

**BRIDGING INCLUSION WITH PRE PRIMARY EDUCATION IN INDIA****Preeti Shah & Prof. Shaheen Ansari***H. G. M. Azam College of Education**Asst. Prof. H. G. M. Azam College of Education***Abstract**

This paper is intended to suggest how excluded children can be brought in education in the early years of their life. It begins with a brief introduction, which provides importance of Early childhood development, importance of inclusion and describes how they both go hand in hand and contribute to the all-round development of a child. It also suggests what practical changes at the preprimary level can be brought about to ensure social equity. These guidelines are intended to provide information and awareness, to be a policy tool for revising and formulating plans, and to serve as a basis for discussion among policymakers, educators, NGOs and international organizations impacting policy in both private and public Pre- school education and concerned with promoting access for ALL learners. The theme presented is also the area of work of UNESCO, UNICEF, and SAVE THE CHILDREN. These guidelines attempt to demystify the notions surrounding inclusion and demonstrate that challenges can be overcome through a willingness to change attitudes regarding inclusion. By following these guidelines, those working with and analyzing National Plans for Education can identify gaps and strategies in order to take steps to ensure that inclusion is achieved within their educational systems and that every child has access to a quality education.

Keywords: *Inclusion, Early Childhood development, Pre Primary, UNESCO, UNICEF, SAVE THE CHILDREN*



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Introduction

Early childhood is the most important and rapid period of development in a human life. The years from conception through birth to eight years of age are critical to the complete and healthy cognitive, emotional and physical growth of children.

Life's early years have a profound impact on a child's future. When loved, nourished and cared for in safe and stimulating environments, children develop the skills they need to embrace opportunity and bounce back from adversity.

The emotional, social and physical development of young children has a direct effect on their overall development and on the adult they will become. That is why understanding the need to invest in very young children is so important, so as to maximize their future` well-being.

Children's early experiences – the bonds they form with their parents and their first learning experiences – deeply affect their future all round development.

Optimizing the early years of children's lives is the best investment we can make as a society in ensuring their future success.

The good news is that early childhood presents an incomparable window of opportunity to make a difference in a child's life. The right interventions at the right time can counter disadvantage and boost a child's development.

Scenario across the globe

Nearly 43% of children under 5 in low- and middle-income countries are not getting the nutrition, protection and stimulation they need. This diminishes both the child's potential and sustainable growth for society at large.

Across the world, UNICEF's early childhood development programmes offer interventions that combine nutrition, protection and stimulation and support parents, caregivers and communities – to help vulnerable children get a fair start in life.

Early Childhood Development is multidimensional, encompassing several aspects of a child's well-being.

Measuring Early childhood development

Developmental potential in early childhood is measured as an index, currently represented in the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS)

UNICEF has been working with countries and partners to close this knowledge gap by developing indicators to measure the status of ECD outcomes. The Indicators are designed to assess

1. The quality of a child's home environment
2. Access to early childhood care
3. Education

These were included in the third round of MICS (MICS3), implemented mainly in 2005 and 2006.

These indicators provide very good estimates of the quality of the child's proximal and most important contexts for stimulating and supporting positive development.

For the fourth round of MICS (MICS4), data collection was expanded to include an Early Child Development Index (ECDI) that aims to measure the developmental status of children within four domains:

1. literacy
2. Numeracy

3. Physical, Social & Emotional Development

4. Cognitive Development

By doing so, now the MICS is one of the only global sources to measure children's outcomes in a holistic manner in the early childhood years.

The MICS surveys calculate an overall Index Score as the percentage of children aged 36-59 months who are on track in at least three of the four domains.

The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) is a set of survey questionnaires developed by UNICEF and carried out by government agencies in each nation. The survey questions are designed to estimate indicators in the areas of health, education, child protection, and HIV/AIDS, and they are adapted to suit the local environment.

The Early Childhood Development Indicators (ECDI) is a set of indicators added to the MICS survey in 2005. ECDI questions provide information about early schooling, learning materials, support for learning, and adequate care.

The age group (36-59 months) mentioned above is the target group which attends Pre-Primary.

What is inclusive education?

There is often confusion around the term 'inclusive education'. Does it mean 'education for disabled children'? Is there a difference between 'education for all' and 'inclusive education'? What does it look like in reality? All children have the right to education. Inclusive education ensures the participation of all students in schooling. It involves restructuring the culture, policies and practices in schools so that they can respond to the diversity of students in their locality.

"Inclusive education in a developing country implies the equal right of all children to the 'educational package', however basic that package may be."

Inclusive education:

- Acknowledges that all children can learn
- Acknowledges and respects differences in children: age, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, HIV and TB status, etc enables education structures, systems and methodologies to meet the needs of all children
- It is part of a wider strategy to promote an inclusive society
- It is a dynamic process that is constantly evolving

Inclusive education is different from special education, which takes a variety of forms including special schools, small units, and the integration of disabled children with specialized support.

