

REVIEW OF THE INTERNATIONAL TRENDS IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITY WITH A SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE INDIAN CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to present a review of international trends in inclusive education of children with disability highlighting the status of inclusive education in India. To start with, conceptualization of inclusive education is presented explicating micro and macro exclusion and pseudo inclusion followed up by explaining the concept of ableism that underpins these processes of exclusion. This conceptualization is continued with the major features of inclusive practices in Australia, USA, UK, Italy, Finland and Canada culled out from an extensive literature review. These features include, funding approach to inclusive education, the process of identification of students with disability, inclusive practices followed, parental involvement, curricular adaptations and the prevalent models of educational settings. A capture of the similarities across these countries, highlighting certain special features is presented as a closure of the analysis of practice in these countries. The Indian scenario is presented in continuation to this consolidation sketching a brief picture of the efforts in the direction of inclusive education, analyzing the key challenges in our path of achieving an inclusive education.

KEYWORDS: Conceptualization of Inclusion, Micro and Macro Exclusion, Pseudo Inclusion, Ableism, Disability

CONCEPTUALISATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Inclusive education is a contentious term that lacks an explicit conceptual emphasis, which perhaps contributes to its misinterpretations and confused implementations. International human rights agreements, covenants and legislation provide definitions of inclusion that cover the societal principles of equity, access, opportunity and rights. There is a lack of unified definition of what inclusion is. The role education plays in the development of an inclusive society are very critical. It is thus important to have a clear conceptual that inclusive education is not about 'special' teachers meeting the needs of 'special' children... it is not about 'dumping' pupils into an unaltered system of provision and practice. Rather, it is about how, where and why, and with what consequences, we educate all pupils.

Macro Exclusion, Micro Exclusion and Pseudo Inclusion

A person who is being segregated or excluded from any group, be it for a short or long period, he/she experiences a stigma of being a 'lesser' or inferior person which is dehumanizing. When a child is excluded from general education and segregated into a 'special' school or a 'special' class/unit for whole or part of the day, week or year (or denied an education at all) macro exclusion occurs which is easy to recognize. However, the lack of clear understanding of our diverse conceptualizations about inclusive education along with contextual diversities results in exclusion in the name of inclusion. When exclusion occurs within mainstream settings that claim to be inclusive, this results in pseudo inclusion, what D'Alessio terms 'micro-exclusion' (D'Alessio, S. (2011).

Presented below is a narration from field observations of the author, in a school in Delhi, which claims to be inclusive in philosophy and practice. In this school, there is no separate resource room or special classes for children with disability; these students study together with others in a mainstream setting.

The teacher completes the daily chores of taking attendance and asking about the homework given for the day. She then starts with her English lesson by asking a student to read a paragraph and answer questions from it. As this process begins, the special education teacher enters the classroom and walks to the back of the room to a student with dyslexia. She then begins working on the paragraph with “her” student by making a gist of the paragraph, replacing the difficult words with alternatives, etc. while the regular English teacher completes the paragraph and carries forward the class to a discussion on a book she had been reading. In this case, the child with dyslexia who is still struggling hard with understanding the paragraph with the help of the special educator is deprived of the classroom process in which the class is involved. This illustrates pseudo inclusion or micro exclusion which is subtler than macro exclusion.

Macro exclusion which is more explicit in many contexts in India and across countries is evident in the below given processes:

- Refusal to enroll children who experience disability
- Refusal to make accommodations within the class and the school environment, thus restricting participation
- Refusal to make accommodations to the curriculum/activities, thus restricting participation
- Exclusion from sports activities
- Only permitting children to attend school for the part of the day where special educator’s services are available
- Exclusion from excursions and school camps
- Exclusion from work experience placements within the school years
- Not being welcome in the educational setting (either refusal to enroll or active attempts to make the child and family feel unwelcome)
- Refusal to make infrastructural adaptations, for example, refusing to install handrails in toilets
- Ignorance and ableist attitudes of school staff, peer group and parents of the peer group
- Conditional attendance whereby a child can only attend: if a parent/caregiver is present; if an aide is present; for part of the day;
- If she/he can be sent home as soon as any difficulties arise.

