Challenges and Opportunities for Inclusive Education of Persons with Disabilities

Varma Sujata Gajendrabhai.* & Dr. B. K. Saini**

Abstract

Drawing on data from previous research, this article focuses on the challenges and opportunities of Inclusive education of persons with disability. The purpose is to explore the situation of Inclusive education and examine factors affecting the effective implementation and the opportunities of practicing inclusive education. The concept of inclusive education is an idea or process that involves both disabled and abled children together in an environment that is free and safe. The concept furthermore includes teaching methods, positive attitudes, buildings, and facilities. The conclusion shows that a policy to embark on the implementation and practice of inclusive education, that is, including disabled children in the regular schools. However, there are some challenges that affect the inclusion of disabled children in mainstream schools. The research considered the negative attitudes of families and people towards disabled children. In addition to that, the importance of the teacher’s attitude towards inclusive education is accentuated because if teachers are not trained to handle the disabled children in the classroom they can develop a negative attitude towards them. Lack of facilities is another of the challenges for the implementation and practice of inclusive education. The article argues that families and communities need to change.

Key Words : Inclusive Education, Challenges, Opportunities, Attitude

* Research Scholar, Ph.D.(Education), Madhav University, Rajasthan.

** Professor, Education Department, Madhav University, Rajasthan.

1. Introduction

The inclusion of children with special needs in educational settings has become a primary service option since the adoption of the UNESCO’s Salamanca statement and framework for action of special needs education (UNESCO, 1994). Although inclusion may mean different things to different people, it is generally believed to mean the extent to which a school or community welcomes children with special needs as full members of the group and values them for the contribution which they make. The children actively belong to, are welcomed by
and participated in a mainstream school and community (Farrel, 2004). Thus, inclusive education is about presence, participation and achievement of all learners (Ainscow, 2005, Engelbrecht and Green, 2007).

Inclusive education means including children with disabilities in regular classrooms that have been designed for children without disabilities (Kugelmass, 2004). It is an educational practice based on the social premise of justice that advocates for equal access to educational opportunities for all children regardless of their physical, intellectual emotional or learning disability (Loreman et al, 2005).

Inclusive education extends the scope of the school so that it can include a greater diversity of children. Here, society is an inclusive community accepting people of varying abilities/disabilities, race, language or other attributes. The range of challenges confronting the school system while including children with diverse abilities and from diverse backgrounds have to be met by creating child centred pedagogy capable of successfully educating all children. It leads to the development of socials skills and better social interaction because learners are exposed to real environment in which they have to interact with other learners each one having unique characteristics, interests and abilities. The inevitable presence of differences among students means that schools needs to become more comfortable with building inclusive communities that value diversity. In Barton’s words, “difference is now to be viewed as a challenge and encouragement for people to question unfounded generalizations, prejudice and discrimination (Barton, 1997). So a reconstruction in school organization and curriculum is required so that the school becomes a supportive community to educate all children. This changing paradigm assumes a different set of beliefs and assumptions that demand different practices in schools (Carrington, 1999). Inclusive education is about listening to the voices in a school community and empowering all members to develop an approach to schooling that is committed to identifying and dismantling actual and potential sources of exclusion (Slee, 2003 a). Moreover, it is about a philosophy of acceptance where all people are valued and treated with respect (Carrington, 2004).

We first have to know about concept of inclusive education and then try to know about various challenges and opportunities for inclusive education of persons with disabilities.
2. Concept of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education means that all students attend and are welcomed by their neighbourhood 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.

Inclusive education is about ensuring access to quality education for all students by effectively meeting their diverse needs in a way that is responsive, accepting, respectful and supportive. Students participate in the education program in a common learning environment with support to diminish and remove barriers and obstacles that may lead to exclusion.

Inclusive education is carried out in a common learning environment; that is, an educational setting where students from different backgrounds and with different abilities learn together in an inclusive environment. Common learning environments are used for the majority of the students’ regular instruction hours and may include classrooms, libraries, gym, performance theatres, music rooms, cafeterias, playgrounds and the local community. A common learning environment is not a place where students with intellectual disabilities or other special needs learn in isolation from their peers.

