

**PREPARING TEACHERS TO WORK WITH DIFFERENTLY ABLED STUDENTS:
OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

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ABSTRACT

An inclusive classroom is a general education classroom in which students with and without disabilities learn together. It is essentially the opposite of a special education classroom, where students with disabilities learn with only other students with disabilities. If children with special needs are included in an ordinary class, it is the responsibility of the teacher to ensure that all children have access to the curriculum. To make the curriculum accessible to Children with Special Needs, teacher can either modify the material or adapt the strategy. Inclusive education is about ensuring access to quality education for all students by effectively meeting their diverse needs in a way that is responsive, accepting, respectful and supportive. Students participate in the education program in a common learning environment with support to diminish and remove barriers and obstacles that may lead to exclusion.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Differently Abled Students

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has been internationally recognized as a philosophy for attaining equity, justice and quality education for all children, especially those who have been traditionally excluded from mainstream education for reasons of disability, ethnicity, gender or other characteristics. While inclusive education has been implemented successfully in many countries, other countries are still in the process of achieving this goal. Inclusive education is defined by UNESCO as a process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of all learners by increasing participation in learning and reducing exclusion within and from education. This means that all children have the right to a quality education that caters, to the extent possible, to their individual needs. Some countries have been successful in promoting inclusive education practices and policies that remove barriers and create conditions which enable all children to learn. However, in developing countries, like India the process of creating an inclusive system is more difficult.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AS SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Inclusive education is a child-focused approach to education that takes into account children's abilities, potential and diverse needs. This approach to education calls for teachers to develop creative strategies that cater to the needs of their students. Because it is a holistic approach to teaching and learning, inclusion requires reforms and innovations at different levels of the education system. From planning lessons and objectives to differentiating activities that cater to diverse needs, inclusive education supports children in their school environment. It involves accurate assessments of children and the creation of friendly and collaborative environments for all children. Inclusive education not only improves learning opportunities for children with disabilities, it also contributes to the facilitation of educational reform for better quality teaching, learning and management.

Collaborative learning and task differentiation are two important aspects of inclusive education that should be considered as key tools for achieving educational quality for all children. However, in order for inclusion to be both successful and sustainable, it must be addressed at all levels of the system, from education ministries to local teachers

STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING IN INCLUSIVE SETTINGS

If children with special needs are included in an ordinary class, it is the responsibility of the teacher to ensure that all children have access to the curriculum. To make the curriculum accessible to Children with Special Needs, teacher can either modify the material or adapt the strategy. Either individualization of instruction will have to be done or the strategy may have to be adopted so that all children are taught at their level.

Team Teaching

An education of Children with Special Need is an area, which has foundations in many disciplines; you may have to seek help of other teachers/professionals like physiotherapist/occupational therapist/speech therapist/ social worker so that the B.Ed./In-service training curriculum is transacted in totality properly to the trainees. Hence, at times you may have to teach as a team. Team teaching is an approach in which two or more teachers, join together, plan together, teach together and evaluate together. As an educator, you have to work out the depth in which the therapists and doctors give their inputs and how they can be related to education and behaviour of the child in school. In inclusive schools the regular education teacher and the special education teacher also work together in providing service to children with Special Need in the classroom.

Peer Tutoring

Peer tutoring involves one-to-one instruction from a student to another in the tutoring role and the tutee who receives instruction. Peer tutoring meets the individual's needs of the child with disabilities by providing remedial or supportive instruction.

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative Learning is a strategy used by group of students to achieve a common goal with mutual collaboration and support. In an inclusive classroom where a large number of children with and without disabilities have been enrolled, children can be taught with the help of cooperative learning in which they have common goals. If a child with Special Need is to be taught he/she should be placed with the children who have the sensitivity and skills to deal with them. All students in the class may have to be oriented and prepared to work with children having locomotor disability. Grouping should be such that they help each other learn, they work together to seek solutions to problems and to complete an assignment. It is opposed to the existing system of education in the regular classroom where children are forced to compete against one another, the educational system encourages children to learn cooperatively through joint ventures. It is particularly suited to children with Special Need as they may feel insecure in a competitive setting. Children having locomotor disability, learning disability and emotional disturbances often lack the opportunity for social interaction. They need to develop the skills necessary for positive peer interaction. Using cooperative learning will provide opportunities to children with special needs, as they would take turns, ask questions, seek assistance, answer questions, offer suggestions, learn and display good manners, speak positively about others and correct others.

