



Inclusive Education in the Indian Context

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Abstract:

Inclusive education services allow children with disabilities to stay with their family and to go to the nearest school, just like all other children. This circumstance is of vital importance to their personal development. Interrupting a disabled child's normal development may have far more severe consequences than the disability itself. Children with disabilities are minorities that are not prioritized in the context of education programmes in India, although they are often found in many marginalized groups that are catered for if non-disabled? For example, girls, scheduled tribe, scheduled caste, and other backward caste children. Inclusive education may be a way of merging these children's needs in order to improve school quality and achieve Education for all. However, dominant special needs conceptualizations of Inclusive education in India, combined with negative attitudes towards disability, are currently preventing this approach. Inclusive Education in the Indian Context is elucidated in the present paper.

Keywords: *Education in India, access to education, inclusion, exclusion, disability, inclusive education.*

Introduction

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. 'When good

inclusion is in place, the child who needs the inclusion does not stand out. The inclusive curriculum includes strong parental involvement, students making choices, and a lot of hands-on and heads-on involvement.' Inclusive education "is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners." It involves restructuring the culture, policies and practices in schools so that they can respond to the diversity of students in their locality."

For a school to be inclusive, the attitudes of everyone in the school, including administrators, teachers, and other students, are positive towards students with disabilities. Inclusive education means that all children, regardless of their ability level, are included in a mainstream classroom, or in the most appropriate or least restrictive environment (LRE), that students of all ability levels are taught as equals, and that teachers must adjust their curriculum and teaching methodologies so that all students benefit. This also avoids wasting resources, and "shattered hopes," which often occurs in classrooms. That are "one size fits all." Studies have shown that systems that are truly inclusive reduce drop-out rates and repetition of grades, and have higher average levels of achievement, compared to systems that are not inclusive. People who believe in inclusive education believe that the education system is the impediment to learning for a child, and that every child is capable of learning. Inclusive education 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 (Dash, 2006). Inclusive education means that all students attend and are welcomed by their neighborhood schools in age-appropriate, regular classes and are supported to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of the life of the school. Inclusive education is about how we develop and design our schools, classrooms, programs and activities so that all students learn and participate together. After independence, the Indian Constitution directed the state to ensure provision of basic education to all children up to the age of 14 years. The education of people with disabilities was, however, not explicit in the early constitutional provisions except for guaranteeing similar rights for people with disabilities as other members of society. The Education Commission of

1966 (Kothari Commission) drew attention to the education of children with disabilities. In 1974, for the first time, the necessity of integrated education was explicitly emphasized under the scheme for Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC). In pursuit of the goal of providing basic education for all, the National Policy on Education (1986) and its follow-up actions have been major landmarks. The World Declaration on Education for All adopted in 1990 gave further boost to the various processes already set in motion 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 enactment of the People with Disability Act in 1996 provided legislative support. This act makes it mandatory to provide free education to children with disabilities in an appropriate environment until the age of 18 years. In 1999, the government passed the National Trust for Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act for the economic rehabilitation of people with disabilities. These acts have been instrumental in bringing about a perceptive change/ improvement in the attitude of government, NGOs and people with disabilities. In recent years, two major initiatives have been launched by the government for achieving the goals of universalization of elementary education (UEE): the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) in 1994 and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in 2002. Inclusive education strives to address the learning needs of children with special needs, with a particular focus on those who are subject to being isolated and excluded. The philosophy behind inclusive education is to promote opportunities for all children to participate, learn and have equal treatment, irrespective of their mental or physical abilities. While the awareness on inclusive education in schools throughout the country is still at an infancy stage, educational institutions are somewhat sceptical about having both normal and special children studying in the same classroom. And in circumstances, where a former excluded child is given admission into a mainstream classroom, the outcome of the action is questionable. As a system, inclusive education should be flexible. Its principle should be education in the regular classroom whenever possible. This need for flexibility must be reflected in the methods and materials used to give these children the widest possible access to the regular curriculum. When discussing the kind of service needed, the starting point should always be what is best for the particular child. Emphasizing inclusive education does not rule out special schools or centres. They would still be required to cater to children with profound and complex difficulties in need of more specialised and extensive help, including e.g. many deaf children. This alternative should, however, not be considered, unless classroom placement cannot meet their needs. In India, a majority of children with special needs do not receive any formal education, in spite of the practice of inclusive education in some schools. This is because children with disabilities and learning deficiencies are segregated from mainstream schools and other regular routines and social activities of normal

children. Other contributing factors to this situation are lack of affordability and awareness on the kind of education choices available to children with special needs.

It is the implementation of the 'policy and process' that allows all children to participate in all programmes. 'Policy' means that disabled children should be accepted without any restrictions in all the educational programmes meant for other children. It denotes equality, and accepts every child with his own unique capabilities. This principle must be accepted by all the international, national and local programmes. The 'process' of inclusion denotes the ways in which the system makes itself welcoming to all. In terms of inclusion of disabled children, it means the shift in services from 'care of the disabled child' to his 'education and personal development'. Inclusive education goes one step further by defining these children as 'children with special needs' who need special attention, rather than children who are 'impaired' or 'handicapped'. Inclusive education is nothing but 'Making the programme for disabled children as an integral part of the general educational system rather than a system within general 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. While a large number of developed countries (e.g. USA, Canada, Australia) now have policies or laws promoting "inclusive education," a number of developing countries continue to provide educational services to students with disabilities in "segregated" schools. Typically, inclusive education means "that students with disabilities are served primarily in the general education settings, under the responsibility of [a] regular classroom teacher. When necessary and justifiable, students with disabilities may also receive some of their instruction in another setting, such as [a] resource room" (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2004, p.7).