Effective common learning environments:

- Enable each student to fully participate in the learning environment that is designed for all students and is shared with peers in the chosen educational setting;
- Provide a positive climate, promote a sense of belonging and ensure student progress toward appropriate personal, social, emotional and academic goals;
- Are responsive to individual learning needs by providing sufficient levels of support and applying student-centred teaching practices and principles.
- Common learning environment: an inclusive environment where instruction is designed to be delivered to students of mixed ability and with their peer group in the community school, while being responsive to their individual needs as a learner, and used for the majority of the students’ regular instruction hours.
3. Meaning of Challenge and Opportunity

According to Merriam Webster Dictionary, it defines that “The Challenge is something new and difficult which requires great effort and determination”.

According to Cambridge English Dictionary, it defines that “The Opportunity is an occasion or situation that makes it possible to do something that you want to do or have to do, or the possibility of doing something”.

4. Challenges for Inclusive Education

Implementing inclusive education requires considerable changes to organizations, practice, norms and more. As inclusive education is a process, it will be motivating and encouraging when all factors leading to its success have been taken into consideration and acted upon for its improvement (inclusive practice). That is, providing the necessary equipment and materials to support inclusive education. There are some factors that make implementing and the practice of inclusive education a challenge for both the government and the people in the country and therefore the disabled children as well. In this chapter, I will discuss some of these challenges.

4.1 Parents and Negative Attitudes in Society

People need to have good motives and intentions about the practice of inclusive education in both the schools and in society. Slee (2011) claims that people should have a good mindset and positive attitude towards inclusive education. As people develop positive attitudes towards inclusive education, implementing and practicing inclusive education becomes easier. In order for that, people need to know the importance of inclusive education. They need to be educated about it and the reasons why they need to develop good behaviour towards disabled children and send them to regular school to help them get a quality education (Slee, 2011). Educating the public will therefore, help to embrace and motivate children with disabilities to be in the regular schools and the society. If the public does not develop a positive attitude towards disabled children, thus raising awareness, the implementation and practice of the plan becomes a challenge.

Adopting a positive attitude towards disabilities begins in the family. As Obeng Asamoah (2016) stated, families especially the parents need to have a good mindset for their children
who are disabled. When family members develop a positive attitude towards their disabled children, they are more open to sending them to schools to get a quality education and its advantage. However, this may not be easy for some families when they find it difficult to show their children in public because people laugh at them (Tchintcharauli & Javakhishvili, 2017). This makes it difficult to let them go out of the home because they consider it a shame to give birth to such child. Therefore, it is important for authorities to identify these families and make them aware of inclusive education and its importance and encourage them to send their children to the schools despite the challenges they are facing in society. As stated in the Salamanca Statement, “a positive and good attitude from parents helps with school and social integration” (UNESCO, 1994, p. 37). This means that parents need to be supported to help children with disabilities by providing the necessary information that is, educating them on the importance of encouraging their disabled children and sending them to school.

In addition, the voice of parent needs to be heard. The Salamanca Statement supports the idea of parents being heard and has a say in how they want their children to be educated. All these promote inclusive education. The Salamanca Statement mentions that the governments should provide parental partnership with parents to contribute to the development and decision making to enhance the education of their disabled children (UNESCO, 1994). If parents are not given the chance to participate in their children’s education, they do not encourage their children to be in school and society which prevents inclusive education to be implemented and practiced.

If successful, these measures lead people in the society to respect and accept disabled children because they see how their families embrace and accept them to be part of the family and closer community. When families do not develop good behaviour and attitude towards disabled children, it becomes a challenge for the children to feel part of society and, moreover, people in the community develop a negative attitude towards them (Gadagbui, 2010). When families and the public are educated on the importance of including disabled children within the families, the society and schools, the negative perception formerly developed against them will turn into positive and good behaviour towards the disabled children. In view of this, many of them will be lead to school and this will encourage the government in building more facilities to support their learning and able children as well and making the necessary organizations in the various schools for disabled children not to feel discriminated from their peers (Ministry of Education, 2015).
Gadagbui (2010) wrote about parents taking their abled children out of the regular schools where disabled children are receiving education among them. Slee (2011) stated that some families believe that disabled children should not be in the same class with their children because it lowers their grades and learning performance. Not all families support the idea of disabled children in the same school and same classroom as their children because they believe their children will perform better without disabled children in the same classroom. This attitude seems to be prevalent in the society (Ghana Education Service, 2004). According to Ghana Education Service (2004), families and people in the society develop a negative attitude towards these special children which prevents said implementation and practice of inclusive education. I believe parents should embrace the idea at hand and encourage their children to share the classroom as well as ideas with disabled children and respect them as peers.

