

Optimising learning process among students with special needs through Special Education – A critical review on status and strategies

Rayees Zahoor Shah¹ & Dr. P. Swarna Kumari²

Abstract

The inception of special education for students with disabilities provided hope and opportunity for equitable educational experiences. A disability studies in education framework allows for complex components of teaching and programming for students with special needs to be explored in a practical way that promotes inclusive education among students with disabilities. Special education ensures students with disabilities receive specialized instruction designed to meet their unique learning needs. That way, they too get an opportunity to reach their full academic potential. For students with special needs, inclusion means everything because they thrive in the presence of their peers. When disability is viewed as a difference rather than deficit, it compels educators to consider the alternatives to pedagogy and programming more importantly it allows curricula and less on students overcoming their disability. Special Education ensures students with disabilities to receive specialised instructions designed to meet their unique learning needs. Through the special education people with special needs get an opportunity to reach their full academic potential.

This paper is focused to provide a critical review on how special education optimises leaning process among people with special needs and highlights various strategies and challenges of special education.

Keywords; Special Education, Special Needs, Rehabilitation, People with Disabilities.

¹ Swachhta Saarthi Fellow by Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India and Research scholar at PG and Research Department of Rehabilitation Science, Holy Cross College Tiruchirappalli, Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, Contact: 7006443150 Email: rayeeszahoor@gmail.com

² Associate Professor and Dean Research Holy Cross College Tiruchirappalli, Contact: 9659762566 Email: swarnakumari@hcctrichy.ac.in

Introduction

“All of us do not have equal talent. But, all of us have an equal opportunity to develop our talents”. (Dr. A P J Abdul Kalam).

Special education is a modified programme which involves some unique tools, techniques and research efforts in improving instructional arrangements to meet the need of exceptional children. It is not a totally different programme which is assigned for the normal children. But it adds a sort of design proposed to assist the gifted children, physically and intellectually disabled children. As it is a planned and systematically mentioned arrangement, majority of average children are not grouped into this category of education. Special education can be provided in general schools with some special arrangement or in special schools the early history of special education was largely a history of separate schools; especially for children who were blind or deaf, whatever the problem, the solution was to put the child in a class with other children having similar problems. This was nothing but to exclude the handicapped from the main stream of the society. Thus separate, became only one of the meanings associated with special education. But as society's response to the handicapped began gradually to shift away from education critics of special classes, began to express doubts and there came special education.

In accelerating the special education programme, extra time may be devoted by the same teacher or by an expert in the concerning field when a project is taken for a delinquent child the child may be directed to attend his regular classes. He should also participate all the curricular and co-curricular activities carried out by the school. In addition to this he may be assigned with extra consultation hours in the school with the counsellor or school guidance officer or with the specific teacher to go through his special problems. The children with some difficulties may be included in this class but there is no necessity for the ordinary children to attend it. With such kind of designed programmes, the exceptional children achieve a great deal success in their personal and academic endeavours.

- The special education helps both the average children and exceptional children in special classes.
- The gifted children are not satisfied in the normal classes. They do not and scope to exercise their cognitive abilities. They also feel the tasks very easy and complete it very soon than others for which they show behavioural problems. But their talent is

daily recognised and the development of skills and potentialities take their full shapes while they are included in homogenous groups with a special treatment.

- Sometimes the hearing impaired, visually impaired, orthopaedically handicapped and mentally retarded need special treatment. So special education helps them to keep pace with the academical activities are with their environment.
- Special education is not only useful the exceptional children it assists the teacher to know the leaders and their learning difficulties.
- Special education stimulates the children to participate in different co-curricular activities. This type of involvement provides the children to highlight their leadership qualities and creative urges.
- Special education tends the children to a fresh their intellectual abilities and know the various streams of knowledge, which they feel difficult in normal class situation.
- Due to facilities including special building features special equipment and special literary materials, special education prompts the children to be more motivated. It develops readiness and cowardness in learning.
- As the different personals like teacher problems of the children and make them more alert and quicker in their thinking process.
- Special education helps teacher to implement new methods, procedures tools and techniques in educational situations.
- Special education condemns the interiority complex among the children. They also get more freedom to work together and achieve their goals educators, consultants, psychotherapists, speech therapists and others are involved in this special education programme the learning becomes more meaningful and permanent. It wipes out the various emotional problems of the children and make them more alert and quicker in their thinking process.
- Special education helps teacher to implement new methods, procedures tools and techniques in educational situations.
- Special education condemns the interiority complex among the children. They also get more freedom to work together and achieve their goals.

