

Study of Existing Pedagogical Practices, Issues and Challenges of Inclusive Education in Chandigarh

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Introduction

'Inclusive education' or 'Education for All' has taken centre stage within the human rights framework. In inclusive education, children with disabilities are taught in regular schools with their age and grade peers with the support services provided within the school system. Inclusion involves valuing diversity in teaching groups and the adaptation of teaching approaches to support them. Inclusion cannot go very far without developing the capacity of schools to respond to diversity among children.

In India, there has been no single policy or act which included all kinds of disabilities till 1995. The PWD Act of 1995 covered seven major disabilities — blindness, low vision, leprosy-cured, hearing impairment, locomotor disability, mental retardation, and mental illness. With evolving time, different policies and acts include different categories. As per the Rights of Person with Disabilities Act of 2016, these have been increased to 21. This act defines inclusive education as a system of education wherein students with and without disability learn together and the process of teaching and learning is suitably adapted to meet the learning needs of different types of students with disabilities.

Children with disabilities constitute one of the largest groups that are still outside the fold of the general education system. They remain marginalised across the region, with their right to education far from being fully realised. Although significant efforts have

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been made to overcome the historic discrimination and exclusion they experience, too often such measures are fragmented and un-coordinated both across and within ministries.

Rationale of the Study

The present study was undertaken to identify the best teaching strategies or methods or approaches for inclusion being used by the government school teachers in Chandigarh, India. It was presumed that such an effort would serve to develop standards or benchmarks for developing inclusive pedagogy practices for use by the teachers. Additionally, the study has also focused on the issues and challenges faced by the teacher or educators in accommodating children with special needs in regular schools and the training needs of the teachers to provide meaningful learning experiences to these children.

Objectives

1. To identify the pedagogical practices used by the teachers for children with special needs in regular classrooms.
2. To find out the challenges faced by the teachers and others in inclusive classrooms.
3. To identify the training needs of the teachers in inclusive education.

Research Questions

1. Are there any pedagogical practices specific in nature facilitating inclusion of any particular type of children with special needs?
2. Are there any pedagogical practices specific to nature of the subject being taught in the inclusive classrooms?
3. What are the practical challenges faced by the teachers and others to include children with special needs in regular classrooms?
4. What are the training needs of the teachers in inclusive education?

Method

Sample

The researcher selected the elementary schools of Chandigarh as the learning site for the study. Among these schools, those with the maximum number of CWSN students were selected for the purpose of gaining a deeper understanding into the existing

pedagogical practices, issues and challenges in the implementation of inclusive education.

Considering how the study required a sample of inclusive schools where CWSN were enrolled, a two-staged sampling procedure was adopted. In the first stage the list of clusters of all government schools in Chandigarh was collected from the Directorate of Education records.

Thus with the help of cluster random sampling, 28 schools were selected, from which 240 teachers teaching maximum CWSN were selected purposively along with 28 principals of these inclusive schools. The study thus targeted principals or administrators and at least eight educators from each of these schools from Classes I to VIII.

Tools

Rather than going by a single tool, multiple tools were used in the study. The details are given below.

Semi-structured Questionnaire

The semi-structured questionnaire was prepared for the teachers and principals. In the former case, the questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section comprised of seven questions on the demographic information about the teachers, whereas the second section consisted of eleven questions that were both open ended and close ended, which were categorised into groups of common themes. These themes included the concepts of inclusive education, pedagogical practices, learning environment, challenges, etc.

In the case of principals, once again, the questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section comprised of five questions dealing with demographic information. The second section consisted of eleven questions on themes like facilities, resources, admission policy, etc.

Observation Schedule

The observation schedule for teachers was developed on the basis of the Performance Indicators (PINDICS) for elementary school teachers developed by the NCERT. In addition to the first four components that were taken from the PINDICS, two more were added. All the components — designing learning experiences, knowledge and understanding of subject matter, strategies for facilitating learning, admission policy, contribution of the school in

inclusion, and challenges in implementation — were used keeping in mind the needs of all the learners.

Other Methods

Focused Group Discussions were conducted with teachers and resource teachers teaching CWSN from each site. The discussion focused on the concept of inclusive education, curriculum adaptation and modification to include CWSN in classrooms, support given by the school to CWSN, barriers and suggestions.

