

Advancement in the field of education of the visually impaired inclusion - a reality based service delivery programme

Dr. R. RANGANATHAN

Associated Professor

Department of Special Education

Andhra University

Visakhapatnam – 530 003

INDIA

santha_rang@yahoo.co.in

INTRODUCTION

Education is the key to human development. Education is a fundamental right of every child, article 26 of United Nations declaration for human right's highlights right to education. Article 45 of constitution of India notes free compulsory education for children under the age of 14 years. Further, Articles 41 emphasized right to education for persons including those with disabilities. Under the constitution, persons with disabilities have been guaranteed the Fundamental Rights as available to other citizens of the country viz., equality of opportunity, non discrimination, no untouchable, freedom of region, right to the language, script or culture, right franchise, right to property, right to enforce fundamental rights, access to education in any education institution, and right to work.

Biwako Millennium Framework (2002) for Action towards an inclusive, barrier-free and rights – based society for persons with disabilities in Asia and the pacific was adopted in the 58th session at Resolution 58/4 on 22nd May, 2002 in Japan. The resolution proclaimed extension of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons 1993-2002, for another decade, 2003-2012.

Government of India is a signatory to various UN resolutions concerning persons with disabilities. The UN resolution 37/52d of 3rd December 1982 is a significant UN instrument, aimed at achieving full participation and equality and protection of rights of persons with disabilities, which followed the declaration of International year of Disabled Persons in 1981. Subsequently, the Asian and Pacific of Disabled Persons (1993-2002) were observed. The Asia and pacific decade has focused on 12 policy areas, one of which is education. Children with disability include those with visual impaired, hearing impairment, mental retardation, locomotors disabilities and multiple disabilities.

Historically, India has been an Inclusive society. Persons with disabilities were always part of the society. The origin of special education in India can be traced back to the era of “Gurukula” education, which adhered to fundamental educational principles of special education like determining the strengths, and needs of each pupil, individualization of teaching targets and methods to match the skills and interests and preparing the pupils for meeting the social expectation of their prospective interests. Though the learners were not labeled as “disabled”, they were provided assistance on the basis of their individual needs.

The development in special education over the years has been slow but steady. Before 1900, voluntary efforts and missionaries mostly managed institutions for persons with disabilities. The charity approach was predominant during those days. After independence in 1947, the human rights approach started gaining ground and providing for services to persons with disabilities found place in the constitution itself. Special school approach was considered to be the most effective strategy. As results, scores special schools emerged. The Governments started committing to education of persons with disabilities thereby starting special schools in various states and also in district. Even today, special schools are increasing in number and this approach will remain as one of the models to serve persons with disabilities, especially to meet the needs of children with serves disabilities.

Education of persons with disability did not have a special focus until recent yes, India, crossing a billion population has about 200 million school aged children, among whom nearly 4 million children require special needs education. A starting figure indicated in the seminar on Special Education, at the Asia Pacific Programme of Education and information Development Japan states that only 5% of children with disabilities are enrolled in schools. Moreover, 40% of children with disabilities do not complete 5 years of basic education and 20% of children with disabilities are found to be not completing the further 3 years of compulsory education, services as most of the services are concentrated in urban areas.

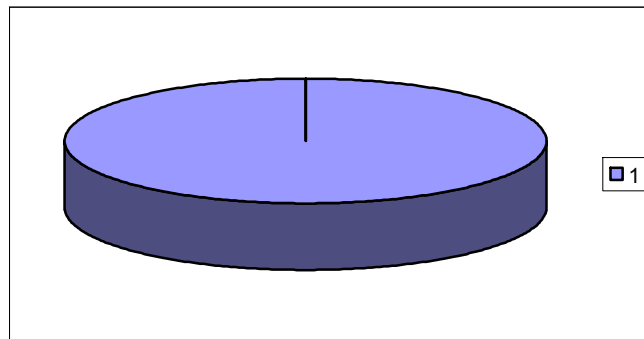
Status of Educational Services for Children with Disabilities in India.

Population of children with disabilities

The project child population in the age group 0-6 years for 2001 was 157.86 million with boys accounting for 51.88% of the population and girls constituting 48.12%. Uttar Pradesh (19.3%) stands high in child population along the states followed by Bihar (10.3%), Maharashtra (8.35%), west Bengal (7.05%), Madhya Pradesh (6.13%), Rajasthan (6.62%), and Andhra Pradesh (6.13%). Northeastern states have less child population when compared to other parts of the country. In all the states, male child population exceeds 50 percent, which was higher than that of the female child population (Census, 2001).

