



ROLE OF TEACHERS IN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education lays the foundation to an inclusive society accepting, respecting and celebrating diversity. The present paper traces the roots and discusses issues to be addressed for effective implementation of the concept of inclusive classroom in present day's context. The paper throws light on perception and importance of role of teachers, curriculum development, social acceptance and role of management and government in making the idea of inclusive setting a success.

KEYWORDS – Curriculum Development, Inclusive Education, Teachers, Students.

1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusion means full inclusion of children with diverse abilities in all aspects of schooling that other children are able to access and enjoy. It involves regular schools and classroom genuinely adapting and changing to meet the needs of all children, as well as celebrating and valuing differences. The prime goal of inclusion for every school is to be ready in advance to accept children with diverse abilities. Most schools advocate the use of child-centred approach to education, which implies that all teachers should be willing to meet the needs of all children [1].

During the 1960s, the first movement towards inclusive education for children with special needs was witnessed [2]. Taking a note of these early movements The United Nations (UN) has made a number of remarkable declarations regarding inclusive education, such as

the Convention against Discrimination in Education [3], the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons [4], and the Convention on the Rights of the Child [5]. In 1990, the World Conference on Education for All was held in Jomtien, Thailand. Following this in 2000 a conference held in Senegal laid the foundation stone for the Dakar framework for Education for All, during this conference the international community decided to ensure education as a right for all people, irrespective of individual differences. Subsequently 1994s World Conference on Special Needs Education at the Salamanca in Spain, the concept of inclusive education was put forward. The Salamanca statement is undoubtedly the most significant international document in the field of special education [6]. In the Salamanca statement, inclusive education is described as a framework for action that would accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions" (Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action, UNESCO, 1994, Article 3). The statement argues that regular schools with an inclusive setting are the most effective way to fight against discriminatory attitudes in order to build an inclusive society and to achieve education for all [7].

Inclusive education is considered as educational practice that attempts to provide equal access to academic instruction and social opportunities for all students, regardless of ability levels. There are many different advantages to inclusion, including opportunities for social interaction [8]; ease in accessing the general curriculum [9]; academic improvement [10]; and positive outcomes for students [11]. Although they may not be included as extensively as students with mild disabilities, inclusion also creates learning opportunities for students with severe disabilities [12].

An International Conference in Education was held in Geneva, 2008; which was organised by UNESCO. The main theme of this conference was to diversify inclusion to a range of learners, regardless of ability or characteristics, as well as the promotion of respect for the needs and abilities of learners and the elimination all forms of discrimination [13].

Inclusive education is both a philosophy and educational practice. Philosophically, inclusive education is based on the rights of all children, regardless of ability level, to have access to a quality educational program. Causton-Theoharis and Theoharis [14] describes inclusive schools as “places where students, regardless of ability, race, language, and income, are

integral members of classrooms, feel a connection to the peers, have access to rigorous and meaningful general education curricula and receive collaborative support to success.

In the Indian context “inclusive education is rapidly becoming a part of official rhetoric” [15]. India is a very vast and diverse country and due to the different geographical regions, ethnic groups, religions and social classes there are approximately 55 million children who are excluded from the mainstream education system [16]. In this context it is very vital to look the inclusive education and inclusive classroom with different perspectives for the developing countries like India. Such as, Singal [15] has rightly pointed out that, in India, in order to bring about the successful implementation of inclusive education, it is necessary to motivate people for their support, to change classroom practices and implement some pedagogical rather than structural changes.

2. PERCEPTION OF INCLUSION

“People’s perceptions determine their actions” [17], it is argued that a person’s perceptions and attitudes are often related directly to learning experiences provided by the environment and the generalised belief systems of the society. The perception and attitude have a direct influence on the way in which one responds to the world. The attitudes and behaviours of teachers toward students is the most important factor related to successful inclusion.

In terms of inclusive education it can be accepted that teachers’ perceptions of inclusive policies will not only determine their acceptance of inclusive policies, but will also affect their commitment to implement such policies. Furthermore, the teachers’ attitudes towards learners with specific needs appear to influence the type and quality of teacher-learner interactions, directly impacting on the learners’ educational experiences and opportunities.

3. TEACHERS VIEWS OF INCLUSION

In present context teaching and learning process is regularly undergoing rapid changes. Due to this, during the past decades, all area of education has changed with major changes to the role of teachers, together with the introduction of new approaches to the curriculum and assessment. In addition, the legislation has also undergone to changes to

incorporate the ways to support the needs of special children's. These changes have involved the development of new understanding about the interactive nature of children's need and a shift in focus from 'what is wrong with the child?' to 'what does the child need to support their learning?' Such developments have substantially affected the professional identity as well as the roles and responsibilities of many teachers. It also has implication for how teachers are trained and supported in their professional development. To implement inclusive education in classrooms, it is important that teachers provide an effective and encouraging educational environment for all pupils. In addition, teachers experience and their training are very important to significantly influence their attitudes. Despite the fact that it is essential to staff inclusive classes with skilled and trained teachers, there is a shortage of inclusive teacher training programmes. Research indicates that adequately trained professionals are required for students with special needs [18].

