Prospects and Problems of Inclusive Education in India

Abha Kumari

Research Scholar, St. Xavier's College of Education (Autonomous), Patna, Bihar, India

ABSTRACT

According to inclusive education, all students will participate in mainstream education, regardless of their abilities and weaknesses. The Sargent Report from 1944 and the Kothari Commission from 1964 both recommended that children with disabilities attend regular educational institutions. The purpose of inclusive education is to make the educational system stronger in its capacity of reaching every student. It attempts to meet every child's educational requirement, with a particular emphasis towards those who are particularly at risk of marginalization and exclusion. In order to adapt to the diversity of children in the region that is impacted, it entails reorganizing the culture, policies, and practices in schools. Through inclusive education, a sense of community is fostered among educators, learners, and other community members. Throughout the world today, 120 million kids do not attend primary school. According to World Bank-cited MHRD figures, there are an estimated 30 million children in India who are not attending school. Many of these children are marginalized due to factors including caste, poverty, gender, and disability.

Various programmes in education have been launched in an attempt to involve these formerly marginalized kids, but people with impairments are frequently overlooked, reflecting their unseen status in a strongly segmented society. Inclusive education emphasizes how children with special needs can be included into a comprehensive platform without experiencing any type of exclusion. We must consider and include children with special needs in regular classrooms if we are to achieve truly inclusive education. Inclusive education is a binding and priority for government of India. But there are a number of barriers and difficulties that need to be overcome in India if inclusive education is to be successful. The primary objective of this article is to highlight the prospects and difficulties related to inclusive education in India.

Keyword*s*: Inclusive education, disabilities, educational marginalization, impairments

Introduction

Inclusive education in India refers to an educational approach that aims to cater to the diverse needs of all learners, including those with disabilities, special needs, and other marginalized groups. The fundamental principle of inclusive education is to create a learning environment that is accessible, supportive, and welcoming to every student, irrespective of their differences. This approach seeks to eliminate discrimination, promote equal opportunities, and foster a sense of belonging among all students.

Inclusive education in India

The Sixth All-India Educational Survey (NCERT, 1998) reports that out of India's 200 million school aged children (6–14 years), 20 million require special needs education. While the national average for

gross enrolment in school is over 90 per cent, less than five percent of children with disabilities are in schools. According to the Census 2001, there are 2.19 crore persons with disabilities in India who constitute 2.13 percent of the total population. This includes persons with visual, hearing, speech, loco-motor and mental disabilities. The United Nation's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which was entered into force in 2008, was ratified by India in October, 2008. It can be safely assumed that achieving the Education for All (EFA) targets and Millennium Development Goals will be impossible without improving access to and quality of education for children with disabilities.

Key features of inclusive education in India include:

1. Diversity and Equality: Inclusive education recognizes and celebrates the diversity of students, acknowledging that every learner is unique. It emphasizes equal opportunities for education, ensuring that no student is excluded based on factors such as disability, gender, socioeconomic status, or cultural background.

2. Accessible Infrastructure and Resources: Inclusive schools are designed to be physically accessible to all students. This includes infrastructure modifications such as ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms. Additionally, educational resources, including teaching materials and technologies, are adapted to meet the diverse needs of students.

3. Individualized Support: Inclusive education promotes a student-centric approach, recognizing that individuals have different learning styles, paces, and needs. Teachers are encouraged to provide individualized support and accommodations to help each student succeed.

4. Teacher Training and Professional Development: In order to effectively implement inclusive education, teachers undergo training to enhance their understanding of diverse learning needs and teaching strategies. Professional development programs focus on equipping educators with the skills to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment.

5. Collaboration and Community Engagement: Inclusive education involves collaboration among educators, parents, support staff, and the community at large. Building partnerships with stakeholders helps create a holistic support system for students, fostering an inclusive atmosphere both inside and outside the classroom.

6. Curricular Adaptations: Inclusive education calls for flexible and adaptable curricula that can be modified to suit the needs of diverse learners. This may include differentiated instruction, use of assistive technologies, and varied assessment methods.

7. Awareness and Sensitization: Promoting awareness and sensitization about diversity and inclusion is a crucial aspect of inclusive education. This involves fostering a positive attitude toward differences and challenging stereotypes and prejudices.

