

Inclusive Education in India

From Concept to Reality

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Children are a nation's most valuable asset. It is our responsibility to ensure that every child is able to live a happy and productive life. For this, it is essential to develop their potential to the maximum. Education is an important pre-requisite for empowering and equipping children to meet the challenges of life and helps in their holistic development.

Over the years, various programmes and initiatives have been undertaken globally to ensure education as a right of all children including those with additional needs particularly those from the weaker and marginalised sections of society.

Despite efforts made over the years to overcome the prejudices associated with disability and highlighting the need for a rightful place in society with inherent dignity, potentials and capabilities, the majority of persons with disabilities still face exclusion and discrimination. They receive education in a segregated environment or are poorly and ineffectively integrated with their potential untapped.



Ground realities

According to the Census 2011, 2.21 percent of the over 120 crore people in India, that is, over 2.68 crore people live with one or other form of disability. Among them, 66 lakh are children in the age group 5-19 years. The World Report on Disability, produced jointly by the World Health Organisation and the World Bank in 2011, estimated that about fifteen percent of the global population lives with disability.

Although much progress has been made in the education sector, India faces immense challenges in addressing the educational needs of children with disabilities in the age group of 5-19 years. Twenty-eight percent of girls with disability have never attended an educational institution. The figure for boys at twenty-six percent is only marginally better. Only sixteen percent of the disabled male population and nine percent of the disabled female population has matriculation /secondary education. Not surprisingly, only nine percent of males and three percent of females with disability are graduates.

Policy and legislative framework in India

In India, over the years, various programmes and initiatives have been undertaken, focusing on making education a right for all children. The following are the main legislative provisions:

- Constitutional provisions: Article 21 A, Article 45 and Article 51 A (K)
- The Mental Healthcare Act, 1987, revised in 2017
- Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 revised in 2016 (The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act)
- Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992, revised in 2000
- Right to Education Act-2009, revised in 2018
- National Trust Act 1999

Due to lack of required infrastructure, adapted teaching-learning material and several other factors the desired objectives of Right to Education Act (RtE) have not been fully met.

National policies

The National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 and Programme of Action 1992, which emerged from the NPE, reiterate the approval to integrate physically or intellectually challenged children with the general category as equal partners so as to prepare them for normal growth. The NPE emphasised the

need for the expansion of integrated education programmes. Recently initiated policies include:

- The National Action Plan for Inclusion of children and youth with disabilities, 2005

- National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2006
- The National Plan of Action for children, 2016
- The Draft National Policy on Education, 2019

The **Draft National Education Policy 2019** does not lay adequate emphasis on inclusive education with holistic approach for its implementation.

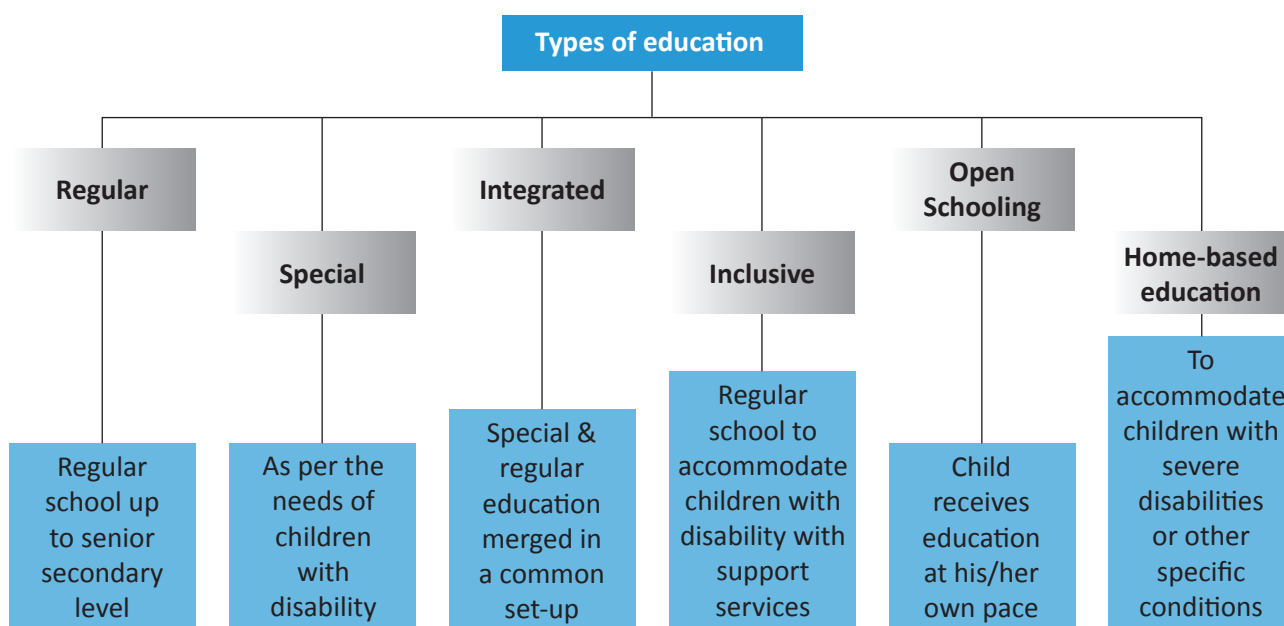
Inclusive education

The changing perspective from being compassionate and sympathetic towards children with disabilities to becoming providers of support and opportunities, and a rights-based approach gave rise to the concept of Inclusive Education. It is a system of education wherein students with and without disability learn together and the system of teaching and learning is suitably adapted to meet the learning needs of different types of students

with disabilities. It is a process that involves transformation of schools and centres of learning, caters to all children – boys and girls, able and disabled, the marginalised and less privileged alike.

