



Inclusive education: A movement for equalization of educational opportunities

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Abstract

Humans are born differently and the matter of sadness is there is individual difference in physiological construction. Many people are born, having physically challenged. They depend upon others to do different general activities. For getting Education they are also facing a lot of difficulties. The present report is based on the movement towards the Education of differently able children. In the 18th century, they were deprived of educational opportunities but after that evolution was created towards the Education of those children. Here; the concept, importance, recommendations of different committees and commissions in India before independence till now a date that is NEP 2020 and abroad have been discussed. Different teaching strategies and suggestions to improve the status of Inclusive Education have been reflected. In the context of education for the children with special needs and the normal ones various programs policies and strategies has been reflected.

Keywords: inclusive education, equalization of educational opportunities

Introduction

The term Inclusive Education (IE) is a new approach towards educating all the children including the children with disabilities and learning difficulties with that of normal ones in a common educational setting (Singh, 2016) ^[16]. It means all learners with or without disabilities are being able to learn together below a single roof through access to common schooling provisions, and with an appropriate network of support services.

The principle of inclusive education that education for all was adopted at the "World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality" (Salamanca Statement, Spain, 1994) ^[18] and was restated at the World Education Forum (Dakar, Senegal, 2000). The Statement solicits governments to offer the very best priority to creating education systems inclusive for everyone and adopt the principle of inclusive education as a policy. The idea of inclusion is further supported by the United Nations, Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for Person with Disability Proclaiming Participation and equality for all (UN, Department of Economic and Social Affairs). Inclusive Education (IE) is defined as a process of addressing the diverse needs of all learners by reducing barriers to, and within the learning environment (Djietror, *et al.*, 2011). It means attending the age-appropriate class of the child's local school, with individually tailored support (UNICEF, 2007). Inclusive education is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners irrespective of any type of difference. At the Jomtien World Conference (1990) in Thailand, the goals for 'Education for All' were set and it had been proclaimed that each person (child, youth, and adult) shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities which would meet their basic learning needs.

In the year 1987, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) collaborated with UNICEF and launched Project Integrated Education for Disabled Children (PIED) in India, to promote the education

of children with disabilities into regular schools. In past years, the concept of inclusive education has been evolved to encompass not only students with disabilities but also all students.

The Government of India is committed to ensuring basic education for every child. It formulated a number of policies in the light of special education since its independence in 1947. One of the oldest formal initiatives undertaken by the GOI was the Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) scheme of 1974 (NCERT, 2011). In the 1980s the Ministry of Welfare, Govt. of India, realized the crucial need for an institution to observe and regulate the HRD programmes within the field of disability rehabilitation. The National Policy on Education, 1986 (NPE, 1986), and the Programme of Action (1992) stress the need for integrating children with special needs with other groups. The Government of India implemented the District Primary Education Project (DPEP) in 1994–95. In the late 90s (i.e. in 1997) the philosophy of inclusive education is added in District Primary Education Programme (DPEP).

Need and Importance of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education promotes holistic participation among learners. When children attend classes that reflect the similarities and differences of people in the real world, they learn to appreciate diversity. Respect and understanding grow when children of differing abilities and cultures play and learn together. In inclusive classrooms, children with and without disabilities are deserved to learn to read, write and do math with higher expectations and good instruction. Children with disabilities learn academic skills. The philosophy of inclusive education is aimed at helping all children learn, everyone in the class benefits. Children learn at their own pace and style within nurturing learning environment. Inclusive education is a child's right, not a privilege. The individuals with disabilities Act clearly states that all children with disabilities should be educated with non-disabled children their age and have access to a general

education curriculum. Children who develop in a typical manner become more sensitive by learning side-by-side with special needs children. They understand how words can hurt, they practice, and patience and they learn empathy. Children in inclusive schools learn that everyone has strengths and weaknesses they learn to appreciate these differences and how to collaborate to accomplish something.

