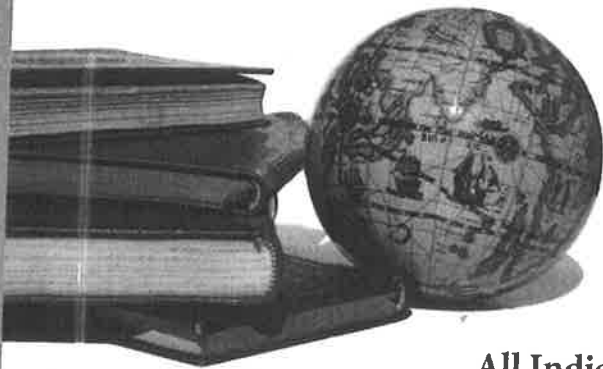




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# Inclusive Education: Contributions of Teacher and Teacher Education Programme

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## Abstract

*Many policies have been penned down regarding the issue of inclusive education in India since the early independence times, but still there exists gaps in true sense of execution of the programme. The present paper reviews some of the barriers to the development of successful inclusive classrooms and suggests that one of the ways of overcoming these difficulties is to reconsider the roles and responsibilities of the teachers. The paper also elaborates some suggestions about the role of teacher education in the development of teachers' skills, knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs regarding the concept of inclusiveness.*

**Keywords:** *inclusive education, teacher education programme, teacher*

## Introduction

This paper locates recent developments in inclusive education and in a broader discussion about the concept of inclusive education. The paper also emphasizes the role of teachers in educating all children more effectively. It considers broad issues of roles, responsibilities and identities of teachers, as well as the development of their skills and knowledge in an education system. In particular it argues for the central role of teachers in promoting inclusion and reducing underachievement, particularly when dealing with children who are perceived as having difficulties in learning. Broadly, the paper focuses on three main issues-

- Concept of inclusive education and its development in Indian scenario.
- Teachers' attitude, beliefs, and skills towards inclusive education.
- Practices to be followed in teacher education programme for achieving inclusive education.

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Extending access to education is part of a worldwide agenda. The Education for All (EFA) initiative from the United Nations is an essential element of the Millennium Development Goals, in part because education is seen as being crucial to human development, and also because so many children do not have access to education (UNESCO, 2005). Across the world, there are many reasons why children do not attend school, including high levels of mobility, social conflict, child labour and exploitation, poverty, gender and disability. Many children are at risk of not attending school, or of receiving a sub-standard education. In some parts of the world, schooling is not available because of a shortage of school places, a lack of quality teachers, or because schools are too far from where children live. Sometimes families choose not to send their children to school because of fears about safety and security, the poor quality of schooling or because of the economic costs. Such costs might include school fees, having to buy uniforms, books and materials, and so-called 'opportunity costs' that arise when young people are not economically active. Differences in access to, and outcomes from, education depend not only on children's individual circumstances, but also crucially on the country in which they live.

Though India has made significant achievements in expanding access and enhancing the quality of basic education, and continues to push towards international goals and national targets. According to India's Education for All Report (NUEPA, 2012), India increased primary school gross enrolment ratio (GER) overall by 22.9 per cent from 95.7 per cent in 2000-01 to 118.6 per cent in 2010-11. GER increased at the upper primary stage by 22.6 per cent from 58.6 per cent in 2000-01 to 81.2 per cent in 2010-11. The GER increased by 14.5 per cent for boys from 66.7 per cent in 2000-01 to 81.2 per cent in 2010-11, while the GER for girls increased by 22.6 per cent from 49.9 per cent to 81.1 per cent during this period. However 8.1 millions of children are still out of school and only 1% of children with disabilities, have access to schools. A need of strong action is required towards making these children an active part of education system.

