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Inclusive Education: Moving From “Why?” To “How?”

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Abstract:

Inclusive Education in the context of the goals of Education for All is a complex issue, and no coherent approach is evident in the literature. 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. 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. There are real challenges that hinder the full implementation of inclusive education. Existing school systems in terms of physical factors, curriculum aspects, teaching expectations and styles, leadership roles will have to change. This is because inclusive education is about the participation of ALL children and the removal of all forms of exclusionary practice. Achieving this goal in India requires serious planning and efforts.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Children With Special Needs (CWSN), Curriculum Adaptation, Role Of Teachers, Parents In Educating CWSN, Education System.

Introduction

Inclusive education means welcoming all children, without discrimination into regular or general schools, 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 can be benefited . Inclusion is not just about placing students with disabilities in to mainstream classrooms. It recognizes that all children have individual needs, and that teachers who are trained to facilitate an inclusive classroom, can better meet the needs of all children. Making the school system flexible and adopting an inclusive approach may, however, prove the most challenging task of all.

It might lead to the need of reforming the school system as a whole from a traditional, examination-oriented to an inclusive, child-oriented approach.

Policies and Laws to Promote Inclusive Education in India:

National Policy on Education (NPE) – 1986: The NPE brought the fundamental issue of equality centre stage. Section 4.9 of the policy clearly focuses on the needs of the children with disabilities. “The objective should be to integrate 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 following measures will be taken in this regard:

- Wherever it is feasible, the education of children with motor handicaps and other mild handicaps will be common with that of others;
- Special schools with hostels will be provided, as far as possible at district headquarters, for the severely handicapped children;
- Adequate arrangements will be made to give vocational training to the disabled;

- Teachers' training programmes will be reoriented, in particular for teachers of primary classes, to deal with the special difficulties of the handicapped children
- Voluntary effort for the education of the disabled will be encouraged in every possible manner".

Integrated Education of Disabled Children (IEDC):

The Government of India's appreciation of the need to integrate children with disabilities came in 1974, when the Union Ministry of Welfare launched the centrally sponsored scheme of Integrated Education of Disabled Children (IEDC). In 1982, this scheme was transferred over to the then Department of Education of the Ministry of Human Resource Development. The centrally sponsored scheme of Integrated Education of the Disabled Children provides educational opportunities for the disabled children in common schools, to facilitate their retention in the school system, and also to place in common schools, such children already placed in special schools after they acquire the communication and the daily living skills at the functional level.

Project for Integrated Education for the Disabled (PIED):

In 1987, to fulfil the provisions for disabled children in the NPE (1986), the government launched the Project for Integrated Education for the Disabled (PIED). It was a joint venture of MHRD and UNICEF. It states 'wherever feasible, the education of children with motor handicaps and other mild handicaps will be in common with that of others'.

Plan of Action (POA) – 1992:

The NPE was followed by POA (1992). The POA suggested a pragmatic principle for children with special needs. It postulated that a child with disability who can be educated in a general school should be educated in a general school only and not in a special school. Even those children who are initially admitted to special schools for training in plus curriculum skills should be transferred to general schools once they acquire daily living skills, communication skills and basic academic skills.

Rehabilitation Council of India Act (RCI–1992):

The POA was strengthened by the enactment of the RCI Act, 1992. Experience showed that there was no mechanism in the country to standardize and monitor the training of special educators and other rehabilitation professionals in the country. Therefore, in 1992, Parliament of India enacted the RCI Act, subsequently amended in 2000, to establish a statutory mechanism for monitoring and standardizing courses for the training of 16 categories of professionals required in the field of special education and rehabilitation of persons with disability. Training of special educators and resource teachers that can offer support services to children with disabilities in regular schools is the responsibility of RCI.

Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights & Full Participation) Act, 1995:

The most landmark legislation in the history of special education in India is the Persons with Disabilities (Equal opportunities, protection of rights & full participation) Act, 1995. This comprehensive Act covers seven disabilities namely blindness, low vision, hearing impaired, loco motor impaired, mental retardation, leprosy cured and mental illness. Chapter V (Section 26) of the Act, which deals with education, mentions that the appropriate Governments and the local authorities shall:

- Ensure that every child with a disability has access to free education in an appropriate environment till he attains the age of eighteen years;
- Endeavour to promote the integration of students with disabilities in the normal schools;
- Promote setting up of special schools in governments and private sector for those in need of special education, in such manner that children with disabilities living in any part of the country have success to such schools;

- Endeavour to equip the special schools for children with disabilities with vocational training facilities. 59 60

National Trust Act-1999:

Another landmark legislation is the National Trust Act. In 1999, the Indian Parliament passed an Act entitled “National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disability. This Act seeks to protect and promote the rights of persons who, within the disability sector, have been even more marginalized than others. Though the National Trust Act of 1999 does not directly deal with the education of children with special needs, one of its thrust areas is to promote programmes, which foster inclusion and independence by creating barrier free environment, developing functional skills of the disabled and promoting self-help groups.

The Centrally Sponsored IEDSS Scheme 2009:

The Scheme of Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS) was launched during 2009-10 and replaces the earlier scheme of Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC). The aim of this scheme is to enable all students with disabilities to pursue four years of secondary education in an inclusive and enabling environment, after completing eight years of elementary schooling. It aims at:

- Enable all students with disabilities completing eight years of elementary schooling an opportunity to complete four years of secondary schooling (classes IX to XII) in an inclusive and enabling environment.
- Provide educational opportunities and facilities to students with disabilities in the general education system at the secondary level (classes IX to XII).
- Support the training of general school teachers to meet the needs of children with disabilities at the secondary level.

