PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

United Nation’s Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) in their review of situation regarding realization of its second goal - GOAL 2: ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION (Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling) – finds that:

- Hope dims for universal education by 2015, even as many poor countries make tremendous strides
- Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia are home to the vast majority of children out of school
- Inequality thwarts progress towards universal education

UNICEF’s Report on the Status of Disability in India 2000 states that there are around 30 million children in India suffering from some form of disability. The Sixth All-India Educational Survey (NCERT, 1998) reports that out of India’s 200 million school-aged children (6–14 years), 20 million require special needs education. While the national average for gross enrolment in school is over 90 per cent, less than five per cent of children with disabilities are in schools. According to the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010: reaching the marginalized, children with disabilities remain one of the main groups being widely excluded from quality education. Disability is recognized as one of the least visible yet most potent factors in educational marginalization. The United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which was entered into force in 2008, was ratified by India in October, 2008.

It can be safely assumed that achieving the Education for All (EFA) targets and Millennium Development Goals will be impossible without improving access to and quality of education for children with disabilities. It is a binding on Indian government as well, being a signatory to UNCRPD. Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS) was approved in India in September, 2008 to replace IEDC Scheme from 2009-10. The Scheme is 100% centrally funded. According to Barton (1997), “Inclusive education is not merely about providing access into mainstream school for pupils who have previously been excluded. It is not about closing down an unacceptable system of segregated provision and dumping those pupils in an unchanged mainstream system. Existing school systems in terms of physical factors, curriculum aspects, teaching expectations and styles, leadership roles will have to change. This is because inclusive education is about the participation of ALL children and young people and the removal of all forms of exclusionary practice”. Achieving this goal in India requires serious planning and efforts.

Present Paper tries to delve deeper into the issue by exploring possibilities and challenges ahead in realizing 100% inclusive education in India.
1. Introduction

In the times of education for all, we need to consider those who are somehow missing out. Among these, children with special needs occupy an important category. These children with disabilities are often left out of schools due to negative attitudes and non-inclusive set-ups. Providing an opportunity to children with special needs is thus essential for every society /country in order to provide opportunities to each and everyone for developing and growing to full potential and realizing the objectives of education for all.

United Nation’s Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) in their review of situation regarding realization of its second goal - GOAL 2: ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION (Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling) – finds that:
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UNICEF’s Report on the Status of Disability in India 2000 states that there are around 30 million children in India suffering from some form of disability. The Sixth All-India Educational Survey (NCERT, 1998) reports that out of India’s 200 million school-aged children (6–14 years), 20 million require special needs education. While the national average for gross enrolment in school is over 90 per cent, less than five per cent of children with disabilities are in schools. According to the Census 2001, there are 2.19 crore persons with disabilities in India who constitute 2.13 percent of the total population. This includes persons with visual, hearing, speech, loco-motor and mental disabilities. Seventy five per cent of persons with disabilities live in rural areas, 49 per cent of disabled population is literate and only 34 per cent are employed. According to the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010: reaching the marginalized, children with disabilities remain one of the main groups being widely excluded from quality education. Disability is recognized as one of the least visible yet most potent factors in educational marginalization. The United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which was entered into force in 2008, was ratified by India in October, 2008. It can be safely assumed that achieving the Education for All (EFA) targets and Millennium Development Goals will be impossible without improving access to and quality of education for children with disabilities.

2. Meaning of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is based on the principle that schools should provide for all children regardless of any perceived difference, disability or other social, cultural and linguistic difference. The diverse needs of these learners and the quest to make schools more learning-friendly requires regular and special education teachers to consult and collaborate with one another as well as with family and community in order to develop effective strategies, teaching and learning (Jelas, 2010) within inclusive setups. With the right training, strategies and support nearly all children with SEN and disabilities can be included successfully in mainstream education.

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education is about the participation of ALL children and young people and the removal of all forms of exclusionary practice”.

The ‘Index for Inclusion’ (Booth and Ainscow, 2011, 3rd edition) summarizes some of the ideas which make up the view of inclusion within the Index as follows (CSIE, 2014):

Inclusion in education involves:
- Putting inclusive values into action.
- Viewing every life and every death as of equal worth.
- Supporting everyone to feel that they belong.
- Increasing participation for children and adults in learning and teaching activities, relationships and communities of local schools.
- Reducing exclusion, discrimination, barriers to learning and participation.
- Restructuring cultures, policies and practices to respond to diversity in ways that value everyone equally.
- Linking education to local and global realities.
- Learning from the reduction of barriers for some children to benefit children more widely.
- Viewing differences between children and between adults as resources for learning.
- Acknowledging the right of children to an education of high quality in their locality.
- Improving schools for staff and parents/carers as well as children.
- Emphasising the development of school communities and values, as well as achievements.
- Fostering mutually sustaining relationships between schools and surrounding communities.
- Recognising that inclusion in education is one aspect of inclusion in society.

