

Inclusive Education in India

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ABSTRACT

Near about 10% of the world's population is affected with a disability, and a large amount of these people live in developing countries. The facilities and services available for these people have a wide difference between developed and developing countries. One of basic need and services for these people is education. The International Community, especially after the UN Convention on People with Disabilities, is becoming increasingly aware of the different forms and models of special education. The three basic models i.e. segregated, integrated and inclusive special education, have been differentiated between by international and local agencies included Government and NGOs, and an overwhelming support is being shown by human rights activists, non-profit organizations, government organizations, and different agencies, which are all in favor of inclusive special education as the most beneficial type of education for people of all ability levels. The Government of India has started numerous plans and policies in the field of special education after the independence but their implementation efforts have neither resulted in an inclusive system of education, nor have they reached their goal of "education for all" across the country. The Government of India needs to bridge the gaps in their education system to build a strong system of inclusive education in India.

Keywords: *Inclusive, Education, India*

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.

- (The Salamanca Statement and Framework of Action on Special Needs Education)

Inclusive education "is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners." It involves restructuring the culture, policies and practices in schools so that

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they can respond to the diversity of students in their locality. For a school to be inclusive, the attitudes of everyone in the school, including administrators, teachers, and other students, are positive towards students with disabilities. Inclusive education means that all children, regardless of their ability level, are included in a mainstream classroom, or in the most appropriate or least restrictive environment (LRE), that students of all ability levels are taught as equals, and that teachers must adjust their curriculum and teaching methodologies so that all students benefit. This also avoids wasting resources, and “shattered hopes, which often occurs in classrooms that are “one size fits all. Studies have shown that systems that are truly inclusive reduce drop-out rates and repetition of grades, and have higher average levels of achievement, compared to systems that are not inclusive. People who believe in inclusive education believe that the education system is the impediment to learning for a child, and that every child is capable of learning!

THE IDEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK: SPECIAL EDUCATION IN INDIA

It is important to comprehend the framework in which special education policy was created and continuously emerges out of in India. Although the beliefs and sentiments of an entire country can never be generalized, there are critical structural, historical, and religious facts that are important to know shape the course of special education and inclusion in India. India was colonized by Britain between 1857 and 1947, and their first constitution was created in 1950. It is important to remember that India has only been a republic for 66 years, which is extremely young for a country. There is a history of colonialism, discussed further below, which affects it to this day.

Adding to the legacy of colonialism, 80% of India’s population lives on less than about R100, or two dollars a day. Even when adjusting for purchasing power parity, this amount puts hundreds of millions of people below the global poverty line. Then, people with disabilities need to account for the “conversion handicap,” a term coined by Amartya Sen. The conversion handicap is when people with disabilities derive a lower level of welfare from a given level of income than the rest of the population, due to additional costs incurred in converting income into well-being. The validity of this theory can be discussed at a different time, but for the purposes of this paper, it will serve to make the point that people with disabilities may have extra expenses. From the perspective of the medical model, their extra expenses would come from their disability. From the perspective of the social model, their extra expenses would come from society’s lack of accommodation of their disability.

HISTORY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION POLICY AND INCLUSION IN INDIA

Pre-Independence

1909 marks the first piece of attempted legislation regarding inclusion and education in India. Gopal Krishna Gokhale, “professor of English literature, mathematics, and political economy, served, for example, on the Poona Municipal Council, the Bombay Legislative Council, and

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finally, the Imperial Legislative Council, “introduced a bill under the Indian council act of 1909 to make primary education compulsory.” This bill, if it passed, would have provided funding for compulsory education for all. However, it was voted down.

The policies and actions by the government of India regarding inclusive special education in the 1940s contradicted each other entirely. The Sargent Report by the Central Advisory Board of Education in 1944 suggested children with disabilities should be entirely mainstreamed¹. Rather than debating the validity of inclusion, the Sargent Report stated that it was the only way to provide an education. Yet both the action and lack of action by the government of India in the 1940s completely contradicted this suggestion. Throughout the 1940s, the government of India began setting up segregated workshops and trade schools separate from those for students without disabilities to teach children with disabilities skills to enter the workforce. In addition, this decade was marked by a large increase in the amount of money given to voluntary organizations to establish special schools. Most of these segregated schools were expensive and located in urban areas, further marginalizing people with disabilities in rural areas.

Post-Independence

After independence, there have been many policies and practices made for inclusion in education in India. Some of major policies are as under-

1. The inclusive education is written into India’s constitution as a fundamental right for all citizens. Part IX, Article 45 of the Constitution states, the state shall endeavor to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years.
2. The significance of Article 45 was reaffirmed in 1993 with the Supreme Court’s Unnikrishnan judgment. In this case, the court ruled that Article 45 must be read in conjunction with Article 21 of the constitution, which states that “No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.”
3. The 86th amendment to the constitution, section 21A reads, “The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine.
4. The 1960s marked an important change in how special education was organized and funded in India. The Ministry of Education split, and a new branch called the Ministry of Social Welfare was created. The Ministry of Social Welfare was given the responsibility for the “weak and vulnerable” sections of society. They largely focused on rehabilitation, and not as much on education. Instead of supporting the current education system, the Ministry of Social Welfare began giving out grants to nonprofits that provided education for children with disabilities, inadvertently preventing inclusion of these children within the public or mainstream sector.

