Administrative Barriers to the Implementation of Inclusive Education

Sandeep Berwal* Renu Bala** and Poonam Punia***

Abstract

This study was undertaken to identify certain administrative barriers that impede the implementation of inclusive education in primary schools of Haryana. The sample comprised 28 school heads selected from nine educational blocks of four districts through a multistage random sampling technique. An 'Administrative Barriers Checklist,' covering six broad areas of 'school working' and 25 standards on the 'functions of school head', given in the framework of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), was used to determine if any standard listed in the checklist was a barrier to inclusion. Each school head was contacted personally while filling up the checklist. The results show that only six standards out of 25 were met fully by head teachers whereas 19 unmet standards were counted as administrative barriers to the implementation of inclusive education. This would imply that school heads being local administrators have failed to comply with the standards given in Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) framework for implementing inclusive education. In particular, the heads failed in their function to encourage the teachers to use technology in the classroom, prepare and use the Individual Educational Plan (IEP), etc. The study recommends the government to undertake intensive in-service orientation and training programmes for the school heads to understand and implement inclusive education strictly as per the guidelines of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). The study has its implications for policymakers, teachers, media personnel, children with disabilities, and their parents.

*Department of Education, Chaudhary Ranbir Singh University, Jind, Haryana
***Special Education Teacher,* Directorate of Education, NCT, Delhi
**** Assistant Professor,* ITTR, BPS Women University, Khanpur Kalan, Haryana

Introduction

According to Census 2011, India is the second most populous country in the world. There are 121 crore persons in the country out of which 2.68 crore have one or other kind of disability. It means, 2.21 per cent of the Indian population comprises of persons with disabilities (Census, 2011). The Census 2011 further indicates a dismal educational status of the persons with disabilities, since only 55 percent of them are reported literate. Therefore, making provisions to educate them in the least restrictive environment is a major concern for educators and policymakers. However, in spite of the concerted efforts by the government, the education of persons with disabilities still has limited coverage.

Educational status of persons with disabilities is not good because of lack of knowledge, skills, and attitudes among stakeholders about the implementation of educational policies for persons with disabilities (Hegarty and Alur, 2002; Pandey, 2009; Limaye, 2016). Inclusive education under SSA is one of such policy that aims to bring all children with disabilities in the ambit of mainstream education so that no child is left out of the education system. Experts have defined inclusive education in different ways and contexts (Singal, 2006). In the Indian context, it is described as a system of education where children with and without disabilities get education in the same physical, social, and emotional environment with the help of special equipment and teachers (Singal, 2006; Thakur and Thakur, 2012). Every inclusive school setting is supposed to comply with certain provisions stipulated in the SSA framework viz. identifying or screening every disabled child at an early stage of development, enroling them in neighbourhood school and providing medical assessment, distributing aids and appliances to help counter disability, providing in-service training to teachers and school heads to know better and deeper about inclusion, organising counselling camps for parents and guardians to generate awareness about inclusion and related issues, making the school premises fully accessible, mobilising and utilising the funds appropriately, etc. However, studies on practices of inclusive education in India vis-à-vis role of school heads being local administrator shows that these provisions or standards are not being met fully and properly (Lohidhasan, Beegam and Basheer, 2012; UNESCO, 2019).

A few years ago, inclusion was considered a new venture in India (Thakur and Thakur, 2012), but, nowadays it is well established in government policies and amongst the stakeholders (Shruti Taneja Johansson, 2014). A variety of documents, including laws, policies, and regulations give a detailed note onits organisational framework. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), launched in 2002, has an inbuilt

mechanism for inclusion of children with disabilities in neighbourhood schools. The Right to Education Act (2009) has defined responsibilities and functions of local authorities to cater to the needs of disabled learners while the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (2009) outlined a formal procedure through which learning needs of secondary school students with disabilities are identified and addressed. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 stipulates measures for full access of the disabled to inclusive education and strengthens the initiatives of government on wider educational coverage to the disabled. However, the law can only stipulate the provisions; the success depends upon the efforts of school heads being local authorities. In spite of the existence of so many laws and regulations, the low educational status of the disabled indicates a gap between the policy and its practices at the school level.