Define inclusive education?

Children learning together in the same classroom, using materials appropriate to their various needs, and participating in the same lessons and recreation: that is inclusive education. In an inclusive school, children with disabilities do not study in separate classes; instead teaching methods, textbooks, materials, and the school environment are designed so that girls and boys with a range of abilities and disabilities — including physical, sensory, intellectual and mobility impairments — can be included in the same class. By definition, inclusive education includes all learners, but it may be interpreted differently according to the context. For example, while it covers children excluded on the

basis of language, gender, ethnicity, disability and other factors, Leonard Cheshire Disability focuses on children with disabilities.

Objectives of policies on inclusive education

1. The governments have to give the highest policy and budgetary priority to improve their education systems to enable them to include all children regardless of individual differences or difficulties.
2. The governments have to adopt as a matter of law or policy the principle of inclusive education, enrolling all children in regular schools unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise.
3. The training programmes for the teachers have to include the education of disabled children.
4. All children have access to general education system, to expand the coverage to reach the unreached population.

Benefits of Inclusive Education

All children benefit from inclusive education. It allows them to:

- Develop individual strengths and gifts, with high and appropriate expectations for each child.
- Work on individual goals while participating in the life of the classroom with other students their own age.
- Involve their parents in their education and in the activities of their local schools.
- Foster a school culture of respect and belonging. Inclusive education provides opportunities to learn about and accept individual differences, lessening the impact of harassment and bullying.
- Develop friendships with a wide variety of other children, each with their own individual needs and abilities.
- Positively affect both their school and community to appreciate diversity and inclusion on a broader level.

Education is a right

Every child in the world has the right to a primary education: this lies at the heart of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agreed by every country in 2000. Although disability was not originally included in the MDGs, this was rectified in September 2010 when disability was officially

acknowledged with regard to the MDGs. MDG 2 — universal primary education (UPE) — was reinforced by the world's most recent human rights treaty, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), when it came into force in 2008.

Legislation and Policy in India

The Constitution of India (26 November, 1949), clearly states in the Preamble that everyone has the right to equality of status and of opportunity. The Article 41 of the Directive Principles of the Indian Constitution supports the right to work, education and public assistance in certain cases including disablement. Further, Article 45 commits to the provision of free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years. Based on this, the Constitution (86th Amendment) Act 2002 has been enacted by the parliament making education a fundamental right of all children in the age group of 6-14 years. Moreover the 93rd Amendment to the Constitution of India (now renumbered as the 86th), passed by the Lok Sabha on November 28, 2001, makes it mandatory for the government to provide free and compulsory education to “all children of the age of 6-14 years”, with its preamble clarifying that “all” includes children with disabilities as well. Yet inevitably again, vital loose ends of such enabling legislation and policies are not tied up.

"Inclusive education is a guaranteed long term investment with excellent returns but a very very high premium that we all have to contribute towards in the short-term," says Alur. Children with special needs (CWSN) are unable to cope with mainstream schools. "Lack of adequate support from the authorities and the society which still views disability only on sympathetic grounds leads to insufficient opportunities for inclusion," says Wadhwani adding post completion of primary education, there aren't sufficient secondary schools or vocational training centres for child with special needs which allow them to progress and become independent in life. This has resulted in many children not getting fair chance on inclusive education. 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, the change has been slow, with segregation in special schools dominating the scene until recently. 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 (Singal, 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 (Mukhopadhyay and Mani, 2002) and that it is inclusion in the mainstream that is currently seen as the resource – constrained inferior alternative. Inclusive education is a step forward from integrated or special school system. In the

special school concept, the special education component is apart of the general education system, whereas in the integrated approach, the special education is a part of the general education. Inclusive education goes one step further, in this approach; the special education is an integral part of the general education system.

Challenges to inclusive education in India

- Large class sizes and a low student-teacher ratio are problems for all children and teachers in some countries, and can reduce enthusiasm for teaching what may be seen as even more diverse ability ranges in a class.
- Many children walk long distances to attend school, and a combination of a lack of adequate transportation, difficult terrain, poor quality roads and the associated cost to families make many schools inaccessible to girls and boys with disabilities.
- The lack of educational psychologists or even the regular use of simple assessment tools means that many teachers are unaware of the potential or needs of the young people in their classrooms.

Conclusion

Inclusive education must respond to all pupils as individuals, recognizing individuality as something to be appreciated and respected. Inclusive education responding to special needs will thus have positive returns for all pupils. All children and young people of the world, with their individual strengths and weaknesses, with their hopes and expectations, have the right to education. It is not our education systems that have a right to a certain type of children. Therefore, it is the school system of a country that must be adjusted to meet the needs of all its children." Children with special needs have a distinctive experience undergoing inclusive education along with normal, non-disabled classmates. There are several barriers for providing education to special children in a regular classroom. Inclusive Education views disabled children as a part of the whole school system, right from enrolment. They are there in their respective community. It is a strategy to develop teaching and a methodology of teaching, using special Instructional material to reach all children, and not particularly any group. It provides options in such a way where all children can learn viz. teaching is planned and presented in such a way to reach all. The success of inclusive education programs depends on a number of variables. One such variable, and perhaps the most important one, is the regular classroom teacher. The nature of their work has undergone a tremendous change since the implementation of inclusive

education programs in India. They are now required to perform a number of additional tasks in order to meet the needs of diverse learners. This paper first discusses the change in their roles and responsibilities in the context of inclusive education.

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