INCLUSIVE EDUCATION ON CHILDREN WITH MENTAL DISABILITIES-A STUDY

ARNAB CHOWDHURY
Student, Dept of Education, University of Kalyani, kalyani Nadia

&

JAYANTA METE
Professor, Dept of Education, University of Kalyani, kalyani Nadia

Abstract
Inclusive Education (IE) is a new approach towards educating the children with disability and learning difficulties with that of normal ones within the same roof. It brings all students together in one classroom and community, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses in any area, and seeks to maximize the potential of all students. It is one of the most effective ways in which to promote an inclusive and tolerant society. It is known that 73 million children of primary school age were out of school in 2010, down from a high of over 110 million out-of-school children in the mid-1990s, according to new estimates by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). About eighty percent of Indian population lives in rural areas without provision for special schools. It means, there are an estimated 8 million children out of school in India (MHRD 2009 statistics), many of whom are marginalised by dimensions such as poverty, gender, disability, and caste. Today, what are the needs and challenges for achieving the goal of inclusive education? How will an inclusive environment meet the needs of children with disabilities? How can quality education be effectively and efficiently delivered for all children? Therefore, inclusive schools have to address the needs of all children in every community and the central and state governments have to manage inclusive classrooms. Keeping in view these questions, this article discusses in detail the concept of inclusive education, and studies three mentally disabled children in detail in a normal school in Kalyani subdivision.

Key words: Inclusive Education, Children with special needs, Disabilities, Inclusion

Introduction
Inclusive education has been defined at various ways that addresses the learning needs of the differently abled children. The efforts of the Government of India over the last five decades have been towards providing comprehensive range of services towards education of children with disabilities. In 1974, the centrally sponsored scheme for Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) was introduced to provide equal opportunities to children with disabilities in general schools and facilitate their retention. The government initiatives in the area of inclusive education can be traced back to National Educational Policy, 1986, which recommended, as a goal, ‘to integrate the handicapped with the general community at all levels as equal partners, to prepare them for normal growth and to enable them to face life with courage and confidence’. The World Declaration on Education for All adopted in 1990 gave further boost to the various processes already set in the country. The Rehabilitation Council of India Act 1992 initiated a training programme for the development of professionals to respond to the needs of students with disabilities. The National Policy for Persons with Disability, 2006, which attempts to clarify the framework under which the state, civil society and private sector must operate in order to ensure a dignified life for persons with disability and support for their caretakers.

All school going children, whether they are disabled or not, have the right to education as they are the future
citizens of the country. Today it is widely accepted that inclusion maximizes the potential of the vast majority of students, ensures their rights, and is the preferred educational approach for the 21st century.

**Background of the Inclusive Education programme**

The government of India is constitutionally committed to ensuring the right of every child to basic education. The Government of India has created numerous policies around special education since the country’s independence in 1947. One of the earliest formal initiatives undertaken by the GOI was the Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) scheme of 1974 (NCERT, 2011). The Kothari Commission (1966) which highlighted the importance of educating children with disabilities during the post-independence period (Pandey 2006). In 1980s the then ministry of Welfare, Govt. of India, realized the crucial need of an institution to monitor and regulate the HRD programmes in the field of disability rehabilitation. Till 1990s, ninety percent of India’s estimated 40 million children in the age group- four-sixteen years with physical and mental disabilities are being excluded from mainstream education. The National Policy on Education, 1986 (NPE, 1986), and the Programme of Action (1992) stresses the need for integrating children with special needs with other groups. The Government of India implemented the District Primary Education Project (DPEP) in 1994–95. In late 90s (i.e. in 1997) the philosophy of inclusive education is added in District Primary Education Programme (DPEP).

**Research Objectives**

This research purposes to:

1. Examine the factors which may influence development of self concept in children with mental disabilities in inclusive settings.

2. Examine the experiences of children with mental disabilities in inclusive school.

3. Suggest strategies to enhance the experience of children with mental disabilities in inclusive schools.

Thus we have analysed the experiences of children in inclusive settings and their perceptions about self. The descriptions of children with disabilities related to experiences in inclusive schools which were supportive as well as those which comprised a challenge were analysed. Based on these analyses, we suggest some recommendations for furthering inclusive education for children with disabilities in a school of Kalyani subdivision.

**Research Methodology**

This is a qualitative study based on interviews of children with disabilities in inclusive school in Kalyani subdivision of West Bengal. We have described and analyzed the experiences of children with disabilities studying in inclusive classrooms.

