

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION - A BOON FOR ODL STUDENTS

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Abstract

Inclusion is not an experiment to be tested but a value to be followed. Inclusive education thus needs to be implemented with full rigour in order to fulfill the mandate of Education for all as guaranteed by the Fundamental Right to education. The principle of inclusive education was adopted at the “World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality” (Salamanca, Spain 1994) and was restated at the World Education Forum (Dakar, Senegal 2000). Against this backdrop of continuous neglect, there is an urgent need to find ways for de The Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode of education with several in-built flexibilities of place and pace of education has emerged as a potential alternative mode of education. Whereas education in formal schools gives opportunity of face to face interaction of teachers with students for sufficiently long duration every year, developing potential of this large proportion of challenged children. Inclusive education stands for improvement of schools in all dimensions to address the educational needs of all children. Inclusive education is at a very early stage of conceptualization and implementation in India. Inclusive education is a new approach towards educating the children with disability and learning difficulties with that of normal ones within the same roof. It seeks to address the learning needs of all children with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion. However, increasing use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) under ODL mode of education has enabled the learner to increase the duration of didactic interaction with Tutors. This paper dealt with role of inclusive education in successive implementation of Open and Distance Learning in this present scenario.

Introduction

Higher Education is a very powerful agent of social change. Higher education should aim at socialization and democratization in true sense of the word. It is clearly evident that ODL Education in India is playing a vital role in catering the higher education to the needs of diversified groups of students including socially disadvantaged sections. With a delightful slogan “Education at your doorstep”, the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system in India brought education virtually to the door steps of the learners and development of Information and Communication Technologies give the 100% percent assurance to reach the unreached pupils. The development of any nation depends on its educational system and it is proved that education is the key to human progress and social change.

Inclusive Education

The concept of inclusion is based on human rights, equal opportunities, social justice and participation. Inclusive education is very complex and multifaceted recognizing that there is not just one inclusion but rather, inclusion according to government rhetoric, inclusion as seen by children within schools, inclusion according to disabled activists, inclusion according to the lay person and inclusion contested by various academics. Inclusive education means that all students attend and are welcomed by their neighborhood schools in age-appropriate, regular classes and are supported to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of the life of the school. Inclusive education is about how we develop and design our schools, classrooms, programs and activities so that all students learn and participate together. Inclusion involves many stakeholders and it is a process that is difficult to implement.

Inclusive education enables both teachers and learners to feel comfortable with diversity and to see it as a challenge and enrichment in the learning environment, rather than see it as a problem. Furthermore, inclusive education is concerned with all learners, with focus on learners with special needs and disabilities, children from ethnic and linguistic minorities (UNESCO, 1994). In developing countries, the major constraint of the move toward inclusive approaches in education is attributed mainly to serious shortage of resources such as lack of schools or inadequate facilities, lack of teachers and/or shortage of qualified staff, lack of learning materials and absence of support (UNESCO, 2003). Regular teachers are not adequately trained to provide diversified instructional methods or to cope with the needs of diverse learners.

Inclusive education involves changes in attitudes, behaviour and ways of working, and has the potential to make an effective starting point to address the rights of learners in a range of cultures and contexts. As a teaching and learning delivery model, distance education is practiced in many parts of the world to provide study opportunities for those who cannot or do not wish to participate in classroom teaching. The expectation is that higher education institutions that facilitate distance learning will be able to create an inclusive teaching and learning environment that provides learners with the opportunity to advance develop and enrich themselves, both intellectually and materially.

Open and Distance Learning in Inclusive Education

The adaptation of study materials is one way of ensuring their inclusion to the ODL environment. Inclusion is the principle that all learners learn together, whenever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Inclusive settings like ODL institutions must meet all their needs. Open and Distance education is seen as a flexible and appropriately inclusive to deliver inclusive education. Technology could be used to support inclusion. The advent of technology and open and distance learning could go a long way in widening accessibility to education for the majority of children and or people with

disabilities, flexibly so that the learning process can go on. These groups may be able to access materials from home, which is seen as the safest, least expensive environment.