In consideration of this, the public and families need to develop good and positive behaviour towards disabled children for their inclusion in school to be effective which helps with the implementation and practice of inclusive education.

4.2 Teacher’s Negative Attitude

As it comes to discussing families and social attitude towards disabled children, it is important to consider the teachers. Obeng-Asamoah (2016) argues that teachers can develop a positive attitude towards children with special needs, however, when teachers are not trained to handle these children in regular or segregated schools, it becomes a challenge for them to handle and develop a positive attitude towards them (Agbenyega, 2007).

Inclusive education opens opportunities for disabled children and realizes their right to be educated in the regular schools (Kuyini, 2010). Therefore, it is significant for teachers and school leaders to be aware of what inclusive education is all about, which means, they need to be introduced to the concept. Introducing the concept means that teachers need to have teacher training in the Teacher Training Colleges (TTC) to equip them with the views and importance of inclusive education, thus, developing a positive attitude towards disabled children and gaining knowledge and skills on how to handle them (Agbenyeya, 2007; Kuyini, 2010). Teachers must also receive training in teaching approaches and styles suitable to teach all children.
The Teacher Training Colleges (TTC) need to introduce to and train both new and old teachers in inclusive education and practices. Teachers need to develop the knowledge and skills in handling and teaching these disabled children in mainstream schools. If teachers are not trained in managing all children in the classroom, it will be difficult for teachers to handle the teaching (Agbenyega, 2007). Teachers may not have a good and positive attitude towards the disabled children if they do not get an education on teaching approaches and relevant pedagogy to include them and learn ways to handle them in the classroom (Kuyini, 2010). Opoku, Aybenyega, Mprah, Mckenzie, and Badu (2017) argue that teachers need to be supported and trained to adopt different teaching techniques, strategies, styles and approaches to teach and support diverse students in the school and classroom.

As a result, this encourages and gets more children to attend schools which motivates and encourages parents to bring their children to school (Banks & Banks, 2010). As Kuyini and Boitumelo (2011) said, teachers contribute to the achievement of inclusive education and practices. Therefore, it is important to train them to develop positive attitudes towards disabled children which these attitudes support more successful inclusive programs for students. However, Hodkinson (2010) mentions that some of the teachers may have a different view of inclusion. He said some teachers will not support inclusive education when it relates to children with difficult behaviors. Some considered it necessary to exclude such children from mainstream schools.

For schools to be inclusive, they need to support disabled children and meet the needs of the teachers as well (Hodkinson, 2010). Agbenyega (2007) added that as teachers are trained and get the experience of working with children with special needs, they develop a positive attitude to teach them. However, from research done by Agbenyega (2007) in his discussion, he came across some teachers making complaints about inclusive education. They mentioned that they need support from principals, authorities and specialists in the schools to help them handle children with disabilities. It is important that they are provided with the expertise to aid them in the schools even though they get the training they need. Moreover, the teachers added that including disabled children in the regular classes affects the academic performance of their peers and the school’s academic success (Agbenyega, 2007). Nonetheless, it is important for them to understand that children should learn to develop themselves and that will eventually help develop the nation.
In conjunction with discussing teachers’ attitude and providing training for teachers, it will be good and great to explore ideas about facilities that support their training and contribute to the important development of a positive attitude towards children with special needs.

4.3 Lack of Facilities and Infrastructures

If teachers are to develop a positive attitude towards inclusive education, they must first be educated, trained and supported. The government needs to provide the various schools with the resources and materials to help with the practice and implementation of this program. Proper facilities and infrastructures need to be provided in the schools to encourage and motivate teachers to teach disabled children (Kuyini, 2010). Agbenyega (2007) added that it is important to provide the resources and facilities to offer opportunities for disabled children. This is part of the proper organization to help include disabled children into mainstream schools and make sure the facilities needed to improve their learning are provided in the school (Sharma, 2015).

