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Inclusive Education: Still a Far Cry in India

Suruchi Arora

Assistant Professor , Khalsa College of Education, Ranjit Avenue, Amritsar, India

Email:- suruchi1301@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Inclusive education is a rising trend worldwide. It is a novel strategy to educate children with disabilities along with that of normal ones under the same roof. Recently, a solidarity has become apparent among Indian educationists and pedagogues for embracing inclusive education in regular schools. It is explicit that education policy in India has slowly enhanced the focus on children with special needs and that inclusive education in mainstream schools has become a supreme policy objective. There are numerous barriers that obstruct proper implementation of inclusive education in our country. Many problems such as lack of well trained and educated faculty, instructional material, good infrastructural facilities, plans and policies are becoming obstacles for furthering the concept of inclusive education. The present article is an attempt to highlight the issues and challenges coming in the way of effective inclusive set up. The difficulties are intrinsic to any change or reform but it is mandatory to develop an educational system that can properly accommodate every child in educational set up without any discrimination.

UNDERSTANDING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

"Inclusive, good-quality education is a foundation for dynamic and equitable societies."

- DESMOND TUTU

Inclusive Education means that all children turn up at and are welcomed by their near by schools in regular classes appropriate according to their ages and are assisted to learn, furnish and participate in all spheres of school life.

Inclusive education is a new approach towards educating the children with disability and learning disabilities with their normal peers under one roof. It seeks to address the learning needs of all children with a special reference on those who are at risk of marginalisation and exclusion.

DEFINING INCLUSION

Inclusive education has been defined as "all students being educated where they would be educated if they didn't have a disability in age-appropriate general education classes in their neighbourhood school with necessary supports provided to students, educators and families so that all can be successful" (Dukes and Lamar Dukes, 2006)

Inclusion is defined as "the acceptance of all pupils within the mainstream education system, taught within a common framework and identified as the responsibility of all teachers." (Thomas, 1997)

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN THE PATH OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Education is the supreme ingredient for the progress and empowerment of individuals and ultimately the nation. And inclusion in education makes this base much stronger (Ahmad, 2014). Though inclusive education policy has made its way in India, however the real concept is still far from practical execution in real terms. An array of barriers act as stumbling blocks in the proper practice of inclusive education in our country such as :-

- ❖ **Lack of awareness about children with disabilities among teachers**:- Unianu (2012) reported that there lacks a basic cognizance about disabled children. They are stuffed with their culturally fabricated notions about certain obvious disabilities but there is paucity of scientific knowledge about disabilities such as classification, special needs etc.
- ❖ **Inappropriate policy planning and implementation**:- Indian Government affirms that it has enforced inclusive education at all levels. Yet, the policy planning is unprofessional and steps to assess the gradation of implementation have not been developed. Moreover, the execution of inclusive education in private sector has not been enforced and ensured.

- ❖ **Teacher resistance to the notion of inclusion**:- Some teachers possess intricate and varying attitudes towards inclusion. Some educators fear and feel unprepared to work with students with disabilities to their classrooms (Kochhor et al., 2000). Concerns that general education have indicated towards inclusion include the negative attitudes of people, sparse support training and time to collaborate with others, massive strength of the classrooms and the difficulty in satisfying the medical needs and physical challenges of the students with disabilities (Salend, 2001).
- ❖ **Lack of funds**:- Financing is the crucial restraint to the practice of inclusion. Teaching disabled students in mainstream demands professionals and extra staff to cater to the students' needs. Offering individual support and services to children require additional funds that schools don't have at their disposal. The shortage of transportation facilities and approachable buildings are considered by some to be far greater problems than social prejudice and negative attitudes (Chatterjee, 2003)
- ❖ **Learner based problems**:- Challenged learners and their normal peers both have their varying methods of comprehension. The physically disabled students are not fast learners thus require more attention on the part of teachers as well as school authorities.
- ❖ **Inadequate resources**:- Sparsity of resources also presents one the major problems in carrying out inclusive education effectively. In some regions, disabled students are presumed to attend the schools that are out of reach. In economically deprived school set ups chiefly those in rural areas, poorly maintained buildings act as a stumbling block to accessibility. Many schools are not equipped to accommodate students with special needs. Some physical barriers like inadequately managed stairs, ramps and passageways pose hindrance in the way of inclusive education policy.
- ❖ **Lack of information to families or prospective students about options**:- Many parents are oblivious about the availability of options at inclusive schools for their wards. They are often unaware of how to access educational services appropriately according to the needs of their children. Students also find it arduous to get sufficient details about vocational education , support services and community education.
- ❖ **Disability unrecognised and undiagnosed**:- In several areas, inadequacy to perceive or failure to diagnose a student's handicap is a problem in providing access to education. In early years of age it may not be practicable to pin point a child's disability. If the child is suffering from learning disability, the child is too young to show up and if it is a blend of muscular, behavioral and intellectual disability it is not diagnosable until an older age.
- ❖ **Curriculum related problems**:- For practicing inclusive education, curricular modifications according to the unique needs of learners is very essential. Concepts like Universal Instructional Design are to properly maintained and included into the curriculum. However, needed curriculum amendments are either missing altogether or are improper.
- ❖ **Negative self-perceptions of children with disabilities**:- Negative self perceptions of physically handicapped children poses a great challenge in carefully implementing inclusive education at mass level. These negative notions are often reinforced by their neighbours, peers and teachers.
- ❖ **Failure to embrace assistive technology**:- Most of the schools still use musty technology to do even office work, hence can't afford computer based assistive techniques for their students with special needs such as large prints, on screen reading, compact discs and talking calculators.
- ❖ **Language and communication**:- Many students are expected to learn while being taught in a language that is new and in some cases unfamiliar to them. This is obviously a potent barrier to successful learning.

