INDIA AND INCLUSION

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Abstract

Inclusive education policy has been introduced in India; however the concept is in its infancy. In India, inclusive education for children with disability has only recently been accepted in policy and in principle. Inclusive education stands for improvement of schools in all dimensions to address the Educational and social needs of all children. In a world where approximately 113 million children are not enrolled in primary school (DFID, 2001) Lewin (2000) highlights the potential for education to reverse the negative effects of social exclusion. 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 dimensions such as poverty, gender, disability, and caste. While many educational programmes have attempted to reach out to these previously excluded children, those with disabilities are often forgotten, emphasizing their invisible status in a rigidly categorized society. This paper, while limited by the lack of available empirical data and constraints of desk research, aims to present a case study of the current status of inclusive education in India.

Paper Identification

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"Ignorance ... is a guarantee of marginalization."

Lewin (2000: 23)

1.0   Introduction:

Inclusive education means that all children, regardless of their ability level, are included in a mainstream classroom, or in the most appropriate or least restrictive environment (LRE), that students of all ability levels are taught as equals, and that teachers must adjust their curriculum and teaching methodologies so that all students benefit. This also avoids wasting resources, and "shattered hopes," which often occurs in classrooms that are "one size fits all.

Studies have shown that systems that are truly inclusive reduce drop-out rates and repetition of grades, and have higher average levels of achievement, compared to systems that are not inclusive. People who believe in inclusive education believe that the education system is the impediment to learning for a child, and that every child is capable of learning.

1.1   Understanding Inclusive Education in the Indian Context:

Inclusion is not a new concept to India; we had been including children with disabilities in the mainstream education unknowingly and were supporting them with common sense methods. That is the reason we see good number of people with disabilities included naturally in the society every here and there. As far as India is concerned, the general education itself had and still has innumerable problems such as poverty, child labor, gender bias etc.

It is now widely acknowledged that to achieve the goal of universal education in India and in order to fulfill provisions laid out in the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2009) the education of children with disabilities cannot be put on the back burner. Inclusion or the education of children with disabilities in regular classrooms must be adopted both as an ideology and as a practical solution to support the Education for All adages, and to bring about equity in education in India.

The teachers were ready to take up challenges, maintained good rapport with the community and had a say in the village. Those who enter into the stream of education were groomed irrespective of their personal, social, economical and psychological limitations by the teachers. Each student of a teacher in a rural area was different from the other. The teacher had to practice different strategies to encourage, educate and retain the students in the system of education. They practiced holistic approach to ensure all round development. It is surprising to note that we ought to speak a lot about inclusive education in India.

1.2 Policy Support for Inclusive Education:

As mentioned earlier, inclusive education has been embraced in policy and in principle as the way forward by all major establishments related to school education in India in general and disability in particular in the last two decades. In India, schemes such as the Integrated Education for Disabled Children, IEDC (1974) launched by the Government of India and the Project Integrated Education of Disabled Children, PIED, launched during the Sixth Five Year Plan (1985-1989), had laid the foundation for inclusive education to be adopted at least in principle. The IEDC scheme was replaced by the Inclusive Education of the Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS) in 2008 (NUEPA, 2009). The Persons with Disability Act (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) 1995 emphatically stated the need for equal opportunities for persons with disability and directed state and local authorities to take appropriate action towards meeting the goal. The Rights of Persons with Disability Bill, 2012 directs educational institutions to provide inclusive education to children with disability with respect to admission, identification, infrastructure, teacher training, social and academic development, educational aids, curriculum and examination reforms (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2011).

The National Policy for Persons with Disability, 2006, which attempts to clarify the framework under which the state, civil society and private sector must operate in order to ensure a dignified life for persons with disability and support for their caregivers. It includes extending rehabilitation services to rural areas, increasing trained personnel to meet needs, emphasizing education and training, increasing employment opportunities, focusing on gender equality, improving access to public services, encouraging state governments to develop a comprehensive social security policy, ensuring equal opportunities in sports, recreation and cultural activities, increasing the role of civil society organizations as service-providers to persons with disability and their families.

