

特別論文

Inclusive Education in India – An overview on policies and practices

Robinson THAMBURAJ

The inclusive education has been accepted and many models of IE have evolved to suit the needs and demands of children with special needs in developing countries including India now. Government and non-governmental agencies have started playing pivotal role especially in making policy changes, strategic approaches and implementing various schemes throughout the nation. The national perspective on inclusive education with various policies evolved and experimental schemes implemented have been discussed. An integrated flagship programme of the Government of India introduced during 2001 - 02, to attain Universal Elementary Education called 'Education for All (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan)' is discussed.

Key words: inclusive education, disability studies, children with special needs

Introduction

The inclusive education (IE) now being practiced throughout the globe because the learning needs and the disabled children demand special attention is not just about including people with disabilities; it is about including everyone, and making specific efforts to identify marginalised or excluded groups. The World Declaration on Education For All has categorised the basic strategies of IE as: (i) flexibility of curriculum and teaching approaches for children with special needs (ii) adequate training of resource personnel (iii) making barrier-free environment to improve accessibility (iv) flexible examination and assessment systems (v) provision of facilities of water, sanitation and safety standards as an integral part of education system (WDEFA1990). Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) a comprehensive and integrated flagship programme of the Government of India, introduced during 2001-02 to attain Uni-

versal Elementary Education (UEE) in the country in a mission mode. Launched in partnership with the State Governments, SSA aims to provide useful and relevant education to all children in the age group of 6-14 years by 2010. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) has visualised of providing quality primary education to all children.

The 2001 Census provided a broad idea about the magnitude of the prevalence of disability in India right up to the district level and hoped to serve as a tool for further detailed investigations by the governments and other agencies associated with the welfare and empowerment of the disabled. As per the Census, 1027 million people live in this country which has 28 states and 7 union territories. Census 2001 has revealed that 21.9 million people in India as suffering from one or the other kind of disability. This is equivalent to 2.13% of the population. Among the total disabled in the country, 12.6 million are males and 9.3 million are females. The number of disabled is more in rural than in urban areas. Among the five types of disabilities on which

data has been collected, disability in seeing at 48.5% emerges as the top category. Others in sequence are: In movement (27.9%), Mental (10.3%), Speech (7.5%), and Hearing (5.8%). The disabled by sex follow a similar pattern except for that the proportion of disabled females is higher in the category of seeing and in hearing.

Documents and policies

National pattern of school education structure comprises of 12 years of schooling – 5, 3, 2, and 2 years of primary, upper primary, secondary and higher secondary education respectively. The concept of integrating children with special needs (CWSN) in regular schools or (otherwise known as mainstreaming) was introduced in western countries during the 1960's and 70's witnessed new initiatives in the area of integrated education, with awareness and services for children with special needs becoming more accessible. Further thrust was given to this sector when the United Nations (UN) declared 1981 as the International Year of Disabled Persons, and 1983-1992 as the Decade of the Disabled. In this decade, UN standard rules on equalisation of opportunities for persons with disabilities were framed in which education of children with special needs in regular schools along with appropriate services was emphasized. This Decade also became memorable as the 'World Conference on Education For All' was held in March, 1990, which affirmed the ultimate goal of meeting the basic learning all children, youth and adults. UNESCO organized the World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca in June 1994, which caste responsibility on the general school system to find ways of successfully educating all children, including those who have serious disabilities. Thus, various declarations and decades promoted by organisations like United Nations have had an effect on the policies regarding persons with disabilities.

Within the country, efforts to educate children

with special needs began soon after independence when the then Ministry of Education established a special unit to deal with education of special children in 1947. The Ministry drew on the experience already gained by NGOs in this field since the last two decades of the nineteen-century, which saw the establishment of the first school for the Deaf in Bombay in 1883. The first school for the Blind was set up at Amritsar in 1887. Before the end of the century a number of special schools for the Blind and Deaf were set up. This had firmly established the special school tradition, which continued till the mid 1950s. At the same time, certain international agencies like Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind and Cristophael Blinden Mission (CBM) began experimenting with the integration of visually impaired children and other children. The success of international experiment in placing children with disabilities in regular schools began to be noticed. The various policies evolved at national level are as follows:

1. National Policy on Education, 1986 (NPE):

The NPE brought the fundamental issue of equality centre stage. Section 4.9 of the policy clearly focuses on the needs of the children with disabilities. "The objective should be to integrate the physically and mentally handicapped with the general community as equal partners, to prepare them for normal growth and to enable them to face life with courage and confidence."

2. Plan of Action, 1992 (POA):

The NPE was followed by POA (1992). The POA suggested a pragmatic placement principle for children with special needs. It postulated that a child with disability who can be educated in a general school should be educated in a general school only and not in a special school. Even those children who are initially admitted to special schools for training in plus curriculum skills should be transferred to general schools once they acquire daily living skills, communication skills and basic academic skills.

3. Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992 (RCI):

The POA was strengthened by the enactment of the RCI Act, 1992. Experience showed that there was no mechanism in the country to standardize and monitor the training of special educators and other rehabilitation professionals in the country. Therefore, in 1992, Parliament of India enacted the RCI Act, subsequently amended in 2000, to establish a statutory mechanism for monitoring and standardizing courses for the training of 16 categories of professionals required in the field of special education and rehabilitation of persons with disability. Training of special educators and resource teachers that can offer support services to children with special needs in regular schools is the responsibility of RCI.

4. Persons With Disabilities Act, 1995:

The most landmark legislation in the history of special education in India is the Persons with Disabilities (Equal opportunities, protection of rights & full participation) Act, 1995. This comprehensive Act covers seven disabilities namely blindness, low vision, hearing impaired, locomotor impaired, mental retardation, leprosy cured and mental illness.

5. National Trust Act -1999:

Another landmark legislation was the National Trust Act. In 1999, the Indian Parliament passed an Act entitled “National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disability.” This Act seeks to protect and promote the rights of persons who, within the disability sector, have been even more marginalized than others. Though the National Trust Act of 1999 does not directly deal with the education of children with special needs, one of its thrust areas is to promote programmes, which foster inclusion and independence by creating barrier free environment, developing functional skills of the disabled and promoting self-help groups.

These three landmark legislations have highlighted the enormous thrust that this area has received

from the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD).

Initial Experiments on Integrated Education in India:

The early attempts to include CWSN in regular schools were through Project Integrated Education for the Disabled (PIED) and District Primary Education Programme (DPEP).

1. Project Integrated Education for the Disabled (PIED):

The first pilot project on integrated education in India came in the form of Project Integrated Education for the Disabled (PIED). PIED launched in 1987, was a joint venture of MHRD and UNICEF. This project was implemented in one administrative block each in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Nagaland, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Mizoram, Delhi Municipal Corporation and Baroda Municipal Corporation. In these ten blocks, 6000 children with special needs were integrated in regular schools.

2. District Primary Education Programme (DPEP):

The success of PIED led to the inclusion of the component of Integrated Education of the Disabled (IED) in DPEP, a scheme launched by the Government of India for the development of elementary education. IED covered 242 districts of 18 states. In these states, approximately 6.21 lakh children with special needs have been enrolled in regular schools with adequate support services. DPEP was launched in 42 districts of seven states and later it was expanded. The guidelines on IED in DPEP were developed in 1997. IED became operational in DPEP in 1998. After action plans on IED were developed by different states and then state specific strategies were evolved differently on every state depending on state specific vision and needs. In each state interventions were broadly made in the area of teacher training, material development and provision of re-

source support to CWSN. Resource teachers were oriented and trained to the needs, problems and implications of every kind of disabilities. As a result there has been substantial expansion of IED in terms of number of disabled children identified and enrolled. Department of Elementary Education and Literacy reported that through DPEP/SSA about 21,00,000 CWSN identified and about 16,00,000 of them were in the regular school system in a span of 8 years. An important issue associated with any large scale scheme/intervention is that how an effect is expected. The impact of DPEP on IED appeared to be an important issue when planners were about to frame strategies for SSA.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Education for all scheme

The key objective of SSA is Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE). Three important aspects of UEE are access, enrolment and retention of all children in 6-14 years of age. This goal of UEE, has further been facilitated by the Constitutional (86th Amendment) Act, making free and compulsory elementary education a Fundamental Right, for all the children in the age group of 6-14 years. The major thrust of SSA is on inclusion or mainstreaming CWSN into the fabric of formal elementary schooling. Experiences of programmes like DPEP and various research findings have shown that inclusion is best determined by the individual needs of the child.

The Challenges

It can be seen from the foregoing that several novel initiatives have been taken up to address the divergent needs of special children. An endeavour has also been made to develop in teachers, the necessary attitude, skills and competencies required to deal effectively with children with various special educational needs. The focus of SSA is now on reaching out to those out of school CWSN, not cov-

ered so far and developing a strategy that will ensure that every child with special needs receives continuing on site support. This perhaps is the biggest challenge of all and a crucial determinant of the success of the inclusive education programme under SSA.

Conclusion

There are a few important issues in IE that are being continued to be stressed upon by Government of India with the States, namely, the percentage of CWSN identified being only 1.44 % of the total child population in comparison to Census 2001, wherein 2.1% of the population has been found to have some disability. Hence, States should further streamline identification procedures. There is a need for monitoring mechanisms to assess both the quantitative and qualitative progress made by States. The statistics mention 57.31% schools have been made barrier-free, but more schools need to be covered.

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