Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education: To Access Education without Discrimination

Dr. Mamta Rani *1, **Ms. Shonal** 2
1Associate professor, Education Department, Mahalakshmi College for Girls, Ghaziabad
2Student (M.Ed) Education Department, Mahalakshmi College for Girls, Ghaziabad
Email : mamta.chaudhary1983@gmail.com, kansalsonal11@gmail.com

*Abstract: Mainstreaming is the education of mildly handicapped children in the regular classroom. It is based on the philosophy of **"Equal Opportunity"** that implemented through individual planning to promote appropriate learning achievement and social normalization. When a child with special needs is brought to the main stream school & the school makes necessary adaptations according to the needs of a particular child. It is called inclusive education. India is known throughout the world for its rich cultural diversity. This diversity is prevalent in our school system too, that learners from all corners of the country come together in a classroom to the get the instructional training. This diversified nature of the classroom has always been viewed in terms of cultural differences, which can't be the true and ultimate measure of diversity prevalent in the classroom. There exists wide diversity among the students in terms of their physical, social, emotional and mental state. Under this diversity, there may be exceptional, slow learners, learner with some forms of learning disability and most importantly mentally retarded, hearing impaired, visually impaired students. As a philosophy it faces many challenges, particularly from forces which stress the maintenance of high academic standards and accountability and from economic rationalism. So to bring inclusiveness in the education system & in the society some changes are needed. Inclusive Education implicitly means to identify a child's learning style and adapt the classroom and teaching strategies to ensure high quality learning outcomes for all members of the class. Everyone is important unique and valued for their contribution to the school.*

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Society, Challenges, Issues, Equal Opportunity.

1. INTRODUCTION:

The National Curriculum for School Education (NCERT, 2005) has laid down the outline, content, presentation and to prepare teachers to make appropriate modifications in transaction strategies and favorable evaluation. Inclusive schools for learners with special educational needs for professional learning development are recommended. This interpretation of 'inclusive education' challenges to establish inclusive schools, where all accept each other, support each other and cooperate with each other. For more than three decades, discussion, exploration and action have resulted in change in the lives of people with diverse needs. The motivators for these changes resulted from a critical mass of discontent from individuals with diverse need denied their basic human rights to be part of the society in which they live, work and play. Once helping professionals and service providers focused on changing the individual, they could "fit" into the community, now there is a need to change whole communities, so that all may be included and participate to the fullness of their individual abilities. An inclusive society is one that highly values each and every life can continually enhances the full participation of every citizen. Education of children and people with diverse needs, training the professionals to cater to the requirements of children with diverse needs, sensitizing and changing the attitude of the community towards inclusion, initiating courses related to inclusiveness, facilitating project and field research, paving way for knowledge transfer, exchange & capacity building and growing an enabling organization to be a model will build the inclusive society as a whole. India is known throughout the worlds for its rich cultural diversity. This diversity is prevalent in our school system too, that learners from all corners of the country come together in a classroom to get the instructional training. This diversified nature of the classroom has always been viewed in terms of cultural differences, which cannot be the true and ultimate measure of diversity prevalent in the classroom. There exists wide diversity among the students in terms of their physical, social, emotional and mental state. Under this diversity, there may be exceptional, slow

learners, learner with some forms of learning disability, and most importantly mentally retarded, hearing impaired and visually impaired students. Therefore, the prime concern in a country like India, which is the largest democracy of the world, should be equal care and attention of this segment of learners towards their educational betterment. Such ideas led to the emergence of the concept of inclusive education. One of the major features that will characterize classrooms of the new century in learner diversity. This will be a notable advance from past practices and indicates an awareness of the important role inclusive education has to play in the future. In order to give all learners access to quality education, a dramatic shift from exclusivity to inclusively is required.

2. SCENARIO: The interpretation of 'inclusive education' challenges to establish inclusive schools, where all accept each other, support each other and cooperate with each other. Not here, in the curriculum members of the school community should also be involved where everyone's needs can be met. A traditional school where adults provide guidance to students regarding teaching activities. Decisions are taken, and these activities provide students with an opportunity to learn. Internationally, the drive towards inclusion is fuelled by a number of initiatives and treaties, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993) and the UNESCO Salamanca Statement (1994). Together, these documents recognize the human right of all children to education which is inclusive. 193 counties have signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child, with Somalia being the most recent in May 2002. All but two countries (Somalia and the United States) have also agreed to be bound by the Convention by ratifying it. In Particular, Salamanca Statement where in 1994, representatives of 92 Government and 25 International Organizations formed the World Conference on Special Needs Education is Salamanca, Spain. They agreed a new dynamic statement on the education of all children, which called for 'inclusion to be the norm'. It concentrated on the children's rights & uniqueness, education system, rationale for regular schooling, requirements of the inclusive child for inclusion.