Even though India has made progress in supporting inclusive education, there are still issues to be addressed, including poor infrastructure, a lack of qualified teachers, and negative social perceptions of people with disabilities. Nonetheless, continuous attempts are being made to deal with these problems and develop a more inclusive educational environment across the nation. Despite the promotion of inclusive education, government documents focus on inclusive education as being about including children with disabilities in the education system, but not specifically the mainstream. However, inclusion in the education system is not the same as inclusion in the mainstream. It is however arguable that special education is in fact regarded as superior in India due to its preferred status and that it is inclusion in the

mainstream that is currently seen as the resource – constrained inferior alternative. The education paves foundation for the growth and development of the children. The children with special needs skip milestones of development due to their disabilities and misses out important experience thus developing secondary handicaps. The author focuses upon compensating these gaps with an optimistic motion for successful inclusion.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The present study was undertaken with the following broad objectives:

1. To study the need of inclusive education in context of Indian scenario.
2. To study the prospects of inclusive education in India.
3. To study the problems of inclusive education in India
4. To study the suggestions for future implications regarding inclusive education in India.

Need and Importance of Inclusive Education

The inclusion of students with special needs in mainstream education is a necessary step towards achieving truly inclusive education. With the increasing diversity of children in general education classrooms, educators must acknowledge each child's unique characteristics and appreciate them. We now know that a more inclusive approach to education will enable every student to succeed. According to research, the majority of children learn and perform better when exposed to the variety of the general education curriculum.

Prospects of Inclusive Education in India

Inclusive education is a developmental approach seeking to address the learning needs of all children, youth and adults with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion. An increasing number of publications, policy papers, workshops etc. have supported the ideology of inclusion. Some organizations and people, however, doubt whether the ordinary classroom can provide quality education for disabled children. This debate has been on, ever since people began to voice their reservation against old segregated institutions and in turn raised their concern for equality of disabled children. These concerns must be taken seriously and dispelled by showing examples of positive experiences, which clearly demonstrate that inclusive education most definitely addresses quality issues in education. The major goal of inclusive education is the Flagship goal. Recognizing the right to education, the Flagship seeks to unite all EFA partners in their efforts to provide access to quality education for every child, youth and adult with a disability. The Flagship has been formed by an alliance of diverse organizations, including global disability organizations, international developmental agencies, intergovernmental agencies, and experts in the field of special and inclusive education. Many countries have developed programs, which promote equality of opportunity by allocating specific funds to areas of social and economic need.

In 1987, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in India collaborated with UNICEF to initiate Project Integrated Education for Disabled Children (PIED), which aimed to improve the inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream education. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) (Department of Elementary Education, 2000) and the DPEP (Chadha, 2002) were two additional significant basic education initiatives that were combined with the IEDC in 1997. One of the provisions

of the Persons with Disability Act, 1995 is to provide special education to children in the most appropriate setting.

A disabled child's right to be included in the mainstream of education is emphasized by the Special Education Policy (SSA), which was introduced by the Indian government in 2001. The Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD) has made it clear in its Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) framework that every child with special needs, regardless of the category, class, or extent of their disability, shall get education in a suitable setting.

In order to make sure that no child is left out of the educational system, the SSA will implement a zero-rejection policy. Additionally, a variety of methods, choices, and strategies for the education of children with special needs will be supported. In September 2008, India authorized the Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS) programme to replace the IEDC Scheme for the 2009–10 academic year. The entire funding for the Scheme comes from the center. For CWSN education and rehabilitation, the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) is mainly in authority. Established in 1986, the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) is a recognized society. The RCI Act was passed by Parliament in September 1992, and on June 22, 1993, it was established as a Statutory body. The Act was amended by Parliament in 2000 to expand its scope of impact. RCI has been responsible in overseeing and regulating services provided to individuals with disabilities, establishing curricula, and keeping a Central Rehabilitation Register of all certified experts and staff members engaged in the fields of rehabilitation and special education. Additionally, the Act stipulates that unsuitable individuals providing services to people with disabilities may face consequences.

The National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (2006) asserts that the best means of achieving social and economic empowerment is education. All children with disabilities must receive free and obligatory education up until the minimum age of 18 years old, in accordance with the spirit of Section 26 of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995 and Article 21A of the Constitution, which guarantees education as a basic right. 51% of people with disabilities are illiterate, according to the 2001 Census. This is an important percentage of the total. Through inclusive education, it is necessary to mainstream individuals with disabilities into the general school system.

The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 is repealed by the proposed Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill, 2014, which was presented in the Rajya Sabha (Parliament) on February 7, 2013 by the then-minister of social justice and empowerment. The Bill gives people with disabilities access to inclusive education, career training, and self-employment. Accordingly, the Indian government promises to introduce inclusive education in all levels and at all institutions of higher learning.

