

THE CATALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM: INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Children with disabilities must be accepted in a school as part of the inclusion process and be allowed to participate in the classroom. The Indian constitution, the Kothari Commission, the Action Plan for Children and Youth with Disabilities (2005), the National Policy for People with Disabilities (2006), and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016) all emphasize inclusion. An inclusive education model is proposed in this paper for children with mild and moderate intellectual disabilities in India, as well as the barriers to their inclusion in school. It is the responsibility of special schools to educate children with severe and profound intellectual disabilities. According to this model, special educators, psychologists, medical experts, and the principal should consult with one another before admitting a child to an inclusive setting. These children should be placed in separate classes with the normally growing children after they have been graded in each subject. There should be no distinction made based on a child's chronological age or any other age-appropriate factor. In this model, the general teacher shall teach the same content to all the children during their sessions in the normal classes and the co-teacher or special education teacher shall teach children with intellectual disabilities in the areas where they need intervention (reading, writing, speaking, mathematics, etc.). In art/craft activities, physical education classes, storytime, music/dance activities, and other recreational activities, children with intellectual disabilities should be integrated with normal children. To remediate or enhance course content, provide more intensive instruction, or receive related services such as speech and language therapy, psychological services, and occupational therapy, these children will have access to a resource room. It is essential that teacher training programmes develop teachers' positive attitudes toward children with disabilities and equip them with the knowledge and skills to handle them in regular classrooms. The Indian education system needs to involve more scientists and policymakers in the education of children with intellectual disabilities in an inclusive environment.

Keywords: *Inclusive education, Intellectual disabilities, Resource room, Special teacher, Individualized Education Programme.*

Introduction

The inclusion of the children with disabilities is about the child's right to participate and also it is the duty of the school to accept the child. The inclusion of children with disabilities in regular schools is now one of the most significant issue facing the education community both nationally and internationally (Sharma et al, 2008). For promoting socialization between disabled and non-disabled children, inclusion is the best practice. An inclusive approach works towards eradication of stigmas, caters for individual learner's rights, encourages staff teamwork, provide opportunities for special needs children to function in the real world to demonstrate their strengths (Hayden and Thompson, 2000). It is important to create an inclusive environment in the classroom for all children, especially children with disabilities (National Curriculum Framework, 2005).

The Convention against Discrimination in Education of United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) prohibits any discrimination, exclusion or segregation in education. Salamanca Statement (1994) calls on all governments to give the highest priority to inclusive education. This statement adopted by the representatives of 92 governments and 25 international organizations in 1994 has definitely set the policy agenda for inclusive education on a global basis (UNESCO, 1994). Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD, United Nations, 2006) emphasizes that people with disabilities have the right to education without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunities. The UNCPRD (2006) calls on all States Parties to ensure an inclusive education system at all levels. Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC, 1974), recommended placing the children with disabilities in regular schools without making any changes in the school to accommodate and support diverse needs. National Action Plan for Inclusion in Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities (IECYD, 2005) emphasized the inclusion of children and young persons with disability in general educational settings from Early Childhood to Higher Education, by providing them with an accessible, affordable and appropriate learning environment. This plan specifically moves from integration towards inclusion. IECYD, (2005) recommended modification of the existing physical infrastructures and teaching methodologies to meet the needs of all children, including children with special needs. The major opposition to IECYD was that it allows children with severe intellectual disabilities to receive home-bound training. The United Nations General Assembly adopted its Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2016) lays down the principle for the empowerment of persons with disabilities such as full and effective participation and inclusion in society. The linguistic shift from the term integration to inclusion was formally introduced in the National Curriculum Framework for Secondary Education, (NCFSE, 2000) by the NCERT which recommended inclusive schools for all as a way to provide quality education to all learners. Another endeavour of the Indian government was in the form of Scheme of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (2000) where the major components are children with Special Education Needs and the major strategy being employed for providing access to education for them is by the convergence of existing provisions for this group.

Most of the Indian policies from the Indian constitution to the Kothari Commission, the Action Plan for Children and Youth with Disabilities (2005), the National Policy for People with Disabilities (2006) and Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016) emphasized on inclusion. Although these policies are inclusive in nature many of them tend to discriminate against people with intellectual disabilities, especially in terms of mainstream versus special schooling. Unfortunately, persons with intellectual disabilities are discriminated and marginalized more than people with physical disabilities.

