

SEGREGATION, INTEGRATION, INCLUSION AND EFFECTIVE PROVISION: A CASE STUDY OF PERSPECTIVES FROM SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS CHILDREN, PARENTS AND TEACHERS IN BANGALORE INDIA.

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Educating special educational needs (SEN) children in special schools is the norm in India but there is a growing trend towards inclusive practice. Perspectives were sought from children, their parents and teachers in Bangalore, India to investigate perceptions of effective provision for SEN children using an interpretative approach to provide 'thick descriptions'. Findings suggest that integration of SEN children in mainstream schools was not the preferred model for both the children and adults in the study. Separate schooling was cited by the majority of respondents as the most appropriate model for reasons of unsuitable pedagogy and curriculum, a lack of individualised attention for children and difficulties of social interaction. The study reveals that teacher dedication, passion and care for the SEN children in their classes is juxtaposed with an acknowledgment of their professional training and development needs. These findings provide teachers and policy makers with an in depth insight from this sample case study into the perspectives of children, their parents and teachers on appropriate SEN provision and the challenges of implementing inclusive practice.

Introduction

In the last 30 years there has been a fundamental shift in India in the education of children with special educational needs away from segregated provision towards a more inclusive approach (Das, Sharma & Singh, 2012). Legislation such as the Persons with Disabilities Act (1995) and initiatives such as the Education for All Movement (2001) and the Action Plan for Inclusive Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities (2005) have focussed attention on the provision of educational opportunities for children with special educational needs in Indian schools (Bhatnagar & Das, 2014). Although considerable progress has been made, it is recognised that much remains to be done in order to ensure that the needs of children with special educational needs are met in Indian schools (Thapan, 2014).

There are many factors that inhibit effective inclusion of students with special educational needs within Indian schools. Some of these are structural aspects of education policy, including the large percentage of Indian schools that are private; the lack of adequate inclusion policies in many schools (including a lack of goals and objectives for inclusive education), and restrictive practices that limit the opportunities of students to enrol in mainstream schools (Bhatnagar & Das, 2014; Ahan, 2013). Other aspects of impediments to inclusive education within schools include poor physical infrastructure including access difficulties and lack of physical adaptation to schools (Bhatnagar & Das, 2014), financial limitations such that funding does not meet basic needs (Bhatnagar & Das, 2014; Sharma, Moore & Sonawane, 2009) and large class sizes that make effective one-to-one interventions difficult to achieve (Sharma, et al., 2009; David & Kuyini, 2012). Whilst these factors inhibit the access of children with special educational needs to mainstream schools, the focus of this study is on those factors that impact on the everyday experiences of teachers and students in school.

Previous studies have revealed that there are a range of curricular and pedagogical difficulties that need to be overcome in Indian schools (Bhatnagar & Das, 2014; Das, et al., 2012). Bhatnagar & Das (2014 and 2013) point out that Indian teachers have a wide variety of concerns and reservations about implementing inclusive education

practices including: lack of preparation and training for teachers in aspects of special education; negative attitudes of teachers and other students towards pupils with SEN; lack of funds and suitable materials; lack of support; inappropriate curriculum design; large class sizes (Sharma, 2002) and concern about increased workload. Of these concerns, a recurring theme is lack of training (Sharma, et al., 2009) with up to 95% of teachers claiming that they had not received any training in teaching children with special educational needs (Bhatnagar & Das, 2013; Das, Kuyini & Desai, 2013).

Previous studies have identified that the attitudes and practices of classroom teachers is fundamental to the success of inclusion and to the quality of education that children with SEN experience (Bhatnagar & Das, 2014; Das, et al., 2013a; David & Kuyini, 2012). In particular, the self-belief of teachers in their own efficacy is seen as being crucially important in teachers meeting the needs of students with special education needs (Bangs & Frost, 2012) and thus the successful implementation of inclusive education relies on addressing teacher concerns effectively (Bhatnagar & Das, 2014; David & Kuyini, 2012). Bhatnagar & Das (2014) suggest that there is a need for more research on teacher concerns about inclusive education practice in India and in particular, they point to the need for qualitative studies to complement the existing quantitative studies.

