

## **SPECIALIZATION: A BOON OR CURSE FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN INDIA?**

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### **Abstract**

The research findings of different researchers and scholars in the area of Inclusive Education are the evidence of the fact that India still has a long way to go to provide high quality Inclusive Education for the children with disabilities. They have mentioned about numerous challenges and difficulties in the system of Inclusive education. One important issue that is often dealt with much emphasis is specialization. Since Inclusive Education refers to the inclusion of all kind of children, namely the gifted, physically and mentally disable with the normal children in the same education system, the term 'special' becomes very significant. It is very interesting that the approach of Inclusive education is to reject the use of 'special' schools or classrooms for educating students with 'special' educational needs. The noble motto is not to separate students with disabilities from students without disabilities. Too much specialization in the education system, such as schools for the deaf and dumb, schools for blind, special schools for the mentally retarded is now considered derogatory for the disable children by the educationists, scholars, social activists and others. But the rejection of special schools does not mean the rejection of special techniques and training. The researcher in this paper makes an attempt to study the diverse specializations both in the case of schools and techniques and trainings for teaching the students of special educational needs and also tries to analyze why specialization becomes a boon and sometimes a curse as well.

**Key Words:** *Inclusive Education, Specialization, India, Boon, Curse, Technique, Training*

### **Introduction:**

The Canadian humourist Stephen Leacock in his essay 'Further Progress in Specialization' satirizes the tendency of narrow specialization of modern man. Though he chose the medical world for his humorous story to satirize the excessive tendency of specialization of modern man, the issue he deals with is applicable to the field of education also. In this paper the term 'specialization' is used in two senses. The first one is to mean the separate system of education for children with disabilities outside the mainstream education system. So, here specialization

means segregation. And the other is to mean the special techniques and trainings needed for inclusive approach to education.

### **Models of special education:**

As per the United Nations Convention on People with Disabilities, International community is becoming increasingly aware of the different models of special education. There are three basic models of special education, namely segregated, integrated and inclusive special education. Wikipedia defines that inclusive education is an approach to educating students with special educational needs. Under the inclusion model, students with special needs spend most or all of their time with non-special needs students. Inclusion rejects the use of special schools or classrooms to separate students with disabilities from students without disabilities. All segments from human rights activists, nonprofit organizations, social welfare departments, governmental organizations, governments and international agencies in favour of the right to education prefer inclusive education as the most beneficial type of education for disable children. And segregated model is gradually losing its previous importance. The convention started with a purpose *“to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities and to promote respect for their inherent dignity.”* (**Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol, United Nations, Article 1**). In Article 24 of United Nations Convention on People with Disabilities, United Nations resolves that *“State Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, State Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels ...”*

### **A brief look at history:**

The inclusive approach to education is not new in India. During the Vedic era children with and without disabilities were sent to ‘Gurukuls’. At that time all children were taught together under a shady tree or gurukul (school). There was no concept of special schools to cater to the disable children. Students found incapable of academic learning were given opportunity to learn other non-academic activities. They used to learn activities useful for daily life, such as tending cattle, gardening, housekeeping etc. These non-academic works were not treated as something disparaging. Inclusive education is actually an approach which takes into account unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs of all children (Hemlata, 2013). In India specialization in schools, better to say segregation in education system can be traced back to 1880s. The first special school was established in 1883 in Bombay for the deaf and then a school for the Blind was established in 1887 at Amritsar. Gradually the number of these segregated schools increased. In 1947, the number of schools for blind increased to 32, for the deaf 30 and for mentally retarded 3. The number of special schools rose to around 3000 by the year 2000 (**Department of Education, 2000, Found in Sanjeev and Kumar, 2007**). The Govt. of India in

the 1960s designed a scheme of preparing teachers for teaching children with visual impairment. Similar schemes for teaching children with other disabilities were gradually developed (**Found in Sanjeev and Kumar, 2007**). It is clear that segregated education takes place in the form of special schools created specifically for the education of students with disabilities.

