

Challenges And Opportunities For Inclusive Education in India

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Abstract

Inclusive education has been the latest trend in the field of education during the last two decades is an undeniable fact. Though the term inclusive education has been in vogue for past few decades and though the education for children with special needs along with the general students has been spoken of strongly in recent times the attempts to educate the disabled goes back a few centuries. It would be worth looking at the history of educating the children with disabilities or as they are now called children with special needs. For a long time those concerned with the field of education have been grappling with the serious question of what kind of education to provide for children especially in the context of varying and different abilities of the students. Traditionally education had come to be separated into two types, namely, general education and special education This study is conducted in order to assess the challenges and opportunities to implement inclusive education. In order to attain the objectives of the study, related literatures on international policies and concepts of inclusive education was reviewed in detail. Concerning the significance of the study it is expected that it will highlight those concerned individuals on the existing situation prevailing in connection with the problem under study and devise mechanisms for addressing the observed situation. The study used descriptive survey. The finding roughly show that even though there are some opportunities that support inclusive education it cannot be taken as a guaranty due to lack of awareness, commitment and collaboration and there are real challenges that hinder the full implementation of inclusive education.
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Introduction

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 brings all students together in one classroom and community, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses in any area and seeks to maximize the potential of all students. It is one of the most effective ways in which to promote an inclusive and tolerant.

Inclusive education is nothing but ‘Making the programme for disabled children as an integral part of the general educational system rather than a system within general education’.

Inclusive schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuing quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities’. Inclusive education promotes child-to-child learning and participation of parents and community in planning and execution of services for children in general and disabled children in particular.

All school going children, whether they are disabled or not, have the right to education as they are the future citizens of the country. Today it is widely accepted that inclusion maximizes the potential of the vast majority of students, ensures their rights and is the preferred educational approach for the 21st century.

In theory, an inclusive education is one that gives disabled children an opportunity to interact with a community of teachers and able-bodied students in a normal school environment. It is different from a “mainstream” education because there is no differentiation between general education and special education.

Types of Inclusive Education

There are, however, two subcategories of an inclusive education: partial or regular inclusion and full inclusion.

Partial or regular inclusion means that the child is in all of the normal classes in which able-bodied students participate, with the exception of special education that would otherwise be disruptive to the rest of the class. Examples include speech therapy or physical education.

Full inclusion schools allow disabled students to spend all of their time in an able-bodied student environment, regardless of their disability.

Full inclusion schools are rare due in part to finding teachers who are certified to work with the disabled student population and concerns that the able-bodied students would be held back so that the disabled students would receive the support they need.

Inclusive Education aims at integrated development of children with special needs and normal children through mainstream schooling. To develop curriculum for special education and its inclusion in general teacher preparation programmes, Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) made a historic collaboration with National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) on January 19, 2005.

Characteristics of an Inclusive School

All children can succeed in an inclusive environment. Research tells us that effective inclusive schools have the following characteristics:

1. Supportive Environment

An effective school is one that has high expectations for its staff members and students, provides caring support for students and staff and provides opportunities for their participation in the classroom and broader school setting.

2. Positive Relationships

Teachers encourage the development of relationships through their decisions about where to seat children in the class. More formal actions include exposing children to role models and setting up buddy relationships. Many strategies can be used to promote the social inclusion of all children.

3. Feelings of Competence

Children need to believe that they are competent at something and that others believe that they can succeed. Children can develop a strong self-concept in many different areas.

4. Opportunities to Participate

All children require opportunities to participate in activities that allow them to understand societal expectations.

Importance of Inclusive Education

Inclusive systems provide a better quality education for all children and are instrumental in changing discriminatory attitudes. Schools provide the context for a child's first relationship with the world outside their families, enabling the development of social relationships and interactions. Respect and understanding grow when students of diverse abilities and backgrounds play, socialize and learn together. Education that excludes and segregates perpetuates discrimination against traditionally marginalized groups. When education is more inclusive, so are concepts of civic participation, employment and community life.

Inclusion assumes that children with special needs are part of the regular stream and should be treated as such. Inclusion is based on Wolfensberger's principle of normalization (i.e., all persons regardless of ability should live and learn in

environments as close to normal as possible). The basic idea behind normalization is that people with special needs should be viewed in the ways in which they are the same as other people rather than in the ways in which they are different. School can be seen as a microcosm of the larger society. As Canadian society has moved toward a more inclusive view of all individuals, so too, have schools moved toward inclusion.

Basic elements of inclusive education

Inclusive curriculum: An inclusive curriculum includes locally relevant themes and contributions by marginalized and minority groups. It avoids binary narratives of good and bad and allows adapting the curriculum to the learning styles of children with special education needs.

Parental involvement: Most schools strive for some level of parental involvement, but it is often limited to emails home and occasional parent–teacher conferences. In a diverse school system, inclusion means thinking about multiple ways to reach out to parents on their own terms.