Segregating children into ‘special needs’ and ‘mainstream’ schools prevent equal access to social and curricular opportunities and labels children (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2008; UNESCO, 1994). Parents of children with disabilities are usually more in favour of inclusive education and have a deeper understanding and wider knowledge of terminology and specific legislation. However, many of the parents of children without disabilities are often reluctant to have children with disabilities in the same class as their own child.

At the Jometin World Conference (1990) in Thailand, the goals for ‘Education for All’ were set and it was proclaimed that every person - child, youth and adult shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities which would meet their basic learning needs. Ever since that conference, UNESCO, along with other UN agencies, a number of international and national non-governmental organizations have been working towards these goals. The inclusion of pupils with barriers to learning and development in ordinary schools and classrooms is part of a global human rights movement. In 1994, at the UNESCO World Conference on Special Needs Education held in Salamanca, Spain, the idea of inclusive education was given further impetus. The conference considered the future international direction of Special Needs to ensure the rights of children to receive a basic education.

The marginalization and exclusion of learners from an educational system was addressed at the Dakar World Education Forum in April 2000 and it was so aptly captured in the statement: "The key challenge is to ensure that a broad vision of Education for All as an inclusive concept is reflected in national government and funding agency policies. Education for All... must take account of the need of the poor and the most disadvantaged...young people and adults affected by conflict, HIV/AIDS, hunger and poor health, and those with special learning needs...”

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2008) is a new international agreement about protecting and promoting the human rights of disabled people throughout the world. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is an international
human rights treaty of the United Nations intended to protect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities. Parties to the Convention are required to promote, protect, and ensure the full enjoyment of human rights by persons with disabilities and ensure that they enjoy full equality under the law. The Convention aims to serve as the major catalyst in the global movement from viewing persons with disabilities as objects of charity, medical treatment and social protection towards viewing them as full and equal members of society, with human rights. UNCRPD makes it a binding that countries ratifying it will ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning.

3. Inclusive Education in India

In India, National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) joined hands with UNICEF and launched Project Integrated Education for Disabled Children (PIED) in the year 1987, to strengthen the integration of learners with disabilities into regular schools. In 1997, IEDC was amalgamated with other major basic education projects like the DPEP (Chadha, 2002) and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) (Department of Elementary Education, 2000). The Persons with Disability Act, 1995 has a provision of providing education to children with special needs in the most appropriate environment. The SSA launched by the Govt. of India, in 2001, underlines the prerogative of a child with disability to be included in the mainstream of education.

MHRD (2006) in its Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) framework clearly states that “SSA will ensure that every child with special needs, irrespective of the kind, category and degree of disability, is provided education in an appropriate environment. SSA will adopt zero rejection policy so that no child is left out of the education system. It will also support a wide range of approaches, options and strategies for education of children with special needs.” Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS) was approved in India in September, 2008 to replace IEDC Scheme from 2009-10. The Scheme is 100% centrally funded.

The Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) is mainly responsible for education and rehabilitation of CWSN. The Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) was set up as a registered society in 1986. On September, 1992 the RCI Act was enacted by Parliament and it became a Statutory Body on 22 June 1993. The Act was amended by Parliament in 2000 to make it more broad based. The mandate given to RCI is to regulate and monitor services given to persons with disability, to standardise syllabi and to maintain a Central Rehabilitation Register of all qualified professionals and personnel working in the field of Rehabilitation and Special Education. The Act also prescribes punitive action against unqualified persons delivering services to persons with disability.

Article 24 of the Convention (UNCRPD, 2008) on education states that:

1. States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning directed to:
   a) The full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity;
   b) The development by persons with disabilities of their personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental and physical abilities, to their fullest potential;
   c) Enabling persons with disabilities to participate effectively in a free society.
2. In realizing this right, States Parties shall ensure that:
1. Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability;
   
2. Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live;
   
3. Reasonable accommodation of the individual’s requirements is provided;
   
4. Persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education;
   
5. Effective individualized support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion.

3. States Parties shall enable persons with disabilities to learn life and social development skills to facilitate their full and equal participation in education and as members of the community. To this end, States Parties shall take appropriate measures, including:
   
   a) Facilitating the learning of Braille, alternative script, augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication and orientation and mobility skills, and facilitating peer support and mentoring;
   
   b) Facilitating the learning of sign language and the promotion of the linguistic identity of the deaf community;
   
   c) Ensuring that the education of persons, and in particular children, who are blind, deaf or deaf-blind, is delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual, and in environments which maximize academic and social development.