Approximately 6% of persons with disabilities belong to the age group 0-14 years in rural areas and 5.4% to urban areas. In the case of number of persons with mental retardation, the NSSO (2002) reveals a low number, though many other reports present a high percentage of persons with mental retardation. It is possible that child with mild mental retardation were not covered in the NSSO 2002 survey. As children with mental retardation do not always have visible characteristics, they could have been missed out. In addition, perception of mental retardation by enumerators and informants also is a major factor including or excluding such persons in the enumeration.

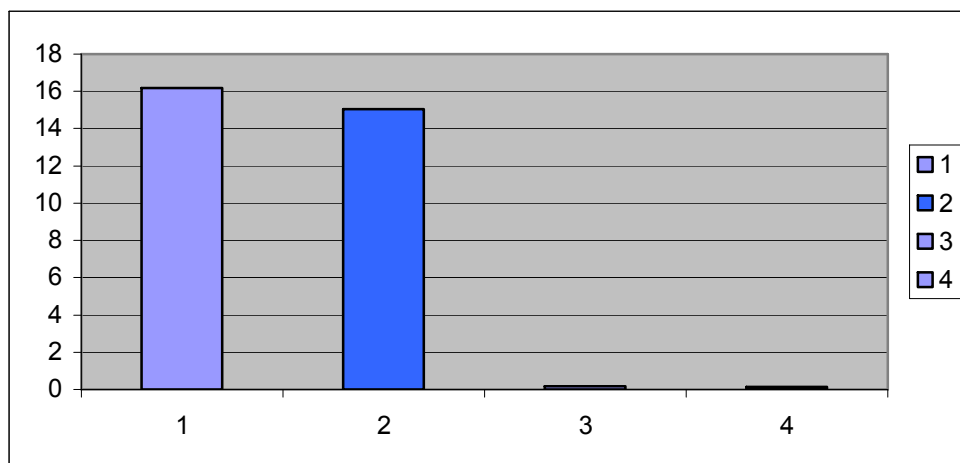
Child population (0-6years)



99% Non Disabled- 1 % Disabled

When compared to the total child population, those with disabilities form a very small percentage (Fig.1 and 2). Yet, every child has a right to equal opportunity. Further, considering the population of our country, the child population with disabilities is proportionately large, requiring attention.

Child population gender wise (in crores)



Non-disabled

Disabled

- **Male** * **Female**

What is Inclusive Education?

Inclusive education or school for all is about mainstreaming disabled children in regular schools. It is about valuing the differences in the child and catering to their different needs and is based on belief that all can learn and should learn together. They in fact, learn best from each other. The general classroom teachers should be equipped with skills to teach the educational needs of children with disabilities with minimum or no assistance of specialist resource teacher or special education. Inclusive education not only provides quality education to all children but also changes discriminatory attitudes within communities and help to develop an Inclusive society. Therefore Inclusive education means creating effective classrooms where the education needs of all children are addressed irrespective of ability or disability.

Why inclusion?

There are many thousands of blind children in India without the hope of an education. A broad system is needed which, when put into operation, would offer service to these individuals. The system chosen must be logical, educationally sound, and at a price governments can afford. That system is inclusion.

Inclusion, itself, is the most important influence in bringing about understanding and acceptance of blind people. Its inclusion among general education has stimulated interest in other areas of exceptional. It has firmly established the idea that effective service for handicapped children is reasonable and proper from a humanitarian point of view and for very practical considerations of cost.

Inclusion places education of blind children directly into the general education system where it belongs. It makes available to the blind child the best thinking of the most experienced people at all local, state and national levels. Inclusion modifies attitudes toward blindness by bringing together blind and seeing children during the formative years of childhood. It gives the blind child an opportunity to enjoy a near-normal competitive school experience like his seeing peers and in so doing relieves him of the need to consider himself at every moment and in every way a handicapped individual. It brings a new hope to the parents of each blind child, as their child lives at home, they have more opportunity to discover the many ways in which their child is like other children. Inclusion improves vocational opportunity for the blind. It helps the blind to meet their obligations of adjusting to a seeing world and it helps the seeing public to judge and accept individual blind children on the basis of childhood, rather than blindness; it introduces the blind to problems of adjustment to the seeing world at an early age when they are most flexible and before they become fearful of the world through years of atypical social experience.

The children to be served have various eye problems, and they vary in the amount of their visual loss. Some children are totally blind; some have a little remaining vision,

which help them to move about and to adapt socially; others have even more remaining vision but still require special services. Educational programmes must consider all levels of various visual losses. A high number of children with eye problems may also have some other serious handicapping conditions as well; programmes must account for those with multiple problems. A loss of vision can occur at any time; there are always some children who are in need of a programme of rapid tutoring in substitute basic communication skills such as Braille and use of the slate and stylus. Also, in India there are many older blind children who have never been in school who must be introduced into the school system as over-aged beginners. Children who are too young for school are most responsive to careful guidance. The years from one to six are now known to be the most important years for learning attitude and habits, which affect one's entire life. A truly effective programme of education must account for all these children.

