

IMPROVING QUALITY OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION BY MONITORING PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES OF TEACHERS FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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Abstract

Education must help learners live their lives with greater competence and greater confidence. Education is also about developing behavior based on positive values- understanding and respect for other people. It will only do this if it is of good quality. It is difficult to pin down exactly what makes for good quality education or what needs to be done to promote it. One of the important factor that contributes directly to higher quality education is the good teaching, well trained teachers using methods focusing on the learner's needs.

Above all, a quality education is for everyone, not only for elites or for those in larger towns but also for the poor, disadvantaged and disabled. Quality education for everyone will mean special approaches for those with disabilities and addressing to their needs. The emphasis is therefore laid on inclusive education that uses the existing infrastructure / institutions and professionals to the extent possible. The inclusion demands for preparing teachers with initial induction and sensitizing them through in- service education programmes to help them attend to the special needs of the learners with various special needs of the learners with various challenges and equipping these teachers with skills, competencies and strategies required to cater to the diversity in an inclusive setting control.

This paper is an effort in this direction.

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Introduction

National policy of education (1986) has focused on the need to equalize education for all children, including special children with impairments. This would attach prime importance to the general system of education requiring children with disabilities to be included in the mainstream school. Government of India through various schemes and programme has been making special efforts in assuring the enrolment of children and youth with disabilities in the regular school system to the extent possible.

In pursuance, a comprehensive law namely, the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act 1995 (PWD Act) was enacted and has been enforced from Feb 2, 1996. The laws deal with both preventive and promotional aspects of rehabilitation. As per the Act, every child with disability will have access to free & concrete education till the age of 18 yrs.

If the SSA is to succeed in the reality it is imperative that children with disabilities are in school as naturally as non-disabled children. As adopted in the Salamanca Framework for Action, Article 7, the fundamental principle of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together, wherever possible regardless of any difficulties or differences that they may have. The inclusive school may recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies resource use and partnership with committees. There should be a continuum of support and services to match the continuum special needs encountered in every school.

Most people feel that educating a differently-abled child in general school is inclusion but it can be treated as total inclusion only when general classroom teachers take most of the responsibilities for the education of these children. If the differently-abled child's needs are taken care of only by a special teacher in a general classroom, it is not total inclusion.

The emphasis is therefore laid on inclusive education that uses the existing infrastructure / institutions and professionals to the extent possible and does not create a plethora of completely new institutions which are expensive and take time to come up.

Objectives

- To assess perception of teachers towards inclusion.
- To assess perception of teachers towards disabled children.
- To assess perception of teachers towards role of parents of disabled child.
- To assess perception of teachers towards relationship of classmates with disabled children.
- To assess perception of teachers towards role of co-curricular and vocational activities in inclusive education.
- To assess the availability of infrastructure facilities for inclusive education.
- To assess training needs of teachers for inclusive education.

Methodology

Segregation or isolation is not good for learners with disabilities nor for general learners without disabilities, societal requirement is that learners with disabilities should be educated along with other learners in 'inclusive schools', which are cost effective and have sound pedagogical practices.

The process of inclusion starts with the assessment of attitudinal barrier of school/classroom teachers/parents/classmates towards inclusion. To realize above stated objectives a study was, therefore carried out in 20 randomly selected Municipal Corporation Primary schools of NW District of Delhi, India. Sample consisted of 274 teachers of these selected primary schools. Questionnaire and interview were used as tools for collection of data.

- Questionnaire- Investigator prepared questionnaire consisting of four parts. Part A consisted of 8 items to assess the attitude and perception of teachers towards inclusive education and towards disabled children. Part B consisted of 4 items to assess how teachers perceive the role of parents of disabled children. Part C consisted of 5 items to assess how teachers perceive the relationship of classmates of disabled children. Part D consisted of 7 items to

assess perception of teacher to role of co-curricular and vocational activities in inclusive education and for personality development of disabled child.

- Interview- investigator prepared the structured interview for the head of schools and for the teachers to assess the infrastructure facilities and training needs of teachers for inclusive education.