Some countries have made significant advances towards promoting inclusive education in their national legislation. Examples include Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, Iceland, India, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Italy, Uganda, the United Kingdom and the United States. In India the last decade has seen the passing of three major legislation on disability by the Government of India. The main focus of the Rehabilitation Council of India Act (1992) is to regulate the training policies and programmes in the field of rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, and to regulate these standards in all training institutions uniformly throughout the country. The persons with Disability Act (Equal opportunities, Protection of rights and Full participation, 1995) has the goal of providing access to free education in an appropriate environment to all learners with and without disabilities till she/he attains the age of eighteen years, also this Act endeavors to promote the integration of learners with disabilities in mainstream schools, National Trust Act (1999) provides for the constitution of national body for the Welfare of persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental, Retardation and Multiple Disabilities. Such a national body will be a trust whose objects is to enable and empower persons with disability to live as independently and as fully as possible within and trustees for persons with disability requiring such protection; to facilitate the realization of equal opportunities, protection of rights and full participation of persons with disability; and to do any other act which is incidental to the aforesaid objects.

3. OTHER POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES :

Mental health Act 1987: This gives provisions for rehabilitation and treatment of people with mental health difficulties. It stresses on reducing dropout rates, improving learning achievements and expanding access to students who have not had and easy opportunity to be a part of the mainstream system.

The NPE, 1986 envisaged measured for integrating the physically and mentally handicapped with the general community as equal partners, to prepare them for normal growth and to enable them to face life with courage and confidence. Project Integrated Education for the Disabled (PIED): The National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) implemented PIED during 1987 with the financial support from UNICEF, to put local communities in charge of education. From the year 1995, the education of children with disabilities has also been included as integral component of the programme. All such children in the selected districts would be enrolled for inclusive education at the primary level.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Education for all Campaign): The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is a historic stride towards achieving the long cherished goal of Universalization of Elementary Education through a time bound integrated approach, in partnership with States. This movement promises to change the face of the elementary education sector of the country, assumes to provide useful and quality elementary education to all children including those with disabilities in the 6-14 age group by the year 2010. It makes a provision up to Rs. 1200 per child for integration of disabled children as per

specific proposal. The idea of inclusive education rests on certain principles which advocate the inclusion of special child in each and every aspect of teaching learning process. These principles are as under mentioned

• Every student has an inherent right to education on basic of equality of opportunity

• The principles cited above shows that there is need of redesigning our educational environment in view of inclusion of each student. It requires not only dissemination of proper knowledge and skill content related to inclusive education but, a major attitudinal change is also of utmost priority.

4. INITIATIVES TAKEN IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: Inclusive education primarily refers to school culture, policies, and practices that are location-specific. It is directly connected to diverse students. In its view, solving personal problems is not a priority. Rather, it enables the process of learning to be strengthened and change to be accepted. Inclusive Shiksha is a campaign to empower students across the continuum of participation, including children with disabilities.

- The Government of India has launched many programs like Operation Blackboard, but most of them focus is more on infrastructure, girl education and education of Scheduled Caste/Tribe students. Some programs like Integrated Education for Disabled Children and District Primary Education Program have also been initiated, which have achieved little success.
- India ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on March 30, 2007. (UNCRPD) was signed. It was also released for signature on the same day. India has a gave its support to the Convention in October 2007 and agreed to provide equal opportunities to all, including children with disabilities and reiterated the resolution. According to Article 24 of the Convention, the government has taken several steps to amend the law. So that the rights of persons with disabilities are balanced in accordance with the provisions of the UNCRPD.
- A new department of disability affairs has been created by the Ministry of Social Justice and Rights. So that by focusing on the problems of disabled people, their solutions can be found in those departments and currently also helps in paying attention to schemes, initiating new schemes and technical research. Although there are many challenges in their implementation also. Sarva Shiksha, the flagship scheme of the Ministry of Human Resource Development the campaign aims to ensure that all children with disabilities in the age group of six to fourteen years have access to education by the age of eight. Till then education can be ensured in primary schools.
- For children between 6 to 14 years of age under the Integrated Education Scheme for Children with Disabilities there is provision for free education. A large number of non-governmental organizations in India are working against disability and the government has taken up the responsibility of implementing infrastructural facilities and providing educational facilities through these NGOs. The programs have combined inclusive education with innovation.

