attempt to meet the unique needs of every child in a regular school setting. All children, in spite of their disability, try to participate in all facets of school life The aim of inclusive education is to remove the historical exclusion within and outside the school through enactment or modification of legislation, policies and educational management practices in order to promote the reorganization of the educational

systems and the acceptance of all students independently of their differences (Rustemier, 2002, Rieser, 2009)27,28. Differences among students could be related to disability, gender, size, colour or ethnicity and disability is just one of the differences and does not limit one's strength and abilities. Inclusive education recognizes that these differences are valuable and bring creativity and through them ideas are shared and experienced. In other words, inclusion is about transforming systems to be inclusive of everyone and not about inserting persons with disabilities into existing structures (UNICEF, 2009)43. Inclusive education extends the scope of the school so that it can include a greater diversity.

1.1 PRINCIPLES OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The important principles of inclusion are:

- Sharing of responsibilities of functionaries working at different levels;
- Providing additional support to children;
- Development of a collaborative framework to meet the additional needs and interests of children;
- Implications for various types of disabilities;
- Knowledge about family and social environment of children;
- Modifications in Teaching-Learning strategies/modalities;
- Improving professional competencies of teachers;
- Ensuring community support and support of other functionaries working at different levels

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The present study was undertaken with the following broad objectives:

- 1.) To study the concept of inclusive education in context of Indian scenario.
- 2.) To study the need for inclusive education in India.
- 3.) To study the problems being faced in implementing inclusive education in India by various stakeholders
- 4.) To study the future implications by the various stakeholders to cope with emerging problems and issues regarding inclusion of children with special needs.

3. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Keeping in view of availability of the resources and feasibility of the present research paper, the research study is conducted on the basis of secondary sources of data. Secondary data has been collected from various books, Journals, research articles etc. The methodology of the study also includes the thoughts and writings of various authors in the stream of academics and research.

4. THE CONTEXT

4.1 Inclusive Education in the Indian Context

In India we have a rich cultural legacy for inclusive education and India has always been and is still today an inclusive society in the sense that a very wide variety of cultural and religious beliefs exist side by side. 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 (Julka, 2005). Despite this, change has been slow, with segregation in special schools dominating the scene until recently. The Equal Opportunities and Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 1995 was comprehensive breakthrough legislation that provided for education and economic rehabilitation of people with disabilities. It states that free education for children with disabilities up to the age of 18 years must be provided in an appropriate environment. The government has recently launched the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). This proposes to implement 'universalization of elementary education' (UEE) in a mission mode with a focus on providing quality elementary education to all children in the age group 6–14 years. Inclusive education is an integral component of SSA, and promises to make 'education for all' a reality by 2010. Programmes launched in the recent past have been able to make only a limited UNICEF's Report on the Status of Disability in India 2000 states that there are around 30 million children suffering from some form of disability. The Sixth All-India Educational Survey (NCERT, 1998) reports that 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 school. There are an estimated 25 million children out of school in India (MHRD 2003 statistics, cited in World Bank, 2004), 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.

4.2 Characteristics of Inclusive Education

The main characteristics of inclusive education are as follows:

- 1.) Acknowledges that all children can learn.
- 2.) Acknowledges and respects differences in children; age, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, HIV &

TB status etc.

- 3.) Enablers education structures, systems and methodologies to meet the needs of all children.
- 4.) Is part of a wider strategy to promote an inclusive society.
- 5.) Is a dynamic process that is constantly evolving.

5. NEED FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN INDIA

According to UNESCO (1994), regular schools with an inclusive orientation are most effective in combating discriminatory attitudes, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all. Furthermore the foreword of UNICEF (2003), focussed on inclusive education in India, estimates that “70% of children with disabilities, including those with mild mental retardation, can attend regular schools provided the environment is designed to be accessible and the institution is willing to accommodate them”.

1) RTE mandates free and compulsory education to all children from 6-14 years of age. The key objective of RTE- SSA is Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE). This goal of UEE, has further been facilitated by the Constitutional (86th Amendment) Act, making free and compulsory elementary education as a Fundamental Right, for all the children in the age group of 6-14 years. Hence inclusive education has become an important component of SSA.

2) More than 90% of disabled children are found in the rural areas in India. The special school as well as integrated education programmes are only a few in numbers and cannot serve all disabled children. Therefore, inclusive education is needed to provide equal educational opportunities to all disabled children.

3) In most part of the country, disabled children of different categories are present. Therefore, the disabled child has to depend on the general school for education. As a result, inclusion is inevitable for these children.

6. CHALLENGES FACED BY STAKEHOLDERS

The key stakeholders in inclusive education are teachers, schools and administrators, parents of children who are physically and intellectually challenged and last but not least the local community. Adequate academic as well as administrative support is the key for the success of inclusion of children with disabilities in general schools. Simply enrolment of these children will not serve the purpose of inclusion. Respecting need of each child is a real challenge for the teachers and administrators. The basic challenges confronted by the stakeholders associated with inclusive are as follows:-

a.) Teachers- Many teachers do not feel equipped to teach children with disabilities and complain that they need more time to instruct these students. In teachers it is found that, there is a lacking of the necessary attitude, skills and competencies required to deal effectively with children with various special educational needs. The number of skilled and trained teachers for supporting inclusive practices is not adequate to meet the needs of different types of disability.