The analysis of literature indicates that there are barriers to the practices of inclusive education (Berwal, 2012). These barriers exist in the form of inaccessible buildings, negative attitudes, rigid, de-motivating and centrally designed curriculum, inadequately trained teachers, inappropriate policies, ignorant administrators, and scant funding (Pivik, McComas and Laflamme, 2002; Quinn and Ryba, 2002; UNESCO, 2005; Barriga, 2011; Sharma, Loreman and Simi, 2017). In order to overcome these barriers, it is essential for the school to meet the needs of all students by creating the facilitators. In an inclusive setting, the teachers and administrators must own all students, support policies, and practices to ensure that individual student succeeds (Jacobs, Tonnsen, and Baker, 2004). The professionals interact and collaborate regularly to understand the requirements of the learners and work together as a team. The school heads being local administrators work as advocates to demand resources (essential and additional like special teachers needed at the school level and counsellors, therapists, etc.) from the district and state functionaries to support inclusion. It is one of the functions of school heads to gather useful resources for teachers to use in the class while differentiating instruction (Irvine et al., 2010).

In the process of inclusion, the role of school head is critical. They are organisers, collaborators, and executors of the school activities. They prepare and submit annual and prospective plans to get funds from the state machinery. They disburse and utilise funds for ensuring the best education for disabled learners. According to Smith and Leonard (2005), the school heads are facilitators of collaborative vision for inclusion. In inclusive settings, it is generally assumed that conflicts and tension occur occasionally where the general teacher only share the responsibility of teaching and learning while the special teachers

own the students with disabilities. Therefore, it is vital that the school head knows the trouble spots and resolve them amicably. It is the duty of the head, being a collaborator of teaching-learning activities, to ensure continuous professional development of their colleagues. In the role of builders of society, the school heads must ensure that disabled children do not get isolated from a peer group or school culture while getting the education.The head can be a powerful facilitator in the process of inclusive education if their relations with all students are fair, frank, kind, and firm.

It is also important for school administrators to hold positive attitudes and beliefs about inclusion since it affects the extent to which the philosophy of inclusion is implemented in their schools. It is significant for them to convey and clarify to staff as what is expected of them to make inclusion effective. A good understanding of the purpose and rationale behind inclusion prepares the staff members to hold a favourable view and get ready to implement inclusion (Smith and Leonard, 2005). Furney et al. (2005), and Ross and Burger (2009) are of the view that school heads being transformational, distributive and democratic leaders are to facilitate teachers' growth, teachers' empowerment, and freedom to support inclusion. It is assumed that an effective school head uses knowledge and skills to ensure that expectations and requirements are well received by teachers. The barriers to inclusion can be removed successfully if the school head gives equal opportunities to all teachers to participate in the decision making, assign them leadership roles, and deal with the problematic staff skilfully. A head with a minimum of bureaucracy facilitates the education of children with disabilities by arranging aids and appliances and developing classrooms, laboratories, and toilets for their optimal functioning. On the other hand, an ignorant and poorly equipped school head acts as a barrier to inclusion. Kalyanpur (2008) surveyed the school heads and found that they are ignorant and untrained to implement inclusive schooling. In a study by Stanley (2015), school heads found inclusion unsuitable for all children with disabilities. Booth and Aniscow (1998), discovered that "many pupils who had been included in a regular class wanted to go back to their special schools after suffering isolation and stigmatisation in the regular class". According to Stevenson-Jacobson, Jacobson, Halinton (2006), training and experience in special education made heads more responsible for the implementation of education policies for children with disabilities. At times, when a teacher believes that the school head does not understand the inclusive practices, have limited knowledge of inclusion, and excludes staff in the decision-making, then implementation of inclusion becomes difficult. Teachers who are not