4. ROLE OF TEACHERS IN AN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM

Inclusive education refers to an academic system that allows special education to students to become included in main streaming classes alongside their peers. Benefits of inclusive education include an opportunity for special need students to learn team work skills while heightening their sense of belonging in school community. While many teachers welcome the change, some may feel challenged by teaching a large spectrum academic ability levels or be confused about their new roles. Inclusion requires teachers to accept the responsibility for creating schools in which all children can learn and feel their belongingness.

In an inclusive classroom, teachers play the key role in the successful implementation of the inclusive policies. In view of this, the regular education classroom has become the main perspective within which inclusive education has to be implemented. The ways to instruct all students in inclusive classrooms, with special emphasis to the physical environment, instructional approaches employed, classroom management techniques etc. must be considered. The most important of this is the acceptability of the special teachers to these changes.

In an inclusive classroom, teachers possibly play the most important role and they must be able to perform many different functions, such as [19] acting as a team member for different committees on assessment and Individualized Education program (IEP), counselling and

innovation. In general, the role and responsibilities of teachers in inclusive class room is to provide educational programs for all students in the classroom, including students with disabilities.

5. ESSENTIAL MEASURES FOR INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS

The concept of the inclusion claims that the students with special needs can be active, valued, fully participating members of a school community in which diversity is viewed as the norm and high quality education is provided through a combination of meaningful curriculum, effective teaching, and necessary supports [20]. Including students with diverse learning needs creates challenges for educators. There are many different factors essential to the success of inclusion. Webber identified five essential features for successful inclusion of students with special needs (1) community and social acceptance (2) recognition of student's diversity (3) attention to curricular needs (4) effective management and instructions (5) personal support and collaboration.

5.1 Community and Social Acceptance

For successful inclusion of students with special needs it is essential that the classroom community is appreciated and accepted by their teachers and classmates. Social acceptance among classmates contributes to students' self-perception of values. Physically placing students with disabilities in inclusive settings can't guarantee social involvement of these students with their nondisabled peers. Sometimes students need to be educated about diversity and disabilities to reduce the fear of differences. In inclusive setting teacher being at the centre of all affairs must pursue students to mix with others whose physical characteristics, behaviors, or learning-related needs require special consideration. While teachers can serve as excellent role models for acceptance of diversity, they can also facilitate interactions and acceptance by organizing situations where students with and without disabilities interact. In studying the importance of social relationships in the lives of students, [21] concluded that school personnel must develop intervention strategies to help students with disabilities form better relations with their peers and with adults. Hence, the fact simply how a student with a disability is introduced to the class will have a far reaching impact on the student's acceptability.

Teachers play the most important role in creating classroom environment where students with disabilities can be accepted because they control several factors that are essential to establishing successful inclusion setting [22]. These include teachers' competence, attitudes, expectations, collaborative skills, and support. These factors are responsible for a positive classroom environment and are critical for the success of inclusion.

5.2 Recognition of Student's Diversity

The acceptance of diversity in general is the most important issue for the success of inclusion. The diversity means difference in language, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation and academic skills [23]. In this situation again teacher is a pivot at the centre stage and has to deal with a wide variety of languages and learning abilities. Unfortunately, acceptance of diverse students is not easy and requires major changes in the way most of schools operate these days. It is also true that some teachers and administrators are ready to accept diverse students but others may not. Teachers and all other school personnel must develop an understanding of the relationship between a student's culture and behavior and view the student as part of his or her cultural background [24].

5.3 Attention to Curricular Needs

All these discussions will be imperative if the curricular requirements are not given due attention. Inclusion can become a mission only in circumstances where the students with disabilities are educated, should be uttered by their individual learning needs. For this good teachers must consider curriculum seriously and modify it as per the needs of the students.

5.4 Effective Management and Instruction

To implement inclusion, effective management and instruction are critical components. In inclusive environment any teacher lacking these skills cannot be successful. Inclusive classroom includes students from diverse range and must be properly managed. Classroom management including physical, procedural, instructional and behaviour management and sets the stage for smooth delivery of instruction. This can only be successful if the teachers in such environment possess the ability to respond to changing situations to support students with special needs. This flexibility in instruction may be managed by

willingness to listen to different ideas, try new ideas, think out of the box, go with the flow, and keep a watch on what was happening in the classroom.

5.5 Personal support and collaboration

Students with special needs not only require student centric instructional support but also need personal support to be benefitted from their placement in inclusive setting. This support is typically provided by special education teachers, Para educators, and related service professionals such as speech and language pathologist, occupational and physical therapist and audio logiest etc. A high level of collaboration is required for the necessary personal resources to work together effectively. This can be accomplished through a variety of collaboration models, including collaboration-consultation, peer support system, teacher assistance teams and co-teaching.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper author has discussed importance of role of teacher in inclusive setting. It also highlights diverse range of issues like perceptions, teacher's views, role of teachers and essential measures for inclusion. Based on these highlighted discussions this study draws the conclusion that the teachers must have a positive attitude towards the implementation of inclusion and that the students with special needs requires special attention during the learning in inclusive setting. For the success of inclusion the role of community in accepting and recognising their diversity is important. Apart from this it is also important that this practice is teacher centric and must be supported by good curriculum and personal support. It can also be concluded that the government support is must for making such programs effective.

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