Types of education

The concept of child-centred, need-based education and life-long learning has led to various schooling options for children with additional needs. These can be classified into the following categories:



The first four options are formal and have well-demarcated locations and appropriate infrastructure and resources where education is received through face-to-face mode, following a well-defined curriculum to be accomplished in the allocated time. The results of summative assessment serve as an indicator for promotion. In the integrated set up, the onus is on the child to fit himself/ herself in the existing system. The child is generally integrated only for social, cultural or sports activities to a certain extent and for academics is integrated only for those subjects which are in the regular curriculum. Children with mild disabilities,

who are able to adjust in regular settings with medical intervention or other forms of support, like special education or remedial education, are integrated. This integration is mostly either only in social activities or partially in academics depending upon the severity and type of impairment.

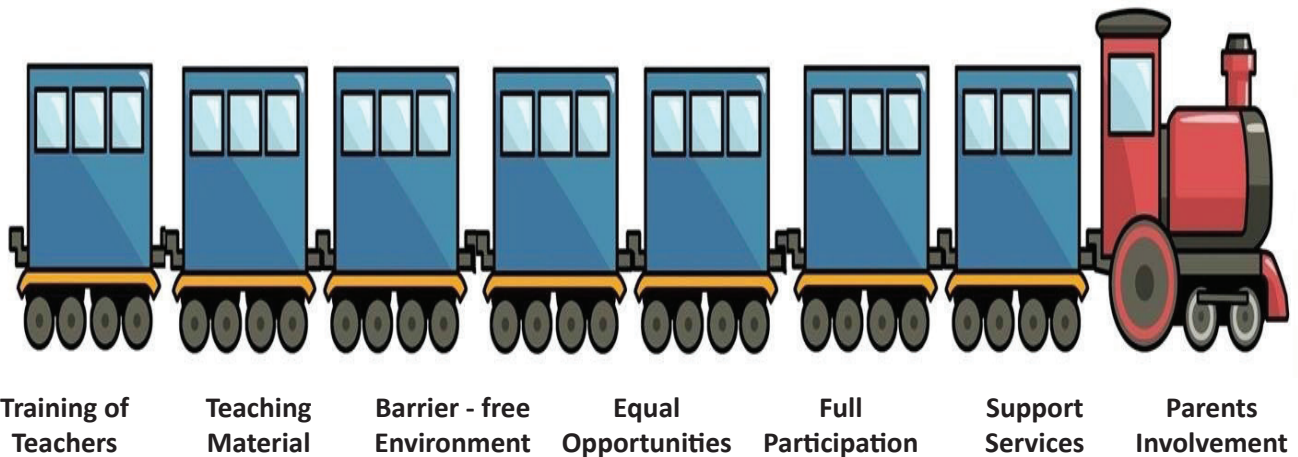
Open schooling provides need-based education, varied subject options at all levels, the self-paced learning and multiple options for completing their grade assessments. *Home-based education* (HBE), recognised in the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, aims to enable children with

severe intellectual /physical disabilities to acquire independent living skills and helps towards school preparedness and preparation for life. Most children undergoing HBE have multiple disabilities, severe cognitive challenges, cerebral palsy and

autism spectrum disorder.

Components of inclusive education

The essential components for implementing inclusive education in the real sense are:



A journey, not a destination..

Involving parents and communities is invaluable and needs to be mobilised and encouraged to lead change. The acceptance of the child by parents/members of the community influences the personality of the child and determines the attitude and treatment of other family/community members towards him/her. They play a crucial role in deciding short- and long-term goals for individualised education.

Equal opportunities and full participation

Inclusive education is based on the philosophy of ensuring equal opportunities and full participation of children with additional needs. It is the responsibility of the school management to be committed and restructure school culture, policy and practices so that students with diverse needs are facilitated in various academic and non-academic activities.

Barrier-free environment

Accessibility to all places in the building and classrooms is the first step towards inclusion, followed by a non-restrictive teaching-learning climate.

Support services

To fulfil all the educational needs of the children, support services must be delivered holistically and, as far as possible, be provided in the school. Services include occupational therapy, physiotherapy,



Accessible bus



Tactile path

speech therapy, early intervention, psychological assessment and counselling. Special educators should collaborate as a team and with mainstream teachers to monitor the progress of the child.

