



Special Education Provision for Children with Disabilities in India- A Way Forward

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“My advice to other disabled people would be, concentrate on things your disability doesn't prevent you doing well, and don't regret the things it interferes with. Don't be disabled in spirit, as well as physically.”

Stephen Hawking

Introduction

Historically, persons with disabilities in India have enjoyed coexistence with the general mass, though at different times, their treatment and attitudes toward them varied but they were never excluded from society by confinement in institutions. However, during more recent times, systematic efforts took place in providing educational and vocational opportunities to individuals with disabilities in India. For instance, formal educational institutions were established for the blind in 1887, for the deaf in 1888, and for mentally deficient in 1934 (Misra, 2000). After these early establishments in the late 19th century or early 20th century, a growth was seen in the establishment of these institutions in the later half of the 20th century.

Special education is a modified programme which involves some unique tools, techniques and research efforts in improving instructional arrangements to meet the need of exceptional children. It is not a total different programme which is assigned for the normal children. But it adds a sort of design proposed to assist the gifted children, physically and mentally handicapped and socially retarded children. As it is a planned and systematically mentioned arrangement, majority of average children are not grouped into this category of education. Special education can be provided in general schools with some special arrangement or in special schools.

Meaning of Disability

According to the Oxford Dictionary, a disability could be described as an impairment which can be Intellectual, limitations, cognitive, improvement, sensory, exercise or the mixture of all these. Incapacity impacts a person's activities and may happen at birth. Sometimes, it could happen in adulthood.

The Preamble to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) -2006, adopted by the United Nations, describes disability by stating that: “Disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”

PREVALENCE OF DISABILITY IN INDIA

As per the Census 2011, the differently abled population in India is 26.8 million. In percentage terms, this stands at 2.21 %. There has been a marginal increase in the differently-abled population in India, with the figure rising from 21.9 million in 2001 to 26.8 million over the period of 10 years.

As per the Census 2011, there are 14.9 million men with disabilities as compared to 11.9 million women in the country. The total number of differently-abled people is over 18.0 million in the rural areas and just 8.1 million enumerated in the urban settings. The percentage of men with disabilities is 2.41 per cent as against 2.01 in women. Social groups wise analysis shows 2.45 per cent of the total disabled population belong to the Scheduled Castes (SC), 2.05 per cent to the Scheduled Tribes (ST) and 2.18 per cent to other than SC/ST.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS ON DISABILITY IN INDIA

The Constitution of India provides ample scope for development of legal instruments to protect the rights of the disabled people. Some of the major Constitutional Provisions facilitating supportive provisions on Disability in India are:-

The Constitution of India, through its Preamble, inter-alia seeks to secure to all its citizens; Justice, social, economic and political; Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; Equality of status and of opportunity. Dignity of the individual is a fundamental notion behind all the fundamental rights guaranteed under part III of the Constitution of India. Part-III of the Constitution provides for a set of six Fundamental Rights to all the citizens (and in a few cases to non-citizens also). These include – Right to Equality; Right to Freedom; Right against Exploitation; Right to Freedom of Religion;

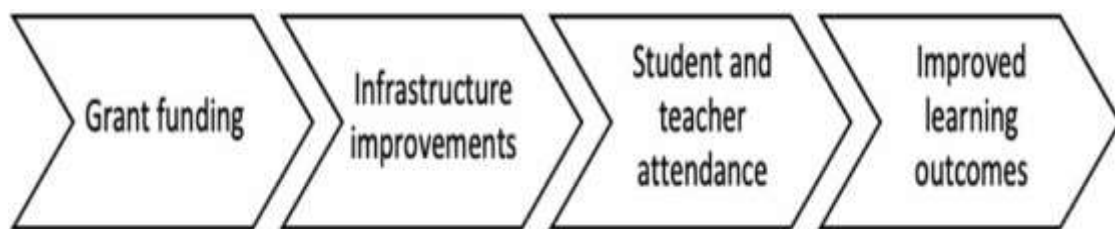
Cultural and Educational Rights and Right to Constitutional Remedies. All these rights are also available to the Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) even though no specific mention of such persons appears in this Part of the Constitution.