4. In order to help ensure the realization of this right, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to employ teachers, including teachers with disabilities, who are qualified in sign language and/or Braille, and to train professionals and staff who work at all levels of education. Such training shall incorporate disability awareness and the use of appropriate augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication, educational techniques and materials to support persons with disabilities.

5. States Parties shall ensure that persons with disabilities are able to access general tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning without discrimination and on an equal basis with others. To this end, States Parties shall ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided to persons with disabilities.

These provisions, being mandatory and a binding are a real challenge for the Government of India which has signed and ratified UNCRPD as early as in 2008. As far as clause 1a, b, and c are concerned, we know that many children with special needs are yet to be accommodated to our system of education. Most of such children are out of schools. Clause 2 desires full inclusion in Indian education which is not going to be easy considering the challenges to be faced. The Article not only desires full inclusion at the primary level but it desires accommodations at secondary and tertiary levels as well. The reality warns us to make immediate efforts in these areas.

National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (2006) states that: “Education is the most effective vehicle of social and economic empowerment. In keeping with the spirit of the Article 21A of the Constitution guaranteeing education as a fundamental right and Section 26 of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995, free and compulsory education has to be provided to all children with disabilities up to the minimum age of 18 years. According to the Census, 2001, fifty-one percent persons with disabilities are illiterate. This is a very large percentage. There is a need for mainstreaming of the persons with disabilities in the general education system through Inclusive education.”

Thus, the government of India promises inclusive education to be implemented in all educational institutions, at all levels.

4. Problems of Inclusive Education in India

Inclusive education is a binding and priority for government of India. 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. Based on the literature and personal experiences, the authors believe these barriers to include the following:

a. Skills of teachers

Skills of teachers which are responsible for implementing inclusive education are also not up to as desired and necessary for inclusion. Das, Kuyini and Desai (2013) examined the current skill levels of regular primary and secondary school teachers in Delhi, India in order to teach students with disabilities in inclusive education settings. They reported that nearly 70% of the regular school teachers had neither received training in special education nor had any experience teaching students with disabilities. Further, 87% of the teachers did not have access to support services in their classrooms. Finally, although both primary and secondary school teachers rated themselves as having limited or low competence for working with students with disabilities, there was no statistically significant difference between their perceived skill levels. The inefficiency of teachers to develop and use instructional materials for inclusion students (Coskun, Tosun, & Macaroglu, 2009) is also a problem issue.

b. Attitudes towards inclusion and disability among teachers, administrators, parents, peers and policy planners

In addition to many other requirements, implementation of inclusive education immensely requires positive attitudes towards inclusion and disability among teachers, parents, peers, administrators and policy planners. However, negative attitudes are still persisting among these in many cases. This is adversely affecting inclusive education scenario in India. Mainstream teacher attitudes may be a contributory barrier to successful inclusive practices (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000; Bender, Vail, & Scott, 1995; De Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2010). Teachers tend to be broadly positive about the principle of inclusion while at the same time viewing its practical implementation as problematic (e.g., Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). However it has been argued that neutral, even negative, attitudes toward inclusion may better characterize teacher viewpoints (De Boer et al., 2010; Soodak, Podell & Lehman, 1998). Indeed teachers in mainstream schools were less positive about the potential of children with learning disabilities than special school teachers. The inclusion of children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties has consistently been reported as a particularly problematic for teachers, and is accompanied by negative teaching attitudes (Cook, 2001; Cook, Cameron & Tankersley, 2007; Hastings & Oakford, 2003; Shapiro, Miller, Sawka, Gardill, & Handler, 1999). These are children whose learning in the classroom is compromised by complex and long-term difficulties in managing their behavior, emotions and relationships (Simpson, Bloom, Cohen, Blumberg, & Bourdon, 2005). Unlike other groups of students with special needs, they are still as likely to be placed in specialist provision now as 30 years ago.
Cooper, 2004). This group is mainly male, with a majority from low socio-economic status backgrounds, and with lower educational attainment than their peers (Farrell & Tsakalidou, 1999; Simpson et al., 2005).

