
Issues and Challenges Related To Creating Inclusive Schools in India

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Abstract

Inclusive schools are an important foundation for an inclusive society. Today the increasing number of students from diverse backgrounds entering schools has reinforced the importance of making schools more inclusive. With a greater variation in the talents, and social, cultural, economic and political backgrounds of the students, the schools in India faces a challenge to use this diversity constructively in order to democratize the teaching-learning processes and practices, and achieve the larger goals of social justice. Creating an inclusive school is a resource designed to motivate school communities to promote, create and sustain inclusive schools throughout country. However, for achieving success to creating an inclusive schools in India there lies several issues and challenges. Many problems such as, lack of well-educated teachers, curriculum, resources, good infrastructural facilities, awareness, positive attitude, plans, policies are creating hurdles for extending the concept of creating inclusive schools in India. Among above mentioned hurdles one of the major problem is to prepare good, effective and competent teacher who can lead and practice inclusive

adequately. Thus, the present paper attempts to analyse several issues and challenges related to creating inclusive schools in India.

Keywords: Inclusive Schools, Issues and Challenges, Diversity, Teaching Learning Process.

Introduction

Inclusive schools are places where students, regardless of ability, race, language and income, are integral members of classrooms, feel a connection to their peers, have access to rigorous and meaningful general education curricula and receive collaborative support to succeed. In inclusive schools, students do not have to leave to learn. Rather, services and supports are brought directly to them. Inclusive school has school-wide systems for planning, monitoring and reporting on the presence, participation, engagement, progress and achievement of students with special education needs. It uses data as a basis for making decisions, problem-solving and monitoring school-wide practices. The school regularly evaluates teaching practice using

good-quality school-wide systems and uses data to improve teaching quality for students with special education needs. Inclusive school has processes for identifying students with special education needs and their strengths. It is clearly willing to adapt the school's physical environment, as well as its systems and processes, to meet the needs of students with special education needs. There are systems to identify, use, coordinate and manage the services and support available to students with special education needs.

Every child is the concern of its nation. They are the future citizens of the country. Development of a nation calls for the contribution of individual citizens. For this the nation is concerned with the health, happiness, achievement, contribution, safety and success of all the children. The system of education calls for providing equal opportunity to every child for optimal development. "Inclusive Education" has emerged as a guiding principle to envisage this vision. Inclusive Education is an approach to educate all children who are at risk for neglect in education system. It expects that all learners learn together through access to common educational provisions. The crucial people in the system are the parents, and community, teachers, administrators and policy makers. All these people have to be supportive towards the diverse needs of children. It should be seen as an experience rather than a problem. Inclusive education

means welcoming all children, without discrimination into regular or general schools. It is a strategy to make education universalized irrespective of any disability within the learner and to maintain equity in the society. It emphasizes that children with special need can be included in general school system without any discrimination. Without segregating them into the boundaries of special school, provisions can be made for a child with special need, who can also get opportunity to learn with other general students having equal opportunities. Inclusive education practices require people to work together to invent opportunities and solutions that maximize the learning experiences of all children. An inclusive school, therefore, is "a place where everyone belongs, is accepted, supports, and is supported by his or her peers and other members of the school community in the course of having his or her educational needs met" (Stainback & Stainback, 1990). It is designed to benefit everyone, students with varying characteristics (including those with disabilities) as well as teachers and other school personnel. The development of a set of indicators for inclusive school is based on the premise that relevant, reliable and comparable information can help build this capacity. A first step to developing a more inclusive school system is to understand present problems and challenges within the broader context of national and international policies.

Building an inclusive society in which all people can participate effectively and live together requires understanding the importance of an inclusive educational system and its impact on development as a key principle to attain and sustain a quality education for all (UNESCO, 2009). Inclusion is not just about placing students with disabilities in to mainstream classrooms. It recognizes that all children have individual needs, and that teachers who are trained to facilitate an inclusive classroom, can better meet the needs of all children. Generally, the concept and practical move needs to be applicable in schools in India because our country is not free from the practice of educational exclusion, particularly for people with disabilities, therefore this paper deals with the challenges and opportunities to provide inclusive education in our school system. Inclusion is becoming the ruling principle in the 21st century and the concept of inclusive education is becoming the best means to allow each and every child to involve in the system of education regardless of differences in terms of disability, sex, religion, ethnicity and other.