Problems of Inclusive Education in India

The Indian government considers inclusive education to be compulsory and essential. However, when it comes to inclusive education, there are significant differences in national practices and policies. A number of challenges prevent the appropriate implementation of inclusive education in our nation. The following are among the problems of inclusive education based on literature and experience:

a.   Skills of teachers

Teachers are the primary people in the successful implementation of inclusive education, but they lack certain competencies. Teachers must possess the necessary skills, knowledge, and educational background in order to carry out the duties given to them, yet they are lacking in these areas.

b.   Attitudes towards inclusion and disability among teachers, administrators, parents, peers and policy planners

Teachers, parents, peers, administrators, and policy planners must all have positive opinions towards inclusion and disability in addition to many additional requirements in order to successfully implement inclusive education. But in many cases, these continue to hold negative opinions. This is negatively impacting India's inclusive education structure.

c.   Lack of awareness about children with disabilities among general teachers

At all levels, regular teachers are ignorant of the fundamentals of working with children who have difficulties. Despite their lack of scientific and educational understanding, they have their own socially and culturally constructed ideas regarding some obvious disabilities, such as classification, labelling, special needs, and adaptations.

d.   Rigid Curriculum:

Rigid curriculum restricts special education children from studying on par with general education pupils. There is no specific curriculum in place to meet the wide range of demands of exceptional pupils. Curriculum adjustments made to meet the individual requirements of each learner, including students with disabilities, are essential for implementing inclusive education. The curriculum needs to be appropriately created and should include ideas such as "Universal Instructional Design."

e.   School environment including difficulties in physical access

For inclusive education to be genuinely practiced in schools, adjustments must be made. Nevertheless, the majority of schools do not offer these accommodations. Schools typically lack amenities like lifts, ramps, and navigational signs, among others. One of the main things preventing us from achieving the goal of inclusive education is the absence of infrastructure in our institution.

f.   Family collaboration

Considering the unique features of Indian society and culture, it is realistic to say that families play a critical role in ensuring inclusive education in India. In India, families have been considered to be the only ones responsible for their offspring. Therefore, encouraging and including family in the process is the only way to truly achieve inclusion.

g.   Insufficient and improper pre-service teacher education

One of the biggest problems with inclusive education is that mainstream teachers, at all levels, do not receive enough training or professional development.

h.   Negative self-perceptions of children with disabilities

Negative self-perceptions of children with impairments present a significant difficulty for inclusive education practices. The opinions of peers, instructors, and neighbors frequently reinforce these unfavorable impressions. For such children to be truly included, these negative self-perceptions must be eradicated.

i.   ICT availability and related competencies

Information and communication technology (ICT) is the age we live in today. Nearly every endeavor in human existence, including education and training, is greatly facilitated by ICT. Many assistive and pedagogical ICT-enabled tools are available that are especially helpful for kids with impairments. Using

them will facilitate and accelerate inclusive education. All parties involved should have access to these and learn the necessary competencies to use them.

j. Improper policy planning and lack-luster implementation

The Indian government asserts that inclusive education has been implemented everywhere and at all levels. Nevertheless, inadequate policy planning has resulted in a lack of established measures to evaluate the extent of implementation. Moreover, the enforcement and assurance of inclusive education implementation in the private sector have been inadequate.

k. Expenses involved

The implementation of inclusive education at all levels is going to cost a lot of money, specifically for a large and diverse country like India. The administration doesn't appear eager to spend this large sum of money. The government's concerns are justified considering that we are a country that is still developing.

Suggestions for Challenging the Challenges

Training of teachers: In order for inclusive education to become a reality in India, teacher training must take priority. India's educational authorities may decide to train a single teacher from each school or group of schools. Before serving as an inclusion facilitator or integration specialist for one or more nearby schools, the teacher would need to undergo extensive training in working with a variety of disabilities. In order to stay current with integrated education practices, in-service teachers would also require ongoing training.

Teaching aids and equipment: To assist young children in overcoming their challenges, numerous pieces of equipment are discovered every day all around the world. To aid these kids, it is important to utilize a lot of these supportive tools and apparatus. In addition to encouraging parents and teachers to use the most recent resources available, a cell will be established to distribute this information. Through the development of a cross-disciplinary approach to the problems, this envisions multi-disciplinary participation.

Class size: Greater opportunities for inclusion arise from smaller class sizes. Government policy does not currently call for a reduction in the teacher-to-student ratio; rather, head teachers and other educators should consider making the classes in specific sections (A, B, etc.) smaller.