Teachers with negative attitudes believe that inclusion is a burden on teachers and they should receive special service delivery in special education settings to avoid the negative impact on their typically developing peers in the regular classroom (Zambelli & Bonni, 2004). A number of studies found that general education teachers are not supportive of inclusion. Hammond and Ingalls (2003), for example, concluded that most of the teachers did not support inclusion, albeit their schools had inclusive programs. Burke and Sutherland (2004) found similar results where in-service teachers’ attitudes toward inclusion were negative. Other studies found that general education teachers are less supportive of inclusion (Armstrong, Armstrong, Lynch, & Severin, 2005; De Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2010; De Boer, Pjil, & Minnaert, 2011). Rakap and Kaczmarek (2010) investigated Turkish general education teachers working in public elementary schools regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities in their classrooms and their readiness to include students with severe learning disabilities. The results indicated that the teachers had negative attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities into regular education classrooms.

School principals too have a central role in promoting an inclusive ethos within their schools. This implied that school principals have a crucial role within their school to communicate their expectations regarding inclusive practices clearly to their teaching staff (MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013). Although no research could be located in Indian settings by the authors, but they believe that negative attitudes are quite prevalent among teachers, parents, peers, administrators and policy planners towards disability as well as inclusive education.

c. Lack of awareness about children with disabilities among general teachers (Unianu, 2012)

The general teachers, at all levels, lack basic awareness about children with disabilities. They have their own socially and culturally constructed notions about certain obvious disabilities but lack scientific and educational knowledge about the disabilities such as classification, labelling, special needs and adaptations etc.

d. Improper curriculum adaptation

For practicing inclusive education, curricular adaptations suited to special and unique needs of every learner, including children with disabilities, are necessary. Concepts like ‘Universal Instructional Design’ are to be properly developed and incorporated into the curriculum. However, needed curricular adaptations are either missing altogether or are improper.

e. School environment including difficulties in physical access

School environment needs accommodations for truly practicing inclusive education. However, such accommodations are not there in majority of the schools. Facilities like ramps, lifts, and directional cues etc. are mostly absent in schools.

f. Support services

For implementing inclusive education in all educational institutions, at all levels, we need strong support services. Their strength should be both quantitative and qualitative. But, existing support services are scarce and inadequate.
g. **Family collaboration**

Keeping in mind the nature of Indian society and culture, it can be safely stated that family has a very important role in implementing inclusive education in India. Family is considered having sole responsibility for their children in India. Hence, inclusion can only be realised by motivating and involving family in the process.

h. **Insufficient and improper pre-service teacher education**

The pre-service teacher education programmes being run in the country are failing to sensitize and equip prospective teachers in inclusive education practices. Modifications are needed to make these teacher education programmes more effective. Currently, teacher education programmes producing special teachers are controlled by Rehabilitation Council of India whereas these producing general teachers are controlled by National Council for Teacher Education. These two apex bodies need to collaborate and devise measures for producing skilled teachers capable of implementing inclusive education.

i. **Negative self-perceptions of children with disabilities**

For practicing inclusive education, negative self-perceptions of children with disabilities pose a great challenge. These negative perceptions are often strengthened by neighbours, peers, and teachers. Without wiping out these negative self perceptions, true inclusion of such children is not possible.

j. **ICT availability and related competencies**

Present age is the age of information and communication technology (ICT). ICT is providing great help in almost all endeavours of human life including education and training. There are a number of ICT-enabled pedagogical and assistive devices are available particularly useful for children with disabilities. Their use can ease and expedite inclusive education. These should be made available and competencies for their use should be developed among all stakeholders.

k. **Improper policy planning and lack-luster implementation**

Government of India claims that it has implemented inclusive education everywhere and at all levels. However, the policy planning is improper and measures to assess the degree of implementation have not been developed. Furthermore, implementation of inclusive education in private sector has not been enforced and ensured.

l. **Expenses involved**

For a huge and diverse country like India, implementation of inclusive education at all levels requires a lot of money to be spent. The government does not seem willing to incur this huge expenditure. Being a developing country, the apprehensions of the government can be very well understood.

The barriers mentioned here do not form an exhaustive list but authors believe that not much are left out.
5. Suggestions for Challenging the Challenges

Teachers’ attitudes towards inclusive education could be formed and developed in the context of an educational system which can provide some specific conditions in order to have a good practice in this field. Those conditions refer to a restructuring of the curricula, more help from support teachers, 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 (Unianu, 2012).

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 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 (Jelas, 2010).

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 (MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013).

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.
References


