Research Paper Education

A Challenge of Inclusive Education in India

Dr.A.BALU Principal i/c., Alagappa University College of Education, Alagappa University, Karaikudi

Mr.P.RAJKUMAR Assistant Professor in Commerce, Vivekananda College of Education, Kummangudi

ABSTRACT

Inclusive education (IE) is a new approach towards educating the children with disability and learning difficulties with that of normal ones within the same roof. Of late, a consensus has emerged among Indian intellectuals and pedagogues for adopting inclusive education in mainstream schools. There is no need of reinforcing the fact that teacher education remains a very weak link with respect to equipping teachers to be prepared for an inclusive classroom environment. The teacher education diplomas and degrees offer "Education of children with special needs" as an optional subject, in order to prepare teachers to identify and diagnose disability. However it gives them a holistic perspective with respect to dealing with diversity or challenge negative attitudes. The present paper aims to highlight the existing educational setting for the differently abled children in India. It also focuses on how inclusive education can be made more effective in Indian context.

KEYWORDS Inclusive Education, Inclusive Education Policy and Special Education

INTRODUCTION

A number of countries in the Western world, educators and administrators have put a great deal of effort into the development of a thorough and widely accepted system of special schools. In these schools all the available expertise has been concentrated in an attempt to educate pupils with special needs in the best possible way. However, this view of special education has gradually changed. Knowledge, expertise and facilities are still of importance to the education of pupils with special needs, but the segregation of these pupils is now perceived as unacceptable. The needs, prevailing view is that, they should be educated together with their peers in regular education settings. The consequence is that regular and special education as separate systems disappear and are replaced by a single system that includes a wide range of pupils. In such way an 'inclusive' system for all pupils including the children with special needs where all study together. Though India has witnessed phenomenal expansion of the educational opportunities at the threshold of 21st century, the differently abled children have not benefited substantially for their growth and achievement. Inclusive education (IE) is a new approach towards educating the children with disability and learning difficulties with that of normal ones within the same roof. It seeks to address the learning needs of all children with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion. It implies all learners – with or without disabilities being able to learn together through access to common pre-school provisions, schools and community educational setting with an appropriate network of support services. This is possible only in flexible education system that assimilates the needs of diverse range of learners and adapts itself to meet these needs.

MEANING OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Inclusive education has been defined at various ways that addresses the learning needs of the differently abled children children. There is confusion about the definition of inclusive education and it seems to be difficult to differentiate inclusive education from the integrated education. Thus, before discussing the importance of inclusive education it is necessary to define the term properly. The purpose of inclusive education is not confined to bring the children with special needs within the same roof, but to provide them respect and confidence to participate and contribute in the learning processequally with their peers.

LEVEL OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Inclusive Education is accepted as an integral part of general education. Training regular classroom teacher in the area of integrated education, curriculum modification, parental education, awareness to parents and developing positive attitude towards the disability are the key point of successful inclusive education. To open up the regular school system to disabled children is not an easy task. The policy on inclusion and mainstreaming can easily get failure if not implemented carefully. There is an urgent need for interventions for equipping general teachers with special skills, making general curricula, teaching methods. Evaluation procedures, learning material disability-sensitive and addressing the attitudes /needs of other children in the school to ensure such interventions benefit to all children. As a system, inclusive education should be flexible. This need for flexibility must be reflected in the methods and materials used to give these children the widest possible access to the regular curriculum. When discussing the kind of service needed, the starting point should always be what is best for the particular child. Emphasising inclusive education does not rule out special schools or centres. They would still be required to cater to children with profound and complex difficulties in need of more specialised and extensive help, including e.g. many deaf children. This alternative should, however, not be considered, unless classroom placement cannot meet their needs. In this context, it is important to stress the role parents have. They have a right to be involved in all decision-making concerning their child. They should be seen as partners in the education process. Where there is such co-operation, parents have been found to be very important resources for the teachers and the schools. Children with disabilities need child-centred curriculum, which takes into account the individual needs of children. The curriculum needs to set specific, observable, measurable and achievable learning outcomes. A flexible, locally relevant curriculum, teaching and learning strategies are intrinsically important for children with special needs to participate in the educational process. They require a learning environment in which they can actively participate in learning in small groups learning settings.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY

Inclusive Education Policy Recommendations to send children with disabilities to mainstream schools were first made in the