aware of the purpose of inclusion tend to have a negative view and/ or feel discomfort with its processes. Shepherd (2006) found that school heads are an important figure in supporting education to children with special needs and their presence on educational support team is crucial at different levels. Burch, Theoharis, and Rauscher (2010) are of the view that school administrators take a proactive approach to staff development and team teaching. The approach of school head to act merely an 'administrator' and 'not contribute' in 'day to day functioning' of school inclusion is harmful to the process since it may lead school heads to distance themselves from day to day work on inclusive practices and from the staff itself (Valeo, 2008). If a school administrator is not interested in developing outreach networks such as contacting the Health Department for health check-ups, liaison with the District Social Welfare Officer and the Red Cross Society for availing the benefits of scholarships, stipends and assistive devices for the disabled children, they are an obstacle to inclusion. It is due to the red-tapeism in the bureaucracy and indifferent attitudes of school heads that most of the time, the purchase of aids and appliances for the disabled children are delayed. The inability of the school heads to execute the policies and provisions with reference to inclusive education is a barrier to its implementation. However, in a study by Stevenson-Jacobson, Jacobson, and Hilton (2006), it was found that if the principals devote between 36 percent and 58 percent of their time to special education matters then they can make it successful.

Taking into consideration all these factors, it was felt that the existing inclusive education practices need a fresh look and administrative barriers to implementing inclusion, if any, need identification first and thereafter removal. Providing effective and successful inclusive education is the need of the hour and demand of the day to enhance the educational opportunities for the disabled and to make India a leader in the 21st century world. While selecting the problem for research, it is assumed that inclusive education is a revolutionary change in the philosophy and practice of education and such a change is likely to face problems and barriers. It is assumed that the findings of the study willmake a significant contribution by identifying the administrative barriers to inclusion at the primary school level in Haryana and recommending the measures for removing the barriers.

Objectives

The study was designed to achieve the following purposes—

(i) To identify the administrative barriers in the implementation of inclusive education at primary school level in Haryana.

(ii) To suggest measures for overcoming the administrative barriers and strengthening the facilitators for successful implementation of inclusive education in primary schools of Haryana.

Method

A descriptive survey method was used to execute the study since it best suited the nature and objectives of the study.

Sample

The sample consisted of 28 government primary schools selected through a multistage random sampling technique. While drawing the sample, the State of Haryana was divided into four administrative divisions namely Hisar, Ambala, Gurugram, and Rohtak. At the first stage, 04 districts namely Sonipat, Hisar, Rewari, and Kaithal, out of 22 districts in Haryana, were randomly selected, each district representing the four different administrative divisions of the State. After that, nine educational blocks, out of 27 total educational blocks in the selected four districts, were drawn randomly. At the next stage, 28 schools out of all schools in 9 educational blocks, were selected on a random basis. It means an equal number of 7 schools were selected from each district. A chosen school had at least three Children with Special Needs (CWSNs) on its roll.

Tool

A self-developed 'Administrative Barriers Checklist' covering 06 broad areas of 'school world' and 25 items on the 'functioning of the school head' was used to determine if an item listed in the checklist was a barrier. The items were constructed by considering the norms, guidelines, policies, Acts, and regulations of the Government of Haryana. The checklist had an in-built rating scale named 'Discrepancy Scale'. There were four levels of 'Discrepancy Scale'. The first level was assigned a score of 1 and a check (√) in this level indicates a 'Major' discrepancy on the part of school head in meeting the standards of inclusive schooling. The next level was designated as 'Minor' discrepancy. It carries a score value of 2. A check (√) in the second column means that the item related to the responsibility of school head to make the school inclusive has not met the standard fully, but it is close to meeting the standards. The third column was given a weighted score of 3. It was labelled as "No" discrepancy column. It means that the item being rated for efforts of the school head to make the school inclusive meets the full requirements of the standard given in guidelines, policies, and Acts. A check in the fourth column means that the item was 'Not Applicable (NA)' to the duties and responsibilities of school heads directly. The tool was handed over to language and subject experts to determine its face validity.