Lindqvist, 1994 asserts that, access to schools is for all children and young people of the world, with their individual strengths and weaknesses, with their hopes and expectations. They have the right to education. It is not our education systems that have a right to a certain type of children. Therefore, it is the school system of a country that must be adjusted to meet the needs of all its children. On the international platform, India is also a signatory to or participated in the United Nations Rights of the Child, United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities, the Jomtien Declaration on Education for All and the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action, stating-

"... Schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, emotional, social, linguistic or other conditions." (Article 3, Salamanca Framework for Action), strengthening towards the accountability to inclusiveness in Indian Education).

According to UNESCO (1994), regular schools with an inclusive orientation are most effective in combating discriminatory attitudes, building an inclusive society and achieving

education for all. Research studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of inclusion in education practice, the positive effects on the educational outcomes of children with disabilities in inclusive settings (Katz & Mirenda, 2002), and the lack of any significant difference in the development of children with special needs in inclusive and special settings (Lal, 2005).

As stated by Lindsay, 2007- Education For All (EFA), projected by United Nations and the Fundamental Right to education for all children as declared by the 86<sup>th</sup> Constitutional amendment in 2002 in India, may be fulfilled in the long-term through the improved implementation of inclusive education only.

Also, Dakar Framework for Action (2000) lays down:

‘... In order to attract and retain children from marginalized and excluded groups, education systems should respond flexibly... Education systems must be inclusive, actively seeking out children who are not enrolled, and responding flexibly to the circumstances and needs of all learners...’ (Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments. Expanded Commentary on the Dakar Framework for Action, Para 33).

And the rationale behind inclusive education as an economic necessity (Mukhopadhyay & Mani, 2002) rather than ideological preference, also, cannot be ignored in a resource-constrained context, and may explain the limited conceptualisation (Singal, 2005b). As Jangira (2002: 69) highlights, “Inclusive education is an alternative for developed education systems but it is an inevitability for developing systems.”

### **Development of Inclusive Education in India**

Officially, the concept of inclusive education was first introduced globally through this statement “The fundamental principle of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences, they may have. Inclusive schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnership with their communities” and was adopted by 92 governments and 25 international organizations as a guideline framework for formulating policies, development of inclusive schools and provision of special services (Lipsky & Gartner, 1999, p. 21).

In India it was after independence, Government of India stressed upon the reforms in education sector, and, directed the states to ensure provision of basic education to all children up to the age of 14 years. The education of people with disabilities was, however, not explicit in the early constitutional provisions except for guaranteeing similar rights for people with disabilities as other members of society. It was The Education Commission of 1966 (Kothari Commission), who initiated and drew attention to the education of children with disabilities.

The formal movement of inclusion spread through the Normalization principle, which is based largely on the writings of Mikkelsen, Wolfensberger, and Nirje. This principle suggests that “you act right when making available to all persons with intellectual or other impairments or disabilities, patterns of life and conditions of everyday living that are as close as possible to or indeed the same as the regular circumstances and ways of life in their communities” (Bengt Nirje, as quoted in Billimoria, 1993).

In 1974, for the first time, the necessity of integrated education was explicitly emphasized under the scheme for Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC). In pursuit of the goal of providing basic education for all, the National Policy on Education (1986) and its follow-up actions have been major landmarks. The World Declaration on Education for All adopted in 1990 gave further boost to the various processes already set in motion in the country. The Rehabilitation Council of India Act 1992 initiated a training programme for the development of professionals to respond to the needs of students with disabilities. The enactment of the People with Disability Act in 1996 provided legislative support. This act makes it mandatory to provide free education to children with disabilities in an appropriate environment until the age of 18 years. In 1999, the government passed the National Trust for Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act for the economic rehabilitation of people with disabilities. These acts have been instrumental in bringing about a perceptive change/ improvement in the attitude of government, NGOs and people with disabilities. In recent years, two major initiatives have been launched by the government for achieving the goals of universalization of elementary education (UEE): the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) in 1994 and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in 2002. Various programmes have been raised by both Govt. and as well as Non Govt. Organisations, making the dream of education, a success.

