



RESEARCH ARTICLE

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: TEACHING- LEARNING STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES

*Sunita K. Sharma

A Teacher Educator and Ph.D Scholar, IGNOU, New Delhi.

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 10th October, 2020
Received in revised form
18th November, 2020
Accepted 04th December, 2020
Published online 30th January, 2021

Keywords:

Inclusion,
Barriers,
Instructional Strategies

ABSTRACT

The concept of inclusion has emerged from the ideas of providing equal opportunities to 'all' children. Providing equal opportunities does not mean providing 'similar' things to all children. It means providing equal opportunities keeping in mind the diverse nature of their individual needs. A teacher in the classroom needs to be responsive to diverse needs of 'all' children. But socially and academically meaningful inclusion of children with disabilities and special needs is a challenge before our teachers in particular and govt. in general. There has been a wide spread belief that the children with disabilities and special needs can be trained and educated properly in special schools and by special educators only. But slowly and gradually, this notion changed as it has been realized that segregated education cannot develop personality of such children in a wholesome way. Meaningful inclusion of such children in regular schools therefore depends to a large extent upon the attitude of general education teachers. But researches have shown that teachers have negative attitude towards inclusion of children with disabilities into regular classroom which can be attributed to their lack of requisite skills, training and professional preparedness. The Director General of UNESCO, Matsuurra (2008)), has articulated his vision of Inclusive education in the following words: "Inclusive education is an approach that looks into how to transform educational systems and enhance educational quality at all levels and in all settings in order to respond to the diversity of learners and promote successful learning" (UNESCO, 2008). It completely dispels the commonly held notion that inclusive education concerns itself exclusively with the inclusion of children with disabilities into the general education system. In fact, it involves a process of reform and restructuring of the school as a whole in terms of curriculum, assessment, pedagogy and grouping of pupils. Although there is widespread support for inclusion at a philosophical level, there are some concerns and barriers that are not supporting the policy of full inclusion and these are - professional preparedness, attitude of general education teachers and ineffective instructional strategies. Inclusion requires teachers to accept the responsibility for creating schools in which all children can learn irrespective of any differences in their abilities. In this task, teachers are crucial because of the central role they play in promoting participation and reducing underachievement particularly among children who might be perceived as having difficulties in learning. Meaningful inclusion of such children in regular schools therefore depends to a large extent upon the professional preparedness, effective teaching strategies and supportive attitude of general education teachers. But researches have shown that teachers have negative attitude towards inclusion of children with disabilities into regular classroom which can be attributed to their lack of requisite skills, training and professional preparedness. Teachers overwhelmingly believed that inclusive education is impossible unless their needs for specialist resources are addressed. The present paper reviews some of the barriers to successful inclusion and suggests the ways of overcoming them by reconsidering the roles & responsibilities of teachers. It also provides some suggestions regarding effective instructional strategies for teachers to manage inclusive classrooms effectively including requisite skills, knowledge, attitudes and beliefs so that they can support and manage the inclusive classrooms effectively.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive Education is primarily about restructuring school culture, policy and practices so that it responds to the diversity of students in the locality. It sees individual differences not as problems to be fixed, but as opportunities to enrich learning and embrace change. Inclusive education is a dynamic and continuing process of facilitating the participation of all students, including those with disabilities. Inclusion enhances learning for both children with and without disability.

"Inclusive education is an approach that looks into how to transform educational systems and enhance educational quality at all levels and in all settings in order to respond to the diversity of learners and promote successful learning" (UNESCO, 2008). It completely dispels the commonly held notion that inclusive education concerns itself exclusively with the inclusion of children with disabilities into the general education system. In fact, it involves a process of reform and restructuring of the school as a whole in terms of curriculum, assessment, pedagogy and grouping of pupils. Although there is widespread support for inclusion at a philosophical level, there are some concerns and barriers that are not supporting the policy of full inclusion and these are the preparation and attitude of general education teachers and ineffective

instructional strategies. Inclusion requires teachers to accept the responsibility for creating schools in which all children can learn irrespective of any differences in their abilities. In this task, teachers are crucial because of the central role they play in promoting participation and reducing underachievement, particularly with children who might be perceived as having difficulties in learning. Meaningful inclusion of such children in regular schools therefore depends to a large extent upon the preparedness and attitude of general education teachers. But researches have shown that teachers have negative attitude towards inclusion of children with disabilities and special needs into regular classroom. Further, they express concerns about their lack of preparation for inclusion and for teaching all learners (Forlin, 2001). But in settings where teachers are encouraged to try out a range of teaching strategies, they report that they knew more than they thought they knew and, for the most part, children learn in similar ways. Although some children might need extra support, teachers do not distinguish between 'types' of special need when planning this support (Florian & Rouse, 2001).

