

Inclusive Teacher Education in India: Issues and prospects

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Inclusive Education is meant for all learners including young people with or without disabilities being able to learn together in ordinary pre-school provisions, schools, and community educational settings with appropriate network of support services (MHRD, 2003). But despite of all the efforts of government and non-governmental agencies, many children with disabilities are still denied access to educational institutions due to attitudinal barrier of normal teachers towards these children. More than 2-3 per cent of children with disabilities have access to preschool and school education. The Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) estimates that 30 million disabled children are in need of education; it aims to educate 10 per cent of all disabled children by 2020. RCI (1996) report states that the number of trained special education teacher are extremely small considering the number of children with disabilities that require their services. There were only 9,492 specially trained teachers in India. RCI also projected a need for more than 700,000 professionals and personnel to serve the population of persons with disabilities in India. Hence there is urgent need to train huge number of special teachers to achieve the target. In the present paper the author has tried to explore and analyze pre-service inclusive training programs running across the country. Special focus has also been laid on the analysis of content, input, output and feedback mechanism of the modular inclusive training in Bihar.

Keywords

Inclusive Teacher Education

Introduction

Inclusive education is education designed to meet the unique learning needs of students who learn more slowly than their normal peers. Inclusive education means, “The act of ensuring that all children despite their differences, receive the opportunity of being part of the same classroom as other children of their age, and in the process get the opportunity of being exposed to the curriculum to their optimal potential”. Our society reacts to Children with Special Needs in ways which are different from the way it reacts to normal children. These reactions are influenced mainly by the causes of exceptionality and the label assigned to it. One must keep in mind that teaching CWSN is a process for helping students with special learning needs and that process

must be an integral part of the general education system. Perhaps, all students – both with special educational need and without special need are more alike than they are different. They need to interact and share experiences. Such an interaction is very important for CWSN in order to learn to behave in expected ways, they must be exposed to expected behaviors. Such an interaction is equally important for children without special needs, because such an interaction brings about an understanding of how unimportant differences are. And with that understanding comes acceptance.

Need of Inclusive Teacher Education

Inclusive teacher education is the need of the day, as the all elementary and secondary schools became inclusive and all the normal and disabled children are being accommodated in general classroom teaching learning process. Children with special needs (CWSN) need special care in general classroom. They need a specialist like a speech correctionist, special educator, social worker, psychologist or any other special education worker. These specialists need to work out the specific needs of CWSN in school. Such a specialist can deal with the CWSN in a school on an itinerant basis. Other schools may also have CWSN who may need a special educator or itinerant teachers. Special educators can share this resource among schools. Itinerant teacher is helpful more in rural areas where CWSN are few and scattered. Thus one teacher can serve many schools. This program is also well suited to certain types of exceptionality such as defective speech or partial vision, which require limited services or materials. Itinerant teachers are employed under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) across the country under Integrated Education for disabled (IED) program. Special educators-cum-Rehab Professionals are also appointed in general mainstream schools. In exercise of power conferred in Sub-section (1) of section 23 of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (35 of 2009) and in pursuance of Notification No. S.O. 750 (E) dated 31st March, 2010 issued by the Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Human Resources and Development, Government of India, the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) laid down that a person having B.Ed. (Special Education) or D.Ed. (SE) may be eligible for the appointment as teacher in general schools.

The majority of school teachers in India are not trained to design and implement educational programs for students with disabilities in regular schools. Most teacher training programs in India do not have a unit on Disability Studies. The universities, which do cover some aspects of special education in their teacher training programs, fail to train teachers adequately to work in integrated settings. Also, placement of pre-service teachers in special or integrated schools is rarely given consideration.

Great variations are noted in the content, process, and examination of existing special education programs as well in the country. However, the situation may improve in the coming years as the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) will periodically evaluate special education programs to ensure that each program meets minimum standards (RCI, 1996). The number of trained special educators is also limited. The most recent report of the RCI (1996) states that the number of trained special education teacher are extremely small considering the number of children with disabilities that require their services. There were only 9,492 specially trained teachers. Of these,

4,295 were trained to teach students with mental retardation, 1,079 were trained to teach students with visual disabilities, 4,011 were trained to teach students with hearing impairments, and 107 were trained to teach students with locomotor disabilities in India. To address this severe shortage of trained teachers, the RCI recommended that an additional 700,000 professionals and personnel including special teachers are required to be trained. At this backdrop, RCI must consider reformulating existing teacher training programs for special educators, with a greater emphasis on integrated education. Special educators could be a key resource as they can be used to train regular school educators in implementing integrated education. They can also act as an itinerant teachers or resource teachers (RTs) working in partnership with a number of regular school educators to advise them on practical issues related to education of students with disabilities.

