

Inclusive Education in India: Prospectus, Challenges and Research Priorities

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Abstract

Our deliberations in the paper begin with a conceptual overview of inclusive education in terms of underlying philosophy and theoretical approaches followed by a survey of existing policy and provisions towards equitable, just and empowering education for all. In the third part of the paper, we have discussed grassroot level inclusive practices in school education in the state of Odisha. The following sections, we have presented a brief survey of researches on inclusive education in India in terms of focal themes and variables of interest, practical issues and challenges identified and the emerging research priorities to direct and guide future course of inclusive education in India. We are hopeful the discussion shall stimulate interest and enthusiasm among the audience for further dialogue on the theme.

Keywords: Inclusive education, Prospectus, Challenges

Contextual Overview

“Inclusion is a sense of belonging: feeling respected, valued for who you are; feeling a level of supportive energy and commitment from others so that you can do your best work.” (Miller & Katz). Inclusion in education means an environment that is the least restrictive and is most conducive to children’s needs where every child can learn and realize her full potential if equal opportunities will be provided to participate in school and supported with adequate resources. Inclusive Education eliminates all forms of discrimination in the learning environment. Inclusive education gives access to all and promotes best outcomes for all. “A system of education wherein students with and without disabilities learn together and the system of teaching and learning is suitably adapted to meet the learning needs of different types of students with disabilities”. (RPwD act,2016).

Why is inclusive education important?

- It improves learning for all children – both those with and without disabilities.
- It promotes understanding, reduces prejudice and strengthens social integration.
- It ensures that children with disabilities are equipped to work and contribute economically and socially to their communities

Approaches to inclusive education

It can be viewed from 3 perspectives

1. Human Rights-Based Approach

The principles of inclusion that are set out in various international declarations can be used as foundation.

A right-based approach to education is based on access to free and compulsory education, equality and non-discrimination and right to quality education content and processes. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, Dec 10 stated that, everyone has the right to education and education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages.

2. Social Approach

The efforts are being made by educating people through direct instruction and media to bring attitudinal changes in the society. Research studies has revealed that there is greater acceptance of PwD with minimum expectations. Everyone should feel the acceptance of CWSN in mainstream.

3. Humanistic Approach

As viewed by Carl Rogers that human experiences are core to the course. He believes that children learn through unconditional positive acceptance and understanding. His approach to education favors person centered or client centered or personal counselling where children learn at their own pace and work independently, which is known as therapeutic education. So, these focused children require humanistic approaches for facilitating their psycho-emotional dimensions and leading towards self-actualization. The practical classrooms can be design with the ideas of Roger's therapeutic education, Nell Nodding's education as caring and to some extent Maslow's theory of human needs.

Policy and Provisions in India

Constitutional provisions for inclusive education

- Article 14 guarantees equality for all its citizens before law and equal protection of law. Article 15(2) further states that state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex & place of birth or any of them.
- Article 21-A the State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years
- Article 45 the State shall endeavor to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years.

International initiatives like **World Declaration on Education for All, 1990 (Jomtien, Thailand)** stated 'Every person- child, youth and adult shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs.' **United Nation Standard Rules, 1993** (PWDs as integral part of educational system). **The Salamanca Conference, UNESCO, 1994 (Spain)** stressed on inclusion. **World Education Forum, 2000 (Dakar, Sengal, West Africa)** identified inclusive education as a key strategy for the development of EFA.

Some National initiatives such as Kothari commission 1964-66 stated about common school system and importance of Integrated Education, NPE-1968 focused on Integrated Education, NPE-1986 stressed on removal of disparities, RCI act-1992 PWD act 1995 (equal opportunities, protection of rights & full participation gave 7 type of disabilities), the RTE Act, 2009 mandates free and compulsory elementary education to all children including CWSN. This act provides a legal framework that entitles all children between the ages of 6-14 years free and compulsory admission, attendance and completion of elementary education. Section 3 (2) of the RTE Act lays impetus on the elementary education of children with disabilities. As per the Amendment of 2012, it also mandates that, a child with multiple and/or severe disabilities has the right to opt for home-based education. And RPWD act- 2016 listed 21 type of disabilities.

Also programmes like Integrated Education for the Disabled Children (IEDC, 1974), Project Integrated Education for the Disabled (PIED, 1987), Janshala(1998), SSA(2000-01), Action Plan for Inclusive Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities (IECYD, 2005), IEDSS-2009 which subsumed under RMSA in 2013. Samagra Siksha Aviyan-2018-19, and NEP-2020.

Recommendations in NEP 2020

- Barrier free access. (enabling mechanism)
- Boarding facilities (matching the standard with JNVs).
- Resources for integration of CWSN.
- Recruitment of special teacher with cross disability training.
- Establishment of resource center.
- Suitable technological intervention to ensure accessible for CWSN.
- Provision of assistive devices, adequate and appropriate TLM (braille, large print books).
- NIOS will develop the Indian sign language.
- NCERT will consult with national institutes of DEPwD (Department of Empowerment of Person with Disabilities).
- Home based education for severe and profound disability.
- Gender inclusion fund and inclusion fund.
- Special education zones.
- Flexible curriculum, appropriate assessment.
- PARAKH (Performance Assessment Review and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development) – formulate guidelines and tools for assessment for all.
- Teacher training (how to teach SEN students).
- Alternative schools to preserve their tradition using alternative pedagogy.
- Network of counsellor with all the stakeholders.
- Strengthen KGBV and additional JNVs and KVs in aspirational districts.

