

From segregation to integration and from integration to inclusion education of visually challenged in India

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SHIFT IN EDUCATION POLICY

The education scenario of disabled children in India has undergone a sea-change after the post independence period in 1947. Education of visually challenged in India started in special schools as in other parts of the world. Bearing in mind that India has the largest number of visually challenged, which is one third of the entire visually challenged population of the world, it was felt that providing education to this vast number of disabled children could not be covered by special schools alone and this was one of the major reasons amongst many that the shift from special schools to integrated education was considered inevitable.

The Scheme of Integrated Education although formulated in 1974 under the Ministry of Social Welfare, Govt. of India, took its proper shape in 1986 when the Government of India took the responsibility to providing education to all groups of disabled children. However, after the launching of the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Integrated Education for Disabled Children in 1986, it was largely felt that government alone could not be competent enough to provide education to the vast number of disabled population without the involvement of non-government organizations (NGOs) working in the field of disabled. Therefore, the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Integrated Education for Disabled Children was revised in 1992 to include the involvement and active participation of NGOs working in the field to provide education to disabled children.

The initiative of UNICEF to promote education of disabled children cannot be underscored as the UNICEF launched Scheme known as “**Project Integrated Education for the Disabled**” (PIED) which was in operation from 1987 – 1997.

The present trend of education of disabled children in India marks a shift from integration to inclusion and the Ministry of Human Resource Development is launching a scheme known as **Inclusive Education Scheme** to promote education of disabled children and along with this scheme, the Government of India’s scheme of **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) (Education For All)** has also taken initiative to provide education to all disabled children. The nodal Ministry of Human Resource Development opines that integrated education of disabled children should not only provide education to disabled children by enrolling them in normal schools, non-disabled children should also study with disabled children in special schools.

INTRODUCTION

“Education for All” is a slogan proclaimed by the United Nations way back in 1960’s. It is like an old wine in a new bottle. Education for the disabled is as old as two centuries and so far as India is concerned, education for the disabled started in the 19th century.

Despite sporadic efforts made by the government and non-government organizations, it is estimated that we have been able to bring merely 10% of the disabled children in the educational arena and a large number of disabled children are still waiting to receive education and to put it figuratively, are languishing in the dungeon of dayless gloom.

The concept of Integrated Education for the Disabled is more a compulsion to cover a large number of disabled children waiting for education. The Special Schools cannot cover this large number. The gap between the number of disabled children receiving education and the number of disabled children waiting to receive education is so large that the Special Schools alone cannot meet the challenge. Besides, the slogan “Education for All” necessitates the urgency of evolving a multi-pronged strategy to promote educational services for all children including disabled children.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Inclusive education is currently being discussed all over the world because it is considered that education of disabled is a part of the larger educational system and should not be treated as a separate entity. The Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in special needs education proclaims that every child has a fundamental right to receive education and must be given an opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning. Every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs. Educational system should be designed and educational programmes implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs. Children with special educational needs must have access to

regular schools which should accommodate them within a child-centered pedagogy capable of meeting these needs. Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving the goal of education for all.

TYPES OF SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED TO DISABLED CHILDREN IN GENERAL SCHOOLS

Three types of services are needed for special needs children in general schools - peripheral, essential and supportive services. Peripheral services include one-time peripheral service such as identification, assessment of educational needs etc. which are provided before the child enters the general school. Essential services include classroom instruction, teaching of concepts, teaching of plus curricular activities etc. These services are classified as essential services as they are vital for disabled children to cope with general class room instruction. Supportive services include supply of Braille material, preparation of teaching aids, teaching abstract concepts, teaching orientation and mobility etc.

To provide peripheral, essential and support services, the role of parents, medical practitioners, volunteers from the village, community at large and service organizations are necessary. Besides, the involvement of non-disabled children in assisting the education for disabled children in general schools is also necessary. General class room teachers are the main service providers. Specialist Teachers who have expertise play an important role in promoting educational services to special needs children in the general class room.

