

ARTICLE

Inclusive Education in India

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Introduction

Inclusive Education means including children with disabilities in regular classrooms that have been designed for children without disabilities (Kugelmass, 2004). It means an education system that accommodates all children regardless of their physical, Intellectual, social, emotional or other conditions. The range of challenges confronting the school system while including children with diverse abilities and from different backgrounds have to be met by creating child centered pedagogy capable of successfully educating all children. It leads to the development of social skills and better social interaction because learners are exposed to real environment in which they have to interact with other learners each one having unique characteristics, interests and abilities. The non-disabled peers adopt positive attitudes towards learners with disabilities as a result of studying together in an inclusive classroom.

Inclusion involves all students having the right to be truly included to actively participate with others in the learning experience provided, to have access to a education system that delivers a quality education that is best suited to their unique competencies, skills and attributes (Ainscow 2000, Farrell, 2000, Fisher, D Riad, V, and Frey NN, 2002)

The Inclusive Schools demand reconstructed educational thinking and practice in regular schools for the benefit of all students (Slee). This involves reconstructing and realigning the whole system and the entire component parts so that “assessment, curriculum, instruction, professional development, program evaluation and accountability..work systematically to ensure meaningful and sustained school improvement” (Smith, 1998)

India is home of nearly 30 million children with special needs, and 82.74% out of which are enrolled in regular schools, it is more challenging to provide quality education to all of them. As for any other group, education is critical to expand the life prospects of people with disabilities. Disabled people have much lower educational attainment rates, with 52 percent illiteracy against a 35 percent average for the general population.

Report of the National Workshop on Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) (2008) states that 30.38 lakh Children with special need (CWSN) were identified in 2006-07 as compared to 14.59 lakh CWSN identified in 2003-04. Similarly the enrolment of children with disabilities/CWSN in 2006-07 has gone up to 19.97 lakh, as compared to 1.71 lakh in 2003-04. The current coverage of children with disabilities is 21.86 lakh (71.99 percent) thus leaving approximately 30 percent of the identified children with disabilities out of the education system. In SSA, 1.70 million children with disabilities have been enrolled in regular schools (MHRD, 2007) This increasing enrolment of CWSN in regular schools brings a difficult task for the teachers, as they are bound to provide quality education to CWSN without any discrimination.

Concept of Inclusive Education

In School, Inclusion has been used to refer to the placement of students with disabilities in ordinary classrooms alongside their peers (Kugelmass, 2004) Inclusive Education is a process of increasing the participation of all students in school, including those with disabilities (Ainscow 2000). Inclusive Education, as an approach, address the learning needs of all children, youth and adults with a specific focus on those who are verge of marginalization and exclusion. It implies all learners, with or without disabilities being able to learn together through access to common pre school, schools and community educational setting with an appropriate network of support services. All stakeholders in the system(learners, parents and community, teachers and administrators, policy makers) to be comfortable with diversity and see it as a challenge rather than a problem It is a dynamic process because it addresses all aspects of child development-emotional, mental, physical, intellectual, creative and social. It is changing the rigid school system in order to meet the needs of all children.

Principles of Inclusive Education

The UNESCO Salamanca statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994) articulated the underlying principle on which inclusive education is based. These are -

- Every child has a fundamental right to education.
- Every child has unique characteristics, abilities, interests and learning needs;
- Education systems need to accommodate this diversity in student population
- Those with special education needs must have access to regular schools;
- Regular schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of achieving education for all.

Moreover is stated as argued that inclusive school provide an effective education for children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost effectiveness of the entire education system (Gillies and Carrington 2004)

Characteristics of inclusive education:

According to Pinnock H and Lewis I (2008) Inclusive Education is a dynamic process that reflects the followings features:

- Acknowledge that all children can learn.
- Acknowledge and respects differences in children: age, gender, language, disability.
- Enables education structures, system and methodologies to meet the needs of all children.
- Is part of a wider strategy to promote an inclusive society
- Is a dynamic process that is constantly evolving

Inclusion does not mean dumping children with special needs into the regular classroom. Every one should accept their diversity, respect their individuality, create opportunities for participation on school activities and apply better teaching strategies, which are beneficial for disabled and non-disabled both. .

The need for inclusive Education

The facts regarding Inclusive Education in the Indian are as follows:

1. The special schools as well as integrated education programmes are only a few in numbers and cannot serve all disabled children. There fore, inclusive education is needed to provide equal educational opportunities to all disabled children in their own locations.
2. One specialist teacher serves 8 to 10 disabled children of the same category. This approach is not practical in rural areas. In most villages 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 from rural areas.
3. The extent of disability in each category ranges from mild to severe. The mild and moderate cases are more in numbers then the severe cases and they depend on the general education system. This calls for the involvement of general education so that the children who are currently left out of schools or those who are at risk can be served.

In reality in India there is need for Inclusive Education. However, the general education system is yet to be fully sensitized to the educational needs of children with disabilities and therefore, the general system needs the assistance of specialist teachers for occasional help to make inclusive education work. For furthering the objectives of Education for all, It considered that schools should accommodate all children regardless of their Physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions.

Inclusive Education in India

During the 1880s Christian missionaries started schools for the disabled on grounds of charity. This was followed by the government initiatives to establish separate workshop model schools, central Braille presses and employment exchange for the disabled population of the country.

In the 1970s the Integrated Education for Disabled Children scheme was launched by the government for providing educational opportunities to learners with SEN in regular schools. The statistics show that through the integration of learners with SEN gathered some momentum, the coverage under this scheme remained inadequate. There was a clear need for fuller access of children with SEN to all educational opportunities.

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) joined hands with United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and launched Project Integrated Education for Disabled Children (PIED) in the year 1987, to strengthen the integration of learners with disabilities into regular school. An external evaluation of this project in 1994 showed that not only the enrolment of learners with disabilities increase considerably. But the retention rate among disabled children was also much higher than the other children in the same blocks.

After the world conference on Special Need Education in Salamanca in 1990s. inclusion became the magic word in the educational field. The Salamanca statement adopted by representatives of 92 governments and 25 international organizations has, in fact, set the policy agenda for inclusive education on a global basis. India is a signatory to the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994) that emphasizes access to quality education for all.

The national policy on education (NPE)1986 envisaged measures for integrating the physically and mentally handicapped with the general community as equal partners, to prepare them for normal growth and to enable them to face life with courage and confidence.

The 86th Amendment of the Constitution of India has made education a fundamental human right for children in the 6 to 14 age group thereby making it mandatory for all children to be brought under the fold of education. This includes children with disability.

Though awareness is being created by the inclusion of learners with SEN in major educational programmes like the DPEP and now the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) most of them address SEN as a segregated issue rather than as one that runs through all initiatives. This is supported by the fact that under the SSA, training linkages with parents, salaries of special educators, aids and appliances etc. are all provided through the separate provision of Rs.1200 per disabled child per annum.

Conclusion

In conclusion, with the philosophical orientation of today's educational system, every classroom should include students with diverse needs and every teacher should be required to meet the needs of these students. This necessitates that teachers have confidence in their abilities, knowledge and skills in Inclusive Education to meet the individual challenges that they may encounter in the present school climate (Johnson and Hawkins, 2008). Teacher education reform view of preparing future teachers for Inclusive Education needs serious

attention and efforts, if we want to achieve the goal as Inclusive classroom, Inclusive Schools and ultimately Inclusive society.

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