- **Need and rationale for the Inclusive Education of children with intellectual disabilities**

There are few services available for children with intellectual disabilities, partly because educators have to make changes to the curriculum to accommodate these children, whereas children with physical or locomotor disabilities are often able to learn the same material as children without disabilities. In addition, due to social stigma, parents and families are more likely to keep their children with intellectual disabilities hiding them at home. Moreover, the requirement of society is that learners with special needs should be educated along with other learners in inclusive schools, which are cost-effective and have sound pedagogical practices (NCFSE, 2000). Instead of adopting ideas from the developed countries and plasticizing in Indian conditions, it is imperative to develop models of inclusion that is based on the cultural differences existing in India.

OBJECTIVE

This paper proposes an Inclusive Education Model for children with mild and moderate intellectual disabilities for Indian schools and focuses on the barriers to the inclusive education of these children.

- **An Inclusive Education model for children with intellectual disabilities**

The suggestions given in this proposed model are exclusively for the children with mild and moderate intellectual disabilities only.

- **Placement:**

The decision to admit the children with mild and moderate intellectual disabilities in an inclusive setting should be in consultation with a team of special educators, psychologists, medical experts and principal of the school. Speech therapists, a physiotherapist or occupational therapist, can also be consulted. The team of experts should review the performance of each child twice a year. Grade placement of children with intellectual disabilities shall be on the basis of their ability to learn, maturity, experience, and level of

motivation which are prerequisite for the learning. This placement should be irrespective of their chronological age and other age-appropriate criteria. In the United Kingdom, readymade performance scales are often used as a curriculum-based assessment. But in the absence of any readymade test in India, schools can use their regular teacher made tests used to assess the children without disabilities for filling vacancies in various classes with adequate modifications as required by the curriculum proposed in the model. After the grade level assessment/testing of these children in each subject by the school, they should be placed in different classes with their counterparts children. This testing by the school shall help to prepare individual timetables, assessing their subject-specific needs on the basis of each child's concentration, memory, and level of intellectual functioning.

- **Timetable:**

Each child should be provided with individual timetables and attend regular mainstream classes according to their ability to learn. For example, the children can attend mathematics Grade-1 in class-1, language Grade-2 in class-2, social studies Grade-3 in Class-3, physical activities Grade- 4 in Class-4, arts Grade-4 in Class-4 according to the needs of the children. Children with intellectual disabilities can be placed to lower grades and then shifted to the higher grades according to their ability to learn and their performance level. Since the children with intellectual disabilities usually have short attention spans, therefore, time duration of the classroom teaching should be appropriate.

- **Classroom teaching:**

As proposed in this model, during their sessions in the regular classes, the mainstream teacher shall teach all the children the same content and the co-teacher or special education teacher shall teach children with intellectual disabilities in the areas where they need intervention (reading, writing, speaking, mathematics, etc). Both teachers share the planning, teaching, and supporting equally. The children with above average intellectual level in the class whose number is quite low can also contribute through peer teaching children with intellectual disabilities who have been placed in the same class. These children with intellectual disabilities should be integrated with normal children for art/craft activities, physical education classes, storybook time, music/dance activities and other recreation activities. Balakrishnan & DJK (2012) recommended age-wise participation in selected co-curricular and extracurricular activities to be allowed for students with SEN along with mainstream children. Children with intellectual disabilities have the benefit of having children without disabilities who would model acceptable behaviour and adaptive skills for them (Hayden and Thompson, 2000). The social acceptance of children with intellectual disabilities increases through social contacts with a greater number of classmates and schoolmates without disabilities (Hayden and Thompson, 2000).

- **Maintenance of records:**

Every subject teacher and special teacher should set individualized goals for each child with intellectual disabilities and maintain the record of each child which should be periodically reviewed. Individualised Education Programme should be developed for each child which should be properly implemented and periodically reviewed. The need to individualize teaching to take into account the learning needs of children with intellectual disabilities is a matter of best teaching practice (McDonnell, 1998).

