

Status of Inclusion of Children with Special Needs and Effective Teaching in Inclusive Classroom

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Abstract

Inclusion, right of Children with Special Needs, is an approach to educate students with special educational needs with non-disabled children, i.e., Inclusive Education. And therefore, the point here to think about is when we think about teaching in an inclusive classroom, what are our concerns? Do we have enough training? Do we get the support we need from school administrators or specialists? Does working with the children with special needs take time away from our other responsibilities? These questions are very common, and sometimes concerns are justified. The objectives for this study of concern are- (i) to study the status of inclusion of Children With Special Needs in schools of Indore city; and (ii) to suggest solutions for inclusion of CWSN in terms of awareness of teachers, school administration and effective teaching in inclusive classrooms. The sample will include the teachers of the schools in Indore city and a questionnaire will be used as a tool of study. The present study, therefore, will concentrate on the common concerns mentioned above, with a special focus on RTE-SSA (SarvaShikshaAbhiyan) policies and its status.

Keywords: CWSN, Inclusion, Intellectual disability

Have you ever found a child different from others in a group? Did you see a child in trouble while performing in a group? What would you feel if in every day school life that child faces same kind of difficulty while everyone else seemed to do that work easily? What kind of support and help, as a teacher, would you need to keep trying? The answer of these questions can easily direct us towards a path of introspection, which is ignored so far, in our profession and service. May be because we take teaching, now a days, only as profession and forget its most important aspect, i.e. service. Archaeological evidences reported that before the colonization of India, when there was the existence of gurukul system, a system of inclusion in the form of adapted toys made accessible for children with disabilities was

followed. This system was sensitive to the distinguished cultural, social, and economic needs of the students and their families believing in the education and training of life skills after recognizing the potential within each student.

Question arises what this 'inclusion' is. Often a term is used as an alternative to inclusion, which is 'integration'. The latter is often mistaken for the former because in integration the students are placed in a mainstream classroom, which is a step towards inclusion. Actually, integration places students in a mainstream classroom with "some adaptations and resources expecting them to fit in with pre-existing structures, attitudes and an unaltered environment."¹ On the other hand, the inclusive education "is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners which involves restructuring the culture, policies and practices in schools so that they can respond to the diversity of students in their locality."² This means that all children, regardless of their ability level, are included in a Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) so that students of all ability levels are taught in equity and that teachers must adjust their curriculum and teaching methodologies for all students benefit.

How did this concept of inclusive education start in India? Was it the same from the very beginning policy on education for the disabled? The concept of inclusive education was not included in the initial policies. The Kothari commission created a plan of action for the education for people with disabilities, but did not bring into action. In 1974, it was the Integrated Education of Disabled Children Scheme (IEDC), which provided children with disabilities "financial support for books, school uniforms, transportation, special equipment and aids," with the intention of using these aids to include children in mainstream classrooms³. Later, in 1986, National Policy on Education (NPE) stated that the children with 'mild' disabilities should be included in mainstream classrooms, while those with 'moderate to severe' disabilities should be trained in segregated schools⁴. Although, its Plan of Action in 1992 (POA 1992), broadened the statement by stating that "a child with a disability who can be educated in the general school should not be in the special school."⁵ In this decade of 90s, the year 1992 was also the year of the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) Act, which provided certain standards for professionals in the field of rehabilitation. But, probably the most important act was Person with Disability Act (PDA) in 1995, which functioned as a catalyst for several other development projects around inclusion and disability.

In 2002, arrived the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) or 'Education for All' with the 86th amendment to the constitution providing a provision of free and compulsory education for all the children of age group 6-14 years.⁶ SSA is not a disability-specific program, but rather a disability-inclusive program, with specific aspects that benefit people with disabilities. Three major parts of this program that benefit people with disabilities include-

- I. Allocation of ₹1200 per annum per child with a disability.⁷
- II. Formulation of own plan by each district for children with disabilities; and
- III. Encouragement to the key institutions to collaborate to further support these students with disabilities.⁸

In addition, SSA has a “no rejection” policy, meaning that children between ages 6-14 cannot be turned away from schools for many reasons, including for having a disability.⁹

The 2002 SSA laid the foundation of Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009 regarding the inclusive education of PWD. Drafted in 2005 by Minister of Human Resource Development, the RTE Act was passed in 2009 and put into full effect in 2010. This bill, framed through a “social justice and collective advocacy perspective”¹⁰ inclusive of educational rights of children with special needs. There are several other important clauses that make up this act to ensure that students with and without disabilities are guaranteed an education. The two main clauses are-

- I. The act specifically prohibits schools from charging any type of fee that, if not paid, would prevent children from completing their elementary education.¹¹
- II. If a child turns six and is not in school, the child will be admitted into an age-appropriate classroom, and will not be admitted into a classroom based on their perceived level of education¹². The exception to this rule is if children have an intellectual disability they may be placed according to their perceived level of education, which is definitely an anti-inclusive stance.¹³

