**Inclusive Education: A Paradigm Shift for 21st Century**

**Dr. C. Ashok Kumar**

Principal

Sakthi Institute for Teacher Education and Research

Oddanchatram, Dindigul,

Tamilnadu, India.

1. **Introduction**

Inclusive education is about how we develop and design our schools, classrooms, programs, and activities so that all students learn and participate together. Article 45(a) of the constitution of India has guaranteed education as a fundamental right to every citizen. For this, the government of India has been taking steps to equalize education opportunities for its entire people since independence. In this process, efforts have been taken to overcome the regional imbalance in the form of provisions for extra educational facilities to underdeveloped regions, and socially, culturally, and economically disadvantaged groups like OBC, SC, and ST. To a certain extent, this has set right the imbalances in the equalization of educational opportunities for all the citizens of India.

The existing educational system must accommodate such students’ needs and abilities and accordingly, the physical, psychological, and learning environments should be modified for the healthy development of these individuals. In other sense, providing a facilitative barrier-free environment i.e., better access to physical facilities for these students, providing a facilitative teaching-learning environment keeping in mind their disabilities, supportive systems for effective integration of these students with normal population, making suitable changes in examination and evaluation systems are the need of the hour for better inclusive education, either at school or college level.

Over the past two to three decades in most developed countries, they have been a significant frequency what's the placement of students with special educational needs in mainstream schools rather than in segregated special students and special classes. This move has been referred to variously as integration mainstreaming and more recently. Intuition refers to students with disabilities becoming part of the general education classroom. Receiving meaningful curriculum with necessary support and being taught with active strategies (Smith 2004). The basic integration inclusion movement is the principles of anti-discrimination, equality, social justice, and basic human rights making it imperative for all other students to have a regular school environment and a broad, balanced, and relevant curriculum (UNESCO, 1994 Knight it, 1999).

1. **Inclusive Education**

Inclusion is a “philosophy that brings students, families, education and community members together to create schools and other social institutions based on acceptance, belonging and community” (Salend 2001, p.5). In theory, inclusion is practiced in schools to establish collaborative, supportive, and nurturing environments for learners and accommodations that they need to learn, as well as respecting and learning from each other’s differences (Salend. 2001). Inclusion only requires that students with disabilities will benefit from being in the regular education class, rather than having a keep up, academically, with other students.

Salend (2001) stated that these are four main principles that provide a framework and summarize the philosophies on which inclusive practices are based: 1) Diversity 2) Individual needs 3) Reflective practice 4) collaboration.

1. **Nature of Inclusive Education**

Inclusive education in special education is a recent concept, and also an accepted approach in general education in the Indian concept. A teacher in the regular school focuses on the average learner but is also experienced in handling academically talented as well as slow learners. The general classroom teacher teaches children, who differ in their level of intelligence. Thus, inclusion concerning his category is already taking place. Therefore, in the present-day context, there arises a need to include the sensorial impaired viz., the visually impaired and the hearing impaired physically and orthopedically impaired into the general stream of education.

The major similarity between non-disabled and disabled children is their cognitive abilities. Thus, proves to be a very supportive factor for these children to study along with their normal peers in the inclusive setup with the learning of the plus curriculum for them to cope with their disabilities. The idea of integration categorizes a child based on some identifiable differences and separates him from the normal group. In educational terms, the deficit of the child needs compensation by special educational inputs in a special educational setup. If the child has to be mainstreamed, he has to be given special attention to cope in the regular class. A key notion associated with integration is the adaptation of the impaired child to school.

1. **Concept of Inclusive School**

An inclusive school is a place where everyone belongs the child is accepted and is supported by his/her peers and other members of the school/community in the source of training for his/her educational needs. Inclusive education is a flexible and individualized support system and is provided in regular schools, committed to an appropriate education for all. Inclusive education recognizes and responds to the diversity of the children’s needs and abilities-including differences in their ways and pace of learning. According to Stainback (1992), inclusion facilitates integration in school systems when general and special education personnel, as well as curriculum and instructional procedures, are combined to provide an educational experience to meet the needs of the students in an integrated setup. The Salamanca statement and framework for action (1994) strongly promote “inclusive education “of schools for all.

# Emphasize Inclusive Education in India

The introduction of education for children with disabilities in India can be traced back to the dawn of the 19th century. Special school services in the country were initiated mostly by foreign missionaries. The concept of inclusion has been finding its reference in many national education documents in the post-independent period. Article 45 of the Constitution of India assures better services to persons with disabilities. The Education Commission Report (1964-66) recommended placement of the disabled child, ‘as far as possible’ in ordinary schools. The National Policy on Education (NPE) (1986). Included a full chapter on ‘Education of the Handicapped’ and formulated guidelines for action. The NPE strongly emphasized the need for the expansion of integrated education programs. The centrally sponsored scheme of integrated education for disabled children (IEDC) which was introduced in 1974 got a fillip as a result of the NPE. Therefore, efforts for inclusion were persistently made.

# Inclusion promoted through the Persons with Disabilities Act 1995

The issue of the services for children with disabilities is treated as human resources development with the introduction of the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act 1995. As a result of this Act, services for children with disabilities are no longer considered a welfare activity; rather it is treated as the right of the disabled child. The main purpose of the PWD Act is to define the responsibilities of the central governments and state governments concerning services for disabled persons. The Act also ensures full life for disabled individuals to make full contributions to their disability conditions. Blindness, Low Vision, Leprosy-Cured, Hearing Impairment, Locomotors Disability, Mental Illness, and Mental Retardation are the seven disability conditions covered under the Act. As per the Act, the central and state governments shall ensure that every child with a disability has access to free and adequate education till the age of 18. Introduction of non-formal education, functional literacy schemes, provision of aids and appliances, education through open schools and universities, etc., are also stressed in the Act. It also indicates that the Government should create adequate teacher training facilities to prepare teachers for special education. Development of research on assistive devices is also envisaged in the Act. Many schemes are being evolved at the national and state levels to implement this Act. Therefore, the PWD Act 1995 is strongly encouraging inclusive education concepts wherever possible.