Context

This study was funded by St Christopher's Trust and the University of Cumbria. The lead researcher collected data in two mainstream and two special educational needs schools in Bangalore, India in order to investigate how practice, perceptions and provision for special educational needs interplay with cultural contexts and belief systems in these Christian foundation schools in Bangalore.

Convenience sampling (Robson 2002) guided by local knowledge was used to select Christian foundation schools in Bangalore for the sample. The sample included:

- School A, the dominant case study school, is a well-resourced special needs school on the outskirts of Bangalore,
- School B is a sparsely-resourced special needs school located adjacent to school C,
- School C is a mainstream school with a high academic reputation in Bangalore city
- Unit R is a resource centre within School C which provides additional support to SEN children who are withdrawn from classes in School C to receive small group support from R unit teachers.
- School D is a mainstream school with a resource unit, in Bangalore city

The majority of the data were collected from School A with additional interviews and observations undertaken by the lead researcher in the other schools.

The purpose of this case study is to contextualize how SEN provision is understood by a sample of children, their parents and teachers in School A and how these perceptions are informed by cultural contexts and belief systems. The case study also identified perceptions of effective educational provision for special needs children and provided a forum for sharing good practice and identifying teacher development needs in Schools B, C and D and the Unit R.

Case study school

On its website School A is described as a *beacon of hope for children with special needs and the newly constructed school building stands as a testimony of God's unfailing love and His unwavering faithfulness*. School A is an accredited institution of the National Institute of Open Schooling, under, 'Special Accredited Institutions for the Education of the Disadvantaged' by the Government of India.

School A's Principal is a dynamic and inspirational woman and a formidable force within the school. Brought up as a Hindu but converted to Christianity, the school is her life and she strives relentlessly to encourage both staff and children to maintain high standards in everything they do - from cleanliness and modest dress code, to marketing the products the youngsters make in the upper school as well as utilizing speech therapists, psychologists and teachers to support the children to achieve the best they can. The Principal has travelled widely to raise financial support for her school building improvement program and classroom resources. She brings back ideas from different countries to enhance provision and is not afraid to challenge traditional Indian mindsets about issues.

Methods/methodology

The study adopts a constructivist stance and utilizes an interpretive approach that builds upon the recognition that *reality and knowledge reside in the minds of the individuals and knowledge may be uncovered by unpacking individual experiences* (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p.56). Perceptions of disability were explored through an ethnographic lens, as understood by the sample of individuals from the school. The project gained ethical approval

from the University of Cumbria and adhered to British Education Research Association (BERA) guidelines. The multi-disciplinary research team designed a range of fit for purpose data collection tools utilising sociological and anthropological field methods - focus groups, interviews, questionnaires, participant observations, collection of documentary and photographic evidence and narrative reports. Data were analyzed using a grounded theory constant comparison method to identify emerging themes from the data (Auerbach & Silverstein 2003, Robson 2002).

This study uses a variety of interpretative qualitative methods within a phenomenological perspective. Phenomenology is useful for this study because of its suitability to explore social phenomena through the perspectives and lived experiences of those involved in the situation (Merriman, 2014; Groenewald, 2004; Gubrium & Holstein, 2000). This approach uses the experiences, beliefs, feelings and convictions of participants in order to unfold and reveal meanings arising from particular situations (Merriman, 2014; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). A case study approach was used in terms of context and data collection with the bounded setting of the 'case' (Robson, 2002) being a Special Needs school in Bangalore. Following Yin (2013), a case study methodology was adopted to investigate affinities between Christian ethos, spirituality and concepts of disability within the real life context as experienced in the special needs school in Bangalore. Savin-Baden & Major (2013, p. 163) suggest that a case study approach is suitable for such a study because it:

- is flexible - the research goals are both descriptive and evaluative,
- draws on a range of research approaches and data collection tools
- presents diverse points of view
- has wide appeal – the case study findings can be used to inform a variety of audiences including teachers, parents, teacher educators and occupational therapists, policy makers in the SEN, RE and Occupational Health spheres.

This study uses a range of data collection techniques, including observation of quotidian practices in contrasting schools alongside discussion and semi-structured interviews with administrators, teachers, parents and children in order to create thick descriptions of the perceptions and actions of participants (Merriman, 2014; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).

