

Policy and Reality: Inclusive Education in India

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Abstract:

Inclusive education advocates improvement of schools in all dimensions to fulfil the educational needs of all children. It recommends that children with special needs should place in regular classrooms and provided with the necessary services and support. In spite of several endeavour made by the Government and other educational agencies in India, the dream of inclusive education for all students with special needs remains unfulfilled. This research paper discusses the historical background of inclusion in education and the development of policies related to inclusive education in India and the challenges in implementation of these policies. It also suggests recommendations for improvements in implementation of inclusive education.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, policies, challenges, implementation

Introduction

Inclusive education is a new approach towards educating the children with special needs with that of normal students within the same classroom. It seeks to address the learning needs of all children with a specific focus on physically, mentally, socially and economically deprived. It includes all learners with or without disabilities being able to learn together through access to common schools and community educational setting with a proper network of support services. This is possible only in flexible education system that fulfils the needs of diverse range of learners and adapts itself to meet their needs. Alur (2003) said that “Inclusion is about minimizing exclusion and fostering participation for all students in the culture within a wider framework of support for all children in normal schools”.

When Salamanca Statement (UNESCO) in 1994 released, many developing countries started reframing their policies to promote the inclusive education. Inclusive education promotes children with and without disabilities participate and learn together in the same classes. It is based on the simple philosophy that every child is worth equally and entitled to the same opportunities and experiences. Inclusive education is about children with disabilities participating in everyday activities, just like normal children and it is about providing the help children need to learn and participate in meaningful ways. Inclusive education is every child's right, not a privilege. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act clearly states that all children with disabilities should be educated with non-disabled children of their own age and have access to the general education curriculum.

Salamanca Statement UNESCO (1994) Framework for Action on Special Needs Education states 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 marginalized areas or groups.” If the right to education for all is to convert into reality, we must ensure that all children have equal access to quality education that meets basic learning needs and enhances lives. Still today, millions of children continue to experience exclusion within and from education around the world. In Dakar Framework for Action (2005), governments and other agencies pledged themselves to: “create safe, healthy, inclusive and

equitably resourced educational environments conducive to excellence in learning with clearly defined levels of achievement for all.”

History of Special Education Policies and Inclusive Education in India

Before nineteenth century, the policy encouraged segregation. Most educators believed that children with physical, sensory, or intellectual disabilities were so different that they could not participate in the activities of a common school (Advani, 2002). Christian missionaries, in the 1880s, started schools for the disabled as charitable undertakings (Mehta, 1982). In India, the Education, Rehabilitation and other services for children with disabilities have been seriously started from the nineteenth century. The early attempt of educating the disabled children was made in the last two decades of the nineteenth century with establishment of the first school for the hearing impaired in Bombay in 1885, followed by the first school for the visually impaired in Amritsar in 1887. Individuals with mental retardation were the last to receive attention. The first school for the mentally challenged was established in 1934 (Mishra, 2000).

Sargent Report (1944)

The British chief educational advisor John Sargent written the C.A.B.E report, observed that in India there had not done much for the education of the disabled. This report suggested that children with disabilities should be totally mainstreamed. The report has important place in the policy on ‘Integration’ of disabled children in mainstream schools, though it continued its recommendation for special schools, but only when the nature and severity of their disability made it necessary.

The National Education Commission (1964-66)

The first Indian Education Commission, popularly known as the Kothari Commission, recommended that disabled children should be educated in regular schools. It was evidently in favour of making education of the disabled children an integral part of the general education system.

National Education Policy (1968)

In an attempt for implementation of national policy of education, 1968, the Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) scheme was launched in 1974 under the erstwhile department of social welfare for admitting children with disabilities in regular schools.

National Policy on education, (1986)

National Policy on education, (1986), under the chapter of 'Education for Equality' proposed the following measures for the education of the disabled:

- Inclusion of children with mild disabilities in regular schools.
- A system of special schools with hostels for severely handicapped children.
- Special schools with hostels will be provided, as far as possible, for severely handicapped children.
- Arrangements to be made for vocational training of the disabled.
- Reorientation of Teacher's training programmes, in particular for primary teachers.

Programme of Action (1992, MHRD)

For the follow up and implementation of National policy on education, plan of action POA (1992) was also formulated. It envisaged on the early intervention and services for the disabled children and stated clearly that since education of disabled in special school is quite costly it will be ensure that only children whose need cannot be met in common schools are enrolled in special school.

Project Integrated Education for the Disabled (PIED)

NCERT implemented PIED during 1987 with the financial support from UNICEF for identification and assessment of children with disabilities, establishment of resource rooms, provision of aids and appliances and allowances for children with disabilities. While it demonstrate some increased enrolment, retention and school achievement prove problematic for lack of appropriate schools support. Lack of fund and limited state support led to the demise of the programme.

