

Inclusive Education: Illusion or Reality?



Education

KEYWORDS :

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ABSTRACT

Millions of disabled children, youth and adults continue to experience exclusion within and from education around the world. Inclusion cannot be simply reduced to an educational issue or an employment issue. Its achievement will require the successful coordination of a whole series of transitions for the handicapped, ranging from early identification, to early intervention, to school programmes, to community jobs and finally to community living. Inclusive education is an educational approach and philosophy that provides all students with disabilities greater opportunities for academic and social achievement. Inclusion is about making sure that each and every student feels welcome and that their unique needs and learning styles are attended to and valued. Research shows that most students learn and perform better when exposed to the richness of the general education curriculum, as long as the appropriate strategies and accommodations are in place. At no time does inclusion require the classroom curriculum, or the academic expectations, to be watered down. On the contrary, inclusion enhances learning for students, both with and without special needs. Students learn, and use their learning differently; the goal is to provide all students with the instruction they need to succeed as learners and achieve high standards, alongside their friends and neighbors. Many years ago, special classes were created for students with special needs. Special educators felt that if they could just teach these students separately, in smaller groups, they could help them to catch up. However, the reality is that students in segregated special education classes have fallen further and further behind. Over time, we have learned that inclusive education is a better way to help all students succeed. This paper intends to find the status of implementation of inclusive education in the secondary schools of Mysore city.

Theoretical background of the study

Meaning of Inclusive education

Inclusive education means enrolling the disabled in regular schools and providing special services within the regular schools. In inclusive education students with disabilities follow the same schedule as non-disabled students. All children are taught to understand and accept human differences. There is a helper and buddy relationship between disabled and non-disabled students. An appropriate individualised programme is provided to the disabled. Inclusion involves keeping students with diverse needs in regular classrooms and bringing the support services to them. Inclusive education views able and disabled children as part of the whole school system. Inclusive education provides equal opportunities for education to all children appropriate to their diverse needs. Inclusive education is not the same as integrated education. There is a vast difference between the two approaches. Integrated education emphasizes placement of children with disabilities in mainstream school. The focus is on attendance. The school system remains rigid and as a result very few children with disabilities are able to cope with the demands of such a rigid system. This is a system that would not accept many of the children with disabilities on the basis of not being prepared enough. In other words, in integrated education, the child is seen as a problem and not the system. He is considered to be different from others and if he cannot learn it is his problem. Hence, Integrated education is based on the medical model of disability and views a child with disability with clinical blinders needing remedy. Inclusive education, on the other hand is all about effective learning by all children including children with disabilities. It is based on the social model of disability and considers that if the child is not learning then the system needs to be blamed. Integrated education can be a stepping stone for inclusive education.

Proponents of mainstreaming hold that students with special need be placed in the general education setting solely when they can meet traditional academic expectations with minimal assistance. Yet, simply placing students with special needs in the regular classroom is not enough to impact learning. Teachers in inclusive schools are asked to vary their teaching styles to meet the diverse learning styles of a diverse population of students. Only then can the individual needs of all our students be met. Schools of the future need to ensure that each student receives the individual attention, accommodations, and supports that will result in meaningful learning.

Review of related literature

The confusion that exists within the field internationally arises, in part at least, from

the fact that the idea of inclusive education can be defined in a variety of ways.

It is not surprising, therefore, that progress remains disappointing in many countries. For

example, in her analysis of national education plans from the Asia region, Ahuja (2005) noted that the idea of inclusive education was not even mentioned. In fact, special schools and residential hostels were often put forward as a strategy for meeting the needs of a wide range of

disadvantaged students, and non-formal education was seen as a solution to the educational needs of marginalised groups. This is a worrying trend, especially given the negative effects of institutionalisation on vulnerable groups of children in under-resourced contexts (United Nations, 2005). Ainscow, M. (2005) argued that inclusion is the major challenge facing educational systems around the world. Reflecting on evidence from a programme of research carried out over the last 10 years, he provided a framework for determining levers that can help to ease systems in a more inclusive direction. The focus is on factors within schools that influence the development of thinking and practice, as well as wider contextual factors that may constrain such developments. It is argued that many of the barriers experienced by learners arise from existing ways of thinking. Consequently, strategies for developing inclusive practices have to involve interruptions to thinking in order to encourage an exploration of overlooked possibilities for moving practice forward. Barton (1997) sought to identify some of the key issues involved in the question of inclusive education. This includes conceptual, ideological and practical difficulties. Part of a realistic approach to the topic necessitates an understanding of the context in which the struggle for inclusion takes place. Particular consideration is given to the marketization of education and the challenges it presents to those seeking to remove exclusionary practices. It was argued for an understanding that can contribute to change and thus advocates the urgent need for a theory of political agency.