The project leader gained the trust of the participants by visiting School A and getting to know the children their teachers and their families in the first two weeks of the research. The sample, negotiated with the Principal, included interviews with four children three parents and five teachers (including the Principal and deputy of the school) from a range of ages, socio-economic status, different faiths and castes (Merriman, 2014; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). During a workshop one male and thirty female teachers completed a questionnaire. The research design included the use of the '*least adult role*' technique for accessing rich data from children (Elton-Chalcraft, 2011) and a participatory role attempting to gain trust was adopted.

Through interviews, focus groups, questionnaires and participant observation the children's, teachers' and parents' perspectives were sought about their concepts of disability and the basis for these opinions, how faith (including the school's Christian ethos) and teacher expertise are seen to contribute to the children's quality of life in the present and the potential for the children's future independent living and economic self-sufficiency. Additional data was collected in another fee-paying Bangalore Christian foundation SEN school (school B) and the mainstream fee paying school nearby (school C) which included a resource unit (R unit in school C). The researcher also undertook an interview with the principal of a fee-paying school (school D).

Data were analyzed using a grounded theory constant comparison methodology to allow themes to emerge from the data and to allow transferable interpretations to be presented (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). The research team investigated participants' thoughts and feelings regarding special needs provision along with self-perceptions of teacher confidence and competence, teacher development and training needs. Participants' views are mapped onto frameworks found in the literature to identify how inclusive practice is exemplified in different contexts (Bangs & Frost, 2012; David & Kuyini, 2012). In India the lead researcher drew on preliminary findings to facilitate a forum for sharing good practice in terms of strategies, techniques and resources for inclusive practice and to identify teacher development needs. The study thus aligns with the call by Bhatnagar & Das (2014) for qualitative studies to complement the existing range of quantitative studies of SEN provision in India.

Results and discussion:

Integration, segregation and inclusion: aspects of provision for SEN children in mainstream schools in India

The overall finding is that the majority of both child and adult respondents in this study did not think that all children should be educated together in a mainstream school. In general, this appeared to be a response to reservations about the nature of provision made for children with special needs in mainstream schools in India. These involved five concerns outlined below.

Participant Concern 1: Mainstream schools use unsuitable teaching methods.

Teachers, parents and children from School A all made mention of the high academic requirements which they thought were unattainable by SEN children. Parent R commented that *the Indian curriculum focusses a lot on academic learning* and Teenager R reported: *Because (at) that school many subjects are so difficult. I can't carry (study) like Kannada and Hindi and the maths, so I can do it at this school.*

This finding was supported by the data from teachers in Unit R who explained that when teachers from School C found a particular child 'unable to cope' with the pace or level of academic work the child was withdrawn from class and sent to the resource unit. All lessons in all schools were taught in English, the *lingua franca* of India and all children are expected to learn through text books written in English but in Bangalore several community languages are spoken, including Tamil (peoples from Tamil Nadu), Malayalam (peoples from Kerala) and Kannada (peoples from Bangalore's state Karnataka). Sometimes a child is sent to work in the resource unit because their teacher feels they have reading and comprehension difficulties whilst other children are referred by parents worried that their child is not able to read and write in English by grade 4 (about age 8).

Teaching in all the classes in School C was almost exclusively didactic with the teacher at the front addressing students sitting in rows facing the blackboard. The teacher usually wrote on the board or displayed posters of chunks of information which the children copied down. Interactions between children and teachers were usually characterised by questions and answers to clarify or reinforce the partial body of knowledge being transmitted. Some children are assessed by the Spastics Society of India, and if the child was deemed, either by the Spastic Society's assessment or by the school to be 'uneducable' in the mainstream class (or even in the resource unit) then they went to a special school. Teachers at Unit R sent such 'uneducable' children to the special needs School B which was located next door to School C.