Rehabilitation Council of India Act 1992

The RCI was established in 1986 and is the apex government body, set up under an act of parliament in 1992, to regulate training programmes and courses targeted at disabled, disadvantage and special education requirement communities. This act makes it compulsory for every special teacher to be register by the council and said that every child with special needs had the right to be taught by qualified teacher.

Persons with Disabilities Act 1995 (Equal opportunities, Protection of rights and full participation)

The major act dealing with the children with disabilities is the Person with Disability act 1995. The provisions in the act do not appear to make any major policy departure despite it coming into force after Salamanca statement. The Act desires the appropriate governments

and local authorities to ensure that every child with a disability has access to free education in an appropriate environment till he attains the age of eighteen years. It also stated that government should “endeavour to promote integration of students with disabilities in normal schools.” The act also provides that all Government educational institutions and other educational institutes, receiving aid from the government shall reserve not less than 3% seat for person with disabilities.

District Primary Education Programme (DPEP)

The goal of the District Primary Education Program was “education for all” by the year 2000. As many of the initiatives in India regarding education and children with disabilities, the DPEP focused on inclusion of children with mild to moderate disabilities. Following the People with Disabilities Act, important parts of the initiative included Teacher trainings through the District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETS), curriculum modifications, resource room, teacher support and integration or inclusion.

National Trust Act (1999)

The National Trust was established as a statutory body under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India. It created a trust for the ‘Welfare’ of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Education for All Campaign)

In 2000, Government of India launched ‘Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan’ an ambitious program seeking education for all by 2010; fully adjuring that SSA will ensure that every child with special needs, irrespective of kind, category and severity of disability, is provided education in an appropriate environment.

Action Plan for Inclusive Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities (IECYD) 2005

The following framework of the Action Plan and list of activities has been developed as a result of the initial consultations. The plan covers the inclusion in education of children and young persons with special needs.

The main objectives of Action plan were:

- To ensure that no child is denied admission in regular schools.
- To facilitate access of female with disabilities and disabled students from rural and remote areas to government hostels.
- To provide for home based learning for persons with severe, multiple and intellectual disability.

- To promote distance learning for those who require self-pace of learning.
- To emphasize job training and job oriented vocational training for disabled.
- To promote and understanding of the paradigm shift from charity to development through awareness, positive attitude, motivation and sensitization campaign.

National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2006

Government of India has declared National Policy for Persons with Disabilities on 10th Feb 2006. In its policy statement it has acknowledged that person with disabilities are valuable human resources for the country and attempts to develop an environment that provide them equal opportunities, protection of their rights and full participation in society. It has also set time limit of ensuring every child with special needs an access to appropriate Pre-school, primary and secondary level education by 2020 by taking care of:

- (i) Making schools barrier free and accessible to all types of disabilities
- (ii) Making needed teaching, learning material and support services available to children with special needs.

The Scheme of Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS)

The Scheme of Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS) was started in 2009-10, replacing the earlier scheme of Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC). It provides 100% central assistance for the inclusive education of the disabled children in classes 11th and 12th in government, local body and government- aided schools. This scheme now merged in Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) from 2013. Main objectives of this scheme is to enabled all students with special needs, to continue further four years of secondary education after completing their primary education in an inclusive environment.

The Rights of Person with disabilities bill, 2016

Latest bill on Inclusive education is the right of Person with disability bill, 2016. On December 16th 2016, The Lok Sabha passed 'The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill 2016'. Key features of this bill are:

- The Bill replaces the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 and broadens the area of disability to nineteen conditions from the existing seven.

- Persons with at least 40% of a disability are entitled to certain benefits such as reservations in education and employment, preference in government schemes, etc.
- The Bill grants several rights and entitlements to disabled persons. These include disabled friendly access to all public buildings, schools, hospitals, modes of transport, polling stations, etc.
- Speech and Language Disability and Specific Learning Disabilities have been included. Acid Attack Victims have been included for the first time. Dwarfism, muscular dystrophy have has been identified as separate class of specified disability. The New categories of disabilities also added three blood disorders, Thalassemia, Hemophilia and Sickle Cell disease.
- Reservation in vacancies in government jobs has been increased from 3% to 4% for certain persons or class of persons with benchmark disability.