More barefaced segregation occurs in macro-exclusively wherein children are educated in segregated ‘special’ schools or ‘special’ classes or units, rather than alongside all peers in general settings. In an inclusive setting child with disabilities are not segregated in the classroom, at lunchtime, for literary or cultural activities or on the playground.

Ableism and Disability

Underpinning micro and macro exclusion is the idea that people who experience disability are in some sense 'lacking' or less human than those who are able bodied. This fundamental ableist view must be critically examined and addressed in order to bring about inclusive education.

Ableism is to disable what racism is to ethnicity. Ableism is deeply and subliminally entrenched within the culture. Like racism or sexism, ableism leads to the undervaluing of people who experience disability. In contrast, valuing and accepting only people who are able bodied results in discrimination, insulting behavior and exclusion of people who have disabilities. This social subjugation impacts the psycho-social well-being of people labeled as 'impaired' by those deemed 'normal'. Inclusive education cannot become a reality in a social context that believes in ableist views and practices: the de-establishment of Ableism is a prerequisite for inclusive educational practice.

Having presented these theoretical principles with reference to inclusive education, an international perspective on inclusive education is discussed below.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

Conceptualizations and philosophy of inclusive education differ between countries as also policy based on varying levels of commitment to and interpretations of, international agreements such as the UNESCO, Salamanca Statement and various UN conventions. In many instances, where inclusive policies exist, these have not been typically translated into classroom practice (Forlin, 2006; McConkey & Bradley, 2010; Sharma & Deppeler, 2005; Xu, 2012).

Contextual differences have to be factored in, to determine the success or failure of environmental, curricular, instructional, and social inclusion. The idea that 'good practice' for inclusive education can exist in a uniform and measurable form is, thus, inappropriate. Inclusion is highly context dependent and resists educational approaches that attempt to apply formulas or recipes to schools and classrooms and the activities that occur within them.

An overview of inclusive education policy in five countries is presented to discuss the examples of similarities and differences between nations followed by discussion of the Indian Scenario.

Finland, known for its international reputation for education excellence, as evidenced by high PISA scores, Italy with long-term policy of inclusive education and low national levels of segregated education and the United Kingdom and USA that provide evidence of policies of inclusion and exclusion that are well entrenched and which have influenced other countries like Australia have been chosen for presenting this international perspective on inclusive education along with inclusive practices in Canada and Australia which are culturally similar with similar educational practices and structures. (Forlin, 2013)

Australia

Policy and implementation level are at State level. Students are categorized under seven different categories of disability which require medical evidence for their presence. Funding is based on assessment of disability. A mixture of services exists including segregated special schools, home based programs and inclusive education. Inclusive education features such as teacher assistants, additional resources, specialists, consultants, etc. are available. A collaborative approach between parents and school staff is encouraged with potential roles for each described. Students follow the regular curriculum, a modified version, or an individual plan. (Forlin, 2013)

Canada

Policy and implementation level are at provincial level. A process known as 'coding' individual students based on disability and/or giftedness is used. Tests, including IQ tests, are used to assist in this process. The Provincial Government provides block funding to school jurisdictions based on disability demographics and coding. A continuum of services exists including segregated special schools, special classes in neighborhood schools, inclusive education, and home schooling options. Inclusive education is to be the first placement option considered by school districts, and therefore local schools. Supports such as teacher assistants, additional resources, specialist consultants, etc. are available at the discretion of the local school district and most commonly the individual school. Parent involvement and cooperation is encouraged. Parents are supposed to be active partners in their child's education and their involvement in individual education plans is mandated. One curriculum is followed for all children, although some children with special education needs follow an individual education plan (known as an IEP). (Forlin, 2013)

Finland

Policy and implementation level are at national level. Additional support requirements are determined in the first instance by teacher/parent observation. After consulting with the special education teacher, and preferably the school psychologist, the IEP team defines the needed services together with parents and the student as part of the IEP process. (Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011)