Participant Concern 2: Children were unlikely to receive adequate, individualised attention because their needs would not be recognised or understood

Most participants felt that mainstream schools were unable to meet the needs of SEN children. Parent M said: *I don't think they get enough help in a normal school. If they go to a normal school there has to be an extra teacher for them* and Teenager R claimed that teachers in the mainstream school ignored her and didn't help her with her work. Parent R voiced her frustration with a mainstream teacher who did not meet her daughter's needs:

I was called into school with complaints that this child was just being pure lazy because she could answer everything when it was done orally, but she couldn't put down anything down onto her piece of paper and the teachers refused to accept that there was something that could be wrong with her. So she went into a severe depression and she was below standard. She's just started moving within, and that is what I actually decided, I decided that enough was enough and I pulled her out of the school.

However, accessing a special school was not always easy and Parent R went on to report on the difficulties they had faced in getting appropriate education for their daughter:

So my daughter she wouldn't get admission into the special school because they felt she didn't need a special school because she comes somewhere in-between. So she is a slow learner, having a specific learning disability so she wouldn't come into, they felt, the school.

Participants in this study regarded it as being too difficult for SEN children to access the curriculum and to benefit from the teaching methods employed in mainstream schools. These participant concerns echo those of Ahan (2013) and Bhatnagar and Das (2013) that many teachers in India do not believe that it is possible mainstream schools to cater for special needs children.

Concern 3: The curriculum would not be appropriate for SEN children in a mainstream school.

The majority of the students in special needs schools A and B engaged in a different curriculum to that followed by children in mainstream schools C and D and teachers in all four schools acknowledged that the curriculum in mainstream schools was geared towards the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE) external exams. For example, students in School C took exams every two months and for those unable to meet the demands of these exams a lower standard National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) exam was available. Although some of the students attending the special school were entered for the NIOS exam many teachers in all four contexts acknowledged that the Indian system was not set up for SEN children to succeed. In the mainstream schools C and D children were sent to the Resource Unit or to a special school if they struggled with the academic curriculum. Parent R reported on the constraints posed by a focus on exam success in mainstream schools:

there was a Principal there who knew something about ... children who could learn in a different way but her hands were not opening up to take a decision to do something for these kids, so although she would empathise with me she said the syllabus does not allow me to do anything for these children. So she also washed her hands ... At that point we thought that academics was difficult for her so instead of just moving on with academics we thought it's time that she does something else.

Often participants saw the child as not suited to the curriculum rather than considering the adaptations need to ensure the curriculum is suitable for students and such a 'deficit model' of SEN was prevalent in all the four schools in the research.

Participant Concern 4: Children with special needs were often mistreated in mainstream schools.

Parents, children and teachers cited instances which confirmed their belief that SEN children could not be educated in mainstream schools because the absence of social-inclusion aspects such as acceptance, tolerance and understanding would culminate in such children being mistreated at school by teachers and other students. Parent M reported that her child *saw teachers hitting children and didn't like it* whilst Teenager J reported that other students hit her in the mainstream school because *they didn't like me* and Parent P stated that *normal children - they don't gel with these children (those with SEN) so we didn't want her to miss out* and consequently they sent her to a special school.

These results support the finding that negative attitudes to disability are prevalent in many parts of India (David & Kuyini, 2012) and that the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities and multiple disabilities in regular schools in India is extremely poor (Ahan, 2013).

Participant Concern 5: Integration is only possible for 'mild disability children'.

Although the majority of the questionnaire respondents supported separate schools for children with special needs, some respondents considered that children with special needs could be educated in a mainstream school, but it was commonly expressed in terms of a need to *be more social and interact with more people* and such opportunity was considered to be suitable only for those with *a mild disability* (questionnaire respondents).

These results correlate with those of previous studies that have pointed to reservations about the feasibility of integration of SEN students into mainstream schools in India (Ahan, 2013; David & Kuyini, 2012).

Other findings: ensuring appropriate education for students with special needs.

In addition to concerns expressed about the inclusion of students with special needs in mainstream school that have been identified, other themes emerged from the data to support developments in educational practice. These themes included meeting the needs of students with special needs; the role of education for SEN children; and the development needs of teachers.

Meeting the perceived personal and educational needs of the SEN students.

