

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

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INTRODUCTION

The education being provided to persons with disabilities is of three types of special education. The one is 'segregated education' which occurs when students with disabilities learn completely separated from their peers. The another one is 'integrated education' which is a step towards inclusion. Students, in this model, usually are integrated but are expected to fit in the school culture already existing. In 'inclusive education' the school, classrooms and programmes and activities are designed and developed in such a way that all students learn and participate together. Inclusive education means that:

"Schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalised areas or groups." (The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, 1994).

Inclusive education means that all children regardless of their ability level, are included in the main stream 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 (UNESCO, 2012). Thus, inclusiveness is about creating an environment where each and every member of any type of community is an integral part of the society notwithstanding physical or mental capabilities, disabilities, economic status and man-made constructs like religion or caste (Bhama, 2009).

Origin of inclusive education relates to the 'Salamanca Statement' adopted at the 'World Conference on Special Educational Needs: Access and Quality' which called upon all governments and urged them to adopt as a matter of law or policy the principles of inclusive education enrolling all children in regular schools, unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise (UNESCO, 1994, Statement, p. ix). The principle of basic education as a human right has been accepted internationally. Overwhelming support is being shown by human rights activists, nonporous, governmental organizations, governments and international agencies, all in favor of inclusive special education as the most biennial type of education for people of all ability levels (Jha, 2012). The Government of India has created numerous policies around special education since the country's independence in 1947. The constitution, the Kothari Commission, the 2005 Action Plan for Children and Youth with Disabilities and the 2006 National Policy for People with Disabilities have always leaned towards inclusion. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2009) is a recent development towards inclusion in India.

Statistics on disability in India vary widely and accuracy of statistics is always questionable. Census 2011 was designed to cover most of the disabilities listed in the "Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995". and "The National Trust Act, 1999" and information on eight types of disability has been collected. Disabled populations in India as per the Census 2011 are 26,810,557 and among them 14,986,202 are males and 11,824,355 are females (Census of India, 2011). There are noted discrepancies related to education of children with disabilities. The World Bank Report (2007) highlighted that 38 per cent of the children with disabilities in the age group 6-13 years are out of school. Irrespective of the estimate, in India the fact remains that a majority of children with disabilities do not have access to education (Ashima Das). Kalyanpur (2008), drawing from the National Census data, found that up to 94% of children with disabilities "did not receive any educational services.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

Although the Government of India has attempted to create policies that are inclusive for people with disabilities, their implementation efforts have not resulted in an inclusive system of education, nor have they reached their goal of "education for all" across the country (Kohma, 2012). It is because of various barriers which according to Johan (2002) and Jha (2007) are both external and internal as well. These barriers, being faced by children with disabilities are summarized below.

1. Special Educational Needs' As 'Barriers' to Inclusion Mittler (2000) sees the identification of children with special educational needs as labeling and discriminatory. Ainscow sees the very concept of 'special educational needs' as 'barriers' to inclusion. He says, "I think the concept of special educational needs, particularly as it is seen in this country, becomes another barrier. I don't think it has a productive contribution to make to the inclusive education agenda. If anything, it is one of the barriers to moving forward" (Clough and Corbett, 2000). Jha (2002) also expresses that the Salamanca Framework of Action did refer to a move from the term 'special educational needs' to inclusive education.

2. Attitudinal Barriers Negative and non-cooperating attitudes of the stake-holders like members of society, parents and teachers etc. that hinder inclusion are :

a. Social exclusion and Discrimination

Disabled persons are socially ostracized by non-disabled people in the less developed societies may be due to their attitudes of fear, ignorance, lack of awareness and traditional prejudices. Regarding disabled children some regions still maintain established beliefs that educating the disabled is senseless and futile. Many are marginalised by dimensions such as poverty, gender and caste. While many educational programmes have attempted to reach out to these previously excluded children, those with disabilities are often forgotten, emphasising their invisible status in a rigidly categorised society. The social exclusion and negative attitudes result in social discrimination and thus leads to isolation, which produces barriers to inclusion. These barriers are caused by society, which is more serious to any particular medical impairment. Another social discrimination is the environmental exclusion which takes place when public services, buildings, and transport services are designed with total disregard to the access needs for persons with disabilities in mind.

b. Peer Pressure

Acceptance by peers provides a much greater challenge for children with disabilities. The peers in school, being the closest on par, play an important role in the lives of the children with disabilities.

There is general support for the hypothesis that children who are not accepted by peers are generally at risk for difficulties later in life (Ochoa & Olivarcz Jr., 1995). McDougall et al. (2004) in their study found negative peer attitude as being a major barrier to full social inclusion at school for students with disabilities (Dutta and Banerjee). Children with disabilities are often an easy target for being teased and bullied by their non-disabled peers as reported by children interviewed in the study by Das. Recent research findings (Nabuzoka and Smith 1993; Dawkins 1996). Mishna 2003; Smith and Tippet 2006 cited in Dutta and Banerjee suggest that vulnerability to bullying cuts across all types of disability.

c. Attitude of regular teachers

Another strong barrier which the children perceive is the attitude of regular teachers. Several studies using both quantitative and qualitative data have examined teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions about students with disabilities and inclusive education. These studies (Agbenyega, 2007; Wall, 2002; Opdal & Wormnaes, 2001; Balboni and Pedrabissi, 2000; Chiang, 1999; Cornoldi et al., 1998; Brantlinger, 1996; Minke et al., 1996; Villa et al., 1996; Fulk & Hirth, 1994; Giangreco et al., 1993; Gerber, 1992 cited in Das and Kattumuri) conclude that attitudes and concerns of teachers affect their acceptance and commitment to implementing inclusion. Das and Kattumuri (2013) found that there were two general attitudes which surfaced from subjects' interviews as being challenges for children with disabilities in inclusive schools. Firstly, regular teachers considered children with disabilities as the responsibility of the resource teachers. Secondly, they felt children with disabilities to be a 'disturbance' to the class and as causing distractions which delayed course completion. Therefore, they choose to ignore their presence and concentrate on execution of their lesson plans.