Funding approach is categorical, based on assessment of disability. Students eligible for full-time support might expect to receive 1.5 times base funding and a relatively small proportion of students with severe disability may receive between 2.5 to 4 times base funding. Every municipality and every school decides independently how they use their own funding allocation. Typically, it is used for hiring special teachers and teaching aides (Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011). In segregated special schools support is provided in curriculum differentiation, guidance, social services, remedial teaching, part-time special education, assistive devices, learner support assistants, and psycho-social services (Väyrynen). Two types of inclusive education support are provided. One is General Support (curriculum differentiation, guidance, social services, remedial teaching, part-time special education, assistive devices, learner support assistants, and psycho-social services). In addition, there is Intensified Support provided in the same areas (Väyrynen). National core curriculum is used for all schools as also Individual Learning Plans for those requiring extra support.

Italy

The Italian system stands out in achieving the goal of enrolling most of their children with disability (97.8%) in regular schools with adequate systemic support in place, including high parental collaboration whereby they are considered as co-enablers in their children's education. It is paradoxical that Italy has had the highest percentage of students fully included in comparison to the population of those served, but rather poor performance in reference to the total population of school-age students; many European and North American countries serve much higher percentages of students in their own inclusive settings, leaving aside the traditional special education settings (Anastasiou and Keller, 2011). As of 2010 – 2011, virtually all students (99.975% of those with disabilities) were served in inclusive general education classes. with the exception of 0.025% of the overall school population educated in 71 special schools or institutional separate settings. (Anastasiou, D.et al. 2015).

Assessment of students is done using various instruments resulting in certification. Quite interestingly, both the identification procedures and classification of high-incidence disabilities (that is, mild and moderate intellectual disabilities, specific language impairment, learning disorders, emotional or/and behavioral disorders) seem to follow a medicalised model, outside the education system. Arguably, the Italian system has had a focus on individualised and intensive instruction based on IEPs. Since 1975, it has been recognised that support teachers play a key role in inclusive classrooms (Zanobini 2013). The average ratio of support teachers to students with disabilities was 2.0 in 2012 – 2013 (Vianello, Lanfranchi and Pulina 2013, 219 – 227). In addition, administrative support is provided to inclusive schools by reducing class size. 'Inclusive classes' are usually limited to a maximum of 20 students; otherwise, classes can have a maximum of 25 – 27 students.

United Kingdom

Policy and implementation are at National level in the UK. Inclusive education is defined as "Inclusion is about engendering a sense of community and belonging and encouraging mainstream and special schools and others to come together to support each other and pupils with special educational needs. There is no commitment in policy or legislation to full inclusion of all students in the UK (Forlin, 2013). Students are issued with a 'statement of special educational needs' following an assessment or series of assessments. The areas of need in which children are assessed include communication and interaction, cognition and learning, behavior, emotional and social development, sensory and/or physical. Funding approach is categorical, based on labels. Maintained schools, other than special schools, should have within their delegated budget some funding that reflects the additional needs of pupils with special educational needs. They receive this through a funding formula that reflects the incidence of SEN measured in various ways. Special schools exist throughout the UK specialising in various disability groupings according to categories identified. Inclusive education features Inclusive education is preferable and can be demanded by parents, who may be refused only on the grounds of strict criteria. Supports such as teacher assistants, additional resources, specialist consultants, etc. may be available at the discretion of the local school district and most commonly the individual school. Parents hold key information and have a critical role to play in their children's education. Special Education Needs Code of Practice underlines that it is essential that all professionals actively seek to work with parents and value the contribution they make. Children identified with SEN can work on the regular national curriculum and/or from IEP.