International Declarations on Inclusive Education

The international promotion and protection of human rights originated within the foundation of the United Nation by the end of World War II. In the year 1970, disability was viewed from a different angle, which was established as a human rights approach. This approach gave away to major international declarations related to the rights of the disabled. All the member countries enforced the declaration as per the law of the land. These various declarations are as follows:

1. The Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons (10th December 1971)
2. The Universal Declaration & on the Rights of the Disabled Persons (9th December 1975)
3. The World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons (1982)
4. The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994) ^[18] The Statement refers to “Regular schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, building on inclusive society and achieving education for all, moreover they provide effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system”. The statement also calls on the international community to endorse the approach of inclusive schooling.

1. Millennium Development Goals, 2000
2. World Education Forum for Action, 2000

The Forum Stated: All children, young people, and adults have the human right to benefit from an education that will meet their basic learning needs in the best and fullest sense of the term, an education that includes learning to know, to do, to live together.

1. Education for all Flagship on Right to Education for Persons with Disabilities, 2001
2. UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), 2007

National Level Policy and Legislation

A reference to the Govt. of India report on Blindness “1944 in this context is very relevant. Most of the modern Educational programs for the Visually Handicapped in this country owe their origin to the recommendations of this report. It was in accordance with its recommendations that the Ministry of Education established a unit for the blind in April 1947. In this connection the commissions, committees, Acts, schemes have been made, implemented and constituted for persons with disabilities in India for their education, employment and rehabilitation. Some important among them are given below in chronological order:

Sargent Report (1944)

The CABE report, written by John Sargent, The British chief educational advisor, observed that the Indian government had not done much for the education of the disabled. What had been done was due to the voluntary efforts and the country could ‘profitably borrow’ from the experiences and achievements of those countries which had been active in this field (CABE, 1944, p.111). 1944, Sargent Report also referred to the 1936 CABE recommendation which are directed the provincial governments not to neglect the education of the handicapped.

Kothari Commission (1964-66)

The Commission emphasized that the education of children with disabilities should be “an inseparable part of the general education system”. The Commission also specifically emphasized the importance of integrated education in meeting this target as it is cost-effective and useful in developing mutual understanding between children with and without disabilities.

National Education Policy (1968)

National Education Policy (1968) followed the commission’s recommendations and suggested the expansion of education facilities for physically and mentally handicapped children and the development of an ‘Integrated Program’ enabling handicapped children to study in regular schools. Eight years later a scheme for the integrated education of disabled children (IEDC), 1974 was started by the welfare ministry.

National Policy on Education 1986

The policy emphasizes the removal of disparities, and ensuring equalization of educational opportunity under its Paraeducator of the disabled. The measures may be taken for education of children with loco motor handicaps and other mild handicaps will be common with that of others.

- Special schools with hostel facilities will be provided, as far as possible at district head headquarters for the severely handicapped children.
- Adequate arrangements will be made to give Vocational training to the disabled.
- Teacher’s training programs will be reoriented, in particular for teachers of primary classes, to deal with the special difficulties of the handicapped children.
- Voluntary efforts for the education of the disabled will be encouraged in every possible manner.

Bahrul Islam Committee (1988)

It mentioned that the state should endeavor to provide free and universal elementary education to children with physical and mental disabilities. The state shall also assist them with education and training at the secondary and higher levels. It also emphasized the promotion of integrated education and the continuation of residential education.

Programme of Action (1990, MHRD)

This program outlined the measures to implement the policy, which included massive in-service training programs for teachers, orientation programs for administrators, development of supervisory expertise in the resource institutions for school education at the district and block levels, and provision of incentives like the supply of aids, appliances, textbooks, and school uniforms.

Programme of Action (1992, MHRD)

The 1992 POA made an ambitious commitment for universal enrolment by the end of the Ninth Plan for both categories of children: those who could be educated in general primary schools and those who required education in special schools or special classes in general schools (MHRD, 1992, p.18).