- **Curriculum:**

This model is based on the premises that general education is to enable future citizens to be effective agents of change when faced with challenges. So the curriculum should be framed accordingly. But the demands of the curriculum of children with normal intellectual functioning are beyond the scope of children with intellectual disabilities. So, there is a need to offer an inclusive education curriculum that encourages children with intellectual disabilities to realize their potential and contribute towards their society. The curriculum should be structured in such a way by the teachers that the content taught should be age appropriate and useful to them in their daily lives. According to UNESCO (2009), accessible and flexible curriculum, textbooks, and learning material are very important for children with intellectual disabilities. Curriculum differentiation for diverse learners in the process of modifying or adapting the curriculum according to the different ability levels of the children in one class (UNESCO, 2009). According to the National Curriculum Framework, (2005), the curriculum must provide appropriate challenges and create enabling opportunities for children to experience success in learning and achievement to the best of their potential. Teaching and learning processes in the classroom should be planned to respond to the diverse

needs of these children. This model of inclusive education follows the mainstream curriculum but it should be simplified according to the level of each child with intellectual disabilities by the subject teacher and special teacher. Balakrishnan & DJK (2012) suggested that readiness levels should be kept in mind when drawing up IEPs which should be made available to the mainstream teacher and form the basis of resource room monitoring. According to UNESCO (2004), there is wide agreement and support for using general education context and curriculum content and not using other context and curriculum content.

- **Resource room:**

After their sessions in normal classrooms, they shall return to the resource room where the special teacher will monitor their progress and record their performance regularly. These children shall have access to a resource room for remediation or enhancement of course content, more intensive instructional sessions, or to receive related services, such as speech and language therapy, psychological services and occupational therapy. These children should be trained in living and vocational skills according to their interests and abilities.

- **Classroom environment:**

The classroom environment is another concern. Teaching and learning processes in the classroom should be planned to respond to the diverse needs of children (National Curriculum Framework, 2005). The inclusive classroom should be ideally located in the middle of normal classrooms rather than in any corner that shall give them an opportunity to interact with normal children in their leisure time. In the inclusive classroom, children are doing different things, independently and with others. They have to move from one learning environment to another. The arrangement of the classrooms should be student-centered and therefore, allow for freedom of movement. Children should have opportunities to make choices. All the children should consider the classroom a community in which each student is important and contributes to the success of the community. The physical arrangement of the classroom need to be modified. Furniture should be rearranged to provide more space for pathways for children in wheelchairs. Single desk and chair should be preferred than two or three seat desks which are usually found in regular classrooms. Classrooms should have seating arrangement in rows with table chair sets as in normal classrooms and few chairs and tables should be provided in the rear of the class with blackboard for the children with intellectual disabilities. This will facilitate teaching children with intellectual disabilities and provide facilities for the special teacher or resource teachers to communicate with these children. In this proposed model, it is assumed that there can be 35 children up to class 8 and in a class, there would be 5 or 6 children with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities which are approximately 2% of the mainstream student population. Balakrishnan & DJK (2012) suggested transit logistics for inter-class movement incorporated in the timetable in such a way that class duration and the number of periods for each subject for the student with intellectual disability do not adversely affect mainstream students.

This model will not overburden the mainstream teacher and at the same time, the benefits of inclusive education are available to children with intellectual disabilities. Children with intellectual disabilities and physical disabilities would need the modified environment and appropriate assistive devices which should be fulfilled by the school. For implementing this model of curriculum, there is a need to train mainstream teachers in setting up and coordinating such an environment.

Criteria for completion should be grade equivalent and usually, these children end up their education up to middle school or 8th class. The school leaving age should also be raised to 20 years. After completing their education, these children should be provided with training at vocational training centres for their development of better adult living. Balakrishnan & DJK (2012) also recommended that students with cognitive disability be included up to grade eight, up to a maximum age of 18 years.

- **Requirements of the model:**

Mainstream children should be sensitized to the needs of children with intellectual disabilities and moreover, their teacher has to play the role model. Joint parents counselling sessions should be held by the school to educate them about inclusive education. This will facilitate acceptance of the inclusive education in the community as a whole which is of greater importance than acceptance in the school. There should be coordinated meetings between the mainstream teacher, special teacher, and resource room teachers that help in sharing their experiences for effective teaching. To promote inclusion education, resource room teacher should participate in the co-curricular and extracurricular activities along with the mainstream teacher which helps in the planning of different activities for the children with intellectual disabilities.

Teachers should be trained through seminars, workshops or courses that help teachers acquire knowledge and skills to be competent in the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in mainstream schools.