The non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also play an active role in the provision of services for people with disabilities including education for children with disabilities since the early 1950s, particularly in urban areas. The NGOs are supported by the government through various grants. In the 1970s and 1980s, there was an increase in the number of NGOs in India (UNICEF 2003). Some of these NGOs are making consistent efforts towards including children with disabilities into regular educational settings.

However, even though support for inclusive education in India looks promising in policy, it cannot

be overemphasized that the incongruity between policy and practice remains an unfathomable challenge. The mere existence of ambitious goals in policy has not ensured their expression such as to reach anywhere near the desired results. Perhaps, it is in the light of this realistic situational analysis that some voices have arisen in support of co-existence of special education facilities along with different models of inclusive education practices. Although a debate on factors responsible for the ineffectiveness of the system is warranted, it is not the focus of this paper. On the other hand, this paper attempts to build a case for individual effort on part of schools to provide inclusive education facilities within their regular settings.

2.0 **Barriers of Inclusive Education in India**

❖ **Attitudes:** Societal norms often are the biggest barrier to inclusion. Old attitudes die hard, and many still resist the accommodation of students with disabilities and learning issues, as well as those from minority cultures. Prejudices against those with differences can lead to discrimination, which inhibits the educational process. The challenges of inclusive education might be blamed on the student's challenges instead of the shortcomings of the educational system.

❖ **Physical Barriers:** In some areas, students with physical disabilities are expected to attend schools that are inaccessible to them. In economically-deprived school systems, especially those in rural areas, dilapidated and poorly-cared-for buildings can restrict accessibility. Many schools don't have the facilities to properly accommodate students with special needs, and local governments lack either the funds or the resolve to provide financial help. Environmental barriers can include doors, passageways, stairs and ramps, and recreational areas. These can create a barrier for some students to simply enter the school building or classroom.

❖ **Curriculum:** A rigid curriculum that does not allow for experimentation or the use of different teaching methods can be an enormous barrier to inclusion. Study plans that don't recognize different styles of learning hinder the school experience for all students, even those not traditionally recognized as having physical or mental challenges.

❖ **Teachers:** Teachers who are not trained or who are unwilling or unenthusiastic about working with differently-abled students are a drawback to successful inclusion. Training often falls short of real effectiveness, and instructors already straining under large workloads may resent the added duties of coming up with different approaches for the same lessons.

❖ **Language and Communication:** Many students are expected to learn while being taught in a language that is new and in some cases unfamiliar to them. This is obviously a significant barrier to successful learning. Too often, these students face discrimination and low expectations.

❖ **Socio-economic factors:** Areas that are traditionally poor and those with higher-than-average unemployment rates tend to have schools that reflect that environment, such as run-down facilities, students who are unable to afford basic necessities and other barriers to the learning process. Violence, poor health services and other social factors make create barriers even for traditional learners, and these challenges make inclusion all but impossible.

❖ **Funding:** Adequate funding is a necessity for inclusion and yet it is rare. Schools often lack adequate facilities, qualified and properly-

trained teachers and other staff members, educational materials and general support. Sadly, lack of resources is pervasive throughout many educational systems.

❖ **Organization of the Education System:** Centralized education systems are rarely conducive to positive change and initiative. Decisions come from the school system's high-level authorities whose initiatives focus on employee compliance more than quality learning. The top levels of the organization may have little or no idea about the realities teachers face on a daily basis.

❖ **Policies as Barriers:** Many policy makers don't understand or believe in inclusive education, and these leaders can stonewall efforts to make school policies more inclusive. This can exclude whole groups of learners from the mainstream educational system, thereby preventing them from enjoying the same opportunities for education and employment afforded to traditional students.

3.0   How to Remove Barriers in Inclusive Education

✓ **Teachers' attitude:** "Where there is a will, there is a way"; it's true in the case of the education of a child with special needs in a mainstream school. More than the techniques, equipments, aids and amenities the major causative factor for a fuller, broader and a healthy inclusion. The teacher training institutions, let it be pre service training or in-service training, their locus rests upon the bringing in an optimistic spirit amongst the teachers. The teachers should also be given enough room to brood upon   the problems of the children in her busy schedule.