USA

All public schools in the United States are responsible for instructing students with disabilities and other special needs (Friend & Bursuck, 2009). Intensity, structure, curriculum, collaboration, and monitoring/assessment have made the special education "special" in the United States (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005). Now, about 75% of the students with disabilities spend all or part of their school day in the general education classrooms with their non-disabled peers. The remainder of the students with disabilities receives academic instruction in pull-out or self-contained classrooms or in residential or hospital placement (National Education Association [NEA], 2009)

Low classroom strength, adequate material resource support, infrastructural support, Assistant teacher in classes where the number of children with disability is more than 2, adequately trained teachers equipped to meet the needs of the children, support of Special Educator and School Counselor, availability of services of professionals like speech therapist, physiotherapist, psychologist etc.

whenever required, high parental cooperation etc. are the key factors of successful inclusive education in USA.

International Scenario in a Nutshell

The countries discussed above are explicit in their support for inclusive education. But no country has rejected the special school model or the special setting- within school model. Most of these countries maintain separate special schools or special pull out education settings within schools for needy children with severe disability, with difference in the percentage of students in special settings across countries. Most countries maintain separated forms of special education, including Finland, despite that country's much lauded progressive education system (Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011). A further common feature is the use of curriculum modification and Individual Education Plans (IEP) as required. The strength of inclusive education in these countries can also be attributed to valuing inter-disciplinary support from various consultants and professionals, as required and their practice reflects collaboration between these professionals. While funding mechanisms vary slightly, it is clear that all these international regions recognise the need for additional resourcing to enable inclusion. Material and human resource support, manageable class strength with teaching assistants as needed, adequate and appropriate pre service and in-service training of teachers with their on-site support, long drawn and reliable assessment of disability are features of inclusive practice seen across these countries. Funding is based on assessment and certification of disability of each child. This means that children who require support, but are not labeled as having a disability, are excluded from the system. These children are frequently overlooked within such a system of education. There is a distinct departure from this in western countries like UK and USA. There has been a phase in the history of evolution of inclusive educational practices when special schools were closed down in these countries and were re-opened later on realizing the role played by these schools in catering to children with severe disability. the Finnish system.

In the Finnish education system, special education services are provided within regular schools without the need for assessment of the children and their certification. Support is based on the teachers' observed needs of the student. The Finnish definition of eligibility for special education is grounded on observed needs (a "difficulty model"), rather than diagnosed disability (a "disability" model) (Itkonen & Jahnukainen, 2010). This informal approach to special education is the most distinctive feature of their special education system and is the main service delivery model (Jahnukainen, 2011) although there are alternative separate special schools for students with high-support needs in Finland.

Literature review brings out another important aspect of inclusive education in the developed countries.

Labelling/Categorization

One global issue of the current education system is the categorical approach to funding support, ie, funding allocations for support are based on processes of labeling and categorization. This means that children who require support, but are not labeled as having a disability, are excluded from the system. These children are frequently overlooked within such a system of education. Additionally, this requirement for a label in order to access support results in many children being constructed as an 'other', 'his/her' (referring to the special educator/counselor of the school) bringing with it the threat of low expectations and exclusion. Both of these issues result in perpetuation of ableist practices and pose major barriers to inclusive education.

The Finnish education system as presented above is an exception to such an approach of providing special education services where formal assessment is not such a crucial part of organising special education services; these

services are based on the observed needs of the student.

INDIAN SCENARIO

The Government of India (GOI) has undertaken a series of initiatives since its independence in 1947 to provide education to children with disabilities. However, a large number of children with disabilities still remain out of school (Mitchell and Desai, 2005) and only 1% to 4% of children with disabilities have access to some form of education (Mani, 2003; Singh, 2001).

It is important to note that most of the work in this regard was undertaken during the past four decades. One of the earliest formal initiatives undertaken by the GOI was the Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) scheme of 1974 followed with the National Policy on Education (1986) and the District Primary Education Project (DPEP) in 1994–5. The Persons with Disabilities (PWD) Act was passed by the Indian parliament in 1996 and became the hallmark legislation of a new era for the education of students with disabilities in India. An essential aspect of the legislation was the emphasis it placed on the integration of students with disabilities into regular schools. For the first time, the integration of students with disabilities into regular schools entered the realm of Indian jurisdiction.