Sargent Report in 1944, and again in 1964 by the Kothari Commission (Julka, 2005). Despite this, the change has been slow, with segregation in special schools dominating the scene until recently. The 1995 Persons with Disability Act (PDA) states that disabled children should be educated in integrated settings where possible, although it seems that the lack of implementation may be due to there being no enforcement agency for this legislation. Despite the promotion of inclusive education, govt. documents focus on inclusive education as being about including children with disabilities in the education system, but not specifically the mainstream (Singal, 2005). 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 (Mukhopadhyay and Mani, 2002) and that it is inclusion in the mainstream that is currently seen as the resource – constrained inferior alternative. However the limited coverage of mainly urban-based, impairment specific special schools in India may result in the exclusion of children with disabilities who do not fit the categories of their institutions or who live in rural areas. Inclusive education may be the only way of facilitating educational access for these children.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN SARVA SHIKSHA ABHIYAN

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) was launched to achieve the goal of Universalisation of ElementaryEducation. This adopts a zero rejection policy and uses an approach of converging various schemes and programmes. The key objective of SSA is Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE). Three important aspect of UEE are access, enrolment and retention of all children in 6-14 years of age. A zero rejection policy has been adopted under SSA, which ensures that every Child with Special Needs (CWSN), irrespective of the kind, category and degree of disability, is provided meaningful and quality education. It covers the following components under education for children with special needs:-Early detection and identification, functional and formal assessment, Educational Placement, Aids and appliances, Support services, Teacher training, Resource support, Individual Educational Plan (IEP), Parental training and community mobilization, Planning and management, Strengthening of special schools, Removal of Architectural barriers, Research, Monitoring and evaluation, Girls with disabilities.

SPECIAL EDUCATION AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The term "Special Need Education" (SNE) has come into use as a replacement for the term "Special Education", as the older one was mainly understood to refer the education of all those children and youth whose needs arise from disabilities or learning difficulties. The Statement affirms: "those withspecial educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within child centered pedagogy capable of meeting these needs". Moreover, the concept of "Special Need Education" extends beyond those who may be included in handicapped categories to cover those who are failing in school for a wide variety of other reasons that are known to be likely to impede a child's optimal progress. Whether or not this more broadly defined group of children are in need of additional support depends on the extent to which school needs to support their curriculum, teaching and/or to provide additional human or material resources so as to stimulate efficient and effective learning for these pupils. (International Standard Classification of Education ISCED, 1997). But marginalization and exclusion of these pupils result in the growth of inferiority complexes among them and their parents/guardians. This leads the vision of "Inclusive Education". Inclusive Education aims at integrated development of children with special needs and normal children through mainstream schooling.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND TEACHERS

The way in which teachers realize inclusion in the classroom largely depends on their attitude towards pupils with special needs and on the resources available to them. Teaching pupils with special needs in the regular classroom is no doubt deviates from the 'regular programme. Teachers are confronted with the question of how to instruct these pupils. Special needs pupils may require more instruction time or other learning methods and professional knowledge. To realize the inclusion of these pupils in regular education, teachers must try to enhance the amount of resources and differentiate between pupils with respect to the amount and type of resources available to them. The idea is that a successful inclusion of special needs pupils not only depends on appropriate organization, legislation and regulations, but also on the availability of resources in the regular classroom and on the wayteachers differentiates the resources between pupils. Teacher's attitudes, available instructions time, the knowledge and skills of teachers and the teaching methods and materials on hand seem to be important prerequisites for special needs teaching in regular setting. The teacher education diplomas and degrees offer Inclusive Education as a subject in order to prepare teachers to identify and diagnose disability. But the need of the hour is to give them a holistic perspective with respect to dealing with diversity and challenge with a positive attitude.

TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

There is no need of reinforcing the fact that teacher education remains a very weak link with respect to equipping teachers to be prepared for an inclusive classroom environment. The teacher education diplomas and degrees offer "Education of children with special needs" as an optional subject, in order to prepare teachers to identify and diagnose disability. Many government programmes have included a teacher training component in an attempt to instigate institutional change. However, a 'special needs' focus and a lack of training for management, combined with didactic training methodology do little to alter the classroom. The poor quality educational provision in many schools is reflected in the fact that many govt. job reservations for adults with disabilities remain unfilled. It is more likely to be directly related to the fact that very few children with disabilities get to, or stay in, school that there is a lack qualified, let alone confident candidates.

CONCLUSION

The Government of India is trying to improve its education system focussing on the inclusive approach. Disabled children have equal right to get education as per their needs and capability. Every stakeholder of the society has to understand their role and responsibilities to work with cooperation and coherence to ensure that not a single child is left without school education. Differently abled children should be treated equally as the normal children and instead of looking them in sympathy their talents and abilities should be recognised for their self-respect and welfare of the society. It is important to remember that Inclusive education is at a very early stage of conceptualization and implementation in India. The fact that it is being discussed, debated and in some places implemented although falteringly, demonstrates a willingness to engage with elements with elements of a new concept that has the potential to be developed in the future in a positive manner.

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