The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) recommended inclusive schools for all without specific reference to pupils with SEN as a way of providing quality education to all learners. According to NCFSE "segregation or isolation is good neither for learners with disabilities nor for general learners without disabilities. Societal requirement is that learners with special needs should be educated along with other learners in inclusive schools, which are cost effective and have sound pedagogical practices"(NCERT, 2000). Most of the general education teachers feel that they are not trained & fully equipped to teach all types of learners with special needs. 'Teachers overwhelmingly believe that inclusive education is impossible unless their needs for specialist resources are addressed. Overall belief is that without sufficient support and resources, inclusive education is not possible and is doomed. The beliefs, negative attitude and concerns expressed by teachers may be explained due to lack of - professional preparedness, available resources, sufficient orientation and specialist assistance. Initial professional knowledge and further training, human and material resources enhance teachers' attitudes positively and affect their willingness make inclusion work' (UNESCO, 1994).

Our constitutional provisions and policies like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), RTE (2009), guided by the dictates of UNCRPD and the democratic principles provide equal opportunities for education to all children including those with disabilities and special needs. Therefore, an important responsibility for all schools is to provide a conducive and non-restrictive learning environment for all children taking into consideration the individual differences in their abilities and learning styles. This will change the entire structure of the schools as well as their practices. The teachers will require a new set of skills, attitude and updated pedagogical knowledge to meet the requirement of inclusive classrooms. This new responsibility of addressing diversity, covering the syllabus in prescribed time and lack of preparedness has also created pressure on the teachers and impacted their beliefs / attitudes unfavourably. Beside this, limited resources like functional resource centres, resource teachers, provision of proper support, proper infrastructure etc. are some of the challenges ahead that need immediate addressal. Because for a country like India with limited

resources and huge population and more specifically for meeting the educational needs of all the children, inclusive education is the only cost effective and most viable option.

Managing inclusive schools: Some Effective Strategies

Managing inclusive schools effective to the extent of optimal benefit is a hard and complex task. It needs a group of sensitised & versatile professionals who have the creative inclination to face variety of challenges with positive attitude. But, the fact of the matter is, that with the changing scenario and putting into practice of new legislations like scheme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), RTE (2009)Act, and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, the schools are currently undergoing a process of reconstructed educational thinking and practice. They are being challenged to review their organizations in terms of infrastructure, the curriculum being taught and their pedagogical practices. The purpose of review is, transforming and making them more inclusive to ensure that all students are truly recognised, respected and benefitted in the schools.

It is in response to the challenges, that inclusive education poses to the schools structures, teachers, curriculum and pedagogy that the state education authorities will have to find out some effective ways and means to implement strategies of inclusion and other collaborated Schemes in a fruitful manner. The dedicated and whole hearted efforts of the teachers, principals, administrators, well informed & sensitised communities; and their coordinated efforts will further help in making inclusive education more meaningful and effective by at the school or micro-level. Schools can play key roles in making Inclusive education a great success by implementing the educational schemes and policies in the true spirit. At present, schools are being challenged towards developing a proper pedagogy of inclusion which Ainscow believes is "not about making marginal adjustments but rather about asking fundamental questions concerning the way in which the organisation is currently structured" (Ainscow, 1997 p. 5). The research has shown that the general feel that the children with special needs (CWSN) may need some specialised teaching-learning strategies and expert skills which they are lacking. Thus, teachers need renewed set of skills and updated knowledge for managing inclusive classrooms in particular and schools in general, below follow some suggestion on effective management of inclusive classrooms:

Role and Responsibilities of Teachers in Inclusive Classrooms

-) To identify individual differences among the learners and their diverse learning needs at the first place.
-) To plan, coordinate, schedule and evaluate curriculum and instructional outcomes within a secure, positive and enriched inclusive classroom environment.
-) Develop and implement lesson plans that facilitate the participation and learning of all students.
-) Frame individual goals for special learners. Monitor and evaluate progress of all students.
-) Undergo continuous professional development to keep abreast of latest changes, knowledge and skills.
-) Maintain positive relationship and good communication with students and parents.

-) Recognize student's individual abilities and use various teaching-learning strategies to facilitate learning of all students in the classroom.
-) Proper Coordination with resource teacher on a regular class and provide information necessary for modification and adaptations to be developed and implemented. Team teaching helps a lot to meet the diverse learning needs of the learners.
-) Facilitate positive social relationships among children by imparting value education, as peer-help is very helpful in inclusive learning.