A few items were reworded and edited on their advice. The reliability of the checklist was found to be .83, which was considered reasonably well.

Scoring

The scoring consisted of recording the number of barriers resulted due to the functioning of school head in the following categories of the checklist: barriers related to resource mobilisation, enrolment related barriers, planning and management barriers, barriers associated with in-service training, instructional and assessment barriers and policy related barriers. The total number of barriers found per school were counted and converted into frequencies.

Results

The number and type of administrative barriers identified in inclusive primary schools are presented in Table 1 to 6. The first area of administrative obstacles to inclusive education was enrolment barriers.

Table 1

Enrolment Barriers

Sr. no.	Items	Discrepancy Scale			
		Major	***Minor***	***No***	***NA***
1.(a)	Identification of out-of-school CWSNs		5 (17.85)	23 (82.14)	
1.(b)	Enrolment in the school			28 (100)	

**The* figures in brackets show the percentage of scores

Table 1 indicates that there were no barriers to the enrolment of Children with Special Needs (CWSNs) in nearby schools as the majority of school heads participated and promoted the identification process following the guidelines and standards issued by the government. Under the zero rejection policy of SSA, all the school heads were giving admission to CWSNs. It was noticed that SSA policy on admission of CWSNs was fully complied with by heads of all the 28 (100%) schools.

Table 2

Planning and Management Barriers

Sr. no.	Items	Discrepancy Scale			
		Major	***Minor***	***No***	***NA***
2.(a)	Medical camps for CWSNs			28 (100)	
2.(b)	Counseling camps for parents of CWSNs	24 (85.71)		4 (14.28)	

2.(c)	Participation of CWSNs in all curricular and co-curricular activities	18 (64.28)	6 (21.42)	4 (14.28)	
2.(d)	Procurement & distribution of aids and appliances	20 (71.42)	2 (7.14)	6 (21.42)	
2.(e)	Civil work proposals for modifications in existing infrastructure as per the needs of CWSNs	25 (89.28)		3 (10.71)	

**The* figures in brackets show the percentage of scores

Perusal of Table 2 reveals that there were administrative barriers to planning and management aspect of inclusive education. Although, all the 28 (100%) school heads were complying fully with the norms of organizing and supporting medical camps for CWSNs, yet they were found reluctant on holding counselling camps for parents through local resources and initiatives. The researchers pointed out it to be a policy barrier at planning, and management level as funds were not allocated to each school for organising counselling camps locally, on the contrary camps were organised at resource schools, thus, only 4 (14.28%) school heads, where resource support was located and special teachers were posted, reported organising the counselling camps. The participation of CWSNs was required to be encouraged by all the heads since it was one of the norms under SSA, but 24 (85.71%) school heads were found discrepant to meet this standard. Inability of 24 (85.71%) school heads to procure aids and appliances and to prepare proposals for modifications in existing infrastructure as per the needs of CWSNs had emerged as an administrative barrier to the implementation of inclusive education.

Table 3

In-service Training Barriers

Sr. no.	Items	Discrepancy Scale			
		Major	***Minor***	***No***	***NA***
3.(a)	In time relieving of teachers for training			28 (100)	
3.(b)	Training of head teachers on inclusion	27 (96.42)		01 (3.57)	

**The* figures in brackets show the percentage of scores

Under the category of in-service training barriers, Table 3 demonstrates two contrasting results. In all the 28 (100%) schools, the teachers selected and invited for in-service training were timely relieved by head teachers, whereas, the lack of in-service training for all, except one, head teacher constituted a potential barrier to the implementation of inclusive education. The in-service training on inclusion was received by 1 (3.57%) head teacher only. In the absence of proper knowledge and understanding of the concept and strategies of inclusion, the lack of in-service training of administrators could be designated as 'major' barrier to inclusive education. The head teachers were supposed to be educational leaders and implementation of inclusive education by and large depend upon them, but if they were ignorant of the policies and provisions of inclusion, then the policy implementation becomes a sham.

