



Policy of Inclusive Education at National and International Perspectives

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Abstract

Inclusive education is a constantly evolving process of change and improvement within schools and the wider education system to make education more welcoming, learner friendly, and beneficial for a wide range of people. It is a process of increasing the participation of all students in schools, including those with disabilities. It is about restructuring the cultures, policies and practices in schools so that they respond to the diversity of students in their locality. The present study focuses on principles of inclusive education, its major barriers, policies at national and international levels and the plan of action necessary for achieving successful inclusion.

Keywords: *Inclusion, Policy, Barriers, Disability.*

INTRODUCTION

Over 100 million primary school-aged children are unable to attend school, and an estimated 98% of children with disabilities in developing countries cannot access formal education. Discrimination is a factor in much of this exclusion. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has identified upto thirty different grounds on which children may face social exclusion- including gender, race, nationality, disability, child labour, poverty, and HIV/AIDS. Discrimination in society is reflected in schools and education systems. Furthermore, mainstream education often fits educators' idea of a 'standard' child, resulting in the exclusion of children who do not fit that template. Children with disabilities may be seen as 'ineducable' and denied a place at school. Children who do not understand the language used in class may drop out. In many contexts, children perceived to have special needs are placed in institutions which provide second-rate educational opportunities and leave them outside the mainstream of school and community life making it impossible for them to realise their potential.

The concept of inclusive education originated with the grassroots disability movement, campaigning for an end to discrimination and exclusion. The principle of inclusive education was adopted at the Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994) and was restated at the Dakar World Education Forum (2000).

Inclusive education efforts have often been focused around children with disabilities, and in some settings the term 'inclusive education' has been seen as 'education for disabled children'. However, inclusive education is not limited to children with disabilities. An emerging consensus can be found among policy makers, NGOs, educationalists and activists, that achieving quality education for all can only be achieved through the creation of inclusive educational environments which welcome and accommodate all children without discrimination.

NEED OF THE STUDY

Inclusion is the need of the hour. Children with disabilities are left out from mainstream education. Any child may experience a special need during the course of educational years (UNESCO). Some children feel 'left-outs' and never enter school or enter only for a few years and, as repeaters, become 'drop-outs', without their needs having been met. These children are a vivid illustration of the failure of schools to teach rather than the pupil's failure to learn. A school system emphasising Education for All should ensure the right of all children to a meaningful education based on individual needs and abilities.

The regular schools will now increasingly play a major role in making provision for children with special educational needs available nation-wide. Making the school system flexible and adopting an inclusive approach may, however, prove the most challenging task of all, a task calling for deep reflection and discussion of the two fundamental questions: "What is the overall role of education", and "What is it we want children to learn in school?" It might lead to the need of reforming the school system as a whole from a traditional, examination-oriented to an inclusive, child-oriented approach. Therefore inclusive education is needed to provide equal educational opportunities to all children with special needs.

OBJECTIVES

- To know the major principles of inclusive education.
- To know about the barriers of inclusive education.
- To know about the policies of inclusive education at national and international levels.
- To know about the plan of action for successful inclusive education.

(a) Principles of Inclusive Education:

Inclusive education works upon the following principles:

1. Every child has the right to quality education: all children should have equal opportunity to access education.
2. All children can learn and benefit from education.
3. No child should be excluded from education on the grounds of race, colour, sex, language, age, class or caste, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, poverty, disability, birth, or any other status.
4. Inclusive education promotes changes throughout the education system and with communities, to ensure that the education system adapts to the child, rather than expecting the child to adapt to the system.
5. Children's views must be listened to and taken seriously as active participants in school and in their own learning.
6. Individual differences between children are a source of richness and diversity, and not a problem.
7. The diversity of needs and patterns of development of children should be addressed through a wide and flexible range of responses.
8. Regular schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discrimination, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all.
9. Simply placing excluded children within a mainstream setting does not of itself achieve inclusion: reform of mainstream education is usually necessary to ensure that the needs of all children can be met.
10. All aspects of education, including the curriculum, teaching methods, school culture and environments, present opportunities for promoting inclusion.

