

A STUDY ON THE SYSTEM OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN KOLKATA

Dr. Ritwika Laskar (email: ritwikalaskar@gmail.com)

Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Alipurduar Mahila Mahavidyalaya

Abstract

Empowerment is a multidimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process which fosters that ability in every individual which they can use in their own lives and their communities by acting on issues which are socially defined as important. Empowerment of individuals with disability is quite a complex task and requires attitudinal change of the society as a whole. The first step in this regard should be ensuring education of children with special needs. The democratic systems all over the world are also equally wedded to the idea of providing equal educational opportunity to every individual without any sort of discrimination especially on grounds of disability. Inclusive education represents the latest trend in the provision of placement in the field of education for children with special needs. Through the present study the researcher has made an attempt to study the system of Inclusive education and the initiatives taken by the Government in Kolkata, a metropolitan city in India. Government officers were interviewed to collect data in this regard. Semi – structured questionnaires were used and the data, in the form of detailed responses were analyzed qualitatively only. It was found that the Government took some initiatives in providing education to children with special needs by providing funds to general schools. However, lack of inclusive schools in the city was quite evident. The present emphasis on inclusive education all over the world underlines the need and importance of this study.

Keywords: Education of children with special needs, Inclusive Education, Kolkata

Introduction

Medically defined, disability is a physical impairment and inability to perform physical functions normally. Basic biological and psychological disturbances lead to impairment. Impairment resulting into functional limitation leads one to disability and the effects of such acquired disability are experienced through societal limitations. In today's awakened societies, every child, as a potentially useful citizen, has its unique worth and should be provided sufficient educational opportunities for his maximum growth and development.

Empowerment refers to the process of unleashing human potential and enhancing human ability to effect and maintain societal growth. Empowerment and education are two sides of the same coin. While on one hand empowerment implies enabling people gain control over their own lives, education on the other hand is a fundamental

component of obtaining better living standards. Education, simply stated, is a tool which leads to empowerment of an individual.

Empowering the disabled involves creating an environment through positive, economic and social policies for full development of the disabled to enable them to realize their potential and elimination of all forms of discrimination against individuals with disability. Empowerment of the disabled involves five major components:

Enhancing their sense of self – worth

Ensuring them their right to have and to determine choices

Ensuring them their right to have access to opportunities and resources

Giving them the right to have the power to control their own lives both within and outside the home

Enabling them to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order nationally and internationally.

In their life, since they have to live along with non disabled human beings, individuals with disability must have their education along with their non – disabled and non – exceptional peers in the normal schools in the integrated settings with minor adjustments for their proper education and adjustment.

“Inclusion is a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children.” (UNESCO, 2005)

Inclusive Education focuses not only on the accommodation of exceptional children into a general education setting but also on restructuring of schools to accept and provide for the needs of all students. Michael F. Giangreco defines Inclusive education as a set of values, principles and practices that seek more effective and meaningful education for all students, regardless of whether they have exceptionality labels or not. [Mangal, 2007, 45]

India is a signatory to the “Declaration on the Full Participation and Equality of Persons with Disabilities in the Asia Pacific Region”. It is also a signatory to the “Biwako Millenium Framework” for action towards an inclusive, barrier free and rights-based society.

Through the present study the researcher has made an attempt to study the system of Inclusive education and the initiatives taken by the Government in Kolkata, a metropolitan city in India. As of 2011, the city had 4.5 million residents, making it the third-most populous metropolitan area in India. This study is important as it tries to delineate the steps taken to ensure inclusive setups for education of the disabled.

Research Methodology

Objective

The objective of the study is to make an analytical study of the system of inclusive education in the metropolitan city of Kolkata.

Methodology

Sample

The sample of study included Government officials looking into the process of implementation of different aspects of Inclusive Education.

Tools

Semi – structured Questionnaires were used to collect data from the Government officials.

Analysis of the data

Data collected was in the form of detailed responses. All the responses were analyzed qualitatively only to analyze the system of Inclusive Education in Kolkata.

Findings of the study

The study revealed that there was awareness about the system of inclusion only to a certain extent. All the general schools (whether government or government-aided) had to follow the system of inclusion. They could not deny admission to a child with special needs. But, in case of private schools, admitting a child with special needs depended on the school's policy. There existed a specific rule for inclusion. It stated, "According to the Government of West Bengal's Notification (NO. 846-SS (PRY), Cal. The 12th Aug. '98) 3% seats of all new admissions shall be kept reserved for persons with disabilities in all Government Educational Institutions and the Educational Institutions receiving aid from the Government with effect from 1st day of September 1998 or with effect from the next academic session, whichever is earlier". However, quite a few of such government schools were not much aware of this specific provision for reservation. The survey showed that the Government had made several provisions for assisting general schools in providing education to the special children.

The government provided assistance in the following ways:

Provided area based Resource Room [4 already functioning and some under construction].

