

Inclusive Education in India

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Abstract: Inclusive Education is a new approach towards educating the children with disabilities and learning difficulties with that of normal ones within the same roof. It brings all students together in one classroom and community irrespective 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.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Children with special needs, Disabilities, Inclusion, Govt initiatives

Introduction

Inclusive education has been defined at various ways that addresses the learning needs of the differently abled children. The efforts of the Government of India over the last seven decades have been towards providing comprehensive range of services towards education of children with disabilities. In 1974, the centrally sponsored scheme for Integrated Education for Disabled Children was introduced to provide equal opportunities to children with disabilities in the area inclusive education can be traced back to National Education 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.

The World Declaration on Education for All adopted in 1990 gave further boost to the various processes already set 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 National Policy for Person with Disability (NPPD 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 caretakers. Most recent advancement is the Right of Children for Free and Compulsory Education (2009) which guarantee right to free and compulsory education to all children between ages six to fourteen. But PWD Act ensure 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. Inclusion is an effort to make sure that diverse learner those with disabilities, different languages and cultures, different homes and family lives, irrespective of their strengths and weaknesses will be part of the mainstream education.

In almost every country, inclusive education has emerged as one of the most the dominant issues in the education. With the release of the **Salamanca Statement** in 1994 (UNESCO), a large number of developing countries started reformulating their policies to promote the inclusion of students with disabilities into mainstream schools. The researches show that teachers in inclusive settings collaborate more and spend more time planning, learn new techniques from one another, participate in more professional development activities, show a greater willingness to change, and use a wider range of creative strategies to meet students' needs. All school going children, whether they are disabled or not, have the right to education as they are the future citizens of the vast majority of students ensures their rights, and is the preferred educational approach for the 21st century.

Concept of Inclusive Education

The principle of inclusive education was adopted at the World Education Forum solicits governments to give the highest priority to making education systems inclusive and adopt the principle of inclusive education as a matter of policy. The idea of inclusion is further supported by the United Nation's Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for Person with Disability Proclaiming Participation and equality for all. Inclusive Education is defined as a process of addressing the diverse needs of all learners by reducing barriers to, and within the learning environment. Inclusive education is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners.

In India, National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) joined hands with UNICEF and launched Project Integrated Education for Disabled Children (PIED) in the year 1987, to strengthen the integration of learners with disabilities into regular schools. 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 (NCF-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.

Importance of Inclusive Education

There have been efforts internationally to include children with disabilities in the educational mainstream. In order to achieve truly inclusive education, we need to think about and incorporate children with special needs into regular schools. Especially, because these kids face some sort of barriers to learning and participation in the classroom. As general education classrooms include more and more diverse students, teachers realize the value of accepting each students, even though their individual goals may be different. We have learned that inclusive education is a better way to help all students succeed. Researches

show that most students learn and perform better when exposed to the richness of the general education curriculum. The growing body of research has shown that children do better academically when in inclusive settings and Inclusion provides opportunities to develop relationships. Some of the benefits include: friendships, social skills, personal principles, comfort level with people who have special needs and caring classroom environments.

The most important function of friendships is to make people feel cared for, loved, and safe. In an inclusive educational setting, low-achieving students are able to get extra help even though they did not qualify for special education. Classmates of students with disabilities also experience growth in social cognition, often can become more aware-of the needs of others in inclusive classrooms. An interesting side effect is that these parents report that they also feel more comfortable with people with special needs because of their children's experiences. Students with disabilities can create long-lasting friendships that would not be otherwise possible and these friendships can give them the skills to navigate social relationships later on in life

Challenges to implement Inclusive Education in India

In India, the number of the disable 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. They are as follows –

Society with Cultural diversity

India is a multi-lingual, multi-cultural, multi-religious country, and its people are satisfied along sharp socio-economic and caste lines. With an estimated 1,250 million people, India is the world's second most populated country after China. 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. According to official estimates from the Census of India, the number of people with disabilities in the country is 26 million (2.4%) of the total population. However, UNICEF's Report on the Status of Disability in India (2000) states that there are around 30 million children in India suffering from some form of disability. 10% of the world's population lives with a disability, and 80% of these people with disabilities live in developing countries.

