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Practices and Attitude towards Inclusive Education among Elementary Teachers of West Golaghat District, Assam

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Abstract

Now education is the fundamental right of every child, youth and adult. They have the right to get education through any means. Though education is the equal rights for all individual, but some people are there who are not able to get minimum level of education because of some social, cultural and problems of disabilities. Inclusive education is the new approach to include all children irrespective of their abilities, disabilities, ethnicity, religion, caste, creed, gender and age. In this paper it is tried to assess the inclusive practices in schools and the teachers' attitude towards inclusive education.

Key Words: *Inclusive Education, Attitude, Inclusive Practices, Teacher.*

Introduction: Now education is the fundamental right of every child, youth and adult. They have the right to get education through any means. Though education is the equal rights for all individual, but some people are there who are not able to get minimum level of education because of some social, cultural and problems of disabilities. Inclusive education stands for improvement of schools in all dimensions to address the educational needs of all children. The major support for inclusive education came from the 1994 World conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca, Spain which emphasized that: Schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. The urgency to address the needs of learners who are vulnerable to exclusion through responsive educational opportunities was also highlighted at the Dakar (Senegal). World Education forum in April 2000 where in it was emphasized– “The key challenge is to ensure that the broad vision of education for all as an inclusive concept reflected in national government and funding agency policies. Education for All... must take account of the needs of the poor and the most disadvantaged, including working children, remote rural dwellers and nomads, and ethnic and linguistic minorities, children, young people and adults affected by conflict, HIV/AIDS, hunger and poor health; and those with special learning needs...”

When considering understandings of, approaches to, and impacts of inclusive education, the inevitable diversity and complexity in a context of this size must be taken into account. India's 1.3 billion people speak 18 different languages (GOI, 2002) (Now its 22 constitutional languages), and 844 dialects (Singal, 2005a), worship varied religions, have unique customs, differ in their exposure to disease and access to types of nutrition which affect their health and socio economic status, and also communication which influence their access to government resources such as education or

healthcare. This diversity is further reflected in disparities of educational achievement. For example in Kerala the literacy rate recorded in the 2001 census was 90.92%, while in Bihar it was 47.53% (GOI, 2002). As a result, the overall (average) literacy rate for India was 65.38% which, while a representative figure cannot reflect the complexity of context (Govinda and Biswal, 2006). Added to this issue of averaging out statistics in such a vast country is the fact that when census data was collected there were some areas which were cut off by “disturbances” or “natural calamities” (GOI, 2002:11) such as the Kashmir conflict, floods or landslides. Data on children with disabilities seems to be unreliable, perhaps due to Filmer’s (2005:3) “selective reporting” of obvious physical impairments, or children being hidden by their families out of shame. A basic disability statistic was recently included in the 2001 Census for the first time, as a result of campaigning by the Indian disability movement (Thomas, 2005). Despite there being no disability indicators in the influential EFA Global monitoring reports, the addition of the disability statistic may indicate the positive influence of the introduction of the inclusive education concept. In India disability is measured in five categories – sight, speech, hearing, locomotors and mental which excludes disabilities such as autism. It is worth noting that according to the 2002 National Sample Survey, only 45% of the disabled population is literate, and 9% has secondary level education or higher (Thomas, 2005).

While impairment is not restricted to any one class or age group, people with disabilities are often found to be amongst the poorest of the poor (Hans, 2003; DFID, 2000) However, a caste/disability link does not seem to have been empirically researched to date in the Indian context. There are many govt. and NGO programmes focused on caste and gender in India, yet none seem to be concerned with how disability interacts and reinforces these dimensions of exclusion. For example, the multiple handicap of being a disabled woman can manifest itself in many ways. Her marriage chances are slight (Coleridge, 1993) she may be more subject to infanticide, her dowry higher as she is perceived as infertile, she is more likely to be abused or hidden from public view by her family, and she “...ceases to exist as a person and is excluded from being recognized as a woman in the fullest sense because she does not fit in with the model of women defined by society and dear to the collective imagination.” (Hans, 2003:22).

What is Inclusive Education: The World Declaration on Education for All, adopted in Jomtien, Thailand (1990), sets out an overall vision: universalizing access to education for all children, youth and adults, and promoting equity. This means being proactive in identifying the barriers that many encounter in accessing educational opportunities and identifying the resources needed to overcome those barriers. Inclusive education is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners and can thus be understood as a key strategy to achieve EFA. As an overall principle, it should guide all education policies and practices, starting from the fact that education is a basic human right and the foundation for a more just and equal society. The major impetus for inclusive education was given at the World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality, held in Salamanca, Spain, June 1994. More than 300 participants representing 92 governments and 25 international organizations considered the fundamental policy shifts required to promote the approach of inclusive education, thereby enabling schools to serve all children, particularly those with special educational needs.

