INCLUSIVE EDUCATION LAYS THE FOUNDATION OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION

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Abstract

Social integration is a highly desirable outcome that reflects the existence of social cohesion, a strong institutional foundation and a culture of acceptance. Societies are better off if they promote social integration through inclusive policies that reduce economic inequality and poverty, and promote sustainable and equitable development (Maria Amparo Cruz-Saco, 2008). Inclusive education is educating ALL students in age-appropriate general education classes in their neighbourhood schools, with high quality instruction, interventions and supports so all students can be successful in the core curriculum. Inclusive schools have a collaborative and respectful school culture where students with disabilities are presumed to be competent, develop positive social relationships with peers, and are fully participating members of the school community. According to the NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT (NCLB) of 2001, all children should obtain a high quality education as per the standard age and to attain the improvement in achievement, the schools of now a days are putting immense pressure on teachers which in turn is reflected on the students. In these circumstances Inclusion is a difficult task to achieve and follow. Regular classrooms with students with different abilities help in building tolerance and acceptance. Inclusion promotes social integration and togetherness where ALL are accepted as they are. Inclusive education lays the foundation of social integration which leads to the foundation of inclusive societies.

Keywords: Social cohesion, Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (1991), No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), Inclusion, Social exclusion, Special Educational Needs (SEN) Students

Introduction

Inclusive education is the education for all students irrespective of their caste, creed, gender and capabilities. It means different and diverse students learning side by side in the common classroom. It is a kind of education which values diversity and unique contributions of each student in the classroom. The sense of being safe and accepted is developed in each child’s life in this system of inclusive education.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA (1975) ensures that no child will be excluded from receiving an appropriate education regardless of their disabilities. This act states that children with disabilities need to be educated with peers who do not have disabilities, in general education classrooms. The IDEA also mandates that students with disabilities should be taught in the least restrictive environment (LRE) as much as possible with their peers who do not have disabilities. This assures that each student with a disability receives an education that is appropriate for his/her individual needs. It is found that this type
of education is beneficial to all students, not just the students without disabilities because they are receiving more individualized instruction and a special education teacher in the classroom to provide support but also the students without disabilities because they learn to be more patient and tolerant towards other human beings. In other words, we can say inclusive education promotes social integration and unity among students who learn to accept people of all kind irrespective of their limitations and disabilities. It is not appropriate to assume that every student with a disability can be educated in a general education setting. By doing this every student may not get the individualized attention they need and therefore their education may suffer in a long run. According to the NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT (NCLB) of 2001, all children should obtain a high-quality education as per the standard age and to attain the improvement in achievement, the schools of now a days are putting immense pressure on teachers which in turn is reflected on the students. In these circumstances, Inclusion is a difficult task to achieve and follow. Regular classrooms with students with different abilities help in building tolerance and acceptance. The approach of inclusion is still in the progress to become a major part of our Indian Education system. It becomes an additional responsibility on the shoulders of the authority of the school to see that no student with or without disabilities should suffer in their education.

**Inclusive Education lays the foundation of social integration.**

Inclusion as we know it today has its origins in Special Education. The field of special education has evolved through a series of stages during which education systems have explored different ways of responding to children with disabilities, and to students who experience difficulties in learning. In some cases, Special education has been a supplement to general education; in other cases it has been entirely separate. In recent years, the appropriateness of having separate systems of education has been challenged, both from a human rights perspective and from the point of view of effectiveness.

**Figure 1: Types of education system**
In the figure 1, four types of education system is shown. Exclusion means separate schools for children with special needs and normal students. Segregation is different classrooms for different types of children; Integration means different spaces in a class for different children and inclusion means all in one classroom in a common space irrespective of their disabilities and short comings.

The major differences between the traditional and inclusive education may be explained in the table 1.

**Table 1: Traditional v/s Inclusive education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRADITIONAL EDUCATION</th>
<th>INCLUSIVE EDUCATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education for some</td>
<td>Education for all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Static</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on teaching subject-orientated</td>
<td>Emphasis on learning child-centred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnostic / prescriptive</td>
<td>Holistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities limited by exclusion</td>
<td>Equalisation of opportunities for all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability view</td>
<td>Curricular view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labels children disability wise</td>
<td>Planning is made on ability levels and opposes all kinds of labelling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In India social exclusion is practiced on the base of caste and untouchability. According to the valid texts of India the society is divided into four varnas or the division of group of people on the base of their birth or the division of the society into four classes. According to the hierarchy the Brahmins should cultivate the knowledge, the kshatriya should bear arms, the vaishya should trade and the shudra should serve all the above three classes. In a country like that of ours where individual differences are based on the family and ancestors, there, the fate of the underprivileged and disabled children can be horrifying. Inclusion may solve the above horrifying situation.

