Inclusive Education Scenario in Indian Context: Challenges and Concerns

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to examine the status of inclusive education in India. Inclusive education (IE) 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. 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. In the Indian context, we are facing some obstacles for the successful implementation of inclusion. The suggestions for strengthening inclusive education are also discussed.

Introduction

Inclusive education (IE) is a new trend for educating the children with special needs with that of normal ones within the same roof. It seeks to cater the learning needs of all vulnerable , marginalized and exclusive children. It implies that all the children whether they have any disability or not being able to learn together. The flexible education system assimilates the needs of diverse range of learners and adapts itself to meet these needs (Sanjeev & Kumar, 2007).

The concept of inclusive education was first highlighted at the "World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality" (Salamanca, Spain 1994) and was restated at the World Education Forum. 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. (Sanjeev & Kumar, 2007).

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Inclusion in the present scenario is a value to be followed by the people. All the children whether they belong to any group or disabled have the right to education as they are the future citizens of the country. In the current Indian educational situation resources are not enough 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).

The school and classroom should work on the principle that students with disabilities are as competent as students without disabilities. Therefore, all students should play an active role in their classrooms and in the local school community. This means they are with their peers without disabilities, and in collaboration with them they can learn better. (Alquraini & Gut, 2012).

Inclusive Education in India

In India, National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in collaboration with UNICEF has launched Project Integrated Education for Disabled Children (PIED) in the year 1987, to enhance the integration of learners with disabilities into regular schools. In 1997, IEDC was amalgamated with other major basic education projects like the DPEP (Chadha, 2002) and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) (Department of Elementary Education, 2000). The Persons with Disability Act, 1995 has a provision of providing education to children with special needs in the appropriate setting with normal students.. The SSA launched by the Govt. of India, in 2001, underlines the prerogative of a child with disability to be included in the mainstream of education. MHRD (2006) in its Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) framework clearly states that "SSA will ensure that every child with special needs, irrespective of the kind, category and degree of disability, is provided education in an appropriate environment. SSA will adopt zero rejection policy so that no child is left out of the education system.

The Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) is mainly responsible for education and rehabilitation of children with special needs. The Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) was set up as a registered society in 1986. On September, 1992 the RCI Act was enacted by parliament and it became a Statutory Body on 22 June 1993.The Act was amended by Parliament in 2000 to make it more comprehensive. The mandate given to RCI is to regulate and monitor services

given to persons with disability, to standardize syllabi and to maintain a Central Rehabilitation Register of all qualified professionals and personnel working in the field of Rehabilitation and Special Education. (Singh & Aggarwal, 2015).

Need and Importance of Inclusive Education

At international level, the efforts have been made 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. As general education classrooms include more and more diverse students, teachers should realize the individual differences and accept every child as unique. In effective inclusive programs, teachers adapt activities to include all 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 educ ation curriculum. The growing body ofresearch 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. In an inclusive educational environment the slow-learners can get extra help and teacher can give them personal attention. 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 (Singh, 2013).

Problems of Inclusive Education in India

Inclusive education has been always a priority for government of India. But there is a gap between policies and their actually implementation in the country with respect to inclusive education. There are various challenges that hinder proper practice of inclusive education in our country. Based on the literature and personal experiences, Singh and Aggarwal (2015) believe these barriers to include the following:

- Teachers are not efficient and skillful as required for inclusive education. Das, Kuyini and Desai (2013) examined the current skill levels of regular primary and secondary school teachers in Delhi, 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.

- Successful implementation of inclusive education requires positive attitudes towards inclusion and disability among teachers, parents, peers, administrators and policy planners. But negative thinking is still prevalent.

- The teachers lack basic awareness about children with disabilities. They have their own socially and culturally constructed notions about certain obvious disabilities but lack scientific and educational knowledge about the disabilities such as classification, labeling, special needs and adaptations etc.

- School environment needs infrastructural facilities for truly implementation of inclusive education. However, such accommodations are not there in majority of the schools.

- Family plays a significant role in implementing inclusive education in India. Family is considered having sole responsibility for their children in India. Hence, inclusion can only be realized by motivating and involving family in the process.

- For practicing inclusive education, negative self-perceptions of children with disabilities pose a great challenge. These negative perceptions are often strengthened by neighbors, peers, and teachers. Without wiping out these negative self- perceptions, true inclusion of such children is not possible.

- The pre-service teacher education programs being run in the country are failing to sensitize and equip prospective teachers in inclusive education practices. Modifications are needed to make these teacher education programs more effective.

- Government of India claims that it has implemented inclusive education everywhere and at all levels. However, the policy planning is improper and measures to assess the degree of implementation have not been developed.

- For a huge and diverse country like India, implementation of inclusive education at all levels requires a lot of money to be spent. The government does not seem willing to incur this huge expenditure.

- For implementing inclusive education in all educational institutions, at all levels, we need strong support services. Their strength should be both quantitative and qualitative. But, existing support services are scarce and inadequate.

Suggestions to Strengthen Inclusive Education in India

In Indian society, if we want successful implementation of inclusive education, some parameters need to be taken care of. Kumar, Rani and Singh (2016) have listed the following points to strengthen the inclusive education in India:

- Encouragements provided by the community of including children with disabilities in local schools

- Readiness of the general education system to accept responsibility for education of children with disabilities.

- Willingness of parents of children with disabilities to send their wards to local schools

- General classroom teachers to be equipped to manage education of children with disabilities.

- Retention of children with disabilities in schools.

- Enrolment rate of children with disabilities at least on par with that of non- disabled children.

- Support from per group to children with disabilities and vice- versa in teaching- learning process.

- Availability of specialist teacher in support to regular class teacher.

Thus, we as teachers, parents, teacher- educators have to facilitate the implementation of inclusive education not only as program but also as an ideology- an ideology based on the principles of human rights approach where in stress is laid on giving importance to individual and respecting his/her potentiality in teaching-learning process.

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