Inclusion and Teaching-learning Strategies

Teaching-learning strategies refer to all those activities including ways and means, methods and techniques which a teacher uses in the classroom to achieve the pre-set instructional and learning outcomes. Further different teachers use different strategies as per need of the content, availability of the resources and their perspectives and convenience. An effective and successful inclusive education depends on the type and quality of instructional strategies used by the teacher and not the mere physical inclusion. Teaching-learning strategies, therefore, play a significant role in the success of inclusion than the mere placement of learners in the inclusive settings. Full inclusion involves the breaking down of the parallel systems of special education and regular education and combining them into one system and transforming schools into inclusive communities (Stainback & Stainback, 1988).

However, the big concern that arises is, whether the teaching strategies used by the general teachers in inclusive settings meet the diverse learning needs of all the learners in the classroom? General teachers use the teaching strategies usually designed for average level learners and they do not meet the diverse range of learning needs of all CWSN. A teacher well sensitised in inclusive practices would plan his classroom instructions and teaching learning-strategies keeping in view the varied learning needs of all the learners in his classroom. One common instructional strategy may not benefit all the learners with wide range of diverse needs. So, it needs to be seen, what research literature on instructional strategies has to say?. Research studies have also found that education in inclusive settings in general system tends to be dominated by instructional practices that are designed for teaching average students instead of a wide range of students with diverse backgrounds and abilities (Stainback & Stainback, 1988). General education teachers minimally change their instructional methods when students with disabilities are placed in their classrooms (Vaughn & Schumm, 1995).

Findings of Baker & Zigmond (1990) and Vaughn & Schumm (1995) support each other and reveal that despite the overabundance of effective instructional strategies for teaching students with disabilities, very few strategies are systematically and frequently implemented in inclusive classrooms by general education teachers (Baker & Zigmond, 1990, Vaughn & Schumm, 1995). As general education teachers minimally change their instructional strategies even while teaching in inclusive classrooms. A research study by Downing et al., 1990, stated that successful inclusion must begin with the application of individualized programs, use of structured routines, and implementation of special education methods (Downing et al., 1990 as cited in Sposaro & Lensink, 1998). Baker & Zigmond (1995) found that it is the instructional

strategies used by the teachers in inclusive classrooms that make the difference for children with special needs and success of inclusion too. Thus, it is the nature and effectiveness of instructional strategies that help the students with disabilities in learning. It is not the placement in the general education classroom, but the instructional strategies used by the general education teachers that make the difference for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms (Vaughn & Schumm, 1995; King-Sears, 1997 and Zigmond, 2003). Research has supported that the instructional strategies used by the general education teachers actually make all the difference for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. General teachers use the teaching strategies usually designed for average level learners and they do not meet the diverse range of learning needs of all CWSN. A teacher well sensitised in inclusive practices would plan his classroom instructions and teaching learning-strategies keeping in view the diverse learning needs of all the learners in his classroom.

Research studies have also found that education in inclusive settings in general system tends to be dominated by instructional practices that are designed for teaching average students instead of a wide range of students with diverse backgrounds and abilities (Stainback & Stainback, 1988). General education teachers minimally change their instructional methods when students with disabilities are placed in their classrooms (Vaughn & Schumm, 1995).

Some Effective Teaching –Learning Strategies for Inclusive Classrooms:

The research has proved that it is not the placement but the resourcefulness and instructional strategies that make the difference in learning outcomes. Therefore, teachers must improvise and use innovative functional strategies beside traditional whole-class teaching-learning strategy. Inclusive education methods are child-centered, employing active and participative learning techniques that improve teachers' capacity to teach children both with and without disabilities. Some research based instructional strategies include:

-) Whole-group instructions with individual attention;
-) Cooperative learning through project works and other activities like group singing, dancing and such like activities;
-) Small-group instructions, extra-attention;
-) Peer-tutoring/ peer-help;
-) Hands-on activities;
-) Shorter assignments for cwsn as per their individual abilities;
-) Make use of reasonable accommodations and modifications
-) Use of colourful teaching - aids like models, charts and audio-visual presentations.
-) Provision and use of learning resource centres for meeting the needs of all children in the classroom;

Beside this, every school must have a functional resource centre with assistive aids and equipments, proper support and a well trained resource teacher to meet the specific learning needs of the learners. Further, in order to build human resources in the field of education, training must be done both at the pre-service and in-service levels. Requisite fundamental knowledge and skills of inclusive education, such as understanding needs and abilities of children with special

needs and pedagogic skills such as instructional accommodation and activity differentiation, should be provided widely to teacher candidates.