(b) Barriers of Inclusive Education:

Many factors enter into creating inclusive classrooms in which children with disabilities learn alongside typical peers. Any one of these factors, or the lack of any, can affect inclusion and the quality of a student's education.

1. Accessibility

Obviously, a student with a disability cannot learn in an inclusive classroom if he cannot enter the room of the school building. Some schools are still inaccessible to students with wheelchairs or to those other mobility aides and need elevators, ramps, paved pathways and lifts to get in and around the buildings. Accessibility can go beyond passageways, stairs, and ramps to recreational areas, paved pathways, and door handles. A student with cerebral palsy, for instance, may not have the ability to grasp and turn a traditional doorknob. Classrooms must be able to accommodate a student's assistive technology devices, as well as other furniture to meet individual needs.

2. Expense

Funding is a major constraint to the practice of inclusion. Teaching students with disabilities in general education classrooms takes specialists and additional staff to support students' needs. Coordinating services and offering individual supports to children requires additional money that many school districts do not have, particularly in a tight economy. Inadequate funding can hinder ongoing professional development that keeps both specialists and classroom teachers updated on the best practices of inclusion.

3. Curriculum

In any education system, the curriculum is one of the major obstacles or tools to facilitate the development of more inclusive system. Curriculum is often unable to meet the needs of a wide range of different learners. In many contexts, the curriculum is centrally designed and rigid, leaving little flexibility for local adaptations or for teachers to experiment and try out new approaches. The content might be distant to the reality in which the students live, and therefore become inaccessible.

4. Teachers

Teachers' abilities and attitudes can be of major limitations for inclusive education. The training of staff at all levels is often not adequate. Where there is training, it often tends to be fragmented, uncoordinated and inadequate. If teachers do not have positive attitudes towards learners with special needs, it is unlikely that these children will receive satisfactory education.

5. Language and Communication

Teaching and learning often takes place through a language which is not the first language of some learners. This places these learners, at a disadvantage and it often leads to significant linguistic difficulties which contribute to learning breakdown. Second language learners are particularly subject to low expectations and discrimination.

6. Socio-economic Factors

Inadequacies and inequalities in the education system and are most evident in areas which have sustained poverty and high levels of unemployment. The impact of violence and HIV/AIDS can also have adverse effects.

7. Attitudes

The greatest barriers to inclusion are caused by society, not by particular medical impairments. Negative attitudes towards differences result in discrimination and can lead to a serious barrier to learning. Negative attitudes can take the form of social discrimination, lack of awareness and traditional prejudices. Regarding disabled children some regions still maintain established beliefs that educating the disabled is pointless. Often the problem is identified as being caused by the child's differences rather than the education systems shortcomings.

8. Policies as Barriers

Policy makers who do not understand or accept the concept of inclusive education are a barrier to the implementation of inclusive policies. In some countries there may still exist policies that facilitate the possibility for authorities to declare that some children are not educated. Usually this practice applies to children with severe intellectual disability. In some other countries, the education of some specific groups of learners might be the responsibility of another authority than the Ministry of Education. Very often this leads to a situation where these learners are not expected to participate in mainstream education and, consequently, they do not have equal opportunities for further education or employment.

(c) Policies of Inclusive Education at National and International levels-

International initiatives include:

1. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 especially articles 23, 28 and 29 along with articles 2, 3, 6 and 12 has been ratified by all countries in the Asia-Pacific region. It is binding on them 'to promote and protect the rights of children with disabilities'.
2. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1975) amended, stated that every child with a disability must have the right to participate in general curriculum as well as extra-curricular and non-academic activities.
3. Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990) regulations state that, "a public entity may not deny a qualified individual with a disability- the opportunity to participate in services programs or activities.
4. World Conference on Special Needs Education and the Salamanca statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, 1994 brought together government representatives, world experts on special needs education and international NGOs, to focus on the value of inclusive schools for a majority of children with disabilities and suggested guidelines for the implementation of such an approach.