Inclusive education is a global movement in the world of education. The introduction of inclusive education brings with it a shift in the paradigm of thinking within the education system and the social world. “Inclusion is about the establishment and maintenance of a social world in which all people experience the realities of inclusive values and relationships. Inclusion is about enhancing social values and practices that influence the ecological aspects
of human beings to support recognition of human rights” (Barton, 1977). Teachers need to comprehend that inclusion is about diversity and change in attitudes and instructional methods of teaching. Inclusion is a process that involves a change in the thinking patterns of educators, majority of whom are influenced by the “medical model” which seeks to highlight the deficits of the disabled individual. Rayner (2007) describes this medical model “as a ‘deficit model’ and presumes that pathology or the disorder itself is the basis for defining disability or learning difficulty.” As such, SEN students were segregated and taught in special classrooms. They were excluded from the regular classes and seen only as people who were different and needed help. The social model of disability highlights the struggle of disabled individuals to attain human rights. The social model of disability says that disability is caused by the way society is organised, rather than by a person’s impairment or difference. It looks at ways of removing barriers that restrict life choices for disabled people. When barriers are removed, disabled people can be independent and equal in society, with choice and control over their own lives.

Disabled people developed the social model of disability because the traditional medical model did not explain their personal experience of disability or help to develop more inclusive ways of living. Inclusive education supports the social model and is meant to promote inclusiveness in all aspects of human life.

**Problems due to lack of inclusive societies.**

Social integration is the process of creating unity, inclusion and participation at all levels of society within the diversity of personal attributes so that every person is free to be the person she/he wants to be. Personal attributes include socio-economic class, age, gender - sexual preference and expression, political ideas, ethnicity and cultural traits, religion, citizenship (national origin) and geographical region of origin and so on.
Social integration enables persons, regardless of their attributes, to enjoy equal opportunities, rights and services that are available to the so-called mainstream group. Social integration can be considered to be antonym to social exclusion, which is broader than poverty and deprivation, and which neglects people’s rights.

In today’s world where social visibility is given preference over academic achievements, inclusion is the must requirement. Inclusion does not specifically deals with students with special needs but also the students who are deprived of their basic rights of education. It is like bringing all students with what so ever problem they have, in a general classroom and teach them so that they learn, understand and become a responsible and sensible adults. The philosophy behind inclusive education is to promote opportunities for all children to participate, learn and have equal treatment, irrespective of their social, physical or mental abilities.

Many studies have shown that the benefits of inclusive education and inclusive classrooms have reached beyond the academics. When students with disabilities are isolated and taught only in specially designed classrooms they are kept deprived of the opportunity to interact with a diverse group of people. They see only their type of people around and assume the world to be of that kind but when they are exposed to reality they suffer a setback and world appears to be a harsh place to survive where they are not accepted and well-treated. Similarly a child with no disabilities shares a classroom with students with special needs develops a feeling of empathy, patience and tolerance which makes him a better human being. By creating inclusive setting these students are now able to socially interact and develop relationships with their peers. They improve their social skills and their behaviour by having appropriate examples in the general education classroom. Students with special needs have shown improvement in their ability to follow directions and initiate contact with others. When students with disabilities become a part of general classroom, they are more likely to become socially accepted by their peers. The climate of such inclusive classroom facilitates the idea of unity in diversity i.e. differences are natural and each student should be comfortable with their peers with or without disabilities or problems. The maximum benefit of inclusion is the feeling which develops in the students with disabilities that he/she is a vital part of the learning community where he/she is accepted and treated equal.

By being exposed to inclusive stings, students have a better understanding and they become more tolerant to individual differences. The students exposed to the environment where diversity is respected are expected to be more sensitive towards the deprived sections or mentally and physically challenged individuals.

William Wordsworth in his poem ‘The Rainbow’ correctly said “Child is the father of the man”. A man develops his characters from whatever he learnt since his childhood. If the child grows in an environment where everyone with a difference is taught and built up with a sense of equality and acceptance then he will have the same feeling in his heart once he grows and this sense will lead to social integration.