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5. The Government of India created the Kothari Commission in 1964, named after its chairman, P.S. Kothari. This commission was created because the Government of India wanted to create a plan of action to improve the education system. The plan of action created by the Kothari Commission included people with disabilities, but unfortunately, the Government of India never implemented it. It reads, we now turn to the education of handicapped children. Their education has to be organized not merely on humanitarian grounds of utility. Proper education generally enables a handicapped child to overcome largely his or her handicap and make him into a useful citizen. Social justice also demands it...on an overall view of the problem, however, we feel that experimentation with integrated programmes is urgently required and every attempt should be made to bring in as many children in integrated programs.
6. The Ministry of Welfare created the Integrated Education of Disabled Children Scheme (IEDC), not to be confused with the Integrated Child Development Scheme in 1974. The program provided children with disabilities “financial support for books, school uniforms, transportation, special equipment and aids,” with the intention of using these aids to include children in mainstream classrooms.
7. The National Policy on Education (NPE) was created in 1986. Continuing in the spirit of the 1974 IEDC, the NPE states that children with “mild” disabilities should be included in mainstream classrooms, whereas children with “moderate to severe” disabilities should be placed in segregated schools. The 1992 Program of Action (POA), created to implement the 1986 NPE, broadens the NPEs definition of who should be included in mainstream schooling, that “a child with a disability who can be educated in the general school should not be in the special school.” It says that once children with disabilities acquire basic living skills, which would be learned in resource rooms or special schools, that they should be mainstreamed.
8. The year 1992 was also the year of the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) Act. The RCI Act provided standards for rehabilitation professionals; one type of rehabilitation professional being special education teachers. This act is important because it establishes consequences for teaching without a license. Teachers without a license could face imprisonment for up to one year, be fined R1000, or both.
9. In 2002 the 86th amendment to the constitution was made, mandating free and compulsory education to all children ages 6-14. And with the help of World Bank, Government of India Initiated Sarva Shiksha abhiyan-SSA (Education for All) in India.
10. The Government of India decided to make Amendment 21A of the constitution, giving children between the ages of 6-14 the right to a free, appropriate and compulsory education, into an act. In 2005, the Right to Education Act was drafted by the Ministry of Human Resource Development. This bill, framed through a “social justice and collective advocacy perspective” rather than through a framework of individual rights, is not disability-specific, but is inclusive of children with disabilities, with specific sections that

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address the educational rights of students with disabilities. The Right to Education Act was passed in 2009 and put into full effect in 2010.

11. It was extremely important that India create a bill around section 45 and 21 (A) of the constitution, which became the Right to Education Act which was originally floated in 2005. However, in the same year, the Ministry of Human Resource Development also drafted the Action Plan for Inclusion in Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities (IECYD). This action plan envisions that all children with a disability will have access to mainstream education; in order to facilitate this, the government, specifically collaborating between the Rehabilitation Council and the National Council for Teacher's Education, will ensure that there are adequate numbers of teachers trained in inclusive education, as well as the proper physical and ideological infrastructure to facilitate inclusion in schools. The plan specifically looks to move from integration towards inclusion, stating, whereas under the Scheme of Integrated Education for the Disabled Children (IEDC) as it stands at present, children with disabilities are placed in a regular school without making any changes in the school to accommodate and support diverse needs, the revised IECYD will, in contrast, modify the existing physical infrastructures and teaching methodologies to meet the needs of all children, including Children with Special Needs.
12. In 2008, the government reformed the Scheme of Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) and created the Inclusive Education of the Disabled at the Secondary Stage (IEDSS). It went into effect on April 1st, 2009. IEDC was reformed to take into account the resources provided for students with disabilities ages 6-14 under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. The objective of IEDSS is to enable the disabled children who have completed eight years of elementary education to continue their education at the secondary stage in an inclusive environment in regular schools. IEDSS provides students with disabilities ages 14-18, studying in public or government-funded schools, R3000 per school year from the central government to purchase the necessary materials to use to ensure inclusion of the student in the mainstream school system. This is the first policy that specifically acknowledges the importance of secondary education for persons with disabilities.
13. The most recent policy specifically concerning education and people with disabilities is the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment's National Policy for People with Disabilities. Although this policy was created in 2006, after the 2005 Action Plan, and the two policies were created under separate ministries, they are very similar in both the ideologies that they were founded on, as well as the actual changes they are trying to make to the system. The National Policy for People with Disabilities utilizes Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (in English, Education for All), also created by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, as their main mode of implementation of the policy. This policy echoes the 2005 plan of action and 2005 (made official in 2009) bill by changing special schools in resource centers for people with disabilities and teachers. In addition, the policy seeks to bridge the gap between rural and urban areas by creating more District Disability and Rehabilitation Centers (DDRCs), which disseminate information in terms of availability of

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aids and appliances, ensure the mandated 3% coverage of persons with disabilities in poverty reduction programs and target girls with disabilities.