### **Special school vs. mainstream school:**

There was sufficient reasonable and positive thought behind starting special schools separate from the mainstream schools for students with special needs. For example, separate schools for blinds, separate schools for deaf and dumb and mentally retarded etc. These schools give specialized treatment and education for the benefit of those who are in need of it. So, what is bad in separating students who need separate treatment in the method and technique of teaching and learning? In mainstream schools there is no surety of getting supportive or context-fitted situations which are very important for learning. It is very much evident that as special schools are exclusively for children with special needs, those would be well-suited to the children with special needs than the regular schools. Since these schools are specially designed for children with physical and mental disabilities, it is quite natural that those would provide special equipments and techniques to prepare them for the future. Different kind of adjustments needed for the special students in the part of routine, span of each class, total school hours, curriculum, and giving time off is not possible in the normal mainstream schools. So, getting the right education in mainstream schools becomes a challenging experience for them. In special schools they get the education they deserve. Where in mainstream schools disable children are easily exposed to the possibility of being attacked and harmed either physically and emotionally in special schools they feel safe. They are easily tormented and intimidated by their peers. They are so vulnerable to torture and negligence that it may take a toll on their health directly. Teachers in conventional schools may not be sympathetic enough as their mind set up is not like the teachers in special schools. Teachers who are in special needs schools spend much of their time working and teaching the disable children. Naturally they become more tolerant and sympathetic and expert towards the disable which is missing in general schools. What is more the special needs schools create a conducive atmosphere to arrange everything necessary for the disable children. If taught separately students with dyslexia or learning difficulties, or visual or hearing impaired can build up a positive identity in relation to their learning or neurological difference, and thus can reap academic and social benefits from separate classrooms. So, apparently this specialization in the education system or in other words educating disable children separately in special schools is working as a boon for those disable children and their parents. So, where lie the needs of inclusive education?

### **Negative attitude towards inclusive education:**

Let us try to find out the answer of the question asked. In the background paper (2009) prepared for Education for All global monitoring report 2010 Dr. Nidhi Singal says that when the disable children's lives intersect with factors such as caste, gender, religion, poverty their lives are largely marked by poverty and marginalization from mainstream social processes. A recent study

by the World Bank (2007) says that disabled children are more likely to be out of school than children belonging to scheduled castes or scheduled tribes (SC or ST) (Found in Singal, 2009). Moreover, when children with disability do attend school they rarely progress beyond the primary level, leading ultimately to lower employment chances and long-term income poverty. So, the poverty-stricken or marginalized parents of children with disabilities not only remain outside the sphere of mainstream schools but special schools as well. Sometimes, attitudes are the major barrier to non-discrimination in education for people with disabilities. In a study conducted by Daniela Dimitrova-Radojichich and Natasha Chichevska-Jovanova it is found that *"attitudes have enormous influence on inclusion of children with disabilities in regular school"*. Parents of disabled children usually do not believe in the proficiency of the education system running in the mainstream schools. *"Parents especially need to get confidence in the capacity of the schools to understand and effectively educate their children with or without disabilities"* (Favazza and Odom, 1997, p.63). Over anxious parents of non-disabled children and insensitive school management is mainly responsible for the exclusion of estimated 30 million children with physical and mental disabilities from mainstream education. Parents fear that the curriculum in the inclusive system must have been simplified for the children with disabilities. So, there would be no challenge for their children to learn in an inclusive classroom and they would not get the required one to one attention and interaction. They believe that their non-disabled children's academic achievement would be higher if they are taught in non-inclusive classroom.