Analysis of Policies

Policy in India has always leaned towards inclusion, from the Sargent report to Right of Person with Disability Bill 2016. Most of the policies and acts adopted 'binary perspectives' for handling issues of children with disability. First all these policies emphasised on the mainstreaming of children with disability, i.e. they should not be segregated and on the other hand they stress on special schools too. Recommendations to send children with special needs to regular schools were first made in the Sargent Report in 1944. This report first time acknowledged the need of education of person with disabilities, but it adopted the 'binary perspectives' to cater these needs. After twenty years, Kothari Commission (1966) also alleged that 'many handicapped children feel psychologically broken after being placed in an ordinary school'. This statement conveyed the inclination of the Commission on sending children with disability to special schools. This indicates that binary approach of reports continued in education policies from British rule to independent India. The NPE 1986 and POA-1992 both incorporated the educational well-being of children with disability as a specific agenda. It was for the first time that education of the people with disability had been recognised as human resource development activity rather than a mere welfare activity. But in Section IV of the National Policy of Education (1986) entitled 'Education for Equality' states that 'where feasible children with motor handicaps and other mild handicaps will be educated with normal children, while special residential schools will be facilitated for severely handicapped children' (MHRD, 1986). It also displays that in independent India

even after twenty years, education policies keep going with 'binary perspective' as it can be observed in the act meant for persons with disability called PWD-1995 (Ministry of Law and Justice, 1996), which notes that, "it endeavours to promote the integration of students with disabilities in the normal schools" and also encourages the establishment and availability of special schools across the nation" in both Government and private sectors.

Alur (2003) observed that in India there is a bifurcation between policy and practice; the government advocates the 'inclusionist' philosophy through its schemes and extends a parallel support to the 'segregationist' policy by promoting the idea of special schools through their help to voluntary organisation schemes. He also contended that the reasons for failure of District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) were corruption in the form of budgets for non-existent non-formal education centres, tribal dropout, the difficulty of multi-grade teaching in one-teacher schools, low learning achievement, and lack of amalgamation of children with disabilities due to continued dependency on special school systems. Julka (2005) observed that in Project on Integrated Education for Disabled (PIED), while enrolment of children with disabilities in the mainstream increased and retention was high but coverage has been 'diminutive' with only 2-3% of children with disabilities integrated in regular schools. According to Angela Kohama (2012) many of policies tend to discriminate against disabled people on basis of their degree of severity, especially in terms of mainstreaming versus special schooling. Still, at present, the policies governing the education system are inclusive, the problem is with implementation.

After analysis of policies it can be said that policies related to inclusive Education are not fully implemented and there are still many loop holes in implementation of these policies.

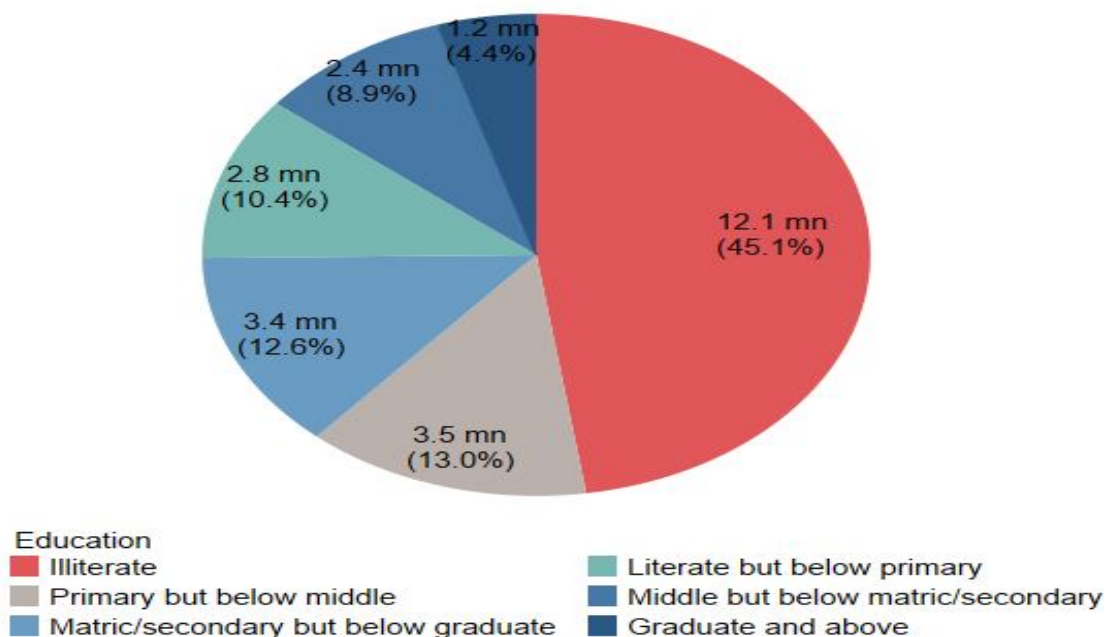
Problems in implementation of policies

According to Baquer & Sharma (1997), "In a country like India the number of the disabled people is so large, their problems so complex, available resources so scarce and social attitudes so damaging, it is only legislation which can eventually bring about a substantial change in a uniform manner. The impact of well-directed legislation in the long run would be profound and liberating."

