

BRIEF REPORTS

**UTILISING EXISTING RESOURCES FOR INCLUSIVE
EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN INDIA**

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ABSTRACT

Every child with disability has a right to education. In the Biwako Millennium Framework, inclusive, barrier free and right based society is emphasised. Various acts and policies have led to programmes towards inclusion in India. Yet, only 3 to 4% of children with disabilities have access to education with or without support services. There is an urgent need for providing competencies at various levels. For inclusion to be successful, education has to be with one government department rather than the divided responsibility among departments, as it is now. Positioning of human resources suitably to meet the educational needs of children with disabilities, adapting of curriculum, evaluation and feedback are imperative for optimum use of existing resources. National institutes have a major role to play in enhancing inclusion. Educating children with mental retardation has to be done keeping in mind their limited intellectual ability levels.

INTRODUCTION

The 86th Amendment of the Constitution of India (1) ensures right to education to every child. In the past decade, education of children with disabilities has seen a paradigm shift from segregated education in separate schools to inclusive education in regular schools along with non-disabled children. Successful implementation of inclusive education requires consideration of policy matters, legislation reforms, financial resources, human resources, infrastructural resources and intellectual resources.

The Biwako Millennium Framework (2) for which India is a signatory has as its main focus, inclusive, barrier free and right based society. Inclusive education is based on the principle that ‘..... school should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual,

social, emotional, linguistic and other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, those from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalised areas or groups' (3).

Inclusion of children with special needs is essentially the responsibility of the regular education system. Yet, special education professionals, parents of children with special needs as well as parents of non-disabled peer groups, students without disabilities and the community as a whole have to be empowered for inclusive education to be successful. Further, there is a need for barrier free environment and suitable transport to reach school. Above all, sensitisation of administrators, adaptations in curriculum, evaluation procedures and teacher preparation to enhance their competence in teaching children with special needs, are imperative for effective inclusion of children with special needs. There is a need for special education and general education to merge. Planning and management of education for children with special needs should aim at bringing about such a change in the educational system.

Current Scenario

It is estimated that about 15,000 schools have enrolled about 60,000 children under the Integrated Education of Disabled Children (IEDC) scheme of the Government of India (4). The drop-out rate is high due to lack of support services and trained teachers to educate children with disabilities. Singh (4) further notes that only 3 to 4 percent of children with special needs have access to education with or without support services.

The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act of 1995 (5) emphasises appropriate educational placement of children with disabilities based on their needs, which demands that a suitable system be developed to include children in regular schools. Other initiatives of the Government such as District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), Sarva Siksha Abhayan (SSA), UNDP Project on Support to Children with Disabilities are a few of the major steps towards including children with disabilities in schools (6). If all children are to be included, it is essential to focus on capacity building among all stakeholders to meet the challenge.

The need

One major focus of capacity building is development of competence in persons involved in achieving an objective. In this context, the major human resources include people in the government departments, schools, families of children with disabilities, peers and community. To be effective, they need competence, which refers to their knowledge, skills and will (7). Providing competencies to all the identified functionaries in the system is key to the success of inclusion. Kochanski (8) describes three elements in providing competency.

- carefully defined strategic direction for overall capacity.
- clearly described competencies of individuals.
- simplified management and human resource development programmes reinforcing the competencies.

Building competencies in the identified functionaries will vary depending on their role in implementing inclusive education. For instance, a school administrator will focus on the cost effectiveness of the proposed system while a teacher will focus on ways and means of developing effective curriculum and instructional method; the peer group on the other hand, will show an interest in accommodating the child with disabilities in the daily routine in school. Therefore, there is a need for tailor-made planning and management of capacity building for all concerned persons, who promote inclusion.

Planning and Management for Policy Makers

The first and foremost step in initiating inclusion is to bring about policy changes in educational administration. For an objective decision on policy changes, it is essential to conduct a situation analysis, gather opinions from concerned people, look into existing legislation to consider changes if needed and conduct pilot studies to find out the feasibility of the proposed change. For instance, if the opinion of majority of the group reflects merging general and special educational systems, it would require field-testing, which in turn will reflect the educational, economic, social and political viability of the proposal. In addition, it will help in identifying resources, building partnerships and recommending changes in legislation.

Currently in India, special education is under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment while integrated education is with the Ministry of Human Resource Development.

Operationally, the system poses problems. Decisions on training of teachers and implementation of the systems in schools, financial implications, uniform development of curriculum are some bottlenecks faced due to this situation.

Once knowledge and skills are acquired, the policy makers will be in a position to plan for:

- human resource projection at central, state and district level.
- the positioning of human resources – grass root level workers and field staff to provide direct teaching in schools, itinerant teaching or home based training for totally nonambulatory children, supervisory staff at village, district levels and planning and monitoring teams at state and central levels.
- role clarity and job description of the various functionaries.
- number of positions at each level and objective planning based on need.
- reporting and feedback systems.
- financial implications and provisions.
- continuous impact studies to promote improved services, keeping pace with developments and trends.
- recommendation to the government on policy decisions based on the findings.
- recommendation on adaptations in curriculum and evaluation systems. This is a major concern of policy makers.
- building partnership with NGOs and INGOs in providing quality education through inclusive schools.

Changing Regular Schools to Inclusive Schools

Successful inclusion of children with disabilities is possible only when the regular schools are involved and committed to inclusion. Methods have to be evolved at the national level by planning and implementing policies and procedures on inclusion. Suitable assessment procedures, curricular adaptations, improved and innovative teaching procedures to meet the need of the child and objective evaluation procedures are important for effective inclusive education. Creation of barrier free environment, suitable signage and access to facilities that a non-disabled child enjoys in the school are essential for successful inclusion of children with disabilities.

The national institutes, the district rehabilitation centers and other training institutions can all play a role in building capacity to facilitate inclusive education.

Education of children with mental retardation in inclusive schools

It is a general belief that children with mental retardation cannot become part of the inclusive education system. Children with mild mental retardation will cope in regular education in primary and upper primary levels. National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) offers open education in which curriculum adaptation and teaching methods with concrete experiences are provided to them. Evaluation methods need to be developed to meet their needs. Inclusion certainly prepares them with adequate social competencies to meet the challenges of living independently in the larger society, later in life. The package for inclusive education at pre-school level developed by The National Institute of Mentally Handicapped (NIMH) with funding support from UNICEF is widely used in regular preschools. It provides a tailor-made curriculum and instruction for regular education with adaptation in one teaching method for the content for each disability at preschool level. Feedback reveals smooth inclusion (9). Organisation of supportive education for children with learning problems at the primary level is an area of concern. A package developed by NIMH which covers Hindi, English, Maths with suitable work sheets which is of help for primary education, promotes academic inclusion also (10).

Those children with severe and profound levels of retardation will benefit from inclusion if they are provided special classes in regular schools, with non-disabled children interacting with them under supervision for purposes of teaching and training them. Each regular class can have some time allotted every week for this purpose. This will enable the teacher to provide individual attention to each child with disability under her supervision through non-disabled students of the school.

CONCLUSION

- Resources are available in the country and there is a need for coordination for optimum utilisation.
- Opinions on the merits of inclusive education are unequivocal and policies promoting inclusion have been developed.

- Different government departments have specific plans of action towards disability rehabilitation which results in overlaps and gaps. There is an urgent need for consolidated and coordinated efforts.
- Focus on material development, teacher preparation and provision of barrier free infrastructural facilities are constantly being carried out by state and central governments, but awareness among the public regarding inclusion, needs focused effort for effective removal of attitudinal barriers and improved and justified use of existing resources.

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