### **Boon (advantage) or curse (disadvantage):**

Even after all these benefits and advantages it has always been a matter of argument whether special needs schools are the best places for children with disabilities. If this specialization in the name of special need schools would have been good enough for them, inclusive approach to education system would not have started. With the passing time it is realized that only a limited number of children who belong to financially stable and urban families can take advantage of these specializations. A large number of poor and rural disabled children are remaining outside the sphere of segregated special schools. *"But most important of all, these special schools segregated children with special needs (CWSN) from the mainstream, thus developing a specific disability culture."* (Sanjeev & Kumar). In the special schools they get special care but these special treatments are becoming great barriers for their successful future life. In real life, in the world of employment, in the sphere of community life and in the portion of civic participation they are lagging behind. School is the place where a child's relationship with the world first starts. Getting educated at special schools has direct impact on their social relationship and synergy. Though said in the context of general advance of science Marx and Engels' opinion is worth mentioning here. They are also of the opinion that narrow specialization hinders the general advance of science. And no one can deny that the whole education system is scientific. (Bukharin, N.I., Deborin, A.M., Uranovsky, Y.M., Vavilov, S.I., Komarov, V.L., & Tiumeniev, A.I et al translated by Ralph Fox, 1935, reprint 2013, n.p). There is no doubt that specialization in schools for educating children with disabilities is one form of segregation. Loreman opines that *"If one truly values children with disabilities and recognizes*

*their inherent strength and capacities while acknowledging that all children are different in some way, then the justification for segregation becomes weaker” (Loreman, 2009, p107).* Actually the supporters of segregated education believe that the inclusive approach to education is based on the principle of social justice only, it is not pedagogically sound enough. But different studies in this field have proved that inclusive education is a more effective approach for children with disabilities and without disabilities. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in 1994 clearly identified that inclusive education is the most effective way of imparting education to disabled children. According to UNESCO (2009) “... an ‘inclusive’ education system can only be created if ordinary schools become more inclusive, in other words, if they become better at educating all children in their communities (p.8) (ARACY, 2013)”. Inclusive education is undoubtedly a very challenging task for the educators and educational system as it demands a completely different approach towards teaching and learning. The logical basis furnished by Loreman (2009) in his book *Respecting childhood* provides the ground for inclusive education. The chapters in his book figure out “*as to why children are viewed, treated and educated in the way they are in modern society*”. He presents both a negative and positive image of children in society. In *Respecting childhood* he promotes inclusive education (Loreman, 2009) by appreciating the value of the basic necessities of life, the present and future of the children, their enjoyment and relationship with others, their contribution to family and society and their individuality and diversity and finally their abilities and capacities.

### **Status of inclusive education in India:**

It is not that segregated schools or special need schools are in practice in developing countries like India only. A good portion of developed countries, such as Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States and Western and Eastern Europe are in practice of segregated schools as well. There are a lot of arguments made in favour of special schools and classrooms. Special schools have provision for imparting education by specially trained teachers or experts. As the classes in segregated schools are relatively small, their needs will be better met there than the regular classrooms. It is not only advantageous for disabled children but for regular children without disabilities. Teachers in regular classes will get more time to teach normal children with less disruption. But the scenario is not same for a country like India.

The status of inclusive education in India is clearly portraying the dearth of acceptance of inclusive education among the common mass. Parents of disabled children are not only in apprehension; parents of children without disabilities are equally bothered about the idea of inclusive education. They are afraid whether they are being able to provide best ever education to their children in inclusive education. The picture is clear in the reports of different national and international agencies. According to the report of UNICEF on the Status of Disability in India there are around 30 million disabled children in India suffering from different kind of disabilities. The sixth All-India Educational Survey report of NCERT, 1998 says that out of 200 million school-aged children 20 million are in special needs of education. What is more the national

average for gross enrolment in school is over 90 percent, less than five percent disable children are in schools. Realizing the scenario it can be easily assumed why the global movement led by UNESCO to meet the learning needs of all children by the year 2015 remains unrealized. According to the EFA Global Monitoring Report of 2015, *“Unfortunately, the target is still far from being met. Despite an increase in the global primary adjusted net enrolment ratio from 84% in 1999 to 91% in 2007, the indicator has since stagnated.”* (EFA Global Monitoring Report of 2015.)