Inclusion is educationally valid, much experience in both the West and the East has shown that the general needs of all children, whether sighted or blind, can be met in regular classrooms. Inclusion has a positive effect on a blind child and his seeing classmates.

Inclusion is practical. Blind children in the classroom have the same kind of schoolwork, the same amount of schoolwork, and the same access to suitable materials as their classmates and the regular same transportation facilities.

Inclusion can be accomplished at minimum cost. Salaries for regular teachers teaching materials, transportation facilities, special buildings and duplications of land areas and playground equipment are not required because the blind are enrolled directly into the existing schools classrooms.

Inclusion requires a climate of acceptance, but once begun creates approval because methods and materials are so much like regular methods and materials, and the visually impaired children, themselves, are so much like their sighted classmates.

BARRIERS IN INCLUSION

- Simply enrolling the special need children in general education system without needed support (both academic and administrative support) will not work.
- Sacrifice quality or appropriate educational experience in order to include special need children.
- Ignore individual needs of student's abled and disabled.
- Requires students to learn the same instruction at the same time.
- It will provide equal educational opportunity but may not equal educational experience.

FACTORS INVOLVED IN SUCCESSFUL INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Capacity building in the 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 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 children with special needs too in general classrooms if appropriate disability specific assistive devices are made available. Specialist teachers may occasionally assist the work of the general classroom teachers.

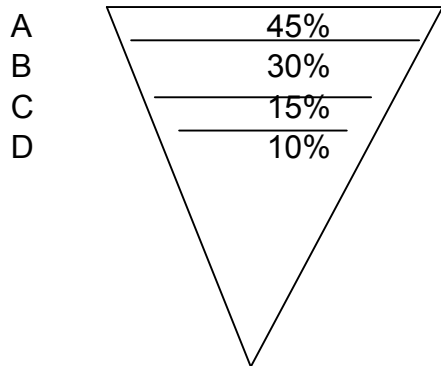
The existing teachers who have no exposure to education of children with special needs can be given in-service training for a period of 5-10 days to learn the following areas.

- Definitions - Disabilities
- Identification and intervention services.
- Psychological and sociological implications of disabilities.
- Learning behaviours of children with disabilities.
- Plus curricular activities.
- Assistive devices for various disabilities.
- Preparation of teaching aids and learning materials.
- Adaptation of existing devices and adapted instructional materials for children with disabilities.
- Teaching methods.
- Evaluation procedures.

The in-service courses may be offered to at least one teacher to begin with from each school and even fully cover all general classroom teachers in a block. This initial investment on capacity building would be vital for making a strong base for Inclusive education.

Adopting need-based instructional strategies: Inclusive education does not mean just enrolling a child with disability in the regular classroom. The child should be given help to cope up with the regular class work. Therefore, 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 other needs continuous help. The children in Inclusive education may be classified as follows:



- Children with mind disabilities that can be handled by general classroom teachers with Minimal training.
- Children with mild/moderate disabilities who need counseling services.
- Children with moderate / severe disabilities who need resource assistance including corrective aids and periodical help in academic areas.
- Children with sever disabilities who require direct Attention / preparatory assistance from the special Teachers.

Therefore, need-base instructional strategies are imminent in the Inclusive setting. The children in. category D may require the assistance of special teacher to a large extent at the beginning to learn plus curricular skills. Therefore, the extent of assistance should be decided on the basis of the instructional needs of the child. With the proper understanding of need-based instructional strategies, Inclusive education will be successful.

Exchange of manpower and material resources: The success of Inclusive education depends on how effectively all departments concerned can be involved in the total development of the disabled child. Inclusive education is a community-involved programme and therefore, its quality depends upon the extent of interaction between the different functionaries of community development. The District Rehabilitation Centers, the ICDS workers. Local eye hospitals, Braille presses, special schools, integrated schools etc., are to be closely involved in the programme implementation.

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. The parental

involvement not only enriches inclusion but also brings attitudinal changes disability in the community.

Improving child-to-child learning: Though general classroom teachers and special teachers are available for providing 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. In fact, 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.