Issues of inclusion of disabled children

Teacher education and school leadership are essential for the implementation of inclusive education in the classroom (Ainscow, 2005; Sandhill & Singh, 2005; Booth et al, 2003; Ainscow, 1991), yet the standard of teacher training courses across India varies hugely, and they usually approach the inclusion of children with disabilities from a deficit perspective. In the general teacher education diplomas and degrees available nationwide, there is an optional ‘special needs’ paper to train and ‘prepare’ teachers to identify and diagnose disability. However, it is not an integral part of the training, and it does not train teachers to deal with diversity or challenge negative attitudes (Singal, 2005a). This reinforces the ‘difference’ of children with disabilities who, some believe, can only be taught by teachers qualified specifically for them (Singal, 2005a). However, it is ultimately teacher treatment of students in the classroom, rather than the training per se, that would reinforce this difference.

Interestingly, distrust in both the special and mainstream education systems leads some parents to keep their children with disabilities at home for fear of their abuse or neglect in the classroom (Julka, 2005), which may then be interpreted by teachers as a lack of community interest in education for their children, as demonstrated in the PROBE Report (PROBE, 1999). This raises the question of how teachers are being trained to include children with disabilities and to what extent they put this training into daily practice. Without access to qualitative research data specifically observing these teacher education outcomes, it is impossible to know. While it may be true that a lack of teacher training to deal with diversity or challenge negative attitudes results in a specialist, medical deficit, focus, there is certainly a need to train teachers in specific disabilities for students who could benefit from special lessons in skills such as Braille, sign-language or speech therapy.

Many teachers do not feel equipped to teach children with disabilities and complain that they need more time to instruct these students. Many government programs have included a teacher training component in an attempt to induce institutional change. However, a ‘special need’ focus and a lack of training for management, combined with didactic training methodology do little to alter the classroom status quo, especially when responsibility is shifted onto a specialist resource teacher rather than methods altered to suit all students. When teacher training is taken out of the context of program islands and geographically accessible environments, teachers are found to be reluctant to attend training because it takes place in their free time and holidays (Lal, 2005). Teacher posts remain unfilled, even in Delhi, because of a lack of qualified personnel, which can

also lead to state employment of under-qualified teachers, further impacting on school quality (Lal, 2005). However, a teacher can be fully qualified, but if the training is sub-standard it will still have a negative impact on teaching and learning quality in the classroom, whereas an under-qualified, poorly paid teacher with some imagination and innovative practices may have a positive effect.

The poor quality educational provision in many schools is reflected in the fact that many government job reservations for adults with disabilities remain unfilled. Some may interpret this as due to the lack of ability many in Indian society believe is inherent in the disabled community. It is more likely to be directly related to the fact that few children with disabilities get to or stay in school and there is also a lack of qualified teachers. However, school (and pedagogical) quality would appear to be one of the keys to an end to marginalization for children with disabilities. The current inclusion policy in India is a major obstacle to the unlocking of this doorway to freedom and empowerment.

Teacher training programs for inclusive teaching-learning include students of all ability levels, as well as help in spreading awareness to teachers about the importance and benefits of inclusion as part of the most important components of implementing a system of inclusive education, because the teachers are the people on-the-ground who are going to accommodate the students. The World Bank claims that the attitudes of general educators or educators in a mainstream environment, towards students with disabilities are generally improving, probably as a result of the various policies and schemes of the 2000s. The Rehabilitation Council (RCI) is in charge of teacher training courses. The RCI currently runs 56 long term and short term courses for 16 categories of professionals run by various universities/institutions. 1176 professionals and 1791 personnel are registered with the Central Rehabilitation Council taking the total number of registered professionals and personnel to 30,935 (MSJE, 2007). These efforts need to be further supported. Teaching educators about the importance of inclusion and how to run inclusive classroom is imperative for reaching the goal of education for all.

