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Fostering Inclusive Education through Community Development and Participation in the Present Teacher Education System of India

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ABSTRACT

India is the third largest economy of the world in terms of purchasing power. Despite this improvement, more than 460 million people in India live in abject poverty. The reciprocity of poverty producing disability, and disability resulting in poverty has created new challenges for the implementation of inclusive education in India.

In India about 240 million children are disabled and have been denied access to education due to certain barriers outside the institutions and those within. Such barriers include narrowly defined set of eligibility criteria, negative attitude, and inaccessible environments. In India, inclusive education is instrumental in addressing these barriers and in making education accessible to children with disabilities and for those who are denied access on racial, ethnic, health, linguistic and cultural grounds. The range of challenges confronting the school system while including children with diverse backgrounds have to be met by creating child centred pedagogy, through community development and community participation.

In purview of these, teachers are crucial because of the central role they play in promoting community development and participation and reducing underachievement, especially with children who might be perceived as having difficulties in learning. The present research paper focuses upon that how inclusion is the major challenge facing educational systems and schools around the world. This paper also highlights that how through community involvement, participation and community development, equal opportunities and complete enrolment for all children with disabilities within inclusive settings is possible. The present paper also provides some suggestions and ways through which integration of pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes in inclusive education could help to overcome the hurdles confronting the inclusion of all children within inclusive school settings.

KEYWORDS: Community development, Inclusion, Inclusive Education, Inclusive Schools

Introduction

The inclusion of children with special needs in educational settings has become a primary service option since the adoption of the UNESCO's Salmanca statement and framework for action of special needs education (UNESCO, 1994)[23]. Although inclusion may mean different things to different people, it is generally believed to mean the extent to which a school or community welcomes children with special needs as full members of the group and values them for the contribution which they make. The children actively belong to, are welcomed by and participated in a mainstream school and community (Farrel, 2004)[10]. Thus, inclusive education is about presence, participation and achievement of all learners (Engelbrecht and Green, 2007)[9].

Inclusive education means including children with disabilities in regular classrooms that have been designed for children without disabilities (Kugelmass, 2004)[12]. It is an educational practice based on the social premise of justice that advocates for equal access to educational opportunities for all children regardless of their physical, intellectual emotional or learning disability (Loreman et al, 2005)[13]. Ainscow (1995)[2] states that the aim of inclusive education is restructuring school so as to address the learning needs of all learners. That is, schools must change in order to be able to meet the learning needs of all learners in a given community. According to UNESCO (2005)[24], "Inclusion is a dynamic approach of responding positively to pupil diversity and of seeing individual differences not as a problem but as opportunity for enriching learning". The aim of inclusive education is thus to remove the historical exclusion within and outside the school through enactment or modification of legislation, policies and educational management practices in order to promote the reorganization of the educational systems and the acceptance of all students independently of their differences. Differences among students could be related to disability, gender, size, colour or ethnicity and disability is just one of the differences and does not limit ones strength and abilities. Inclusive education recognizes that these differences are valuable and bring creativity and through them ideas are shared and experienced. In other words, inclusion is about transforming systems to be inclusive of everyone and not about inserting persons with disabilities into existing structures (UNICEF, 2009)[25] . The concept of inclusion has developed from a long history of educational innovation and represents school improvements on many levels of all students. The several theories dealing with the democratic community (Dewey, 1996)[7] provide opportunities to rethink how one can improve acceptance of differences and create communities inclusive of all members of society (Turner and Louis, 1996)[22]. Communities and their involvement in community development is for the benefit and growth of inclusive schools and these communities cooperate and collaborate for the common good of all (Apple and Beane, 1995)[4]. In inclusive school difference is recognised, respected and represented. The inclusive schools demand reconstructed educational thinking and practice in regular schools for the benefit of all students (Slee, 2001 b) [20]. This involves reconstructing and realigning the whole system and the entire component parts so that assessment, curriculum,. Instruction, professional development, program evaluation and accountability…. work synergistically to ensure meaningful and sustained school improvement.