Different educational practices

Traditional Approach

- Education for some
- Static
- Collective teaching
- Learning in segregated areas
- Emphasis on subject-orientated teaching
- Diagnostic / prescriptive
- Opportunities limited by exclusion
- Disability view
- Labels children disability wise

Inclusive Approach

- Education for all
- Flexible
- Individualized Teaching
- Learning in Integrated areas
- Emphasis on child-centered teaching
- Holistic
- Equalizations of opportunities for all
- Curricular view
- Planning is made on ability levels and opposes all kinds of labeling

Problems in Inclusive Education in India

Inclusive education is a binding and priority for government of India. However, a wide gap in policy and practice exists in the country with respect to inclusive education. There are a number of barriers that hinder proper practice of inclusive education in our country. Based on the literature and personal experiences, these barriers are as follows:

Skills and attitude of teachers

Skills of teachers which are responsible for implementing inclusive education are also not up to as desired and necessary for inclusion. The teachers should be trained to develop Individualized Educational Plans accommodating the curriculum and the needs of the child, putting them on one line. The inefficiency of teachers to develop and use instructional materials for inclusion students is a big issue.

Lack of awareness about children with disabilities among general teachers

The general teachers, at all levels, 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.

Improper curriculum adaptation

For practicing inclusive education, curricular adaptations suited to special and unique needs of every learner, including children with disabilities, are necessary. Concepts like 'Universal Instructional Design' are to be properly developed and incorporated into the curriculum. However, needed curricular adaptations are either missing altogether or are improper.

Improper School environment

School environment needs accommodations for truly practicing inclusive education. However, such accommodations are not there in majority of the schools. Facilities like ramps, lifts, and directional cues etc. are mostly absent in schools.

Support services/facilities

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.

Family collaboration

Keeping in mind the nature of Indian society and culture, it can be safely stated that family has a very important 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.

Insufficient and improper pre-service teacher education

The pre-service teacher education programmes 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 programmes more effective. Currently, teacher education programmes producing special teachers are controlled by Rehabilitation Council of India whereas these producing general teachers are controlled by National Council for Teacher Education. These two apex bodies need to collaborate and devise measures for producing skilled teachers capable of implementing inclusive education.

Negative self-perceptions of children with disabilities

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

ICT's availability and related competencies

Present age is the age of information and communication technology (ICT). ICT is providing great help in almost all endeavors of human life including education and training. There are a number of ICT-enabled pedagogical and assistive devices are available particularly useful for children with disabilities. Their use can ease and expedite inclusive education. These should be made available and competencies for their use should be developed among all stakeholders.

Improper policy planning and lack-luster implementation

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 has not been developed. Furthermore, implementation of inclusive education in private sector has not been enforced and ensured.

Expenses involved

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. Being a developing country, the apprehensions of the government can be very well understood.

Networking

Networking amongst the stake holders and professionals for sharing of the experiences shall reduce reinventing wheels and smoothen service delivery. It also improves the quality of the service and brings in scope for viewing the problems from several and different angles. This network will be a real brain master for diagnosis and remedies.

Family-school partnerships

- Collaboration between general and special educators
- Well-constructed plans that identify specific accommodations, modifications, and goals for each student
- Coordinated planning and communication between "general" and "special needs" staff
- Integrated service delivery
- Ongoing training and staff development

Suggestions for facing the challenges:

Teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education could be formed and developed in the context of an educational system which can provide some specific conditions in order to have a good practice in this field. Those conditions refer to a restructure of the curricula, more help from support teachers, more time for preparing the educational activities, decreasing the number of students in one class, creating and developing opportunities for interactive partnerships between teachers, students, support teachers and parents and so on. The reform of the curriculum should be made in parallel with a proper training for teachers regarding their knowledge of inclusion and its principles. The difficulties are inherent to any change or reform, but it is necessary to develop an educational system which can properly respond to all the needs, characteristics and individual differences of all children in school. The separate teacher education programs for regular and special education do not equip teachers with an integrated knowledge of the expected roles, functions and responsibilities to meet the diversity of learning needs in the classroom. A need is being felt for a new paradigm for the preparation of teachers. There exists the need for teacher educators of regular and special education at all levels of teacher education to develop a "whole faculty approach" in facilitating an inclusive pre-service teacher education curriculum embedded across all discipline areas .

Ideas which make up the view of inclusion:

- Putting inclusive values into action.
- Increasing participation for children and adults in learning and teaching activities, relationships and communities of local schools.
- Reducing exclusion, discrimination, barriers to learning and participation.

- Restructuring cultures, policies and practices to respond to diversity in ways that value everyone equally.
- Linking education to local and global realities.
- Learning from the reduction of barriers for some children to benefit children more widely.
- Acknowledging the right of children to an education of high quality in their locality.
- Improving schools for staff and parents/carers as well as children.
- Emphasising the development of school communities and values, as well as achievements.
- Fostering mutually sustaining relationships between schools and surrounding communities.
- Recognising that inclusion in education is one aspect of inclusion in society.

Conclusion:

The inclusive education is not a dream but would definitely turn a reality, as we are still in the phase of development, these considering these issues and putting up efforts would lead to a real success. Indeed, the government could find that the cost of well-resourced specialist provision spread across all schools rather than centralized in resource centers more financially prohibitive than the current situation. To improve the existing trends and practice of teaching students with special needs and to address the special educational needs of those children, it require the collaborative efforts of parents, community members, teachers, school principals, governmental agencies.

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