EDUCATING CHILDREN WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

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ABSTRACT

Disability is a socially defined phenomenon. It has all-encompassing social consequences for individuals and has a significant impact on societies. The social reality of disability is characterised by "considerable variation in the experience of impairment by large numbers of people who nonetheless share common conditions of exclusion, marginalisation, and disadvantage. Discrimination against children with developmental disabilities can be observed in terms of exclusion from education and healthcare, limited opportunities for play or access to cultural life, denial of family life, vulnerability to violence, poverty, and exclusion from participation in decision-making. It also undermines self-esteem and self-confidence among children, particularly among girls with developmental disabilities). Accordingly, disability has been conceptualised and addressed as a human rights issue in different forums. It is observed that persons with developmental disabilities who belong to poor families are more marginalised and disadvantaged by various factors, such as lack of access to productive resources and opportunities, and lack of information and skills that could have enabled them to participate in social, economic and political processes. It is also found that disabled women and girls are more vulnerable to elimination .

KEYWORDS: Child, Education, Disability, UNICEF,

The World Health Organisation and the World Bank estimate that one billion people experience some form of disability. Of those, it is estimated that 93 to 150 million are children. According to Plan International, these children are 10 times less likely to go to school than other children and when they do attend school, it is likely to be in a segregated setting. The Global Partnership for Education estimates that 90% of children with developmental disabilities in low and lower-middle-income countries do not go to school. In 2016 the UN reported that less than half of the world's six million refugee children were in school whilst a report on the education of Syrian refugee children, Human Rights Watch identified that refugee children with developmental disabilities faced particular and ongoing barriers to school enrolment.

Historically, children with developmental disabilities have been excluded from the general education system and placed in 'special schools'. In some cases, they are separated from their families and placed in long-term residential institutions where they are educated in isolation from the community if they are educated at all. Both practices persist in many regions, for example, Eastern Europe has the highest number of institutionalized children in the world and a child with a disability is almost 17 times more likely to be institutionalized than other children (UNICEF, 2012). Children with developmental disabilities have very low rates of initial enrolment. Even if they do attend school, children with developmental disabilities are more likely to drop out and leave school early without transitioning to secondary school

and beyond (GCE, Equal right, equal opportunity report, 2014). Children with developmental disabilities are also at increased risk of school violence and bullying, preventing the safe enjoyment of Global status report, 2016). their right to education (UNESCO, School violence and bullying:

People with developmental disabilities are recognized under international law as rights-holders, with a right to education without discrimination and based on equal opportunities. This right is guaranteed by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

People with developmental disabilities are also protected by a specific treaty that interprets existing human rights law in a manner that takes account of the specific situation of people with developmental disabilities. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities (2006) sets out the right to education as applied to people with disabilities in Article 24, and has been interpreted by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with education (2016). disabilities in General Comment 4: Article 24:

Right to inclusive Despite the relative strength of international law in guaranteeing the right to education of people with developmental disabilities, at the national level very few states guarantee the right to education of people with developmental disabilities in their national constitutions.

In the 1970s, the Government of India launched the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC). The scheme aimed at providing educational opportunities to learners with developmental disabilities in regular schools, and to facilitate their achievement and retention. The objective was to integrate children with developmental disabilities in the general community at all levels as equal partners to prepare them for normal development and to enable them to face life with courage and confidence. A cardinal feature of the scheme was the liaison between regular and special schools to reinforce the integration process. Meanwhile, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) joined hands with UNICEF and launched Project Integrated Education for 6 Disabled Children (PIED) in the year 1987, to strengthen the integration of learners with developmental disabilities into regular schools. An external evaluation of this project in 1994 showed that not only did the enrollment of learners with developmental disabilities increase considerably, but the retention rate among disabled children was also much higher than the other children in the same blocks. In 1997 IEDC was amalgamated with other major basic education projects like the DPEP (Chadha, 2002) and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) (Department of Elementary Education, 2000). The IEDC scheme provides for a wide range of incentives and interventions for the education of children with developmental disabilities. These include preschool training, counselling for parents, allowances for books and stationery, uniforms, transport, readers and escorts, hostel facilities, and other assistive devices. The scheme provides one special teacher for every eight children with developmental disabilities, community involvement, and a resource room in a cluster of eight to 10 schools. Several voluntary organisations are implementing the scheme in various States. Similarly Right to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 for children with special needs provide free and compulsory elementary education to all children including children with special needs(CWSN). To address the educational needs of CWSN at the secondary and senior secondary level, the scheme for Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS) was, implemented. The Scheme aimed at enabling all students with disabilities to complete eight years of elementary schooling, an opportunity to complete four years of secondary schooling in an inclusive and enabling environment in the general education system at the secondary level (classes IX to XII).

Does the constitution guarantee the right to education for children with disabilities?

- No, none
- General right to education
- Aspirational
- Broadly guaranteed
- Specifically guaranteed

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Despite impressive gains in the last few decades a large number of children with developmental 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 Harriss-White (1996), this is a syndrome that sets up barriers to the participation of persons with developmental disabilities in the normal routines and activities of the community, including regular schooling. At the beginning of the last decade, the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, has allocated 3 percent of funds in poverty alleviation programs targeting families of children with developmental 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.