Also, a shift of focus from *integration* to *inclusion* initiated by UNESCO (1994), through the Salamanca statement on “special needs education to all excluded children in regular schools with inclusive orientation”, which advocated the development of inclusive education systems for all children. Finally, it was after the movement on equality of opportunity in education the ‘Education for All’, (UNESCO, 2000), that “the right to education for persons with disabilities towards inclusion”, got established and ‘inclusive education’ became a terminology used for including all groups of children, those socially, economically or those excluded due to disabilities (Miles and Singal, 2008).

In India, the shift of the educational model from *integration* of children with disabilities to *inclusion of all* can be observed in the National Curricular Framework (NCERT, 2005), the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (MSJE, 2006), and the National Curricular Framework for Teacher Education, NCFTE (NCTE, 2010), which emphasised the need of making learning environment appropriate not only for children with disabilities but also for all children with diverse backgrounds and needs.

## Defining Inclusive Education

The term 'Inclusive Education' has been used interchangeably in English literature with integrated education, and/ or, with special education, but all terms have distinct and unique connotations and applications. "inclusion and inclusive education are concerned with the quest for equity, social justice, participation, and the removal of all forms of exclusionary assumptions and practice" (Zoniou- Sideria & Vlachou, 2006, p. 379). Also, with the shift in geographic and demographic settings, there is shift in understanding the concepts related to special education needs or inclusive education. As, children with special needs or special educational needs tend to be perceived as children with disabilities in India, as demonstrated by Mukhopadhyay and Mani's (2002) chapter on 'Education of Children with Special Needs' in a NIEPA government-funded research report, which solely pertains to children with disabilities. In contrast, the intention of Mary Warnock's term 'special educational needs', coined in the UK in 1978, was to imply that any child, with an impairment or not, may have an individual educational need at some point in their school career (e.g. dyslexia, or language of instruction as a second language) which the teacher should adapt to. This further implies that a child with a disability may not have a special educational need while their able-bodied peers could (Giffard-Lindsay, 2006).

Inclusive education is defined by UNESCO as a process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of all learners by increasing participation in learning and reducing exclusion within and from education. This means that all children have the right to a quality education that caters, to the extent possible, to their individual needs (UNESCO, 2005). 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".

According to the Action Plan for Inclusive Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities (MHRD, 2005)- "In its broadest and all encompassing meaning, inclusive education, as an approach, seeks to address the learning needs of all children, youth and adults with specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion. And the UNESCO has identified marginalised groups of children in education on the basis of remote location, poverty, gender discrimination, disability, language and traditional or cultural deprivation (UNESCO, 2010). It implies all learners, young people - with or without disabilities - being able to learn together through access to common preschool provisions, schools and community educational setting with an appropriate network of support services". This is possible only in a flexible education system that assimilates the needs of a diverse range of learners and adapts itself to meet these needs.

'When good inclusion is in place, the child who needs the inclusion does not stand out. The inclusive curriculum includes strong parental involvement, students making choices, and a lot of hands-on and heads-on involvement.' (Dr. Melissa Heston, Associate Professor of Education, University of Northern Iowa).

As a system, inclusive education is a flexible system, catering to individual needs. One of the biggest principles of inclusive education is education in the regular classroom whenever possible. "Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system." (Article 2, Salamanca Statement). This need for flexibility must be reflected in the methods and materials used to give these children the widest possible access to the regular curriculum. When discussing the kind of service needed, the starting point should always be what is best for the particular child.

Inclusive education services allow children with disabilities to stay with their family and to go to the nearest school, just like all other children. This circumstance is of vital importance to their personal development. Interrupting a disabled child's normal development may have far more severe consequences than the disability itself. Inclusive education does not entertain a focussed group, rather a service to all, including children from all sectors, being; working children, children in remote tribal areas, children with disability, girl child, children of migrant labours, street children, under a single roof.

