RJPSSS RESEARCH JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY & SOCIAL SCIENCES A Peer Reviewed International Journal

Inclusive Education in Present Scenario: An Introspection

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Introduction

India gained independence from Britain in the 1947, and inclusive education is written into India's constitution as a fundamental right for all citizens. It is important to differentiate between constitutional rights and state policies and their legal implications. Rights are listed in the constitution; they are absolute and completely enforceable. State policies are completely subjective on a state by state basis. Part IX, Article 45 of the Constitution states,

'The state shall endeavor to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years.'

The significance of Article 45 was reaffirmed in 1993 with the supreme court'sUnnikrishnan judgment, also known as the case "Unnikrishnan vs. the state of Andhra Pradesh." In this case, the court ruled that Article 45 must be read in conjunction with Article 21 of the constitution, which states that "No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law." By requiring these two articles to be read in conjunction, elementary education is now considered imperative for life and personal liberty in India. A clause was added to India's constitution to this affect; however, it was not added until December 2002. The 86th amendment to the constitution, section 21A reads, "The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine." Although many viewed this amendment as positive, others criticized the age restrictions. In addition, many thought that the type of education (inclusive, segregated, or other) should be specified within the law.

The 1960s marked an important change in how special education was organized and funded in India. The Ministry of Education split, and a new branch called the Ministry of Social Welfare was created. The Ministry of Social Welfare was given the responsibility for the "weak and vulnerable" sections of society. They largely focused on rehabilitation, and not as much on education. Instead of supporting the current education system, the Ministry of Social Welfare began giving out grants to nonprofits that provided education for children with disabilities, inadvertently preventing inclusion of these children within the public or mainstream sector. The split of these two ministries has never been reversed, and is still this way at present.

After independence, the policy makers worked hard to transform the system of education created by the British into a mass based system built on principles of equality and social justice. Right to Education was made a fundamental right with the formulation of the Right to Education in 2009 and a National Educational Policy was also announced. Policy makers tried to universalise education through various measures like SarvaShikshaAbhiyan and Mid Day Meal Scheme.

Introspection of Inclusive Education

The Government of India created the Kothari Commission in 1964, named after its chairman, P.S. Kothari. This commission was created because the Government of India wanted to create a plan of action to improve the education system. The plan of action created by the Kothari Commission included people with disabilities, but unfortunately, the Government of India never implemented it. It reads,

'We now turn to the education of handicapped children. Their education has to be organized not merely on humanitarian grounds of utility. Proper education generally enables a handicapped child to overcome largely his or her handicap and make him into a useful citizen. Social justice also demands it…on an overall view of the problem, however, we feel that experimentation with integrated programmes is urgently required and every attempt should be made to bring in as many children in integrated programs.'

There are two major roadblocks that prevented the plan of action of the Kothari Commission from being implemented. The first is the split in 1964 within the Ministry of Education and the simultaneous creation of the Ministry of Social Welfare, and the Ministry of Social Welfare's subsequent policy of assistance to voluntary organizations.The second policy that prevented the plan of action of the Kothari Commission from being successfully implemented is The Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) of 1974. Created by the Ministry of Human Research Development, the ICDS reaches out to "vulnerable populations" of the population to provide services such as pre-5 year old schooling & early intervention, including health care, nutrition and pre-school facilities. ICDS does not include people with disabilities under that category.

The National Policy on Education (NPE) was created in 1986. Continuing in the spirit of the 1974 ICDS, the NPE states that children with "mild" disabilities should be included in mainstream classrooms, whereas children with "moderate to severe" disabilities should be placed in segregated schools. Many were upset that this policy contradicted Article 45 of the constitution, which lists equality in education as a fundamental right for all, and not just those with "mild" disabilities. The policy also included a provision regarding teacher training for all mainstream education teachers, by "including a compulsory special education component in pre-service training of general teachers." Although this policy was created in 1986, it was not implemented until the Plan of Action was created in 1992.

The 1992 Program of Action (POA), created to implement the 1986 NPE, broadens the 1986 definition of who should be included in mainstream schooling, that "a child with a disability who can be educated in the general school should not be in the special school."It says that once children with disabilities acquire basic living skills, which would be learned in resource rooms or special schools, that they should be mainstreamed. The POA does not define what constitutes basic living skills. The POA envisioned and expected that schools across India would "accept responsibility by sharing their resources with other institutions." However, rather than including, or even integrating children with disabilities into their programs, these schools would open "resource centers for the underprivileged," providing children with disabilities learning resources after typical school hours, but not during the normal school day, eliminating the possibility of inclusion for these students.

