

Inclusive Education in Punjab: Challenges and Way Forward

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Abstract

The study was carried out to explore (i) the challenges faced by Punjab Government in implementing Inclusive Education; (ii) to what extent Punjab Government has been successful in bringing parity in education system by employing inclusive education. Relevant literature and articles of renowned scholars were studied. Structured interviews with inclusive education experts and concerned professionals were carried out. Result reveals that a number of initiatives were taken by Punjab Government but challenges are proportionately much grave hindering its effective implementation. It is recommended that the Department of Special Education should upscale its implementing strategy and advocacy needs in line with the provisions of the national education policy so as to develop a road map for bringing inclusive education into the education system. Required instructional material should be provided within the schools. If schools are not equipped with requisite material, teachers would not be able to perform their duty properly. A meaningful coordination between general and special education can bring positive results in terms of planning and implementing inclusive education in a time bound strategic framework. General and Special education Departments need to have to actively undertake a joint review of the current curriculum and collaborate with relevant university departments in this arduous task.

Keywords: Inclusive education, government of Punjab, special education, challenges

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Introduction

Inclusive education is built on the concept that all learners get quality education that meets basic learning needs and develops their full potential. Inclusive education concentrates on susceptible and downgraded strata of society so that every individual could be educated. The key objective of inclusive education is to eradicate all forms of discrimination, promote social cohesion and nurture nationwide camaraderie to shape an inclusive and plural society. Although it is constitutional obligations to provide equal education to all citizens yet being a developing country, there is a sizeable population with disability in Pakistan which is facing discrimination and exclusivity in educational system. Implementing the concept of Inclusive Education is therefore, a panacea to provide education to all. National Policy of Persons with disabilities, 2002 was a major break through which addressed the national and international commitment to lay down a plan of action for initiating inclusive education in Pakistan.

International community has made laudable efforts to spot this right across the world through a convention and different declarations. World community adopted a Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD). CRPD article 24 therefore, provides that general education system should principally include Persons with Disabilities (PWD) as they cannot be ghettoized and denied free and compulsory, primary education owing to their disability. Pakistan, being a signatory and endorsee to the Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) is therefore, obliged to implement Inclusive Education in its educational institutions as the benefits of inclusion are well-expressed. Inclusive Education covers all ethical, social, economic and legal dimensions to shape up human personality of physically and mentally challenged children, if we have a closer look at CRPD and its protocols. Being a signatory of UNCRPD Pakistan is fully responsible to achieve its goals. Punjab Government responsible to cater for educational needs of 62% of the total population with sizeable number of children with disability has to meet the challenges that may hinder full and effective implementation of the UN Convention on the right of persons with disability related to inclusive education in terms of implementing Article 24 of UNCRPD. Therefore, it is pertinent to examine as to what extent

Punjab Government have been successful in its targets and what should be its future implementation frame work to overcome these challenges.

The Conceptual Dimensions of Inclusive Education: It is different from concept of integration and mainstreaming, which deals with disability and special educational needs and is more fretful about accommodation. Contrarily, inclusion addresses the child's right to share the same classroom. The responsibility of school is to accept the child with disability. Inclusion rejects the idea of special schools and classrooms. Inclusion provides skills to the student with disability which they can use in and out of the classroom. Inclusive Education ensures that all children contribute to regular schools and classroom learning activities to make them socially acceptable with their classmates for whom adequate resources should be committed and teachers and support staff be trained.

Approaches to Implementation of Inclusive Education: Societal and Education System: Collaboration among government agencies, non-government organizations educators, parents, peers, other school personnel, and community agency to bring about change at all levels of society to suitably create welcoming environment where dedicated teachers should inculcate skills in students with disability enabling them to enter into work force (Dyson & Millward, 2003).

School Level: In order to determine the extent to which schools facilitate inclusion, two school-level themes sprinted through these studies: the importance of school culture exhibiting the values and attitudes possessed by the school staff and leadership and decision-making of the heads of school (Bates, 2013).

Classroom Level: Inclusive education focused on every detail of class room and students concerns and their diversity. Inclusive education does not only deal with one agenda for students with disability and separate programme for other student but it collectively deals with all students. It provides adoption of student-centric tutoring, a distinctive way of curriculum-centered pedagogy and ensures teamwork among regular class teachers, experts including specialist teachers, teaching assistants, therapists, and parents (Mitchell, 2010).

