Critical Analysis of Inclusive Education Development in India: Need, Challenges and Possible Solutions

Kavita Rani*

ABSTRACT

Inclusive education in India is a new approach towards educating the children with disability and learning difficulties with that of normal ones in the same roofs. Its main aim is to bring all the students together in uniform learning environment, despite of their strengths or weakness in any area and seeks to elevate the potential of all students. Inclusion rejects the use of special schools or classroom to differentiate the students with disabilities from students without disabilities. Inclusion involves the responsibility of every school to accept every child irrespective of their disabilities. Inclusion plays an very important role as in inclusive education Children develop a positive understanding of themselves and other, develop friendship, and all children learnt by being together thus learn important academic skills in cooperative environment. Inclusive education involves the transformation of schools and other learning centres in such a way that it meets the requirements of all Children with difficulties and disabilities in learning and to provide learning opportunities for all youth and adults as well. Its aim is to eliminate exclusion that is a consequence of negative attitudes and lack of response to diversity in race, economic status, social class, ethnicity language, religion, gender, and ability. Consequently inclusive education is not a marginal issue but it results in the achievement of high quality education for all learners and the development of more inclusive societies. Inclusive education is essential to achieve social equity and is constituent element of lifelong learning. The paper will focus on various questions like what is inclusion? What is the importance of inclusion? What are the challenges to inclusion? How to overcome these challenges? It also reflects an analysis of key developments in national policies and programmes in relation to education of children with disabilities in India.

Key Words: *Inclusive Education, Education for all, Need, Challenges.*

* Ph.D. Research scholar, Department of Education, University of Jammu, J&K

INTRODUCTION

"Growth will not, by itself guarantee that most of people in country have chance to live the lives of dignity and fulfilment. A healthy society is one that takes care of all its members, and gives them a chance to participate in decision that affects their lives".

(Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General, 2000)

Education is regarded as base for equality, empowerment and development. On one hand we talk of equality of educational opportunities, right to education and education for all but on the other hand we can see that across the globe there are large number of children who remain excluded from the educational system or sent to special schools because of their disability. It is observed that children with disability are being refused to be enrolled because of one or other reason and those get enrolled are unable to complete minimum prescribed number of school years. To address this issue and to achieve the concern of millennium development goals i.e. access and participation, inclusion as a strategy proves to be quite significant.

Inclusive education which has emerged as a reform   in the education of children with special needs gained momentum since 1994' world conference on special educational needs: a cess and equality'. In 1994, UNESCO, the UN's education agency, published the Salamanca statement, a declaration on the education of disabled children, calls for inclusion to be the norm. Representative of 92 governments and 25 international organisations agreed on it. UNESCO's statement is unequivocal in asking the international community to endorse the approach of inclusive schooling:

"we call upon all governments, and urged them to adopt as a matter of law or policy the principle of inclusive education, enrolling all children in regular schools, unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise". disabled children 'must have access to regular schools' and it adds for me, the most powerful paragraph in the whole document: "regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society, and achieving the education the efficiency and ultimately the cost effectiveness of entire education system" (article 2 Salamanca statement). The Salamanca statement asks all government to undertake a variety of actions, and it could helpfully form the basis of the agenda for the work to be done in many of the countries included India. It wants governments.

➢ To give the highest priority to policies and budget in order to improve education so all children can be included, regardless of individual differences or difficulties.

➢ To develop demonstration projects and encourage exchanges with countries which have inclusive schools

➢ To ensure involvement and participation of organisations of disabled people along with the parents and community bodies in planning and decision making; and

➢ To give priority to identification at an early stage, intervention techniques as well as vocational aspects of inclusive education and

➢ To ensure that both initial and in-service teacher training address the provision of inclusive education

Salamanca says: in those countries with few or no special schools, those countries should established inclusive ordinary schools-not special schools, to serve disabled children'. And to finish this part on the Salamanca statement, there is a quote in the report from a Swedish member of parliament, Mr Bengt Lindquist:

The challenge now is to formulate requirements of a school for all. All children and young people of the world have the right to education. It is not our education systems that have right to certain types of children. It is the school system of a country that must be adjusted to meet the needs of all children.

