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Challenges Face by Inclusive Education Practice in North-East India

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Abstract: From the last few years an effort has been made to make education inclusive in nature, so that all children, regardless of their strength or weaknesses are accommodated in a school and become part of the same school community. Inclusive education means to provide quality education to all irrespective of their abilities, disabilities, ethnicity, gender and age. In India generally children without disabilities are sent to regular schools and with disabilities are sent to special schools. Amongst these vulnerable groups, children with disabilities and special educational needs are often the most marginalized within education systems and within society in general. Traditionally, they have experienced exclusion, discrimination and segregation from the mainstream and from their peers. They have often been placed in separate classes and schools or indeed, have been denied access to education of any sort. The inclusive education approach is particularly important for these groups. But to attain the objective of inclusive education in India specially in North East is not so easy task. It has suffered from so many practical problems. In the present study an attempt has been made to generalize some important problems that hinder proper practice of inclusive education in India specially in North East and also suggest some measures to overcome from it.

Keywords: Inclusive education, Problem & North East.

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INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education means that all the children, regardless of their ability level, are included in a mainstream classroom, or in the most appropriate or least restrictive environment (LRE), that students of all ability levels are taught as equals, and that teachers must adjust their curriculum and teaching methodologies so that all students benefit. Inclusion is not a new concept to India; we had been including children with disabilities in the mainstream education unknowingly and were supporting them with common sense methods. That is the reason we see good number of people with disabilities included naturally in the society everywhere and there. As far as north east is concerned, the general education itself had and still has innumerable problems such as poverty, child labour, gender bias, infrastructure etc. Inclusive education is a human right issue. Awareness regarding the need to do something more than what is being done is growing but the intensity and seriousness of the initiatives taken in this direction do not match up to the rising expectations. Realizing this the Government of India recently initiated an ambitious plan to make all schools disabled friendly by 2020 and mobilize special schools run by nongovernmental sectors as resource centers to assist teachers and prepare teaching material.

Inclusive education acknowledges that individual children differ in their abilities and support that each student receives quality education irrespective of their abilities, disabilities, ethnicity, gender and age. In India generally children without disabilities are sent to regular schools and with disabilities are sent to special schools. Now a days through inclusive education system

an efforts are being made that all children, regardless of their strength or weaknesses are accommodated in a school and become part of the same school community. Inclusive education is about ensuring the rights to education of all learners, regardless of their individual characteristics or difficulties, in order to build a more just society. However this means that inclusive education initiatives often have a particular focus on those groups who have traditionally been excluded from educational opportunities.

Amongst these vulnerable groups, children with disabilities and special educational needs are often the most marginalised within education systems and within society in general. Traditionally, they have experienced exclusion, discrimination and segregation from the mainstream and from their peers. They have often been placed in separate classes and schools or indeed, have been denied access to education of any sort. The inclusive education approach is particularly important for these groups.

UNESCO Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994) proclaimed that, "Every child has a fundamental right to education and must be given the opportunity to achieve & maintain an acceptable level of learning. Every child has unique characteristics, interest, abilities and learning needs, educational system should be designed & educational programmes implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs. Those with special educated needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child-

centered pedagogy, capable of meeting these needs.” Thus, Inclusive education “is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners. It involves restructuring the culture, policies and practices in schools so that they can respond to the diversity of students in their locality.” For a school to be inclusive, the attitudes of everyone in the school, including administrators, teachers, and other students, are positive towards students with disabilities.

But the implementation of inclusive education and its smooth functioning is not so easy task as children with special need is different from the general student. They always need to take some extra care according to their degree of disability. Whereas the methods which are followed for teaching general students may or may not be suitable for the disable student which results in creating problems in inclusive education. Like these inclusive education in North East has also suffered from so many practical problems. In this paper an attempt has been made to generalize some important problems that hinder proper practice of inclusive education in India and specially in North East and also suggest some measures to overcome from it.

Policy Measures of Inclusive Education in India

Recommendations to send children with disabilities to mainstream schools were first made in the Sargent Report in 1944, and again in 1964 by the Kothari Commission. Despite this, the change has been slow. 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, Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) was amalgamated with other major basic education projects like the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) 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 Integrated Education for Disabled Children (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 Children with Special Need (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 broader based. The mandate given to RCI is to regulate and monitor services given to persons with disability, to standardize 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.