NATURE OF TRAINING NEEDED FOR GENERAL CLASSROOM TEACHERS

For the effective implementation of inclusive education, general classroom teachers need training in understanding the special needs of disabled children. It is therefore recommended that a separate paper on "Special Need Children" be included in the Pre-service Teachers Preparation Course". The curriculum framework of the National Council of Teacher Education (1998) indicates that the Pre-service Teachers Preparation Courses should include content on special needs children. Teachers thus trained would be in a position to take care of the educational needs of disabled children in general classroom by providing materials such as Braille books, assistive devices etc. The work of the general classroom teachers may be occasionally assisted by specialist teachers. It is also recommended that in-service training for a period of 10 days should be provided to such teachers who have no exposure to the educational needs of disabled children.

I would like to mention here that unfortunately general schools and special schools are treated as two different entities. It has been rightly suggested in the document of UNESCO Consultation meeting on Special Education for Disabled that Special Schools

be considered as “Special Education Centers” to serve as a resource to general schools providing education to disabled children. “The Special Education Centre” resources can be utilized for early stimulation programme, preparing children for education, providing special education support to general schools. Likewise, resources of the general schools can also be utilized for reinforcing endeavors of the Special Education Centers. The goals of special schools and general schools catering to disabled children are the same viz. to educate disabled children and equip them to become independent members of the society. In fact, the special schools for disabled and the general schools catering to disabled children are complimentary and supplementary to one another, and should not be treated as two different modes of institutions. Both special and general schools should go hand in hand to provide more and more educational opportunities to the vast number of disabled population.

When we talk of inclusive education we can not underscore the importance of special schools. It may be well-neigh to mention that as per the present trend the numbers of children having multiple disabilities is on the rise. We are getting a larger number of children who are visually impaired as well as orthopaedically handicapped, visually impaired and mentally retardation and visually impaired orthopaedically handicapped. When we are talking of education for all, we can not avoid these groups of children who need much more attention and for them special schools would play a key role in promoting education to such disabled children.

After obtaining specialized attention which is mandatory to meet the special needs of such children they could be enrolled in the inclusive education system.

ROLE OF NATIONAL TRUST

The National Trust which is in operation under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is providing necessary services and input to children who are spastic, mentally challenged, cerebral palsy and down syndrome. With the active involvement of National Trust we have been able to provide succour to such children who are denied educational opportunities and were not included in the educational arena so far.

THE ROLE OF SENSE INTERNATIONAL

The role of Sense International which is providing all facilities to deafblind children whose number is in the rise. The needs of deafblind children are totally different from that of a hearing impaired child and a visually impaired child. It is strongly felt that the deafblind children should be treated as a separate category of disabled children. It is felt that integration of such children may be classified into two broad categories – curricular integration and social integration. Curricular integration can be provided to children with single disability in the inclusive education system. However the other groups of children having additional handicaps can best enjoy social integration which may be provided in

the inclusive set up. They would require specialized training and attention in special schools.

The achievement of the goal of “Equal Educational Opportunities” is to be made a reality. An operational Plan of Action should be evolved. Education of disabled children should be considered as an integral component of general education. Special Education of Disabled Children should be accepted as an integral part of the general education system and this has to be accepted at all levels of general education-right from the administration, National and Sub-National levels to the institutional level. The administrators of the general education system are reluctant to accept the changing role of encompassing the special education component into the fabric of general education, because they feel that by doing so their area of field would increase considerably and consequently their tasks would become more complex. The operational strategy being suggested globally refers to breaking the isolation of general education and special education institutions.

It is a fallacy of undue assumption that disabled and non-disabled children are two distinct categories and therefore they should be kept in isolation from one another. A child, whether disabled or non-disabled, is first a child, having common traits. The disabled child is no way different from his non-disabled counterpart, except the fact that due to his/her disability, he/she is differently able to do the same task as his non-disabled counterpart.

Pragmatic steps should therefore be taken to provide educational services to special needs children on a massive scale and in light of this, the roles of both general institutions as well as special institutions should be re-designed.

CONCLUSION

To provide services to all groups of disabled children and adults it may be pointed out that children with multiple disabilities may not be able to cope up with the level of studies with their non-disabled counterparts. For such children and adults a multi-pronged strategy has to be formulated and in light of this non-formal education, adult-education, national open school, education through distant mode and various other strategies will have to be initiated.

Imparting education to all is not only necessary for the development of the child or family, it also goes a long way in the development of the society at large. To achieve this goal the roles of teachers, teacher educators, social and community workers and the mass media will all have to make concerted efforts to provide education to more and more disabled children to achieve the goal of “Education for All”.