Prevalence of Disability in India

According to a UNICEF Report on the Status of Disability in India (2000), there were around 30 million children that had some form of disability. Another report, the sixth All-India

Educational Survey reported that of India's 2,000 million school aged children (6-14 years), 20 million require special needs education (Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) 2000). Although these numbers show a large discrepancy, it is clear that there are a large number of students with special needs that require appropriate educational services. Recognizing the large number of special needs population and regional disparities, the Government of India initiated policy reforms and strategies for special needs and inclusive education. The educational system in India has witnessed many changes after the coveted independence from Great Britain in 1947. The post freedom era together with the economic and social development policies in the last four decades have contributed substantially to bringing about an evolution in the overall educational system in India through legislative measures as well as social welfare activities.

Special Education in India

- The Indian Education Commission, widely known as the Kothari Commission (Kothari, 1966), was the first statutory body which highlighted the issue of children with disabilities in the Plan of Action in 1964 (Alur, 2002). It made strong recommendations for including children with disabilities into regular schools.
- The Ministry of Welfare launched the scheme for Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) to overcome some of the difficulties faced by the special education system in the country, particularly, limited coverage and a lack of qualified and trained teachers (Dasgupta, 2002). The Central Government provided 50 percent financial assistance to the State Governments for the implementation of the IEDC in regular schools.
- The IEDC scheme was followed by the seminal year of International Year for the Disabled Persons (IYDP) in 1981. The United Nations established that all countries should frame legislation for people with disabilities and that was the major thrust of the year. India was one of the first signatories to the resolution proclaiming the year 1981 as the "International Year for the Disabled Persons."
- The NPE highlighted various issues in relation to children with disabilities, such as, the magnitude of the problem, the approaches to service delivery, the scheme of human and material resources, and nature of linkages between various agencies, in special education, which created the platform for serving children with disabilities as well as highlighted "education as the right of the disabled child".

- The DPEP, a centrally sponsored scheme, was launched in 1994, with the ultimate goal of achieving universal education. This program laid a special emphasis on the integration of children with mild to moderate disabilities in line with the world trends. The DPEP is noteworthy because it was the first time that primary education had been delinked from the state (Alur, 2002). The DPEP in 1994-1995 with financial support from the World Bank, the European Community, and the United Kingdom's Overseas Development Agency, UNICEF, and the Government of the Netherlands and the GOI became one of the largest programs of the GOI in terms of funding. Approximately 40 billion rupees were budgeted to fund this program in 149 districts, in 14 states.
- A number of significant initiatives have taken place in the last decade that further strengthened inclusion movement in India. Some of these initiatives included: Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2000), The Action Plan for Inclusion in Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2005), National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2006), and Inclusive Education of the Disabled at Secondary Stage (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2009).
- The second education policy of India was adopted in the year 1986. NPE 1986 by emphasizing on Inclusive Education states that "the children with mild disabilities should be permitted to education in the regular school while the children with moderate to severe disabilities should continue to get education in the special school" (NPE, 1986).
- In the year 1987, the Mental Health Act came into action which revoked the Indian Lunacy Act of 1912 intending to consolidate the law for mentally ill persons.
- In the same year, the Project Integrated Education for the Disabled (PIED) to encourage the school in the neighbourhood to enrol the children with disabilities. This was a joint venture of Education Ministry with NCERT and UNICEF.
- However, the Programme of Action in the year 1992, stated that "the children's disabilities who can be integrated in the regular school must get education there and the children who are facing problem in integrating in the regular school must send to the special. After learning skills, they can further have shifted to the regular school" (POA, 1992).

