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INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN INDIA: A REVIEW PAPER FOR UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS

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ABSTRACT
Inclusive education is an approach to teaching all the students under one roof that includes underrepresented groups along with the normal ones. Inclusive education is the system of integrating differentially abled, marginalised groups, disabled students and disadvantaged groups who are traditionally excluded with the normal students so that the learning needs of all types of students can be met and a uniform system of education can be formed in the country. Despite various policies and numerous reformations in the system by the government, Indian schools are still struggling with the mainstreaming and inclusion, lack proper implementation, and resources. This paper is a step towards knowing the present status of inclusive education in India, steps taken by the government, and various policies and research undertaken to address the needs of underrepresented groups in the system.
KEYWORDS: *Inclusive Education, Underrepresented groups, India*

INTRODUCTION

Inclusion means to include all. Education is the right of everyone. Even the constitution of India has education as the fundamental right of every citizen. Inclusion is a concept that can be characterised as an attitude or a dedication to appreciating differences and accepting that all children can achieve their full potential in a common school (Amazona et.al.,2022). Inclusive education provides the right to education to all the children irrespective of their gender type, type of disability, impairment, locality or area, caste, religion, and socio-economic background. Education under one roof is the motive of inclusion. It is an initiative to make a discrimination-free environment where every child is free to interact, learn, and grow and achieve the goals of life. The act of inclusion creates a sense of unity, patience, and cooperation between the peer groups so that the sensitivity can be increased. Special children study and collaborate with the non-special ones, which will make them fear-free and barrier-free, which ultimately increases the learning outcomes. Teachers are to play the most important role in inclusion. Variety of instructional and pedagogical strategies are to be adopted by the teachers for this type of teaching and learning to make inclusion possible. Teachers are to create such an environment that every student feels comfortable, motivated and eager to learn and achieve their best. Children with Special Needs sometimes require extra assistance, for this, special educators are appointed by the schools who collaborate with the normal teacher to tackle the needs and requirements of the special children. Inclusive education is the necessity to foster the learning needs and give every child equal opportunity to achieve their dream. The present study focuses on the past, present, and future of Inclusive Education in India.

Government initiatives for Inclusive Education in India

In 1966, the Kothari Commission had highlighted the importance of educating children with disabilities in regular schools. The government of India launched the **Integrated Education for Disabled Children** (IEDC) program in 1974. This was the first formal step towards inclusion. The Center-sponsored scheme aimed at providing educational opportunities to children with special needs in regular schools. It also hoped to facilitate their achievement and retention. The first Indian policy that stressed the need of inclusion was the National Education Policy 1986. The policy recommended integrating children with special needs in the normal schools. The objective to be achieved as stated in the NPE, 1986 is "to integrate the physically and mentally handicapped with the general community as equal partners, to prepare them for normal growth and to enable them to face life with courage and confidence". There after Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992 was passed by the Parliament in 1992, this act made it mandatory for every special teacher to be registered by the council and laid down that every child with disability had the right to be taught by a qualified teacher. The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 stressed the need to provide free of cost education to all children in an appropriate environment till they are 18 years old. The government is committed to provide education through mainstream schools for children with disabilities in accordance with PWD ACT, 1995, and all the schools in the country will be made disabled friendly by 2020. 86th amendment in the constitution was made in 2002, that mandates the education of children from 6 to14 years of age. RMSA was launched in 2009 to improve the secondary education system in India with great focus on eradicating gender barriers, socio-economic and disability barrier.

Other initiatives are SSA, ECCE, Right to Education Act 2009, PWD Act 2016 include many more policies were implemented by the government to achieve the universal system of education for every child across the country. New Education Policy 2020 also aims for Equitable and Inclusive education as the goal to be achieved by 2030 in every school.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Different studies have been carried out regarding the

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implementation, recommendation and situation of the Inclusive Education in India.

Mishra and Nageri (2021) conducted an empirical study and pointed out the four factors that are important in determining the barriers of Inclusive Education in India: financial constraints, Family Background, Socio-cultural, and Geographic. The researcher used the questionnaire to collect data from 300 primary school teachers of Uttar Pradesh. 11 variables were selected to measure the equal access to education among children. The variables are: Parents job status, income, lack of resources, family well-being, Proximity of the school, poverty, gender, parent's education, caste, religious groups, languages etc. data was then analyzed using SPSS 2.0 software and results showed that four factors that are important in determining the barrier of Inclusive Education in India financial constraints, Family Background, Socio-cultural and Geographical conditions. Financial & Family background are considered most important by Primary teachers.