Policies for Inclusive Education recommend that children with learning disabilities should be educated in inclusive settings wherever possible, although it seems that these

policies are not fully implemented because data from the national census 2011, states that 45% Of Indians with special needs are illiterate. In terms of educational levels, only 11% of children with disabilities between the ages of 5–18 years in urban areas (less than 1% in rural areas) were enrolled in special schools, while 55% of adults with disabilities were illiterate (59% in rural and 28.40% in urban areas), with only 7% in rural and 18% in urban areas having completed secondary education.

Educational level of persons with disabilities in India



Source : census 2011

Many schools, including government as well as some private schools, are following inclusive education policy by giving admission to children with special needs. But, in the absence of proper provision and facilities, children get isolated and many times they are segregated in school or even in inclusive class they do not feel welcomed. Regular schools

faced many challenges in implement of inclusive education. They do not conduct any check-up and counselling session at time of admission to identify the children with special needs, to know the degree of severity, and their needs.

Infrastructures in schools are not developed properly. Students with special needs cannot access all the places in the school. In most of the schools, there are no sufficient physical facilities. These range from lack of ramps and railings, disabled friendly toilets, classrooms, desks, adequate reading materials, to among others.

Teachers are not enough trained to teach the children with special needs. Teacher's training is very important in the teaching-learning process. Most of the teachers in regular school do not have proper training on handling both the disabled and normal students in one class. In a survey of classroom teachers in Delhi, Das, Kuyini, & Desai(2013) found that many teachers did not understand the concept to finclusion. General education teachers largely lacked the skills of implementing effective inclusion, such as strategies to include students in regular classrooms.

Hettiarachchi and Das(2014) found that a lack of dissemination of information about inclusion policies has been a major challenge in the implementation of educational reform policies. Further more, teachers were found to learn of policy initiatives through word of mouth or the media, leading to varied interpretations of the policy. In a study conducted by Sharma, Moore, and Sonawane(2009) found that teacher stend to resist inclusion practices due to a lack of essential tools for instructing SWDs. Policy makers have not successfully provided training opportunities while implementing inclusive education programs. There is no enough support for inclusive education from the concerned stakeholders. In India, most of the parents of the disabled learners are cautious about admitting their children in an inclusive school because of fears that the children will be ridiculed by other children, or they may be unable to develop basic life skills in an inclusive classroom. This is mainly due to poor policy implementation. In India, inclusive education has in recent times been largely introduced in various State and Central Government schemes; but there is still a huge gap between planning and implementation of education of children with disabilities in schools.

Suggestions for successful implementation of policies

- A positive attitude of teachers towards children with disabilities is most important for inclusive education to succeed. Change in attitude can be shaped through proper knowledge, training and affirmative interactions with the children with disabilities.
- There is need for all school teachers to receive in-service training in special educational needs and pre-service training for those joining the fresh training. A common unit should be designed on special educational needs especially on sign language and Braille machines.
- Curriculum is a plan of learning course that has to be followed to achieve desired outcomes. But children with learning disabilities require a special curriculum to suit their needs; the relevance and necessity for such especially modified curriculum should be constructed according to the individual needs of different disabilities at different ages and stages of their development.
- The government should make all the possible efforts to improve and modify the existing physical facilities to make them barrier-free and therefore easily accessible to all learners. It should also raise the budgetary allocation to inclusive education in its annual budget.
- The society which includes parents should be sensitized on their role in ensuring success of inclusive education. Parents to be made to understand that giving birth to disable child is not a curse hence they should expose these children to all the opportunities available in the country in education in order to maximize their potentialities.
- There are many NGO's in India which are providing educational services to children with learning disabilities. These organizations can play a pivotal role in implementing inclusive education because they are widely spread in India and can serve both urban and rural school communities.

Conclusion

Inclusive education must treat all pupils as individuals, recognizing individuality as something to be appreciated and respected. The present scenario of inclusive education needs action rather than mere promises. To include disabled children in the regular school system is not an easy task. The policy on inclusion can easily become 'mere dumping' if not implemented carefully. It is, however, noted out that a big gap exists between this ideal

situation and the present reality. There is an urgent need for equipping general teachers with special skills, making general curricula, teaching methods. Evaluation process, learning materials, disability-sensitive and addressing the needs of other children in the school to ensure such interventions help all children. It is important to have a holistic, comprehensive approach where all pieces are put together. It is not enough to make policies only. An inclusion policy cannot bring any change alone and cannot be a replacement of careful planning of interventions and organised implementation of these interventions. Success of inclusion needs effective collaboration and meaningful cooperation from all stakeholders of society who are associated with education of children. To make the policies of Inclusive Education successful, the parents will have to come forward and it will only come true by making the people aware about Inclusive Education. We need to create an inclusive design of teaching- learning to make the education joyful for all children so that the education for them is welcoming, learner friendly and fruitful and they feel as a part of it not apart from it. That is a mammoth task, but "where there is a will there is a way!"

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