



Inclusive education for children with special needs: Developments and Practices

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Abstract

Inclusion refers to an emerging trend and philosophy which believes that all children regardless of their ability, disability, caste, creed, religion, socio-economic background and so on should learn and can learn together in mainstream school. Globally as well as in India, there is apparent consensus and shift towards inclusive education. The impetus is augmented by many legislations, policies, acts, conventions, and recommendations at national and global levels, including UNCRPD (2006), which categorically makes provision to ensure inclusive education. As a result, inclusive education comes to the fore front and supposed to be only feasible means to achieve the goal of "Education for All"- India's long cherished goal. Inclusive education is a worldwide movement aiming to create one education system that values all children irrespective of their ability, disability, community background, ethnic background etc. The present paper aims to conceptualise the term 'inclusive education' in Indian context. It also talks about its development with regard to both international and national perspective and current practices that have been adopted in India to promote inclusion of children with special needs in mainstream education system.

Keywords: children with special needs; inclusive education; developments; current practices

Introduction

Education of children with special needs has never received such amount of consideration and special efforts by government agencies in the past as in the present days. Now inclusive education is the most feasible plan of getting across of education to each child. The meaning of inclusion has emerged as a result of social justice and human right movement in the field of disability which emphasizes that the school should create an environment in which children with special needs are seen as an active member of the social community with competence and capability for making positive contribution. Inclusive education as a concept is a notion that requires school to respond to the varying competencies of all children (Sandil & Singh, 2004) ^[1].

In this context of education, the restructuring of school on inclusive lines is a reflection of the social model in action (Mittler, 2000) ^[3]. The fundamental principle of inclusive school is that all children should learn together wherever possible regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Inclusive school must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnership with their communities (Lipsky & Gartner, 1999) ^[2].

Conceptualizing Inclusive Education in Indian Context

The concept of inclusive education was introduced in India by Jangira in 1997 ^[5] when he made reference to the Warnock Report. The credit of expanding the notion of special education was endowed on the Warnock Committee Report which revolutionized the earlier thought systems focusing on categorization and labelling. This, he argued, had further 'evolved into a broader and natural concept of inclusive schooling in recent years' (Jangira, 1997, p. 496) ^[5]. As the

developed world is moving towards providing an inclusive system of education, the developing countries like India are left with little choice but to follow trail. Thus, he contends that inclusive education is not an alternative but is inevitable. On the other hand, Mani (2000, p. 9) ^[4] notes that he is the first proponent of inclusive education in India, as it is he who had suggested such an approach in the 1980s, when referring to the concepts of 'dual teaching model' and the 'multi-skilled teacher plan'. 'Dual teaching model' he elaborates as involving: regular classroom teachers with support instructional material and limited competency oriented training can usually look after children with disabilities in addition to their regular classroom responsibility (Mani, 2000, p. 10) ^[4]. He also noted that a 'token incentive' may be provided for the teachers for their additional work with children with disabilities (p.7) (cited in Singal, 2005) ^[6]. The way inclusive education is defined and understood has tremendous effect in the way it is conceived amongst schools and the idea is propagated to the teachers, administrators, peers, families and communities. In Indian context, however, Singal (2005) ^[6] perceived inclusive education as "a concept that has been adopted from the international discourse, but has not been engaged within the Indian scenario". In India the concept of 'inclusive' and 'integrated' education are used interchangeably (Julka, 2005) ^[5], and has been applied to placement of children with disabilities in the regular schools where there is a provision of aids and appliances and teachers are trained to manage children with disabilities. There is little emphasis on connotations of school, curriculum and teachers flexibility for all children (ibid). Thus, Singal (2007) ^[8] contends that in India inclusive education is understood and practiced differently from the western world. In fact there is "a tendency to be 'politically correct' by taking on current trends in the west without a real or common understanding of their meaning, resulting in dilution of service quality" (Kalyanpur, 2007

quoted in Singal, 2007) [9]. Ideally, “inclusive education means attending the age appropriate class of the child’s local school, with individually tailored support” (UNICEF, 2007) [10]. Hence, it is difficult to find a suitable definition for the Indian context where the concept is new and developing. However, ‘Inclusive Education’ is defined as a schooling system where the children with disabilities study alongside their non-disabled peers with some support mechanisms for continuing their education.