Objectives of the Present Study

The present study was undertaken with the following broad objectives:

1.) To study the concept of inclusive education in context of Indian scenario.
2.) To study the need for inclusive education in India.
3.) To study the problems being faced in implementing inclusive education in India.
4.) To study the strategies that must be adopted to cope with emerging problems and issues regarding inclusion of children with special needs.
5.) To study the role of Teachers and their Training in promoting Inclusive Education.

Methodology of the Study

Keeping in view of availability of the resources and feasibility of the present research paper, the author conducted his research studies on the basis of secondary sources of data. Secondary data has been collected from various books, Journals, research articles etc. The methodology of the study also includes the thoughts and writings of various authors in the stream of academic, research & corporate industry. Thus, the author utilized all resources available and carried out extensive studies for the present research paper.

Concept of Inclusive Education

In schools throughout the world, 'inclusion' has been used to refer to the placement of students with disabilities in ordinary classrooms alongside their peers (Kugelmass, 2004)[12]. "Inclusive education means that students with disabilities are served primarily in the general education settings, under the responsibility of regular classroom teacher. When necessary and justifiable, students with disabilities may also receive

some of their instruction in another setting, such as resource room" (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2004)[14]. According to Vaughan & Schumm (1995)[26], inclusion offers and supports a school community in which all students, including those with disabilities and learning difficulties, are accepted, as integral members of the community.

In Indian context, Inclusion can be viewed from three perspectives which are:
1.) Physical inclusion
2.) Social inclusion
3.) Cognitive inclusion

1.) Physical inclusion
Physical inclusion receives consistent promotion, support and facilitation from the government. All the policies and regulation have made education free and compulsory for all children. No institution can deny admission to a chi old with disability on account of his/her disability. The universalization of elementary education (UEE) focuses on enrolment, retention and achievement of all children.

2.) Social inclusion
This type of inclusion is only happening in some sections of the society. In the lower socio-economic strata, research studies have revealed that there is greater acceptance of persons with disabilities (PWDs) with minimum expectation from them, whereas people from economically upper and affluent class of society have high expectations from PWD and for acceptance they do not move beyond denial (Bhan, S., Mehta, D, 1998)[5]. Gradually the efforts are being made by educating people through direct instruction and media to bring attitudinal changes in the society.

3.) Cognitive Inclusion
The educational institutions try out cognitive inclusion by allowing the children with special educational needs to study in general classrooms with non-disabled children. Cognitive inclusion is possible only if the subject matter is broken down into smaller learning units and teacher should make sure that all the children to the expected level of mastery learn each of the micro-units of a lesson.

Therefore, the transition from "Special School Concept" to "Inclusive Education" can be treated as an evolutionary process in the service of children with disabilities.

Need for Inclusive Education in India
In addressing the issue of "why inclusion", is the reality in Indian context should be reviewed. Some of the important facts with regard to inclusive education in Indian scenario are as follows·

1.) More than 90% of disabled children are found in the rural areas in India. The special school as well as integrated education programmes are only a few in numbers and cannot serve all disabled children. Therefore, inclusive education is needed to provide equal educational opportunities to all disabled children in their own locations.
2.) As far as standardized models of integration are concerned one specialist teacher serves to 10 disabled children of the same category. This approach is not practical in rural areas. In most villages of the country, disabled children of different categories are present. Therefore, the disabled child has to depend on the general school for education. As a result, inclusion is inevitable for these children from rural areas.
3.) The extent of disability in each category ranges from mild to severe and sometimes there are profound cases. The mild and moderate cases are more in number than the severe and profound cases and they depend on the general education system. This call for the involvement of general education so that the children who are left out of schools or those who are at risk can be served. All the above discussion's related data can be shown through Table-1.