To make inclusive education a reality we need to do the following:

1. ensure that educators have the training, flexibility and resources to teach students with diverse needs and learning styles
2. ensure that kindergartens and schools receive adequate and sustainable financial support so that all activities and services are fully inclusive
3. empower parents to assert their children’s right to education in inclusive settings
4. enable the entire community—including mainstream and special educators, social workers, parents and students—to work together and participate in the design, delivery and monitoring of education, thereby reframing inclusive education as a shared responsibility
5. hold governments accountable for implementing antidiscrimination legislation, legal mandates for inclusion and policies to remove barriers

Background of the Inclusive Education Programme

In 1997, the philosophy of inclusive education is added in District Primary Education Programme (DPEP). By 1998, many DPEP states had conducted surveys, assessment camps and evolved strategies to provide resource support to those children with special needs who were enrolled in DPEP schools. The thrust was on imparting quality education to all disabled children. The government is committed to provide education through mainstream schools for children with disabilities in accordance with PWD ACT, 1995 and all the schools in the country will be made disabled friendly by 2020. Enrolment and retention of all children with disabilities in the mainstream education system should be ensured providing need based educational and other

support to these children in order to develop their learning and abilities

The government of India is constitutionally committed to ensuring the right of every child to basic education. The Government of India has created numerous policies around special education since the country's independence in 1947. One of the earliest formal initiatives undertaken by the GOI was the Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) scheme of 1974 (NCERT, 2011). In 2005, the Ministry of Human Resource Development implemented a National Action Plan for the inclusion in education of children and youth with disabilities. It is important to integrate these children into regular schools to help them socialize and build their confidence.

Challenges to implement Inclusive Education in India

In India the number of the disabled people is so large, their problems so complex, available resources so scarce and social attitudes so damaging. The road to achieving inclusive education is a long and varied one, on which challenges and opportunities will arise. India is a multi-lingual, multi-cultural, multi-religious country and its people are stratified along sharp socio-economic and caste lines.

Measures for implementing Inclusive Education

Inclusive education helps the disabled child to develop a sense of pride in their work because they actually feel like they accomplished something. There are following measures for better implementation of Inclusive Education in India:

1. The Right to Education (RTE) must apply to all citizens of India.
2. A policy of inclusion needs to be implemented in all schools and throughout Indian education system (NCF, 2005).
3. The preparation of teachers for special education programmes should be planned differently, as the aim of these programmes would be to integrate disabled persons in their own environment and community.
4. As a system, inclusive education should be flexible. Its flexibility must be reflected in the methods and materials used to give these children the widest possible access to the regular curriculum.
5. A school-based support team should develop strategies for the whole school to meet the needs of learners with special educational needs.
6. The school has must enable education structures, systems and methodologies to meet the needs of all children.
7. Parents have a right to be involved in all decision-making concerning their child. They should be seen as partners in the education process.
8. Differently abled children should be treated equally as the normal children and instead of looking them in sympathy their talents and abilities should

- be recognized for their self-respect and welfare of the society.
9. Necessary school supplies such as audio learning or textbooks in Braille should be made available.
 10. In-service training programmes of two to three weeks' duration for general educators and special educators in all the disabilities and in specific areas of disability should arrange to effectively teach children with disabilities.
 11. Periodic evaluation of the training programmes and constant updating to meet the challenges of changing trends in special education should be part of the planning of teacher preparation.
 12. The reform of the curriculum should be made in parallel with a proper training for inclusive education.

Inclusive Education aims at integrated development of children with special needs and normal children through mainstream schooling. To develop curriculum for special education and its inclusion in general teacher preparation programs, Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) made a historic collaboration with National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) on January 19, 2005. Fewer than five percent of children who have a disability are in schools. In India, special education as a separate system of education for disabled children outside the mainstream education system evolved way back in 1880s. Consequent on the success of international experiments in placing children with disabilities in regular schools, the Planning Commission in 1971 included in its plan a programme for integrated education. The Government launched the Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) scheme in December, 1974. It was a Centrally Sponsored Scheme aimed to provide educational opportunities to children with special needs (CWSN) in regular schools and to facilitate their achievement and retention

The Benefits of Inclusive Education

Followings are some of the main benefits of inclusive education to the children:

1. Families' visions of a typical life for their children can come true.
2. Children develop a positive understanding of themselves and others.
3. Friendships development.
4. Children learn important academic skills.
5. All children learn by being together.
6. All children learn in different ways.
7. It is every child's right to be included.

All children benefit from inclusive education. It allows them to:

1. Develop individual strengths and gifts, with high and appropriate

- expectations for each child.
2. Work on individual goals while participating in the life of the classroom with other students their own age.
 3. Involve their parents in their education and in the activities of their local schools.
 4. Foster a school culture of respect and belonging. Inclusive education provides opportunities to learn about and accept individual differences, lessening the impact of harassment and bullying.
 5. Develop friendships with a wide variety of other children, each with their own individual needs and abilities.
 6. Positively affect both their school and community to appreciate diversity and inclusion on a broader level.

Conclusion

Education envisages that the education of the disabled is not only the integral part of the education but is the part and parcel of the general education system itself. Some of the successful experimentation proves that the inclusive education is going to be reality. In this context, it is worth mentioning the Composite Area Approach (CAA) adopted in the Project Integrated Education for the Disabled (PIED) since 1987 in several parts of India in which regular classrooms teachers, specialists teachers, parents and community members jointly work in the program. Therefore, inclusive education is the only viable alternative for education for all, which brings all children to learn together, regardless of any difficulties or difference they may have. It gains cost effectiveness also when compared to all others programs. The world now recognizes that inclusion of children with special needs in general education is not an option but a compulsion (Mani, 2000). Now, the global concern is how to attain the goal of Education For All (EFA). EFA strategy advocates that inclusive education is the most appropriate method of extending education to children with all disabilities.

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