**Methods**

This qualitative study is based on discussions with children with disabilities in private inclusive schools in Kalyani subdivision, West Bengal. We had employed the case study method as it allows an intensive study (Shepard 2003) within its real-life context of children with disabilities. It provides an in-depth and systematic way of looking at events and helps in gaining a sharpened understanding of causality and provides a sound base for extensive exploration in future research (Bent 2006). A total of three in-depth interviews were conducted from a inclusive school in Kalyani Subdivision. The general characteristics of the children are
presented in Table 2. The discussions related to children’s perceptions and experiences regarding themselves and their placement in regular educational settings were noted down. The interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed for analysis. Many researchers have subscribed to audio-taping of interviews in order to avoid bias (Borg & Gall 1989; Seale & Silverman 1997). Borg and Gall (1989) suggested that it could prevent unconscious selection of text favouring the bias of the researcher. In this research it particularly helped as the interview span with children lasted more than an hour in each case and the questions related to the research were interspersed with a lot of other information sharing. Children often lost interest if the researcher resorted to note-taking.

Table 2 Characteristics of the Research Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Impairment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arpita</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Memory disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>swati</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Understanding Disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwaipayan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Application Disability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*the names of all children have been changed to maintain anonymity.

The interviews were conducted from October 1, 2017 to October 15, 2017. The interviews were conducted with the help of an interview guide that contained the list of issues and probes were included wherever considered essential. The questions intended to gain an understanding of how these students viewed their physical, social and psychological self, their abilities, class placement, the legitimacy of inclusive education, and the extent to which they regarded themselves as part of the wide school and community culture and felt accepted by their classmates, friends and teachers. There were one children who had problems with understanding disorder (swati) and therefore, her mother acted as interpreters for the interviews with child. This is a limitation of whether the interpretations adequately reflected the views of the children. However, the mother were the best possible interpreters for these children. Before each interview, the purpose of the study was explained to the prospective participants, it was also made clear that there would be no consequences to their schooling or in any other way by not participating, that there was no compulsion to participate and accordingly consent was obtained from both the children and their parents before conducting the interviews. The interviews were conducted in English and Hindi depending on the understanding of the respondents. The interviews conducted in Hindi were later translated.

This study focuses on two key areas; the child’s understanding of self as well as their comprehensive experience of inclusive environment, both of which govern their participation in inclusive schools and the development of their individuality.

Data Collection and Analysis

The interviews were conducted in one inclusive school. A monthly fee was required to be paid and additional costs were incurred for subsidiary expenses on uniforms, books, school activities and transport. They were all mainstream schools with a Resource unit of children with disability which provided at least one Resource teacher within campus to assist the children with disabilities. The schools were implementing the “Resource Room Model”.

As there was no official list of inclusive schools, the school were chosen based on information from key informants and practitioners/ NGO’s. The inclusive school which had at least three children with disabilities on roll were selected for this study. The idea behind this inclusion criterion was that it would enable us to get at least one student we could interview. It also made it possible to find children with different types of
mental disability. For instance a school with one child with a mental disability would only be dealing with the mobility issues and may/may not have other resources like a resource room or therapy room etc. Another assumption which guided this was that the number of children with disabilities would be scattered in different grades bringing to light issues related to particular classrooms like variation in curriculum, teaching strategies etc. A number larger than three might have been too optimistic as the concept is still new and in its earlier stages of implementation so that we might not have been able to find any school with more than 3 children. This also helped in further selection of the students taking into account refusal and non-response.

None of the state administered inclusive schools in Kalyani had at least 3 children with mental disabilities hence the school in our study was private school.

For purposes of confidentiality, since the number of children with mental disabilities in the selected school is very small, we have not disclosed the names of the school.

The permissions from the Principals of the school were secured with relative ease. Identifying the children and procuring informed consent from their parents was time consuming and difficult. Obtaining consent from parents and children was not easy. We had sent request letters to thirty parents through their children. Twelve of them returned the consent forms with outright rejection. Ten parents sought clarifications through phone and personal meetings and eight of them did not respond at all. Thus the refusal rate was high (66%) since parents were afraid of reiteration of the fact that the child had a disability and any negative impact of the questions related to child’s disability. Additional information pertaining to the child’s background information, reports/feedback related to performance, challenges and achievements was secured from interviews with principal of the school, twenty regular teachers, twelve resource teachers. The concerns raised with the Principals included; the basic requirements for an inclusive school, how do the admissions criteria reflect the needs, attributes and diversity of potential students, in what way the school is different from other schools, what were the support systems available for children with disabilities etc. Interviews with fifteen non-disabled peers, with appropriate consent, provided data related to interpersonal interactions.

Limitations

- A major limitation is the lack of availability of relevant literature for Indian context as very few empirical studies have been undertaken in India.
- Obtaining permission from parents and children for interviews was not easy. The refusal rate was 66%; (40% rejecting the request and 26% non response) indicating the unwillingness of the parents to participate in the research. We may have lost valuable information and reasons for non-participation in the research.
- Finding appropriate times for conducting the interviews was extremely difficult. The interviews and discussions had to happen within the available time and without causing any disturbance to the normal school proceedings.