A number of other policy initiatives have been taken by the Government of India since the PWD Act in 1996. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), launched in 2001, National Action Plan for the inclusion in education of children and youth with disabilities, 'Inclusive Education of the Disabled at the Secondary Stage' (IEDSS) (2009), a revised form of IEDC that provided the opportunity to all students with disabilities who had completed eight years of elementary schooling to complete four years of secondary schooling in an inclusive environment. Evaluation of IEDSS has shown an increase in student enrolment in 11 states from 2010 to 2012. In 2010, India implemented the Right to Education Act (RTE) which was an initiative to legally support inclusive education along with many other educational provisions. The latest is the passing of Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill in the Parliament in December 2016.

It is evident from the historical analysis that the Government of India is committed to equalizing educational opportunities for all children, including those with disabilities. But to find out the extent to which these the policies have been translated into practice warrants careful examination.

Literature review brings out a dismal picture of the outcomes that the policy initiatives had aimed to achieve. Review brings out the number of students with disabilities who have been enrolled in regular schools (Mani, (2003), Gopinathan, (2003), Mitchell and Desai, (2005), Singh, (2001)). It is clear from these figures that the number of students with disabilities receiving services under inclusive education has been constantly growing, however it can also be deciphered that even if the number of students who are enrolled in regular schools may be considered as a positive indicator of progress in this direction, the efforts made by the government have only been able to touch the fringe of the problem, considering the number of students with disabilities in the country. The pertinent question here is, does enrollment of children with disability, indicate their inclusion?

Key Challenges

Some of the key challenges to the slow progress toward the goal of educational inclusion in India categorized at the systemic level and school level are presented below.

Challenges at Systemic Level

One of the most significant challenges at macro level that seems to have affected the progress of the country is how disability is defined and understood in the country. The two prominent perspectives on disability are the medical and the social perspectives.

From the medical or deficit perspective disability is seen to reside within an individual, and is perceived and explained in medical terms. It is common to read in literature within this framework, words like, 'diagnosis', 'suffer', 'treatment', 'deficiency', 'cure', 'rehabilitation' etc. There is pressure on an individual to fit in with society. The social model, meanwhile, defines disability as caused by barriers that society creates for an individual. Hence, in this framework, it is the society that needs to change its practices to meet the individual's needs.

In India, the medical model seemingly predominant in the formulations of definitions that percolate from the highest level of central Ministry has pervaded almost all policy and legislative documents. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment that is mainly responsible for the welfare of people with disability, defines a person with a disability as someone with a condition that falls into one of the following categories: locomotor, visual, hearing, speech or mental (GOI, 2005).

Conceptualization of Inclusive Education

It seems the way in which inclusive education is defined and understood may be another critical challenge in providing quality education to children with disabilities. There are wide variations in how 'inclusive education' is defined and operationalized; terms such as 'integrated education' and 'inclusive education' are frequently used interchangeably. Inclusive education is largely adopted from the international discourse and has not been discussed and deliberated upon, situating in the Indian context.

Types of Inclusive Education

Most schools accommodate children with one particular type of disability rather than being open to a wide diversity of students. Some schools have a Special Education Unit. Some students from these units are placed in regular classrooms for part of the day; others remain in the unit most of the time. In some schools, the children with disabilities share space with others on play ground or for other co-curricular activities; but are restricted to Special Education Unit for all their academic learning. The type and extent of disability that a student has, plays an important role in influencing the decision of the school. Students with the 'hard' disabilities, ie: disabilities that are obvious, (eg: a child using crutches/wheel chair/hearing aid) those children who look physically different from others and have low intellectual ability are denied admission to school. There is enough research evidence to show that one of the major reasons schools include 'disabled' students is pressure from either government bodies or parents. (Studies by Sandhill and Singh, 2005; Singal and Rouse, 2003).

Teacher Preparation

Lack of adequate teacher preparation has been identified as a major barrier to inclusive education in South Asian countries (Sharma et al., 2013), including India (Singal, 2005a, 2005b). Currently, graduate teachers completing teacher education programs are exposed to education of children with disabilities through a theory-based paper on Inclusive School which gives an overview of theories and principles of inclusive education, legal provisions with nature and needs and pedagogic strategies corresponding to each category of disability. School internship does not focus on the classroom processes in the context of children with disabilities.

