

Inclusive Education: Challenges and Prospects in India

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Abstract: 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 society. 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 society. It is an approach, which takes into account unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs of all children. It is an attempt to meet the unique needs of every child in a regular school setting where all children, including those with disability, try to participate in all facets of school life. The goal is to provide accommodating and personalized education for all students within the context of a general educational classroom. The need of the hour is to develop a universal design of learning which makes learning joyful for all children. This paper discusses in detail the concept of inclusive education, including importance, challenges and measures to implement inclusive education in India.

Keywords: Inclusive education, challenges, prospects, India

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 society. There are an estimated 25 million children out of school in India (MHRD 2003 statistics, cited in World Bank, 2004), many of whom are marginalized by factors such as poverty, gender, disability, caste, religion etc. Therefore undoubtedly the idea of inclusive education is certainly highly relevant to our current condition, where differences in religion, faith, gender, ethnicity and ability are often seen as a threat rather than a source of richness and diversity. Inclusive education stands for improvement of schools in all dimensions to address the educational needs of all children. The major support for inclusive education came from the 1994 World conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca, Spain which emphasized that: Schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions.

PRINCIPLES OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

In inclusive education each child should have the opportunity to experience meaningful challenges, exercise choice and responsibility, interact collaboratively with others, and be actively engaged in developmental, academic, non-academic, inter and intra personal activities as part of the educational process. Implementation of the plans, programmes and actions depend upon continuous community support, broad planning, training and evaluation. An adapted school environment is needed to suit the need of every child with disabilities. The important principles of inclusion are:

- Sharing of responsibilities of functionaries working at different levels;
- Providing additional support to children; Development of a collaborative framework to meet the additional needs and interests of children;
- Implications for various types of disabilities;
- Knowledge about family and social environment of children;
- Modifications in Teaching-Learning strategies/modalities;
- Improving professional competencies of teachers;
- Ensuring community support and support of other functionaries working at different levels .

The process of inclusion starts with the planning of education for all children under regular education in the classrooms, which is least restrictive. Children with disabilities need improvement in cognitive and social development and physical motor skills. All functionaries associated with school should share responsibilities and support all children. Collaborative efforts from school staff to meet the unique needs of all children are essential. So far as the provision of Individualized Education Programme is concerned, it is based on intensity of service required. Family and social circumstances of children are crucial to inclusion of children with disabilities.

CHALLENGES FOR INCLUSION

Adequate academic as well as administrative support is the key for the success of inclusion of children with disabilities in general schools. Simply enrolment of these children will not serve the purpose of inclusion. Respecting need of each child is a real challenge for the teachers and administrators.

The basic challenges confronted by the stakeholders associated with inclusive education are:

1. School reforms.
2. Attitude of teachers, parents and community.
3. Curricular adaptations for effective classroom processes.
4. Capacity building of teachers and other functionaries
5. Adapting need based instructional strategies
6. Provision of adequate human resources and material resources
7. Facilitating collaborative learning
8. Developing partnership with professionals and organizations.

Prospects of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is a developmental approach seeking to address the learning needs of all children, youth and adults with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion. An increasing number of publications, policy papers, workshops etc. have supported the ideology of inclusion. Some organizations and people, however, doubt whether the ordinary classroom can provide quality education for disabled children. This debate has been on, ever since people began to voice their reservation against old segregated institutions and in turn raised their concern for equality of disabled children. These concerns must be taken seriously and dispelled by showing examples of positive experiences, which clearly demonstrate that inclusive education most definitely addresses quality issues in education. These are:

- Quality teacher education
- Curriculum and pedagogy
- School organization including adequate accessible facilities
- Aids and appropriate materials

Many countries have developed programs, which promote equality of opportunity by allocating specific funds to areas of social and economic need. If inclusion is to be successful, the following parameters need to be taken care of:

- * Encouragement provided by the community for 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 the education of children with disabilities. *Enrolment rate of children with disabilities at least on par with that of nondisabled children. *Retention of children with disabilities in schools. Availability of support from peer group to children with disabilities and vice-versa in teaching learning processes.
- * Comparable achievement of children with disabilities in curricular and cocurricular activities at par with their capabilities.
- * Availability of specialist teacher support, if possible to the regular classroom teachers.

Recommendations

Following measures are suggested for better implementation of Inclusive Education in India.

- 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.
- A policy of inclusion needs to be implemented in all schools and throughout Indian education system Schools need to become centers that prepare children for life and ensure that all children, especially the differently abled children from marginalized sections, and children in difficult circumstances get the maximum benefit of this critical area of education.
- The preparation of teachers for rural special education programs should be planned differently, as the aim of these would be to integrate disabled persons in their own environment and community.
- .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.
- . A school-based support team should develop strategies for the whole school to meet the needs of learners with special educational needs. This team should also be a resource for teachers experiencing problems in their classrooms.
- .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.
- . Parents have a right to be involved in all decision-making concerning their child. They should be seen as partners in the education process. Where there is such co-operation, parents have been found to be very important resources for the teachers and the schools.
- . 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.
- . 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.
- . 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.

- . 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.
- . 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.
- . Families with children without disabilities should develop relationships with families with children with disabilities and be able to make a contribution.
- . In-service training programs 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.
- . Those schools that are committed to taking in children with special needs, then teachers must attend workshops in order to be adjusted to the child's needs.
- . Periodic evaluation of the training programs and constant updating to meet the challenges of changing trends in special education should be part of the planning of teacher preparation.
- . Inclusion should not be the sole responsibility of the specific class teacher. Everybody should be involved and take responsibility. Training for teachers should be sustained and ongoing. It should most importantly focus on attitudinal change.
- .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 programs should be carefully developed by an expert group which include practicing special teachers

CONCLUSION

In the model of inclusive education, it is not the Child, but the education system, which is seen as a problem. Therefore, it is the system (with all its components) which should be changed, modified & made flexible enough to accommodate the diverse needs of all learners, including children with disabilities. The onus for success is therefore on the flexibility of the system. It focuses on the environment, as the “disabling” cause because it fails to provide appropriate access to equal opportunities for all persons to participate fully in social life. It is essential to build an inclusive society through an inclusive approach. Success of inclusion demands effective collaboration and meaningful cooperation from all stakeholders associated with education of children. It would be pragmatic to chalk out the ways and means to make schools more accessible for children with disabilities. We need to develop an inclusive design of learning to make the education joyful for all children so that the education for them is welcoming, learner friendly and beneficial and they feel as a part of it not apart from it.

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