

Inclusive Education: A case study on challenges faced by children in school setting in Assam

Dr. Mrityunjay Kr Singh,

Assistant Professor (Stage-3), Department of Social Work, Assam University: Silchar

Mousumi Saikia

Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, Arunachal University of Studies, Arunachal Pradesh

Abstract

Inclusive education means welcoming children regardless of their physical abilities or their background. Inclusive education aims to provide education in a uniformed mannered to all the children with disabilities or without disabilities. The inclusive education radically altered the system of special education. It has promoted the concept of inclusion at all levels of education. It is a right based approach to inclusion. The present study tried to explore the provisions for inclusive education under the national policy on education and to find out the facilities provided for inclusive education in school. The study also tried to understand the experiences of children with special needs regarding inclusion and exclusion in the schools. To fulfill the objective the researcher adopted qualitative method of research through intensive case studies using unstructured interview guide. During the research it was found that the children with special needs are able to get full participation in the schooling process. The national policy on education emphasises mainly on the socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups which include disability and its process of enabling the full participation of disabilities in the regular schooling process. The study also found that the children with intellectual disability face difficulty in management by the teachers at the early stage of their admission into the school. But later according to the study the children get adjusted into the environment of inclusive education and accept each other with varied abilities and disabilities. The children with special needs are found to have positive impact on the process of acquiring regular education in the schools. Thus the study tries to understand inclusive education and its challenges face by the children in the school setting.

Key words: *Inclusion, Exclusion, inclusive education, national policy on education,*

I. Introduction

Inclusive education is an approach towards educating children with special needs in the regular schools rather than the special schools. It is an attitude towards developing the society into an inclusive setting where there will be no discrimination regarding any caste, class, race religion, disability and socio economic condition. The process of inclusion starts from home and its environment. The children with special needs are on special focus because of their vulnerability and marginalization they face within the community. According to Kumar & k. kumar (2007) inclusion should be just an experiment but a value that is to be followed with a focus on leading children with special needs into the system of education. They also revealed that in Indian situation resources are insufficient even to provide quality education in the mainstream schools. Inclusive education means welcoming all children without any discrimination. According to United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) no child should be excluded. Every child has the right to inclusive education including the children with special needs. An inclusive education is a system of education that welcomes and supports all learners with abilities or disabilities. The UNICEF also tries to make sure that in inclusive setup there must be appropriate teaching and the curriculum, school buildings, classrooms, play areas, transport and toilets for all level of children. There is an importance of inclusive education because it will help children improve their learning, it will promote understanding reduces prejudice and strengthens social integration. It ensures that children with special needs are equipped to work and contribute economically and socially to their communities. It has the set the aim to end discrimination. Inclusive education provides every child has the right to quality education and learning. The schools must have trained teachers, buildings must be refurbished and students must receive accessible learning materials. At the community level, stigma and discrimination must be tackled and individuals need to be educated on the benefit of inclusive education. At the national level, governments must align laws and policies with the convention on the rights of persons with disabilities and regularly collect and analyses data to ensure children with effective services (UNICEF). According to Article 24 of the UNCRPD i.e. United Nations Convention of Rights of Persons with Disabilities the state parties shall

ensure an inclusive system at all levels and lifelong learning directed to the full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity. The development by persons with disability of their personality, talents and creativity as well as their mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential and also enabling persons with disabilities to participate effectively in a free society. The concept of inclusive education was first reported in this world conference that comprises of new thoughts in special education, guidelines for action at national level and international level. From integration towards inclusion is a journey where the disabled children should be valued and get the opportunity to achieve the equal rights in attending mainstream school along with the other non-disabled children. Thus the concept of Inclusive education came forward for the first time in the Salamanca statement 1994.

The National policy on education 1968 was the first official policy document which attested Indian government's commitment towards elementary education. This further emphasized in the National Policy on Education 1986. During the review of the policy in 1990, it was recommended to include Right to education as a fundamental right in the constitution, on the basis of which the national policy on education 1992 was formulated (Ojha 2013:1). Later in the national policy for persons with disabilities (2006) mandates to include the persons with disabilities in the general education system implying that there must be mainstreaming of children with special needs in the regular schools or implying the mainstreaming of children with disabilities in regular schools or the provision of the same type of education that is provided in special schools. The Right to education Act 2009 or the Rights of children for free and compulsory education Act 2009 are the same act that provides free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years. The Act provides eight years of elementary education in the neighborhood school. The children should be given admission to the class appropriate age. Right to education tries to provide a base to inclusive education where no child shall be denied of admission into the regular schools. Sharma (2016) found that inclusive education is a combination of philosophy and pedagogical practices that allow each student to feel respected, confident and safe learning environment in the schools. So that it can nurture the student with diversity of education and provide them with quality education.