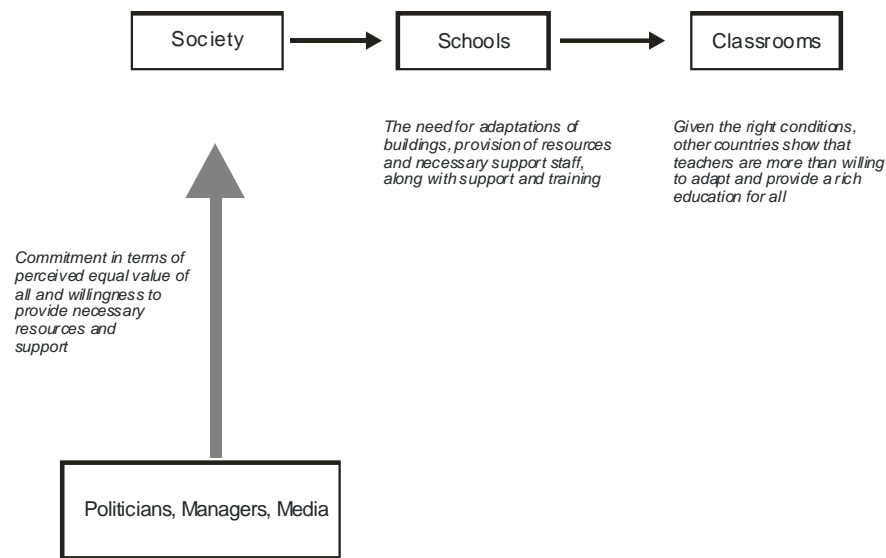


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Inclusive Education in Punjab: An Overview

The Special Education Department has collaborated with international partners like UNESCO to popularize the concept and endeavored to highlight the significance of Inclusive Education in Pakistan and made an effort to discuss the policy paradigm to achieve a clear vision of a result-oriented initiative in a three days seminar held in February, 2012. Other international partners like DIFID, British council, INGOs and NGOs also sent their delegations. It was stressed in the seminar that children with disabilities are routinely denied access to health, education and social services. They are often excluded from opportunities to participate in their communities, and are more vulnerable to violence and abuse. UNESCO assured it's commitment for working to overcome the barriers that stand between children with disabilities and the full realization of their rights by highlighting the need for a shift in policies and programmes so that education institutions become more conducive to persons with disabilities.

Punjab government has adopted a policy framework of inclusive education system for the special children of mild to moderate physical disabilities that special children will get education in the general educational schools with the ordinary students in various cities of the Punjab where infrastructure and quality education are offered. This initiative was based on the understanding that sense of deprivation can be alleviated in children of moderate and mild disability including polio affected limbs, partial impairment of vision and hearing if they would be able to get education in main stream environment. To cater this target Public sector schools with skillful teachers and good infrastructure was selected. Primary and middle schools were selected and teacher trainings were also provided in special education department, where special education teacher will give training to general education teacher. The Department pledged that provision of cost free education, lodging and boarding, cost free pick and drop facility packets of milk on weekly basis and a stipend of Rs. 800. It has also built recreational parks meant for the special children only. Proposal is underway to identify special children of school going age at village and mohallah level for their placement in inclusive set up.

The concept of Inclusive education in Pakistan is comparatively nascent born. It was popularized with joint efforts of Ministry of Social Welfare, Special Education, UNESCO and UNICEF Regional Office of South Asia. Article 24 of UNCRPD clearly stipulates the course of action for implementation of inclusive education. Pakistan being underdeveloped country with current literacy rate of 58% and province of Punjab with 62% literacy rate (Pakistan Economic Survey, 2015-16) has to work hard for inclusion of marginalized segment of persons with disabilities. Hence, there is a strong need to identify the challenges faced by Punjab Government in implementation of Inclusive Education and design future course.

Inclusion improves the quality of life of students with and without disabilities and they learn to cope with differences. Inclusive Education in most populated province of Punjab needs awareness and clear understanding of the concept for true implementation at grass root level in marginalized communities. General public lacks understanding of inclusive education and there is lot of discrimination seen in Punjab. Mostly children dislike and do not accept their fellow physically challenged children who need care and affection in an inclusive milieu. Generally teachers are also not motivated enough to attend the needs of physically and mentally challenged students in class room environment which Article 24 of CRPD demands from them. Punjab Government has

taken initiative to highlight the significance of Inclusive Education in Punjab and faced many challenges in its effective implementations. Thus, this study has been conducted to analyze challenges faced by Government of the Punjab in implementation of inclusive education in Punjab and how effective strategies could work as way forward. The objectives of the study were: (i) to identify the steps taken by Punjab government to implement Inclusive Education; (ii) to explore the challenges faced by the Government stakeholders in implementing Article 24 of UNCRPD in Punjab; and (iii) to suggest way forward for effective implementation of Inclusive Education.

Methodology

The study was conducted on the Qualitative paradigm of research. Documents related with the implementation of Inclusive education in Punjab were reviewed on the initial plans and the process of implementation.