✓ **Rigid curriculum:** The teachers should be trained to develop Individualized Educational Plans accommodating the curriculum and the needs of the child, putting them on one line. This becomes a tough job when the curriculum becomes rigid. This rigidity does not permit the teachers to provide enough space for the child with a special need in her class. In most of the cases, the teachers break through the curriculum and modify to the extent possible to help the children meet their realistic need through education. Many of the children with special needs are in need of functional academics to lead a hassle free life.

✓ **Rigid methods of Teaching:** To solve the common problems of the education, new methods and strategies are suggested from time to time by the government. But they fail to understand the kind of difficulties the children with special needs undergo. The strategies and methods should be more accommodative.

✓ **Peer support:** The greater boon to inclusion is the peer support. The peers are taking active part in the education of their classmates that are with a special need. The personnel should encourage and tap the support. The child with a special need, enjoys the company of his peer, socializes and vents his grievances. Not only the physical inclusion becomes possible with the cooperation of the peers but also the academic inclusion turns easier as the children of the same age communicate their ideas easily and understand each other with a greater ease.

✓ **Accessible environments:** The physical conditions and psychological climate of the institution denies or accepts the student with a special need. In Indian conditions, the

infrastructural barriers shall not be removed easily as it may involve lot of money.

- ✓ **TLM /Teaching aids:** Innumerable equipments are found every day all through the world to help these children come out of their difficulties. Such supportive devices and equipments should be used widely to help these children. Other modern multimedia devices also can be introduced in process of education.

- ✓ **Early diagnosis and intervention:** All gynecologist, pediatricians should be trained in the early diagnosis of disabilities. They should also be informed about various educational interventions apart from the services of the para professionals. The educational intervention should start at the earlier stage. There should be a separate institution with a comprehensive support of all professionals –clinician, paramedical and educational to ensure bringing out fullest potential of the student.

- ✓ **Parent's involvement:** The parents are in need of proper guidance. They miss or ignore the very important early days of the child's development in doctor shopping. The doctors shall have a multi disciplinary approach in up bringing the children; there shall be special counselors to guide these parents for a holistic and total rehabilitation. All the information should be provided under one roof.

- ✓ **Supported teachers and schools:** The society and the local community shall support inclusive Education. The practical problems in educating the child with a special need viz transportation, community living and economic crisis shall be well supported by the community in a united effort. Each one taking up some small part of the responsibility shall lessen the burden of the parents, teachers and the schools. After all the child is a part of the community and it shall behold responsibility in upbringing the child.

- ✓ **Class size:** The lesser the size of the class, greater the scope for inclusion. The government shall not decrease the teacher pupil ratio at this moment, but the head teacher and other teachers shall think of reducing the size of the class of the particular section (section A, section B etc) small. Skills/strategies to deliver curriculum differentiated instruction, student centered lesson becomes achievable through this.

- ✓ **Ongoing training to school and community:** The authorities shall take up restoring the facilities and also increasing them. The optimistic spirit needs regular encouragement for happy and healthy restoration of the motivation. People friendly awareness campaigns, awards shall encourage inclusion.

- ✓ **Success of inclusive classrooms:** Well-designed individualized education programs, professional development for all teachers involved, general and special educators alike, Time for teachers to plan, meet, create, and evaluate the students together, reduced class size based on the severity of the student needs, Professional skill development in the areas of cooperative learning, peer tutoring, adaptive curriculum, collaboration between parents or guardians, teachers, specialists, administration, and outside agencies, sufficient funding so that schools will be able to develop programs for students based on student need instead of the availability of funding.

Conclusion:

Above all the barriers mentioned, the crucial point to be noted is that inclusive education cannot be in any way equated with only enrollment and with the

mere construction of a ramp. Enrolling a disabled child into school is only the beginning of the process. The school community needs to be prepared for the education of the child and all stakeholders must have undergone capacity building. Focus needs to be put on the education on severely disabled children who often get left out of the system. Only through a sustainable and foolproof system can we ensure that the 24 million accounted and more unaccounted numbers of invisible disabled children are given an opportunity to go to school and to dream of a better future without discrimination and neglect.

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