Present Scenario of Inclusive Education in North East: -

There are 2,68,10,557 persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in India as per census 2011, constituting 2.21% of total population. The number of Children with Special Need (CWSN) and the number of school for inclusive education North East region are as Follows: -

Table 1: Scenario of Inclusive Education in North East

Sl. No.	Name of the State	PWD of Age Group 5-9 years	PWD of Group 10-19 years	No of Schools for Inclusive Education
1	Assam	35,211	76,681	1,256
2	Arunachal Pradesh	2,082	5,026	92
3	Nagaland	1,937	4,631	58
4	Manipur	3,973	9,107	147
5	Mizoram	988	2219	216
6	Tripura	4,114	9,764	287
7	Meghalaya	4,459	9,624	65
8	Sikkim	716	2,014	34

Source: Census Report 2011 & RMSA, Ministry of Human Resources, Govt. of India Reports.

The Government of India has approved to cover 2,11,616 Children with Special Need (CWSN) under the

IEDSS Scheme in the year 2014-2015 out of which 46,122 from North East. Since the PWD Act 1995

advocates for free education of Children with Special Need (CWSN) up-to the age of 18 years.

It is identified from data shown in the table that among all the state of north east Assam has the highest number inclusive School followed by Tripura, Mizoram and Manipur. Whereas the of number Children with Special Need (CWSN) within the age group of 5 to is concern in the north east Assam has the highest number of children followed by Meghalaya, Tripura and Manipur, and the lowest number of PWD children with in this age group in the state of Sikkim. But in case of Children with Special Need (CWSN) within the age group of 10-19 again has the highest number of children but followed by Tripura, Meghalaya, Manipur and in this age group also Sikkim has the lowest number of Children with Special Need.

Problems of Inclusive Education in North East 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 as well as in the North-East India some of these are as follows:-

- 1. Lack of Trained Personnel and of Flexi Curriculum:** The majority of school employees are not trained to design and implement educational programs for Children with Special Need (CWSN) in regular schools. Evidences reveal that all the states of North East do not have sufficient trained/qualified personnel to teach CWSN. Further the non-flexi "curriculum and evaluation method" is also found to be a challenge to the system.
- 2. Attitudes Towards Inclusion and Disability Among Teachers, Administrators, Parents and Peers:** Like 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 north east. Mainstream teacher attitudes may be a contributory barrier to successful inclusive practices. Indeed teachers in mainstream schools were less positive about the potential of children with learning disabilities than special school teachers.
- 3. Removal of architectural barrier:** Though provisions have been made under the PWD Act 1995 for creation of architectural barrier free environment for the PWDs. However, such accommodations are not there in majority of the

schools in north east. Facilities like ramps, lifts, and directional cues etc. are mostly absent in schools and it has adverse affect on the integration of Children with Special Need (CWSN) in the regular education system. School environment needs accommodations for truly practicing inclusive education.

- 4. Poverty:** A large number of Children with Special Need (CWSN) live in families with income below poverty in north east. The combination of poverty and disability results in a condition of immediate deprivation" which sets up challenges to the participation of CWSN in regular schooling.
- 5. Support Services:** For implementing inclusive education in all educational institutions, at all levels, a strong support services very important. Their strength should be both quantitative and qualitative. But existing support services are scarce and inadequate in this region.
- 6. 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 neighbors, peers, and society. Without wiping out these negative self-perceptions, true inclusion of such children is not possible.
- 7. Negative Attitudes:** The prejudice mind setup of the parents of the non-disabled Childs that disability is disease and it can be spread to their child if mix up with Children with Special Need (CWSN) is a major hurdle in the process inclusive education in north east.
- 8. Time:** Usually, children with special needs need more time to learn or to write their paper. They usually do not get extra -time, rather they are rebuked for not being able to complete the work in time in case of inclusive education.
- 9. Problem of Communication:** Communication is one of the major problems of north east Children with Special Need (CWSN) face a big difficulty in case of travelling. Majority of the road condition of north east is so bad that even normal children also face problem in travelling from one place to another. Many places of north east are even not well connected with road of it become a great barrier for the inclusive education.

Steps to Be Taken for Overcome These Challenges

The following measures may be taken for overcoming the problems that hinders in the process of inclusive education in north east India.

