Inclusive education

Inclusive education is when all students, regardless of any challenges they may have, are placed in age-appropriate general education classes that are in their own neighbourhood schools to receive high-quality instruction, interventions, and supports that enable them to meet success in the core curriculum .

The school and classroom operate on the premise that students with disabilities are as fundamentally competent as students without disabilities. Therefore, all students can be full participants in their classrooms and in the local school community. Much of the movement is related to legislation that students receive their education in the least restrictive environment (LRE). This means they are with their peers without disabilities to the maximum degree possible, with general education the placement of first choice for all students

Successful inclusive education happens primarily through accepting, understanding, and attending to student differences and diversity, which can include physical, cognitive, academic, social, and emotional. This is not to say that students never need to spend time out of regular education classes, because sometimes they do for a very particular purpose — for instance, for speech or occupational therapy. But the goal is this should be the exception.

The driving principle is to make all students feel welcomed, appropriately challenged, and supported in their efforts. It’s also critically important that the adults are supported, too. This includes the regular education teacher and the special education teacher, as well as all other staff and faculty who are key stakeholders — and that also includes parents.

**Need and Importance of Inclusive Education**

Inclusive education (when practiced well) is very important because: All children are able to be part of their community and develop a sense of belonging and become better prepared for life in the community as children and adults. It provides better opportunities for learning.

There have been efforts internationally to include children with disabilities in the educational mainstream. In order to achieve truly inclusive education, we need to think about and incorporate children with special needs into regular schools. Especially**, because these kids face some sort of barriers to learning and participation in the classroom.** As general education classrooms include more and more diverse students, teachers realize the value of **accepting each student as unique.** In effective inclusive programs, teachers adapt activities to include all students, even though their individual goals may be different. We have learned that inclusive education is a better way to help all students succeed. Researches show that most students learn and perform better when exposed to the richness of the general education curriculum. The growing body of research has shown that **children do better academically when in inclusive settings and Inclusion provides opportunities to develop relationships**.Some of **the benefits include**: friendships, social skills, personal principles, comfort level with people who have special needs, and caring classroom environments. The most important function of friendships is to make people feel cared for, loved, and safe. In an inclusive educational setting, low-achieving students are able to get extra help even though they did not qualify for special education. Classmates of students with disabilities also experience growth in social cognition, often can become more aware of the needs of others in inclusive classrooms. An interesting side effect is that these parents report that they also feel more comfortable with people with special needs because of their children‟s experiences. Students with disabilities can create long-lasting friendships that would not be otherwise possible, and these friendships can give them the skills to navigate social relationships later on in life.

**Challenges to implement Inclusive Education in India** .

In India the number of the disabled people is so large, their problems so complex, available resources so scarce and social attitudes so damaging. The road to achieving inclusive education is a long and varied one, on which challenges and opportunities will arise. India is a multi-lingual, multi-cultural, multi-religious country, and its people are stratified along sharp socio-economic and caste lines. With an estimated 1,210 million people, India is the world's second most populated country after China. It has 17 percent of the global population and 20 percent of the world's out-of-school children. The aim of inclusion is to bring support to the students.

There could be many challenges for educating children with disabilities in regular classrooms. These challenges could emanate from scarcity of adequate human and material resources, negative attitudes of teachers and community, non-disabled peers and their parents. Although the Government of India has attempted to create policies that are inclusive for people with disabilities, their implementation efforts have not resulted in an inclusive system of education. Moreover, the number of students dropping out of school is getting higher, especially in poverty-stricken areas. Students are forced to leave school due to their parents' poor economic condition, and to work to help their parents make ends meets. This leads to the growing number of child laborers, which in turn leads to physical and psychological disabilities. There are particular challenges around negative attitudes and behaviour, on the part of both teachers and parents, in relation to the ability of disabled children to learn. Another serious challenge is the fact that most disabled people are still excluded from equal access to mainstream education. Large class sizes present another challenge for the implementation of inclusive education in the Indian context. Das, Kuyini and Desai (2013) examined the current skill levels of regular primary and secondary school teachers in Delhi, India in order to teach students with disabilities in inclusive education settings. They reported that nearly 70% of the regular school teachers had neither received training in special education nor had any experience teaching students with disabilities. Further, 87% of the teachers did not have access to support services in their classrooms. According to Sixth All India Educational Survey (NCERT, 1998) about20 million out of India's 200 million school-aged children (6–14 years) require special needs education. While the national average for gross enrolment in school is over 90 per cent, less than five per cent of children with disabilities are in schools. Acceptance by peers provides a much greater challenge for children with disabilities. Children with disabilities are

