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Inclusive Education in India: Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract:

Inclusive Education is a new approach towards educating the children with disability and learning difficulties with that of normal ones under the same roof. It advocates that special children with special needs have to be educated along with normal peers in regular classrooms. 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 to promote an inclusive and tolerant society. India has advocated the implementation of inclusive education supported by relevant policies, legal enactments, schemes, programmes and plans.

The 1994 Salamanca statement on inclusive education states—

“School should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups.”

Keywords: Inclusive education, Special Education, Challenges and Opportunities.

Introduction:

Inclusion is the ideological basis for the process of inclusion of students with disabilities in general education. It is an idea where every child will have a certain place in the field of education and teachers will become not only information distributors, but also appropriate teaching-assistants. The ideal inclusive situation will only arise when the education of students with disabilities becomes an integral part of that education system. That is to say, from now on, the general teachers of every general school will be able to provide minimum education to the disabled students without the help of any special teacher.

“Inclusive education happens when children with and without disabilities participate and learn together in the same classes. ... We also know that simply placing children with and without disabilities together does not produce positive outcomes. Inclusive education occurs when there is ongoing advocacy, planning, support and commitment.”

--- L Sodak & E Erwin.

Objectives:

- Minimally controlled environments include more intensive education for children with mild disabilities.
- Emphasis on meeting the specific educational needs of the child rather than class.
- Determining ways to improve the mindset of normal classmates and to develop a collaborative attitude towards a classmate with disabilities.
- Gradually reducing social distance through sharing of various facilities and on the basis of mutual understanding.
- Eliminate the frustration, inferiority complex of students with disabilities.

Meaning of Inclusive Education:

Inclusive education is about ensuring access to quality education for all students by effectively meeting their diverse needs in a way that is responsive, accepting, respectful and supportive. Students participate in an education program in a common learning environment with support to diminish and remove barriers and obstacles that may lead to exclusion. Inclusive education is carried out in a common learning environment that is educational setting where students from different backgrounds and with different abilities learn together in an inclusive environment. A common learning environment is not a place where students with intellectual disabilities or other special needs learn in isolation from their peers.

“Inclusive education is a set of values, principles and practices that seek more effective and meaningful education for all students, regardless of whether they have exceptional labels or not.”

---- Michael F. Giangreco

Background of Inclusive Education:

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 (Seventh all India School Education Survey - NCERT, 2017). The Kothari Commission (1966) which highlighted the importance of educating children with disabilities during the post-independence period (Sharma B. , 2011), In 1980s the then ministry of Welfare, Govt. of India, realized the crucial need of an institution to monitor and regulate the HRD programmes in the field of disability rehabilitation. Till 1990s, ninety percent of India's estimated 40 million children in the age group- four-sixteen years with physical and mental disabilities are being excluded from mainstream education. The National Policy on Education, 1986 (NPE, 1986), and the Programme of Action (1992) stresses the need for integrating children with special needs with other groups. The Government of India implemented the District Primary Education Project (DPEP) in 1994–95. In late 90s (i.e. in 1997) the philosophy of inclusive education is added in District Primary Education Programme (DPEP).

Needs and Importance of Inclusive Education:

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. Especially, because these kids face some sort of barriers to learning and participation in the classroom. As general education classrooms include more and more diverse students, teachers realize the value of accepting each student 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 education curriculum. The growing body of research 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.

- Inclusion in education involves the process of increasing the participation of students in and reducing their exclusion from the cultures, curricula and communities of local school.
- Inclusion involves restructuring the cultures, policies and practices in schools, so that they respond to the diversity of students in their locality.
- Inclusion is concerned with fostering mutually sustaining relationship between schools and communities.
- Inclusion in education is one aspect of inclusion in the society.