- **Barriers to the inclusive education of the children with intellectual disabilities**

The physical and attitudinal barriers socially and politically constructed within the environment are the obstacles to inclusive education (Peters, 1993). Implementing the inclusion model of education is time-consuming and requires a high level of human resources (Hayden and Thompson, 2000). Funding, policy issues, large class numbers and negative attitudes towards learners with intellectual disabilities are the challenges of inclusion (Badza and Tafangombe, 2010). Lack of qualified personnel and lack of supervision, monitoring and evaluation of the system cause problems in the inclusion of learners with intellectual disabilities (Badza and Tafangombe, 2010). There are convictions among teachers that special schools are better and can relieve children with intellectual disabilities from the stress of continuous performance pressure of failure and underachievement in regular schools. Some teachers felt that they had little to no input on the instructional activities and content meant for children with intellectual disabilities (Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007; Matzen et al, 2010). According to the National Curriculum Framework, (2005), a lesson plan or unit plan for an inclusive class should indicate how the teacher alters the ongoing activity to meet the different needs of children. Failure to learn is currently being mechanically addressed through remediation, which usually means simply repeating the lesson. Teachers trained for the regular school find it difficult to teach the child with intellectual disabilities to use the toilet as a lesson (Chimedza & Peters, 2001). The regular teacher would consider reading or writing as the lesson rather than teaching daily living skills. Therefore regular school teachers may be unable to teach daily living skills which make them self-dependent in their lives. Special education teachers with adequate qualification are still unable to make an impact which affects the proper implementation of inclusive education.

- **Implications of the model of inclusive education for children with intellectual disabilities**

Setting up this proposed model of an inclusive education in a regular classroom/ school for the children with intellectual disabilities is cost-effective, easy to set up, educates children with intellectual disability in a less restrictive environment and gives them the opportunity to interact with normal children. In contrast, setting up special schools is difficult to set up. With the constant efforts by the government and non-government agencies, the goal of universalization of primary education and providing inclusive education in India is not difficult to achieve. The authors expect more fruitful results after field testing of this proposed model of inclusive education.

There is little evidence-based research on the effects of inclusive education of the educational achievements of the children with intellectual disabilities in India and other developing countries. In India, there is a need for further research in the education of children with intellectual disabilities in an inclusive setting as well as need to involve more scientists and policymakers in the education system.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The role of the special schools should be changed in order to create a society that is more inclusive. Inclusive education must be carefully supervised and well-planned in order to meet the needs and not only the rights of children with special needs (Hayden and Thompson, 2000). Planning inclusive education programs should balance the requirements of both children with intellectual disabilities and children in the general population. Collaboration between general education teachers and special educators is essential to achieving the educational objectives of children with intellectual disabilities. The ability of special educators to collaborate with general education personnel for the education of these children, as well as their availability and expertise, are critical to the success of inclusive education. Among mainstream professors, discriminatory attitudes and skepticism frequently predominate. Inclusive education is still hampered by the ignorance and prejudice of parents of typically developing children toward including students with intellectual disabilities in their classrooms. To alter the attitudes of the teachers, educational administrators, and other community members, special measures like orientation and sensitization programs should be implemented. For the achievement of inclusion, some writers have promoted relationships of collaboration between instructors and stakeholders because this would foster individual and team empowerment (Sharma et al., 2008). It is well acknowledged that teacher education programs must make sure that new teachers are prepared to instruct effectively in classrooms where students have a range of learning requirements (Sharma et al., 2008). The schools should provide for regular instructors to attend in-service training sessions, seminars, training sessions, or workshops on the importance and various facets of inclusive education. The goal of teacher education programs should be to instill in educators the necessary knowledge and ability to manage students with intellectual disabilities in regular classroom settings. To accommodate all children in inclusive environments, teachers must be

proficient in a variety of instructional techniques (Kisanji, 1997). Instead of depending solely on pre-service training, Badza and Tafangombe (2010) argued that each school should assume responsibility for the professional development of its own employees. In-service training sessions or workshops for regular teachers on special education should be organized by the Schools Psychological Services, according to Barbra and Joyline's (2014) recommendation. To meet the requirements of each student with intellectual disability, teachers must create a highly customized Individualized Education Plan (IEP). For learners with intellectual disability, Forlin (2008) supports a highly personalized education strategy or program. In partnership with other teachers or with groups outside of the school, teachers can study effective techniques for educating all students, including those who are thought to have impairments (National Curriculum Framework, 2005). The curriculum must be carefully chosen to avoid reinforcing preconceptions about the preferences, options, and capacities of various groups (National Curriculum Framework, 2005). As a result, a key component of an inclusive curriculum would be the gradual integration of vocationally oriented skills as part of exposure to the workplace (National Curriculum Framework, 2005). In order to adequately meet the educational requirements of students with intellectual impairments in inclusive settings, there is a need for an inclusive education policy.

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