



The Special Education System for People with Disabilities

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Abstract

Over the years, both the federal and state governments in India have developed programmes and policies aimed at assisting children with disabilities in becoming fully integrated members of society. But since their needs aren't properly served, children with disabilities continue to be among the most marginalised in terms of primary school enrolment and completion. This paper explores the broader challenges in the current education system with respect to issues of quality education and drop-out rates of primary students with disabilities, drawing on my own experiences, research, and communication with various stakeholders involved in the field of education for children with disabilities over the last 30 years. A variety of issues, such as the general attitude of society, government officials, school staff and infrastructure, insufficient levels of training of key stakeholders, the invisibility of disability in the community, poverty, lack of acceptance, lack of interest, and genderism, all play a role in determining whether or not children with disabilities have equal access to education.

Keywords India, education, educational policy, children with disabilities

Introduction

Every kid, handicapped or not, deserves the chance to learn the skills they'll need to succeed in life. Learning about the world around us is an essential part of developing into an adult. It is a fundamental human right since it is a potent agent of social change and often marks the beginning of ascent in the social hierarchy. We can't stop until every kid gets a good education, since that's the only way to make "education for all" a reality. Exclusion from educational opportunities on the basis of sex, ethnic origin, language, religion, nationality, socio-economic conditions, abilities, etc. is prohibited by the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960) and other international human rights treaties such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1946), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006). However, millions of kids still face barriers to entry and participation in educational institutions across the globe. Over the years, the government of India has made great strides to improve the quality of education in the country. The current educational climate in India necessitates a careful examination of how best to serve students with special needs in the classroom. This article draws on my thirty years of experience working in special education and on my research and conversations with a wide range of professionals in the area of education for children with disabilities.

LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN)

There is no universally accepted definition of a student with SEN in India. In a District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) document, for instance, a child with SEN is classified as a kid with a handicap of any kind (visual, hearing, locomotor, or intellectual) (DPEP, 2001). However, as stated in the national report included in the NCERT/UNESCO regional workshop report titled Assessment of Requirements for Inclusive Education: Report of the First Regional Workshop for SAARC Countries (2000), SEN encompasses more than only those with physical impairments. It also alludes to the vast number of children of school age who are part of the populations most affected by child labour: those living on the streets, those who have lost their homes due to natural disasters or civil strife, and those



living in severe poverty. The majority of school-age children who do not attend school belong to this group (pg.58). Children with Special Needs (SN) are addressed under the SSA Implementation Framework's subsection on Special Focus Groups. As part of the Special Education and Needs (SEN) requirements, the law sets aside a special category for children with special needs, distinguishing them from females, children from minority groups, and children from low-income metropolitan areas. Disabled students, as well as students from other socially disadvantaged and marginalised groups (such as SCs, STs, and minorities), have their educational needs specifically addressed by the NCERT's Department of Education of Groups with SN. A definition for Special Needs Education (SNE) is included in the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED-97) (UNESCO, 1997). Rather of using the older word "Special Education," the newer "SNE" is being used instead. Traditionally, the phrase "special education" has been used to refer to the specialised instruction of students with special needs in settings outside than the public school and university systems. The majority of children with disabilities in many nations currently attend mainstream schools. Further, the idea of children with SEN encompasses not just those who may be included in disabled categories but also those who are failing in school for a broad range of causes that are recognised to be potential barriers to a child's optimum growth. Whether or not schools need to make changes to their curriculum, instruction, and organisation and/or provide additional human and material resources in order to stimulate efficient and effective learning for this more broadly defined group of children is determined by the extent to which these changes are necessary.

Benefits of Inclusion for Students without Special Needs³ The benefits of inclusion for students with SEN are as follows:

- Being able to spend the school day among peers who do not have impairments opens up numerous doors for socialisation that would be closed in a segregated environment.
- In this case, the children with SEN are exposed to positive role models. As a result, they are able to learn from and act like typically developing peers.
- Typically, educators raise the bar for pupils with SEN.
- All kids in inclusive classrooms are held to the same behavioural standards by both regular and special educators.
- Separated classrooms don't provide students with SEN the chance to learn age-appropriate, practical components of academic subject (for example, the sciences, social studies, etc.).
- Students with SEN who have the opportunity to attend schools that foster inclusion have a greater chance of remaining active members of society.