Meeting a child's educational need through adjustment of the curriculum and through adaptation of teaching was reported by many respondents as a key feature of the provision at School A. There was recognition of the individual needs of children and attempts to understand those needs and to meet them through *individualized teaching according to their level and needs with Individual lesson plans targeting the needs specific to each child*. However, as well as adjusting teaching to meet the needs of the children, there were also attempts to provide alternative curricula to meet the needs of children, for example by extending focus beyond the 'academic' curriculum into *imparting life skills and values required for life* (for instance by providing vocational training and developing self-confidence) with the aim to *make the child to be independent and responsible citizen*. This focus beyond the 'academic' contrasts with the strong focus reported in mainstream schools in India (Bhatnagar & Das, 2014).

Having spent time in school A over several weeks it was evident in the way teachers and children conversed with each other that School A seemed to provide a 'safe haven'. Several teachers and parents from School A cited instances where SEN children had been rejected by the mainstream education sector, both educationally by teachers providing inappropriate curriculum or were rejected personally by the bullying behaviour of many of their peers who viewed SEN children negatively. Sometimes these SEN children had also suffered rejection by society and in a few cases rejected by their own families too. Similar stories were also echoed in discussions with teachers in Unit R and the Principal of School B, all of these teachers voiced concerns about SEN children whose personal and educational needs had not been met in mainstream schools.

Meeting a child's personal needs at School A was reflected in recognising a child as a unique individual. A recurring response from respondents was that this entailed acceptance, care, compassion and empathy and that these qualities of attention were distinct features of School A that were less available or missing in mainstream schools. The focus

on individualised needs, expressed as *opportunity to grow to full potential of the person in spite (sic) of the disability* appears to be at variance with a deficit model of special needs that is reported as a characteristic of mainstream provision in India (for example, Sharma, et al., 2009). This finding is borne out by interviews with resource centre Unit R teachers at C school and the Principal of B special needs school.

Meeting personal needs and meeting educational needs clearly overlapped for many of the respondents and was reflected in a recurring theme of attention for an individual child that was held to be different from practice in mainstream schools. An underlying characteristic of the provision at School A was to provide individual attention within a safe, secure and happy setting *where each child is recognised as a unique individual*. The focus on a school environment that recognises and responds to individual needs of children appears to be a distinct feature of School A compared to many mainstream school contexts in India (Bhatnagar & Das, 2014 and 2013; Das, et al, 2013b).

The role of education for SEN children - aspirations

The hopes and aspirations of the respondents for children with special needs centred on the children developing independence; fitting in with society; and developing interpersonal skills. These aspirations centre on the role of school education being a direct preparation for a 'productive' life as a 'contributing citizen' in a competitive world (questionnaire respondents). Parent R reported that their challenge is to find a suitable role for their child as they approach adult life; this parent firstly engaged her daughter in singing activities, next she thought a coffee shop waitress would be a suitable occupation, finally she settled on data input and helped to train her daughter, and her peers at school A, to enter data onto computers: *We need to train them properly to be thorough. They [the commissioning businesses] don't mind that the children are slow but they should be perfect. The work should be perfect for accuracy.*

This focus on meeting the needs of an individual to meet the wider needs of society was reflected in the perception that the study school A provided an educational experience for children with special educational needs that was different from that provided in a mainstream school. This different experience was expressed in terms of meeting a child's personal needs and providing for specific, individual educational needs. Although there is considerable overlap in these two elements, analysis of the data suggested that these reflected two dimensions of meeting a child's needs.

Staff development needs for teachers working with SEN children

A large majority of respondents thought that teachers needed specific training to work with special needs children but a recurring theme was that those needs centred on how to deal with behavioural challenges felt to be posed by students with special needs rather than on personal enhancement as a teacher through developing appropriate pedagogical strategies or developing an understanding of particular special needs and how to deal with these.

This appears to relate to most teachers feeling that they had only been trained to use didactic methods of instruction that left some children feeling disengaged combined with a realisation that some special needs pose challenges to accepted norms of social interaction (David & Kuyini, 2012). It was typical for teachers from the two special needs schools and Unit R to have been trained as classroom teachers not SEN specialists and specialist training appeared to have been confined to a few teachers such as the co-ordinators of the resource units in Schools C and D.

