



Parameters Related To Children With Special Needs In Integrated And Special Schools

¹Sachin Kumar Prabhakar, ²Dr. Alka Kumari and ³Dr. Devendra
¹Sachin Kumar Prabhakar, ²Dr. Alka Kumari and ³Dr. Devendra Kumar

¹Research Scholar, Department of Education, SunRise University, Alwar, Rajasthan (India)
²Assistant Professor, Department of Education, SunRise University, Alwar, Rajasthan (India)
³Assistant Professor, Department of Education, BMT College, Meerut, Uttar Pradesh (India)
Email: nihul108@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: Special Education as a separate system of education for disabled children outside the mainstream education evolved way back in the 1880s in India. It was based on the assumption that children with disability had some special special needs that could not be met in mainstream Schools therefore, they need to study in a separate school with other children having similar needs. Special schools exist all over the world in the form of day or residential schools, and also special classes are attached to the mainstream schools. In 1947, India had a total of 32 schools for the blind, 30 for the deaf and 3 for mentally retarded. The special schools are generally organised according to different disability categories. There are schools for children with visual. The major disadvantages of separate education in separate environment are that, the children staying away from families may find it hard to readjust to their families, peers and communities, and children usually have to leave their families and communities to stay in a residential setting because these schools are usually not available in their immediate environment. impairments, for the intellectually challenged and for those with hearing impairments.

[Prabhakar, S.K., Kumari, A. and Devendra. **PARAMETERS RELATED TO CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN INTEGRATED AND SPECIAL SCHOOLS.** *Rep Opinion* 2022;14(3):1-5]. ISSN 1553-9873 (print); ISSN 2375-7205 (online). <http://www.sciencepub.net/report>. I. doi: [10.7537/marsroj140322.01](https://doi.org/10.7537/marsroj140322.01).

Keywords: - Parameters, Children, Education, Review of Literature

INTRODUCTION

Children's Special Educational Needs (SEN) are met through certain methodologies of special education. Special education is not segregated or exclusive education of students with disabilities. It is an approach that facilitates their learning and allows them to participate in different activities that they may not have had access to on account of their inability to go to school. Hence, children with special needs do not have to always study in a separate institution. In fact, most of them can learn quite well in general classes of a school. However, some children who have severe difficulties, due to the nature of their disability, may benefit greatly from being educated in a classroom prepared exclusively for them, as a smaller number of students are grouped together, where the educator interacts with the students on a one-to-one basis. The educators/teachers who provide special education are called Special Educators. When children/ students with SEN study in general classrooms with their peers, the arrangement is called 'inclusive education'. As the term indicates, the philosophy that guides this approach is that students with diverse needs (educational, physical, social and emotional) are placed together in age-appropriate classes/groups

such that the students can optimally achieve their learning potential. The school makes suitable adjustments and modifications in its curriculum, teaching methods and physical set up to facilitate their education.

A person who chooses to become a special educator is said to have a career in Special Education. There are several models of special/inclusive education in which a special educator can work with children with SEN:

(i) Some schools impart education exclusively to children with disabilities. Most such schools offer services to children with specific disabilities, such as those with intellectual impairment, cerebral palsy or visual impairment. These fall in the category of special schools/programmes and require the services of special educators who are trained in working with children with those specific disabilities.

(ii) **Inclusive Education** means including children with disabilities in regular classrooms. It is about all children learning together even if they differ from each other in style and pace of learning. It benefits all students and is an education for all. An inclusive school has within its premises, facilities for children with SEN. Here, all the students are placed

in regular classes. In such a system, the special educators would not directly teach children with SEN, but provide pedagogical (instructional) support to the regular teachers.

(iii) Integrated Education emphasises placement of children with disability in mainstream school. The school system remains rigid, as a result, very few children with disability are able to cope up with the demands of the school. There are many general schools which are inclusive. This means, the students with SEN are a part of the regular classes. The special educator then co-ordinates work with the regular teachers and provides extra inputs to the students in a Resource Room of the school. For special and inclusive education to be effective, certain support services should be available to the children as well as to the educators and children's parents. These may be located within the school or in the community, accessible to the family. These are: i) Resource materials for students with SEN and educators ii) Transportation for students iii) Speech therapy iv) Physical and occupational therapy v) Counselling for children, parents and educators.

STUDENTS WITHOUT DISABILITIES

Students without disabilities progress in social cognition and develop a greater understanding and acceptance of students with disabilities and diversity as a whole, as a result of experiencing inclusive programming. Students without disabilities also experience increased self-esteem and improved self-concept.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

When students with disabilities are educated with their peers without disabilities, they learn age-appropriate social skills by imitating students without disabilities in the environments where they are needed. Integrated settings provide a challenging environment for students with disabilities. Therefore, these students learn to be more independent and acquire developmentally advanced skills. Also, they may develop friendships and a more positive self-image by having the opportunity to do what other students do.