World Commitment on Education as a Right

The right of every child to education is proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and was strongly reaffirmed by the World Declaration on Education for All (1990). The philosophy agreed upon at the Jomtien World Declaration included the following statements:

- Every person(child, youth and adult) shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs.
- The learning needs of the disabled demand special attention. Steps need to be taken to provide equal access to education to every category of disabled persons as an integral part of the education system.

The UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993)

For furthering the objectives of education for all, it considered the fundamental policy shifts required to promote inclusive education. It emphasizes that schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. The statement affirms, "Those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child centered pedagogy capable of meeting these needs"

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA, 2000-01)

SSA covers various components under education for children with disability like Early detection and identification, Functional and formal assessment, Education placement, Aids and appliances, Support services, Teacher training, Resource support, Individual Educational Plan (IEP), Parental training and community mobilization, Planning and management, Strengthening of special schools, Removal of architectural barriers, Research, Monitoring and evaluation, Girls with disability

National Policies for Persons with Disabilities (2006)

This recognizes that persons with disabilities are valuable human resources for the country and seek to create an environment that provides equal opportunities, protection of their rights and full participation in society. The focus of the policy includes-Prevention of Disabilities, Rehabilitation Measures, Women with Disabilities, Children with Disabilities, Barrier free environment, Issues of Disability Certificate, Social Security, Promotion of NGO, Research and Sports Recreation and cultural life.

Specific Legislation for Persons with Disabilities

In the light of the above international declaration and policies framework, Parliament of India has passed following legislation for equalization of opportunities and safeguarding the rights of the persons with disabilities in India.

1. The Mental Health Act 1987

The purpose of this Act was to regulate admission to psychiatric hospitals or nursing homes of mentally ill persons who do not have sufficient understanding to seek treatment on a voluntary basis and to protect the rights of such persons while being detained. Some of the important provisions of the Act are:

- A mentally ill person has the right to be admitted, treated and taken care of in a Psychiatric hospital or psychiatric nursing home established or maintained by the government or any other person for the treatment and care of mentally ill persons.
- Even mentally ill prisoners and minors have a right of treatment in psychiatric hospitals or psychiatric nursing
- Mentally ill persons undergoing treatment shall not be subjected to any indignity physical or mental or cruelty.
- Mentally ill persons who are entitled to any pay, pension, gratuity or any allowance from the government (such as government servants who become mentally ill during their tenure) are not to be denied such payment.
- A mentally ill person shall be entitled to the services of a legal practitioner by order of a magistrate or district court if he/she has no means to engage a legal practitioner or his /her circumstances so warrant in respect of proceedings under the Act.

2. The Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) Act, 1992

It was amended by Rehabilitation Council of India (Amendment) Act, 2000 to provide for monitoring the training of rehabilitation professionals and personnel, promoting research in rehabilitation and special education as additional objectives of the Council.

- Recognition of qualifications in the field of disability and rehabilitation granted by institutions, universities, etc. in India for rehabilitation professionals.
- Recognition of qualifications granted by Institutions outside India under a reciprocal system. Granting/withdrawal of recognition to institutions on the basis of approved standards.
- Set minimum standards of education /curriculum.
- Maintenance of Central Rehabilitation Register (CRR) for rehabilitation professionals/personnel.
- Provision for inclusion/removal of names from CRR.
- The RCI through its linkages with training institutions and universities has been undertaking standardization of curriculum, monitoring and evaluation, assessment of teacher training and research and development in the field of disability and rehabilitation.

3. Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights & full Participation) Act, 1995

This comprehensive Act covers seven disabilities, namely blindness, low vision, hearing impaired, loco-motor impaired, mental retardation, leprosy cured and mental illness. Chapter V(Section 26) of the Act, which deals with education, mentions that the appropriate Governments and the local authorities shall:

- Ensure that every child with a disability has access to free education in an appropriate environment till he attains the age of eighteen years;
- Endeavour to promote the integration of students with disabilities in normal schools;
- Promote setting up of special schools in government and private sectors for those in need of special

education in such a manner that children with special needs living in any part of the country have access to such schools; and

- Endeavour to equip the special schools for children with special needs with vocational training facilities.

