

## Barrier Free Inclusion of Learners with Special Educational Needs in Regular Classroom: Issues and Challenges

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### Abstract:

Education provides a base of development to a country. As per Universal Declaration of Human Rights, education is a fundamental right for all including learners with special educational needs. A prevailing concern in inclusion of special educational needs is lack of access to education for both children and adults with special educational needs. Literature review reveals the fact that it is hard to identify those students who are not visible special educational needs, unstructured strategies and approaches are the significant barriers to access, equity, enrollment and participation into mainstream. In addition to this unprofessional attitudes of in-service and pre-service teachers, inadequate use of technology to support inclusive education are the significant cause of slower inclusion rates at primary, secondary and higher education levels.

The aim of present study is to find out the problems and strategies to facilitate inclusive education among learners with special educational needs. As in the present scenario the most exigent and influential issues in implementing inclusive education are student accessibility, drop-outs, identification, assessment, societal attitudes, teachers attitude, flexible and adaptive as well as functional curriculum within the learning system toward special educational needs. This study also focuses on current and past scenario of inclusive education for better learning and also it provides a clear insight about the various problems and suggests the strategies to develop better inclusive educational practices for learners with special educational needs.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education can be referred as an opportunity towards building an inclusive society for a diverse group of learners. The National Policy on Education (NPE, 1986) recommends 'removal of disparities' in education so the ultimate goal of inclusive education is to provide education for all learners with educational special needs by 2015. As per the goals of Education for All (EFA) the process of inclusion requires building the right environment to strengthen the capacities of the learners with special educational needs, regardless of their difficulties or differences (UNESCO, 2010). Major barriers in including the learners with special educational needs are lack services related to early identification and intervention services, negative attitudes of parents and teachers, inadequate teacher training, inflexible curriculum, inadequate assessment procedures, lack of para professional to facilitate inclusion and appropriate teaching equipment at primary and secondary school levels.

Inclusive schools must be acquainted with the diverse needs of the students, ensuring quality education through a flexible curriculum, organizational arrangements and teaching strategies. Through proper policy planning and implementation of strategies as well allocation of resources inclusion of learner with special educational needs can overcome all the barriers. Access and equity are the basic requirement for the process of inclusion at different educational levels. The educational system, which is rigid with respect to time, curriculum, evaluation and learning pace will be unable to accommodate and include learners with special educational needs. (UNESCO, 2009). There is an

emergent need of policy implementation, to prepare the school system for inclusive education, with an intension that all children have the right to attend school in a least restrictive environment and the responsibility of the school is to accommodate differences among learners with special educational needs.

To meet the challenges, it is required to ensure access which is relevant and good in quality. Salamanca Framework for Action, 1994 stated that there should be a variety of support within the educational system and to encounter the problems of learners with special educational

needs. So inclusive education practices should provide the best opportunity for the majority of learners with special educational needs to receive education in urban as well as rural areas (UNESCO, 1994).

## II. KEY TERMS

- **Inclusive Education:** Inclusive education refers to a kind of education system which can fulfill goal of education for all irrespective of their disability conditions.
- **Learners with Special Educational Needs (LWSENs):** Those learners who have difficulties in communication or behaviour, or requires abundance of help for completion of specific educational task.
- **Barrier Free Inclusion:** Inclusion of learner with special educational needs which is free from inflexible curriculum, assessment procedures, environmental and attitudinal barriers.

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### III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study concept and factors affecting the inclusive accommodation of Learners with special educational needs at different educational levels.
- To list out emerging concerns and basic recommendations with respect to the Barrier Free Inclusion of Learners with Special Educational Needs.