FAMILIES OF STUDENTS WITH AND WITHOUT DISABILITIES

When students attend integrated programs, parents of children with disabilities have the opportunity to see that many of their children's behaviours are typical of most students. By seeing their children accepted by others and successful in integrated settings, parents may feel better about themselves and their children. Parents of children

with disabilities also have the chance to become acquainted with other parents and participate in the same activities. Providing positive experiences in integrated settings allows children without disabilities and their parents to learn about disabilities and develop positive attitudes about people with disabilities. Integration can expand and enhance the personal experiences of children, parents, and teachers.

The shift from integration to inclusion in special education

A glance at the history of special education leads to consider the great advances that have been reached throughout the twentieth century in which has been reached a great development. In this development, the authors distinguish four stages (Buchem, 2013: 387-395): a) exclusion: people with disabilities or special needs were excluded from all social contexts (family, school, community); b) segregation: it was understood that they required and were likely to be educated but still, remained separated from the rest of society; c) integration: in this stage, the public schools were required to create new spaces for the students with special needs so they could socialize with the other non-disabled students. Within those "spaces" were regular classrooms, special education classrooms and pull out services (Franklin, 1996: 18); d) inclusive stage: social structures (classrooms, schools, communities) and socio-educational actions are designed from the outset considering the students with special needs. This last stage began with the Salamanca Statement in which the delegates of the World Conference on Special Needs Education, representing ninety-two governments and twenty-five international organizations, reaffirmed their commitment to "Education For All" (Jomtien, 1990) proclaiming five principles that would structure special education policies and practices (UNESCO, 1994: VIII-XIX):

1. Every child has a fundamental right to education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning.
2. Every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs.
3. Education systems should be designed and educational programs implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs.
4. Those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child-centred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs.
5. Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive

society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide and effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire educational system. These five principles respond to a question that has repeatedly arisen in the field of special education: Which is the best place for students with special needs? The first author to ask this question was Dunn in 1968, seven years later it was made again within the context of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act —later known as IDEA—; and was debated once more in the mid-1980s as papers on the failure of pull-out services began to spread (Zigmond, 2003: 194). Almost 25 years after that debate, Zigmond gives a response that goes beyond the answers given so far. She argues that “in practical terms, the question of where students with disabilities should be educated is misguided. That question is antithetical to the kind of individualized planning that is the hallmark of special education for students with disabilities” (Zigmond, 2003: 194). Why does she consider the question “antithetical”? Because the underlying idea behind the "Education For All" movement is paradoxically, against the basis of special education that demands a personalized attention centered on the abilities and disabilities that every person has. When asking Which is the best place for students with special needs? Dunn is considering the questions in order to determine the best place for all students with special needs. Whereas Zigmond, before answering this issue proposes two additional questions: Best for whom? and Best for what?.

Inclusive and integrated education

With the release of the Salamanca Statement in 1994 (UNESCO), a large number of developing countries started reformulating their policies to promote the inclusion of students with disabilities into mainstream schools. While a large number of developed countries (e.g. USA, Canada, Australia) now have policies or laws promoting "inclusive education," a number of developing countries continue to provide educational services to students with disabilities in "segregated" schools. Typically, inclusive education means "that students with disabilities are served primarily in the general education settings, under the responsibility of [a] regular classroom teacher. When necessary and justifiable, students with disabilities may also receive some of their instruction in another setting, such as [a] resource room" (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2004, p.7). Historically, many educational systems have adopted an integrated education model as an interim approach in the move towards inclusive education. In

the "integrated education" model "whenever possible, students with disabilities attend a regular school". The emphasis, however, is upon the student to fit the system rather than the system to adapt to meet the educational needs of a student. In India, "integrated education" has been provided mainly to students with mild disabilities who are considered "easy" to include into regular school programs. Students with severe disabilities, in a majority of cases, do not attend a school, or in rare cases, attend a special school.

Challenges to implement integrated education

The challenge of poverty associated with disability:

With an estimated 1,027 million people, India is the world's second most populated country. It has 17 percent of the global population and 20 percent of the world's out-of-school children. Despite impressive gains in the last few decades (11th largest industrial power, 4th largest economy in terms of purchasing power parity) India still has more than 260 million people living in poverty (Canadian International Development Agency [CIDA]. 2003). A large number of children with disabilities live in families with income significantly below the poverty level. According to Rao (1990), while disability causes poverty, it is also possible that in a country like India, poverty causes disability. The combination of poverty and disability results in a condition of "simultaneous deprivation." According to HARRIS-White (1996), this is a syndrome that sets up barriers to the participation of persons with disabilities in the normal routines and activities of the community, including regular schooling. Recently, the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, has allocated 3 percent funds in poverty alleviation programs targeting families of children with disabilities (B.L. Sharma, 2001). However, motivating poor families, with all the associated costs to send their child to school, is proving to be a big challenge.