Table 4

Instructional and Assessment Barriers

Sr. no.	Items	Discrepancy Scale			
		Major	***Minor***	***No***	***NA***
4.(a)	Procurement of activity textbooks	2 (7.14)	1 (3.57)	25 (89.28)	
4.(b)	Support to collaborative teaching	24 (85.71)		4 (14.28)	
4.(c)	Resource room support	24 (85.71)		4 (14.28)	
4.(d)	Ensuring availability and accessibility to teaching-learning material within the classrooms	24 (85.71)		4 (14.28)	
4.(e)	Effective use of peer support to ensure increased participation of CWSNs in instructional activities	22 (78.57)		6 (21.42)	
4.(f)	Adequate time for individualised teaching-learning opportunities	24 (85.71)		4 (14.28)	
4.(g)	Use of appropriate technology, technological aids and software like PacMate	28 (100)			
4.(h)	The arrangement of a suitable writer for children with writing difficulties	28 (100)			
4.(i)	Promoting the use of adaptive assessment procedures	28 (100)			

The most significant administrative barrier to inclusive education was reflected in the field of instructional and assessment areas. It is clear from Table 4 that the head teachers in 24 (85.71%) sample schools rated 'major' discrepant in the area of collaborative teaching, resource room support, ensuring availability and accessibility to teaching-learning material in the class and giving adequate time for individualised teaching-learning opportunities. The head teachers of 22 (78.57%) schools were using peer support to ensure increased participation of CWSNs in instructional activities. All the 28 (100%) head teachers appeared 'major' discrepant in use of appropriate technology, technological aids, and software, arranging suitable writers for children with writing difficulties and in the promotion of adaptive assessment procedures. The only area where head teacher acted as a facilitator to inclusive education was the procurement of activity/ textbooks since it had been procured by 25 (89.28%) out of 28 (100%) head teachers.

Table 5

Policy Barriers

Sr. no.	Items	Discrepancy Scale			
		Major	***Minor***	***No***	***NA***
5.(a)	Appointment of special teachers	24 (85.71)		4 (14.28)	
5.(b)	Teacher salaries	28 (100)			
5.(c)	Inconvenient/forced placement of teachers	24 (85.71)		4 (14.28)	
5.(d)	Categorical funding			28 (100)	

**The* figures in brackets show the percentage of scores

Table 5 indicates the policy barriers to inclusive education. The four sub-barriers reported under this category were not directly related to the school heads, but during interaction with the researchers, the school heads revealed that these barriers were related to administrators and policymakers at the district, state, and national levels. The appointment of a teacher at the block level and forced placement of a special teacher in certain pockets and clusters to meet the individual needs of disabled children was a straight departure from the policy documents and court judgments. All the 28 (100%) school heads described low salaries of special teachers as potential barriers to inclusive education.

Table 6

Resource Barriers

Sr. no.	Items	Discrepancy Scale			
		Major	***Minor***	***No***	***NA***
6.(a)	Funds transferred to the schools			28 (100)	
6.(b)	Receipt of funds by the schools			28 (100)	
6.(c)	Utilization of funds			28 (100)	

**The* figures in brackets show the percentage of scores

It is evident from Table 6 that there were no resource barriers to inclusive education. The funds were transferred timely from the office of State Project Director to office of District Project Coordinator and then to the school heads. All the 28 (100%) schools received the funds well in the time since the transfer was mostly through electronic mode. The funds were utilised by all the 28 (100%) school heads by meeting specifications and standards and for the purpose for which they were allocated or sanctioned.

Table 7 provides a collective picture of administrative barriers experienced or identified in the implementation of inclusive education.