5. The Dakar Framework for action of the World Education Forum recommended that by 2015, 'Education for All' should be achieved. To achieve this ambitious goal for children with disabilities, all states should be requested to strengthen their existing national plans of actions.
6. United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, (UNCRPD, 2006) states 'people with disabilities must have the right to participate legally, politically, socially in all areas of life including financial and reproductive.'

National initiatives include:

1. The Indian Education Commission (1964-66) was the first statutory body to suggest that the education of the handicapped children has to be organised not only on humanitarian grounds but also on grounds of utility.
2. 'Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC 1974)' -The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Govt. of India initiated this programme to promote the integration of students with mild to moderate disabilities into regular schools.
3. National Policy on Education (1986) NPE (MHRD, 1986a) in its broad objective of 'education for equality' proposed to integrate the physically and mentally handicapped with the general community as equal partners, to prepare them for normal growth and to enable them to face life with courage and confidence. Plan of Action (POA, 1992) also states education of the disabled should continue in general schools along with non-disabled peers.
4. Project Integrated Education for the Disabled (PIED 1987)'- The Ministry of Human Resource Development in association with UNICEF and NCERT undertook this project to strengthen the implementation of IEDC scheme.
5. District Primary Education Programme (DPEP, 1994): A centrally sponsored scheme, aims to reduce the overall dropout rates of all students enrolled in primary classes and to provide primary education for all children, including the special child.
6. Persons with Disabilities Act (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation, 1995) is a quite composite act which stipulate that appropriate governments and local authorities shall ensure that every child with a disability has access to free education in an appropriate environment till he reaches the age of 18 years. For this it recommends a barrier-free environment.
7. Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (2001) ensures that every child with special needs, irrespective of the category and degree of disability is provided education in an appropriate environment. SSA adopts 'zero rejection' policy so that no child is left out of the educational system.
8. National Trust for welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disability Act (1999) focused to protect and promote the rights of persons with autism, cerebral palsy, mental retardation and multiple disabilities on a national level to participate fully in all aspects of life.
9. The right to Education (RTE Act, 2009) puts the responsibility of ensuring enrolment, attendance and completion on the government to promote participation of all children with disability without any discrimination.

(d) Plan of Action for Successful Inclusive Education-

The following are ways through which the dreams of successful inclusion and provide a barrier-free environment for all may be achieved:

1. Create a balanced educational approach among government-society educational institution.
2. Redefined roles and relationship among teachers, students, peer group, governing body and family.
3. Adopt need-based curriculum
4. Continuous comprehensive evaluation for students.
5. The teachers must have the proper training for dealing and teaching of the students with special educational needs.
6. Students should be provided emotional support throughout the school community.
7. Bridge the gap between policy formulation and implementation.
8. Effective utilization of human and material resources.
9. School's infrastructural facilities like building, playground facilities, learning materials etc should be improved.
10. Technical assistance should be provided by the teachers in classroom teaching for using ICT equipments.

11. Appropriate and monitoring student's progress is needed from the part of the teachers and parents.
12. A teacher should modify the teaching strategies according to the students' needs, interest and abilities.

CONCLUSION

Inclusive education is a human right approach and the philosophy for attaining equity, justice and quality education for all children, especially those who have been traditionally excluded from mainstream education due to disability, ethnicity, gender or other characteristics. As it is a human right approach, no single child with a disability should be left out from including in regular schools. Every child should bear the opportunity to be integrated in regular schools with the normal peers. 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, organisational arrangements, teaching strategies, use of resources and partnership with their communities. The attitude of parents, teachers, community members, and peers towards disability needs to be changed. Children with disability should be given due respect in society so that they can face the challenges of life boldly with courage and confidence.

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