Results and Discussion

We have examined the supportive factors and challenges for children with disabilities studying in inclusive school. We have also analysed data pertaining to self concept of children with disabilities in inclusive school settings.

Support

There were several supporting factors which helped the child with disabilities to continue in a regular school. The school has the primary responsibility for helping children learn alongside their typically developing peers. An inclusive school must enable education structures, systems and methodologies to meet the needs of
all children, particularly those who face the greatest barriers to achieving their right to education (see also Save the Children 2006). The inclusive schools considered in this study have taken on the initiative of inclusion. All the 7 schools in this study have provided supportive mechanisms for their enrolled students with disabilities. All the inclusive schools had a resource room for students with special needs with at least one resource teacher.

**Table 3 Efforts of schools to include children with disabilities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Impairment</th>
<th>No of years spent in inclusive school</th>
<th>Facilities provided at School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arpita</td>
<td>Memory disorder</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Regular remedial classes with the resource teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swati</td>
<td>Understanding Disability</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Remedial classes with the resource teacher thrice a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwaipay-na</td>
<td>Application Disability</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Counseling sessions for child and parents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The resource rooms of the schools were variedly equipped and very few had all the necessary teaching aids. The schools make the ‘writer’ available to the children who may need their help. The ‘writers’ are usually children from lower grades who volunteer their services. Most schools had a policy to give extra time for children with disabilities to complete their examination. Resource teachers are mainly responsible to provide the extra support for students with disabilities in inclusive schools. The resource teacher handles the remedial workload, conducts counselling sessions with the child and parents, collaborates with the regular teachers to monitor their progress in class, and takes responsibility of the child during co-curricular activities. Their favourable attitude toward the children was evident during personal conversation with the researcher. All the children and their parents reported that the resource teacher would go the extra mile to make the child feel a part of the regular school. Almost all the children mentioned their resource teacher’s name as their favourite teacher in school.

**Challenges**

There could be many barriers for educating children with disabilities in regular classrooms. It is evident from the experiences of children with mental disabilities and their families, in an inclusive school environment. These barriers could emanate from scarcity of resources, negative attitudes of teachers, non-disabled peers and their parents. The peers in school, being the closest on par, play an important role in the lives of the children with disabilities. There is general support for the hypothesis that children who are not accepted by peers are generally at risk for difficulties later in life (Ochoa & Olivarez Jr., 1995). Acceptance by peers provides a much greater challenge for children with disabilities. Children with disabilities are often an easy target for being teased and bullied by their non-disabled peers as reported by children interviewed in this study (see also Nabuzoka and Smith 1993; Dawkins 1996). Recent research findings suggest that vulnerability to bullying cuts across all types of disability (Mishna 2003; Smith and Tippett 2006). Seven children interviewed found it difficult to make friends with the non-disabled peers because they were made fun of and bullied. The children commonly reflected that they wanted to be accepted and have more friends in the class who understand them and involve them in their talks and play.
Recommendations

In our study we observed that the school had one resource teacher for all children with special needs in the school (ranging between 20-25 children). This meant that the proportion of resource teacher to student was very low in the school. A similar finding has also been reported by Sreekumari (2003), that the number of children with disabilities under one resource teacher is high which acts as a barrier. For the Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) scheme the ratio of resource teacher to student has been decreased to 1:6 (Mukhopadhyay and Prakash 2004). It is important to have resource teachers in the school to be proportionate with the needs of the children with disabilities in order to provide adequate support. Sometimes, children with disabilities display some needs which may require a constant collaborative effort of the regular and resource teacher in the classroom, for instance, a child with an acute hyperactivity disorder may require the presence of a resource teacher in the classroom. This would only be possible if there are enough resource teachers to share the workload.

Conclusion

Right to Education Act 2009 ensures education to all children irrespective of their caste, religion, ability, and so on. It is essential to build an inclusive society through an inclusive approach. In doing so, we have challenged commonly held beliefs and developed a new set of core assumptions. Inclusion is more than a method of educating students with disabilities. It stresses that each child, regardless of the intensity and severity of his or her disabilities, is a valued member of society and is capable of participating in that society. A good inclusive education is one that allows all the students to participate in all aspects of classroom equally or close to equal. To meet the challenges, the involvement and cooperation of educators, parents, and community leaders is vital for the creation of better and more inclusive schools. The Government of India is trying to improve its education system focusing on the inclusive approach. In our present study we that the parents of such students with mental disabilities need to be more open minded in order to frame a knowledge based society in its fullfledge.
References