- Rehabilitation Council of India Act (RCI) also came in September 1992. This act was enforced for regulating the training of rehabilitation professionals and the maintenance of a Central Rehabilitation Register.
- After RCI act the Persons with Disabilities Act came in 1995, which ensure the full participation and equality of the people with disabilities in the Asian and Pacific Region.
- With the joint effort of Government of India and the world bank in 1997, the District Primary Education Program was launched. DPEP states that “any difference that a child exhibited in learning was to be attributed not a problem with child, but of school system.” This was the first time when the emphasis was on the school preparedness (DPEP, 1997).
- In the year 1999, National Trust for Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act came. To provide financial support to the people with mentioned four disabilities, various scheme such as “Reach and Relief Scheme” and “Samarth Scheme” was introduced (National Trust Act, 1999).
- For the Universalization of Elementary Education, Government of India launched Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in 2001. Though SSA was not an intervention specific to disability but the emphasis was Education for All.
- In the year 2009, Inclusive Education of the Disabled at the Secondary Stage (IEDSS) came. This was a reformed of IEDC for secondary stage education. 18. In the same year Rastriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) was introduced by the Government of India, for the Universalization of Secondary Education.
- 2009 was a major year in education for India. The Right to Education act was passed in the same year and enforced from 1st April 2010. RTE 2009 under the article 21 A, makes the education a fundamental right of every child in India.
- The Rights of Person with Disability Act 2016, replaced the PwD Act of 1995. This act was in line with the UNCRPD. It includes 21 conditions as disable. The central and state government will be established advisory board on disability.
- In the year 2018, the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan was launched by the MHRD. It is an integrated scheme for school education, which merged three scheme SSA (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan), RMSA (Rastriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan) and TE (Teacher Education).

- NEP 2020 is in line with the RPwD act 2016. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act 2016 defines inclusive education as a “system of education wherein students with and without disabilities learn together and the system of teaching and learning is suitably adapted to meet the learning needs of different types of students with disabilities “(RPwD Act, 2016). The RPwD act also affirmed the provision of free education for the child with disability up to the age of 18 years in an adequate condition (Banga, 2015). The RPwD act also increased the 3% reservation to 5% for the people with benchmark disabilities in all government institution for higher education. Any person with at least 40% of the listed 21 disabilities in the RPwD act is known as the person with benchmark disability.
- The act also emphasised on the barrier free access as a non-discrimination measure (Narayan, John 2017);
 - a) Schooling NEP 2020 affirm all the recommendation given by RPwD Act 2016, regarding school education. The policy has given highest priority to enabling regular schooling process from foundational stage to the higher education, for the children with disability. Children with moderate to severe disabilities will have the option of regular or special schooling (NEP 2020, Part-I, Section 6.10).
 - b) School Complex School complex will be provided with a resource centre inside the complex itself and other resources. School also must ensure the recruitment of special educators with cross-disability training. The school will be supported to provide individualized accommodations and support mechanism in order to fulfil the need of the child with disabilities and to ensure barrier free access (NEP 2020, Part-I, Section 6.11).
 - c) Curriculum, Supportive Devices and Assistive Devices NCERT will work with expert bodies like DEPwD to make national curriculum framework (NEP 2020, Part-I, Section 6.10). NIOS is responsible for developing high-quality modules to teach Indian Sign Language and through this to teach other basic subjects. The curriculum will be flexible according to child strength, which will allow the children to work on their own pace. To integrate and

engage the child in the classroom activities, appropriate technology-based tools and other assistive devices, as well as teaching-learning materials which are adequate and language-appropriate such as large print textbooks and Braille will be made available in school (NEP 2020, Part-I, Section 6.11).

- d) d) Teacher NEP 2020 talks about reform of teacher education programmes. Sensitization, early intervention, support and special pedagogy to teach children with disability, to be an integral part of teacher education programmes (NEP 2020, Part-I, Section 6.14).
- e) Assessment National Assessment Centre, PARAKH, will formulate the guidelines and recommend tools for the assessment of the child with disability. This will be for all the exams including the entrance test from the foundational stage to higher education (NEP 2020, Part-I, Section 6.13).
- f) Home Schooling The home-schooling option will be available like before for children with severe and profound disabilities. The resource centres and special educators will provide support for homeschooling. For home-schooling all the guidelines and standards will be developed as recommended in the RPwD Act 2016.