The principles of inclusive education encompass a much broader range of issues than disability. But the changes needed to ensure that disabled children can benefit from education are not very different from the changes needed to help all excluded children get an education. Education for children with disabilities is essential for the alleviation of poverty and sustainable development. The impact of keeping Children with disabilities at home and economically inactive, denying them education, as well as impacting family members who are unable to work due to caring responsibilities, all contribute significantly to the impoverishment of persons with disabilities, their families and their communities.

Why Inclusive in Pre-Primary Education

Provision of high quality pre-primary education has the highest rates of return in terms of achievement and social adaptation of children. It is also the basis for lifelong learning, preventing school drop-out and promoting equity of access and outcomes. For all children and in particular for those with SEN(special educational needs)/disabilities or at risk the early childhood stage is critical because the different learning needs of children become clearer as the child enters the educational system. This is often where ‘labeling’ begins and the early identification of SEN can be beneficial or also ‘limit the options’ the child has from this point onwards. Quality early education programmes result in early detection of emerging problems and risk factors. Early childhood education programs improve the life of children and influence the social equity.

We need to identify and analyze the factors (facilitator’s challenges/barriers) that enable high quality and equitable pre-primary education of pupils in inclusive settings. It will address all pupils, including vulnerable pupils such as pupils with SEN/disabilities and/or at risk, as a means to improve the lives of children and influence the social equity. Co-ordination between health, education and social sectors as well as the active involvement of parents is considered very important.

The analysis of these factors will be the basis for the development of a ‘practical tool/guide’ and ‘recommendations’ aimed at pre-schools and policy makers. A practical tool/guide, addressing pre-schools, on how to make quality inclusion work at pre-primary level, with provision of practical advice on key issues like-

- . Workforce -roles and staff, organizational status of the professionals and in-service staff training, co-operation with external personnel, collaboration with health and social services.

- Curriculum/content - focus on all aspects of the child's development (cognitive, social, emotional and physical)
- Evaluation and monitoring – crucial role of early identification and first assessment process, ongoing assessment of children and teacher work.
- Governance and funding – role of leadership, accountability, funding models.

According to OECD/EU/UNESCO-IUS (2015), Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and Preprimary education refer to a wide range of programmes, designed with a holistic approach, all aimed at the early physical, cognitive, social and emotional development of children before they enter primary school, from birth until, in certain countries, the age of 7 or 8. They are guided by a framework of common goals linking education and health in the first educational stages of childhood. In line with the UNESCO International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED, 2011), there are two categories of ISCED level 0 programs: early childhood educational development and pre-primary education. The former has educational content designed for younger children (in the age range of 0 to 2 years), whilst the latter is designed for children from age 3 years to the start of primary education

Pre-primary education is considered to be very important for the child as it is the first step towards entering the world of knowledge as well as a healthy and purposeful life. Pre-primary education helps children become more independent and confident as well as promoting the all-round development of the children (Ramachandran et al., 2003). Children who have been to pre-primary schools tend to learn more rapidly through an organized curriculum, learning aids and by interacting with other children.

How attractive are our primary schools? According to the latest statistics available from the Flash Statistics and Analytical Reports on Elementary Education in India (reports of the DISE – District Information System for Education, published by the National University of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi in 2009 and 2010), on average there are only three classrooms per primary school in the country, and there are only three teachers on average per school. About 14 per cent of the schools have a single classroom each and a similar proportion of the schools are single-teacher schools.

Elementary education is the base of character building, habit formation and value learning on which the future castle of a child personality depends. Though normally our elementary education starts formally from class –I, but in Private schools/ public schools, the elementary

education starts from Nursery classes that is from L-K.G. and U.K.G. where the child learns the alphabets , numbers, small words and tables through play way method.

The high class and higher middle class family feel pleasure when their child starts communicating in English from the very childhood and when they present some English rhymes before them. At the same time, the children from economically deprived class, poor class and low middle class who depends on Government schools for their education learn the habit of respecting elders, speaking skill in mother tongue,, playing with age mates and certain basic skills of their parental profession by imitating them. Till quite some time neither the state government nor the Central government has opened school for Nursery / preprimary classes. Only Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt. Of India was facilitating full funding for preprimary education to the Tibetan refugee children studying in India through its own autonomous organization Central Tibetan Schools Administration. This Administration has also handed over the preprimary schools to the NGO run by the Tibetan government in exile obeying the decision of the Union Government of India with full funding assistance. Now, the question arises that,

A) Should Government provide the facility of pre- primary education to all Children?

And immediately we get the response that even we are not providing the quality primary education to entire population than how can we provide preprimary education.

B) If we will not provide the preprimary education to the children of economically deprived class/ low middle class than how their children will academically achieve at par with the children who are getting quality preprimary education in private/ public schools?

And the answer is the New Education Policy should think upon this question considering the economic condition of this nation too.

Here we need to first be clear whether Pre Primary Education is must and secondly if it should be available for all?