Table 1: Children with Special Needs (0-14 years) per 1000 population

Category of disabled	Age (in years)	Total (Rural &Urban)	Rural	Urban
VI	0-4	20	8	2
	5-1	39	17	22
	0-14	59	25	34
HI	0-4	16	09	07
	5-14	41	18	23
	0-14	57	27	30
Speech	0-4	77	42	35
	5-14	95	47	48
	0-14	172	89	83
Locomotor	0-4	50	29	21
	5-14	67	36	31
	0-14	117	65	52
MR	0-14	40	31	90
All (VI+HI, Speech, Locomotor, MR & others)	0-4	163	88	75
	5-14	242	118	124
	0-14	445	237	208

Source: RCI Report: disability Status in India, 2006[26]

Therefore, the reality in India focuses on the need for inclusive education.

Problems & Prospects in implementation of Inclusive Education in India
The main challenge to implementation of inclusive education is policy issue. While the World Conference on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994)[23] recognised the need for reforms in schools, without significant changes in the policies in the universities and middle colleges, the objective of inclusive education cannot be achieved. Lack of policy on inclusive education means that institutions of higher learning and teacher training institutions cannot invest in the elimination of barriers, which is evidenced by poor architectural accessibility to higher institution buildings, low number of lecturers with training in special needs education and lack of awareness about education for students with disability. Lack of interest in developing policy on education of PWD may be attributed to poor attitude, ignorance, professional protectionism towards segregated education, antagonism towards inclusive education from within disability itself.

Teacher training institutions and universities need to move from ivory tower and work with communities, so as to provide accessible housing and other services to students with disabilities. Higher education institutions are further faced with high cost of higher education against weak national economies and even where the economy is good, there is lack of commitment on financial support to students with disabilities. Individual countries would have to make commitment to support those who are coming from economically weak background by reducing costs on education to individual households and introduce grants and make loans available to those who need it. They should promote community development and participation in order to maximize resources so as to ensure that there is sufficient, efficient and sustainable resource allocation to education for vulnerable students.

Some other Problems and Challenges towards implementing Inclusive Education in India
Some other challenges and problem in implementing inclusive education in India are:

1.) Challenge of poverty associated with disability:
With an estimated 1,027 million people, India is the world's second most populated country. It has 17% of the global population and 20% of the world's out of school, children. Despite impressive gains in the last few decades, India still has more than 260 million people living in poverty . A large number of children with disabilities live in families with income significantly below the poverty level.

Disability causes poverty. The combination of poverty and disability results in a condition of "simultaneous deprivation". Recently, the Ministry of Rural development, Govt. of India, has allocated 3% of funds in poverty alleviation programmes targeting families of children with disabilities (Sharma, B.L.2004)[19].

2.) Challenge to modify deeply held attitudes
Attitudes of the non-disabled are proving to be a major barrier in social integration of PWDs. "The more severe and visible the deformity is, the greater is the fear of contagion, hence the attitudes of aversion and segregation towards the crippled" (Desai, 2002)[8]. Such attitudes are hurdles in path of any attempts to include students with disabilities into regular schools. Alur, M. (2001)[3], in her study found that disability

in India is not seen as something "normal" or "natural", rather it is seen as an "evil eye". She further concludes that "the contradiction here was that the Indian society, although integrated in accepting and valuing diversity in so many ways has a social role construct of disability which is negative, discriminatory and exclusionary". Parents of disabled children also think that disabled and handicapped are not educable. Teacher's attitude is not positive towards the implementation of inclusive education in the regular classroom, as it gives extra burden on them without any incentive.

3.) Challenge of providing adequate levels of training to key stakeholders

Majority of school personnel in India are not trained to design and implement educational programs for students with disabilities in regular schools. Most teacher training programs in India do not have unit on Disability Studies (Myreddi & Narayan, 2000)[15]. Universities, which do not cover some aspects of special education in their teacher training programs, fail to train teachers adequately to work in inclusive settings. For example, there is limited coverage of information about practical strategies (Myreddi & Narayan, 2000)[15]. Placement of pre-service teachers in special or integrated schools is rarely given consideration (Jangira, Singh) [11]. However, the situation may improve in the coming years as the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) will periodically evaluate special education programs to ensure that each program meets minimum standards (RCI, 2006)[16].