Besides, there were two more policies drafted by the Minister of HRD. One was Inclusion in Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities (IECYD) in 2005, which specifically looks to move from integration towards inclusion¹⁴ and other one, was Inclusive Education of the Disabled at the Secondary Stage (IEDSS), which was the reformation of IEDC scheme of 1974¹⁵. Joining these policies, the most recent one is the National Policy for People with Disabilities, which utilizes SarvaShikshaAbhiyan as the main mode of implementation of the policy¹⁶. In addition, the policy created more District Disability and Rehabilitation Centers (DDRCs) to bridge the gap between rural and urban areas.¹⁷

Summary of Policies

Policies made so far, by the Government of India have always shown an inclination towards inclusion-right from the constitution of the Kothari Commission in the early days of the republic, to the 2005 Action Plan for Children and Youth with Disabilities and recently the 2006 National Policy for People with Disabilities. However, these policies only tend to present the inclusive policies on education, which often are not perfectly inclusive. Many of them tend to discriminate against people with people with intellectual disabilities, especially in terms of mainstream versus special schooling. Still, at present, the policies governing the education system are inclusive but yes, the problem is absolutely with their implementation.

The point here to think about is when we think about teaching in an inclusive classroom, what are our concerns? Do we have enough training? Will we get the support we need from school administrators or specialists? Will working with the children with special needs (CWSN) take time away from our other responsibilities? These questions are common ones, and sometimes concerns are justified.

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives were taken as a matter of concern in this study entitled Status of Inclusion of Children With Special Needs and Effective Teaching in Inclusive Classroom (especially for children with intellectual disability)-

- (i) To study the status of inclusion of Children with Special Needs in schools of Indore city.
- (ii) To suggest certain solutions for inclusion of CWSN in terms of awareness of teachers and school administration, and effective teaching in inclusive classrooms

Review of Related Literature

A number of researches had been conducted in the field of inclusive education. Beauchamp (2012), discussed the representation and participation of disabled students in the development of higher education policy and provision within the UK, at both a national and institutional level. Broderick and others (2012), explored the disconnection between the disability studies in education (DSE) perspectives on inclusive schooling. Butt and Lowe (2012), conducted a research on teaching assistants and class teachers working in mainstream classrooms with special needs students with differed perceptions, role confusion and the benefits of skills-based training. Hardy (2012), explored the nature of teachers' professional development (PD) practices in special needs/special education settings in Australia under current neoliberal and managerial conditions. Nind, Boorman and Clarke (2012), reflected on the affordances of visual and digital methods and on how the girls with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties perceive their educational inclusion and exclusion. Tarr, Tsokova and Takkunen (2012), insight into inclusive education through a small Finnish case study of an inclusive school context. Brown, Howerter and Morgan (2013), developed tools and strategies for making co-teaching work for the students with disabilities who are being educated in the general education environment for a majority of the academic day. Dawson and Scott (2013) reported on the development of a scale of teacher self-efficacy for teaching students with disabilities enabling them to promote inclusion. Grigal, Hart and Weir (2013) presented an overview of current legislative and policy issues as they related to postsecondary education for people with intellectual disability, including the Higher Education Opportunity Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and state vocational rehabilitation program policies. Hoppey and McLeskey (2013), performed a case study of principal leadership in an effective inclusive school. Marks, Kurth and Pirtle (2013) studied the effect of "measurable and rigorous" state performance goals for addressing "free and appropriate public education within the least restrictive environment". Ryndak, Jackson and White (2013) described extant research, debate, commentary related to involvement and progress in the general curriculum for students with extensive support needs, and discussed implications for future research, policy, and practice related to inclusive education.

The analysis of trend in researches mentioned above, suggests that some the researches involved the studies related to teaching in inclusive classrooms while some others were focused on attitude of professionals in this area. Few other researches tried to develop teacher and teaching efficacy, while some studies were related to the policies on inclusive education. The present study, therefore, was

undertaken to study the status of inclusive setting of education, along with some suggestive measures to accept phenomenon of inclusive education in an effective manner.

Methodology

The following methodology was followed for the present study-

Sample

The sample included ten teachers of ten different schools of Indore city having experience of at least three years in the same school; and for the purpose of case study, a school affiliated to Madhya Pradesh Board of Secondary Education.

Tools

A questionnaire was used to study the status of inclusive education for CWSN in Indore city. Besides, an interview schedule was also developed for the purpose of case study of a selected school providing education to children with intellectual disability.

Procedure of Data Collection and Analysis

The data was collected through a questionnaire including both open ended and close-ended questions on inclusive education, facilities for inclusion of CWSN, appointment or contact with special educators and change in academic methodologies and evaluations. The questionnaire was given to ten teachers of ten different schools. The answers were written by the teachers and then those questions were interpreted by calculating percentage of similar responses.

Furthermore, the interview schedule was prepared. A special educator in a general school setting was interviewed to find out the status of CWID (children with intellectual disability) in the inclusive setting of education.