Analysis and Interpretations

Part A: Attitude of teachers towards inclusive education and disabled children

32.9% of teachers strongly agreed for the inclusive education system whereas 44.5% of teachers support inclusion. 10.9% disagreed and 6.9% strongly disagreed with inclusive education. This disagreement could be due to unconfident group of teachers in dealing with disabled children or inclusive class. Though small % of teachers is against inclusion but this attitudinal barrier has to be removed through awareness campaign and training programmes. The agreement among the teachers for inclusion was highlighted by 30.6% of teachers that is in disagreement for sending disabled children in special schools but still 18.2% of teachers strongly agreed for special schools. 39% of teachers strongly disagreed that school is meant only for normal child, they believe that disabled child should be educated not at home but in school system in order to socialize. 48.5% of teachers strongly disagreed and 23.4% of teachers disagreed that education is only for normal child, they opinioned that every equal opportunity should also be provided to disabled child. 23.7% of teachers strongly agreed and 39% of teachers agreed that disabled child should be treated as any other normal child but 31.4% of teachers feel that sympathy should be shown to disabled child. This requires training programme for teachers to guide them to be able to distinguish between sympathy and empathy. 28.8% and 47.1% of teachers strongly agreed and agreed respectively with the fact that disabled child should be taken care of and its emotional problems, adjustments problems should be handled with care. 33.5% and 34.3% of teachers strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively that teacher should not be ignorant towards disabled child and try to involve such children in school activities to bring social adjustments.

Part B: Perception of teachers towards role and relationship of parents towards disabled children

Teacher's role is not only to transfer knowledge to learners but s/he has to work as a friend, philosopher and guide. Teacher is a guide not only for learners but also for parents; therefore it is imperative to know perception of teachers towards role and relationship of parents and classmates towards disabled children. 47.4% of teachers strongly agreed and 35% of teachers agreed that parent of disabled children should make their child confident by allowing them to do their work independently. 44.5% of teachers and 39.4% of teachers strongly agreed and agreed that role of parents in the child's development is to encourage them and motivate them to build their self-esteem. 33.4% of teachers strongly advocated that parents should not over protect their child and should allow them to live like a normal person. Parents should not sympathize with them and with their behavior do not child feel handicap. 56.2% of teachers strongly agreed that parents should provide quality time to their disabled child and do not be ignorant to their socio-emotional demands.

Part C: Perception of teachers towards role and relationship of classmates towards disabled children

Education is about developing behavior based on positive values-understanding and respect for other people. To inculcate these values it is the duty of teacher to guide its students to have healthy relationships with disabled children to be a good human being and thus it is essential to assess how teachers itself perceive the relationship among normal children and disabled children. 41.6% of teachers and 29.9% of teachers agreed and strongly agreed respectively that classmates should treat the disabled child normally like any other child. 31% of teachers agreed that normal child should share and take care of disabled children. 37.9% of teachers strongly agreed and 39.4% of teachers agreed that normal children should encourage their disabled classmates and for this environment teacher should use cooperative and peer learning in classroom. 40.8% of teachers disagreed and 35% of teachers strongly disagreed that classmates should ignore disabled children rather they should involve the disabled children in their play and other activities.

Part D: Perception of teachers towards role of co-curricular and vocational activities in inclusive education

Co-curricular activities are inseparable part of education. These activities are responsible for the overall personality development of child and prepare the child for better life. Vocational activities provide insight into the vocational available to the child and bring out the talent of child. One of the aims of education is to prepare the child as good and productive citizen of its country. This requires disabled child should not only be included in education system but later on be part of the society as productive worker.

41.2% of teachers agreed and 29.6% of teachers strongly agreed that disabled child should be allowed to do physical activities but it is the duty of teacher to plan and organize activities as per the level of child. Equal % of teachers, 38.6%, strongly agreed and agreed that for personality development of child teacher should encourage participation of disabled children in co-curricular activities. This way teacher could also identify the talents and likes and dislikes of children. 41.6% of teachers and 40.8% of teachers strongly agreed and agreed respectively that equal opportunity should be provided to each and every child irrespective of their disabilities. It is the duty of teacher to plan and organize activities as per their needs .44.2% of teachers strongly agreed and 33.5% of teachers agreed for provision of vocational courses and activities for disabled children so that they could be guided in that direction by nurturing their interest.51.1% of teachers were undecided about how to provide extra tutorials and assistance to disabled child but they strongly agreed that such classes should be arranged for them.

Part E: Availability of infrastructure facilities and assessing training needs of teachers for inclusive education

When interviewed teachers felt that they are not well equipped with the basic knowledge of various disabilities, their diagnosis, management and rehabilitation. They need programmes for their skills development to manage classroom to meet the needs of special children. The exposure should be given not only to teachers but also to the head of schools to various aids and appliances, equipments and infrastructure needed to cope with basic needs of special children.

Conclusions

Reiterating the 1968 policy, NPE 1986 laid emphasis on growth of teachers. It stressed the continuing education of teachers and meeting the needs of the teachers. The need for the In-service training of teachers on continuous basis has been stressed to develop a commitment to future. The invasion of mass media, educational technological development and now PWD Act 1995 placed an additional responsibility on the teachers. As a leader a teacher has to provide guidance, support and encouragement to pupils, to cope up with the changing ideas, advancements in knowledge and also to motivate them for more effective achievements.

