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A study on challenges facing the implementation of inclusive education in elementary level of Malkangiri district of Odisha state

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Abstract

Inclusive education is the most effective way to give all children a fair chance to go to school, learn and develop the skills they need to thrive. It means all children in the same classrooms, in the same schools. It means real learning opportunities for groups who have traditionally being excluded not only children with disabilities but speakers of minority languages too. From the year 2018-19, Samagra Shiksha lays emphasis on improving quality of education for all students including CWSN. The component provide support for various student oriented activities which include identification and assessment of CWSN, provision of aids, appliances, corrective surgeries, Braille books, large print book, therapeutic services, development of teaching-learning material and orientation programme to create positive attitude and awareness about nature and needs of CWSN. This study tried to determine the challenges faced by educators in implementing inclusive education in elementary level of Odisha. The sample consisted of 50 Elementary Level teachers 10 from each block i.e. Balimela, Kalimela, Khairput, Korukonda, Malkangiri, and 10 Head Masters (two from each block) of Malkangiri District. The results revealed that educators do not show an understanding of inclusive education and are uncertain of their roles. The findings revealed that there is a relationship between the teacher's qualifications, attitudes, stress, gender, large class size and challenges associated with the implementation of inclusive education. The findings also revealed that the teacher's understanding of the extent of inclusive education is limited.

Keywords: Inclusive education, children with special needs (CWSN), elementary level and Malkangiri district

1. Introduction

RTE mandates free and compulsory education to all children from 6-14 years of age. The key Objective of RTE- SSA is Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE). Three important aspects of UEE are access, enrolment and retention of all children in 6-14 years of age. This goal of UEE, has further been facilitated by the Constitutional (86th Amendment) Act, making free and compulsory elementary education a Fundamental Right, for all the children in the age group of 6-14 years. This Amendment has given a new thrust to the education of Children with Special Needs (CWSN), as without their inclusion, the objective of UEE cannot be achieved. In-fact inclusion of one of the groups, which is extremely crucial for UEE, is perhaps that of the CWSN. SSA ensures that every child with special needs, irrespective of the kind, category and degree of disability, is provided meaningful and quality education. Hence, SSA has adopted a zero rejection policy. This means that no child having special needs should be deprived of the right to education and taught in an environment, which is best, suited to his/her learning needs. These include special schools, EGS, AIE or even home-based education. The major thrust of SSA is on inclusion or mainstreaming CWSN into the fabric of formal elementary level. Experiences of programmes like District Primary Education Program (DPEP) and various research findings have shown that inclusion is best determined by the individual needs of the child. Most children with special needs can be enrolled and retained in regular schools if adequate resource support is provided to them, whereas there are others who might have to be provided some kind of pre-integration programmes, before they can be mainstreamed in a classroom. Every child with special needs should be placed in the neighbourhood schools, with needed support services. Children

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with special needs need to be facilitated to acquire certain skills that will enable them to access elementary education as envisaged in the Act.

For instance, they may need mobility training, training in Braille, sign language, postural training, etc. Inclusive education refers to a system of education in which all children learn together in a regular school or class with their peers the implementation of multi-option model of inclusion in SSA has been made possible due to the flexibility offered to each State by the programme. Although most SSA States have identified and enrolled CWSN in schools, they differ in the approaches and strategies adopted to achieve the ultimate objective of inclusion. No matter what the educational setting, it is widely accepted that there can be no inclusion of CWSN without adequate resource support. This aspect has been taken care of in SSA mainly through NGOs, inclusive education resource teachers (IERTs), volunteers or by imparting long-term training to regular teachers on inclusion. States like Haryana have opened model inclusive schools in every block and equipped them with all possible facilities (like transport, equipment for physio-therapy, occupational therapy, resource teachers etc.) mainly to provide all kinds of support services, including remedial teaching to CWSN. ALMP (Alternate Learning & Mentorship Program) is implemented across all 30 districts in Odisha, with daunting challenge of having only 4,700 teachers to reach out to 300,000 school-going children from SC and ST. Another recent initiative of SSA States has been of providing disabled friendly toilets. The movement of learners with barriers in learning and development into regular classrooms require the general educator to teach a significantly diverse population and most but not all learners with barriers to learning are appropriate candidates for an inclusive education. Learners with special needs are said to be those who, because of physical, sensory, cognitive, or other exceptionalities require some form of specialised intervention if they are to be effectively educated. Few Headmasters and teachers have the inclusive kind of training that enables them to deal with the complexities of inclusive education. Most headmasters in school come up through ranks as teachers with no special educational needs training or experience outside general education. Teachers, who lack knowledge, have a little experience and training in special needs education are likely to experience negative attitudes towards the inclusion of learners with barriers in learning in their classrooms. Serving learners with barriers in learning in a regular classroom requires a major shift in roles and responsibilities of educators, intervention and also special services. Possibly one of the most important requirements for ensuring the effective inclusion of learners with barriers in learning and development is the provision of support at schools, if schools are to serve a heterogeneous population of learners.

2. Review of related literature

P.V. Gouri Prabha (2021) ^[23] concluded inclusion “is understood more broadly as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners. The Inclusive Education under SSA has changed the identity of CWSN with a hope of lead better life like others as several novel initiatives have been taken up to address the divergent needs of special children. No doubt a lot of provisions have been made to mainstream the said category of children but an endeavor has also been made to develop in teachers, the necessary attitude, skills and competencies required to deal

effectively with children with various special educational needs. The focus is to be given to develop the strategy to provide onsite support to each and every CWSN.