Inclusive education is now an integral part of international discourse as noted in sustainable developmental goals (UN 2015a) and Incheon declaration (UNESCO, World Education Forum 2015, Ministry of Education, Republic of Korea).Incheon Declaration noted:

"No education target should be considered met unless met by all. We therefore commit to make the necessary changes in educational policies and focussing our efforts on the most disadvantaged, especially those with disabilities, to ensure that no one is left behind".

Inclusion-What It Is?

"Inclusion is a philosophy…..bringing children with special needs well within purview of mainstream education….recognises the diverse needs of the students and ensures quality education to all through appropriate

curricula, teaching strategies, support services and partnerships with the community."

(District primary education report)

Inclusion means provisions provided to the children with disabilities in regular classrooms with the children of same age who do not have difficulties. It develops a sense of belongingness by welcoming everyone to school. Inclusion is to accept and value human diversity, to provide support and to motivate the children with disabilities so that no one left behind and feel isolated. Inclusion ensures the bright future of the country as everyone is provided equal opportunity to participate. Inclusion is a term which can be defined as an attitude or a commitment of appreciating diversities and accepting that all children can be educated in a common school to their maximum potential. It requires increasing the capacity of regular schools so that they can respond creatively to grater diversities. It also involves building the capacities of teachers to deal with the diverse population of students and to acquire pedagogical competencies that facilitate the learning of all the students in their classroom. (Julka,2001).Its main objective is to ensure that all the children in spite of any individual differences they may have, are to be fully included in mainstreaming system. It is not about 'dumping' the children with special needs into regular system of education rather   it is about how, where and why, and with what consequences we educate all the children. Inclusion is about responding the children with diverse needs, empowering all members, listening to unfamiliar voices, removing of all forms of exclusionary practices and about celebrating the differences in a proper way.

Inclusion-Why It Matters

Education is a human right issue and children with special educational needs should be part of normal school system. By doing so, children with disabilities have the opportunity to prepare for life in the community, teachers improve their skills, and society makes conscious decision to operate according to social value of equality. Inclusive schooling is the practice of including one and all irrespective of disability in supportive mainstream school and classroom where needs of all students met. The rationale of inclusive education can be discussed in terms of benefits to teachers, students and society.

In inclusive setting all children are learn from one another, and take proper care of their fellow students which in turn develops the positive attitude, skills and values necessary for living in community. When proper arrangements are made inclusion works not only for students with special educational needs but also for students without disability as they also get benefited from the improved instructional technologies in the classroom meant for students with disability.

With appropriate guidance and direction from the adults inclusion helps to develop the friendship and positive peer interaction. It helps the students to understand, respect and be comfortable with each other despite of having the individual differences. Children gain tremendous benefits as they learn many academic skills, communication skills and social skills by interaction with the peers during school years.

It helps in overcoming discrimination by enabling the education structures, systems and different methodologies to meet the needs of all the children and by improving the quality of education for all.

Inclusion responds to a variety of students and acknowledges that all children can learn. It helps in breaking the cycle of deprivation, poverty and exclusion.

Inclusive education has also benefitted to teachers as the teacher must acquire new skills for working with students who are academically and socially disadvantaged. In this way teachers have the opportunity to develop professional skills and attain competency.

Inclusive schooling empowers teachers. Teachers keep themselves informed of changes occurring in their fields, and receive in-service education programme from time to time. Initially teachers have negative reaction about inclusive education which strikingly got changed after active exposure to the practice of inclusion.

The most important reason for inclusive schooling is the social value of equality. Despite differences, we all have equal rights. According to Stainback and Stainback (1990), "if a society supports integration of all individuals, then segregated schools and classrooms have no place in that society. There is no defensible rationale, excuse, nor scientific research that can be conducted that will in the final analysis justify segregation". In contrast to the past experiences of Segregation inclusion reinforces the practice of idea that differences are accepted and respected. It is important that we avoid the mistakes of the past. We need schools that promote wider social acceptance, peace and

cooperation. When schools include all students, then equality is respected and promoted as a value in society.