Das, et al. (2012) suggest that seven core competencies need to be met in order to deal effectively with SEN: professional knowledge; classroom management; collaboration; assessment and evaluation; instructional techniques; individualized and adaptive instruction; and assistive technology but, interestingly, none of the respondents suggested that training would be useful for them to develop these competencies or to design more appropriate curricula for children with special needs. Indeed, a small number of respondents did not recognise a need for specific training in order to teach children with special needs: for these respondents, *any teacher with a love for children can work in this field* (questionnaire respondent) and the most important elements were personal attributes of the teacher such as passion, patience and calmness.

Conclusion

Although India has made good progress with inclusion in recent years much still needs to be done (Das, et al., 2013b; Ahan, 2013; Das, et al., 2012) and this study lends support to previous studies that many Indian teachers claim they lack knowledge and skill to teach SEN, yet evidence suggests that the quality of classroom teachers is the most important factor in the effectiveness of inclusive education strategies (Das, et al., 2012, Mitchell, 2014; Kosko & Wilkins, 2009). Many of the teachers in this study express the willingness to meet the social and educational needs of students although lack of confidence remains and serious concerns and reservations about the advisability or practicalities of inclusion persist. Additionally, there is a need for social inclusion initiatives to address wider

concerns (David & Kuyini, 2012; Ahan, 2013; Bhatnagar & Das, 2014) and to develop cooperative learning approaches within the classroom (Das, et al., 2012).

However the widespread concerns of teachers regarding their lack of training for teaching SEN suggests the urgent need for mainstream classroom teachers to upgrade their knowledge and skills (Das, et al., 2012; Das, et al., 2013b). The type of integrative, flexible and child-centred approach that works well with SEN children (Kochlar & West, 1996) contrast with the widespread use of traditional, didactic, teacher-centred approaches typical in Indian schools (Bhatnagar & Das, 2014; Das, et al., 2012). In particular, mainstream teachers need to develop knowledge about strategies to meet the needs of pupils with SEN and need to develop understanding of the learning styles of such students (Friend & Bursuck, 2013).

This study lends support to the suggestion that there is a very high level of training need amongst regular school teachers in India for developing inclusive practice (Das, et al., 2012). Of particular concern is the negative attitudes of some teachers towards inclusion as it has been shown that positive teacher attitudes towards inclusion is a decisive factor in establishing inclusive practice (Hegarty & Alur, 2002; Sharma, et al., 2009; David & Kuyini, 2012). In part, this is reflected by the high levels of teacher anxiety displayed by teachers in our study, with their doubts about advisability of inclusion, including concerns about the effect of inclusion on other children's academic results (with concomitant impacts on rewards for teachers) and perceptions of own competencies amongst teachers (Sharma, et al., 2009, David & Kuyini, 2012). Unfortunately, there is a lack of initial training for teachers combined with an absence of in-service professional development for teachers as this is not a normal part of school activity for many teachers (Bhatnagar & Das, 2014). Although the call for greater professional development derives from the needs of teachers in this and previous studies (Das, et al., 2013a; Bhatnagar & Das, 2014) the benefits extend beyond this by changing the attitudes as well as the behaviours of teachers (Kosko & Wilkins, 2009).

The development of key competencies among regular teachers in Indian schools is thus a priority for improving the provision of education for children with disabilities in India. This calls for long-term and systematic staff development as part of a process of on-going professional development (David & Kuyini, 2012; Das, et al., 2012). The characteristics of successful in-service programmes are characterised a number of factors including: activities to meet the needs of individual teachers; recognition of the diverse strengths and needs of teachers; and involvement of teachers in the planning and delivery of the programme with a key aspect being consideration of the specific contextual factors within which teachers operate in a particular country (Avalos, 2011). This study supports the call of Das, et al., (2013a) that the design and delivery of professional development programmes for teachers in India needs to involve teachers in considering a 'bottom-up' strategy that draws on the experience and expertise of classroom teachers at all stages of the process.

Clearly, ongoing professional development of teachers is needed to facilitate teachers to develop pedagogical knowledge and to incorporate specific practices into their regular teaching (Avalos, 2011; Kosko & Wilkins, 2009; Das, et al., 2012) but this forms only part of a wider strategy that is needed, including increased resources to provide support for teachers, infrastructure development, changes in admissions and funding systems (Bhatnagar & Das, 2014).

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