

A REFLECTION ON THE STATUS OF INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS IN MCD SCHOOLS OF SOUTH DELHI

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ABSTRACT

The concept of inclusive education is not new in Indian Education system. A number of initiatives have been taken by the government and other bodies in the past to promote inclusion in the classrooms. With the implementation of the RTE Act (2009) special emphasis was laid towards creating inclusive settings in schools. Inclusion in itself is a comprehensive concept which not only means providing and integrating children with impairment and learning disabilities but goes a level higher to accommodate the diverse special educational needs of all the children to accomplish the aims of Education for All. In Indian Education system there exists different forms of exclusion such as gender, caste, region, religion, ethnicity, language socio economic diversities to name a few. To cater to such diverse needs and also to mainstream the education of children with special needs and learning disabilities in regular classroom settings a number of educational provisions and restructuring is required in the school systems. Thus inclusion is not only making extra provisions but also provision of equal opportunities in the teaching learning process so that all have access to quality education without any discrimination and benefit from the education they receive. The present paper is a reflection on the current status of primary schools towards creating inclusive settings, as primary education forms the basis for higher education it is imperative that at this level itself no child is denied education and has equal access to opportunities. The paper focuses on the provisions and access to opportunities created with respect to promoting inclusion within classrooms and provides reflection on the inclusive practices being followed in the light of RTE Act.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Right to Education

INTRODUCTION

The educational scenario has undergone a major change over the past decade. A number of initiatives have been taken by the government of India to change the existing practices to bring quality education and uplift the education system. RTE Act is a step towards realizing the objective of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. The act has a number of provisions and creating inclusive classrooms is one of the important concepts highlighted in RTE Act. The National Curricular Framework for school education (NCFSE) (2000), brought out by the NCERT, recommended

inclusive schools for all without specific reference to pupils with special needs as a way of providing quality education to all learners. Though in India there is no formal or official definition of inclusion it does not only mean the placement of students with SEN in regular classrooms. The Draft Scheme on inclusive education prepared by the MHRD (2003) uses the following definition, “Inclusive Education means all learners, young people-with or without disabilities, being able to learn together in ordinary preschool provisions, schools, and community educational settings with appropriate network of support services (Draft of Inclusive Education Scheme,MHRD,2003). The identification of children with special needs at an early stage is crucial to helping them cope with the challenges in later life. Developing inclusive schools requires a lot of restructuring of the curriculum, adequate financial provisions, extensive orientation programmes and teacher training programmes, public sensitization and development of positive attitude.

However the concept of inclusion has yet not been understood in its true sense .It does not mean integration nor creating special provisions for children with special needs. It means a curriculum for all students rather than a separate curriculum for special need learners. It means an education system where all can participate without discrimination on the grounds of gender,caste, SES, ethnicity, etc.

NEED OF THE STUDY

The country has taken great initiatives towards revolutionizing the education system of our country. Following inclusive practices to cater to the demands of the children with special needs has been the centre of focus for quite some time now. A number of policies and programmes have been initiated by the government of India to implement the concept of inclusive education. To realize the goals of SSA and universalization of elementary education amendments have been made and right to education have been made a fundamental right. With the implementation of the Right to Education act a number of provisions and practices have been initiated to achieve the goals of Education for All and improve the education system of our country which would further strengthen the nation’s development. One of the main focus areas of RTE act is with respect to creating inclusive classrooms. The concept of inclusion is very broad and comprehensive where the benefits of inclusion are not only for the children with special needs but for the children without special needs as well. The Right to Education act allows children with special needs to pursue mainstream education and that all children irrespective of their impairment should be educated in mainstream schools.

However though some schools practice inclusive education, a majority of children with special needs still do not receive any formal education. It is not only important to provide infrastructures like ramps, toilets, accessibility to laboratories, playground, etc but also to identify and support children with learning and mental disabilities.

The present study would explore the classroom provisions of the MCD schools of south Delhi with respect to the concept of inclusive education. The present study would be a reflection of the present status of the schools in implementing the inclusive practices for children with special needs. The study would give us a fair idea as to how far we are in achieving the goals of education for all. Primary schools have been selected as they form the basis for laying the foundations of education.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To develop understanding of inclusive education with respect to RTE Act.
2. To identify the provisions for creating inclusive classrooms
3. To explore the school provisions catering to the needs of children with special needs
4. To explore the school practices for implementing inclusive education

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample comprised of 10 MCD schools of south Delhi. Purposive Sampling was undertaken by the researcher.

Tools and Techniques

An Observation schedule was designed by the researcher with a Checklist developed to explore the inclusive practices being followed in schools.

Qualitative analysis of the data was done.

RESULTS

Out of 10 south Delhi schools surveyed the following observations were done.

Provision of special education teacher: - Out of 10 schools only 2 schools had special educators. The data for the number of children with special needs was also taken from the respective schools. Each had substantiate number of such children.

Infrastructural provisions: - Ramps were present in all schools, however wheelchair, ground floor seating arrangements, separate toilet facilities were missing in these schools.

Academic support: - No separate Braille books, or assistive devices were found available.

General sensitization programmes: - Not many initiatives were taken to sensitize the staff or students towards the specific needs of such students.

INTERPRETATIONS

The results obtained are indicative of the fact that there is a conceptual lack in understanding the RTE clause on inclusive education whereby inclusive education does not only refer to children with special needs, but it is a high quality education individualized to each child's needs. Lack of flexibility in the curriculum, infrastructural lags, being rejected in the classrooms and not getting adequate attention from the teachers who themselves are not trained and sensitized to teach and accommodate children with special needs are the other contributing factors to this situation. Education for all would remain a distant dream if children with special needs are not treated as equal but are looked upon as a burden and passive participants in a classroom.

CONCLUSIONS

Inclusive education is the need of the hour. The inclusive education clause in the RTE act is an important step in the right direction. But still a lot needs to be done to realize and implement the principles of inclusive education in its true essence. Training programmes need to be restructured and curricular provisions need to be more flexible. Sensitization of children towards such learners and infrastructural facilities need to be more supportive. Efforts on part of all the stakeholders need to be taken to implement the inclusive practices.

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