Family-school partnerships

- Collaboration between general and special educators
- Well-constructed plans that identify specific accommodations, modifications, and goals for each student
- Coordinated planning and communication between "general" and "special needs" staff
- Integrated service delivery
- Ongoing training and staff development

Peer support: Peer support is a bigger benefit of inclusion. Peers actively participate in the education of their classmates who have special needs. The staff needs to be supportive and encourage others. The special needs child socializes, enjoys the companionship of his classmate, and lets out his frustrations. When peers work together, physical inclusion is made possible, academic inclusion also becomes simpler because children of similar ages can more easily understand and interact with one another.

Need to design innovative system of training: Many scholars have issued warnings, stating that without widespread training for normal school teachers, India will not be able to successfully deploy integrated educational services. Remarks regarding this circumstance are as follows: "the." vast number of people in need of training, and traditional training approaches are unable to adequately address the demands to teach educators on a large scale, it is therefore necessary to create some creative models. One way to train so many teachers is through Distance Open Learning, or DOL (Ramanujam, 2001).

Need for collaboration between different ministries: In India, several ministries oversee various programmes for people with disabilities. For instance, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is in charge of education at special schools, whereas the Ministry of Human Resource Development oversees "integrated education." This merely represents a single instance of the wastage of scarce resources. Such administrative arrangements are beyond the means of India. Administrative arrangements must be made more efficient.

Involve NGO's in implementing integrated education programs: India is home to over a million non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Canadian International Development Agency, 2003). Many of them continue to offer educational services to children with disabilities even though they are not all employed in the school sector. These organizations may serve both urban and rural school communities, and their widespread presence in India makes them valuable partners in the implementation of integrated education.

Establish an alternate system of examination: The majority of Indian teachers fear that integrating children with disabilities will lead to a drop in academic standards because these pupils won't be able to pass tests (U. Sharma & Desai, 2002). Teachers seem to genuinely worry about this because it may affect their chances of being promoted. Therefore, it is essential to create a different kind of assessment where students with disabilities take part in tasks that highlight their strengths rather than their impairments.

School-university partnership: India's multilingual, multicultural, and multireligious makeup is frequently mentioned as a barrier to any initiatives at educational reform. In order to overcome this obstacle, local universities in each of the States and Union Territories may be essential. Universities might start experimental programmes with nearby schools to investigate ways that might work for each area.

Conclusion

A novel approach called inclusive education (IE) aims to educate children with disabilities and learning challenges with typical students under one roof. Indian academics and thinkers have recently come to agree that inclusive education should be implemented in regular classrooms. Through mainstream education, inclusive education seeks to promote the integrated development of kids with special needs and normal children. There may be progress being made with certain government policies that prioritize teacher education. Also, teachers are not the only stakeholders involved. Students, parents, administrators and local government officials are affected too, all of whom will see any innovation or new concept in a different light.

All students would gain if this led to smaller classes and better instruction. In order to ensure inclusiveness, all programs—regardless of level of education—must make appropriate teacher preparation, awareness of and attitudes towards disabilities, retention of exceptional children, etc. mandatory. For inclusive education programmes to be successful, facilities must be provided to each institution. The inclusive education is not a dream but would definitely turn a reality, as we are still in the phase of development, considering these issues and putting up efforts would lead to a real success.

References

1. Aggarwal, R. (1994). India. In K. Mazurck & M. A. Winzer (Eds.), *Comparative studies in special education* (pp. 179-203). Washington D. C.: Gallaudet University Press.
2. Alur, M. (2001). Inclusion in the Indian Context. *Humanscape, 8*(6), 1-8.
3. Azad, Y. A. (1996). *Integration of disabled in common schools: A survey-study of IEDC in the country.* New Delhi: National Council of Educational Research and Training.
4. Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). (2003). *India Country Program Framework (2002-2007).* Retrieved 10th June, 2003, from www.acdi-cida.gc.ca
5. Chatterjee, G. (2003, April). *The global movement for inclusive education.* Retrieved 10th Feb, 2017, from http://www.indiatogether.org/2003/apr/edu-inclusive.htm
6. Karna, G. N. (1999). *United Nations and rights of disabled persons: A study in Indian perspective.* New Delhi: A.P.H. Publishing Corporation.
7. Ministry of Law Justice and Company Affairs. (1996). The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995, *Government of India.* India.
8. Ramanujam, P. R. (2001). *DOL and disability studies.* Retrieved July 10, 2003, from www.fernuni-hagen.de/ZIFF/rampoten.doc
9. Sharma, U., & Desai, I. (2002). Measuring concerns about integrated education in India. The Asia-Pacific Journal on Disabilities, 5(1), 2–14.
10. https://dea.gov.in/sites/default/files/ac_canadian_assistance_1.pdf
11. https://prsindia.org/billtrack/the-right-of-persons-with-disabilities-bill-2014