Need for the study

With the right to education becoming a fundamental right, the need to create inclusive educational environment and implement inclusive educational practices have become a mandatory requirement on the part of various stakeholders of education. Government of India is addressing the concerns of universalisation of elementary and improving the quality of education both at elementary and secondary level. The maximum problem of dropout and stagnation at elementary stage is happening due to lack of early identification of children with diverse needs. Education is not only a fundamental right but has been declared as one of the human rights. The key aim of inclusive education is to benefit all learners including those with diverse needs. This aim is shared across the globe and is also reflected in the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) which states that those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools. Regular schools with an inclusive ethos are the most effective way to combat discriminatory attitudes, create welcoming inclusive communities and achieve education for all. Such schools provide effective education to the majority of children and improve efficiency and are cost effective. As estimated, 40 million of the 115 million children who are enrolled in school have one or the other form of disabilities. The vast majority of these children have moderate impairments that are often not visible. They may have difficulties which are physical, cognitive, sensory and emotional in nature. In fact these moderate level disabilities become the single most important factor for their dropping out from the schools. One of the main strategies to get these children educated in the existing system of education is to prepare teachers for inclusive education. At present there is the need to develop teaching methodology by using compensatory instructional materials to meet the needs of these children so that all children get benefitted. Educational professionals have to accept the rights of children with diverse needs and the principle of inclusion under the Right to Education Bill, (2009). All the schools need to cater to the needs of children with diverse needs regardless of their ability and disability (Hwang and Evans, 2011). There is an urgent need to reform and reframe the thinking of teachers and teacher educators towards the accomplishment of goals of inclusive education. India has also travelled a long way from the charity model to the human rights model. Initially the people with disabilities were treated as helpless victims needing care and protection. This was more driven from charity and benevolence rather than justice and equality. The human rights model recognizes disability as an important dimension of human culture and rights of all individuals. This derives its philosophy and strength from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) stating that "All human beings are born free and equal in rights and dignity. Education is the core of equality and empowerment. Though the right to education and to equality of educational opportunities is guaranteed by the Constitution of India, it is disturbing to find that more than half of the population of children and youth with disabilities are denied these rights and do not receive adequate schooling in appropriate environment. Most of these out of school children with disabilities are those who were refused admission in the neighbourhood school where all other children of their village were going. Usually, the major reasons for not giving admission to these children with disabilities in mainstream schools are that "we do not have enough resources for these children" or "they should be going to only special schools specially made for these type of children". The message from the school system is loud and clear. The society assumes that the future of children with disabilities is worth less. In addition, many parents of children with disabilities, not being aware about the developments in this field lose hope for the future of their children. They prefer to sit back and accept their fate without pushing the matters any further. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan was launched to achieve the goal of Universalisation of Elementary Education. This adopts a ZERO rejection policy and uses an approach of converging various schemes and programmes. We all

know that The National Policy on Education, 1986 (NPE, 1986), and the Programme of Action (1992) stresses the need for integrating children with special needs with other groups. The objective to be achieved as stated in the NPE, 1986 is "to integrate the physically and mentally handicapped with general community as equal partners, to prepare them for normal growth and to enable them to face life with courage and confidence". The present study was conceived in this context.

Methodology

The study adopted an ex-post facto descriptive survey design. The study covered selected government and private schools within Mysore city. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were employed in selecting the sample for the study. The study was limited to 14 secondary schools randomly drawn from Mysore city. Out of 14 schools 7 were government schools and the remaining 7 were private schools. The sample comprised of 112 secondary school teachers out of which 56 teachers were from government schools and the remaining 56 teachers were from private schools. 14 headmasters/headmistresses, 7 from government schools and 7 from private schools were also included in this study. The tools used to obtain data were

Inclusive Education Teachers' Questionnaire (SSTQ); and Inclusive Education Head Teachers' Questionnaire (SSHTQ) study.

The data obtained were analysed using descriptive statistics. Findings of the study 50% of teachers and 55% of head masters / headmistresses were aware of inclusive education.

90 percent of the schools did not have any trained teachers for inclusive education. The teachers were not even aware of the of the institutions and courses for such training.

97 percent of the schools did not have any resources for inclusive education.

97 percent of the schools did not have any support services for inclusion..

98 percent of the schools did not have any resources for inclusion.

99% of headmasters/headmistresses opined that there was lack of requisite support to inclusive education.

99% of teachers and 99% of headmasters/headmistresses cited lack of time as a handicap in attending training programs, stating that most teachers are overloaded and often suffer from professional burnout.

99% of teachers and headmasters stated that lack of information and sensitization as the main reasons for their ignorance on inclusive education..

99% of headmasters/headmistresses opined that the disabled children were liability on society and inclusive education was an absolute necessity for them.

99 percent of the teachers and head teachers were interested to recognize, accept, the disabled and in helping disabled students to develop their potential, to adjust to school, and to develop the skills they need to cope with the problems in life.

Conclusion

This paper raises a few concerns. Is inclusive education just an illusion or a reality? Are we just romancing with inclusive education? When will it get implemented even in small pockets like the schools that were taken up for this study? Without inclusive education it is difficult to achieve the goal of universalisation of education.

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