After discussing the various benefits of inclusive setting, it is not an exaggeration to say that inclusive education is of paramount importance. It minimises the exclusion and fostering participation of all the students. It includes and values equally all students from its surrounding communities or neighbourhood and minimising the groupings on the basis of attainment, gender or disability.

Role of National Policies and Programmes to Addresses Education of Children with Disabilities

In India the two separate ministries named as Ministry of social justice and empowerment and ministry of human resource development focus on children with disabilities. Ministry of social justice and empowerment takes the charge of overall responsibility for the person with disability while the ministry of human resource development focus on educational provisions for children and young adults with disabilities. Government has launched various schemes and policies to address the education of children with disabilities**. India's right to education Act 2009** is a fundamental right falls under the article 21A of Indian constitution states that children in the age group of 6-14 including those who have dropped out or face challenges in admission due to migration, caste, disability etc. should be provided free and compulsory education. Within Act the blanket term "disadvantaged group" included all children with disabilities**. National policy on Education -1986 and POA -1992** emphasis on the removal of disparities and equalise educational

opportunities by attending to the specific needs of those who have been denied equality. **Person with disability act (equal opportunities, protection of rights and full participation)1995** was the first and most important act to recognise and make provision for seven different disabilities (vision impairement, deaf or hard of hearing, mental health conditions, intellectual disability, acquired brain injury, autism spectrum disorder and physical disability). It advocates both for mainstreaming and for specialist provision where needed in educating the children with special needs. Recent amendment has been made to the Act after India's ratification of the united nation convention on the rights of person with disabilities (UN 2006). The revised disability bill expands the definition of disability from purely medically drawn boundaries to the disability's influence on activities of daily life. These amendments are significant as it changes the perceptions and attitude of people towards disability. **The national Action plan for inclusion in Education of children and youth with disabilities (IECYD)-2005** ensures the inclusion of children and youth with disabilities in all available general settings by providing them available, accessible, affordable and appropriate learning environment. **National policy on education 2009** gives emphasis to equalise access to education by providing special facilities for girls and boys, under-privileged and marginalised groups, and physically disabled children and adults. Various national level programmes such as **District primary education programme DPEP (1990) and SSA** focussed on promoting the educational provisions for children with disabilities and made necessary developments

in schools and classrooms to ensure maximum participation. In India SSA is current flagship elementary education programme seeks to provide quality elementary education to all focussing specially on education of girls and children with special needs. SSA argues for the "adoption of zero rejection policy" so that no children left behind and categorically brings the concern of "children with disabilities "or those termed "children with special needs" under the framework of " inclusive education". SSA Notes that education should be delivered to children with disabilities through multi –option model, it will not only increase access but also provide these children appropriate need based skills in the most appropriate learning environment. Therefore along with mainstreaming SSA also promotes the combination of home based education (HBE) and alternate settings in order to address the educational needs of children with severe intellectual and physical disabilities (SSA, 2007). While the SSA objectives are expressed nationally, they offer flexibility at the state and district levels in implementation, depending primarily on number of children identified and the resources available. For example, 27 states are currently implementing HBE while Himachal Pradesh and Uttrakhand depends on NGO's to implement this programme and Karnataka and Kerala have appointed volunteers who visit to these children at home to provide them with basic functional skills. Such type of flexible approach might be regarded as a positive step and this has resulted in many different models across the country-raising concerns about quality and effectiveness of provision (SSA, 2013).

Barriers to Inclusive Education

It has been accepted internationally that basic education is the birth right of every individual. However Government put every possible efforts to provide quality education to all children but still situation altogether different in many countries where greater percentage of students are not able to complete their minimum years of schooling. They face variety of obstacles in order to get proper education. Some of these barriers are discussed below:

Poverty: poverty is one of the main barriers in achieving inclusion. It has been observed that number of students do not go to schools because of their parent's poverty. Poor parents cannot afford to meet the need of children. With the result they left behind and it becomes very much difficult to success inclusive education.

Non availability of schools: sometimes non availability of schools or its location in area that cannot be accessed becomes the major barrier for children to get education.

Rigid curriculum: curriculum is one of the major obstacle to facilitate the development of inclusive system. It does not able to meet the needs of wide variety of learners. Curriculum is designed with rigid approach leaving little flexibility for local adaptations. The contents in the curriculum might be far away from the real conditions in which students live and thus develop uninteresting and unmotivating attitude.