b.) School & Administrators:- Majority of schools in India are poorly designed and few are equipped to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities. The lack of disability friendly transport services and inaccessible building are considered by some to be far greater problems than social prejudice and negative attitudes. Besides this, architectural barrier are also an important obstacles as school buildings do not have facilities of ramps, accessible toilets, etc. In terms of school administration teaching methodology and rigid curriculum acts as a barrier. In a regular school it is difficult to provide special material and method in the instructional setting. The curriculum lacks the required flexibility to cater to the needs of children with disabilities. There are limited developmentally appropriate teaching-learning materials for children both with and without disabilities. The teaching-learning process addresses the individual learning needs

of children in a limited way.. Thus in short it can be said that lack of physical facilities and inclusive infrastructure for those with disabilities, lack of training to teachers either pre-service or in-service, to “address the learning needs of all children including those who are marginalised and disabled” (Julka, 2012), lack of pedagogical research for effective teaching in inclusive settings, lack of inclusive culture and inclusive practices in schools, lack of “knowledge base about various impairments... and how it effects the learning process” (Auluck, 2012) and lack of special co-educators in schools. Gillies & Carrington (2004) point to a dire need to review the attitude, organisational structures, curriculum and pedagogical practices of education to guide a transformation regarding inclusion of all children.

c.) Parents:- Parents mostly seek to get the right kind of help for their children. They even don't know how to deal with the behavioural challenge of their wards. Families do not have enough information about their child's particular disability, its effects and its impact on their child's capacity. This often leads to a sense of hopelessness. Parents can have apprehensions of ridiculed of their child by other children. Parents of a child with disability may prefer the protective special class to the large regular class where their child may not get attention from the teacher. It is difficult for them to avail appropriate services and programs to fulfill their child's needs.. There have been occasions where the parents of a child without any special needs were also afraid that their child might 'behave' in an odd manner by being with children with special needs.

d.) Community:- Children, parents, families, teachers and education officials all live in communities. Community involvement and partnerships between government agencies and NGOs have been lacking in promoting inclusive education. UNESCO (2010), identifies public attitudes as a barrier to equal education of people in India. Research indicates that negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities may lead to low expectations which in turn can lead to reduced learning opportunities (Sharma, Forlin, Loreman and Earle, 2006). The provision of resources and the involvement of the community in identification and intervention in

the child's own milieu need emphasis and focus. In short, in community due to low level of awareness, it becomes difficult to make realistic interventions to overcome the problems of such child's needs.

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS TO COPE WITH EMERGING

PROBLEMS AND ISSUES

Possible strategies adopted so as to address and tackle some of the emerging problems and issues regarding inclusion of children with disabilities by the various stakeholders are as follows:-

a.) Teachers:- Training for sensitization towards disability and inclusion issues, and how to converge efforts for effective implementation of programmes, are of important concerns. The teacher would need to be provided with intensive training to work with various disabilities and would then act as an integration specialist or an inclusion facilitator for one or a number of schools located in close proximity. Sharma, K (1992)³⁰ suggest that the curriculum for pre-service training programs should be carefully developed. The training of general teachers at pre-service and in-service levels should address the issue of education of children with disabilities, so that teachers are better equipped to work in an inclusive environment. Some of the issues in training that need to be addressed include the methodology to be adopted for identifying children with disabilities; classroom management; use of appropriate teaching methodologies; skills for adapting the curriculum; development of teaching-learning materials that are multi-sensory in nature; evaluation of learning; etc

b.) School & Administrators:- Based on the type of disabilities the school is likely to admit, the some basic infrastructural changes. Building of ramps, railings, disability friendly toilets, and magnified sign boards may be some of these. An effective communication and delivery system for specific delivery of teaching/ learning material, aids and appliances, hardware/ software etc. must be provided. Thus, schools should use variety of innovative practices to get children involved and participating in learning processes. Some of the inclusion strategies are listed as under-

- Teaching students to look for ways to help each other.
- Utilizing physical therapy, equipment such as standing frames, so that students who use wheelchairs can stand when other students are standing.
- Encouraging students to take the role of teacher and deliver instruction.
- Focusing on the strength of a student with special needs.
- Peer tutoring, Co-operative learning, Multidisciplinary Approach, Collaborative Teaching,
- Teaching and Activity Based Learning should be used for the better results in the present scenario.

Beside these, it is expected from school administrators to provide appropriate resource services support through appointment of special educators, rehab professionals, provision of resource room, etc to support mainstream schoolteachers in the classrooms. In short, It is essential that issues related to infrastructural facilities, curriculum modification and educational materials should be addressed by them.

c.) Parents:- Parents need to be trained in the development and evaluation of their own children. They must be encouraged to send their wards to local schools and also train them to manage the use of low cost teaching materials. Resource teachers should train parents and other family members alongside disabled children when developing disabled children's potential and daily life-skills at home. Parents must provide a social environment which is gender-sensitive and child-friendly.

d.) Community:- Community should humanize education by promoting awareness, acceptance and feasible techniques for inclusive education. The attitude that 'inclusive education is not an alternative but an inevitability, if the dream of providing basic education to all children is to ever become a reality' needs to be cultivated among all community members. Linkages also need to be established between community-based rehabilitation programmes and inclusive education. Community involvement and partnerships between government agencies and NGOs will act as an instrumental in promoting inclusive education.

8. CONCLUSIONS:- The success of inclusive education in any context depends upon many factors. Teachers themselves are an essential component to ensure the quality of students' inclusion in the school and teacher education institutions. Preparing teachers with essential knowledge and skills for inclusive education requires the commitment of all factors. The literature has identified many of the challenges that face the full and successful implementation of inclusion. Inclusion without 'adequate' preparation of general schools will not yield satisfactory results. It is essential that issues related to infrastructural facilities, curriculum modification and educational materials should be addressed. Building the capacity for inclusive education must be done at community level, by including awareness activities such as community involvement, community mobilization. Thus, to conclude it can be said, that, including children with disabilities in education is a challenging task and needs a mass community mobilization and involvement and above all provision of appropriate responses to wide spectrum of learning needs of special children in both formal and non-formal settings.

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