ODL experience needs to be inclusive and relevant to the needs of the learners with disabilities. ODL should have local provision that is available within a local area through drop-in. Learning Centers, Community-based Learning Centers, workplace Learning Centers or at home. This kind of platform would allow distance learning to take place for excluded groups as the technical element of learning is localized thus, making attendance for tutorial or technical guidance during a programme less of a barrier. In an inclusive environment the definition of ODL needs to take into consideration the characteristics of people with disabilities. The ODL institution must avoid placing them in a double danger from both the disability and the inaccessibility of the study material.

Challenges of Inclusive Education for Odl

The following are some of the challenges of inclusive education for ODL mode of study;

- An inclusive philosophy is concerned with developing inclusive values, shared among all stakeholders. The principles, derived within an inclusive institutional philosophy, guide decisions about policies and moment-to-moment practices.
- Inclusion must be central to the development process and permeate all policies, so that they provide a framework for enhancing the learning and participation of all stakeholders within the community of the institution.
- Policies related to behaviour management, assessment procedures, organisation of support, curriculum, professional development, etc. need to reflect the institution's responsibility, both for the teaching/learning development of all learners, and support for educators and the institution.
- Inclusive practices should also promote the creativity of educators with a view to improving their skills and knowledge, making space and time for sharing, supporting and participation.
- Barriers to learning are a new theory of knowledge that must be imposed on any framework of thinking that relates to teaching and learning. Barriers may be located within the learner, within the site of learning, within the education system and within the broader social, economic and political context.

Barriers in Adopting Inclusive Education

The barriers in adopting inclusive are:

- Negative attitudes to and stereotyping of difference
- An inflexible curriculum
- Inappropriate languages of learning and teaching
- Inappropriate communication

- Inaccessible and unsafe built environments
 - Inappropriate and inadequate support services
 - Inadequate policies and legislation
 - The non-recognition and non-involvement of parents
 - Inadequately and inappropriately trained education managers and educators
- Undeniably, early identification of barriers to learning should logically be followed by timely and appropriate support.

Ways to Overcome the Barriers in Adopting Inclusive Education in Developing Countries

India is being a developing country; the inclusive education has to be imparted effectively so as to reach the millennium goals without fail. The term ‘Developing Countries’ is not name happened or given by the others, it is developed by developing a sound educational opportunities to each and every one without any disparities in any aspect. It is strongly recommended that the Governments in Developing Countries should enact laws to give strong support to the policy of integration and the provision of other relevant services to individuals with disabilities in these countries. It is suggested that all higher education institutions in Developing Countries should be adequately equipped by the educational authorities to enable them provide appropriate training to prospective special needs teachers and specialist support staff. The governments should encourage selected firms in these countries to boost the production of educational equipment and materials to meet the needs of these institutions. More institutions of further education in these countries should be equipped and upgraded to offer programmes for the training of these professionals. In addition, the necessary facilities for them to work with should be provided in all the institutions serving students with special needs in these countries. The opportunities should be created for the teachers of students with special needs to participate and benefit from in-service training by the organization of workshops and seminars on a regular basis within the schools.

It is recommended that the relevant authorities in Developing Countries should consider strategies that could facilitate the planning and implementation of inclusive education that would address the inadequacies in special needs provision for people with disabilities in these countries that have been highlighted in this paper. The organizations of people with disabilities and relevant professional ones should intensify advocacy activities to ensure that these governments duly take the needs of individuals with special needs in these countries into consideration in policy formulation and legislative mandates.

Conclusion

In developing countries, the major constraint of the move toward inclusive approaches in education is attributed mainly to serious shortage of resources such as lack of schools or inadequate facilities, lack of teachers and/or shortage of qualified staff, lack of

Shanlax International Journal of Education

learning materials and absence of support (UNESCO, 2003). There is no need of reinforcing the fact that teacher education remains a very weak link with respect to equipping teachers to be prepared for an inclusive classroom environment. Regular teachers are not adequately trained to provide diversified instructional methods or to cope with the needs of diverse learners. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar (1989) recognized the importance of education in shaping the future and cautioned the under-privileged not to lose any opportunity to get that right, and said "We may forego material benefits, but we cannot forego our right and opportunities to reap the benefit of the highest education to the fullest extent." He put all his efforts to guarantee the educational opportunities without any discrimination to all the citizens of independent India. With the advent of all available technologies and the sound equipped man and material resources, we still have challenges to eradicate illiteracy throughout. In this context, the role of ODL is the best path to reach the learners not only in non-formal way and also by perceptive mode of education in all levels of execution and implementation of education productively.

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