To study the practices adopted by the schools towards being inclusive, case studies were done keeping in mind factors like infrastructure and aids provided to CWSN, resource centers, teaching aids, instructional practices etc.

Various existing documents like school information record, policy documents on inclusion, attendance registers, student records, circulars, etc., were also analysed.

Results

The pedagogical practices towards implementing inclusive education include lesson designing, teaching strategies, teaching and learning materials and aids. Result showed that about 90 per cent of the teachers engaged the students in various activities, whereas nearly two-thirds (66.78%) of the teachers prepared teaching learning material and half of the teachers (53.36%) used previous performance record of the students to plan the lessons. Apart from this, 66.78 per cent teachers stated that they prepare extra worksheets for children with special needs as per their disabilities and pictures or visual aids are also added in the lesson plan. With respect to the teaching strategies, majority of the teachers (about 79%) used cooperative method, nearly 71 per cent used task analysis and about 60 per cent used some visual aids while delivering lessons. In addition, 58.26 per cent of the teachers reported that they use storytelling method, practice in smaller units, use drill method and questioning techniques to create interest and draw attention to the lesson.

With regard to the teaching learning material and aids, a majority (about 79%) of teachers reported that they use flash cards and pictures. Newspaper and magazines were other resources used as TLM by nearly half (48%) of teachers in their classes while around 74 per cent of the teachers reported use of diagrams, maps and charts in their classes. The teachers also made adjustments

in the learning environment to facilitate the CWSN in their class. A majority (83%) of the respondents reported that they make seating arrangement for special children close to the blackboard, particularly for those with vision problems. Approximately 79 per cent teachers said that they give appropriate desk or table to CWSN in their classrooms. Proper lighting in the learning environment is ensured by about 65 per cent of teachers. Special children need a lot of motivation and encouragement to do even a small task, and about 91 per cent of teachers responded that they ensured this. Apart from this, 24.36 per cent teachers reported other adjustments in learning environment such as teaching them patiently and empathetically, flexible time table, providing emotional support, giving responsibilities and duties, conducting peer sensitization programmes, being approachable to students and holding regular meeting with the parents.

More often than not, the teachers also faced with challenges in implementing an inclusive approach in the classrooms. Nearly 12 per cent of the teachers responded that the furniture in the class rooms were not as per the requirements and this made it difficult for them to change seating arrangements for the children. Around 14 per cent found the school infrastructure to be lacking. This included a lack of ramps and other required modifications and adaptation with regard to toilet facilities, laboratories, libraries, playgrounds, etc. On the other hand, one third (30%) of the teachers reported that they do not have enough TLM.

Pointing at a very crucial issue when it comes to teaching students of different levels under the same roof, nearly 46 per cent of teachers stated that in inclusive set up they faced difficulty to complete the syllabus within the time. In addition, only about 9 per cent of the teachers reported that they got support from other staff or the head of the school. Around 40 per cent of the teachers pointed out that they did not get cooperation from the parents. Furthermore, according to approximately 24 per cent of the teachers, services of professionals and specialists were not provided for CWSN and thus they found it difficult to evaluate the performance of CWSN.

With regard to training, most (76%) of the teachers reported that they have not received any special training and about 43 per cent of the teachers said that due to the lack of training, they were not able teach these children according to their needs.

Nearly 65 per cent of the teachers reported that they needed in-service training to meet the needs of CWSN in an inclusive set up.

Conclusion

Inclusive set up needs some changes and adjustments in the physical environment therefore most of the teachers use few strategies for creating a positive environment in the class. Majority of the teachers make the seating arrangement of the CWSN near the blackboard and on front desk. Other than this they provide proper infrastructure, i.e., table and desk as per the needs of the children and appropriate lighting. They also stated that to provide conducive learning environment the CWSN students are taught patiently and empathetically using flexible time-table and by providing emotional support. To enhance the confidence among these children, responsibilities and duties are given to them, peer sensitization programmes are conducted, and, most importantly, teachers remain easily approachable by the students.

The classroom observation, suggested that most of the teachers gave their best efforts to make their classroom inclusive in nature but there remain some areas which need improvement like availability of TLM, infrastructure, resource teachers, rationalisation of class size, parental awareness and involvement, training and administrative support.

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