Bansal(2010) views that inclusive education is a concrete effort made by the government and the non-government organisation including the educational institutions. According to the researcher the general education system is yet to be fully sensitized to the educational needs of the children In India researches say that inclusive education has a long way to go in terms of sensitization of educational needs of children with special needs. Bhateja&Narang (n.d.) mentioned in their study that Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan was launched to achieve the goal of Universalization of Elementary Education. It adopts the zero rejection policy which ensures that every child within the age of six to fourteen year under any condition must not be denied for admission in the regular schools. It must aim in providing meaningful and quality education. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is showing progress towards inclusion of children with special needs. There is a uniform curriculum adopted in the schools for all the children. The severe children with special needs are also provided home-based services.

The new education policy was drafted in 2016 and was implemented in year 2020. This education policy also ensures the students with varying levels of disability. The global education development agenda reflected in the Goal four of the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by India in 2015 seeks to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all" by 2030. As mentioned in the national education policy the world is undergoing rapid changes in the knowledge landscape with various dramatic scientific and technological advances like big data, machine learning, and artificial intelligence, many unskilled jobs worldwide may be taken over machines. The national education policy 2020 is the first education policy of the 21st century and aims to address the many growing developmental imperatives of our country. It tries to emphasize on the creative potential of each individual. The national education policy also aims in achieving social justice and equality. The national policy reaffirms that bridging the gaps in access, participation and learning outcomes in school education will continue to be the major goal of education sector development programs. The new policy on education also recognizes the importance of creating enabling mechanisms for providing children with special needs or Divyang, the same opportunities of obtaining quality education as any other child. 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 need the learning needs of different types of students with disabilities." The policy also upholds the awareness and knowledge to teach children with specific disabilities which will be an integral part of all teachers' education programs.

The present study focuses on the practice of inclusive education in the school level where the children with special needs are enrolled. The study was conducted within the state of Assam. As it is always a matter of concern for the rights of disabled for which education plays a vital role in the lives of people with disabilities. Thus the study aims to fulfill the objective of exploring the provision for inclusive education under the national policy on education also to find out the facilities provided for inclusive education in schools and to understand

the experience of children with special needs regarding inclusion and exclusion in the schools. The study was conducted through qualitative research method with unstructured interview guide. The study was undertaken in the government school of Assam. The number of cases on children with special needs studied were twelve. The cases tried to provide the indepth understanding of the phenomenon that the child with special needs in inclusive setup faces. The experience of children regarding both exclusion and inclusion has been recorded in the study.

Need and significance of the study

Education is termed to be the powerful instrument in the development process. Educational prospect of India has undergone major changes over the years that resulted in better educational practice. The first education commission in India i.e. the Kothari commission in 1964-66 brought into view the importance of education in the life of children with special needs. It stressed the matter to include children with special needs in regular schools in an integrated programme. The Right to Education Act 2009 have taken the full responsibility of including children with special needs in the regular education system. Thus Inclusive education came into force with the enactment of the Right to Education Act. The journey from segregation to integration and to inclusion went long way. Here the process of inclusion has challenged both the other two approaches. Inclusion of children with special needs does not only mean the placement of students with special educational needs in the regular classroom but also it is the process of education children with special needs along with the other children without disability in the same classroom without any kind of discrimination according to their body, mind and behavior. It helps in the restructuring of schools to accept and provide with all facilities required to them. The schools are being reconstructed and are led to disabled free environment. So that the children with any kind of disability can easily access the school education like all the other children without special needs achieve. Thus the study tried to understand the implementation of inclusive education in the schools at the ground level with the changes that are being brought on the physical structure of the schools to make the schools more disabled friendly.

Objectives of the study:

- To explore the provisions for inclusive education under national policy on education
- To find out the facilities provided for inclusive education in schools
- To understand the experiences of children with special needs regarding inclusion and exclusion in the schools

II. Methodology

In order to undergo the present study the researcher used the qualitative method where the cases are taken from the government schools of Assam. The studied cases are the children with special needs currently enrolled in the schools.

Sample of the study

The study is conducted in the Tinsukia District of Assam. The schools were selected through purposive sampling method where the children with special needs are enrolled. Six schools were selected from which two children with special needs each from the schools are being studied. The study also included the two headmasters and the four regular school teachers from the schools.