### IV. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: CONCEPT AND NEED

In 1990, UNESCO hosted the first World Conference on Education for All, in Jomtien, Thailand which emphasis on providing equal access to education for every category of disabled persons as an integral part of the education system. After the concept of integration of person with disability, Inclusion came into existence as in integration a person has to become as per the norms of the educational system. As per Stubbs (2008) "Inclusive education refers to a wide range of strategies, activities and processes that seek to make a reality of the universal right to quality, relevant and appropriate education. It acknowledges that learning begins at birth and continues throughout life, and includes learning in the home, the community, and in formal, informal and non-formal situations". Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) has developed several norms for the creating barrier free environment including the railings and ramp, doors, windows, signage's in print and Braille, disable friendly toilets and other architectural facilities following the principles of Universal Design. (Dept. of Education, MHRD, 2000 & SSA, 2009).

Kohama (2012) in her study stated that "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 40% in urban areas), with only 7% in rural and 18% in urban areas having completed secondary education." Whereas University Grants Commission (UGC), a statutory body for higher education in India in its report stated that only 6 % of the youth population is enrolled in Indian universities and colleges. However only 1.2 % of the 3.6 lakh disabled youth are enrolled in the universities and colleges. We can conclude from the above data that there is lack of support services at different levels for inclusive teaching learning practices.

### V. FACTORS AFFECTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The barriers which keep children with disabilities out-of-school in such disproportionately large numbers is attributed to negative attitudes and systems, and societies that discriminate against them (UNESCO, 2009).

There are several factors affecting inclusive education at different educational levels which involves structural barriers with respect to accessibility, attitudinal barrier of society as well as teachers, parents and other family members , etc. (Shown in Fig:1)

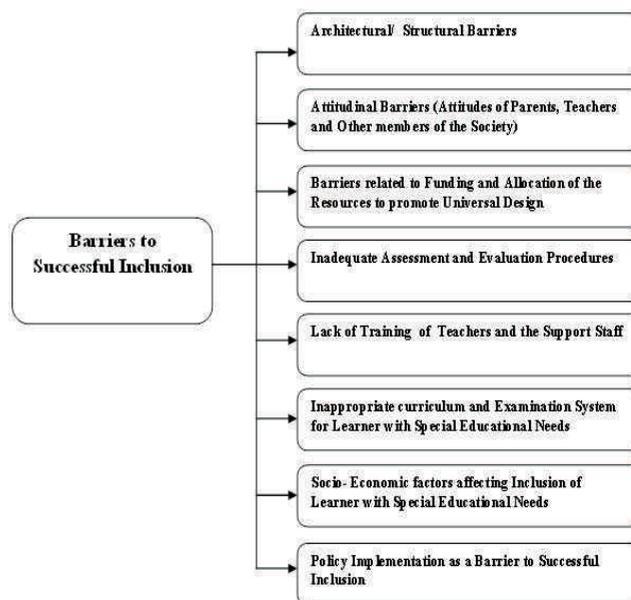


Fig:1 Showing Barriers to Inclusive Education

The barrier which prevent learner with special needs from getting benefitted are as follows:

**1. Architectural Barriers:** Person with Disability Act (1995) gave strong recommendation on creating barrier free environment at school so that learners with special needs can also participate in general school with their non disabled peers. Many schools even university and college campuses are not accessible to provide facilities to accommodate learners with special educational needs , may be its due to lack of financial support and planning issues. Architectural barrier scan include construction of doors, passageways, stairs and ramps, toilets, grab rails and hand rails, and recreational areas. These can create a barrier for some students to simply enter the school building or classroom.

**2. Attitudinal Barriers:** It refers to the barriers related to the attitude of the parents, teachers, peer group and other members of the society which affects the accommodation of learners with special educational needs. Prejudices of the social groups of society can further lead to discrimination, which hinders the educational process. Ward, Center, and Bochner (1994) conducted their study on teacher attitude towards integration. They suggested that attitudes towards integration were strongly influenced by the nature of disabilities and / or educational problems being presented. With positive teacher attitudes and beliefs about inclusion of students with disabilities will be given greater educational opportunities with their peers and will be more successful within the inclusive setting.

