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Inclusive education in India – Concept, need and challenges

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Abstract

It is an established fact that inclusive education is entirely a new approach to educate the children who are disabled and face difficulties to learn in comparison to normal ones under the same roof. In this approach, all students are brought together in one classroom and community, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses in any area, and seek to maximize the potential of all students. The present approach is generally regarded as the most effective way to promote an inclusive and tolerant society. It has been observed that 73 million children of primary school age were out of school in 2010, down from a high of over 110 million out-of-school children in the mid-1990s, according to new estimates by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). Today, we are facing a number of problems regarding the needs and challenges for achieving the goal of inclusive education? How will an inclusive environment meet the needs of children with disabilities? How quality education can be effectively and efficiently delivered for all children?

Keywords: inclusive, environment, education, concept, challenge

Introduction

There is no doubt in denying the fact that keeping in view the importance of inclusive education in India the efforts of government of India have been to provide comprehensive range of services towards education of children with disabilities since the last five years. The government of India introduced the scheme for disabled children in 1974 which was a centrally sponsored scheme to provide disabled children equal opportunities in order to facilitate their retention. With the recommendation of as a goal to integrate the handicapped with the general community at all levels as equal partners, to prepare them for normal growth and to enable them to face life with courage and confidence, the government took initiative in the field of inclusive education under National Educational Policy, 1986. Besides it, the adaptation in 1990 of the world declaration on education proved as boost for the various processes already set in the country. According to the Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992, a training programme was started for the development of professionals to respond to the requirements of students with disabilities. In the National Policy for Persons with disability, it has been clarified that the framework under which the state, civil society and private sector must operate in order to ensure a respectful life for persons with disability and support for their caretakers. In addition to it, if we go through the recent advancement of this the Act mentioned above, we find guarantees right to free and compulsory education to all those children who are between six to fourteen. This Act emphasis on every child with disability is entitled to get free education up to the age of 18 years. Moreover, the main focus of inclusive education is that all children irrespective of their strength and weaknesses are supposed to be the part of the mainstream education. It clearly reflects that education policy in India has focused on children and adults with special needs and inclusive education in schools has become a part and parcel of primary policy objective. Not only in India, but also in almost every country, inclusive education has become one of the most the dominant issues in the field of education. According to inclusive education, all school going children, whether they are disabled or not, have the right to education as they are the future citizens of the country.

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Inclusive School

Schooling is vital to child's development. It is therefore important that a child must attend school where his/her abilities are respected, educational needs are met and potential is realized. The concept of inclusion is premised on the principle that all people with disabilities have the right to be included in 'naturally occurring settings and activities' with their non disabled counterparts (Erwin 1993, p.1). For children with disabilities for whom a dual system of education exists and a number of associated factors which determine the choice of school, an inclusive school in its real sense of term would be the uncontested choice. There are a number of definitions for an 'inclusive school' and it would be useful to look at some prevailing definitions in the field and define it for this research.

Many definitions of inclusive education have evolved throughout the world. Critics have defined this concept as per their taste, temperament and angle of perception. The most common definition of inclusive education is the practice of educating students with moderate to severe disabilities alongside children without disabilities in general classrooms within their home neighbourhood schools

"Inclusion includes physical integration, social integration, and access to normalized educational, recreational and social activities that occur in school". The presentation of the definitions would be according to content and philosophy.

Firstly, the definitions which focus on restructuring schools for serving all learners would be portrayed. These definitions adopt an institutional perspective and focus on organizational arrangements for bringing about effective inclusion.

Inclusive education is the process with which schools try to respond to all students as individuals, reviewing the organisation and provision of their curriculum.

Some definitions lay stress on the human rights aspect of inclusion. All children have the right to education and it is important to provide equal opportunities to them. Inclusion within the educational system is a right for all learners and that neither parents nor professionals have the right to choose segregation for their children. Inclusion proponents argue that our schools must mirror this inclusive and diverse society.

Characteristics of Inclusive School

Without any shadow of doubt, there are certain 'school factors' which influence students achievements like professional leadership, learning environment, high expectation, positive reinforcement, monitoring student's progress and parent-school co-operation identified some common characteristics of inclusive schools in which committed leadership, democratic classrooms, reflective teachers, a supportive culture, engaging and relevant curriculum, and responsive instruction are worthy of detailed consideration.

1. **Committed Leadership:** People in the leadership positions like principal, administrators, board members have a key role in inclusion. They can be source of inspiration and can provide encouragement and support to teachers, educate families and communities about the school's philosophy and commitments, celebrate success and solve problems.
2. **Democratic Classrooms:** Democratic classroom is an approach where everyone (students, teachers, staff, and

family of students) is responsible, contribute and participate in the teaching-learning process. Everyone is treated with respect and dignity, their opinion is respected and the individuals work in close co-operation.

3. **Supportive School Culture:** The inclusive school culture is 'open, accepting and caring'. The leaders and educators take interest in creating cultures which is enabling and welcoming for instance, invite and implement suggestions from students, parents and Community and give equal opportunities to all students.
4. **Engaging and Relevant Curricula:** The curriculum and instruction in inclusive school must be appropriate to suit individual needs and learning styles to nurture each child's abilities and talents. The teachers must inform children about the diversity amongst learners and must promote cooperative learning.
5. **Responsive Instruction:** Teachers have to be flexible and must be skilled to adapt materials, lesson structures and instructional arrangements.

Outcomes of Inclusion

The researchers suggest that while not all of the benefits listed necessarily exist in all cases, they represent a range of benefits that have been experienced when inclusion of reasonable quality has been provided based on observations and research conducted in the United States

Impact on Students with Disabilities

- Educational programs are more relevant and focused.
- Increased access to typical environments (e.g., school, community, work).
- Access to new experiences/opportunities in school and beyond school.
- Access to peer models.
- New relationships and friendships.
- Raised expectations.
- Increased awareness and responsiveness to people environment activity.
- Increased skill acquisition.
- Greater enjoyment of school

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