4.) Lack of Trained Teachers

The report of the RCI (2006)[16] states that the number of trained special education teachers is extremely small, considering the number of children with disabilities that require their services. In 2011, there were only 9,492 specially trained teachers. Of these, 4,295 were trained to teach children with mental retardation, 1,079 were trained to teach students with visual disabilities, 4,011 were trained to teach students with hearing impairments; and only 107 were trained to teach students with locomotor disabilities in India. To address, this severe shortage of trained teachers, RCI recommended that an additional 44,000 teachers would be needed to be trained by the end of Eleventh five year plan (2007-2012). However, even if these targets are to be achieved, only 10% of the population of children with disabilities would be served (RCI, 2006)[16].

6.) Inadequate Resources

Majority of schools in India are poorly designed and few are equipped to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities. The lack of disability friendly transport services and inaccessible building are considered by some to be far greater problems than social prejudice and negative attitudes (Chatterjee, 2003)[6].

7.) Rigid methods & Curriculum

Teaching methodology and curriculum in the present educational system are rigid and not in accordance with the special educational needs of children. There is a need of coordination between the educational institutions/ universities and schools for the flexible teaching methodology and curriculum development.

8.) Drop-out Rate

Drop-out rate of special educational needs children is very high. Drop-out is greatest in the early grades. Pre-cursors to drop-out include repetition, low achievement, poor teaching, degraded facilities, very large classes, household poverty and poor health and nutrition. The Total enrolment of Children with Special Needs (CWSN) at Elementary level is shown in Table-2:

Table -2 Enrolment of CWSN at Elementary Level (in million)

Year	Elementary level (I-VIII)		
	Total	Boys	Girls
2003	0.97	0.63	0.34
2004	1.75	1.04	0.71
2005	1.39	0.83	0.56
2006	2.12	1.16	0.96
2007	2.39	1.32	1.07

Soure: Analytical Report: NUEPA (2007)

Strategies that must be adopted to cope with Emrging Problems and Issues regarding Inclusion of Children with Special Needs

Possible strategies adopted so as to address and tackle some of the emerging problems and issues regarding inclusion of children with disabilities are:

i) Qualitative Teachers Training

The educational authorities in India may adopt a policy of training one teacher from each school or a cluster of schools. The teacher would need to be provided with intensive training to work with various disabilities and would then act as an integration specialist or an inclusion facilitator for one or a number of schools located in close proximity. A similar strategy has worked well in certain parts of India when several school teachers were specifically trained to work in integrated settings under the Project Integrated Education for the Disabled (PIED) program launched in 1987 by MHRD and is recommended by several researchers in India (Jangira, 1995; Myreddi & Narayan, 2000)[11, 15]. Sharma, K (1992)[18] suggest that the curriculum for pre-service training programs should be carefully developed, incorporating feedback from special and regular educators.

ii) Classroom Practices in Inclusive Education

Teachers can use the following numbers of techniques in the inclusive classroom:

- Using games designed to build community.
- Involving students in problem-solving.
- Sharing songs & books that teach community.
- Openly dealing with individual differences by discussion.
- Assigning classroom jobs that build community.
- Utilizing physical therapy, equipment such as standing frames, so students who use wheelchairs can stand when other students are standing.
- Encouraging students to take the role of teacher and deliver instruction.
- Focusing on the strength of a student with special needs.
- Peer tutoring, Co-operative learning, Multidisciplinary Approach, Collaborative Teaching, Whole Class Teaching and Activity Based Learning should be used for the better results in the present scenario.