5. DIRECTIONS FOR CHANGE: Based on the nature and characteristics of inclusive education, the following directions have been suggested to bring inclusiveness in the education system and in the society.

Enrolment and Retention of all Children with Diverse Needs:

i. Review implementation of existing programmes, provisions to identify factors leading to success or failure of the drive towards enrollment and retention of children with diverse needs in mainstream educational settings. Address administrative issues arising out of review.

ii. Generating awareness in the general community, persons in the education field and more specifically among parents and children with diverse needs that they too have full rights to appropriate education in mainstream schools and that it is the duty of those involved in administration at every level including schools to ensure that they have access to education.

iii.) Ensure enrollment and intervention for all children with special/diverse needs in the age group 0-6 years in Early Childhood Care and Education Programs.

iv.)Facilitate free and compulsory elementary education for children with diverse needs in the age group six to 14 in mainstream education settings.

v.) Emergency classes, "such as multi-credit classes", for over age students who are off track, to decrease dropout rates.

vi.)Ensuring physical access for children and youth with disabilities in schools and educational institution by enforcing the requirement for provision of universal design in buildings and provide support in transportation. viii. Improve data collection and database analysis using dis-aggregate data to create a comprehensive database regarding the children with diverdse needs.

Supportive Services, Organizational Arrangements & Teaching Strategies

i.) Development of national norms for Inclusive Education, to set standards of implementation, training, monitoring and evaluation for the programme.
ii.) Provide inputs in all pre and in service training for mainstream and special/regular education teachers to enable them to work with children with diverse needs in an inclusive education system.
iii.) Teachers and communities have been trained to participate in 'School Mapping' to identify the unreached children.
iv.) Appropriate Resource service centers in every province for students and teachers through appointment of special educators, rehab professionals, provision of resource room, aids and assistive devices etc to support mainstream school teachers in the classrooms.
v.) Adaptable alternative learning systems for more economically efficient, mobile schools-especially available to areas of conflict, children in special situations are reached out to in different ways.
vi.) Mobilize local resources available.
vii.) vii. Put in place an effective communication and delivery system for specific delivery of teaching/learning material, aids and appliances, hardware/software.
viii.) Participation in sport, co-curricular activities, to promote all round ability development. ix. Safety education should be the part and parcel of curriculum.

Creating Barrier Free Learning Environment and Continuing Education:

i. Ensuring physical, social, economic, cultural and intellectual access for children with diverse needs in all colleges and educational institutions by enforcing the requirements. For eg., provision of universal design in buildings, support in transportation, better access to ICT etc.
ii. Introducing and expanding alternative learning systems (e.g. Mobile Schools/Distance learning).
iii. Facilitate transition of young students with diverse needs wihing to pursue secondary education.
iv. Facilitate college and / or vocational education for young persons with diverse needs through proper implementation of existing reservation quota and provision of support for educational material during examinations.
v. Make learning meaningful, flexible, non discriminatory & gender responsive and link contents to the learner's life situation.
vi. Finding appropriate job requirements according to the abilities of children with inclusive needs and giving vocational training. Put in place mechanisms to ensure a system of regular feedback, monitoring and evaluation.

Community Based Participatory Action Research: A coherent awareness of an evolving world socially, economically and culturally- is essential to an understanding of the drivers for change that will result in a move inclusive society. World demographics are changing. As impacts and new direction shape the lives of people with disabilities, new knowledge generation from diverse sources will be required, which must involve the participation of people with disabilities and the collaborative of stakeholders such as governments, academia, disability organizations as well as the private sector.

Participatory action research combines action research aims with concerns about the politics of research; it is through the actual research process that improvements to some aspects of society are thereby accomplished.