The children with special needs were studied for the purpose of knowing their experiences in the inclusive educational setup. The headmasters of the schools were interviewed to bring out the implementation of the provisions of national education policies into the school environment and the regular teachers were interviewed for the purpose of getting the in-depth understanding regarding the classroom functioning of the schools. Thus the selected samples are analysed using the thematic analysis. Where the field data are transcribed and coded and then categorised from which the themes have been derived. This helped the researcher to get a broader understanding of the existing facts within the school environment.

III. Findings and discussions

National policy provisions and the schools

During the study the researchers tried to explore the provision that has been implemented under the national policies on education. The National policy on education 1986, stressed on the need of integrating children with disabilities with the other group of children without disabilities which to make both the communities partner to each other. They had a hope that by integrating children with disabilities and without disabilities it will enhance their courage and confidence in the society. Whereas the New education policy of 2020 aims to ensure that no children losses any opportunity to learn and excel because of circumstances of birth or background. The study found that the schools are trying to work in an inclusive environment with enrolling the children with special needs in a regular basis without any hindrances during the time of admission. As per the

inclusive education mention in the National policy on education children with special needs will be enabled to fully participate in regular schooling process after the foundation stage to higher education. The children must avail free education as well as infrastructural facilities. The headmaster of a school describes that free education is provided in all the schools.

After the enactment of the Right to education Act we are compulsorily taking admission of any kind of disability that comes to us. We are glad that people are now aware of their rights and they are willingly coming to school for admission. Seeing their interest we cannot deny any of the admission into our school. We have lack of special educator so our regular teacher tries to manage those children in the classroom. Being regular teacher we sometimes find difficult in managing some particular disability like intellectual disability. We do not show any discrimination towards any child in the school. We allow our children to participate in every programme equally.

The study found that the respondent tries to express their effort in enrolling the children with special needs in the regular schools as per the policies on education for inclusive education. The schools are trying to render their services to the fullest whereas the respondent also revealed during the interview that they are in need of special educator in the school to guide the other regular teachers in taking classes. The respondent clearly informs that the school faces difficulty only in managing children with intellectual disability as they find them difficult to understand and develop communication. Thus they say that this gap in the relationship with those children with special needs can only be fulfilled by the trainings of teachers in inclusive education. This will help understand the circumstances that prevail within the class room environment.

Infrastructural and the physical development in the schools

The infrastructural facilities in the government schools as mentioned in the study by Ojha (2013) the school infrastructures facilities have been increasing. The physical structures of the schools have been changed since the earlier. The schools are tried to make disabled friendly environment. The schools are granted to build the ramps and rails. The schools must have girls and boys separate toilet facility. The toilets must be handrailed and they must possess wide doors for wheel chair users. The children with special needs must be provided with proper seating facility in the classroom. The schools must have the all-weather building as according to provision mentioned in the Right to education Act. The schools must also have playground, safe drinking water facility and barrier free access. The schools must have library facilities and proper furniture for the children and the school staffs. According to the Right to Education Act 2009 the schools must fulfill all the infrastructural facilities this will help in achieving the goal of better performance by the Children in an inclusive setup. The respondent mentioned that the resources in the school are being fully utilised.

We work for our children to let them give a comfortable environment to study. Our children help us in cleaning and maintaining our campus. We have received the grant of toilet for both boys and girls very recently. Earlier our girls use to go to the nearby house for use of toilet because we had a temporary constructed common toilet for all like teachers, students, and other staff present in the school. This was very problematic for our children specially the girls. After we received the grant we have started our work for building the toilets. We have a girl with locomotor disability she is unable to walk straight. Her toes are twisted and we found for her it is very much necessary for a ramp with hand rails. The toilets must have handles in the walls so that they can take support of it. This will help our children to get a disabled friendly environment within our school premises. During the interview by the researcher, the respondent tried to point that the infrastructural facilities of the school are developing. The physical infrastructure also helps the student in growing a positive mind to attending school. The infrastructural change is also a milestone towards changing attitude of people with disability in availing school education. The Ramps and Rails in the school are constructed for the provision of moving the wheelchair smoothly within the school premises.

But apart from the positive infrastructural changes some schools are still found to have bamboo constructed walls and classrooms. They do not even have the pathway from the school main gate to the school building. It gets difficult for the children during the rainy days.