Access to education is still a dream for those who are in remote and rural areas where there are no school buildings or even possibility of reaching the school during rain or snow. Equitable educational access to tribals, marginalised, SC_s and ST_s is a major point of concern. Children with special needs have invariably been placed in unseen corner while planning for

education. These issues are now been recognised by the government and several initiatives for inclusive growth of these sections of society are now on priority.Technology is being used to provide better access to education through several programmes like GIAN, SWAYAM and National Digital Library. Inbuilt monitoring and effective e assessment systems, vocationalisation of education at high school and college levels have also been rocognised as the need of the hour.

Inclusive Education is an approach for addressing learning needs of all learners by removing barriers faced by those with special needs i.e. all learners, young people − with or without different abilities. To learn together through access to common pre-school provisions, schools and community educational settings in a flexible education system that assimilates the needs of a diverse range of learners to meet their needs. Inclusive education includes those with physical, sensory, intellectual or situational impairments through the use of inclusive policies and practices at all levels of education.

National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCERT − 2005) has recommended inclusive schools for learners with special educational needs by making appropriate modifications in the content, presentation and transaction strategies, preparing teachers and developing learning friendly evaluation procedures. There is an urgent need to reconstruct the overall goals of educational system so as to help students to develop into global citizens. To create inclusive schools is a big challenge to inclusive education where every participant supports and get supported by each other so as to meet their educational needs in reality.

In inclusive classroom environment teachers and students provide support and guidance to the community of learners within the school and teachers and students can explore curriculum while benefiting from contributions of various ability peers. Teachers who are inclusive reject rigid textbook teaching method and use cooperative learning, thematic instruction, critical thinking, problem solving and authentic assessment for facilitating teaching learning process. Thus, inclusive education can contribute to an accelerated achievement of education for all to meet the new demands, challenges, difficulties, dilemmas and tensions regarding the implementation of this education.

Diversity of needs is undoubtedly a challenge but it is also an opportunity to enrich learning and social relations : a pedagogical challenge for the system and the institution, rather than an individual problem. To face this challenge reformation and reconstruction is required in educational systems, schools, colleges and classroom activities so that all learners can respond to opportunities and all teachers can construct them. The success of inclusive education is in the hands of class teacher who is the key to educational change and to bring attitudinal change in the individuals of school, family and society. Teachers must believe that all students can learn and plan for the success of diverse learners and must recognise, accept and promote equity through accepting differences.

For effective inclusive classroom teaching teaching-strategies need improvement regarding the context of learning, the content of learning and the teaching-learning processes. To make inclusive education more practicable in actual classroom conditions seminars, refresher courses, short-term courses, workshops etc. should be made mandatory for teachers so that they may develop skills and may be able to implement inclusive teaching learning and assessment in more effective manner. In context of learning if inclusion is a two way process then it requires more participation of learners by reducing or removing barriers that inhibit the learning of learners. In inclusive setting children of different ages work together in the atmosphere of

cooperation rather than competitiveness. Thus teaching strategies of inclusive education must enhance a climate of trust and interactive peer relationships through mutual support by cooperative learning groups. In this way students support and nurture each other's learning.

Conclusion

In order to meet diverse needs in the classroom differentiated instruction must be planned and a variety of techniques must be used for students to explore curriculum content so that they can understand information and ideas in their own way. For example developing preferred stimulus-response format based on students' preferred learning style – written, oral or any other alternative method so that students can develop into active explorers to promote inductive thinking and teaching – learning process may shift from being teacher-centered to learner-centered.

The development of inclusive education not only requires a constant change in teachers' values, attitudes, professional expertise and knowledge but also in those responsible for their training and support. In many teacher education courses, inclusion is considered as an ad-on module, usually associated with learners with impairments or those having 'special educational needs' rather than permeating the approach to education in all courses for all students. There is a need for reflection and introspection of both general and special education courses in order to reframe inclusive education course to meet the challenges of present day society.Thus every child in a school or college should be provided with equitable access to curriculum, textbooks and teaching-learning material in the best suited form according to his/her learning needs. Last but not the least, one thing that needs focus is 'not only slogans but conviction' is a real source of going forward to seek inclusive educational objectives.

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