Barriers to Creating Inclusive Schools in India

Inclusive school is a binding and priority for government of India. However, a wide gap in policy and practice exists in the country with

respect to inclusive schools. There are a number of barriers that hamper proper practice of inclusive schooling in our country. Inclusive school does away with the practice of segregating students with learning and/or physical challenges from the rest of the student body. While the practice of inclusion places extra demands on students and facility logistics, there are numerous benefits to all students, both disabled and non-disabled. Perhaps most importantly, inclusive classrooms encourage open and frank dialogue about differences as well as a respect for those with different abilities, cultural backgrounds and needs. Despite the benefits, there still are many barriers to the implementation of inclusive education.

Environmental Barriers: School environment needs accommodations for truly practicing inclusive education. However, such accommodations are not there in majority of the schools. Facilities like ramps, lifts, and directional signs etc. are mostly absent in schools. Environmental barriers faced by special needs children associated with the existing facilities at the school. Suppose that, if the study room or laboratory is located on the first floor, it is the barrier for children with wheel chairs to move up without lift. Environmental issues are also barriers that occur in restroom facilities. Toilets in many mainstream schools are not equipped with special rooms for special needs students that

are wider so that students with wheel chair find a lot of problems in getting in and out. They have to ask for the help of teacher or parent when going to the restroom. Environmental barriers can include doors, walkways, stairs, ramps, and leisure areas. These can create a barrier for some students to simply enter the school building or classroom.

Attitudes: In addition to many other requirements, creating inclusive schools immensely requires positive attitudes towards inclusion and disability among teachers, parents, peers, administrators and policy planners. However, negative attitudes are still persisting among these in many cases. Mainstream teacher attitudes may be a contributory barrier to successful inclusive practices (Avramadis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000; Bender, Vail, & Scott, 1995; De Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2010). Teachers with negative attitudes believe that inclusion is a burden on teachers and they should receive special service delivery in special education settings to avoid the negative impact on their typically developing peers in the regular classroom (Zambelli & Bonni, 2004). This is adversely affect to creating inclusive schools in India. Societal norms often are the biggest barrier to inclusion. Old attitudes die hard, and many still resist the accommodation of students with disabilities and learning issues, as well as those from minority cultures. Prejudices against those with differences can

lead to discrimination, which inhibits the educational process.

Physical Barriers: In some places, students with physical disabilities are expected to attend schools that are inaccessible to them. In economically-deprived school systems, especially those in rural areas, broken-down and poorly-cared buildings can restrict accessibility. Some of these facilities are not safe or healthy for any students. Many schools don't have the facilities to properly accommodate students with special needs, and local governments lack either the funds or the resolve to provide financial help.

Teacher's Competencies: Teachers who are not trained or who are unwilling or unenthusiastic about working with differently-abled students are a drawback to successful inclusion. Skills of teachers which are responsible for implementing inclusive education are also not up to as desired and necessary for inclusion. Training often falls short of real effectiveness, and teachers already straining under large workloads may resent the added duties of coming up with different approaches for the same lessons. The inefficiency of teachers to develop and use instructional materials for inclusion students (Coskun, Tosun, & Macaroglu, 2009) is also a problem issue. The general teachers, at all levels, lack basic awareness about children with disabilities. They have their own socially and culturally constructed notions about

certain obvious disabilities but lack of scientific and educational knowledge about the disabilities such as classification, identifying, special needs and adaptations etc.

Curriculum: A rigid curriculum that does not allow for experimentation or the use of different teaching methods can be an enormous barrier to inclusion. For practicing inclusive education, curricular adaptations suited to special and unique needs of every learner, including children with disabilities, are necessary. Concepts like Universal Instructional design are to be properly developed and incorporated into the curriculum. However, needed curricular adaptations are either missing altogether or are improper. Study plans that don't recognize different styles of learning hinder the school experience for all students, even those not traditionally recognized as having physical or mental challenges.

Language and Communication: Many students are expected to learn while being taught in a language that is new and in some cases unfamiliar to them. This is obviously a significant barrier to successful learning. Too often, these students face discrimination and low expectations.

Socio-economic Factors: Areas that are traditionally poor and those with higher than average unemployment rates tend to have schools that reflect that environment, such as neglected facilities, students who are unable to

afford basic necessities and other barriers to the learning process. Violence, poor health services, and other social factors make create barriers even for traditional learners, and these challenges make burden for inclusion of all learners.

Funding: Adequate funding is a necessity for inclusion and yet it is rare. For a huge and diverse country like India, implementation of inclusive education at all levels requires a lot of money to be spent. The government does not seem willing to incur this huge expenditure. Being a developing country, the apprehensions of the government can be very well understood. Schools often lack adequate facilities, qualified and properly-trained teachers and other staff members, educational materials and general support. Sadly, lack of resources is general throughout many educational systems.

Organization of the Education System: Centralized education systems are rarely favourable to positive change and initiative. Decisions come from the school system's top authorities whose initiatives focus on employee compliance more than quality learning. The top levels of the organization may have little or no idea about the realities teachers face on a daily basis.