Table 7

Summary of Administrative Barriers to the Implementation of Inclusive Education

Sr. no.	Dimension	Number of Standards Surveyed	Number of Standards Met Fully
1.	Enrolment Barriers	2	1
2.	Planning and Management Barriers	5	1
3.	In-service Training Barriers	2	1
4.	Instructional and Assessment Barriers	9	0
5.	Policy Barriers	4	0
6.	Resource Barriers	3	3
Total		25	6

Figures presented in Table 7 provide evidence that the school administrators were a barrier to the implementation of inclusive education. It is clear from Table 7 that only six standards out of 25 were fully met by head teachers (administrators) of the sample schools. This would imply that the majority of school heads did not adequately comply with the provisions of inclusive education mentioned in the SSA framework.

Discussion of Results

The results suggest that the heads of inclusive schools have posed a significant barrier to the implementation of inclusive education. The school heads failed miserably to encourage the teachers to use technology in the classroom. Heads did not collaborate with classroom teachers in developing instructional plans, conducting cultural events, procuring aids and appliances, and providing assistance to civil engineers to modify existing infrastructure in accordance with the need of the disabled learners. Only 1 (3.57%) head teacher, out of 28 (100%), attended in-service training on inclusive education, revealing that 96.42 per cent remained ignorant about the existing policies and provisions. The poor salaries and faulty appointment of teachers were reported as top administrative barriers to inclusive education. The positive side of the results was that the head teacher facilitated the inclusive education through timely procurement of activity textbooks for CWSNs. The findings, by and large, confirm the observations of Hegarty and Alur (2002) that although most of the administrators have heard of inclusion, they were not aware of the specific provisions for inclusive education. It also corresponds with the report of Ahuja and Ibrahim (2004) that administrators were significant barriers to the inclusion of children with physical disabilities. The results of the present study are consistent with the findings of Kalyanpur (2008) who reported that merely 37 per cent of school principals had heard of inclusive schooling and administrators were not trained for inclusive settings. However, the present results are not consistent with the findings of Wehbi (2007) who found finance as the most crucial obstacle to the education of persons with disabilities. The results are contrary to the beliefs of Furney et al. (2005), and Ross and Burger (2009) who considered school heads as facilitators of inclusion rather the results confirm Valeo (2008), revealing that the heads were working like 'bureaucrats', 'bosses' and merely as 'administrators' rather than 'contributing' in the system. The findings are by and large support Stanley (2015) but do not upheld the views of Burch, Theoharis, and Rauscher (2010) that school administrators take a proactive approach to staff development and team teaching. For the successful implementation of inclusive

education, the need of substantial administrative support and adequate human and material resources has been highlighted by many researchers like Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996), and Cook, Semmel and Gerber (1999). Therefore, school system needs to train the school heads on inclusive policies and philosophies, in particular about individualised education plans, collaborative teaching, inclusive technology, curriculum adaptations, and simplified assessment techniques. Inclusion is better facilitated when administrators are aware of their roles and responsibilities.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that the heads were ignorant about the policies and programmes on inclusive education. These findings are not surprising since they, except one, were yet to attend any training on inclusive education. Inclusion expects from heads to provide ample opportunities and motivation to staff for collaboration, mobilise resources, and address school diversity but the study reveals the opposite trend. The utility of this study lies in eliminating the administrative barriers by generating awareness among the policymakers about the magnitude of the problem and inspiring them to allocate larger funds for conducting workshops, in-service training, and conferences for the school heads to understand and implement inclusive education strictly as per the guidelines of policy documents viz. SSA and RTE Act. The training of administrators is critical since action by an untrained person in the implementation process may prove a bane rather than a boon. The study also suggests inspiring the media to give maximum coverage to inclusive education activities viz. sports, cultural, tours, and excursion for CWSNs so that every member of the society may have an idea of the problems and prospects of inclusive education and can play a significant role in bonding and building an inclusive society.

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