Making the programme for children with disabilities an integral part of the general education system: As stated earlier, the ideal Inclusive education in India would be possible only when all general education teachers are capable of serving children with special needs. Till then, presence of a specialist teacher should also be treated as a part and parcel of the general system. Often times, specialist resource teachers in integrate programmes are treated as additional members in the schools and therefore, the assistance given by them to disabled children and treated as an add-on component to general education. This scenario should change. The specialist teacher should be treated as a teacher first and a specialist next. Unit and unless this happens, total inclusion may not happen. Therefore, inclusion should take place at all levels.

Type of Services in Inclusion

In Inclusive education programs in India, the disabled child directly or indirectly requires three types of services.

Essential Services: The most essential services in an ideal Inclusive setting are to be provided by the general classroom teachers, non-disabled children and parents as well. The concept of child-to-child learning, cooperative learning approaches, etc., have demonstrated that rue learning can happen through interact ional between the disabled child and all entities in the general school. A sample list of essential services is as follows:

- Planning instructional strategies for children with disabilities.
- Teaching content to them
- Maintaining attendance for curricular and plus curricular activities.
- General discipline in the classroom.
- Checking home assignments.
- Conducting examinations.
- Evaluation

- Facilitating child-to-child learning.
- Taking progress of the child
- Consulting with special teachers about the plus-curriculum needs, of disabled Children.
- Interacting with parents of disabled children.

In an ideal Inclusive setting, the general classroom teachers provide, these services to disabled children. The terminology 'essential services' is used here because the disabled child cannot function well in Inclusive setting without these vital services. When general classroom teachers provide these vital services, the child would be able to get education in the local school itself even if there is no specialist teacher to attend to him/her.

Support Services: The second type of service required in inclusion is the support service given by the fully qualified special teachers. These teachers provide necessary material support and occasional academic support to children with disabilities and also provide the needed consultancy to regular classroom teachers. The support materials are compulsory but providing academic support by specialist teacher need not be made mandatory. The support services include the following:

- Identifying children with disabilities in the community.
- Teaching skills peculiar to disability wherever necessary.
- Assisting general classroom teachers if needed.
- Arranging assessment for children with disabilities.
- Arranging learning materials for children with disabilities.
- Arranging aids and appliances
- Monitoring the progress of the child through classroom teachers.

Peripheral Services: The third type of services is the one-time peripheral services, which are adhoc in nature. Agencies such as hospitals, Rehabilitation centers, and non-governmental organizations etc., can provide one-time services such as identification. Assessment, counseling, etc,

The types of peripheral services are as follows:

- Issuing medical reports.
- Providing social benefits.
- Arranging sponsorship to educational activities.
- Counseling to parents.

These peripheral services are to be arranged by the head of institutes of Inclusive education programmes.

CONCLUSION:

"Special needs education cannot advance in isolation. It must be part of an overall educational strategy and, indeed of new social and economic policies. This requires a review of the policy and practice in every sub sector within education, from pre-school to universities to ensure that the curricular, activities and programmes are, to the maximum extent possible, fully accessible to all school for all or Inclusive education which meet the individual needs of all pupils. Most children and youth with special educational needs can be achieving educational progress and social integration within Inclusive schools in the community.

The paradigm shift from "child as a student" to "child as a human resource" in the classroom paves way for comprehensive inclusion where every child has a place to perform. As Swami Vivekananda observed, "Education is the manifestation of perfection already in man" and the meaning of this statements can be fully realized in a true inclusive setting where every child is treated as a special child and the teacher becomes a facilitator of learning.

By separating children with disabilities from the general system, residential schools emerged.

By capitalizing on the abilities of children with disabilities, integration emerged.

By looking at the child beyond his disabilities, the inclusion is emerging.

Therefore, inclusive education is beyond disabilities. Inclusion is all about effective education.

By making the schools inclusive, the education becomes more effective.

What is required is a commitment and political will to bring about change-change in human attitudes and behaviour, and the modification of development strategies. Through education for all, it should be possible to enable all human beings-including the disabled-to develop their full potential, to contribute to society and, above all, to be enriched by their difference and not devalued.

References:

1. **R. Ranganathan (1996):** "Effectiveness of adapted instructional material in teaching science to the visually impaired children of VI, VII & VIII classes in integrated Education Program.

2. **William G. Brohier (1999)** "SEE with the Blind" The education of children with visual impairment.
3. Rehabilitation council of India (2000), Status of disability in India (2000)
4. Rights of the child: India, First periodic Report, 2001, Delhi: department of Women and Child Development, MHRD
5. **M.N.G. Mani (2002)** value on Non -Discrimination on the basis of disability - Handbook for teachers.
6. **J.P. Singh (2003) Technology** for the blind concept and context.
7. Summit of the mind (2003) "All India Cross Disability Convention"