The challenge of modifying deeply held attitudes:

Attitudes of the non-disabled are proving to be a major barrier in the social integration of persons with disabilities. "The more severe and visible the deformity is, the greater is the fear of contagion, hence the attitudes of aversion and segregation towards the crippled" (Desai, 1990, p.19). Such attitudes reinforced by religious institutions may militate against any attempts to include students with disabilities into regular schools. For example, Hindus (who constitute 85 percent of the total population in India) believe that disability is a consequence of misdeeds performed in the previous life (often

referred to as the doctrine of Karma). Many Hindu religious institutions and temple trusts, therefore, do not think a part of their duty is to help persons with disabilities, because they consider the disability to be the result of a person's misdeeds in his previous life (Rao, 1990). Any attempts to improve the life of a person with a disability may be considered a "defiance of the wills of Allah or as interference with a person's karma" (Harriss-White, 1996, p.7 [also see Miles, 1995]). Alur (2001), in her study found that disability in India is not seen as something "normal" or "natural," rather it is seen as an "evil eye." Guilt, stigma and different kinds of fears tend to be paramount in such families. She further concludes that "the contradiction here was that Indian society, although integrated in accepting and valuing diversity in so many ways, has a social role construct of disability which is negative, discriminatory and exclusionary"(n.p.). Kannan, (2000), states that in order to harness the great potential of more than 30 million people with disabilities, it is essential that "prejudice, mental and irrational myths concerning disability, is eradicated."

Dissemination and public education:

People, including parents and school personnel, are largely unaware of the full intent of the recent legislation passed by Indian Parliament. A large number of school personnel are also not aware of funding available to include students with disabilities in regular schools. There is some evidence that those educators who are knowledgeable about government policies and laws concerning integrated education tend to have positive attitudes toward implementing such programs (U. Sharma, 2001). There is also evidence when parents are knowledgeable and supportive of integrated education, they tend to have a positive effect on school personnel (U. Sharma, 2001). Thus, unless people, especially parents of children with disabilities and school personnel, are made knowledgeable about the various provisions enshrined in the Act, the Central and State governments' commitment to providing integrated education will be in vain. Although some attempts are being made to disseminate information about the Persons with Disabilities Act to parents, to government officials and non government organizations (B. L. Sharma, 2001), they have been extremely limited in coverage (Chatterjee, 2003).

There is also a greater need to have a National Resource Center for Disabilities. Such a center would work to collect, and disseminate information on various aspects of disability (B.L. Sharma, 2001). The center would provide

information through various TV and radio programs as well as through internet (B.L. Sharma, 2001). The center would also fulfill the role of scrutinizing all mass communication programs (TV, radio and even entertainment programs) to ensure that disability is not portrayed in a negative manner.

The center could also start documentary projects (e.g. video programs) that feature inclusion being implemented in different parts of India. Such programs are likely to make a positive impact on school educators who often believe that inclusion can work only in Western or developed countries.

The challenge of providing adequate levels of training to key stakeholders:

The majority of school personnel in India are not trained to design and implement educational programs for students with disabilities in regular schools. Most teacher training programs in India do not have a unit on Disability Studies (Myreddi & Narayan, 2000). The universities, which do cover some aspects of special education in their teacher training programs, fail to train teachers adequately to work in integrated settings. For example, there is limited coverage of information about practical strategies (Myreddi & Narayan, 2000). Also, placement of pre-service teachers in special or integrated schools is rarely given consideration (Jangira, Singh, & Yadav, 1995).

Great variations are noted in the content, process, and examination of existing special education programs as well in the country (Myreddi & Narayan, 2000). However, the situation may improve in the coming years as the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) will periodically evaluate special education programs to ensure that each program meets minimum standards (Rehabilitation Council of India, 1996). The number of trained special educators is also limited. The most recent report of the Rehabilitation Council of India (1996) states that the number of trained special education teachers is extremely small considering the number of children with disabilities that require their services. At the time of the publication of this report there were only 9,492 specially trained teachers. Of these, 4,295 were trained to teach students with mental retardation, 1,079 were trained to teach students with visual disabilities, 4,011 were trained to teach students with hearing impairments, and 107 were trained to teach students with locomotor disabilities in India. To address this severe shortage of trained teachers, the Rehabilitation Council of India recommended that an additional 44,000 teachers needed to be trained by the end of the Ninth Five-Year Plan (1997-2002). However, it should be noted

that even if these targets were to be achieved, *only* 10 percent of the population of children with disabilities would be served (Rehabilitation Council of India, 1996). RCI must consider reformulating existing teacher training programs for special educators, with a greater emphasis on integrated education. Special educators could be a key resource as they can be used to train regular school educators in implementing integrated education. They can also act as itinerant teachers working in partnership with a number of regular school educators to advise them on practical issues related to education of students with disabilities.

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3/22/2022