



Issues, Challenges & Educational Implications for Meaningful Inclusion of Children with Intellectual Disabilities

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Abstract: *Inclusive Education is philosophy that advocates all children regardless with their diversities should be learn with their peers in mainstream education system. Recent international and national declarations and policies supported inclusion of persons with disabilities in their documents and vision. Many children with mild and moderate disabilities were brought back to mainstream school education system. However, meaningful inclusion is still beyond reach for children with intellectual disabilities. The challenges faced by children with intellectual disabilities are different and severe in nature including attitudinal, physical and pedagogical barriers. These issues and challenges are creating obstacles in the path of making schools more inclusive and welcoming for a diverse group of learners including children with intellectual disabilities.*

The attitudinal changes among all stakeholders towards children with intellectual disabilities are the key for successful inclusion. The government needs to address the issues and challenges with a sense of urgency for conducting sensitization and awareness programs for all stake holders with special focus on gross root level workers, teachers, parents and administrators.

Key Words: *Inclusive Education, Issues, Challenges, Intellectual Disabilities.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Inclusive Education refers to an education system which provides equitable and appropriate education to different ability group including children with and without disabilities in school at nearby community. A diverse group of learners are welcomed and addressed without any discrimination under inclusive education and their full and equal participation in all activities is ensured. It is strongly believed that all children can grow and learn together in a better manner and this would lead to a strong foundation of an inclusive society. Inclusive education is system supported for achieving goal of universal elementary education with the principle pillar of equity, justice and quality education for all children.

“Inclusive education means a system of education wherein students with and without disability learn together and the system of teaching and learning is suitably adapted to meet the learning needs of different types of students with disabilities.” (Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Act 2016)

Indian culture is more inclusive in nature by inherent and diversity and disabilities as an integral part of our civilization. The Indian government has formulated various polices, schemes and legislations for promoting inclusive education in the country. The Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) scheme was launched in 1974 under which children with mild and moderate disability should be integrated in their nearby schools. The National Policy on Education (NPE, 1986) recommended that children with disabilities should learn in mainstream schools. The Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (previously known as Sarva Shiksha Abhiya- SSA) was started in 2002 with zero rejection policy in elementary education for all. The Right to Education (RTE) Act (2009) established education as fundamental right for all between 6 to 14 years of age. The age range for children with disabilities was 6 to 18 years for completing their elementary education and they were kept under the disadvantage group with special provisions for their inclusion. The Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary Stage (IDESS) Scheme was started in 2009 with special provisions for educating students with disabilities at secondary level and to promote their transition in vocational and higher education. In recent years the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act (2016) and National Education Policy (NEP-2020) have strong provisions and recommendations about strengthening and supporting inclusive education practices in



today's mainstream classrooms. These provisions are going to game changer in coming years to bring revolutionary changes in promoting inclusion of children with disabilities.

However, despite of all the schemes and provision in the support of inclusive education, it is observed that student with physical, sensory and other disabilities are receiving more appropriate education than students with intellectual disabilities. The teachers are facing severe pedagogical challenges and issues regarding meaningful inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities. The needs of children with intellectual disabilities are more severe and diverse in nature due to which the inclusion become more challenging task.

"Intellectual disability, a condition characterized by significant limitation both in intellectual functioning (reasoning, learning, problem solving) and in adaptive behavior which covers a range of every day, social and practical skills" (RPwD Act, 2016). Therefore, CwIDs face more challenges in accommodating themselves in school environment due to their limited cognitive abilities and higher dependency in activities of daily living.

They generally respond slowly to what others say and to what happens to their surroundings and may need repeated instructions. There is a lack of clarity observed in the expression of thoughts, needs and feelings by CwIDs and they need more time to learn activities as well as have difficulty to understand easily what they see, hear and touch. The attention span of CwIDs is often low and has difficulty to remember what they are told or what they see. They also exhibit higher rate of problem behaviours like- aggressiveness and injurious behaviours. Some of the may show lack of have difficulty in sucking, chewing or eating, use of hand or going from place to place may also have poor or no speech. The CwIDs have difficulty to cope with regular school curriculum due to which they usually have repeated failures. They show delay in development in one or more area such as physical, social, cognitive, speech and language, emotional development etc.

However, strengths often coexist with limitations and therefore CwIDs may also have special abilities in areas like: sports, art & craft, music, dance, etc. Usually they like to enjoy with their peer group and help others. They participate in general tasks according to their abilities and feel happy when their efforts are acknowledged, valued and appreciated by others. Therefore, although the inclusion of CwIDs is comparatively more challenging, there is a need to identify their positive traits and the focus should be given to develop those skills and abilities.

2. THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IS BASED ON THE PRINCIPLES AS MENTIONED BELOW:

- No discrimination and embrace diversity among children regardless their religion, gender, ability, disability etc. It makes inclusive education a practice to celebrate diversity.
- Respect for inherent dignity of the persons with disabilities which believes that every child born with some qualities and every person have his own identity, self-esteem and dignity. The education system should accept all fundamental human rights.
- Equitable quality education for all should be ensured in all schools and complete access of education should be provided to all with appropriate reasonable adaption by accommodating different educational and therapeutic services.
- Creation of barrier free environment in school is an essential condition which includes restructuring the school infrastructure such as- making ramps, lifts, accessible toilets, transportation and learning resources for all. Philosophy of inclusive education advocates that school environment should be least restrictive for all learners as per their needs.
- Inclusive education stresses on implementation government policies without discrimination and adopting an inclusive culture within the school and community.
- Teachers play more important role in inclusive leadership to make school more inclusive by increasing awareness and sensitization towards CwIDs among school staff, parents and their peer group.
- Inclusive education is always proactive for readiness to change according to needs of children with disabilities. It reflects a paradigm shift in the education system through changes required on the right-based approach.

3. ISSUES & CHALLENGES OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR CwIDs:

Students with disabilities are admitted in regular school as per the legislative provisions and the zero rejection policy. However, a meaningful inclusion is still beyond the reach of majority of CwIDs. The key issues and challenges related to the inclusion of CwIDs are mentioned below:

- The awareness about intellectual and developmental disabilities among community, parents, peers and regular teachers is very low. As a result CwIDs are often excluded from the school regular activities.
- There is lack of trained teachers with required competencies to accommodate a more diverse group of learners in their regular classrooms. The needs of CwIDs are different and diverse in nature and therefore the teachers



require skills and competencies in screening, identification of needs and implementation of suitable pedagogy and curricular adaptations in their classrooms.

- There is scarcity of early intervention centres and inclusive pre-schools which could develop the school readiness skills among CwIDs.
- There are many myths and misconceptions about disabilities among community, parents, peers and regular teachers which create hurdles in the implementation of inclusive education for CwIDs.
- The physical infrastructure in the school is often lacks accessibility. As a result it hinders the education of CwIDs.
- There is lack of research evidences in inclusive practices for CwIDs focused on local problems and their solutions in the country which is very diverse in nature.

4. STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING THE INCLUSION OF CwIDs:

As we know that every child is unique and in order to address the individual differences while educating and training of CwIDs in regular schools, the teacher should be aware about their abilities and needs. The inclusion of CwIDs could be promoted by the following steps:

- Acceptance the child with his inherent strengths and abilities as this is the first and most important step of promoting inclusion of CwIDs.
- Understanding the learning style and pace of the child is required for bringing pedagogical changes to support inclusion.
- Appropriate functional and educational assessment of the child's skills and abilities is required.
- Development of holistic curriculum for children is the need of the hour as the developmental and unique needs of children could be fulfilled during the transaction
- Appropriate curricular content should be delivered with suitable pedagogy and teaching materials in different setting such as- group and individual teaching.
- Reasonable adaption should be given to CwIDs as per their requirement so they accommodate with regular class curriculum and those who cannot be benefited with such curricular accommodation strategies, teacher should provide appropriate modifications in objectives, content, instruction and evaluation so they can be more benefited from such modification and they enjoy their meaningful and equal participation in school activities.
- School should provide accessible and least restrictive environment for all so that CwIDs could participate in all school activities and their daily routine.
- Use of assistive devices, adaptive devices and information communication technology for the functional mobility and enhancement of learning of CwIDs is required.
- Community support and peer interaction required for development of age appropriate interpersonal relationship, social skills, communication skills and etiquettes. Teacher should use peer tutoring and cooperative learning strategies as per the requirement.
- The active engagement of parents should be encourage because they are key partners of rehabilitation team. Therefore, the parent training and counselling program should be plan and implemented by school.

5. CONCLUSION:

Inclusion of children with disabilities is more than just imparting education along with children under same roof. Inclusive education has idealistic and humanistic philosophical bases and it has provisions to ensure equal opportunities and impart equitable education to all. Some issues, barriers and challenges barriers are there for children with disabilities especially more for intellectual disabilities which require immediate attention and effective planning for their management through appropriate strategies like- reasonable adaptations, accommodation, modifications in regular school class curriculum, use of appropriate teaching learning material, implementation of suitable pedagogy and evaluation strategies. Some important consideration should be kept in mind to teach CwIDs like- we have to keep our focus on stages of learning, teaching principles, use of behavioural teaching approaches and strategies appropriately. Teachers also should be use the 5 E models of inclusive education schools i.e. encourage, engage, educate, establish and empower the student with disabilities and join their hands and provide full of acceptance, love and affection for all children in the class.

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