The National policy on Education 1986 (GOI, 1986) and its Plan of Action, (GOI, 1992) have placed immense importance on pre-school education. However, it has not been considered a fundamental right, nor it is being fully managed by the educational departments at national or state level although it is partially supported by the ongoing flagship educational programme SarvaSikshaAbhiyan (SSA) which includes a major component of ECCE.

While the Ministry of Human Resource Development in India is responsible for elementary education, the Ministry of Women and Child Development deals with pre-primary education. The Government of India launched the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme in 1975. The Department of Women and Child Development has been implementing

the scheme which seeks to provide health care facilities, supplementary nutritional support and to improve children's communication and cognitive skills as a preparation for entry into primary school. The SSA envisages providing preschool education in convergence with the ICDS programme.

In India, preschool education is provided by private schools and government ICDS (Anganwadi) centres. In addition, there are some ECCE centres running under SSA and some preschools are attached to private schools. According to the estimate given by the Seventh All India Education Survey (NCERT, 2005), there are 493,700 pre-primary institutions in India, out of which 456,994 are in rural areas. These schools serve 26.453 million children of which 12.829 million are girls according to DISE (District Information System for Education) data (2007- 08). The percentage of enrolment in primary schools with pre-primary facilities is low. We hope these figures have improved now.

The quality of teaching and facilities in public pre primary

- Anganwadicentres is unsatisfactory due to a lack of trained teachers. The government needs to invest in an improvement of quality of services in Anganwadicentres including pre-school education, which will improve the learning achievement of children at pre-primary stage.
- Provision of equitable access to all eligible children in the country requires expanding the coverage of the ICDS programme by opening more pre-school centres or attaching such provision to existing government primary schools. Many states have already started these initiatives but the situation is far from satisfactory.
- More focus is needed for quality pre-primary education for disadvantaged groups living in poor and remote areas. The pre-primary education component of the ICDS programme although evident on paper is often non-existent in reality. Facilities are important and must be safe, healthy and suitable environments for young children.

Save the Children sees the concept of inclusive education as inseparable from the concept of quality education: education cannot be considered good quality unless it meets the needs of all learners.

Availability of quality preprimary education will promote inclusive education and meaningful access to school education by increasing enrolment and reducing the vulnerability of children to failure and drop out at later stages of education.

Making education more inclusive requires schools and education authorities to remove the barriers to education experienced by the most excluded children – often the poorest, children with disabilities, children without family care, girls, or children from minority groups.

Inclusive education involves a continual process of change towards increased flexibility across an education system.

The process aims to ensure that all children get a good education of a similar standard, without being cut off from other children or the rest of society. Schools need to put in place conditions that enable the most excluded children to learn; this usually results in more flexible, more welcoming and more child centered schools.

Even where countries have bigger education budgets and receive more predictable aid, there is evidence that without investment in inclusion and quality alongside efforts to improve access, increased enrolments quickly turn into high drop-out rates and the persistent exclusion of certain children from education.

For instance, in India and Bangladesh there has been large-scale investment in improving access to education, yet there has been little focus on whether schools are inclusive and good enough to retain and be of any real benefit to children after enrolment, resulting in drop-out rates of up to 60%. Serious attention needs to be placed on ensuring that education planning and delivery focuses on access and quality from an inclusion and equity perspective.

Suggestions

Why people within education may make little progress towards inclusive education is that they don't know what changes would make the biggest difference. Creating opportunities for dialogue between those excluded from education and those with the power to make changes in education can be most productive. In other words, implementing inclusive education principles is often a matter of working towards responsive schools.

The question of access and availability of education to children with disability however is of particular importance since ensuring children with disabilities can succeed in education is not just an important human rights issue, but a way in which to ensure they can contribute to economic growth as adults.

The following conditions in place will enable the most excluded children to go to school and learn:

- Parents are aware that all children have the right to an education

- The probable solution in my vision for this question is; - Government may establish the Elementary and Primary Education board. - This Board should issue the Registration Number to all the students studying in Pre- Primary classes and it should be mandatory to get registration number for appearing in any succeeding Board or other examination. There should be no barrier of requirements like buildings, land, infrastructure, medium of Instruction, students strength etc. be kept for affiliation to preprimary schools. However they should be inclusive is a criteria which cannot be overlooked.
- Families' basic survival needs are met so that children can attend school rather than go to work
- Schools are near to children's homes, they are physically safe and accessible to all, and have a reasonable number of trained teachers
- Teachers are trained and motivated to work with a diverse range of children, and are able to try out different approaches in their day-to-day work
- School principals and teachers do not turn children away, and they reach out to all children in their community
- Teachers are recruited from a range of marginalised groups including disabled people and linguistic minorities
- Children are not prevented – by examinations, fees or other barriers – from progressing through school
- School management is informed by children's and parents' views
- Children and adults try not to discriminate against those who are seen as different.

Conclusion

Thus we can say that preprimary is the starting point of a child's formal life which should be catered to, from all directions. Just providing opportunities for the regular goers is not sufficient. It is necessary to have inclusion to include all right from foundation level which is Pre Primary. This inclusion will help minimizing encounters with exclusion at later stages and thus a step towards Social equity.

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