



Inclusive education: Research and practice

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Abstract

A body of relevant researches in the field of education of students with disability during the last 40 years has greatly emphasized on the fact that inclusive education has produced superior social and academic outcomes for all students. Research has consistently found that academic and social outcomes for children in completely inclusive settings are without exception better than that in the segregated and also in partially segregated environment, e.g., “Education support units” or “Resource Classrooms”. Segregated education still remains a practice, it is only because of either some historical reasons or because of the families and educators who find it as an appropriate option despite having virtually no evidence basis. The most comprehensive review of the research was undertaken by the Alana Institute and presented an international report entitled “A Summary of the Evidence on Inclusive Education” in 2017, prepared by Dr. Thomas Hehir, Professor of Practice in Learning Differences at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. However, for achieving success in inclusive education in India there lies several obstacles and challenges, like,, curriculum, resources, lack of well-educated teachers, good infrastructural facilities, positive attitude, awareness, plan and policies, which are creating hurdle in spreading the concept of Inclusive Education in India. In is most important to explore various problems creating hurdles in the field of Inclusive Education with special reference to teacher preparation. The fact being that there is a dire need of personnel support and provision of technical assistance to teacher and staff in order to improve the quality of students' educational environment.

Keywords: inclusive education

Introduction

The body of relevant researches for over 40 years, in the area of education of students with disability has overwhelmingly established the fact that inclusive education results in superior social and academic outcomes for all students. In addition to this, the research has also consistently found that academic and social outcomes in fully inclusive settings are, without exception, better than in any segregated or partially segregated environment (e.g. “education support units” or “resource classrooms”). However, segregated education has continued as a practice, mostly, for historical reasons. Families and educators consider it as an appropriate option, inspite of having no virtual evidence basis. The most comprehensive review of the research had been undertaken by the Alana Institute and presented an international report entitled “A Summary of the Evidence on Inclusive Education” in 2017, prepared by Dr. Thomas Hehir, Professor of Practice in Learning Differences at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. This Report is an essential reading for education administrators, teachers and parents being a precious document consisting of the results of a systematic review of 280 studies from 25 countries.

According to United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the "non-inclusion" or “segregation” is nothing but the education of students with disabilities in isolated environments that means a separate special schools or the special education units co-located with regular schools.

The Report puts forward that the growth in inclusive educational practices begins from increased recognition that

students with disabilities thrive, to the greatest possible extent, when they are provided with the equal educational and social opportunities as non-disabled students.

The Report also acknowledges the significant barriers, like, negative cultural attitudes and misconceptions among, teachers, parents and communities and school administrators in the implementation of effective inclusive education. Report emphasizes on the need of general societal education to be aware of the advantages of inclusive education.

The main findings of the Report are as follows

1. There are a number of evidences that inclusive educational settings can bring substantial short and long-term benefits for students with and without disabilities.
2. Researches also indicate that inclusion students with disabilities develop stronger skills in reading and mathematics. They have higher rates of attendance, and are less likely to have behavioural problems, and more likely to complete secondary school as compared to the students who have not been included. As adults, students with disabilities who have been included are more likely to be enrolled in post-secondary education, and to be employed or living independently.
 - Most of the reviews indicate that students with disabilities educated in general education classrooms perform much better than their peers who have been educated in segregated settings. A 2012 study by Dr Hehir examined the performance of 68,000 students with disabilities in Massachusetts and found that

greater the proportion of the school day spent with non-disabled students, the higher the mathematic and language outcomes for students with disabilities.

- The benefits of inclusion for students with disabilities have been found not only in academic results but also in social connections. In addition to it, there is increased post-secondary education placement and improved employment and independence outcomes for the students with disabilities. There are evidences that the inclusive settings yields not only social and also emotional benefits for students with disabilities that includes forming and maintaining positive peer relationships, which have important connection with a child's learning and psychological development. There is also a positive correlation between social and emotional benefits and proportion of the school day spent in general education classrooms.

The benefits of inclusion for students with disabilities extend beyond academics

The Report states that researches have proved that most of the times including students with disabilities in regular education classes does not have any harmful effect on normal students and may even confer some academic and social benefits. Several latest reviews have resulted in the fact that, many a times, the effect on non-disabled students of being educated in an inclusive classroom are either neutral or positive. Very less negative effects on outcomes for non-disabled students may arise in a class where a school 'concentrates' students with severe emotional and behavioural disabilities in a segregated class rather than distributing these students across classrooms in a natural proportions.

Key Report Recommendations for Fostering Inclusive Education

- **Establish an Expectation for Inclusion in Public Policy:** National policy, publicly endorsed by national leaders, must affirm the right of students with disabilities to be included along-side their non-disabled peers.
- **Establish a Public Campaign to Promote Inclusive Education:** Changing public opinion about the importance of inclusive education, especially for students with intellectual disability, is important. Long-standing misconceptions about the capacities of students with disabilities to thrive in an inclusive classroom must be countered – teachers, school administrators and parents must be supported and educated so that students with disabilities experience effective welcoming schools and classrooms that meet their needs.
- **Build Systems of Data Collection:** Countries must invest in collecting accurate data on the degree to which students with disabilities have access to general education, including the amount of time actually spent in general education classrooms. This data can be used to identify schools and communities in need of support in better educating and including their students with disabilities.
- **Provide Educators with a Robust Program of Pre-Service and In-service Preparation on Inclusive Education:** First, attitudes matter a great deal and attitudes among educators are often negative, and those attitudes

can carry over into the classroom and the school. Teachers and school leaders need opportunities to both confront these attitudes and to see how successful inclusion can work. Secondly, educators must learn classroom techniques that can help students with disabilities to thrive – in particular, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework – which requires that schools design curricula to accommodate the diverse strengths and weaknesses of all learners – should be used to support teacher development.