FACTS AND FIGURES OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN INDIA

Statistics on disability in India vary widely, and accuracy of statistics is always questionable. However, almost all of the statistics available point to the gaps in the education system, the marginalization of children with disabilities, and the need of the Government of India to step up their efforts to reach their goal of “education for all.” The Government of India (GoI) did its first and only national survey to date on the population of people with a disability, from July-December, 2002. In December 2003, one year later, Report No. 485, the 593 page Disabled Persons in India was published in conjunction by the National Sample Survey Organization, Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation, and the Government of India. Although statistics vary across the board, depending on the year, surveyors, methods used, and other extraneous factors, this survey is considered most legitimate and accurate by governments and organizations across the globe. The Ministry found that there were 18.49 million people with disabilities in India, or about 1.8% of the population. Data from the World Bank differs in both the ages of the sample group and the statistics, but draws a dramatically different picture. According to the World Bank, 38% of children with disabilities ages 6-13 are not in school. In addition, starkly contrasting with Kalyanpur’s interpretation of the National Census, the World Bank states that 70% of children with disabilities ages 5-20 have attended a school at some point in their life, and that 90% of these children have attended a mainstream school. This data is further supported by data from the National Census, which states that of the children with disabilities in school in 2002, 94.8% of these children attend a mainstream school, and only 5.2% of children with a disability attend a special school. It is important to emphasize that these statistics do not include all of the children with a disability out-of-school, but only those that were attending school in 2002. Therefore, a large percentage of the population is still not receiving any type of schooling. Alarming, the World Bank states that almost all children with disabilities do not continue their education past primary school.

There are several areas across which people with disabilities receive unequal services in India. One of those is the difference between urban and rural areas and the services available in both. 75% of people with disabilities live in rural areas in India. This is an overwhelming majority. The number becomes worrisome in comparison to where the majority of services are offered; which is in urban areas. Less than 15% of national services for people with disabilities are located in rural areas, and of those, most are expensive and/or private. The discrepancy in services is directly reflected in educational achievement and enrollment in schools. Drawing data from The National Census, states, “In terms of educational levels, only 11% of children with disabilities between the ages of 5–18 years in urban areas (less than 1% in rural areas) were enrolled in special schools, while 55% of adults with disabilities were illiterate (59% in rural and

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40% in urban areas), with only 7% in rural and 18% in urban areas having completed secondary education.

Another area of inequity between persons with disabilities is gender. The Government of India National Census pointed out the extreme inequities between girls and boys with a disability. In number, there are fewer girls than boys with a disability.

People with disabilities in India are also discriminated against based on their type of disability. The National Census did not break down types of disability according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV (DSM IV) or a similar text, but rather, by the categories “locomotor, multiple, mental retardation (intellectual disability), mental illness, blindness, low vision, hearing and speech.

CONCLUSION

The policies of the new millennium are the most inclusive of those to date. But, just as the policies of the past, will these policies remain words on paper? The Government of India has fallen short of their goal for all of the policies of the past 66 years. Yet in the past decade, there have been several promising pieces of legislation and schemes: 2005 Action Plan for Children and Youth with Disabilities, the 2006 National Policy for People with Disabilities, the 2008 Inclusive Education of the Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS) and the 2009 Right to Education Act-as well as continuing with the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan scheme. So is there a lack of political will that is preventing full implementation of policies, or lack of governmental resources and capacity? It seems to be a combination of both.

To enable an inclusive system of education, the Government of India needs to consolidate the responsibility for education under the Ministry of Education, and abolish the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. Although the 2006 National Policy for People with Disabilities mandated the change of special schools into various types of resource centers, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan states that people with disabilities should be educated in the least restrictive environment, which could potentially be a special school. Therefore, this scheme and this policy actually contradict each other. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment could still support students with disabilities by continuing to provide grants for these resource centers, but ultimately, it is imperative for inclusion that students of all ability levels are receiving services under the same ministry. This directly relates to the definition of inclusion and the social model defined above, because the Ministry of Education will have to adjust to accommodate people of all ability levels, including everyone.

Accountability of the Government of India and its implementing partners is imperative for ensuring successful implementation of policy. One of the best ways to do this is to ensure that citizens are well informed about these policies and schemes.

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A system of reliable monitoring is imperative for evaluating the success or failures of a policy or scheme.

Training teachers in teaching methods that include students of all ability levels, as well as spreading awareness to teachers about the importance and benefits of inclusion, is one of the most important parts of implementing a system of inclusive education, because the teachers are the people on-the-ground who are going to accommodate the students.

Building accessibility is absolutely imperative for students with disabilities to be included as an equal member in their school. But what is typically more challenging for mainstream schools who are trying to become inclusive is converting their curriculum to fit students of all ability levels.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declared no conflict of interests.

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