Inclusive Education through Short term In-service Training

The modular in-service inclusive teachers training system was developed in response to an urgent need for advance and continuing training, and to a desire to divide the education process into basic units in order to create more flexible structures and put an end to the traditional division of educational content into school years. Designing the module needs knowledge, understanding of teaching-learning process, intellectual qualities, professional skills and skill transferability. Modular training thus implies more often than not a division of the knowledge or skills to be acquired into a number of training units that can be absorbed or read through independently; the possibility of combining different types of knowledge in a single module in order to take into account the interdisciplinary of the content of certain subjects is by no means ruled out.

In Bihar, more than half a dozen of training modules were developed by the BEP. Some of them are: Ujala III (2006), Pahal (2005) Samarth (2006), Sampreshan, Anterdrishiti etc. BEP (Bihar Education Project) has developed 'Pahal' (2005) an inclusive training module to sensitize teachers towards children with special needs (CWSN). It includes identification of CWSN,

causes of disability, concessions and facilities provided under Government Scheme/SSA and role of VSS/community representatives. Another new module 'Samarth' (2006) a three days teachers training module is also developed by the BEP. It is concentrated exclusively upon Inclusive Education (IE). The issues undertaken in this module are; concept of IE, need of its training, types and levels of disability, sensitization, IEP, causes of disability, teaching techniques facilities for Children With Special Needs (CWSN), rules and regulations for CWSN. Another 10 days Special Training Module 'Sampreshan' was developed for elementary teachers to sensitize towards the children with Hearing Impairment. It includes sensitization of teachers towards CWSN, concept of inclusive education and all about the Hearing Impairment. Another 30 days training module 'Antardristhi' was developed for elementary teachers. It includes the concept of children with visual impairment, guardian counseling and community motivation, legislation and concession, daily life skill, concept formation and sensory training, TLM and the development of IEP for Visually Impaired Children. 'Bodhi Samvad (Part-II) (2012), 10 days training module was developed to sensitize Primary Teachers towards CWSN. It includes the concept of Inclusive Education, difference between disability and impairment, sensitization towards children with special needs (CWSN), method of Identification of CWSN, how to minimize the affect of disability, school and class management for Inclusive Education and facilities provided under government Scheme/SSA.

Possible strategies to address some of the issues

Training of teachers

If inclusive education is to become a reality in India, then the training of teachers has to become a top priority. The educational authorities in India may adopt a policy of training one teacher from each school or a cluster of schools. The teacher would need to be provided with intensive training to work with various disabilities and could then act as an integration specialist or an inclusion facilitator for one or a number of schools located in close proximity. A similar strategy has already worked well in certain parts of India when several school teachers were specifically trained to work in integrated settings under the PIED program and is recommended by several researchers in India. Also in-service teachers would need continued training to update their skills and knowledge of integrated educational strategies.

It is clear that regular school educators need training in issues related to the implementation of integrated education. A question that arises with regard to such training is the identification of the specific content that should be included in these training programs. Given the enormous diversity in India (cultural, linguistic, socio-economic, etc.), further research is clearly warranted. Sharma (1992) suggest that the curriculum for pre-service training programs should be carefully developed, incorporating feedback from special and regular educators. Some research has been conducted in India that points out that educators need basic skills, professional knowledge, communication and interaction skills, knowledge about assessment techniques, and resource management, knowledge of multi-grade teaching, instructional techniques, and peer-tutoring and cooperative learning techniques to include students with disabilities into regular classes.

Need to design innovative system of training

Several authors have cautioned that India will not be able to successfully implement inclusive educational services unless regular school educators are trained at mass scale. Ramanujam has commented that the number of persons who need training is very large and the conventional training methods cannot simply meet the requirements. Therefore, there is a need to design some innovative models to train educators at mass level. One possibility to educate such a large number of teachers is by using Distance Open Learning or DOL (2001). Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) has a history of successfully running courses for a larger number of students using DOL mode. IGNOU, in association with Rehabilitation Council of India, is considering to offer various courses to the trainers of children with disabilities, including teachers. It is expected that such training, accompanied with ongoing in-service training, would prove very useful for school educators. It would, however, be important that practical aspects of implementing integrated education form a key part of any such course.

Conclusion

The School education and teacher education system is considered as the backbone of education system. For years the education system has provided special education and related services to Children with Special Needs and systematically developed a dual service delivery system comprising of different settings, different curricula, different services and different service providers for Children with or without Special Needs. There is urgent need of paradigm shift in teacher education, i.e., from integrated to inclusive teacher education.

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