Language Experience Approach (LEA)

The Language Experience Approach (LEA) integrates the development of reading skills with the development of listening, speaking and writing skills. What the child is thinking and talking about would make the material for developing the lesson. Many children with Locomotor Disabilities may talk like any other child in the class e.g. children with visual impairment polio, muscular dystrophy and some types of spina bifida. However, some children with hearing impairment, mental retardation, cerebral palsy and some types of spinal bifida may show difference in thinking, talking or communication. In such cases the teacher will have to make special efforts to see that she/he talks about the experiences in the child's world or she should try to give the experience to the child before discussing it.

Multi-Sensory Approach

The Multi-Sensory approach is based on the premise that for some children learning is facilitated if content is presented via several modalities. Kinaesthetic and tactile stimulation are used along with visual and auditory modalities.

Breakthrough to Literacy Programme

Many children cannot remember what they read as it seems very remote from their immediate environment. If they are taught to write what they are actually doing they should be able to retain it. Hence a strategy that could promote retention over a long period of time should be based on involvement of the child at different levels. One such strategy called 'Breakthrough To Literacy Programme' could be used with children having Special Need, as some children with hearing impairment, mental retardation cerebral palsy and spinal bifida may not be able to read easily. The strategy involves following steps:

Task Analysis

Various activities of daily living as need academic activities can be taught through this method. You should ask the teacher to task analyze different tasks and administer them on children with Special Need.

Word Analysis Skills

Children can use this type of skill to unlock new words at one time or another and beginning readers use this variety of strategies most frequently. Hence teacher can use these strategies with children with hearing impairment. Based on the special needs of the children he/she will have to choose the strategy, which he/she thinks, is appropriate for the child as well as for the whole class.

Other Transaction Strategies used by Teachers in Classroom

For catering every child's individual needs, teachers modify teaching materials and activities of teaching. Time-to-time teacher use inquiry approaches, independent studies and prepare different textual material for proper understanding of children.

While these strategies foster the future development of Inclusive Education, they also raise important questions that must be addressed if future developments are to be meaningful and sustainable.

BARRIERS FOR IMPLEMENTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

While we cannot neglect the importance of inclusive education it remains unanswered why the practice of inclusive education is presenting problems. It appears that it is both levels of government and non-government policy but rather at the level of implementation. While the policy states that all children should go to school and governments are enforcing this rule-in many cases quality learning is not taking place, which is contradictory to the ethos of inclusive education. The reasons for the non-implementation of the inclusive education in India, is because of various barriers which according to Dash (2012), are both external and as well as internal. The external barriers are confronted before coming to and getting enrolled in schools, which includes physical location of schools, non-availability of school, social stigmatization or economic conditions of the learners. The internal barriers are mostly psychological barriers like self-concept, confidence etc. which are sometimes imposed by the external factors and first step to remove the internal barriers is to remove the external barriers. The following are some of the external barriers. However, a wide gap in policy and practice exists in the country with respect to inclusive education. There are a number of barriers that hinder proper practice of inclusive education in our country.

- The inefficiency of teachers to develop and use instructional materials for inclusion students.
 - Attitudes towards inclusion and disability among teachers, administrators and policy planners.
 - Attitudes of parents of children without disabilities.
 - Lack of awareness about children with disabilities among general teachers.
 - Improper curriculum adaptation.
 - School environment.
 - School management.
 - Support services.
 - Family collaboration.
 - Insufficient and improper pre-service teacher education.
 - Negative self-perceptions of children with disabilities.
 - Negative attitudes of normal peers.
 - ICT availability and related competencies.
 - Improper policy planning and lack-luster implementation.
 - Difficulties in physical access.
 - Expenses involved.

Inclusive education does away with the practice of segregating students with learning and/or physical challenges from the rest of the student body. While the practice of inclusion places extra demands on students and facility logistics, there are numerous benefits to all students, both disabled and non-disabled. Teachers in inclusive classrooms must incorporate a variety of teaching methods in order to best reach students of varying learning abilities. This has benefits even for those students who would be placed in a traditional classroom, as this increases their engagement in the learning process. Even gifted and accelerated learners benefit from an environment that stresses responsiveness from all students.

Perhaps most importantly, inclusive classrooms encourage open and frank dialogue about differences as well as a respect for those with different abilities, cultural backgrounds and needs. Despite the benefits, there still are many barriers to the implementation of inclusive education. A UNESCO IBE (2008) article, "Inclusive Education," outlined many of them, including:

Attitudes - Societal norms often are the biggest barrier to inclusion. Old attitudes die hard, and many still resist the accommodation of students with disabilities and learning issues, as well as those from minority cultures. Prejudices against those with differences can lead to discrimination, which inhibits the educational process. The challenges of inclusive education might be blamed on the students' challenges instead of the shortcomings of the educational system. (Dash, 2012)

Physical Barriers - In some districts, students with physical disabilities are expected to attend schools that are inaccessible to them. In economically-deprived school systems, especially those in rural areas, dilapidated and poorly-cared for buildings can restrict accessibility. Some of these facilities are not safe or healthy for any students. Many schools don't have the facilities to properly accommodate students with special needs, and local governments lack either the funds or the resolve to provide financial help. Environmental barriers can include doors, passageways, stairs and ramps, and recreational areas. These can create a barrier for some students to simply enter the school building or classroom.