People, including parents and school personnel, are largely unaware of the full intent of the recent legislation passed by the Indian Parliament. A large number of school personnel are also not aware of funding available to include students with developmental 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 evident 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 developmental 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 Developmental disabilities Act to parents, government officials and non-government organizations (B.
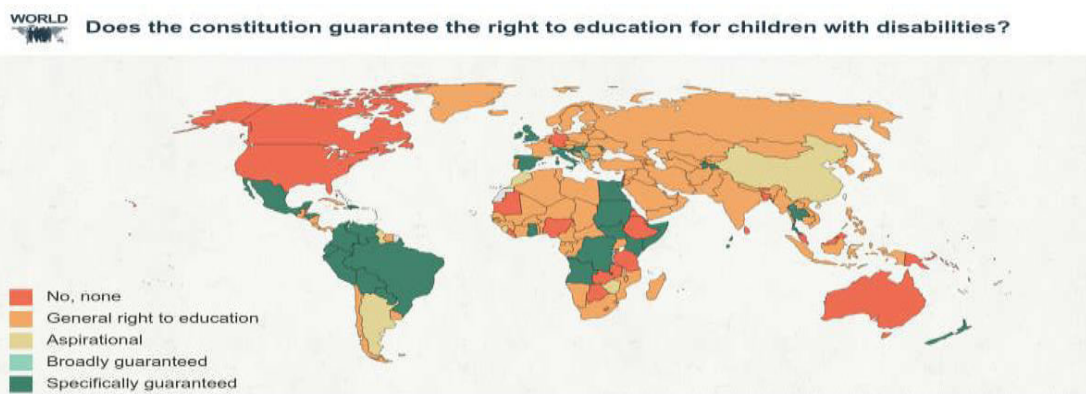
L. Sharma, 2001), they have been extremely limited in coverage (Chatterjee, 2003).

The majority of school personnel in India are not trained to design and implement educational programs for students with developmental 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, the placement of pre-service teachers in special or integrated schools is rarely given consideration (Jangira, Singh, & Yadav, 1995).

The majority of schools in India are poorly designed and few are equipped to meet the unique needs of students with developmental disabilities. The lack of disability-friendly transportation services and accessible buildings are considered by some to be far greater problems than social prejudice and negative attitudes (for example, Chatterjee, 2003). Both the Central and State governments will have to provide increased resources to this aspect of education to ensure the successful implementation of integrated practices in schools. Over and above some of these challenges that India shares with other developing countries are some distinctive features that will make the implementation of educational reform particularly difficult. India is a multilingual, multicultural, multi-religious country, and its people are stratified along sharp socio-economic and caste lines. Therefore, unless the challenges are carefully identified and systematically addressed, inclusion will remain a policy on paper.

POSSIBLE STRATEGIES

Training of Teachers:

If integrated education is to become a reality in India, then the training of teachers has to become a top priority. The educational authorities in India may adopt a policy of training one teacher from each school or a cluster of schools. The teacher would need to be provided with intensive training to work with various developmental disabilities and could then act as an integration specialist or an inclusion facilitator for one or several schools located nearby. A similar strategy has already worked well in certain parts of India when several school teachers were specifically trained to work in integrated settings under the PIED program and are recommended by several researchers in India (Jangira, 1995; Jha, 2002; Myreddi & Narayan, 2000). Also, in-service teachers would need continued training to update their skills and knowledge of integrated education strategies.

Need to design an innovative system of training:

Several authors have cautioned that India will not be able to successfully implement integrated educational services unless regular school educators are trained at a mass scale. comments on this situation as follows: "the number of persons who need training is very large and the conventional training methods cannot simply meet the requirements." Therefore, there is a need to design some innovative models to train educators at the mass level. One possibility to educate such a large number of teachers is by using Distance Open Learning or DOL (Ramanujam, 2001). Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) has a history of successfully running courses for a larger number of students using DOL mode. It is expected that such training, accompanied by ongoing in-service training, would prove very useful for school educators. It would, however, be important that practical aspects of implementing integrated education form a key part of any such course.

Involve NGO's in implementing integrated education programs:

NGO's can play a significant role in implementing integrated education because they are widely located in India and can serve both urban and rural school communities. Unfortunately, a large majority of NGOs still believe that segregated education is the best way to educate students with developmental disabilities (Alur, 2001). It would, therefore, be necessary to train the key stakeholders in these NGO's about the benefits of integrated education as well as practical aspects of implementing integrated education in regular schools.

Establish an alternate system of examination:

Most school educators in India are concerned that the integration of students with developmental disabilities would result in lowering school standards because these students won't be able to pass exams (U. Sharma & Desai, 2002). This seems to be a genuine concern of teachers because it can influence their promotion. Thus, it is necessary to establish an alternative system of examination for students with developmental disabilities.

School-university partnership:

The multilingual, multicultural and multi-religious nature of India is often cited as a challenge in implementing any educational reforms. Local universities in each of the States and Union Territories may play a significant role in overcoming this challenge. Pilot projects involving local schools could be initiated by universities to explore strategies that may be appropriate for each region. Also, texts on practical strategies can be produced in the common language spoken by educators in each of the States.

CONCLUSION

With the passage of The Persons with Developmental disabilities Act in 1996, RTE Act 2009 and subsequent legislation on Rights of Persons with Developmental disabilities Act, 2016, India has joined the few countries that have legislation to promote integrated education. This is a landmark step as India has now overcome a major legislative hurdle. Several unique challenges still need to be overcome to implement the key objectives enshrined in the legislation. Attitudinal barriers ingrained as part of India's historical response to a disability must be changed through education programs for both teachers and the general populace. These programs require financial and collaborative commitment from key national and state education stakeholders, and partnership with universities to support research-based initiatives. Success in achieving integrated education will ultimately depend on how Indian educators and educational systems can collaborate to deal with the difference in India's culturally charged context.

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