Article 41 of Constitution of India declares that the State shall, within the limits of its economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing the right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement and in other cases of undeserved want.

Article 46 lays down an obligation on the State to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.

INITIATIVES OF GOVERNMENT TO IMPROVE SPECIAL EDUCATION IN INDIA

In India, the 2009 Right to Education Act (RTE) mandated that all children between 6 and 14 years of age have access to a free and quality elementary education in their local community (Parliament of India, 2009). This included an allocation of 25% of seats in every classroom to children from economically weaker sections (EWS) and children with disabilities (Chaturvedi and Kuldeep, 2015) and equal access for girls and children of cultural backgrounds with non-dominant languages and religions. It also required that all education be acceptable (free of discrimination, relevant, and culturally appropriate), and adaptable (flexible and adjustable to student requirements, societal changes and community needs).



In support of this goal, the Indian government allocated grant funding to schools for infrastructure improvements and material provisions. This funding was based on a causal argument that by these means, student attendance would increase, which would, in turn, improve learning outcomes. (Abogan et al., 2013):

The Government has enacted the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016 and the said Act mandates the Government and local authorities to take measures for providing inclusive education to Children with Disabilities (CwDs). Further, the Act also mandates appropriate Government and local authorities to ensure that every child with benchmark disabilities (disability of 40% or more) has access to free education in an appropriate environment till he attains the age of 18 years.

The Centrally sponsored Samagra Shiksha – is an integrated scheme for School Education of the Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, covering children from pre-primary to senior secondary. Under Samagra Shiksha, there is a dedicated component for Inclusive Education for Children with Special Needs (CwSN) through which various provisions are made available for the educational needs such as, identification & assessment camps, provision of aids, appliances, assistive devices, teaching learning materials (TLMs) etc.

The National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 advocates full equity and inclusion as the cornerstone of education to ensure that all students are able to thrive in the education system. It also underscores within its framework, education of CwSN in order to ensure equitable quality schooling. The Samagra Shiksha scheme has also been aligned with the recommendations of NEP 2020 to ensure that all children have access to quality education with an equitable and inclusive classroom environment

ROLE OF EDUCATOR IN THE FIELD OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

Keeping up with the learning process of children who do not have special needs is difficult for children with any form of handicap. They have the right to lead happy lives and realise all of their potential. Therefore, the goal of special education should be to create an educational framework that can overcome the challenges posed by these disabilities and aid in providing children with a high-quality education.

As a result, a special education teacher who works with students who have special needs must strictly adhere to a set of guidelines in the classroom.

1. 1. To begin with, lessons should be organised to fulfil the specific needs of the students. Depending on individual needs, the pace of the instructions may be slowed down or accelerated. Less students in each class means more time for individualised instruction. This allows the kids time to comprehend the information and also practise reciprocity.
2. Teachers in a special needs classroom should be willing to make a concerted attempt to educate a pupil. Before a child fully grasps an idea, they may require numerous trials and opportunities. Therefore, a teacher of special needs children should persevere until the pupil has mastered whatever idea that is being taught.
3. *When instructing a student with exceptional needs, appropriate instruments and aids should be employed. Frequently, teaching aids that are effective with children who don't have special needs are ineffective with those who do. As a result, educators must develop concepts and proposals that satisfy their specific needs. It is best to use a trial-and-error approach. If a certain tool is ineffective, it should be abandoned and replaced with a more suitable one. Because of the nature of the situation, patience is a virtue that should be exercised throughout.*

4. Accepting others in the classroom Finally, is one of the most crucial maxims in any classroom for students with special needs. As has been noted, showing impatience in a special education class is strongly discouraged. Positive comments about a student's behaviour are also important. A special needs youngster should always be coached for appropriate behaviour and praised for inappropriate ones. Negative criticism may demotivate people, which in turn has an impact on their cognitive capacities.

References

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