Curriculum - A rigid curriculum that does not allow for experimentation or the use of different teaching methods can be an enormous barrier to inclusion. Study plans that don't recognize different styles of learning hinder the school experience for all students, even those not traditionally recognized as having physical or mental challenges.

Teachers - Teachers who are not trained or who are unwilling or unenthusiastic about working with differently abled students are a drawback to successful inclusion. Training often falls short of real effectiveness, and instructors already straining under large workloads may resent the added duties of coming up with different approaches for the same lessons.

Language and communication - Many students are expected to learn while being taught in a language that is new and in some cases unfamiliar to them. This is obviously a significant barrier to successful learning. Too often, these students face discrimination and low expectations.

Socio-economic factors - Areas that are traditionally poor and those with higher-than-average unemployment rates tend to have schools that reflect that environment, such as run-down facilities, students who are unable to afford basic necessities and other barriers to the learning process. Violence, poor health services, and other social factors make create barriers even for traditional learners, and these challenges make inclusion all but impossible.

Funding - Adequate funding is a necessity for inclusion and yet it is rare. Schools often lack adequate facilities, qualified and properly-trained teachers and other staff members, educational materials and general support. Sadly, lack of resources is pervasive throughout many educational systems.

Organization of the Education System: Centralized education systems are rarely conducive to positive change and initiative. Decisions come from the school system's high-level authorities whose initiatives focus on employee compliance more than quality learning. The top levels of the organization may have little or no idea about the realities teachers face on a daily basis.

Policies as Barriers - Many policy makers don't understand or believe in inclusive education, and these leaders can stonewall efforts to make school policies more inclusive. This can exclude whole groups of learners from the mainstream educational system, thereby preventing them from enjoying the same opportunities for education and employment afforded to traditional students.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

On the basis of above mentioned problems it is very clear that teacher should be well equipped and qualified. Teacher should be emphatic in nature. There are some suggestions which can be very fruitful for making the inclusive setup of education more successful. Teaching is very noble profession. Teachers can change the vision of the society. So for creating inclusive environment, they should have to perform following task:

- They should try to involve parents and community in various school activities.
- They should be able to have complete awareness about the policies and concept of inclusion.
- They should be able to develop feeling of co-operation and sharing among the students.
- They should be able to use peer tutoring, collaborative teaching techniques frequently.
- They should be able to use ICT and other modern technology for catering diverse needs of students.

CONCLUSION

Teacher's attitudes towards inclusive education can be developed to provide some conditions to have a good practice in this field. Those conditions refer to a restructure of the curricula, more help from support teachers, and more time for preparing the educational activities, decreasing the number of students in one class, creating and developing opportunities for interactive partnerships between teachers, students, support teachers and parents and so on. The reform of the curriculum should be made in parallel with a proper training for teachers regarding their knowledge of inclusion and its principles. The difficulties are inherent to any change or reform, but it is necessary to develop an educational system which can properly respond to all the needs, characteristics and individual differences of all children in school (Menon, 2014). The separate teacher education programs for regular and special education do not equip teachers with an integrated knowledge of the expected roles, functions and responsibilities to meet the diversity of learning needs in the classroom. A need is being felt for a new paradigm for the preparation of teachers. There exists the need for teacher educators of regular and special education at all levels of teacher education to develop a "whole faculty approach" in facilitating an inclusive pre-service teacher education curriculum embedded across all discipline areas (Sexena, 2008) Within a tradition of a dual regular and special education system in India, the Government is promoting educational reforms that encourage an inclusive approach to education. A move towards an inclusive approach to education in India is being promoted through collaboration and support between teachers trained in regular and special education. Thus, different perceptions of pre-service teachers preparing to work either in elementary schools or in special schools are a particular concern for people devoted to inclusive education. A need is being felt for better teacher preparation due to the very low understandings of inclusive education and pre-service teachers' perceived lack of skills, knowledge, experience, and/or training for an inclusive approach.

Investigating the determinants of teachers' attitudes and behaviour and their relative importance is crucial for improving teaching practices, initial teacher education and professional development opportunities for effective inclusion of children with special needs. (Menon, 2014) We need to develop an inclusive design of learning to make the education joyful for all children so that the education for them is welcoming, learner friendly and beneficial and they feel as a part of it not apart from it. Summing up, authors feel and believe that many initiatives have been introduced at all levels to implement inclusive education in India but the road ahead is still quite long.

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