Opportunities of Inclusive Education:

- Provides access to students with disabilities to curricula and text books to which most of the other students are exposed who have no disability.
- Inclusive education enables the handicapped and the gifted to learn in accordance with their potential and needs.
- Provides equal opportunities to special children with regard to education. Inclusive education is based on the principles of social justice and human rights. No separate education for special children because it terms it as, dehumanizing, labelling ineffective and expensive.
- Inclusive education provides appropriate education to special children that afford them the opportunity to achieve their best and safeguards the interest of the children.
- Inclusive education firmly states that the educational institutions shall make to every extent possible, their facilities and programmes amenable to use with relative ease by physically challenged students. Provide special support to students who wish to pursue their higher education.
- With the right training and support, good strategies, the children with special educational needs can be successfully included in the mainstream education.
- Inclusion of special children in inclusive education is the process by which schools, local authorities of education and others develop their cultures, policies and practices to include all the students.
- Inclusive education services offer excellent choice and incorporate the views of parents and children.

Challenges of Inclusive Education:

- The latest challenge to inclusive education is to meet the needs of all the children, with and without disability in the general classroom. It is not an easy process and requires lot of struggle and commitment to overcome attitudinal and social barriers.
- The determinant factors that refers to the attitude of the community towards persons with disabilities and inclusion is the limited understanding of the concept of disability, negative attitude towards persons with disabilities and a hardened resistance to change.
- The challenge towards inclusive education emanates from different directions e.g.

- Attitudinal factors.
- Parental approach.
- Resistance to change.
- Rigid school system and learning environment.
- Lack of clear educational strategies.
- Lack of instructional and learning materials.
- Inadequate budget.
- Poor response by the society at large.
- Remove barriers to learning and participation.

Few 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. We know that Albert Einstein was learning disabled but still managed to become the greatest mind of the 20th century. Educating children with disabilities alongside their non-disabled peers is considered one of the better ways to provide education to the population in India (Shah, 2005, Shah et al., 2014). The Government of India needs to bridge the gaps in their education system to build a strong system of inclusive education in the country. So, there are following measures for better implementation of Inclusive Education in India.

- The school has the primary responsibility for helping children learn alongside their typically developing peers. An inclusive school must enable education structures, systems and methodologies to meet the needs of all children, particularly those who face the greatest barriers to achieving their right to education.
- Bringing special children into mainstream requires adjustments that schools need to make in advance. Transport facilities should be altered, so that these children can move around with relative ease. Architecturally, there should be ramps and wheelchair access constructed in service areas such as toilets.
- Necessary school supplies such as audio learning or textbooks in Braille should be made available. Suitable modification to examination system may be required, so as to eliminate pure mathematical and logical assessments.
- A policy of inclusion needs to be implemented in all schools and throughout Indian education system (NCF, 2005). Schools need to become centres that prepare children for life and ensure that all children, especially the differently able children from marginalized sections, and children in difficult circumstances get the maximum benefit of this critical area of education.
- 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.
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- The Right to Education (RTE) must apply to all citizens of India. State and central Governments as well as all the other social actors should recognize the importance of a broadened concept of inclusive education that addresses the diverse needs of all learners.
- The preparation of teachers for rural 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.
- 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 curriculum for each of the above

programmes should be carefully developed by an expert group which includes practising special teachers.

- Student-oriented components, such as medical and educational assessment, books and stationery, uniforms, transport allowance, reader allowance and stipend for girls, support services, assistive devices, boarding the lodging facility, therapeutic services, teaching learning materials, etc should provide according to need of the students.

Conclusion:

Right to Education Act 2009 ensures education to all children irrespective of their caste, religion, ability, and so on. It is essential to build an inclusive society through an inclusive approach. In doing so, we have challenged commonly held beliefs and developed a new set of core assumptions. Inclusion is more than a method of educating students with disabilities. It stresses that each child, regardless of the intensity and severity of his or her disabilities, is a valued member of society and is capable of participating in that society. A good inclusive education is one that allows all the students to participate in all aspects of classroom equally or close to equal. To meet the challenges, the involvement and cooperation of educators, parents, and community leaders is vital for the creation of better and more inclusive schools. The Government of India is trying to improve its education system focusing on the inclusive approach. The success of inclusive education depends largely on the association of normal classmates with children with disabilities. An important aspect of the relationship with classmates is the support they receive from the students in the classroom. This means that normal children who are a little ahead in their studies can also help their classmates with disabilities in some educational matters in the classroom. At present, in some developed countries, short-term training of normal students is provided in this field.

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