Results and Discussion

The objective wise analysis of data is reported as following-

Study of Status of Inclusion of Children with Special Needs

The first objective of the study was to study the status of inclusion of Children with Special Needs in schools of Indore city. The data from questions on inclusive education reported that only 20% teachers were aware about actual inclusive education. The other set of questions was related to the training of teachers for teaching CWSN, and the answers reported that neither of the teachers had attended any such training program nor any of the selected schools had organized such trainings. The next set of

questions was related to the availability of facilities in schools for CWSN, which reported that in 60% schools, there is the facility of ramp for PH children, 70% schools arrange remedial classes for slow learners, 30% schools have the facility of assistive technologies designed for CWSN and only 20% admitted the identification of a learning disabled or intellectually disabled child.

A case study was also performed to study the status of CWSN in inclusive setting of education. A school in Indore city, SaraswatiShishuMandir, affiliated to Madhya Pradesh Board of Secondary Education, had a provision of admitting students with intellectual disability. Maximum of 20 students, ranging from mild to moderate level of severity, can get education in that school. A staff of four, two trained teachers, one for support and one Physical Educator is appointed by the administration. These children are allowed to sit in general classrooms with certain conditions-

- (i) Enough training to sit peacefully
- (ii) Permission of sitting for only one or two periods

The support of only 20% teachers is with these CWSN and rest give priority to normal children. Two separate rooms are provided for their education. A psychologist and physiotherapist are consulted from time to time. The in-charge teacher also took the responsibility of placement of these children through 'Rozgar Camps' organized by the Collector of Indore city, once in a year.

With a overall study, it was found that the educational setting was not inclusive, but was an integrated setting of education, where the children with intellectual disability got their education with certain adaptations and resources expecting them to fit in with pre-existing structures, attitudes and an unaltered environment.

Suggesting Certain Solutions for Inclusion of CWSN

The second objective of the study was to suggest certain solutions for inclusion of CWSN in terms of awareness of teachers and school administration, and effective teaching in inclusive classrooms. These can be seen as following-

(i) For the awareness of teachers and school administration

There is a need to bring change in the attitude towards teaching. Keeping 'teaching as profession' out of our mind, we should start taking 'teaching as a service' to mankind. Secondly, a training session for dealing with CWSN in inclusive education should be organized by each and every school at the beginning of new session and the state governments should take initiative for this purpose. Thirdly, the teachers of normal school must have to read the Teaching Manuals, designed under SSA. Fourthly, the appointment of special educator(s) or co-teachers as per the requirement of the school should be made mandatory. Last, but not the least a cumulative record of the students should be kept, so that if any unusual change came into notice, then the history of the child would be very helpful in determining the cause.

(ii) For effective teaching in inclusive classrooms-

Two goals may be set for effective teaching in inclusive classrooms. First, the CWSN need to learn academics; and second, they need to participate completely in regular classrooms.

To achieve the first goal of learning academics, the teachers in mainstreamed classroom should use time efficiently by managing the routines smoothly, avoiding discipline problems, and planning carefully. Secondly, the questions should be asked carefully at right level of difficulty. Thirdly, a trend of positive feedback to students should be followed. Last but not the least; an extended practice may be used for children with specific disabilities.

In order to attain our second goal of the need of CWSN for complete participation in regular classroom, following measures may be taken-

- Certain teaching strategies, viz. Cooperative Learning, Reciprocal Teaching, and Positive Behaviour Support should be used effectively and frequently. This can be done by mixing CWSN into groups with students who do not have special needs.
- Take formative assessments as an effective tool to educate the CWSN by assigning tasks and projects in cooperative groups, like through role-plays, lab works, skits, etc.
- Give students many different ways to show their ability- writing, talking, organizing, drawing, diagramming, planning, demonstrating, helping or performing, for example [Ferguson, Ferguson and Bogdan (1987)].
- The classroom setting should be changed in accordance to the tasks assigned or the different levels and types of disabilities.
- ‘People have differences in many aspects’, should be part of curriculum so that students become familiar about CWSN.
- The effective and efficient use of assistive technologies must be adopted by the teachers.
- Teachers should ensure the use of language and behaviour towards the CWSN, so that they may not feel distinguished in the mainstream classrooms.

These solutions do not require much of the extra effort by the mainstream teachers, but yes, a little effort is needed.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The present study explored the areas in inclusive setting of education, like awareness among teachers of mainstream schools, status of children with special needs and effective teaching in inclusive classrooms. For a successful implementation of inclusion in education system, the mainstream schools should be equipped with resource rooms, go for collaborative consultation, and adopt cooperative teaching.

There are many areas, which remain unexplored in the present study. The further suggestive researches in the field of inclusive education should include the study of awareness and training of parents of CWSN; a survey on status of RTE-SSA check on the mainstream schools in accordance with guidelines provided; experimental studies on effective teaching in inclusive setting; historical study on the status of CWSN in India; comparative study on inclusive education among different states in India and between India and other nations... and many more.

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