- **Create Model Universally Designed Inclusive Schools:** Schools that have done inclusion, particularly well, should serve as demonstration models for the training of inclusive teachers and school administrators.
- **Promote Inclusive Opportunities in Both Post-Secondary Education Settings and the Employment Market:** Post-secondary education and employment settings should be encouraged to expand opportunities for people with disabilities.
- **Provide Support and Training to Parents Seeking Inclusive Education for Their Children:** Parents often need support in seeking inclusive education for their children and in maximizing their child's development. In the United States, parent-training centres have been funded by the federal government to teach parents about inclusive education and to provide them with support in seeking effective inclusive placements for their children.

In Addition To This, There Are Few More Researches That Can Be Related Here For Our Benefit

Kliewer and Biklen (2001) ^[4] found that inclusive learning environments facilitated the acquisition of literacy and adaptive skills as well as enhanced students' social relationships.

Swanson and Hoskyn (2001) ^[5] also confirmed the use of advanced organizers as an effective strategy for positively influencing student performance. The use of content enhancement routines, a type of advanced organizer, was shown to have dramatic results for students with learning disabilities in general education classrooms.

Soukup and her colleagues conclude that students receiving instruction in general education were significantly more likely to be working on activities linked to the general education standards, although they were doing so without the types of adaptations that research suggests is critical for making progress (Soukup, Wehmeyer, Bashinski, & Bovaird, 2007) ^[6]. Positive educational outcomes are not in the area of academics alone. The National Longitudinal Transition Study examined the outcomes of 11,000 students with a range of disabilities and found that more time spent in a general education classroom was positively correlated with: a) fewer absences from school, b) fewer referrals for disruptive behavior, and c) better outcomes after high school in the areas of employment and independent living (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, & Levine, 2006) ^[7].

Positive outcomes are accrued when training for tutors is emphasized and in some cases, results in large effect on student outcomes (Stenhoff & Lignugaris/Kraft, 2007) ^[8].

Following up on this work, Lee, Wehmeyer, Soukup, and Palmer (2010) ^[9] studied the impact of curriculum

modifications on student and teacher behaviors. Researchers observed 45 students with a range of disabilities and found that the presence of curriculum modifications predicted increased student engagement and decreased competing behaviors that would disrupt learning. In addition, the presence of modifications also resulted in teachers engaging in fewer management behaviors.

Thus, inclusive education being a strategy to make education universalized irrespective of any disability within the learner and to maintain equity in the society, emphasizes on the fact that children with special need can be included in general school system without any differentiation. Without segregating them in the boundaries of special school, provisions can be made for a child with special need to get opportunity to learn with other general students having equal quality and facilities.

For achieving success in inclusive education in India, however, there lies several obstacles and challenges, such as, lack of well educated teachers, curriculum, resources, good infrastructural facilities, awareness, positive attitude, plans, policies are creating hurdles for spreading the concept of inclusive education in India. Among above mentioned hurdles one of the serious problem is to prepare good, effective and competent teacher who can lead and practice inclusion appropriately. This can be discussed as follows:

Obstacles Faced by Inclusive Education with Special Reference to Teacher Preparation

Some of the major obstacles and challenges related to inclusive education with special reference to teacher preparation are:

1. Lack of Teacher preparation Institution
2. Lack of Competent Teacher Educator
3. Lack of Infrastructure and Resources
4. Lack of Proper Curriculum with special reference to Inclusive
5. Education during teacher preparation. Lack of proper strategies to improve practical skill and competency development on the part of student teachers. Lack of time for preparing teachers for inclusion in general classes.
6. Lack of continuous workshop, seminar, projects, internship for special children education.
7. Lack of adequate pedagogy and strategy to educate children with special need.

Challenges

Teachers are the key to success in inclusion. Following seven essential components for Teacher Preparation Programmes should be introduced based on the experience of training teachers in different teacher education institutions.

The Inclusive Teacher must be prepared professionally keeping in view the following measures:

1. The Teacher Preparation Programme should include subjects with high social and community content because they need to be sensitive to the needs of students and the environment to recognise the individual differences
2. Knowing the needs of individual differences the teachers must be able to implement different learning strategies for all. The other essential aspects in the Teacher Preparation Programmes, like, Quality, equality and equity concepts

should be translated into specific actions of educative interventions.

3. The collaborative work among educators, facilitates inclusion. The Teacher Preparation Programme, in Inclusion need to be funded to promote among teachers a spirit of team sharing knowledge, making decisions, solving problems together and generating actions in order to improve the school and to increase the learning for all. All pre service teachers should know and develop skills.
4. The economic resources are a result of collaborative work.
5. Heterogeneity provides a great richness.
6. Collaboration boosts accountability and recognition processes in all communities.

Conclusion

Research findings emphasize on the fact that positive educational outcomes are the result of inclusion in education. Though, there lie several obstacles and challenges related to teacher preparation to promote inclusive education, it is not impossible to attain success in inclusive education in our country through effective teacher preparation strategies. To make inclusion appropriate teacher preparation for inclusive education must be made compulsory in all teacher education programmes irrespective of elementary or secondary level. Further quality resources, faculties and facilities must be supplied to each teacher education institution to make inclusive education programme successful.

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