Development of Inclusive Education-International Scenario

Numbers of strides instigated worldwide under the leadership of world bodies like UNO and World Bank fuelled the drive towards inclusion. A special mention can be made of the following strides in this direction:

1. Based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the convention on the rights of the child (1989), UNESCO claimed that being included within mainstream education is a basic human right.
2. The World Conference on Education for All held at Jomtien, Thailand in March 1990 stated that children and adults with disabilities do have the right to education and have the right to be part of the mainstream education system.
3. The UN standard rules on the equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities (1992) emphasized that states should aim for the gradual integration of special education services with mainstream education.
4. Biwako Millennium Framework recommended for action by governments in the region and concerned stakeholders to achieve an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for persons with disabilities in the new decade, 2003-2012.
5. The World Conference on special needs education held in Salamanca in June, 1994 declares that “Education policies at all levels, from the national to the local, should stipulate that a child with disability should attend the neighbourhood school. It also says that regular schools with an inclusive ethos are the most effective way to combat discriminatory attitudes, create welcoming and inclusive communities and achieve education for all.”

Development of Inclusive Education: Indian Scenario

The education of the children with special needs has surpassed many significant phases in its journey from the era of negligence and extermination to the present era of right based inclusive education for bringing all types of children with special needs into the mainstream schooling system in India. Listed below are the steps that have been taken by the Government of India in order to promote education for all in an inclusive and enabling setting:

1. There are several articles in the constitution referring to measures to be taken towards improving accessibility of education in India. For instance, article 29 states that no citizen shall be denied admission, article 45 talks of provision of free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years and article 46 deals with the promotion of educational and economic interests of weaker sections states.
2. Kothari commission report (1964-66) identified mass illiteracy as one of the major problems that India was facing and gave many recommendations for increasing of

productivity of the citizens and strengthening national and social integration.

3. The National Policy on Education (1968) [9] stressed the need for promoting rapid Universalization of Education as well as prevention of wastage and stagnation. In order to implement it, the Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) scheme was launched in December, 1974 for admitting children with disabilities in regular schools.
4. Another policy on education called the National Policy on Education (NPE, 1986, henceforth) supported Universalization of Education.
5. In 1992, India launched the Programme of Action in order to practically implement the NPE (1986) in an effective manner. Under the Programme of Action, 1992, the Project Integrated Education for the Disabled (PIED) was launched in 1987 for encouraging schools to enrol children with disabilities in their neighbourhood.
6. The principle of inclusion brought along a change in the attitude towards the learning abilities of children with disabilities. The difficulty that a child exhibited in learning was not to be attributed to the child but to the school system. This attitude became the prime reason for the addition of inclusive education into the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) in 1997.
7. This further drew the attention of the Government to the need for Universalization of Education which subsequently led to the birth of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA, henceforth) in 2001.
8. Following the successful implementation of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, a programme to universalise Secondary Education has been launched under the name Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA, henceforth) in 2009. Under RMSA, a scheme was introduced to promote inclusive education at secondary level known as Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS).
9. The latest development in the field of education is the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act or Right to Education Act (RTE) which was passed by the Indian Parliament on 4th August 2009 and came into force from 1st April 2010.

Current Practices of Inclusive Education in India

Inclusive education has been regarded as the most viable strategy to ensure right of children with special needs to quality education in both developed and developing countries. In India, the following practices are central towards attainment of the goals of inclusive education for children with special needs.

1. Peer tutoring approach
2. Individualized teaching
3. Cross disability approach
4. Adapted physical education
5. Advocacy and legal support
6. Least restrictive environment
7. Vocationalization of education
8. Integration of ICT in education
9. Cooperative and team teaching
10. Individualised Educational Plan (IEP)
11. Universal Design for Learning (UDL)
12. Use of assistive technology and devices
13. Curriculum reform and curriculum adaptation
14. Reformation of traditional evaluation system

15. Acknowledging and valuing individual difference
16. Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE)
17. Collaboration between parents, teachers and administrators
18. Conception of learning as an individual and communal process
19. Collaboration between government bodies; NCTE, RCI, MCI etc.
20. Incorporating special education in curriculum of general B.Ed. and M.Ed. programmes
21. Professional development for all teachers involved, general and special educators alike
22. Introduction of various educational policies and schemes to combat discrimination and ensure inclusive ethos in education as well as in life at large
23. Conception of holistic developments with focus on both scholastic and co-scholastic activities

<http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/digest13-disability.pdf>. (Accessed on 18.11.2016) 2007.

Conclusion

In the view of above, it can be rightly concluded that inclusive education has become a prime agenda for bringing children with special needs into mainstream settings in both developed and developing nations in including India. It is needless to mention that the Government of India has taken numbers of initiatives to implement inclusive set up, but still a long path is remaining to walk on. Thus, an exalted attention should to be given to reconnoitre proper strategies for ensuring implementation of the inclusive education for children with special needs in a pragmatic and systematic manner keeping in mind the diverse need and varied confronting issues of the country, India.

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