

Inclusion in Education: Role of Educationist

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Abstract

Inclusive education (IE) is a new approach towards educating the children with disability and learning difficulties with that of normal ones under the same ridge. It seeks to address the learning needs of all children with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion. The paper aims to focus the role of educationist to promote the development of successful inclusive schools and suggests that one way of overcoming these difficulties is to reconsider the roles and responsibilities of educationist in inclusive education and also provides some suggestions to be acted out well. In this regard, a questionnaire exploring the knowledge and the understanding of the school teachers on inclusive education was administered as a part of the pilot study on 50 elementary teachers chosen by incidental sampling from the nearby schools of Delhi. The questionnaire consisted of 30 closed ended questions. The mean score obtained was 23, which was quite appreciable. 21 teachers out of a total of 50 i.e. 42% had scored below the mean marks in the questionnaire whereas 29 teachers had scored above the mean marks. It was found that most of the teachers restricted the concept of inclusion still to 'disability' only. They still regarded diversity in the classrooms as a hindrance that needs to be overcome for successful learning. Whereas, low scores of the teachers emphasized that a lot firmer work is needed to put in for the in-service training of the school teachers who actually will respond to the needs of the students at the grass root levels.

Key words: Inclusion, Inclusive education, Role of educationist in Inclusive education.

1. Introduction

1.1 What is Inclusion?

We all know that every child is unique and different from each other. They have different abilities, learn in different ways, and at different paces. In Inclusive classrooms, learning-friendly, and barrier-free environments should be created in every school and community throughout the world so that all children will be enabled to develop to their full academic, social, emotional, and physical potentials and rise up to the level of a normal child. It is important to remember that a child's academic potential cannot be developed separately from her/his social, emotional and physical potential, as they are interdependent aspects of a child's development. This is possible only in flexible education system that assimilates the needs of diverse range of learners and adapts itself to meet these needs.

Without access to a comprehensive support system, many children with disabilities will never enroll in school, will drop out, or will stay in school, yet be prevented from reaching their full potential. Individual support should primarily be given by the class

teacher (educationist). They may also need assistance from school-based and itinerant resource teachers to ensure that the children concerned receive quality support that is based on their individual learning needs.

The principle of inclusive education was adopted at the “World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality” (Salamanca, Spain 1994) and was restated at the World Education Forum (Dakar, Senegal 2000). The idea of inclusion is further supported by the United Nation’s Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for Person with Disability Proclaiming Participation and equality for all.

We see that majority of children with disabilities in developing countries are out of school, while many of those who are in school are enrolled in special schools away from their families, friends, and peers. However, more and more children with disabilities enroll in regular schools where they play, learn, and grow up with their non-disabled peers (inclusive education).

The National Curriculum Framework 2005, states that a policy of inclusion needs to be implemented in all schools and throughout our education systems. The participation of all children needs to be ensured in all spheres of their life in and outside the school.

The NCF 2005 says:

- ❖ Inclusive education is about embracing all.
- ❖ Disability is a social responsibility accept it.
- ❖ No selection procedures to be adopted for denying admission to learners with disabilities.
- ❖ Children do not fail, they only indicate failure of the school.
- ❖ Accept difference.... Celebrate diversity.
- ❖ Inclusion is not confined to the disabled. It also means no exclusion.
- ❖ Learn human rights... conquer human wrongs.
- ❖ Handicap is a social construct, deconstruct handicap.
- ❖ Make provision -not restriction; adjust to the needs of the child.
- ❖ Remove physical, social and attitudinal barriers.
- ❖ Partnership is our strength such as School- community; school- teachers; teachers- teachers;
- ❖ Teachers-children; children-children; teachers-parents; school systems and outside systems.
- ❖ All good practices of teaching are practices of inclusion
- ❖ Learning together is beneficial for every child.
- ❖ Support services are essential services.
- ❖ If you want to teach, learn from the child.
- ❖ Identify strengths not limitations.
- ❖ Inculcate mutual respect and interdependence.