Status of Education of Children with Disabilities

There are 1.2 billion people in India, and around 833 million of them reside in rural regions, as estimated by the 2011 Census. There are 164.5 million children worldwide that are disabled. The 58th round of the National Sample Survey (July-December 2002) found that among the literate population of people with disabilities, 25% had completed only primary school (5 years of schooling), 11% had completed only middle school (8 years of schooling), and only 9% had completed nine or more years of school. Those with impairments between the ages of five and eighteen who attended a regular school were more likely to be represented in rural regions than in metropolitan ones. It is difficult to find reliable data about the prevalence of disability in India (<https://targetstudy.com/articles/education-of-disabled-children-in-india.html>), and the country's education system for children with disabilities is flawed in some way (either in its efficacy, infrastructure, implementation, or other aspects). In India, kids with special needs may attend either mainstream classrooms or adapted learning environments. Christian



missionaries brought the specialised institution to India in the latter two decades of the nineteenth century. Many metropolitan regions have a high concentration of special schools that are well-equipped to educate children with special needs. The special education system was separated from regular education because of the prevalent misconception that children with impairments cannot learn in a mainstream classroom. For children with special needs, these schools were a boon in terms of access to education, but they did nothing to prepare them for life in the general population (<https://targetstudy.com/articles/education-of-disabled-children-in-india.html>). In addition, there are significant limitations to this alternative educational system, including the fact that it is both costly and has a small footprint. The legislation requires the establishment of special schools for children with disabilities despite the fact that these institutions have been shown to have negative effects on the lives of its students. The Ministry of Welfare, currently known as the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, has initiated a programme to fund the creation of special schools. The plan gives preference to establishing new schools in areas without any existing special education facilities. Presently, there are no special education schools in over 240 districts throughout the nation (Baquer & Sharma, 2006). Approximately 3000 special schools for kids with various impairments are now in operation. An estimated 900 schools serve students who are deaf or hard of hearing, 400 serve those who are visually impaired, 1,000 serve those who are developmentally challenged, and 700 serve students who are physically impaired. The Rehabilitation Council of India has approved these institutions to receive funding from the Indian government. There are many more pupils with impairments than there are spaces in the nation's special education institutions. It should be taken into account that a theory known as "integration" developed, which argued for including children with mild and moderate impairments in regular classrooms with typically developing peers, provided those children had access to appropriate resources. However, students who were part of the integration process were remained segregated at school. That's why people came up with the idea of "Inclusive Education" (IE), which holds that all kids with disabilities, no matter how severe, should be taught in regular classrooms alongside kids who don't have any kind of impairment. It's been implemented in classrooms, but there's still a long way to go.

Improvements in Special Education via Concentrated Efforts There have been several initiatives since independence on 15 August 1947 to provide inclusive education to children with special needs. The Project on Integrated Education for Disabled (PIED) was initiated by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the government-funded National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) with a primary emphasis on teacher training to foster integration. After some time, PIED was merged with the District Primary Education Program (DPEP) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). The enrolment and retention rates rose, but the coverage was poor, and only around 3% of students with disabilities were mainstreamed into normal classrooms. Children with impairments who are able to be taught in a normal school setting should not be accepted to a special school, as proposed by the Plan of Action (POA) in 1992. Despite being enrolled at specialised institutions, many once accepted students eventually dropped out. In 1964, the Kothari Commission emphasised include all students with disabilities (regardless of the kind of the condition) in the regular school curriculum. In 1968, the Kothari Commission made recommendations that informed the National School Policy. One of those proposals was to increase access to education for children with physical and mental impairments. When the National Policy on Education was released in 1986, it placed the problem of educational fairness front and centre. Children with disabilities were given explicit attention in Section 4.9 of this policy. All general education instructors will be required to undergo "a obligatory special education component in preservice training of general teachers" under this policy. To help students with mild to moderate



impairments attend and succeed in mainstream classrooms, the Ministry of Welfare launched the Integrated Education of Disabled Children (IEDC) programme in 1974. However, the programme failed to achieve its goals because of a number of factors, including a shortage of properly prepared educators, resources, cooperation across agencies, etc.

Conclusion

There are several obstacles in the way of a child's development when they have a disability. The families of these kids sometimes go through a lot of stress because of the many difficulties they have to go through, especially if they are impoverished or have to deal with other types of humiliation. Disabled children face insurmountable barriers in breaking the cycle of poverty due to a lack of or insufficient vocational training. They have a higher propensity to be poor and are at greater danger of being marginalised from society. The predominant policy bias before to the 1970s in India is reflected in the country's service delivery trends. However, as several perspectives on disability have emerged, ranging from the charity model to the human rights model, different policies and practises have emerged to address the issue of disability. There is still a major need to make educational institutions and education more accessible for children with disabilities, despite the efforts of government and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs).

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