**3. Barriers related to Funding and Allocation of Resources:** Allocation of resources comprises adequate facilities with respect to the physical environment, trained teachers, other staff and general support to the children with special needs and their parents. It also requires proper funding from the government and non- government bodies for the proper inclusion of students with special needs.

**4. Inadequate Assessment and Evaluation Procedures:**

According to Goodwin (1997) cited in, assessment and inclusion are naturally connected, and that equity in schooling relies on both. In PWD act only few disabilities are listed. Some of the disabilities are not listed yet and also have no proper tools for assessment so it is required first to develop tools and also training of the professionals regarding assessment should be mandatory in all aspects (Darling & Falk, 1997).

**5. Lack of training of teachers and support staff:**

Teacher training is an important task to incorporate inclusive practices into regular classroom. There is still lack of trained and unenthusiastic teachers in the field of inclusive education. Sometimes training programmes suffers due to funding related issues.

**6. Inappropriate Curriculum and Examination System:**

Rigid and inappropriate curriculum as well as teaching methods create a major barrier for inclusive practices of diverse group of learners. Many students are expected to learn while being taught in a language that is new and in some cases unfamiliar to them. This is obviously a significant barrier to successful learning. Too often, these students face discrimination and low expectations. On the other hand the examination process is not flexible for the LWSNs.

**7. Socio-economic factors affecting Inclusion of LWSNs:** Violence, poor health services and other social factors make create barriers even for traditional learners, and these challenges restricts the process of inclusion.

**8. Policies Implementation as a Barrier to Successful Inclusion:**

Many policy makers don't understand or believe in inclusive education, and these leaders can stonewall efforts to make school policies more inclusive. Decisions come from the school system's high-level authorities whose initiatives focus on employee compliance more than quality learning. The top levels of the organization may have little or no idea about the realities teachers face on a daily basis.

## VI. BASIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BARRIER FREE INCLUSION

Dakar Framework (2000), suggest several strategies to overcome the challenges within the existing inclusive scenario by encouraging policy-makers to recognize barriers within the education system, and how the removal of these barriers can be done; right to education for all persons with disabilities should be integrated in National Education Plans; Stimulating and monitoring development towards sensitization, raising awareness and advocacy for the right to education; monitoring processes which include data and documentation of resources for learners with special educational needs should be done properly; parental involvement in the classroom, teacher problem-solving and mutual support should be persuade, and support of peers should be taken under consideration (UNESCO, 2009). Undergoing review of literature following recommendations can be given as follows:

- Modifications in existing teacher training programs at higher education institutions are required. In-service

training programmes should be updated and financially supported using best practice information at the local school and higher educational levels for teachers, service professionals, administrators, and parents.

- Government should create funds, grants, and/or low interest loans to support removal of architectural barriers for schools and university levels based on Universal Design.
- Maintenance and improvement of continuous in-service training in order to retrain and educate new staff members and parents about inclusive practices should be done. Revised evaluation and planning procedures and forms should be made to promote greater emphasis on documenting modifications, adaptations, and support services.
- School administration should provide training to educators and parents based IEPs that will be functional in the regular education classroom at primary and secondary level school system. Promotion of advocacy at grass root levels to provide support to the local school and district level should be done.
- Higher Education Institutions should revise the curriculum to prepare future educators to implement inclusive practices. Also Promotion of a spirit of inclusiveness and provide motivation to support staff to respond positively to the opportunity for involvement with inclusive practices.

## VII. CONCLUSION

India is progressing day by day so as its educational system but there is an emergent need to make several changes in the existing educational system so that the Learners with Special Educational Needs get equally benefitted. Our census rarely has disability related questions and most families prefer not to reveal data. It is required to aware and sensitize the education system and society using inclusive practices together with barrier free access. An important step has to be taken at school level to train teachers and support staff, to meet the needs of inclusive education, as good quality education is a basic prerequisite to ensure sustainable rehabilitation and the hope of a better future.

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