One of the children with locomotor disability using wheelchair mentioned during the interview that the village people along with his parents are trying in the construction of the school and maintain the school building. The village people contribute all the needed resources for construction of the building. The desk and bench in the classroom are donated by the nearby village people. He knows about the establishment of the school because his parents were directly related to the village committee that helps in construction. He as a wheelchair user cannot run his wheelchair during the rainy days as he has to reach the school building through the playground that gets muddy and water gets accumulated in certain places of the field. This creates a problem for him. The school teachers and the parents carry him along with the wheelchair upto the class. The school has classes up to five. There are almost sixty students in the school. The number of students in the school is less because of the infrastructural facility. The children whose parents can drop their children to the nearby village lower primary school are sent to those schools rather than this school. The children attending this school are

mostly wage labourers who are from poor economic background. There are three children with special needs in the school where two of them have hearing impairment and the one with locomotor disability.

The insight drawn by the researcher was that school that has poor infrastructural facility is found to have less number of children enrollments with special needs as well as without special needs. The school infrastructure has a long way to go in the remote areas where there is less accessibility of resources the school are set up by the initiative of the villagers but the government has to look after the facilities provided to those children enrolled in the particular schools. The concept of inclusive education itself tries to create an environment which is friendly for all kind of children coming to the schools. The policy measures taken by the government have to be implemented fully in the ground level rather being in documentations. The people of the society are needed to make aware of their provisions and facilities they are supposed to receive. Education is an important matter of concern because it helps in nation building and preparing each of its children to become human resources which can contribute to the country's holistic development. The villagers or the public has shown their effort towards providing education to the children with special needs along with the other children of the village to attend school and get their education.

The study also found that the infrastructural facilities of the schools depend on the geographical location of the schools. The schools in the remote villages are yet to be developed whereas some schools in the town areas or the villages nearby the towns are fully equipped with all the infrastructural facilities provided by the government. This has shown that equitable infrastructure has not taken place in all the schools

Experiences of Children with special needs and the schools

Experiencing exclusion

The concept of exclusion has been a widespread because of the societal inequalities that exist within the society. The group of people those referred to as the disadvantaged and the marginalised are facing discriminations within the society. Thus the term of exclusion has evolved which has clearly depicted the ultimate form of inequalities exist within the society. Disability is also termed as the socially excluded group. The exclusion for the disabled group is because of their varied physical and cognitive development. In terms of inclusive education we must first understand about the exclusion children face. Ahmad (2015) in the study tries to explain the fact that inclusion of children in the system of education must not only be included through the enrollment process but also in the process of learning. Fuchus (1988 cited in Ebersold n.d.) described the education system as a system of exclusion because of the inability to take into consideration the special educational needs of children who find difficult to keep up in the traditional system of education. Challenging exclusion is terms of education serves as a greater support in inclusive education.

During the study the researchers tried to experience the exclusion that the children with special need face in an inclusive setting. From the cases studied it was found that the concept of exclusion is something that the people have in their attitude towards the children with special needs. Unless the attitudinal barrier has been removed there will be exclusion of the children with special need in various grounds of discrimination like equal importance within the class, equal participation in school activities and all the opportunities that the children has to be same for each one.

Daisy (name has been changed) is an intellectually disabled child. She is thirteen years of age studying in class three. She joined late to school. The school staff at the very first tried to deny her admission because of her disability. She has behavioural issues. But later it was bound to take her into the school because of inclusive education. The teachers in the school were not prepared to teach her because of her behavior. The teachers mentioned that it is not our aim to teach her with the classroom education whereas we will try to develop her skills of socialisation that can bring change in her behaviour. But the teachers do not allow her to go and play in the playground because the school does not have boundary wall and it becomes easy for children to leave the campus. The school is nearby the road for which number of vehicles passes by. The girl seats in the class but no other children feel comfortable seating with her together because she tries to hit other and create disturbance. As she is new to our school the children also need some time to get adjusted with her behavior. We exclude her in some activities because of some particular reasons like her patience to be seated in one place. We use to ask her parents to come along with her if any function or programme is held in the school. We have limited staff as we are only two teachers and the headmaster with ninety three students in the school. To look after each student especially we need more teachers. There are only two children with special needs enrolled with us at present.

Exclusion has its own specific reasons that lead people to exclude the other group because of certain dissimilarities. These dissimilarities are often the reason behind the barriers to inclusion. In the school where the child with intellectual disability was admitted she has different behaviour that is not easily acceptable by the other people within the class or the school. Thus in certain times the child will face exclusion within the inclusion like through letting her seat in a separate seat, controlling her behavior by various means to let her behave as the other children in the class. Here it is seen that the schools need to train in managing inclusive setup. This will help change in the attitudinal barriers of the people without special needs. The children with

special needs need special attention in the beginning of their start into the new environment of inclusion but as they spent more time with all the other children they get adjusted and various developmental changes in their growth has been observed by the teachers and the parents.