The school system is facing one big social challenge of integrating and mainstreaming persons with disabilities. As per the findings of the study, there is no attitudinal barrier among teachers towards inclusion. But to keep pace with societal changes, an imaginative in-service education / training programmes for teachers in the direction of total inclusion and to realize the aim of SSA is necessary.

Findings of the study highlighted that

- There is general agreement among the teachers for inclusive education. As such there is no attitudinal barrier among teachers and they are mentally prepared to accept the inclusive class. But small group of teachers disagreed with this inclusion. This disagreement could be due to unconfident group of teachers in dealing with disabled children or inclusive class. Though small % of teachers is against inclusion but this attitudinal barrier has to be removed through awareness campaign and training programmes for total inclusion.
- Teachers perceived the role of parents of disabled child as that of source of encouragement and socio-emotional support.
- Teachers believed that normal children should have healthy relationships with disabled children to be a good human being and classmates should help, assist, care, love, be friendly, empathize and involve the disabled children in their activities and should not make fun of them or tease them.

- Teachers strongly agreed that the disabled child should not only be included in education system but also later on be part of the society as productive worker and towards this aim the role of co-curricular and vocational activities in inclusive education is very essential. Every opportunity should be provided to the disabled child to bring out its talent and creativity.
- In-service training programmes for teachers should be planned to realize the followings
 - To acquaint teachers with basic knowledge of various disabilities and their identification.
 - To orient teachers with classroom management strategies to meet challenges and needs of disabled children.
 - To develop skills of teachers for knowledge and usage of aids and appliances, teaching methods and materials for disabled children control.
- The head of schools threw light on the non-availability of effective infrastructure facilities in schools for disabled children like toilet facilities, broad ramps and corridors for movement of wheel chair and side supports on walls. Further there are no aids, appliances, TLMs, etc. are provided by the Govt. or no financial grant is provided by Govt. for providing these assistive devices to disabled underprivileged children from low socio-economic status. Also no support is being provided or being taken from the community in this regard as Heads are not aware of supporting organizations and funding social agencies.
- For effective implementation of inclusion programme schools should be provided with basic facilities like aids, appliances, TLM, infrastructure, financial aid and above all training for their effective and optimum utilization.

Suggestions

Successful implementation of any programme requires a strong will and commitment of all the people involved in the process. Total inclusion is possible by effective implementation of

- Climate building
- Capacity building
- Material development
- Resource mobilization.
- Community involvement

Climate building

The positive acceptance of disabled children by parents, teachers and community is the first step towards inclusion. Attitudinal barrier has to be removed in all fronts. Conscious efforts, therefore, need to be made through awareness among the masses to educate parents, teachers and community and through in-service training programmes for teachers regarding the merits of inclusion.

Capacity building

All the persons involved in the 'inclusion process' – administrators to teachers, will need capacity building interventions by in-service training programmes or by school based training programmes. The course design for such programmes should be in view of the needs of the target group for total inclusion.

Material Development

Materials have to be developed to assist administrators, teachers, parents and disabled children. These will have to be

- Teacher Learning Materials
- Tools of evaluation
- Teaching strategies and methods
- Detailed continuous and comprehensive evaluation programme for every level of education.

- Guidelines for head of schools regarding infrastructure facilities and availability of aids, appliances and materials needed for effective inclusion.

Resource Mobilization

Efforts have to be made to mobilize all the probable and possible resources available at any level for implementation of the inclusion. Provision should be made for availability of specific assistive devices to disable children; services of available guidance and counselor workers should be made use of for the benefit of disable children as well as for normal children, for solving their socio-emotional problems and for providing vocational guidance to them and to their parents for rehabilitating disabled children.

Community Involvement

The various agencies responsible for qualitative improvement in step towards inclusion in school education and for realizing aim of SSA –‘education for all and equal opportunities for all’, have to be integrated/networked to bring about ‘total inclusion’.

- One possible way to involve community is through interaction with community. Some suggestions in this direction are
 1. Showing films depicting children with disability coping well and doing everything thing.
 2. Having persons with disability as guest speakers or visitors.
 3. Reading and discussing stories about differently abled persons.
- Involvement of District Rehabilitation centers, Medical officers, local hospitals, Braille Press, special schools, NGOs and like organizations.

In nut shell with more confident and skilled teachers the inclusive education programme will have a positive impact on the awareness of the community. This would increase the enrolment of disabled children in school in the light of education for all and more disabled or differently abled children would be working and contributing towards the growth of the society.

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