Accommodations and Modifications

Due to the initiatives of the govt. to facilitate inclusive education for the Children with special needs (CWSN), there has been considerable improvement in the enrolment of cwsn in the schools. The past one decade has seen consistent movement towards adopting an Inclusive Education approach, and moving away from the segregation of children with disabilities in schools across India. This movement was propelled forward by the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). Consequently, composition of classrooms has been changing with students from varying levels of abilities who cannot, and should not, be taught in the same manner. This diverse composition of classrooms needs suitable adaptations. Thus, reasonable accommodations are needed in the regular curriculum along with the modifications of teaching-learning practices and modes of evaluations. There has to be the provision of proper support and other facilities to facilitate the education of CWSN. Learners with different levels of abilities cannot be taught in the same manner following same strategy. Because, without adaptations / modifications, some children in your classrooms would never be challenged to perform upto their potential, while others may not be able to ever experience success. Curriculum adaptations involve effective teaching in the classroom that takes into consideration the individual needs of all children including CWSN and learning difficulties. Modification of classroom setting, seating arrangement and peer-help & rotation also helps a teacher in managing a classroom effectively.

Preparation of teachers both at Pre-service and In-service level

Finally, the preparation of teachers must not only mean providing prospective teachers with inclusive education skills; it is equally important to provide training and support for existing teachers as well. Building the capacity for inclusive education must include awareness raising through professional development programmes to ensure that teachers are fully aware, prepared and willing to bring inclusive education into action. The teachers to assume the responsibility will need renewed set of skills and updated knowledge for managing inclusive classrooms in particular and schools in general. To conclude, the professional preparedness of teachers, suitable teaching-learning strategies, and coordinated efforts of all the stakeholders will surely make inclusive education more meaningful and effective for the both type of children i.e. with and without special needs.

REFERENCES

- Ainscow, M. 1997. Towards inclusive schooling. *British Journal of Special Education*, 24 (1), 3-6.
- Baker, J. & Zigmond, N. 1990. Are regular education classes equipped to accommodate students with learning disabilities? *Exceptional Children*. 56 (6), 515-526
- Black-Hawkins, K., Florian, L. & Rouse, M. (2007) *Achievement and inclusion in schools*. London: Routledge. other? *The Journal of Special Education*. Vol. 37, 193-199. doi: 10.1177/00224669030370030901 .
- Blanton, L. B. 1992. Pre-service education: Essential knowledge for the effective special education teacher. *Teacher Education and Special Education* 15 (2): 87-96
- Department of School Education & Literacy, MHRD, Govt of India, <http://mhrd.gov.in/overview-ses> Retrieved on 14 March 2016.
- Downing, J. A., Simpson, R. L., & Myles, B. S. (1990). Regular and special educator's perceptions of non academic skills needed by mainstreamed students with behavioral disorders and learning disabilities. *Behavioral Disorders*. 15 (4), 217-226.
- Florian, L. & Rouse, M. (2001) Inclusive practice in English secondary schools: Lessons learned. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 31 (3), 399-412.
- Florian, L. 2007. Reimagining Special Education. In L. Florian (ed.). *The Sage Handbook of Special Education*. London: Sage. Pp 7-20.
- Forlin, C. (2001). Inclusion: Identifying potential stressors for regular class teachers. *Educational Research*, 43 (3), 235-245.
- http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/upload_document/RTE_Section_wise_rationale_rev0.pdf
- <http://www.csie.org.uk/inclusion/unesco-salamanca.shtml>
- http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/SALAMA_E.PDF
- www.iosrjournals.org (Inclusive Education: Challenges and Prospects in India).
- Peterson, Kristen (2011). A qualitative study of instructional strategies used by elementary general education teachers in Inclusive Classrooms. Retrieved from <http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations>
- Sposaro, Sara Ann and Lensink, Julie Mara (1998). "Barriers to Implementing Inclusion Practices". Masters Theses 372,16. <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/theses/372> (Sposaro & Lensink, 1998 pp.16).
- SSA. (2006). Education of Children with Special Needs in SSA, Confluence Concept and Meaning of Inclusion. Vol. (1) New Delhi: SSA.
- SSA. (2011). *Inclusive schools: 'A Training Module for Teachers'*. published by Save the Children, Nehru place, New Delhi, India. pp. 1-6. www.savethechildren.in
- SSA. (2014). *Confluence: Reaching Out To Children With Developmental Disabilities*. Vol . (15).
- UNESCO (2005) Children out of school: Measuring exclusion from primary education. Montreal: UNESCO Institute for Statistics.
- UNESCO. (1994). Final Report: World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality. Salamanca, Spain 7-10 June, Paris.
- UNESCO. (2009). Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education Paris: UNESCO.
- Vaughn, S., & Schumm, J.(1994). Middle school teachers' planning for students with learning disabilities. *Remedial & Special Education*, 15(3), 152. (Retrieved from Academic Search C. Database via <http://int.search.myway.com/search> www.savethechildren.in
- Zigmond, N., & Baker, J. M. (1995). The meaning and practice of inclusion for students with learning disabilities: Themes and implications from the five cases. *The Journal of Special Education*, 29,163-180. Doi: 10.1177/002246699502900207