### **Understanding inclusive Education:**

Inclusive education is actually a very controversial term. Inclusive education is useful only when executed appropriately. Lack of proper conception misguides people about the idea of inclusive education. Disable children are subject to discrimination everywhere. Special schools themselves in a way are the greatest evidence of social discrimination. The sense is like as you are different (disable) you are bound to be segregated. Len Barton in his professorial lecture titled ‘Inclusive education and teacher education’ at the Institute of Education, University of London viewed that *“inclusive education is not an end in itself but a means to an end. It is also about contributing to the realization of an inclusive society with the demand for a rights approach as a central component of policy making. This position has been informed by insights and ideas derived from disability studies”* The problem aroused because the idea of inclusion is conceived as *“assimilation or accommodation of individuals into an essentially unchanged system of educational provision and practice”* (Barton, 2003). Inclusive education system would be a curse for those disable children who would be removed from a special school to inclusive school just for the sake of removal from one set to another only. Then it would just be an extension of their former segregated experience. Barton views that *“inclusive education is not about the reform of special education, nor is it a sub-specialism of special education. Inclusive education is about why, how, when, where and the consequences of educating all learners”* (Barton, 2003). The irrelevant, discriminatory and exclusionary features of the current education policy are the main reason of the parents disinterest towards inclusive education.

### **Preparing for Inclusive education:**

India is walking at the right path now. It has come a long way from segregation to inclusion. A lot of policies and acts have been passed in the parliament but the problem lies somewhere else. To achieve its pre-set goals India no more needs ‘special schools’. According to a report published by NCERT, 2014 *“Now with the Right to Education Act in place, it has become imperative for most children with special needs to be mainstreamed, and not kept in ghettos of ‘special schools’”*. What is most necessary is the preparation. There are a lot of challenges teachers are facing in the inclusive approach. So, the successful inclusion practices in an inclusive classroom are the need of the hour. The most important need is to shift the idea of

children with special needs installing into mainstream classrooms to mainstream classrooms accommodating the needs of all children including the disable. There are heterogeneous problems and challenges involved in inclusive education. So, the policy makers, researchers and economists and educators are constantly trying to make better policies, suggestions, ideas, techniques, strategies and practices to bring expected changes in the system. In the European Hearing in Portugal of the European Agency for Development in special needs Education 2012, students with disabilities affirmed that they see a lot of benefit in inclusive education; they acquire more social skills; live more experiences; learn about how to manage in the real world; they feel the need to interact with friends with and without special needs. **(Retrieved from [www.ibe.unesco.org](http://www.ibe.unesco.org)>presentations)**. The above example is an evidence that the concept of inclusive education is not only based on social justice and equity but also on sound pedagogy. According to EFA Global Monitoring Report of 2015 "*New education targets must be specific, relevant and measurable. Marginalized and disadvantaged groups, hardest to reach and still not enjoying their right to education, must be a priority.*"

## **Conclusion:**

Seeing the scenario and studying the national and international reports it is quite clear that though inclusive education is not successful in India, it is in no way a curse for the children with disabilities. It is a positive sign that realizing the basic human right Indian society has come a long way from fear, negligence, pity & sympathy towards empathy for the foundation of a more just and equal society. Segregated schools or special schools are definitely not the best places for children with special needs (CWSN). So far teachers are being trained to teach children with special need in special schools only, for example UGCs Teacher Preparation in Special Education or TEPSE Scheme. It is the need of the hour to increase awareness and change our attitude, create trained Professionals through special Pre-Service Training and In-Service Training and Professional Development and thus building on existing human resources. The Inclusive Education Clause in the RTE Act 2012 is an important step towards inclusive education. When both children with and without disabilities share the same classroom they experience both the similarities and differences of people in the real world and they learn to appreciate diversity. So, there is no scope of any delusion that special techniques, special trainings within the sphere of inclusive education are desirable not the special schools. It is truly said by Alur "*Inclusive education is a guaranteed long term investment with excellent returns but a very high premium that we all have to contribute towards in the short-term*" (Found in <http://righttoeducation.in/media/news/2014/10/14/children-learn-better-with-inclusive-education>). It is a high time for all stakeholders of education and the society as well to strive to improve the status of inclusive education within their respective spheres of influence.

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