Arranging 128 special educators for the 141 wards in Kolkata, roughly 1 special educator per ward.

Arranging training programmes for the teachers.

Foundation Course for 3 months was organized to provide basic knowledge to teachers to deal with children having special needs. Further, these teachers, whenever required, could consult the special educators for meeting educational needs of children with disability and also for construction of the curriculum.

Efforts were made to provide training to almost all teachers at the Primary level. At the Upper Primary level 1/2 teacher(s) per school were provided training to deal with the needs of disabled children.

At the Primary level, child based programmes were implemented. For example: If there were 4 blind children in a particular institution/class, then Braille books and other aids like Braille slate, Taylor Frame, Walking Sticks, etc. were provided to those children by the Government.

Implementing single language option in schools for persons with Hearing Impairment. Students with Visual Impairment, Physical Disability and Dyslexia were allowed to take help of scribes during examinations. The scribe should hold a lesser qualification than the candidate.

The study also revealed that the Government exempted special children studying in government and government aided institutions from paying any tuition fees in all academic sessions. Assistance was also provided to special children mainly in the form of scholarships. Scholarships were provided in two categories: upto class VIII and class IX onwards. Those students aspiring for the scholarship in the second category needed to apply to the District Mass Education Extension Officer in the prescribed format and those aspiring for the first category had to apply to the Heads of their Institutions who would then have to forward the application to the Commissioner (Disability). Scholarships were open to all children and those were advertised on television; some of the scholarships were provided to children on the basis of their socio-economic condition and the recommendation of the schools. The academic performances of these children were also taken into consideration while providing the scholarships. A concession of 40% was also given to special children in application fees for secondary and higher secondary examinations.

The survey showed that in spite of all the efforts made by the Government, there were not many general schools with special children on their rolls. It was also found that in the general schools there was no provision of dividing a particular class into sections in case there was more than four or five special children in that particular class. These schools also lacked basic infrastructural facilities like ramps, handrails, etc considered quite important in facilitating attendance of special children to general schools.

Discussion and Suggestions on the basis of Findings

It was compulsory for government schools or government aided schools to follow the system of inclusion and provide admission to children with special needs. However, the private schools were given independence to grant or refuse admission to children with special needs.

The government was definitely concerned about education of special children and tried to provide them with all kinds of assistance (both in terms of finances as well as facilities to the schools). However, it was noted that children with disability preferred going to Special Schools. This was possibly because they felt safer and more at home in those schools. This mindset needs to be changed in order to make the idea of Inclusive Education successful. It is important to realise that although Special Schools play an important role in rehabilitation, yet they also keep special children away from the mainstream, and the mainstream away from special children. Children with special needs should be made to feel at ease and comfortable in general schools with their non – disabled peers. Infrastructural facilities in the general schools needed a lot of attention. Ramps, handrails, toilets should be built keeping in mind needs of special children.

It is important to keep the provision of reducing the class strength of a General School in case a Special Child was admitted in that class. This would enable the teacher to pay more attention to children and especially those children with disabilities. Otherwise, there are chances for a Special Child to feel neglected in a big class. This arrangement would require more trained teachers and more facilities. The Government will also have to take an initiative in training teachers to deal with Special Children. Along with courses like Special B.Ed, refresher courses should be regularly organised. Teachers have to be encouraged to participate in these courses to enhance their knowledge. Parents also have to be trained in care and education of their wards with special needs. Special children require more care and affection than their non – disabled peers. It is therefore the responsibility of both the parents and the teachers to fulfil their needs.

The attitude of the society at large has to be changed to increase the acceptability of special children. The social stigma against them needs a modification. Special children do not need sympathy; instead they need acceptance in the form of love. They are also capable of proper education and employment and they can realize their potential with education according to their needs and ability.

Conclusion

Inclusion assumes that all children are a part of the regular school system from the very beginning of the school. Inclusive Education is thus a process of acknowledging and addressing the diverse needs of the two sets of children commonly termed ‘normal’ and ‘exceptional’. It is a common fact that children with disabilities are often deprived of any kind of education and are less likely to be in schools. They are either forced to stay at home or are institutionalized which is detrimental for their all-round development. With access to education, people with disabilities can become an integral part of the society. It is therefore imperative on the part of the Government to take an active role in promoting Inclusive Education.

With the increasing population of Disabled Children throughout the world, Inclusive Education is the need of the hour. With proper planning and execution, Inclusive Education can prove to be a potential instrument for serving the needs of all types of students. The most pronounced goal of any system of education for the youngsters is to help them in leading their adult and community life as properly as possible. For this purpose, students (whether disabled or non disabled) must learn to cope with the demands of their social and community life. They should be able to get along with their peers, seeking their friendship and participating with them in some or the other social, vocational, and leisure activities. All such virtues can be available to them in the Inclusive set-up.

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited to the Government and Government – aided schools. NGOs were not included in the study.

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