iii) Need to Design innovative system of training

The number of persons who need training are very large and the conventional training methods cannot meet the requirements. Therefore, there is a need to design some innovative models to train educators at mass level. One way to educate such a large number of teachers is by using Distance Open Learning or DOL. IGNOU, in association with RCI is offering various courses to train special education teachers.

iv) Need for collaboration between different Ministries

Different ministries in India administer services for persons with disabilities. For example, while "integrated education" is the responsibility of MHRD, education in special school is the responsibility of Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. So, there is a need for streamlining administrative arrangements so that funds provided to different ministries for Persons With Disabilities (PWDs) can be used effectively.

v) Involvement of NGO's through Community Development and Mobilization of Communities in implementing Inclusive Education programs

NGO's can play a significant role in implementing integrated education because they are widely located in India and can serve both urban and rural school communities. The Sikshit Yuva Sewa Samiti (SYSS), an NGO in partnership with the government, participates in the implementation of the Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) and DPEP projects, and strengthens the programme through community-based and community mobilization intervention initiatives. It also provides resource teachers as a support system to general teachers, and a back-up team of physiotherapists and occupational therapists at the district level.

vi) Establish an alternative system of examination

Most school educators in India are concerned that inclusion of students with disabilities would result in lowering school standards because these students won't be able to pass exams (Sharma, U & Desai, 2002)[21].

Thus, it is necessary to establish an alternative system of examination for students with disabilities. Such a system is already in practice in USA.

vii) School-University Partnership

Multi lingual, multi-cultural and multireligious nature of India is cited as a challenge in implementing any educational reform. Local universities in each of the States and Union territories may play a significant role in overcoming this challenge. Evidence from a number of western countries indicates that such collaborative projects can produce positive results for students with disabilities as well as for school educators. For example; one such project is the Learning Improves in Networking Communities (LINC) program that was conducted in partnership between the Catholic Education Commission, Victoria (CEVC) and Monash University in Melbourne, Australia. The project was geared to identify the factors within the school environment that most effectively contribute to successful integrated practices.

viii) Establishment of National Resource Centre

There is need to have a National Resource Centre for Disabilities. Such a centre would work to collect, and disseminate information on various aspects of disability through various TV and radio programs as well as through internet (Sharma, B.L. 2004)[17]. The centre would also fulfil the role of scrutinizing all mass communication programs to ensure that disability is not portrayed in a negative manner.

ix) Individualised Education Plan (IEP)

An individualized Education Plan must be tailored so as to cater to the individual student needs as identified by the evaluation process and must help teachers and related services providers to understand the students disability and how the disability affects the learning process.

xi) Educational Concessions and Facilities

There is need of educational concessions and facilities for the education, occupational training, placement and rehabilitation of the disabled persons with the main objectives as following:

- To develop their potentialities in academic, occupational and social spheres.
- To help slow learners to work on inclusion to general stream programmes.
- To make partial integration programmes a success to bridge the gap between special education ands general education pattern.
- To provide remedial or supportive help and training on time to the disabled children (Virk, 2012)27.

Role of Teachers and their Training in Promoting Inclusive Education

It is a fact that regular schools and regular classroom environment often fail to accommodate the education needs of many students, especially individuals with disability. This is the reason that so many pupils with disabilities do not attend regular schools. Tesfaye (2008)[21], reported that, the regular classroom teacher is responsible for any adaptation that may be necessary for students' success in this environment. Consequently, these teachers must have the skills to develop and adapt curricular to meet individual needs. Necessary skills for the regular classroom teachers include an understanding of how a disability affects the ability to learn academic skills or to adapt in social situation. According to Abate (2005)[1], it is unrealistic and unfair to expect that the regular class teacher will be able to include children with disability in regular classroom without receiving adequate training. It is through training that teacher could bring the necessary adaptation required to meet the special needs of their students.