“Inclusion is a philosophy that urges schools, neighbourhoods, and communities to welcome and value everyone, regardless of differences. Central to the philosophy of inclusion are the beliefs that everyone belongs, diversity is valued, and we can all learn from each other” (Renzaglia, Karvonen, Drasgow & Stoxen, 2003). Holding such an attitude can greatly impact the participation of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. According to a study
conducted by Robertson, Chamberlain, and Kasari (2003), when teachers have positive perceptions of their relationship with students with disabilities, the students’ behavior problems were reported to be lower, and the students were more socially included with peers. Prater (2003) also identified teacher attitudes as one of several elements that are critical in promoting the success of students with disabilities in general education settings. In addition to the role that teacher attitudes play in the success of inclusive classrooms, it is widely acknowledged that an inclusive school culture begins with the committed leadership of principals. Praisner (2003) examined principals’ attitudes toward inclusion including their placement perceptions. Out of 408 principals surveyed, only one in five held positive attitudes toward inclusion. Factors that were associated with positive attitudes included experiences with students with disabilities and exposure to special education concepts. Furthermore, principals who had positive attitudes were more likely to place students in less restrictive settings. Clearly, teacher and administrator attitudes are critical factors that shape the experiences of students with disabilities. These findings hold particular implications for personnel supporting and providing technical assistance to teachers and staff. Efforts aimed at providing teachers and administrators with meaningful contact with people with disabilities as well as information on special education concepts makes a difference in the quality of students’ educational programming.(Xuan Bui, Carol Quirk, Selene Almazan, Michele Valenti, 2010).

Inclusion is a view which is widely accepted by all but few have to change their mind sets to accept all. This also shows that inclusive education lays the foundation of inclusive societies. Social integration is understood as a process by which efforts are made to ensure equal opportunities for all, regardless of their background, so that they can achieve their full potential in life. It is a multi-dimensional process aimed at creating conditions which enable full and active participation of every member of the society in all aspects of life, including civic, social, economic, and political activities, as well as participation in decision making processes. Social integration is understood as the process by which societies combat poverty and social exclusion. Inclusive education prepares an individual with a mindset of total acceptance and inclusive societies provide an environment where a disabled person can enjoy all his rights independently. Slight change in the infrastructure of the various components of the societies can help a disabled person to live independent life. In a society where all with or without disabilities could live independently with equal human rights, social integration can be realised to its true meaning. We all have laid the foundation of inclusive societies but still much of the work is awaited. Nowadays buildings are provided with lifts, elevators. All social places have special washrooms for disabled people, ramps are provided on the stairs, and specially designed vehicles are available to help those who help themselves. Education helps us in knowing our rights and once we know them we can use them for the benefit and upliftment. Success and development of nation involves upliftment of all his citizens irrespective of the disabilities. Inclusive education lays the foundation of social integration which leads to the foundation of inclusive societies.

Summary
Social integration is a multi-dimensional and cross-sectional concept, which needs to be mainstreamed into national, regional and local levels. There is a larger and infinitely more
comprehensive aim to social integration that encompasses many areas of society and humanity.
If a vision can be created which is communicable to the masses and stems from a collective agreement that promotes diversity, tolerance, empowerment, inclusion, participation and community-minded action, then important steps can be made. Fostering a common purpose in all members of society which has input from all sectors is crucial.
As inequality and exclusion are produced systematically in a society due to lack of knowledge and privilege, they can be tackled by incorporating inclusion first at elementary educational level and then to the final society level. A child is the future of a nation so it’s important to make him understand the real meaning of the terms like inclusion, tolerance and empathy.
It is necessary to distinguish inequality from being different. While we can be different, we all need to be provided with equal opportunities and access. Accommodating people with different backgrounds and working together to build a common future is a core value of an inclusive education and an inclusive society. Developing a concept of inclusion in which people get together, are interconnected, and share sense of belonging as well as sense of responsibility, is necessary.
If this concept of inclusive education/society is promoted, cycles of exclusion and traditional blockades will begin to dismantle. This would constitute an important step towards social integration.

Human are a social animal and his complete evolution can occur only when there are no invisible lines between two individual human beings. All human with equal educational rights can build up a society where there is social integration, where all human are treated equal and possess equal rights and responsibilities. Inclusive education lays the foundation of social integration which leads to the foundation of inclusive societies.

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