Inclusion is not an experiment to be tested but a value to be followed. All the children whether they are disabled or not have the right to education as they are the future citizens of the country. In the prevailing Indian situation resources are insufficient even to provide quality mainstream schools for common children, it is unethical and impracticable to put children with special needs to test or to prove anything in a research study to live and learn in the mainstream of school and community (Dash, 2006).

Kugelmass, (2004) Inclusive education means including differently abled children in regular classrooms that have been designed for normal children. It refers to an education system that accommodates all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions.

Thus, educationist sentiments, beliefs, attitudes, values, professional competence are known to influence their teaching practices and management strategies in the classroom, and therefore, to directly influence students' learning process and management. An educationist beliefs and knowledge about the learning capacity of children with disabilities may determine the extent to which the educationist is willing to make adjustment to teaching methods, curriculum, or classroom organisation, or indeed whether he or she even recognises that some students in the class do have special needs.

Successful inclusion is possible only when teachers display reasonably positive and accepting attitude towards children with disabilities and to the basic principles of inclusion. Teachers share responsibility for educating children with disabilities, they should possess knowledge of different disability types, characteristics of disabilities, learning styles, instructional techniques or methods, problem and behaviour management, etc. They must have the skills necessary to modify educational programmes to effectively meet the needs of individual students and adopt appropriate classroom practices to meet the needs of these students.

2. Inclusive Classroom Practices:

As general education classrooms include more and more diverse students, teachers realize the value of accepting each student as unique and special. Special educators understand that effective general education practices really are appropriate for students with special needs, and general educators often turn to special educators for additional ways to teach their increasingly diverse groups of students so that a balance could be maintained to achieve the goals of inclusive education.

2.1 Some of The Specific Classroom Practices Recommended in National Reports Is:

- ❖ LESS whole-class, teacher-directed instruction.
- ❖ LESS student passivity.
- ❖ LESS prizing and rewarding of silence in the classroom.
- ❖ LESS classroom time devoted to fill-in-the-blank worksheets, dittos, workbooks, and other "seatwork".
- ❖ LESS student time spent reading textbooks and basal readers.
- ❖ LESS effort by teachers to thinly "cover" large amounts of material.
- ❖ LESS rote memorization of facts and details.
- ❖ LESS stress on competition and grades.
- ❖ LESS use of pull-out special programs.
- ❖ LESS use of and reliance on standardized test
- ❖ MORE experimental, inductive, hands-on learning.
- ❖ MORE active learning.
- ❖ MORE enacting and modeling the principles of democracy in school.
- ❖ MORE choice for students.
- ❖ MORE time devoted to reading full, original, books.
- ❖ MORE deep study of a smaller number of topics.

- ❖ MORE emphasis on higher order thinking skills when learning key concepts and principles of a subject.
- ❖ MORE cooperative and collaborative activity.
- ❖ MORE delivery of special help to students in general education classrooms.
- ❖ MORE varied and cooperative roles for teachers, parents, administrators, and community members when teaching and evaluating student performance.

3. Role of Educationist in Inclusive Education:

Teacher has to provide high quality, holistic support and focused involvement with the children with special needs based on a joint perspective, mutual understanding and networking. Teachers with the support of the principal of school, colleagues, special educators and parents should develop effective ways of overcoming barriers to learning and supporting effective teaching through observing the quality of teaching and standards of pupils' achievement and by setting targets for enhancement. Teacher works as a catalyst between the principal of the school and children with special needs and their parents. In the field of education, teachers are viewed as the primary agents in the implementation of the philosophy of inclusive education; therefore, their perceptions may influence their behaviour towards and acceptance of children with disabilities. Further, the attitude of mainstream educators may have some bearing on the success of inclusive educational programme.

Mastropieri & Scruggs, (2010), stated that teachers play a pivotal role in mainstreaming inclusive education. The literature on inclusive education is undisputed about no matter how excellent the educational infrastructure might be, how well articulated educational policy might be, how well resourced a program might be, effective inclusion does not take place until regular classroom teachers deliver relevant and meaningful instruction to students with disabilities.