Inclusive Practices- Current Scenario

The core intention of accommodations is to effectively assist learning for students with specific learning needs of the children

Content accommodations: Use of bigger fonts of the printed material with adequate spacing, sharing printouts of summarized notes of the class, using assistive technologies (e.g., text-to-speech read aloud, speech-to-text software), repeated and reinforced ideas and concepts in the TLM are important support mechanisms.

Pedagogical accommodations: Teaching strategies will require a Universal Design in their planning and structure for equitable access. Allowing students to use word processors with/without spellcheck (through the use of assistive devices to practice spelling, grammar, and computing), creating a system of peer support, and organizing special educator support in the classroom for an inclusive pedagogy.

Assessment accommodations: This typically involves changing or reorganizing the order of tasks or questions for assessment, making assessment question papers or worksheets with large font print for ease of reading, allowing extended time for completion, organising for a scribe/writer or reading assistant, allowing the use of word processing software on a computer, organising a distraction free room, allowing

for the use of a calculator or a tablet, permitting more frequent breaks in the course of the assessment, and providing alternative furniture.

Assistive devices and appropriate technology-based tools, as well as adequate and language-appropriate TLMs (e.g., textbooks in accessible formats, such as in large print or Braille) are made available.

In order to address the educational needs of CWSN at the secondary and senior secondary level, the scheme for Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS) was implemented. The Scheme aimed at enabling all students with disabilities completing eight years of elementary schooling, an opportunity to complete four years of secondary schooling in an inclusive and enabling environment in the general education system at the secondary level (classes IX to XII).

Presently, Samagra Shiksha aims to cover all children with special needs (CWSN) in a continuum from classes I to XII. Under Samagra Shiksha, in the year 2018-19, an outlay of Rs. 1023.50 crore has been approved for the education of 21,00,918 CWSN (from classes I to XII) including financial support (for the honorarium/salary) of 15,909 Resource Teachers/Special Educators for the year 2018-19. Also, financial assistance of Rs. 300 crores towards salary of 11865 resource persons/resource teachers (for CWSN) working at BRC/CRC/URC levels, has been approved. Therefore, the total number of special educators and resource teachers/persons available to address the specific needs of children with special needs is 27,774.

Inclusion for Whom

NEP-2020 defined Inclusion of SEDGs (Socio Economically disadvantaged groups)

- Gender identities (female and transgender)
- Sociocultural identities (SCs, STs, OBCs & Minorities)
- Geographical identities (village, small towns)
- Disabilities (specific learning disabilities)
- Socioeconomic conditions (migrants, low income households, victims of trafficking, orphans, urban beggar, urban poor etc.)

Research on Inclusive Education in India

About 50 number of Indian Ph.D. thesis available in South Ganga thoroughly reviewed and it is found that researches conducted on the areas like status of the Inclusive Education in terms of provisions, physical infrastructure, enrollment and attitude of the stake holders (parents, teachers, CWSN & non-CWSN, administrators etc.), implementational practices and challenges and teacher preparation.

Challenges and Research Priorities

Studies show that a large percentage of students who either drop out of school or discontinue their education. Many among these groups who manage to continue their education struggle to achieve appropriate Learning Outcomes due to a lack of adequate support, access to learning resources, or various sorts of social and/or economic distress (NCFSE,2023), inadequate pupil-teacher ratio, lack of TLM, lack of skilled teacher, lack of policy guidelines, negative attitude, lack of awareness, odd playground, lack of technological aids, lack of training of teachers, inadequate infrastructure, lack of resource room, lack of individualized attention, lack of classroom management skills, lack of communication, rigid

curriculum, lack of assistive devices and lack of knowledge about inclusive education (Nizeyimana,2016; Devi,2017; Mohanty,2022; Kumar, 2019; panda, 2023; Mir,2022; Mahajan, 2022).

However, apart from these the following two questions still remains unanswered. Which are major challenges to the so-called inclusive education system.

1. What counts as learning for the focus children?
2. What learning counts for education of the focus children?

Conclusion

Inclusive education is social justice for every child and social justice is everyone's job. We cannot do it alone as individuals, we are in this together and if we do it together nothing will stop us then we can prove that inclusion is in-possible and we are in it to win it. Inclusive education can be the best answer to the Education For All. It can be possible through the proper coordination of head (policy), heart(attitude) and hand (implementation). However, from research findings which shows the difficulties in implementing the inclusive education also the need of the CWSN are different from the general students as viewed by humanistic approach why inclusion be the approach instead of the need- based approach to educate the focus children.

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