Kuyini (2010) supports the idea of providing the necessary facilities for the implementation and practice of inclusive education to be effective. Similarly, Kuyini and Boitumelo (2011) added that it is necessary to provide more facilities for effective inclusion. They state that lack of these facilities and infrastructures lead teachers to develop a negative attitude towards children with special needs and teachers think these children need to be excluded. Lacking facilities and resources in school make teachers have limited knowledge and skills in handling these children. Kuyini and Boitumelo (2011) concluded that limited resources and facilities and lack of training for teachers act as a barrier to practicing and implementing inclusive education.

Furthermore, Alhassan (2014) mentions that teachers develop a negative attitude towards inclusion because of large class-size in many of the schools. In my experience from back home, there were around 40 to 50 students in a classroom and this makes it difficult for teachers to attend to all students, especially disabled ones. As there are many children in one classroom, it is difficult for the teacher to take care of all and this makes the practice of inclusive education a challenge. Therefore, it is important for the government to provide more facilities and support to accommodate fewer students in the classroom for teachers to handle all (Alhassan, 2014).
With this in mind, families, society and teachers must develop positive attitudes towards inclusive education. It is important to draw attention to the benefit and possible opportunities inclusive education brings. The next chapter will discuss the opportunities of inclusive education.

5. Opportunities for Inclusive Education

Even though there are some challenges of implementing and practicing inclusive education, there are opportunities as well. Educating children with disabilities in the various schools is an advantage for everyone (Mihai, 2017). This chapter will discuss some of these opportunities of inclusive education.

5.1 Building and Providing Facilities

Inclusive education has many advantages for children with disabilities as well as parents, schools, teachers and society. This leads the government to provide more facilities. As the government wants to implement and practice inclusive education, it builds more schools and provides more facilities which do not only benefit disabled children but everyone around them. Building more facilities encourages more children to be in schools because a lack of facilities becomes the barrier for many children who find themselves out of the school system (Obeng-Asamoah, 2016). This lack has led many children to drop out of schools when there are not sufficient facilities to accommodate them (Gadagbui, 2010). As more facilities are provided, it encourages more children to stay in schools and this also encourages teachers to develop a positive attitude towards children with disabilities (Alhassan, 2014). Creating more facilities reduces the number of students in a classroom to help the teacher have time to focus more on each student. The result is that when teachers get more time for all the children, they also have time to encourage their students to help one another in the classroom.

Furthermore, as the government builds or provides more facilities, it effectively reduces cost because it is more economical to build facilities that accommodate and benefit all children than building separate facilities for disabled children (ObengAsamoah, 2016). As the government reduces cost by providing facilities to benefit everyone, they can use the remaining money to help train more teachers and develop expertise to help the teachers handle and teach diverse students in the schools (Agbenyega, 2007). As teachers are trained, they get innovative ideas, techniques, teaching approaches and styles to teach disabled students. This develops teachers to be creative and innovative in their teaching strategies.
As more facilities are provided and teachers are trained, this encourages the implementation and practice of inclusive education to become effective. This then leads to the provision of appropriate teaching aids and equipment to support all children to learn which makes children’s needs and interests taken care of. Furthermore, it encourages more flexibility in the teaching methods and approaches by teachers (Gadagbui, 2010). This furthermore leads to positive attitude developed by teachers and children. Therefore, inclusive education encourages the government to provide more facilities and resources to support its implementation and practice.

5.2 Developing Positive Attitudes

Inclusive education puts both non-disabled and disabled children in the same school and classroom with teaching approaches that benefit all of them. The environment is free and safe. There are facilities to accommodate all children and this encourages everyone to develop positive attitudes towards disabled children. When teachers are educated, trained, and supported in inclusive practice, it helps to develop positive attitude and behaviour towards disabled children (Alhassan, 2014). This encourages teachers to teach and train their students to do the same. Banks and Banks (2010) argue that teachers need to apply teaching approaches that include children with disabilities which makes them respect and encourage their students to do the same. Gadagbui (2010) added that as children are encouraged to respect each other, they play, work, study and help one another when one is in a difficult situation or does not understand the subject being taught in the class. It brings about collaborative learning as they study together. This makes children with disabilities feel accepted by their peers and encourages children to stand up for one another to prevent any discrimination among them (Obeng-Asamoah, 2016). They develop mutual respect.