often an easy target for being teased and bullied by their non-disabled peers. A large number of children with disabilities live in families with income significantly below the poverty level. Most of school personnel in India are not trained to design and implement educational programs for students with disabilities in regular schools. Most teacher training programs in India do not have a unit on disability studies (Myreddi& Narayan, 2000). The majority of schools in India are poorly designed and few are equipped to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities. It is also worth noting that there are challenges around procuring and resourcing for assistive devices. Despite various efforts for inclusive education in India, about 94% of children with disabilities didn‟t receive any educational services. 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. The commitment of the Government of India to Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) cannot be fully achieved without taking care of special educational needs of the physically and mentally challenged children. Inclusion is becoming a cant and doing the rounds in education circles but there are still a lot of cobwebs surrounding it. Few measures for implementing Inclusive Education Inclusive education helps the disabled child to develop a sense of pride in their work because they actually fill like they accomplished something. We know that Albert Einstein was learning disabled but still managed to become the greatest mind of the 20th century. Educating children with disabilities alongside their non-disabled peers is considered one of the better ways to provide education to the population in India (Shah, 2005, Shah et al., 2014).The Government of India needs to bridge the gaps in their education system to build a strong system of inclusive education in the country.

**Measures for better implementation of Inclusive Education in India.**

1. The Right to Education (RTE) must apply to all citizens of India. State and central Governments as well as all the other social actors should recognize the importance of a broadened concept of inclusive education that addresses the diverse needs of all learners. 2. A policy of inclusion needs to be implemented in all schools and throughout Indian education system (NCF, 2005). Schools need to become centres that prepare children for life and ensure that all children, especially the differently abled children from marginalized sections, and children in difficult circumstances get the maximum benefit of this critical area of education.

3. The preparation of teachers for rural special education programmes should be planned differently, as the aim of these programmes would be to integrate disabled persons in their own environment and community. 4. As a system, inclusive education should be flexible. Its flexibility must be reflected in the methods and materials used to give these children the widest possible access to the regular curriculum. 5. A school-based support team should develop strategies for the whole school to meet the needs of learners with special educational needs. This team should also be a resource for teachers experiencing problems in their classrooms. 6. The school has the primary responsibility for helping children learn alongside their typically developing peers. An inclusive school must enable education structures, systems and methodologies to meet the needs of all children, particularly those who face the greatest barriers to achieving their right to education. 7. Parents have a right to be involved in all decision-making concerning their child. They should be seen as partners in the education process. Where there is such co-operation, parents have been found to be very important resources for the teachers and the schools. 8. Bringing special children into mainstream requires adjustments that schools need to make in advance. Transport facilities should be altered, so that these children can move around with relative ease. Architecturally, there should be ramps and wheelchair access constructed in service areas such as toilets. 9. Student-oriented components, such as medical and educational assessment, books and stationery, uniforms, transport allowance, reader allowance and stipend for girls, support services, assistive devices, boarding the lodging facility, therapeutic services, teaching learning materials, etc should provide according to need of the students. 10. Differently abled children should be treated equally as the normal children and instead of looking them in sympathy their talents and abilities should be recognised for their self-respect and welfare of the society. 11. Necessary school supplies such as audio learning or textbooks in Braille should be made available. Suitable modification to examination system may be required, so as to eliminate pure mathematical and logical assessments.

12. Teachers‟ attitudes towards inclusive education could be formed and developed in the context of an educational system which can provide some specific conditions in order to have a good practice in this field. 13. Families with children without disabilities should develop relationships with families with children with disabilities and be able to make a contribution. 14. In-service training programmes of two to three weeks' duration for general educators and special educators in all the disabilities and in specific areas of disability should arrange to effectively teach children with disabilities. 15. Those schools that are committed to taking in children with special needs, then teachers must attend workshops in order to be adjusted to the child's needs. 16. Periodic evaluation of the training programmes and constant updating to meet the challenges of changing trends in special education should be part of the planning of teacher preparation. 17. Inclusion should not be the sole responsibility of the specific class teacher. Everybody should be involved and take responsibility. Training for teachers should be sustained and ongoing. It should most importantly focus on attitudinal change. 18. The reform of the curriculum should be made in parallel with a proper training for teachers regarding their knowledge of inclusion and its principles. The curriculum for each of the above programmes should be carefully developed by an expert group which includes practising special teachers.