The key responsibilities of a teacher for inclusive education are as follows:

3.1 Curriculum Modification-The major task of the Educationist teaching in an inclusive classroom is to modify their curricula to meet the growing needs of their special education students. Curriculum modifications should include the provision of an audio-taped text, shortened assignments and summarized chapters of the textbook as well as tools such as graphic organizers and color-coded chapters to enhance a student's level of comprehension.

3.2 Communication-Means of communication is also a major aspect in the field of teaching the special needs students. In order to advocate the needs of special education students the educators should ensure the resources such as peer tutoring, instructional assistants, team teaching and staff development opportunities. Teachers also should communicate regularly with the principal to make sure that he/ she is aware of the specific learning needs of the special education students and also about the academic resources that are necessary for them to experience success in the inclusive classroom setting.

3.3 Classroom Environment- Teaching environment also has a major effect on the students studying in an inclusive class. A successful inclusive classrooms are those that are taught by teachers and school personnel who believe in the academic potential of their special needs children. It is also important for educators to create a safe classroom environment that allows special-needs children to learn alongside their peers while experiencing positive socialization.

3.4 Collaboration-Collaboration is very important process of merging the knowledge, experience and skills of all partners to meet common goals. Although

collaboration is seen among all educationalist, but a collaboration between instructional resource educator and classroom/subject teachers is very important for inclusion in the classroom to be a successful and knowledge giving to the students. This can happen both formally, such as a scheduled meeting, and informally, such as a work room conversation. Such collaboration may involve:

- ❖ Problem solving around program planning, choice of instructional strategies, interpretation of assessment data to inform instruction.
- ❖ Participation on service delivery teams, program planning teams.
- ❖ Preparation and follow up regarding parent-teacher conferences.
- ❖ Sharing resources for better teaching.
- ❖ Common planning such as grade level or department meetings.

3.5 Co-Teaching- Normally a co-teaching can occur between two classroom/subject teachers or other education professionals. Co-teaching in this regard refers to a classroom/subject teacher and an instructional resource teacher to -

- ❖ Work in collaboration in the same physical space.
- ❖ Collaboration in the delivery, assessment and evaluation of outcomes.
- ❖ Devoting time for planning, reflection and problem solving.
- ❖ Instructing a heterogeneous class.

3.6 Professional Development-Professional development of the teaching staff is very important to deal with inclusive setup in a classroom. Inclusion teachers should attend in-service training or professional development sessions to polish their skills in curriculum modification, instructional techniques and collaborative teaching strategies that allow special education teachers, specialists and mainstream teachers to team teach these students.

3.7 Pull-out instruction- Pull-out instruction refers to implementation of individualized programming for alternate programs, courses, and curriculum which occurs outside of the classroom. Instruction should be offered in the least restrictive, most inclusive environment respecting the dignity of every the student. For a student to receive instruction in an alternate learning setting (pull-out instruction) the following criteria must be met.

The program planning team has determined that optimal learning for specified IEP outcomes cannot occur in the classroom. This decision will be based on a review of the following:

- ❖ Individual student strengths and needs.
- ❖ Dignity of the student.
- ❖ Effectiveness of changes made to the environment (e.g., grouping, lighting, seating arrangement, differentiation in content, process, and product).
- ❖ Success achieved in the classroom as a result of implemented accommodations.
- ❖ Personnel available in the classroom setting.
- ❖ Alternate programs or courses contain a plan for ongoing review of the student's placement outside of the general classroom.

3.8 Managing Behavior- An inclusive classrooms can promote positive peer interactions for special education students, behavioral issues can arise that may require a different disciplinary approach than that used with mainstream students. So educationist need to consider a developmentally appropriate method for managing the behavior of their special-needs students. Common approaches often include a system that allows a student to self-regulate and manage his own behavior, coupled with a reward system that reinforces the student's positive behaviors.