Inclusive education can be summarized as- Flexible, individualised teaching, learning in integrated areas, emphasis on learning child-centred, holistic in nature, and, equalization of opportunities for all.

### **Literature Review of Inclusive Education**

The policy on inclusion and mainstreaming can easily become "main dumping" if not implemented carefully. It was, however, pointed out that a big gap exists between this ideal situation and the present reality. There is an urgent need for interventions of equipping general teachers with special skills, making general curricula, teaching methods, evaluation procedures, learning material disability-sensitive and addressing the attitudes /needs of other children in the school to ensure such interventions benefits all children (Burrett & Nundy, 1994).

The research literature suggests that the implementation of inclusion policies has been uneven (Evans & Lunt, 2002). Whilst there are many success stories to be told about inclusion (e.g. Ainscow, 1997; Black-Hawkins, Florian & Rouse, 2007), there have also been failures and difficulties. Such difficulties have been blamed on a variety of factors including, competing policies that stress competition and ever-higher standards, a lack of funding and resources and existing special education practices. It has also been suggested that one of the greatest barriers to the development of inclusion is because most teachers do not have the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to carry out this work (Forlin 2001).

Nevertheless teachers do have concerns about inclusion and many surveys have found that teachers' attitudes towards inclusion are not particularly positive (Ellins & Porter,



2005). Further, they express concerns about their lack of preparation for inclusion and for teaching all learners (Forlin, 2001). But in settings where teachers are encouraged to try out a range of teaching strategies, they report that they knew more than they thought they knew and, for the most part, children learn in similar ways. Although some children might need extra support, teachers do not distinguish between 'types' of special need when planning this support (Florian & Rouse, 2001). Many teachers reported that they did not think that they could teach such children, but their confidence and repertoire of teaching strategies developed over time. This would suggest that by 'just doing it' teachers are capable of developing knowledge and positive attitudes to inclusion

### **Contributions of Teacher and Teacher Education Programme towards Inclusive Education**

The current context in which teachers are working, is one of rapid change. All areas of education have changed during the past decades, with major changes to the role of teachers, together with the introduction of new approaches to the curriculum and assessment. In addition, the legislation has seen changes in how difficulties in learning are conceptualised from special educational needs to additional support for learning. These changes have involved the development of new understandings about the interactive nature of children's needs and a shift in focus from 'what is wrong with the child?' to 'what does the child need to support their learning?' Such developments have substantially affected the professional identity as well as the roles and responsibilities of many teachers. It also has implications for how teachers are trained and supported in their professional development. The overall picture is one of a rapidly changing field in which there is a lack of consistency in the role and responsibility of many teachers of children with additional support needs.

Many academics in the field of inclusive education point to teacher education and school leadership as 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 are 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.

There is evidence to suggest that many teachers do not feel equipped to teach children with disabilities and complain that they need more time to instruct these students (Mukhopadhyay, nd). Many government programmes have included a teacher training

component in an attempt to instigate institutional change. However, a 'special needs' 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 (Mukhopadhyay, nd).

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. Rouse, 2007 has suggested that developing effective inclusive practice in the teacher education programmes, is about not only extending teachers' knowledge, but it is also about encouraging them to do things differently and getting them to reconsider their attitudes and beliefs. A teacher must be equipped with the belief of targeting the aim, with the coverage of vast knowledge domains of the concerned field, along with an activist approach. For moulding the children from passive learners to knowledge creators, it has become important for a teacher to update herself with changing scenarios, focusing on 'knowing', 'doing', and 'believing', which includes:

### **Knowing**

- Teaching strategies
- Disability and special needs
- How children learn
- What children need to learn
- Classroom organisation and management
- Where to get help when necessary
- Identifying and assessing difficulties
- Assessing and monitoring children's learning
- The legislative and policy context