J D Singh (2016) ^[22] concluded that Right to Education Act 2009 ensures education to all children irrespective of their caste, religion, ability, and so on. It is essential to build an inclusive society through an inclusive approach. In doing so, we have challenged commonly held beliefs and developed a new set of core assumptions. Inclusion is more than a method of educating students with disabilities. It stresses that each child, regardless of the intensity and severity of his or her disabilities, is a valued member of society and is capable of participating in that society. A good inclusive education is one that allows all the students to participate in all aspects of classroom equally or close to equal. To meet the challenges, the involvement and cooperation of educators, parents, and community leaders is vital for the creation of better and more inclusive schools. The Government of India is trying to improve its education system focusing on the inclusive approach. The challenges can be overcome by raising awareness of human rights in communities and publicising positive examples of disabled children and adults succeeding in inclusive education.

Deppeler (2012) found that pre-service teacher's attitude is still less than optimal supportive of inclusive education. Pre-service teachers were less concerned about peer acceptance towards children with disabilities and about their stress levels.

Hwang and Evans (2011) revealed that teachers expressed that they did not have enough time to effectively meet the needs of students with disabilities as well as those without disabilities simultaneously.

Hwang and Evans (2011) revealed that the teachers' reluctance towards the practice was due to lack of training in the area of Inclusive Education.

2.1 Objectives of the Study: The following were the objectives of the study

1. To study the problems and challenges faced by the teachers and Heads in the inclusive education.
2. To determine the teacher's and head's knowledge about inclusive education.
3. To study a relationship between the problems and challenges facing the implementation of inclusive education and the attributes of teachers and heads such as qualifications, attitudes, age and the grades taught at school.

2.2 Sample: Purposive sampling was used. The researcher picked only those respondents whom they thought would best meet the purpose of the study. The sample consisted of 50 Elementary Level teachers 10 from each block i.e. Balimela, Kalimela, Khairput, Korukonda, Malkangiri 10 Head Masters (two from each block). The respondents were approached because they were accessible, knowledgeable, experienced and informative with regard to research under investigation.

2.3 Tools and Techniques: The following tools and techniques were used for the data collection.

1. **Questionnaires:** Two separate questionnaires for the teachers and headmasters were prepared by the investigator themselves.
2. **Interview:** The interviews were semi structured but the questionnaire formed the basis for the discussion.

3. Methodology of the study

List of schools with the larger number of Children with Special Needs was taken from the SSA. From the list 50 Elementary Level teachers 10 from each block i.e. Balimela, Kalimela, Khairput, Korukonda, Malkangiri and 10 Head Masters (two from each block) were taken for the study. The researcher communicated the aims of investigation to the respondents and assured them confidentiality, anonymity and privacy. The questionnaires were handed to them and were collected three days later allowing teachers to complete them at their own leisure time. The researcher used questionnaires because the use of questionnaire enabled to obtain voluminous information from respondents in a non-threatening way. The questions consisted of open (80%) and closed dichotomous questions (20%). Open ended questions are not followed by any choice; respondents answer the question in full. Out of this sample 10 Elementary Level teachers and 5 Headmasters were interviewed individually at places where they felt at ease and ensured confidentiality.

4. Analysis and Result

Completed questionnaires were collected from 50 teachers from the schools piloting inclusive education. The data that was collected was qualitative and descriptive, hence they were inductively analysed. The data analysis was divided into two stages. The data that was obtained from the questionnaires was transcribed and summarised while data collected from audio tapes were transcribed for the analysis process. The analysis of data involved using both narrative reconstruction of the respondent's accounts and experiences and categorising of accounts. The subjects were requested to write their responses that best described their circumstances or situations. The researcher sorted the data obtained from questionnaires for the analysis process. A thorough reading of data was done and topics covered by the data. Answers from the self-completion questionnaires were analysed through elementary content analysis and frequency counts and then converted to a percentage. The researcher labelled data according to percentages. The percentage scores from the questionnaires represents the teachers' responses per question while the unreflected percentages were minor and remained divided among opposite views and non-responses. The data collected from interviews were aggregated and organised according to the research questions.

1. Both Children with Special Needs (CWSN) as well as peers of CWSN were benefited in the inclusive set ups.
2. Teachers grow professionally and enhance personal support as a result of opportunities to collaborate with others in the development of inclusive services.
3. There is a relationship between the teacher's qualifications, attitudes, stress, gender, large classes and problems and challenges associated with the implementation of inclusive education.
4. Teachers who participated in the study are qualified to teach but are inadequately trained to teach learners with barriers in learning. Teachers lack appropriate professional training to implement inclusive education and meet the needs of the diverse learner population.

5. The teachers' understanding of the extent of inclusive education is limited and also views inclusive education in a limited way as a means of ensuring equality of educational opportunities for learners with barriers in learning and development in the general education classes.
6. Teachers with little or no experience of learners with barriers in learning experience negative attitudes towards the inclusion of these learners in the regular classrooms. Experience tends to change attitude.

5. Findings and Discussion

Lack of effective in-service and pre-service or training regarding the implementation of inclusion and special needs reinforces the high levels of stress associated with adapting the curriculum to the needs of and sustaining an effective learning environment for all learners in their classroom. The experience of the researcher is that inclusion has occurred without the understanding of the implications for teachers who have much of the responsibility for implementing it. Teachers have a diffuse knowledge about inclusive education. In service education training should be intended to directly enhance the educational provision offered to learners, and affords individual teacher the opportunity to critically look at their practices. In service training should be closely related to ongoing development and strategic planning.

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