Challenges at School Level

Challenges such as low levels of economic infrastructure and literacy and unique cultural and social background, are hurdles India faces in the way of implementation of inclusive education.

The literature has consistently indicated that an overwhelming majority of schools in India lack the necessary physical resources to implement inclusive education (Bhan and Rodricks, 2012; Bhatnagar and Das, 2013; Shah et al., 2014; Sharma et al., 2009). These resources include basic facilities such as public transport facilities, ramps, adequate lighting and availability of wheelchairs, wheel chair friendly toilets among other physical resources needed for a child to attend school. Such challenges are greater for schools located in rural areas and those located in distant, hilly terrains. In addition to a lack of these required physical resources, there is a severe shortage of required personnel such as special education teachers, teacher aides, related service professionals (speech and language therapist, physical therapist and occupational therapist) and other school professionals (Shah, 2005). In the absence of such key professionals, inclusion endeavors turn out to be no more than 'child dumping' in many instances.

Large class sizes present a major challenge for the implementation of inclusive education in the Indian context. According to the Government of India's own accounts (Sarva Siksha Abhiyan Evaluation Report, 2010), class sizes of 40 students or more are widespread in states such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. This, compounded by a lack of trained professionals, severely limits the ability of regular school teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Reducing class size may not be a solution; preparing teachers to teach in large classes and using existing resources to address the barrier of large class sizes is necessary.

Special Educators, Itinerary Special Educators and Regular Teachers

Albeit the law that each school should have at least one Special Educator, this is yet to be implemented in most schools across states. In some regions Special Educators work as itinerary specialists and cover 2/3 schools in the neighboring area. But these specialists in many instances do not have proper guidance as to what their role is in the respective schools and the time they spent in a school is not adequately utilized by the system. In some schools Special Educators are used as regular teachers 'due to the syllabus load' and gradually their role as special educator is forgotten. To make full use of the expertise of a specialist, the school head and the school teachers too need orientation. Collaborative working style is critical to maximize the contribution from specialists, as also professionalism and collegiality.

It is also seen that there is no balance in the number of graduates passing out from the B.Ed. (Special) Programme for each category of disability. This number seems to be skewed to certain disabilities like visual and intellectual disabilities. But when a specialist is recruited, it is hoped that she/he will get trained to address the needs of students with other disabilities as well. But on the contrary, in many instances, instead of getting oriented to the other disabilities, these specialists get into the routine of a regular subject teacher.

Classroom Transactions

The entire premise of inclusive education hinges on classroom teachers' ability to provide differentiated learning environment tailored to the needs of students with disabilities. However, a number of authors (Shah, 2005; Unnikrishnan, 2010) have pointed out that the regular school teachers in India lack familiarity with these critical skills. In addition, a vast majority of the teachers utilize one -method - for - all as a dominant form of transaction. This approach therefore severely

limits the educational opportunities for a child with a disability to benefit from education.

In many schools with students with disability, they are just let to be in the class and are grossly ignored by teachers. It has been recorded that even when Teacher Interns from pre service programmes approach the regular teachers with queries about such children, the response given by the regular teachers often is ‘ignore them, they cannot learn anything’. Such expressions of related attitude and conceptions are commonly observed among regular teachers.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, it can be said that there are more similarities between the approaches of various countries toward inclusive education than there are significant differences. India, with its very specific cultural and historical background cannot be compared to the developed countries with reference to progress in the area of inclusive education. There is enough research evidence to state that India’s progress vis-à-vis inclusive education is comparable with many other countries especially the South Asian countries. Having said this, it is clear that whichever the country may be, inclusive policies need to address the local needs emerging from the contextual uniqueness and specificities. Adopting models from external contexts without due consideration of the sociocultural, economic and political context and corresponding requirements will not result in effective and sustainable practice.

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