Moreover, families and society develop positive attitudes as well when they have knowledge about inclusive education. It promotes a union between the school and parents, making teachers and parents help each other in helping disabled children within schools. This encourages parents who want to withdraw their children from schools to reconsider their choices (Gadagbui, 2010). As argued by Slee (2011), everyone should be able to understand the importance of inclusive education which leads people to embrace and support all children with disabilities in the schools and communities. This leads people in the communities to help them do their homework as well as other activities (UNESCO, 1994). As the children are supported and encouraged, it brings them closer to people which helps us all to develop a
positive attitude and good behavior towards them (Agbenyega, 2007) and this leads them to participate in the society as well. Inclusive education leads people to develop positive attitudes towards disabilities.

5.3 Developing Themselves and the Society

Developing good behavior towards children with disabilities encourages them to participate in the school. It helps them to get a proper quality education to develop themselves. Inclusive education promotes quality education and social development for disabled children (Mihai, 2017). As they develop themselves, it leads them to participate in activities and work to develop the society and nation. As they better situate themselves in society, it generates people to accept, appreciate and respect them. This leads to the development of the nation because it encourages them to do more for their country. As stated by Ametepee and Anastasiou (2015), disabled children had the chance to do life skills activities such as weaving baskets for trading in the country which helps to generate incomes for them and the government and the government uses the income to develop the nation. Mihai (2017) stated that it brings advantages in respect of the evolution of the society, on the labor market, more income to generate from the work they do as well as other children to develop the country.

Furthermore, as disabled children are developing themselves, acceptance, appreciation and respect from people around them is generated and this helps to bring tolerance and harmony among people in the country. This helps to develop the country by creating a better future for today’s generation and the generations to come and to a greater degree, include everyone whether disabled or not to live together in society (Mihai, 2017). It increases social inclusion, builds relationships, encourages networking and gives opportunities for people to interact among themselves as with other communities and nations (Gadagbui, 2010), thus, preparing all for inclusive life and society in the future. Therefore, it is important to implement and practice inclusive education for disabled children to develop themselves and their country. Each and everyone’s contributions help in the development of the country.

6. Conclusion

As discussed, there are factors that prevent the inclusion of disabled children into the schools. The research considered the negative attitudes of families and people in the society that sometimes prevent these children from going to inclusive schools. As Obeng Asamoah (2016) said, people need to have a positive attitude and good behavior towards these
children for them to find themselves in the society and the schools. For people, families and teachers to develop this attitude, they need to be informed about inclusive education and how important it is for them to embrace disabled children and encourage them to stay in schools. Another factor mentioned was the teacher’s attitude because if teachers are not trained in how to handle disabled children in the classroom, they may develop a negative attitude towards them. Moreover, they need to be trained in teaching approaches, strategies, and styles as well as classroom management to include all children in their teaching methods. As teachers are trained and supported with inclusion in mind, they develop a positive attitude and good behaviour towards these children which makes inclusive education to be effective. Furthermore, lack of facilities was another challenge for the implementation and practice of inclusive education. If facilities are not provided to support teachers and the disabled children, it becomes a challenge for both teachers and children. This does not encourage the parents to send their children to schools and makes some of them drop outs of the education system.

Despite the challenges, there are also great opportunities in the practice of inclusive education. Inclusive education creates many opportunities which include making the government builds or provides more facilities to benefit simultaneously disabled and nondisabled children, teachers, parents and society in general. Building and providing more facilities encourage more children to attend school and helps prevent children from dropping out. As more facilities are provided, it engages more teachers to be trained and supported. Parents are encouraged to send their children to schools as they can rely on that facilities are being provided to support their children’s learning and safety in the school. Last but not the least; this encourages collaborative work between parents and teachers. As parents support their children to attend school, society embraces them and they get the chance to obtain an education in order to develop themselves and therefore their society.

7. References