# The Role of the Rehabilitation Council of India in Inclusion

In 1992, the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) Act was passed in the Parliament. The Act was created by the then Ministry of Welfare (presently known as the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment) to regulate manpower development programs in the field of education of children with special needs. Though RCI does not deal directly with the promotion of services at the school level, it has projected the need for massive manpower to facilitate education for all disabled children. The RCI has so far developed more than 50 courses and recognized more than 100 institutions to offer special education and rehabilitation manpower development programs in India. Institutes working in the area of disability are encouraged to develop manpower development programs in specific categories, and recognition to the institutions is accorded when they comply with the norms prescribed by the RCI. The enactment of the RCI Act 1992 goes a long way in accrediting special education manpower development programs in the country and bringing professionalism to serving persons with disabilities. The RCI’s manpower projection is made to facilitate education for all disabled children. Therefore, the inclusive education policy is supported by the RCI too.

# Factors are vital for the Success of Inclusive Education

Capacity building in general education: For the effective implementation of inclusive education for all types of disabled children, general classroom teachers need training on understanding the educational needs of these children. It is ideal to teach about special needs children in the pre-service teacher preparation course itself. The curriculum framework of the National Council for Teacher Education (1998) indicates that the pre-service teacher preparation course should include content on special needs children. Teachers, thus trained, will be in a position to take care of the educational needs of disabled children in general classrooms if appropriate disability-specific assistive devices are made available. The work of the general classroom teachers may be occasionally assisted by specialist teachers.

1. **Adopting need-based instructional strategies**

Inclusive education does not mean just enrolling a child with a disability in the regular classroom. The child should be given help to cope with the regular class work. Therefore, a child-centered approach is needed. The ideal inclusive setting would enroll disabled children of all categories and also of different levels of disability. All of them may not require the same kind of assistance. Some may require guidance rarely whereas some others need continuous help.

1. **Exchange of manpower and material resources:**

The success of inclusive education depends on how effectively all departments concerned at the State and local levels can be involved in the total development of the disabled child. Inclusive education is a community-involved program and therefore, its quality depends upon the extent of interaction between the different functionaries of community development. The District Rehabilitation Centers, local hospitals, braille presses, special schools, etc., are to be closely involved in the program implementation.

1. **Enlisting parents and community’s participation:**

Ideal inclusive education programs strongly insist on the importance of parental involvement in education. Parent-interact groups are important for augmenting the quality of inclusive education. Parental involvement not only enriches inclusion but also brings attitudinal changes about disability in the community.

1. **Improving child-to-child learning:**

Though general classroom teachers and special teachers are available to provide services to children with disabilities in any locality, the influences of non-disabled children on the educational achievement of disabled children and vice-versa are noteworthy. The non-disabled children are the best teachers for enabling disabled children to develop proper concepts. The child-to-child learning also becomes relevant in India where the size of the classroom is fairly large. Inclusive settings should tap the child-to-child learning strategy effectively to improve the achievement of all children including that of disabled children.

# Advantages of Inclusion for Regular Education Students

One advantage is that it allows students to be more accepting of differences among individuals ("Rational for and benefits of inclusion", 2004). Inclusion can help the regular education students understand individual differences, and the needs of others and begin to understand and deal and not meet the original goals of special education". ("Special education inclusion" 2001) recent research has confirmed there are many beneficial effects inclusion education for a student with disabilities when these students are put into regular education classrooms ("special education inclusion ", 2001).

When a student with a disability is put into a regular education classroom many positives can come about for that student. Typically, it can provide a more stimulating environment versus the traditional special education classroom environment ("Rational and benefits of intrusion", 2001). This environment often leads to enriching growth and learning for the special education student (“What does an inclusive classroom look like?” 2004). Research reveals that students with disabilities who are put into inclusion programs have more engaged instructional time, and have greater exposure to two economic activities (Salend, 2001). This stimulating environment hopefully will lead to Greater academic success.

Another advantage of inclusion for special education students is the opportunity to make new friends and share new experiences ("Rational for and benefits of inclusion", 2004). The student is exposed to a whole new sector of the student.

Next, inclusion also enhances the student with a disability's self-respect and self-esteem ("Benefits of inclusive classrooms for all", 1999). When they start to make connections with regular education students and teachers, they begin to feel a sense of self-worth. They feel good about themselves and their overall school experience. They can begin to see themselves as an individual who can share some of the same experiences and opportunities as their non-disabled peers ("Benefits of inclusive classrooms for all", 1999)

Research has also shown that for students with disabilities, inclusion results in improved standardized test scores, reading performance, mastery of IEP goals, and great (Salend, 2001). An inclusive setting can enhance the usual education program, and the overall educational environment ("Rational for and benefits of inclusion", 2004).

1. **Conclusion**

Many studies have provided evidence of the significant contributions of teachers, parents, and policymakers to the inclusion of students. Disabilities in a regular educational setting. As a result, the inclusion of students with disabilities into regular educational settings has become a concern of educators, government, and specifies at large. Teacher’s attitude is regarded as one of the major factors guarantying the success of inclusive education of students with special needs. It is important to know the attitudes of teachers as their options, may have an impact on their behavior towards and acceptance of such special education children.

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