It is important to point out that such content knowledge is important, but the evidence suggests that it is insufficient to improve practice in schools because many teachers did not act upon this knowledge when they returned to the classroom. It was clear that there was a big gap between what teachers knew as a result of being on a course and what they did in their classrooms. In an attempt to bridge this gap, initiatives have been designed to link individual and institutional development. In other words 'doing' has become an essential element of professional learning and institutional development. In many cases this involves action-research type initiatives built around school- or classroom-based development projects and new ways of:

### **Doing**

- Turning knowledge into action
- Moving beyond reflective practice

- Using evidence to improve practice
- Learning how to work with colleagues as well as children
- Becoming an 'activist' professional

Although many action research initiatives to develop inclusion have had positive outcomes and have resulted in changes to practice, it became apparent that some were 'content-free' and only focussed on process. Others ran into barriers associated with negative and deterministic attitudes about children's abilities and 'worth'. Sadly there are those who believe that some children will never be able to learn those things that are important to their teachers. Further, there are teachers who do not believe that they have the skills to make a difference, perhaps because they 'have not been on the course', and they lack confidence. Therefore it is also important to consider how it might be possible for teachers to develop new ways of:

### **Believing**

- That all children are worth educating
- That all children can learn
- That they have the capacity to make a difference to children's lives
- That such work is their responsibility and not only a task for specialists

If responsibilities are to be shared and teachers are to take on new roles, then there have to be changes to the way inclusion is conceptualised and a realisation that it can only be achieved if all teachers are supported in the development of all aspects of this process; knowing, doing and believing. This knowing, doing and believing model of inclusive education practices focuses on teachers' belief on the education of all children and their capacity in dealing with diverse needs of learners with a positive frame work of mind. Teachers must be facilitated towards using multiple teaching strategies along with numerous kinds of evaluation practices. The teacher must also be aware about the available resources, where she could seek help in case of need.

The traditional way of attempting to bring about developments in inclusion was to focus on improving teachers' knowledge and skills, but this did not always work. Providing new knowledge has been seen as a necessary but not sufficient condition. Equally it was not sufficient to establish 'content free' action-research development projects as they often drift aimlessly. Rouse, 2007 mentions that if two of the three aspects of development (knowing, doing and believing) are in place, then it is likely that other aspects will follow. In other words, if teachers acquire new knowledge and they are supported in implementing new practice, using a 'just do it' approach, then attitudes and beliefs will change over time. Equally if teachers already have positive beliefs and they are supported in implementing new practices, then they are also likely to acquire new knowledge and skills. Therefore, if two of the three elements of developing inclusive practice are in place, the third is likely to follow.

Florian (2007) has identified three areas that deserve particular attention in the reform of teacher education based on the argument that future progress in inclusion requires new ways of thinking about provision and practice. These are: clearer thinking about the right to education; the need to challenge deterministic views about ability; and a shift in focus from differences between learners, to learning for all.

## Conclusion

"A human being is a positive asset and a precious natural resource, which needs to be cherished, nurtured, and developed with tenderness, and care, coupled with dynamism. Each individual's growth presents a different range of problems and requirements at every stage from womb to tomb" (NPE, 1986). Catering to these individual needs along with India's vision of 'inclusive society' can only be achieved by inclusive education, as inclusive education lays the foundation of an inclusive society accepting, respecting, and celebrating diversity (Singh, 2012). Also to make RTE (2009) a huge success it is need of hour to implement inclusive education practices encompassing a whole school approach to the inclusion of children with disabilities, in that all teachers are consulted and trained, not a select few 'specialists' (Miles, 2002). In addition, it is essential that teachers are supported not only by strong educational management with a clear strategy to improve school quality, but also by parents and community. Ideally, all stakeholders should participate in the inclusive education process (Stubbs, 2002) including the child (UNICEF, no date). The inclusive education can be achieved following the 'knowing, doing, and believing' sequence of action plan.

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