Government Policy on Education: Many policy makers don't understand or believe in inclusive education, and these leaders can resist efforts to make school policies more

inclusive. This can exclude whole groups of learners from the mainstream educational system, thereby preventing them from enjoying the same opportunities for education and employment afforded to traditional students. Government of India claims that it has implemented inclusive education everywhere and at all levels. However, the policy planning is improper and measures to assess the degree of implementation have not been developed. Furthermore, implementation of inclusive education in private schools have not been enforced and ensured.

Intentional Attitudinal Barriers: Students generally reported instances of bullying and emotional isolation. Isolation took the form of either being ignored or having difficulty forging friendships. The students indicated emotional attitudinal barrier that was the most hurtful included name calling, pointing, being mocked, being labelled as stupid. Surprisingly, it is not done by the only fellow students but also their parents. In fact there are parents who prohibit their children to make friends with children with special needs. The special needs children regretted that until now, teachers often give understanding to all students to appreciate the differences. There are even teachers who know that there is a disabled child being bullied but they never take any action and it seems that this is not a serious problem.

Unintentional Attitudinal Barriers:

Unintentional attitudinal barriers relate to a lack of knowledge and understanding or effort on the part of the educational system or staff. It happens for instance in physical education classes. The teachers always treat special need children to keep scoring or check the students' attendance rather than giving them a chance to participate in the sports activities. It happens also during the teaching and learning session in the classroom. If there is a session of art and culture, teachers never ask special need children to choose what they want to perform but they assign them to play musical instruments or sing a song rather than participate in a dance together with the other students. Actually, sometimes children with special needs are treated discriminatively by the teachers.

Issues that need to be addressed for Inclusive Schools in India

There are several issues that need to be addressed for creating inclusive schools in India. The schools have a large number of children in each classroom. The number of teachers is relatively low. Teachers are not willing to work in rural areas and use political influence to defer their appointments to rural schools. There is an urgent need to recruit more teachers. General teachers do not follow a child-centred approach, as they feel that this would involve more work. The law mandates

education for all children. The methodology adopted for identifying children with disabilities needs to be modified. Preparation of children before enrolment is required. This would ensure that they do not drop out, are retained in the schools, and can compete equally with other children. Multi-sensory teaching-learning materials need to be developed. These materials are not available, and teachers do not have the knowledge or skills to develop such materials. Training of teacher is needed. The curriculum is rigid and teachers are not skilled in modifying it to suit individual needs. All the schools meant for the inclusive education should be equipped with all physical, academic and recreational facilities and should possess the barrier free environment so as to retain the CWSN at the

schools. Measures are needed to promote awareness and adjustability among all the students through cooperation, coordination, recognizing the potentialities of the CWSN, helping them to overcome their inferiority, counselling and convincing the children to overcome the bias. The head teachers, teachers and parents should be oriented in this regard to promote harmony among them. The policy of inclusive education must be emphasized in education of all children and not only for children with disabilities. It is intended to help nurture the development of rich and inclusive educational settings that respect and value diversity, promote belonging for every student, and ensure that student receive a quality education in common learning environments.

An Inclusive Schools Welcoming Diversity



Conclusion

Inclusive school helps the development of children in different ways. Students with

specific challenges make gains in physical, cognitive, social development and motor skills. They do well when the general environment is adjusted to meet their needs. Children in the schools develop higher levels of tolerance for people with diversities in general and those who are disadvantaged. For creating inclusive schools in India, at all levels, we need strong support services. Their strength should be both quantitative and qualitative. But, existing support services are scarce and inadequate. Overcoming the many barriers to creating inclusive schools will require additional funding, but even more importantly, it requires the change of old and outdated attitudes. When we exclude children from the education system, there begins a discrimination in the society. It is very difficult to include them in the later stages for any purpose in the community. For practicing inclusive education, negative self-perceptions of children with disabilities pose a great challenge. These negative perceptions are often strengthened by neighbours, peers, and teachers. Without rubbing out these negative self-perceptions, true inclusion of such children is not possible. The school and staff together make a commitment that all students should be welcomed into the school and that teachers and other staff will work to have inclusive classes. Innovative and concerned teachers are seeking to create inclusive

schools where diversity is valued and children of great differences learn together. Inclusive schools, and the teachers and staff within them, accept this diversity of ability and make it part of the design of instruction. Perhaps most importantly, inclusive schools encourage open and frank dialogue about differences as well as a respect for those with different abilities, cultural backgrounds and needs. Thus, inclusive school lays the foundation to an inclusive society accepting, respecting and celebrating diversity.

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