



Inclusive education and the challenges

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Abstract

Inclusive education is an approach to make education universalized irrespective of any disability within the learner and to maintain equity in the society. It stresses that children with special need can be included in general school system without any distinction and differentiation. Without quarantine them into the boundaries of special school, provisions can be made for a child with special need who can also get opportunity to learn with other students having equal quality and facilities. However, for achieving success in inclusive education in India there lie several obstacles and challenges. Many problems such as, lack of well-educated teachers, curriculum, resources, good infrastructural facilities, awareness, positive attitude, plans, policies are creating hurdles for extending the concept of inclusive education in India.

Inclusive education still remains in the realm of theory and far from practice especially in Kashmir, which was the focus area of the study. The objective of the study was to explore several problems creating hurdles in the way of inclusive education. It was found that the concept of Inclusive Education is still fumbling with problems of policy implementation, an environment that is not conducive for practice. The success of inclusive education is hindered by other factors like community's attitude towards disability, lack of adequate involvement of all stakeholders among others. Among the mentioned hurdles one of the serious problems is to prepare a good, effective and competent teacher who can lead and practice the concept of inclusive Education adequately. In addition, more still needs to be done in order to ensure that the best is achieved from the objectives of inclusive education.

Keywords: inclusive education, resources, awareness, positive attitude

Introduction

Education is the fundamental right of every child, the purpose of which is to ensure that all students gain access to knowledge, skills, and information that will prepare them to contribute to communities and workplaces in new era. 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. 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." There has been an increasing interest in inclusive education over the last two decades. During this period, researchers that have done considerable amount of research on children with disabilities and their successful functioning in the society have promoted integration of these children who would traditionally be placed in special schools (Rayner 2007) [26]. The logic behind this assertion could be like any other normal person, individuals with disabilities are influenced by

similar social, economic, political and other challenges in the society they need to cope up with.

The key to inclusive education is a transformative approach. The transformation of regular schools system is needed so that mainstream schools are given an enhanced capacity to reach out to all learners in a continuous and sustainable manner that becomes an ongoing process. Inclusion in this sense means that children with disabilities need an opportunity to be educated together with peers in the same education environments. Pijl *et al.* (1997: 1) [25] thus defines inclusive education as "an education system that includes a large diversity of learners and which differentiates education for this diversity." "Inclusive education, according to UNESCO, means that the school can provide a good education to all pupils irrespective of their varying abilities. All children will be treated with respect and ensured equal opportunities to learn together. Inclusive education is an ongoing process. Inclusive Education means including the children with disabilities in the regular classroom that have been designed for children without disabilities (Kugelmass 2004) [16]. Inclusive education refers to an education system that accommodates all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. For the development of social skills and better social interaction of the student's inclusive education is the need of education system.

The National Curriculum Framework for School Education NCFSE (2000), brought out by the NCERT 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. The National Curriculum Framework for School Education recommended inclusive schools for all without specific reference to pupils with SEN as a way of providing quality education to all learners. "This includes children with disabilities, who may need assistance or more time to complete their assigned tasks. It would be even better if, while planning for such activities, the teacher discusses them with all the children in the class, and ensures that each child is given an opportunity to contribute. When planning, therefore, teachers must pay special attention to ensuring the participation of all. This would become a marker of their effectiveness as teachers". (NCERT, 2005).

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) was launched to achieve the goal of Universalisation of Elementary Education. As the key objective of SSA is Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE), the three important aspect of UEE in this regard are access, enrolment and retention of all children in 6-14 years of age. A zero rejection policy has been adopted under SSA, which ensures that every Child with Special Needs (CWSN), irrespective of the kind, category and degree of disability, is provided meaningful and quality education. It covers the components under education for children with special needs:- Early detection and identification, functional and formal assessment, Educational Placement, Aids and appliances, Support services, Teacher training, Resource support, Individual Educational Plan (IEP), Parental training and community mobilization, Planning and management, Strengthening of special schools, Removal of Architectural barriers, Research, Monitoring and evaluation, Girls with disabilities.

Inclusive education has faced many challenges that seem to bring down the efforts to making it achieved by governments worldwide as a means to enhance accessibility to quality education to all citizens. Appropriate interventions that can help children with disabilities in developing countries to access equal education have been quite a challenge as this has been dominated by their isolation and exclusion (Mariga, *et al.* 2014) ^[18]. Some of the factors include; less conducive and enabling policy environment and very little commitment in initiating change through research, lack of resources and poverty (Peters 2003) ^[24]. Hence, learners with disabilities are left with very little or no support to continue advancing their unique capabilities in such challenging learning environments. These empirical evidences have been the points of reference for most countries when developing policies to ensure learners have equal access to education.