Lead Disability Studies Growth Globally for Better Inclusive Societies: This course is designed to be of particular interest to people with disabilities, people with interest in providing disability services, educators, caregivers, therapists, and all people with an interest in disability issues. Some of the ways and means to promote disability studies are:

i.   Collaborate with universities in India and abroad to develop degree programs, disability studies options and centers of excellence.
ii.   Develop and market a philosophy and ideological framework of reference that is progressive and reflects a human rights approach to disability.
iii.   Establish Universities as an important coordination and reference point for disability studies program information and development.
iv.   Explore and establish and exchange program for academics working in the field of disability studies and develop opportunities for the ongoing exchange of views, innovations and lessons learned.

Provide a Platform for Knowledge Transfer; Exchange and Capacity Building: Knowledge is power, and when people with and without disabilities become well informed, opportunities for people with disabilities will be maximized as we move toward a more inclusive society for all. Knowledge transfer and exchange is collaborative problem solving between researchers and decision makers. This results in collective learning and capacity building through a process of planning, disseminating, and applying existing or new research in decision making.

Grow an Enabling Organization: To meet the expectations of associates and stakeholders, one need to ensure that is remains a strong, vibrant, forward-looking organization that continues to grow its human, informational and financial resources. The human resource in combination with a strong base of volunteers provides much potential to expand knowledge and organizational growth. The Way Forward to Rights Based Approach The strategic directions described above are particularly meaningful for promoting inclusive society of good quality, since its own core definition includes strong elements such as gender sensitivity, non-discriminatory curricula and learning environments, child centered teaching and learning methods, enhanced participation of all stakeholders, and a holistic approach to education, which can largely benefit from applying a rights-based framework.

 Realization of rights based education requires: Knowledge of the international human rights standards that should inform education programmes; and ii) development of necessary skills and capacity to adapt these standards to national contexts (Tomasevski & Katarina, 2004). Applying a rights based approach to education programming in practice, the following outline provide useful guidance (Urban & Jonsson, 2003).

Challenges in the Pathways of Effective Implementation of Inclusive Education: (The Indian Perspective) Inclusive education has been a controversial concept in education because it relates to educational values, as a philosophy it faces many challenges, particularly from forces which stress the maintenance of high academic standards and accountability and of course, from economic rationalism due to globalization (Kirk et al. 2006). In Indian context too, a number of challenges exist which are the hurdles in effective implementation of inclusive education. The following section presents these challenges.

Negative Attitude and Lack of Awareness in India: Inclusive education is at its infancy period. Since inclusive education is not merely change in certain educational facilities, it needs a complete change in attitude and desire of each stakeholder. The greatest barriers to inclusive education are caused by society, not by particular medical impairments. Most people in India have negative attitudes towards inclusive education which results in discrimination and leads to a serious barrier to learning. Most parents are concerned about academic performance of their children, and they worry that acceptance of students with special educational needs into general classroom will affect that achievement of others. There is need to work hard to persuade parents that inclusive education is possible.

School Related Variables: In terms of effective implementation of inclusive education it is found that, most of the schools still lack the basic infrastructure to cater the needs of disabled children. Winslow (1995) asserted that inclusive education aims to restructure schools in order to respond to the learning needs of all children. But in India, even today, the schools do not provide disabled friendly infrastructures and barrier free environment

Curriculum Related Issues in any Educations System: The curriculum is one of the major obstacles or tool to facilitate the development of more inclusive system. The curricula are not designed on the basis of flexibility and tend to be content-heavy in contrary to this Prasad (2004) suggested that one of the most important aspect for programming of the child with learning problems is 'Flexibility.' Thus, with a rigid curriculum, students with special education needs are excluded and even marginalized from mainstream education. Thus, we see that designing suitable curriculum as per inclusive setting is a challenge for implementing inclusive education.

6. CONCLUSION: It may be concluded that through inclusive education where by the school systems, strategic plans, and policies adapt and change to include teaching strategies for a wider more diverse range of children and their families, general an enabling organization should generate knowledge that is relevant, future oriented and reflective of the needs, concerns and aspirations of people with disabilities to transform civil society through a process of knowledge transfer and exchange with stakeholders, decision makers and researchers, thereby influencing policy and practices that lead to inclusive societies and lead in utilizing innovation and experience to provide leadership to other interested communities. In brief, when analyzing entry points for intervention in the entire education sector, there is a need to follow a more systemic approach.

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