Untrained teachers: teachers' abilities can be limitation for   inclusive education. Adequate training is not provided to staff at all levels. If the fragmented and uncoordinated training is provided to teachers, they are not able to use

innovative technology meant for educating the children and it is unlikely that children with special needs will receive satisfactory education.

Inadequate funding: inadequate funds are another major constraint in inclusion. Lack of funds results in shortage of facilities, shortage of qualified staff, shortage of equipment's and learning materials causes threat to the implementation of inclusive education.

Negative attitude of society: Negative attitude of society towards person with disabilities results in discrimination that can lead to a serious barrier to learning. In some regions people still believed that educating the disabled is pointless and of no use.

Infrastructural barriers: Majority of learning centres are not physically accessible to many   learners especially to those who have some form of physical deformity. Many schools do not have even proper toilet, and drinking water facilities. Buildings are poorly maintained and lack of wheel chair ramps in school buildings and lack of assistive technology to aid the children in the particular type of difficulty creates hindrances in process of learning.

Communication gap: Successful inclusion is possible only by proper interaction with persons associated to the well-being of students with disabilities. Lack of communication among teachers, parents, administrators, community members and stakeholders is one of the major barrier towards inclusion.

Rejection: sometimes students do not get admission in schools on the ground of admission test scores or other

physical, social and economic factors. It creates a great wall towards the path of inclusive education.

Despite the problems, many countries in the region are making efforts to overcome the barriers of inclusive education and reach out the excluded children. In order to achieve the proper inclusion first of all attitude of the society should be changed towards education of disabled children should be changed. They have to understand that educating disabled children is of paramount importance to ensure the progress of society and nation as a whole. Reforms in teacher education are crucial, for this not only teacher training programmes but also systematic approach towards continuous professional development is required. Teachers should be provided appropriate support and involved in constructive dialogue to support the development of training programmes that are beneficial in equipping them with needed pedagogical skills. Teachers, parents, community members, stakeholders should be involved in the process of inclusion. The admission policy of schools would accept the children from a diverse community rather than rejection on the ground of admission test scores or others social, economic and physical factors. Inclusive schools should follow the flexible curriculum approach and child centred pedagogy that would respond to the diverse needs of children.

There are walls between schools and children before they get enrolled, they face walls with the curriculum inside the classroom and finally they face more walls when they have to take examinations which determine how successful they will be in life (Jha , 2002)!on walls and barriers confronting the school education system today, it is further observed:

Removing barriers and bringing all children together in school irrespective of their disabilities or social and economic status, and ensuring their participation in learning activities leads to the initiation of the process of inclusive education. Once the walls within the schools are broken, schools move out of their boundaries, end isolation and reach out to the each and every person. This will results in the elimination of distance between open schools, formal schools, non-formal schools and special schools.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

"The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little"(Roosevelt 1937) . In the present times Inclusive education is considered as a new perspective which characterises an innovative and correct way of thinking about disabilities and   the education of disabled children where in the students are not discriminated   on the grounds of disabilities but must be included into mainstream of education and societal life. It is not viewed as an education mere in context of disability or 'special education needs' but rather an education that caters to the needs of every child in changing political and social scenario where everyone is bestowed with the same right and privileges. The new inclusive mantra seeks to make the learning more meaningful and relevant for all with particular reference to disabled children who were more likely to be excluded from the mainstream education. It rejects the notion of segregation and invites all the learners, thus ensures maximum participation in the schools as well as in the society. As the government makes an efforts to achieve the

goals of education for all so it must stresses on the exclusionary factors that remain unaddressed in the mainstream education system. An essential starting point for the government is to re-examine and restructure the policies ,curriculum and practices in schools and learning environment in such a way that it responds to diversity in terms of ability,gender,caste and economic status. The government must re-examine its understanding of inclusion, the objectives of an inclusive system, processes calls for developing it, and motivations reinforcing such effort. In doing so there occurs increased possibilities of Advancement of human society that helps to push the concept of social justice at a new and higher plane.

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