4. National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act, 1999

This Act seeks to protect and promote the rights of persons who, within the disability sector, have been even more marginalized than others. Though the National Trust Act of 1999 does not directly deal with the education of children with special needs, one of its thrust areas is to promote programs, which foster inclusion and independence by creating barrier-free environments, developing functional skills of the disabled and promoting self-help groups.

Right To Education (RTE) Act, 2009

It was originally drafted in 2005, was not passed until 2009, and put into full effect in 2010. The Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the act in 2012. This act was not disability specific, but rather included people with disabilities.

RPWD (Right of Persons with Disability) Act (27 Dec 2016)

RPWD Act 2016 replaced the PWD Act 1995 to comply with the UNCRPD (United Nations Convention on Rights of Person with Disability). This act laid emphasis on the dignity of the every disabled person in the society and prevent from any discrimination. This act is more holistic than the previous one as it recognized disability conditions from 7 to 21. The new list includes blood disorders, acid attack victims along with intellectual disabilities. It also promoted a more accessible and safe environment for all children along with CWSN. It also mandates the construction of district level special courts for disabled peoples.

National Education Policy (2020)

The policy recognizes children with special needs and believes in incorporating them into the mainstream education systems. The policy also aims to recruit special educators in all school complexes to make sure that teaching is more inclusive and cognizant of the needs of children. Children with benchmark disabilities will be allowed to opt for homeschooling and would be provided with skilled homeschooling educators so that they can still learn and acquire the best educational facilities. Further, teachers will be trained to identify learning disabilities in children early on and to help children with learning disabilities succeed in education and take care of their mental health. National Assessment Centre, PARAKH will be formulated to create equitable systems of assessment for children with learning disabilities. Alternate models for schooling are proposed to advance this objective.

Suggestions

The Government of India is trying to make its education system completely inclusive. However, it is important to be realistic about the time span in which this change will occur. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, or the Education for All initiative, was created not only for people with disabilities, but because of discrepancies in the general education sector.

The importance of intention and effort should be recognized in this situation, as well as the immense improvements that the country has already made toward inclusion.

- Pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes with sufficient update skills, workshops, seminars should be arranged from time to time.
- Different ministries in India (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Ministry of Labour etc.) have to work together for the education of the CWD.
- NGOs working in India should focus more on the educational sector.
- Attitudinal barriers ingrained as part of India's historical response to disability must be changed through education programs for both teachers and the general populace.
- It is essential to address issues related to infrastructural facilities, curriculum and educational materials for education of children with disabilities. It is also necessary to establish an alternative system of examination for CWD. Students in this system should be asked to do activities that demonstrate their abilities rather than disabilities (Kauts & Bhardwaj, 2012).
- Make all schools inclusive by removing physical barriers, reviewing barriers created by admission procedures.
- Universalization of participation should be carried out effectively.
- Finally, the provisions regarding the education of the CWD under the Persons with Disabilities Act, 2005, the RTE Act, 2009, RPWD Act 2016, NEP 2020 must have effective and successful implementation

Conclusion

Inclusive education is an innovative step towards quality of education and assists in developing each child fully and helps in universalisation of education. The SC/ST and OBC population; women, children and minorities and other excluded groups require special attention for their mainstreaming in national life. Therefore, inclusive education should be utilized effectively in schools, colleges and other institutions. To achieve inclusiveness or equity in all these dimensions requires multiple interventions by the Central and State governments, private sector, NGOs, civil society and each one of us. Its success will depend not only on new policies and government programmes, but on a collective and conscious effort of all sections of society. Teachers play an important role in making this goal of inclusive education achievable.

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