Devkumar S., (2017) identifies the gaps in implementation of the policy and states that there is a strong framework for the implementation of Inclusive Education in India but the system lacks efforts to achieve the goal of "Education for all" in India. Major recommendations given as the compulsory course for inclusive education at all the levels for teachers, hands-on experience of teaching training and experience, curriculum adaptation according to the needs, modification of the evaluation system.

According to Singh S., (2020), 50% of the disabled children are not in school. Approximately 8 million children are not in school as they are marginalised by gender, caste, poverty and disability. Government, despite of implementing several policies, is unable to universalise the "Education for all". For successful implementation, teachers need to adapt differential teaching activities and understand that all students have a goal or dream and accept the uniqueness of every child.

Gale, Bhushan et.al. (2022) pointed out intervention that successfully leads teachers and leaders to improve Inclusive Education in the classroom, which includes capacity building,training of the teachers and other staff, professional development, collaborative and optimal teaching-learning environment. The attitude, mindset, beliefs, and commitment of school leaders and teachers have to be improved for inclusion. Professional learning opportunities should be provided to teachers and leaders of the school for attitudinal change. Decentralised culture to be encouraged, rights-based policies must be implemented in schools, improving working culture and classroom support, motivation and collaboration among leaders and teachers, also necessary for fostering the inclusive culture in schools. Improve in teaching, learning, and assessment materials, improving professional development, and monitoring periodically the outcomes will show the results in a positive direction.

Sarkar T., (2020) examined the implications of NEP for children with disabilities around four key aspects: school choice, teacher and special educators, assessments and curricula and terminology of inclusion and disability and pointed out that teachers are generally not able to implement the policy in the classroom or are unaware of the policy, teachers are not enough trained to facilitate inclusivity in normal classroom or do not have enough resources and peer support in the system. Other than that, parents of the unrepresented groups often lack the proper knowledge, facilities, and confidence in sending their wards to general classrooms. Curriculum is also a major concern, which is not in line with the diverse classroom needs. Teachers have given flexibility to mould the curriculum and not to be rigid while teaching a mixed classroom in NEP 2020.

METHODOLOGY

The Researcher has collected data from sources like websites, policy documents, published journals and articles, e-books, policy reports, commissions, national education plans, local, national and international article publications. Secondary data sources for this review study include books, articles, libraries, reports, personal sources, journals, newspapers, websites, government documents, and online data that are available as open databases collected electronically.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Inclusive education has become the prime focus of researchers and educationists nowadays. Inclusion is not an experiment to be tested but a value to be followed (K & Kumar,2007). Several policies come forth for recommendations and reformations in the system, but the actual situation is something different. The grassroots level is the most affected area in this regard. Disabled children rarely progress beyond primary school, and only 9% complete secondary education. Around 45% of disabled people are illiterate and only 62.9% of disabled people between the ages of 3 and 35 have ever attended regular schools (Sarkar, 2020). Many studies focus on the attitude, belief, commitment, and motivational level of the school administrators to set up inclusion. Various research showed that the lack of awareness among teachers and stakeholders leads to failure in the system. The awareness campaign, seminars, conferences, workshops for hands-on-training and experiences need to be initiated at the state and national level by the government, which is also stated in the NEP draft, and hope for the implementation of the same. Similarly, parents of the underrepresented groups need to be aware of the rights and the policies. Often it has been seen that the parents are hesitant to include their child, or due to lack of resources in school or low socio-economic condition, parents do not send their child to the school. Teachers are not trained for inclusive education. For inclusion, teachers must have skill and knowledge of inclusive curriculum, various teaching strategies, instructional methods, sensitization, and motivation to teach in an inclusive classroom. NEP 2020 focuses on inclusive education to be an integral part of pre-service and in-service training of the teachers. In schools where high proportionate of underrepresented groups are there the pupil-teacher ratio should not more than 25:1. Government recognized that, people with disabilities also have the right to education as other citizens but the necessities of the nation which is grappling with problems like poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, malnutrition, and sheer survival needs of its people made it difficult to sustain focus on the development of services for disabilities (Singh, 2020).

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CONCLUSION

Education is the greatest tool for achieving equality and harmony in the society. Every citizen is a member of the country and has all the rights to live the life according to their will and achieve their dreams. Right to Education is one of the most important fundamental rights of every citizen. Any kind of physical, mental, socio-economic, geographical disability should not become an obstacle in their personal growth. Over the past years, the government and the Indian Education System have been trying to universalize the education and bridge the gaps for underrepresented groups of India. However, large disparities can be seen in the system and a constant failure of the policy implementation still remains. Unfortunately, the government is still failing in the transformation of the mindset of the people and prejudices and biases still prevail in the system, which ultimately affects the people from getting the benefit from the education system. Government should not only ensure the successful implementation of the policies but also monitor at the grassroot level, a reality check is necessary. Several audits, reports, and research should come forward to fill the loophole of the system.

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