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Significance of Study

Inclusive Education means including the children with

disabilities in the regular classroom that have been designed for children without disabilities (Kugelmass 2004) ^[15]. Inclusive education refers to an education system that accommodates all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. For the development of social skills and better social interaction of the student's inclusive education is the need of education system. (Tyagi Ed, 2013) ^[32]. Despite of the efforts, many children with disabilities are still denied access to education. It is believed that not more than 2-3 per cent of children with disabilities have access to education (Draft National Policy on Special Education 2002). The Rehabilitation Council of India estimates that 30 million disabled children are in need of education; it aims to educate 10 per cent of all disabled children by 2020. As under Children with Special Educational Needs 29.57 lac children identified while only 24.77 lac could enroll in schools in 2009-10. (MHRD 2009-10) ^[21].

The significance of this study provided an opportunity to identify the challenges faced by the schools implementing inclusive education. The findings from this research may help the policy makers to enhance the teaching and learning environment in the schools that offer inclusive education. It is also hoped to benefit the educational administrators in identifying the problems that are being faced at their schools and therefore find relevant solutions to these problems. Finally, the results of this study will also aspire to benefit the special needs students who are presently learning in inclusive settings, through providing them with a more conducive learning environment where their needs are being addressed adequately.

Objectives

The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To identify those schools in the district of Srinagar, Ganderbal, Pulwama and Baramulla which have implemented Inclusive education
2. To assess the challenges these schools confront while implementing Inclusive education
3. To assess the role of teacher in making Inclusive education a success

Research area

Major four districts were selected as the sampling area for the study namely Srinagar, Ganderbal, Pulwama and Baramulla. All schools of these districts which have implemented Inclusive education served as sample units of the study

Research tool

Survey method and interview schedules were employed to collect the required data. All the concerned groups' viz., teachers, parents, students, resource persons and administrators were contacted in this regard

Findings

- The data reveals that Inclusive education is still fumbling with problems of policy implementation, an environment that is not conducive for practice. The success of inclusive education is hindered by other factors like community's attitude towards disability, lack of adequate involvement

of all stakeholders among others.

- The finding suggests that there is lack of human capital in schools that offer inclusive education settings. The human capital here is defined as the capacity, qualifications and expertise of the teachers in handling students with special abilities. The teachers felt that they were incapable to differentiate the learning activities for the students resulting frustration in both the students and the teachers.
- Students with disability tend to disrupt the classroom with behaviour issues. Majority of the teachers felt that the biggest challenge in dealing with students with disabilities is the lack of knowledge and skills they require to understand these students' behavioural needs. Because they are not as cognitively developed as their peers, the teaching-learning process is not as effective as it could be.
- The teachers also felt that there were inadequate teaching and learning resources available to cater for the students with special needs, hence making it very challenging for the teachers to successfully teach a concept to the students.
- Resources are extremely limited. There is lack of infrastructure, trained teachers because of the insufficient funding. These insufficient facilities affect the success of the inclusion and those who are involved in the program. Government involvement is very less as compare to the non-governmental organizations. As such; more is still needed to be done in order to ensure that the best is achieved from the objectives of inclusive education

Discussion

Many academics in the field of inclusive education point to teacher education and school leadership as essential for the implementation of inclusive education in the classroom (Ainscow, 2005; Sandhill and Singh, 2005; Booth *et al.*, 2003; Ainscow, 1991), yet the standard of teacher training courses across Kashmir varies hugely, and they usually approach the inclusion of children with disabilities from a deficit perspective. According to Agbenyega (2006), many regular education teachers who feel unprepared and fearful to work with learners with disabilities in regular classes display frustration, anger and negative attitude toward inclusive education because they believe it could lead to lower academic standards (Gary, 1997; Tiegerman-Farber, 1998). According to a study carried out by Mukhopadhyay (2005) in India, teachers do not feel equipped to teach children with disabilities and complain that they need more time to instruct these students. Many government programs have included a teacher training component in an attempt to instigate institutional change. However, a 'special needs' focus and a lack of training for management, combined with didactic training methodology do little to alter the classroom status quo, especially when responsibility is shifted onto a specialist resource teacher rather than methods altered to suit all students. However, a teacher can be fully qualified, but if the training is sub-standard it will still have a negative impact on teaching and learning quality in the classroom, whereas an under-qualified, poorly paid teacher with some imagination and innovative practices may have a positive effect.