3. Schools as Barriers

The challenges faced by children with disabilities who have secured admission in inclusive schools are:

I. Admission All the schools in neighbourhood locality do not grant admission to the students with special needs (Dutta and Banerjee). Das and Kattumuri and that Children with disabilities aspiring to study in inclusive school have the greater challenge in their attempt to secure admission. The eligibility criteria of these schools are stringent; the nature and severity of disability is the foremost concern of the school authorities. It was observed that most inclusive schools enrol children with only mild disabilities. They also and that schools also assess the parental support during the time of admission. They give preference when parents are willing to take on the extra responsibility for their child. Parents' inability to pay high fees, particularly in case of private schools, also is another barrier to get admission.

II. Commutation Problem Physical location of schools is another problem. Sometimes non availability of school or its location in area that cannot be accessed becomes the major barrier for children to get education. Inclusive Schools are far away. Students undergo difficulty in reaching the schools by themselves or with the help of their parents. Lack of proper local transport facilities add to the problem.

III. Buildings and Infrastructure Children with disabilities face barriers if the building has not been constructed with their mobility needs in mind. Most school buildings don't respond to the requirement of these learners properly. Students with special needs cannot access all the places in the compound such as playgrounds, washrooms, library, doors, passageways, stairs and steep ramps, recreational areas, etc. Infrastructure in schools is not properly developed.

IV. Materials and Technology For the hearing impaired students teachers hardly use any visual aids. Similarly, for the visually impaired the schools often do not provide Braille slate, Braille, Braille sheets, Braille-Text books.

V. Classroom Size Another challenge in the inclusive schools is high teacher-student ratios. Generally in a normal classroom there are fly to sixty students. For a teacher it is not possible to deal with so many learners with diversity. It becomes difficult for students to adjust with so many students and sometimes children with special needs feel alien in the normal classroom.

4. Curriculum as A Barrier

In any education system, the curriculum is one of the major obstacles or tools to facilitate the development of more inclusive system. In our country curriculum is unable to meet the needs of a wide range of different learners. In many contexts, the curriculum is centrally designed and rigid, leaving little edibility for local adaptations or for teachers to experiment and try out new approaches. As a result of the knowledge based curriculum, the examinations are also too much content oriented rather than success oriented. Usually children with special needs need more time to read or to write their paper. In certain cases severe problems arise for arranging Writers to assist children with special needs during examination. Jha (2002) states, 'There are walls between schools arid children before they get enrolled, they face walls with curriculum inside the classrooms and nally they face more walls when they have to take examinations which determine how successful they will be in life.

5. Untrained Teachers as Barrier

Teachers' training, abilities and attitudes can be major limitations for inclusive education. The teachers are not trained adequately to teach the children with special needs. The training of staff at all levels is often not adequate. At present, training to teachers is fragmented, uncoordinated and inadequate taking place in a segregated manner i.e. one for special children and another for students with general capabilities. So, all teachers do not have proper skills and positive attitudes towards learners with special needs, it is unlikely that these children will receive satisfactory education(Singh).

6. Organisation of the Education System

In our country school education is controlled by central or state boards. Education systems are often centralised and this inhibits change and initiative. Responsibility for decisions tends to be located at the highest level and the focus of management remains orientated towards employees complying with rules rather than on ensuring quality service delivery. There is also not an accurate picture of the number of learners excluded from the school system due to lack of coordination within many systems. Moreover, there arc different types of schools such as private, government and public schools which are developing inequality by offering different levels of facilities and support. Those having an access to private schools have higher possibility of success as compared to those who go to government schools but high cost of education becomes a barrier.

7. Constraint of Resources

Adequate facial resources are a big challenge to inclusion. India is among the countries that have a low 'Education for All Index' (EDI) of less than .800 and is ranked 105 out of 129 countries. All countries with a high EDI (above .950) has government spending ranging from 5.4% to 7.7% , with the exception

of Germany with 4.6% (Educational Statistics at a glance 2005 — 06). For inclusion every institution would be required to make Financial provisions for providing facilities like lifts, ramps, barrier free classrooms, toilets etc. Technology could be used in the form of motion sensors to open doors, us toilets and automatic door buttons for easier resources for persons with disability. This could be in the form of digital library, Braille literature and additional visual resources for students with hearing disability etc. Financial resources would also be required to train and retrain faculty for teaching persons with disabilities in inclusive environment. The Government of India's spending on education will have to be increased to provide inclusive set up (Bhama, 2009).

CONCLUSION

It is important to remember that inclusive education is at a very early stage of conceptualization and implementation in India. So long as the "struggle to achieve compulsory education for a majority of children takes precedence over meeting the needs Of those with disabilities... , change for children with disabilities will continue to be sporadic and painfully slow" (Ainscow etal, 1995 cited in Yadva) It is now widely acknowledged that to achieve the goal of universal education in India and in order to fulll provisions laid out in the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, the education of children with disabilities cannot be put on the back burner. There could be many barriers for educating children with disabilities in regular classrooms but Jha (2002) rightly opines, "Removing barriers and bringing all children together in school irrespective of their physical and mental abilities, or social and economic status, and securing their participation in learning activities leads to the initiation of the process of inclusive education. Once walls within schools are broken, schools move out of their boundaries, end isolation and reach out to the communities. The distance between formal schools, non-formal schools, special schools and open schools will be eliminated".

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