Conclusion

Only placement of the child with disability will not help. If we want to grow as a country, it's our moral duty to make education accessible to every child regardless of their disability. India as a country of diversity, always see these diversities as an opportunity similarly now it's time that the mindset of people to change and see every disability as a special ability. That is to focus on what these children can do better rather than merely focusing on things that they cannot do. From segregation to inclusion, the inclusive education system in India goes through several hurdles. To look at the disability as a special ability, it's required a change in the mindset. Finally, the government of India came up with such a policy which include the minute details. The New Education Policy 2020 if implement with proper planning, will be proved as a catalyst for inclusive education. This will bring the paradigm shift in inclusive education. All the aspects discussed above altogether will give rise to effective and quality

education for children with disability. This will help in bridging the gap between the expectation and the reality of inclusive education.

Educating all children in India requires a joint effort from people at all levels. It includes support and cooperation from government officials, school administrators, parents, teachers, typically developing children, and people in the community. By including all children in regular schools, children with and without disabilities would get an opportunity to learn from one another. Both parties can learn to accept each other from a younger age, valuing differences and similarities in one another. A limited number of special schools, such as those currently existing in India, will never be able to address the needs of these children. True inclusion can happen only when every child with disability gets admission to his or her local public school. If Indian law requires education of all children, public school officials do not have any right to deny admission to a child based on his or her disability. Parents should no longer wait for more special schools to emerge for the education of their children with disabilities; instead, they should start agitating for their children's right to be educated in a public school. Community members and organizations should come forward to advocate the education of all children in public schools. Every Indian needs to understand that inclusion is an opportunity for children with and without disabilities to learn from one another. India has already adopted the inclusion model but has not succeeded in implementing it. Research reveals that implementation of current laws and policies with strict enforcement can yield positive results. There is evidence that the inclusion model is not fully understood by politicians, government officials, school administrators, teachers, parents and people with disabilities. We should not forget that no nation can build inclusive communities using the philosophy of segregation.

Acknowledment

I am very thankful to my research supervisor and Dean Research Holy Cross College **Dr. P. Swarnakumarai Ma'am**.

I am also thankful to **Bharathidasan university** for giving me the opportunity of doing research to find interventions for the people with disability.

I am also thankful to **Dr. Joicy P Manickam**, associate professor and Dean schools of behavioural sciences, Holy cross college for the necessary support.

Conflict of Interest: - I declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to this research.

Funding: The author received no financial support for the research

References

- Antony, Pavan. (2013). Special Education History, Current Status and Future: India. Journal of International Special Needs Education. 16. 5-16. 10.9782/2159-4341-16.1.5.
- Barik N. (1990): A Text Book of Exceptional Children, BANIRUPA, Cuttack-2.
- Baker, Harry J: Introduction to Exceptional children New York. The Mac Millan Company, 1947.
- Barik N (1990): Educational Psychology, BANIRUPA, Cuttack-2.
- Duukes, E. and Margaret Hoy : Children of today and Tomorrow, London George Allen & Unwin, Gibbon and 1949.
- Dunn, Liyod M (Ed) Exceptional Children in School (2nd Ed) New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973.
- Ministry of Education, Govt of India, New Delhi: Challenge of Education: a policy perspective, Printed by the manager, Govt. of India, Text-Book Press, Chandigarh (3rd Reprint.).
- Rao, Dr. Usha, S.: Exceptional Children- Their Psychology and Education, Somaiya Publications Pvt. Ltd., Bombay. • Shankar, Udda: Exceptional Children, Sterling publishers private limited, New Delhi, 110016.
- Panigrahi, Soumya & Malik, Navita. (2020). A Roadmap to Inclusive Education in NEP2020. Vol-10. 41-47.