Teachers who support inclusion identified critical problems with its implementation. Research suggests that training and education are critical to the success of inclusion programs

(Winter, 2006). Teachers are feeling ill equipped to teach in an inclusive setting because they feel that they did not receive appropriate training or professional development to properly implement inclusion into their classrooms. According to Smith, Tyler, and Skow (2003), many general and special education teachers feel that they were not prepared to plan and make adaptations for students with disabilities. Researchers have found that inclusion is inadequately addressed and often neglected in teacher training. The National Center for Education Statistics (2005) found that almost 60 percent of all public school teachers indicated that they did not feel well prepared to meet the social and emotional needs of students with special needs from their teacher education program. As Winter (2006) states, ensuring that newly qualified teachers have a basic understanding of inclusive education is the best investment that can be made. The uniqueness of special education was not being achieved in most inclusive settings. General educators are not trained to provide differentiated instructional methods or able to cope with the needs of diverse learners (Cook, 2002). In a comprehensive evaluation of inclusive settings, Cook (2002) concluded that, "there was almost no specific, directed, individualized, intensive, or remedial instruction for students who were clearly deficient academically" (p.253). Becoming socially accepted depends on the severity of a student's disability, according to Voltz and Brazil (2001). Students without disabilities soon realize the differences in capabilities of those students and label them and treat them differently, as found by Kavale and Forness (2000). This can result in students without disabilities rejecting them as friends, especially if their behaviors are unusual or inappropriate. Parents also had different views of inclusion. Parents seemed to be concerned about their child's inclusion in all areas of life as well as the school environment. Brown (2001) found that parents focused on the social aspects of inclusion and normalization. Many parents of children with disabilities wanted them to have a normal life experience and not be excluded or isolated from their peer group (Brown, 2001). Although parents acknowledged the benefits of inclusion for their children, they also expressed some concerns. Some of the concerns were lack of attention from teachers, their child's emotional well-being, and the quality of services their child is receiving in an inclusive setting. Many of the parents were concerned that the professionals that were working with their child with a disability might not have time to

provide the direct attention and instruction their child needs. Being ridiculed and rejected by their peers and social isolation were also fears of parents of children with disabilities (Leyser and Kirk, 2004).

Educational Implications

Education as we believe is one among the significant ways to develop a complete human being, Inclusive education is a major step in this regard. If the obstacles coming in the process will be identified and then addressed accordingly, the ultimate aim of education will be attained.

As mentioned earlier there are many positive effects of inclusion where both the students with special needs along with the other students in the classroom benefit. Research has shown positive effects for children with disabilities in areas

such as reaching individualized education program (IEP) goal, improving communication and social skills, increasing positive peer interactions, many educational outcomes, and post-school adjustments. Positive effects on children without disabilities include the development of positive attitudes and perceptions of persons with disabilities and the enhancement of social status with non-disabled peers.

This study may be a help to the policy makers and stake holders to address the challenges which intervene while implementing Inclusive education.

Suggestions

- Although Inclusive education is a big project, in India the concept and implementation of inclusive education is still in infancy. It is a fact that the concerns shown by the policy makers about its implementation are sincere, but the objectives of Inclusive education cannot be achieved unless the collective responsibilities are not taken by the families, communities, schools, developmental agencies and the government. Partners are key entity in promoting inclusive education.
- The role of teachers especially in implementing Inclusive education is very diverse and challenging. They need to understand their contribution towards making a good individual out of every student through this inclusive system of education. To understand and attend the issues of the students with disabilities training of teachers is necessary. Teachers have to treat special needs students differently based on their learning level standards. The effectiveness of students with learning differences in the general education classroom requires that educators be trained in the informative strategies to help learning. The present situation demands that teachers must be confident, competent, and skillful to handle any situation in inclusive setup. Their attitude regarding inclusive education and about the education of the disabled children needs to be modified.
- Along with the training of teachers which is immensely required in this regard, resources are also found insufficient and needs to be addressed. Resources such as adequate and trained teachers, infrastructure, orientation of the concerned about Inclusive education should be prioritized, and concept of inclusive education within the education system be evaluated. In order to provide a quality education for special needs students in the general education classroom, all of the necessary resources must be available for both the students and the teachers.

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