Training of teachers must be done at pre-service and in-service levels. This includes training at teacher training colleges and universities at both the national and provincial level. In pre-service training programs, inclusive education should be a compulsory subject for all teacher candidates & an integral part of teacher training curricula. Fundamental knowledge and skills of inclusive education, such as understanding needs and abilities of children with special needs and pedagogic skills such as instructional accommodation and activity differentiation should be provided to teacher candidates.

Training of teachers at in-service level includes professional development of teachers who are already working in the classrooms. In-service training of teachers equips teachers with methods for community mobilization, community development, community participation and child centred pedagogies, employing active and participative learning techniques that improve teachers' capacity to teach children both with and without disabilities. Through, in-service teacher education programme, the concept, meaning, strategies of team teaching, various instructional strategies to suit challenged learners in inclusive school etc. will be introduced by orientation programmes and refresher courses.

Teachers teaching in an inclusive classroom should have the following abilities:

1.) To problem-solve, to be able to informally assess the skill a student needs.
2.) To make appropriate expectations for each student, regardless of the students' capabilities. If teachers can do this, it allows all students to be included in a class and school.
3.) To learn how to value all kinds of skills that students bring to a class, not just the academic skills.
4.) Accommodate to students different learning styles and rates of learning by employing a range of teaching methods, including cooperative group learning, peer tutoring, team teachings and individualized instruction.
5.) Locate appropriate material, equipment or specialists.
6.) Identify and overcome barriers to learning.
7.) Use appropriate forms of assessment.
8.) Create an inclusive community that extends beyond the walls of the school.

Thus, at least one teacher educator from every Teacher Education Programme is supported to have short term training in the area of special education and all teacher educators have to receive a week-long orientation about inclusive education.

Recommendations and Suggestions for Integrating Inclusive Education in Teacher Education Programmes.

Teachers who can teach in settings that are inclusive, meeting the needs of all students, must be prepared. If teacher education programmes are to prepare educators to be successful in the inclusive classroom of the future they must reconceptualize and redesign their approach to pre-service preparation of teachers.

Inclusive education in teacher education for pre-service should lay more emphasis on the process subsystems, which includes collaborative experiences through simulation, Role-playing, field-based activities, multiple opportunities to observe and work in actual classrooms where inclusive practices are being implemented etc.

Inclusive education in Teacher Education Programme is not so easy because it is community-based program and it depends upon the extent of interaction with the general community. Success of inclusive education in Teacher Education Programme depends upon combining efforts of teachers, teacher educators, peers, administrators, volunteers, parents and in general all members of society. More special needs departments in colleges and universities need to be opened so as to meet the staff requirement to teach special needs component in teacher training institutions. Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI), which has a statutory status can revise the norms for the maintenance of standards, curricula and can bring about improvement in teacher education.

Conclusion

The success of inclusive education in any context depends upon many factors. Teachers themselves are an essential component to ensure the quality of students' inclusion in the school and teacher education institutions. Preparing teachers with essential knowledge and skills for inclusive education requires the commitment of all actors. Out of a small number of studies conducted in the area of inclusive education, one thing has been confirmed that successful inclusive programs exist, but there are still a range of conditions that must be in place. It presents a challenge to government funding bodies to provide the resources that will facilitate inclusion and identification of a successful mode of professional development.

Building the capacity for inclusive education must be done at community level, by including awareness raising activities such as community involvement, community mobilization and community development as well as integrating pre-service and in-service teacher training

programs in inclusive education. More and more teaching training modules need to be developed so that not only pre-service but also in-service teachers could also be trained in inclusive practices. The administrative and management aspects of inclusive education needs to be studied at the micro and macro levels both in rural and urban settings, so that the models thus developed could be replicated in varied situation.

Thus, to conclude it can be said, that, inclusive educaion is the need of the hour.

Including children with disabilities in education is a challenging task and needs a stricter government control, policies, legislative framework, mass community mobilization and involvement and above all provision of appropriate responses to wide spectrum of learning needs of special children in both formal and non-formal settings.

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