Multi Policies on Education

The Government has created numerous policies around special education since the country's independence. There could be many challenges for educating children with disabilities in regular classrooms. These challenges could emanate from scarcity of adequate human and material resources, negative attitudes of teachers and community, non-disabled peers and their parents. 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.

Negative attitudes of Parents

Moreover, the number of students dropping out of school is getting higher, especially in poverty-stricken areas. Students are forced to leave school due to their parent's poor economic condition, and to work to help their parents make ends meet. This leads to the growing number of child labors, which in turn leads to physical and psychological disabilities. There are particular challenges around negative attitudes and behavior, on the part of both teachers and parents, in relation to the ability of disabled children to learn. Another serious challenge is the fact that most disabled people are still excluded from equal access to mainstream education.

No Training in Special Education

Large class sizes present another challenge for the implementation of inclusive education in the Indian context. The current skill levels of regular primary and secondary school teachers in India in order to teach students with disabilities in inclusive education settings. They reported that nearly 70% of the regular school teachers had neither received training in special education nor had any experience teaching students with disabilities.

Teasing by Non-disabled peers

The national average for gross enrolment in school is over 90 per cent, less than five cent of children with disabilities are in schools. 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.

Poor Family Back Ground

A large number of children with disabilities live in families with income significantly below the poverty level. Most of school personnel in India are not trained to design and implement educational programs for students with disabilities in regular schools.

No unit on disability studies

Most teacher training programs in India do not have a unit on disability studies. The majority of schools in India are poorly designed and few are equipped to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities. It is also worth noting that there are challenges around procuring and resourcing for assistive devices. Despite various efforts for inclusive education in India, about 94% of children with disabilities didn't receive any educational services.

Over and above some of these challenges that India shares with other developing countries are some distinctive features that will make the implementation of educational reform particularly difficult. The commitment of the Government of India to Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) cannot be.

Student-oriented components, such as medical and educational assessment, books and stationery, uniforms, transport allowance, reader allowance and stipend for girls, support services, teaching learning materials, etc should provide according to need of the students.

Differently abled children should be treated equally as the normal children and instead of looking them in sympathy their talents and abilities should be recognised for their self-respect and welfare of the society.

Necessary school supplies such as audio learning or textbooks in Braille should be made available. Suitable modification to examination system may be required, so as to eliminate pure mathematical and logical assessments.

Teacher's attitudes towards inclusive education could be formed and developed in the context of an educational system which can provide some specific conditions in order to have a good practice in this field.

Families with children without disabilities should develop relationships with families with children with disabilities and be able to make a contribution.

In-service training programs of two to three week's duration for general educators and special educators in all the disabilities and in specific areas of disability should arrange to effectively teach children with disabilities.

Periodic evaluation of the training programs and constant updating to meet the challenges of changing trends in special education should be part of the planning of teacher preparation.

Inclusion should not be the sole responsibility of the specific class teacher. Everybody should be involved and take responsibility. Training for teacher should be sustained and ongoing. It should most importantly focus on attitudinal change.

The reform of the curriculum should be made in parallel with a proper training for teachers regarding their knowledge of inclusion and its principles. The curriculum for each of the above programs should be carefully developed by an expert group which includes practicing special teachers.

Conclusions

Right to Education Act (2009) ensures education to all children irrespective of their caste, religion, ability, and so on. It is essential to build an inclusive society through an inclusive approach. In doing so, we have challenged commonly held beliefs and developed a new set of core assumptions. Inclusion is more than a method of educating students with disabilities. It stresses that each child irrespective of the intensity and severity of his / her disabilities, is a valued member of society and is capable of participating in that society.

A good inclusive education is one that allows all the students to participate in all aspects of classroom equally or close to equal. 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. The Government of India is trying to improve its education system focusing on the inclusive approach. The challenges can be overcome by raising awareness of human rights in communities and publicizing positive examples of disabled children and adults succeeding in inclusive education.

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