1. **Training of Teachers:** Effective training on disabilities has to be provided to the teachers to make the inclusive education system success. The Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) who is responsible for the creation of human resources in the field of disabilities needs to adopt a policy for training of at least one teacher from each school. The provision for appointment of Special Educators in the ratio of 1: 5 under IEDSS should be implemented soon.
2. **Collaboration Between Different Ministries:** As different ministries are entrusted with the responsibilities of implementing different schemes/policies hence a better coordination among the different ministries will certainly help in achieving desired goals.
3. **Channelizing NGO's in Implementing Inclusive Education Programs:** Government departments have limitations in execution of certain programs under certain conditions. The involvement of NGOs will certainly be very instrumental in such situation.
4. **Accessible environments:** The physical conditions and psychological climate of the institution denies or accepts the student with a special need. In north east psychological and infrastructure is one of the major problem. Which must be remove so that Children with Special Need (CWSN) can easily access the education facility.
5. **Parents involvement:** The parents are in need of proper guidance. They lose the very important early days of the child's development in doctor shopping. The doctors shall have a multi disciplinary approach in up bringing the children; there shall be special counselors to guide these parents for a holistic and total rehabilitation. All the information should be provided under one roof. The parents are not to run from post to pillar for information and services. They shall not ruin their mental energy in vein; providing the possibilities and developing a picturesque image of the realistic development of the child in the early years ensures proper utilization of the crucial periods of development.
6. **Success of inclusive classrooms:** Well-designed individualized education programs, professional development for all teachers involved, general and special educators alike, Time for teachers to plan, meet, create, and evaluate the students together, reduced class size based on the severity of the student needs, Professional skill development in the areas of cooperative learning, peer tutoring, adaptive curriculum, collaboration between parents or guardians, teachers or para educators, specialists, administration, and outside agencies, sufficient funding so that schools will be able to develop programs for students based on student need instead of the availability of funding.
7. **Networking:** Networking amongst the stake holders and professionals for sharing of the experiences shall reduce reinventing wheels and smoothen service delivery. It also improves the quality of the service and brings in scope for viewing the problems from several and different angles. This network will be a real brain master for diagnosis and remedies.
8. **Class size:** The lesser the size of the class, greater the scope for inclusion. The government shall not decrease the teacher pupil ratio at this moment, but the head teacher and other teachers shall think of reducing the size of the class of the particular section (section A, section B etc) small. For example, if there are 60 children in a grade, 40-45 children shall be put in a section and the rest in another section, including the child with special need in the smaller section to have better access, individual attention and provide extra time and efforts for the education of these children since proportionately the duties like correction, monitoring and other administrative work of the teacher gets reduced. Skills/strategies to deliver curriculum differentiated instruction, student centered lesson becomes achievable through this.
9. **Peer support:** The greater boon to inclusion is the peer support. The peers are taking active part in the education of their classmates that are with a special need. The personnel should encourage and tap the support. The child with a special need, enjoys the company of his peer, socializes and vents his grievances'. Not only the physical inclusion becomes possible with the cooperation of the peers but also the academic inclusion turns easier as the children of the same age communicate their ideas easily and understand each other with a greater ease.
10. **Role of university:** Universities may be used in designing curriculums which may help in changing the attitudes of people towards PWDs. As a large number of teachers will be required to make the programs success, distance mode of education may be used. Further flexi "curriculum and evaluation" system may be designed considering the needs of Children with Special Need (CWSN).

CONCLUSION

From the above it can be concluded that inclusive education is very much essential for the overall development of a nation. We know that worldwide an effort has been made to educate all the people regardless of their ability, religion, cast age, sex etc., in the same way government of India also try to attained goal of educating all the people of the country. So for attaining this goal many plans and policy has been started by the government of India. like The Persons with Disabilities Act in 1995, Rights of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act 2009, National Policies for Person with disabilities, 2006, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and the National Policy for Children 2013, etc., which results in the inclusive education has started gaining momentum. But there are many problems which create barrier in attaining the goal of inclusive education in the country. Whereas in the case of North East it is a back word region in the country. It suffers from so many natural, social and infrastructural problems which results in creating barriers in the process of inclusive education. So to overcome such problems and for properly implementation of inclusive education in the north east India sufficient measure must be taken by the government.

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