3.9 Assessment and Evaluation- Regular school teachers are required to demonstrate competency in assessment in order to identify the specific needs of students with disabilities. The educationist are required to employ not only basic skills such as gathering learning and background information of students with disabilities, but also, highly specialised skills such as selecting, administering, scoring and interpreting standardised measurement instruments. Educationalist need to be knowledgeable about a variety of evaluation methods in order to determine the learning outcomes of students with disabilities. They need to demonstrate competency in performance-based assessments, portfolios and curriculum based assessments. Performance based assessments allow teachers to assess students' understanding and proficiency.

The inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classrooms requires regular school teachers to upgrade their skills to respond to the new challenges provided by their changing roles and responsibilities. These teachers are now expected to address problems and offer solutions to challenges posed by special needs students who may vary in their skill levels.

4. Do Educationist Understand Inclusion?

The success of inclusive education in any context depends upon many factors. Educationist themselves are an essential component to ensure the quality of students' inclusion in the school environment. Teachers have direct interaction with students and play a critical role in determining students' experiences in the classroom on a daily basis. Special attention must be paid to ensure that the classroom teachers have the proper skills and support needed to provide quality education to children with diverse learning needs.

Skilling the teachers for inclusive education is the most important task to imbibe the inclusive approach in real terms. In this regard, a questionnaire exploring the knowledge and the understanding of the school teachers on inclusive education was administered by the researcher as a part of the pilot study on 50 elementary teachers chosen by the way of incidental sampling from the nearby schools of Delhi. The questionnaire consisted of 30 closed ended questions. Each question had 4 options to it but only one right answer. One mark was awarded to the teachers for each correct answer given by them. Thus the total maximum score that could be obtained was 30. It was observed that the mean score obtained was 23, which was quite appreciable. 21 teachers out of a total of 50 i.e. 42% had scored below the mean marks in the questionnaire whereas 29 teachers had scored above the mean marks. The wrong answers were then analysed to get an insight into the wrong concepts engrained in the teachers mind while conceptualizing inclusion. It was found that most of the teachers restricted the concept of inclusion still to 'disability' only. They still regarded diversity in the classrooms as a hindrance that needs to be overcome for successful learning.

The low scores of the teachers highlighted that a lot more efforts need to be put in for the in service training of the school teachers who actually will respond to the needs of the students at the grass root levels. Most of the teachers complained of the dearth of practical experiences in this regard and recommended field visits and intensive training programmes to improvise the same.

5. Conclusion

The success of inclusive education requires strong collaboration among the classroom teachers, key teachers, school principals, education officers and policy makers. With a strong motive of increased focus on educating students with special needs with their age appropriate peers, more and more schools are turning to an inclusion model of special education service delivery.

When regular education teachers and special education teachers are placed in a co-teaching situation, there can be a great deal of excitement as well as fear for everyone involved. As many teachers can attest to, teaching in an inclusion situation can be a great experience or it can be a very confusing experience. Communication and having an open mind to suggestions are two key things to keep in mind when working in a co-teaching situation.

Inclusive education denotes “all children in a school, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses in any area, to become a part of the school community. There is a feeling of oneness and belongingness among the children, teachers and other functionaries. Inclusive education is a fast growing concept, which is continually expanding to achieve the target of Education for All.

Children with disabilities studying in inclusive schools have unique experiences where they constantly interact with their non-disabled peer group students. The success of inclusion depends upon many factors. Educationist themselves are a very essential component to ensure the quality of students’ inclusion in the school environment. Educationist have direct interaction with students and play a critical role in determining students’ experiences in the classroom on a daily basis. Special attention must be paid to ensure that classroom teachers have the skills and support needed to provide quality education to children with diverse learning needs. . Inclusion focuses on to as it relates to different disabilities and difficulties in learning, some of the factors which help build inclusive schools to respond to diversity and some on evaluations of specific examples of inclusion, including the perspectives of children, teachers and administrators.

In this model of inclusive education, it is not the Child, but the education system, which is seen as a problem. Therefore, it is important that the system should be changed, modified & made flexible enough to accommodate the diverse needs of all learners, including children with disabilities. The onus for success is therefore on the flexibility of the system.

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