Experiencing inclusion

Learning is a basic need for all the children. Formal education and institutional learning plays a greater impact in the lives of children with special needs. The move towards inclusive education has led the changes in the institutions physically as well as functionally. Inclusive education brought up better opportunities to the children with special needs in equal access to rights and needs. It also provides with equal participation in learning process. Inclusion is a way forward that helps the persons with disabilities in access to education and employment. Khan (2014) found in the study central and state government have taken a number of initiatives in improving the enrolment, retention and achievement on children with special needs in collaboration with various organisations. There are non-governmental organisation working in the field of disability and inclusion.

During the study the researcher found that the children with special needs are giving positive response towards inclusion in the schools. The parents and the children are showing interest to join school. They are finding themselves to be more comfortable than the earlier as the schools are adopting inclusive curriculum in the classes. Inclusive education means to welcome children without any discrimination. The children with special needs face lots of challenges and experience in the inclusive setup.

During the study the researcher also found that a child with hearing impairment undergoes challenges in communication. They mostly take notes in the class. The teachers are unable to make out the level of understanding they get in the classroom teaching. They follow the instructions very well but the communication with them is built through self-adoptive sign languages. The teachers use to indicate with different signs to make them understand.

One of the children without disability is a friend of the child with disability; she speaks that the girl with hearing impairment lives nearby their house. So they come and go home together. The girl with hearing impairment is her best friend as she stays with her. She helps her taking notes in the classroom she helps her to take out the books and copies from her bag. She also helps her in the road while coming to the school. The child with hearing impairment has three more siblings in the house. She is the eldest. She is often irregular to school because her parents go for work in the tea garden. The girl remain absent from the school for many days for which the teachers had to inform her parents personally to send their child back to the school. The teachers find difficult in getting her back to the classes she lastly attended. The girl with hearing impairment is fond of dancing but they do not have any electronic gadgets like mobile phones, televisions or any music system for which she has to visit her neighbour's house and watch the videos of dance. She also performs in the functions that take place in the school.

From the case study it has been found that the child with hearing impairment has to undergo challenges in communication. They are not taught the formal sign language. The teachers are not trained in it. They use self-adoptive language or indications for any communication. The school makes effort in approaching the parents if the child is irregular. The child has her own friend in the classroom that helps her. The girl likes dancing but because of the poor economic condition of the parents the child visits neighbours house to watch television and through this she learns dancing. Dancing helps her to participate in the events that are being organised in the school. This has given her chance to participate along with the other children of the school. Inclusion helps the children in socialization.

IV. Conclusion

In India various policies and provisions have been enacted for the children with special needs and their education. These policies are being not fully met to their needs because of the unawareness of the people. There is a need to create more awareness among the people so that the policies and government laws may reach to the more people in need. The attitudinal barriers found within the people are a major barrier towards existence of exclusion. But in some cases the exclusion that is found to be some specific reason where it has been purposefully excluded. The schools must have adequate teachers. There must be training in inclusive education because the regular school teachers are not trained in managing and understanding children with disabilities. The National education policy is trying to provide equitable and inclusive education. Thus the country needs proper implementation of the policies and laws so that the targeted group can be reached and no one should be left out because each of the individual belonging to the nation has to be turned into resources for all round development of the country. Thus, from the study it can be suggested that the government or the non-government organisation must act proactively working in providing the rights of education to the children with special needs.

References

- [1]. Ahmad, FouziaKhursheed (2014). Assistive Provisions for the Education of Students with Learning Disabilities in Delhi Schools. *International Journal of Fundamental and Applied Research*
- [2]. Gulyani, Ritika (2017). Educational Policies in India with Special Reference to Children with Disabilities. *Indian Anthropological Association*, 47(2), 35-51. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26494030>
- [3]. Kalyanpur, Maya (2008), Equality, Quality and Quantity: Challenges in inclusive education policy and service provision in India. *International Journal of Inclusive education*, vol. 12, No. 3, 243-262. Retrieved from <http://doi.org/10.1080/13603110601103162>
- [4]. Nation Education Policy 2020. Ministry of Human Resource Development. Government of India. Retrieved from https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf
- [5]. Ojha Seema S. (2013) Implementing Right to education: Issues and challenges. *Research Journal of Educational Sciences*.1(2), 1-7. Retrieved from www.isca.in
- [6]. Sardar, Biswajit (2017). Integrated Education In India: Past And Present. *International Journal of Innovative Research and Advanced Studies (IJIRAS)*, 2394-4404. Retrieved from www.ijiras.com