STRATEGIES TO IMPLEMENT INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Inclusive education helps the disabled children to develop a sense of pride in their work because they actually feel like they have achieved something. Lot of efforts have been put in to realize the dream of Education for All. However, there exist a gap between providing access to all children and realization of inclusive education.

Government of India needs to bridge the gaps in their education system to build potentially a strong educational set up. To improve existing trends and practice of teaching students with special needs, requires the efforts of teachers, parents, community, schools and principals in a collaboration. With this background, following recommendations are forwarded:-

- ❖ A policy of inclusion needs to be implemented in all schools and throughout Indian education system. Schools require to become the hubs that would work continuously for the security of all children especially the differently abled children.
- ❖ Parents have a full fledged right in all decision making process pertaining to their children. They should be treated as partners in the education process as they can act as one of the valuable resources for the teachers and the schools.
- ❖ Right to Education (RTE) must apply to all natives of India. The Governments at both Central as well as State level should

acknowledge the importance of a broadened concept of inclusive education that address the diverse of all learners.

- ❖ The Government should allocate funds to the schools that stand in need of special facilities for special needs education such as talking books, talking machines, braille machines etc.
- ❖ Inclusion should not be exclusive duty of the specific class teacher. Everybody should be involved and take responsibility. Training of teachers should be encouraged and assisted.
- ❖ The curriculum should be customised catering to the needs of special needs education. The curriculum should be carefully developed by an expert group that include practising special teachers.
- ❖ Transport facilities should be modified, so that these children can move around with a relative ease. Architecturally, there should be availability of ramps and wheelchair access constructed in service areas such as toilets.
- ❖ In- service training programmes of two to three week time period for general as well as special educators in all the disabilities and in specific areas of disability should be carried out on a regular basis.
- ❖ The schools should make sure that there is enough availability of special materials and equipments by allocating special budget. Moreover, library and resource room should be furnished with required materials needed by students with unique needs.
- ❖ The desks in the classrooms need to have wide surface area that can accommodate all the stationary and other materials and suitable to use slate and stylus.

CONCLUSION

Inclusion is nothing but a drive from attitudes to achievement, sympathy to empathy, indifference to involvement and helplessness to hopefulness. India is a vast country with extreme diversity from east to west and north to south in terms of language, ethnicity, caste, religion and access to resources. In a country with such diversity proposing one way to do things may not be the best way to move forward. The mind set of those in power does need to be altered and made to understand that disability is not just a medical issue but also social and human rights issue. Barriers to access and success can be viewed in physical as well as structural sense. But more than that it is the curriculum, the pedagogy, the examination, the schools and the approach of community which create barriers. Unless these barriers are taken care of an assurance of success to all would remain far cry. Even though we still have a long way to go, Inclusive Education is possible when all participants, governments, NGO's, teachers and parents take action , the goal of productive inclusive education for those with disabilities can start to become a reality.

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