The data was collected through purposive sampling to identify the challenges faced by stakeholders of the system. Structured interviews were carried out with the inclusive education experts and concerned Government functionaries. The aim of selecting this instrument was to get in-depth understanding of the issue. The purpose was to identify challenges that could hinder the effective implementation of inclusive Education in Punjab. Structured interviews were based on some main challenges i.e., teachers and parental attitude, physical barrier, curriculum, Socio economic factors, inadequate funding, improper policies and low awareness level of high authorities as barriers in implementation of inclusive education. In addition, questions were formulated about the way forward. The instrument was pre-tested and got vetted by the experts of the field to examine its reliability and validity.

Results

A. Punjab Government's Initiatives for Inclusive Education

The following key initiatives were identified during the interview and review of related documents with the sample population:

1. In February 2012 the Special Education Department of Punjab held a seminar in collaboration with UNESCO with a purpose to popularize the concept of Inclusive Education

2. Punjab Government launched a pilot project (Punjab Inclusive Education Project) in Bahawalpur and Muzaffargarh Districts with a cost of Rs. 188.235million during the financial year 2015-2016. The major components of projects include identification of potential children, screening & placement in schools, monitoring & retaining of enrolled children, teachers' training, enhancing school infrastructure, provision of assistive devices and strengthening of Tehsil level Special Education Centers. On the basis of results of pilot Project, it will be extended to 09 other districts (D. G. Khan, Rajanpur, Layyah, Bahawalnagr, Rahim Yar Khan, Lodhran, Bhakkar, Pakpattan and Chiniot).
3. Inclusive Voucher Programme has been initiated in PEF Partner Schools in 07 districts (Multan, Vehari, Lahore and 04 districts of Rawalpindi Division) from 2015-16 to 2017-18 with a cost of Rs. 191.900 million for identification and screening, offering additional voucher (Over and above the existing one), Provision of assistive devices, teachers' training and provision of enabling infrastructure.
4. Inclusive Education is an integral component of all teacher training programmes at DSD and Special Education Department's Training Centers but the training modules should be realigned with the international practices.
5. A CRPD cell has been established in the Special Education Department to serve as a Provincial Resource Centre for information relating to the CRPD. Further, the Cell was given the responsibility to coordinate and monitor implementation of activities pertaining to the convention and generate periodic progress reports.
6. Realizing the necessity of disability-wise data bank of special children in the Province, the Department of Special Education felt that a survey / mapping of special / out of school children may be carried out for proper decision making.
7. Punjab Resource Management Programme (PRMP) had also been allowed by the Chief Minister to include the Special Education Sector in the Punjab Capacity Building Programme (PCBP). Doing this was in consonance with the CRPD's mandate.
8. For implementation of Inclusive Education, the Special Education Department had formulated training modules and Training Programmes for Special Education Teachers. These training programmes were successfully carried out at Government In-Service Training College for the Teachers of Disabled Children, Lahore.

9. Special Education Department is working on the insertion of a focused module of Inclusive Education in 4 Years Bachelor of Education (B. Ed) Degree Programme.
10. For implementation of Inclusive Education Programme, NGOs like Amin Maktab, Punjab Education Foundation (PEF), Danish Schools, Punjab Welfare Trust for the Disabled (PWTD) were picked up with a view to initiating a process of phased implementation. The Directorate of Staff Development in consultation with Special Education Department has devised curriculum and modules for the training of Teachers for Inclusive set-up. This effort was undertaken in collaboration with the Sight Savers International (UK). Organizations with experience of training teachers for Inclusive Education, like Rising Sun, Beacon house school system and Bloomfield Hall had also supported training ventures by sending their Resource Persons.

B. Challenges in Implementation of Inclusive Education

Ensuring provision of equal educational opportunities is a global challenge and every country, either developed or under developed, is facing this challenge. Inclusive education is a corner stone of educational policy and has become an international obligation. Pakistan, being an under developed country has to undertake this task given the resource constraints and baffled social behavior towards education especially that of girls and poor state of education in the country. Not to talk of special education schools or institutes, the prevailing conditions of about 54670 general education schools portray a pathetic picture. The conditions of a fewer 259 special education schools or centers are even worse for the education of children with special needs. Further there are no worth mentioning training institutes except DSD in Lahore which has recently developed a module on inclusive education in collaboration with Special Education Department. This study suggests that despite persistent efforts of Government of Punjab implementation of inclusive education is faced with many challenges in Punjab. Those are:

1. Owing to unmindful of fruitful benefits of inclusion institutional, negligence prevails at all level which has hindered the way of inclusion.
2. Resource constraints is main reason of inadequate facilities at school level, lack of teachers, and qualified staff, non-availability of learning materials and support. The inadequacy of resources to meet the basic needs in education is a universal issue. According to an estimate, the goal of achieving education for all will require

additional financial support by countries and donors of about US\$ 8 billion per year.