Although the immediate focus of the Salamanca Conference was on special needs education, its conclusion was that: ‘Special needs education – an issue of equal concern to countries of the North and of the South – cannot advance in isolation. It has to form part of an overall educational strategy and, indeed, of new social and economic policies. It calls for major reform of the ordinary school’. An ‘inclusive’ education system can only be created if ordinary schools become more inclusive – in

other words, if they become better at educating all children in their communities. The Conference proclaimed that: 'regular schools with [an] 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' (p. ix). This vision was reaffirmed by the World Education Forum meeting in Dakar, April 2000, held to review the progress made since 1990. The Forum declared that Education for All must take account of the needs of the poor and the disadvantaged, including working children, remote rural dwellers and nomads, ethnic and linguistic minorities, children, young people and adults affected by conflict, HIV and AIDS, hunger and poor health, and those with disabilities or special learning needs. It also emphasized the special focus on girls and women.

Inclusion is thus seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all children, youth and adults through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing and eliminating exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision that covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children.

Policies Taken in India: The Constitution of India and the educational policies envisaged in post independent India reflect a perseverance and commitment to the fulfillment of UEE. The Constitution states that 'free and compulsory education should be provided for all children until they complete the age of 14 years'.

The first education commission in India (Kothari Commission, 1964–66) addressed issues of access and participation by all. It stressed a common school system open to all children irrespective of caste, creed, community, religion, economic condition and social status. In 1968, the National Education Policy followed the commission's recommendations and suggested the expansion of educational facilities for physically and mentally handicapped children, and the development of an 'integrated programme' enabling handicapped children to study in regular schools. Two decades later, the National Policy on Education (NPE) (1986) stressed the 'removal of disparities' in education, while attending to the specific needs of those who had been denied equality so far (MHRD, 1986). It stated 'the objective should be to integrate the physically and mentally handicapped with the general community as equal partners, to prepare them for normal growth, and to enable them to face life with courage and confidence.' In 1987, to fulfill the provisions for disabled children in the NPE, the government launched the Project for Integrated Education Development (PIED). It states 'wherever feasible, the education of children with motor handicaps and other mild handicaps will be in common with that of others.' According to the NPE, 'the indicators of integration are that handicapped people enjoy the same rights as the rest; have opportunities for growth and development in environmental conditions available to the rest; have access to the quality of life like any other citizen; and are treated as equal partners in the community.'

In 1993 the Delhi Declaration on Education for All promised to "...ensure a place for every child in a school or appropriate education programme according to his or her capabilities" (cited in Mukhopadhyay & Mani, 2002: 96). This issue of 'capabilities' is key to the varied interpretations of 'inclusivity' of children, the focus on the child's abilities diverting attention away from inadequate teaching methods (Singal, 2005b).

Objectives of the Study:

- To analyze the practices and teachers attitude towards inclusive education.
- To assess the knowledge about inclusion of different children into the field of education.
- To make concern that inclusive education is one of the main tool to implement Right to Education Act.

Methodology of the Study: The researcher followed descriptive survey method to collect relevant data.

Tool of the study: The researcher prepared a questionnaire to collect data from elementary teachers of west Golaghat district of Assam. The questionnaire was distributed among 40 teachers which were randomly selected.

Findings:

- The attitude towards inclusive education is positive among those teachers.
- The teachers are aware about the needs of the different disadvantaged group of children, but they feel that it is the most challenging task to fulfill every child's need in a classroom.
- The teachers think that though somebody is disabled in some area he/she may creative in another area.
- They are interested in training programme related to inclusive education.
- The teachers are not satisfied with the infrastructural facilities available at their schools; they need more facilities to properly implement the Govt. policies related to Inclusive education.
- They also need the co-operation from their co-workers to fulfill the need of desired children.
- Some of the teachers are not aware about the Govt. policies and need of including the different children who are also the important part of our society.

Suggestions for Improving the Inclusive Practices at School:

- The school environment should safe, accessible, structured and predictable for all students.
- Classroom seating arrangement should support inclusion. All pupils are to positioned so as to be able to see the board, teacher and displays.
- The school actively should collaborate the parents, NGO's and other stakeholders.
- Developing inclusive policies and plans in consultation with all stakeholders, including parents.
- Developing an access and admission policy that is open to all students without discrimination.
- Ensure that students with SEN (Special Educational Need) are included in school social events.
- Ensure that teachers are equipped to respond to diverse needs among children with a variety of SEN.
- Ensure that the achievements of all students are recognized.
- Involving children in their own assessment, allowing them achieve against personal goals.
- There should be a mixed ability of teaching approach.
- There should be differentiation of the Curriculum and should ensure that all students are able to access the curriculum.
- Teachers should use variety of teaching styles to cater for different student abilities.

Conclusion: Though the findings reported that teachers are interested towards inclusive education, but it can't be ignored that the poor condition of elementary education in Assam. The newly appointed teachers are getting the opportunity of the teachers training programme like D.El.ED with the help of which they are little bit concern about the various types of special needs children, differently able children, and children from the special groups like SC, ST and OBC and girl child who are still deprived because of some socio-cultural problems existing in our traditional society. From the study it can be said that teachers should be trained in inclusive education and should help them to prepare such environment through which all the children or students feel included in classroom and school activities. The goal of achieving Right to Education Act and Universalization of Education is incomplete without inclusive education of the disadvantaged group.

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