3. There is deficiency in policy initiative at administrative level. Administration lacks expertise to implement inclusive education. The right to an inclusive education has been muddled with the simple right to an education for a child with disability, which has led policymakers to support separate and specialized schools in the name of inclusive education.
4. Curriculum evaluation and standardization process block flexibility to cater for the needs of the children with disability in normal school. Unfortunately there is acute shortage of experts who have ability to adapt curriculum and instructions according to special needs of the students. No effort has surfaced so far to make up this shortage.
5. Teacher training is one of the major constraints. Inclusive education has been totally omitted from Federal Government's mega projects. Teachers' training institutes also could not highlight this need to relevant forum for policy decisions on budget allocation. In this way inclusive education at grass root level has never been taken seriously by policy makers.
6. Admission policies of ordinary schools and special schools have also failed to create room and flexibility for inclusive education.
7. Media couldn't play its role in promoting the cause of inclusive education. It couldn't mobilize the stake holders of inclusive education.
8. The biggest challenge for inclusive education in Pakistan is its ownership. The Government of Pakistan, in spite of all good intentions, is still reluctant to place inclusive education on a priority list as concrete steps could not be taken to make the inclusive education a national agenda item.

Discussion

Evidently, adequate resources to finance inclusive education agenda to materialize this globally recognized concept at all levels in society would be required to create an inclusive society: free from all discriminatory ills. This would require support from Government as well as community. Professionally designed well thought out plans focusing on special needs children with excellent tutoring and peer support are also essential for class room administration and inclusion. More so, Inclusive friendly policy intervention is required for effective

implementation of Article 24 of the UNCRPD. Punjab Government should take initiatives on this aspect and provide a comprehensive Special Education Policy to fulfill the international commitment of Inclusive Education at this age of globalization.

Nevertheless, the challenges which have obstructed effective implementation of inclusive education must be addressed assigning priority to each. Real challenge of inclusive education is to promote inclusive ideology which could change public perception about inclusive education to create inclusive society. Among many important challenges, parents and teachers' negative attitude are main challenges because they both are important stake holders of the education system. So, their attitudinal change is required. Similarly, the high expense of instructional material of inclusive education and low budget allocations are also deterring the inclusive education. Therefore, a well thought out public policy indicating a phased implementation plan with adequate funding for inclusive education is needed. Media and civil society should also come forward to play its role for promotion of inclusive education.

Recommendations

The following strategies and way forward are suggested:

The Department of Special Education should redefine its strategy with its advocacy needs aligned with the stipulations of the national education policy, and develop a road map for execution of its role in inclusive education.

Teachers need in-depth understanding of the concept of inclusive education and attitudinal change required to mainstream children with and without disability.

Required instructional material should be provided within the schools enabling them to create an inclusive environment.

Parents' involvement is extremely important factor in implementation of inclusive philosophy. They should be involved in decision making process of their children and should be given clarity of long term and short term educational objectives of their children. Parent-Teachers meetings can create better understanding between them.

General and Special Education Departments should formulate joint coordination mechanism between general and special education at departmental level for planning, implementation, monitoring and review of inclusive education.

There is need to improve infrastructure of schools to make education accessible. In this regard Chief Executive Officers, Education can play their role to monitor the facilities in all schools.

A review should be conducted of current information flow of education indicators collected at Union Council, District and Provincial level to ascertain gaps and areas of duplicity. Moreover, disability indicators may be made mandatory in the Education Management Information System and the staff at various data collection tiers may be oriented on disability and inclusive education.

General and Special education Departments should undertake a joint review of the current curriculum in collaboration with relevant university departments, technical experts and consumer groups to modify it where necessary in order to make it inclusion friendly and culturally appropriate. Furthermore, formal technical representation from special education may be incorporated on the Punjab Textbook Board to ensure that learning materials developed are appropriate for inclusion.

Inclusive Education may be launched on the platform of School Education Department, as mainstream schools (General Schools) and teachers are working under the administrative & financial control of School Education Department. Comprehensive capacity building programme may be commenced by Government with a view to improving teacher's skills to accommodate children with disabilities in mainstream schools along with other children.

An inter-sector coordination committee may be set up to oversee the progress achieved in ADP scheme launched by Special Education Department and look into critical ownership issues in terms of formulating Inclusive Education Policy. Comprehensive Training modules may be developed on Inclusive Education international practices & processes by Directorate of Staff Development. The teachers of general education as well as Special Education may be imparted training at DSD and MPDD. Further, P&D Department may ensure that the PESRP funds from WB & DFID may be linked to a DLI related to Inclusive Education efforts. Public private partnership may also be encouraged to launch low-cost Assistive Technology projects to facilitate Special Education Department in their implementation agenda of inclusive education.

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