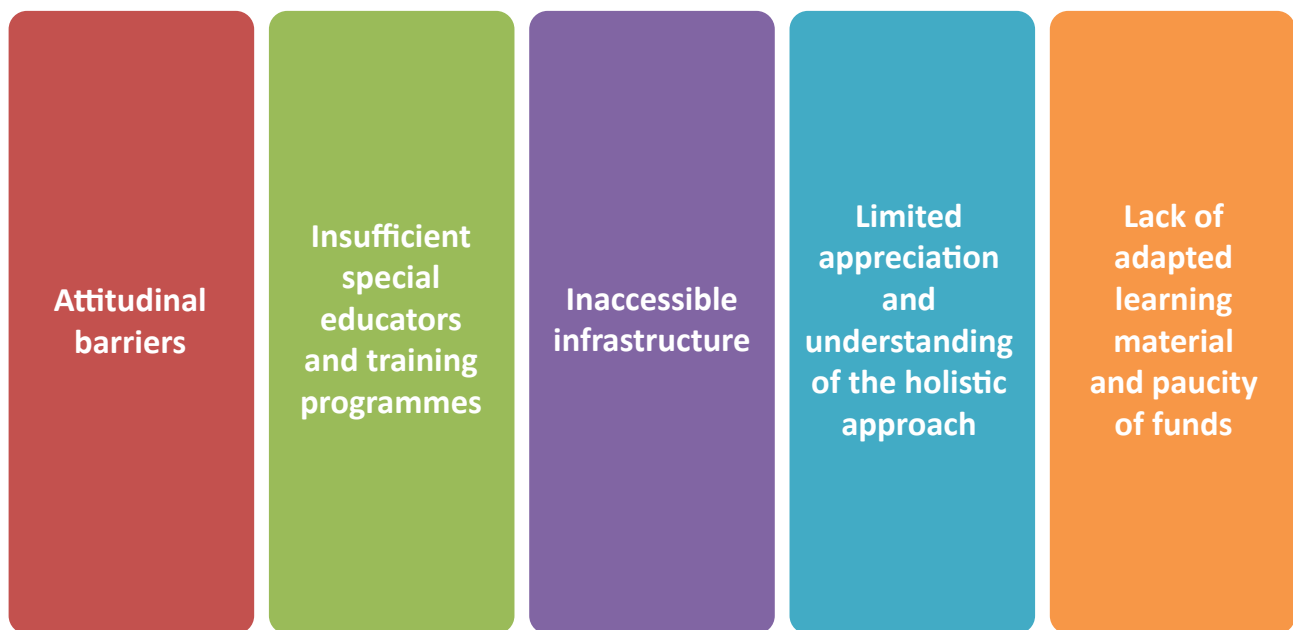
Teacher training

It is necessary that teachers who teach and manage the classroom are sensitised and oriented to the concept and philosophy of inclusive education and exposed towards adjustments to be made in terms of infrastructure, flexibility in curriculum and teaching methodology. Continuing rehabilitation education programmes and short-term courses

for pre-service and in-service teachers will provide them with an insight and prepare them to respond to diversity and children with different disabilities. Schools should impart life-enhancing knowledge and skills to students that can improve their lives. Skill development also increases their potential for greater economic independence.

Challenges

Global studies have revealed the major challenges in implementing inclusive education. The following diagram depicts these.



Why inclusion is necessary

Research indicates many benefits of inclusion.

- Students learn to appreciate each other's unique strengths and abilities
- Students are encouraged to help each other.
- Students with additional needs are able to foster friendships in a natural manner and in a natural environment.
- Non-disabled students get a chance to develop positive attitudes towards people with disabilities.
- The sense of belonging to a community helps build self-esteem and a feeling of achievement for students with disabilities.
- Students often learn desirable social behaviours best from each other.
- Children reach their developmental potential and learn to adjust in all environments.

Promoting special-needs education in Amar Jyoti

With its holistic approach of rehabilitation, the Amar Jyoti Charitable Trust (AJCT), Delhi was among the first institutions in India to launch integrated and inclusive education in 1981. The school started under a tree with a multidisciplinary approach for the wholesome development of children. There was one class of thirty children of which fifteen were with additional needs.

Today, the school follows a modified NCERT curriculum and is recognised by the Directorate of Education. At present, it has 510 students, with and without disabilities in almost equal numbers. Recently, a new section for children with deaf-blindness has enrolled sixteen students who are receiving home-based and centre-based training. The academic inclusion

from nursery class onwards helps in nurturing the feeling of social inclusion amongst the students. The Trust has a branch in Gwalior (Madhya Pradesh) which is rendering similar services since 1989.

Students are encouraged to participate in various co-curricular activities, like integrated sports and cultural activities. Pre-vocational training in computer applications, beauty, culture, art and craft, screen printing, jewellery-making and tailoring forms an integral part of the curriculum for the all-round development of the students. It is mandatory for all the students from class 3 onwards to choose one vocation as per their interest. Some of these skill courses are accredited through National Institute of Open Schooling and State Council for Vocational Training.

Inclusion in sports and cultural activities

Children play before they learn to read and write. Sports like basketball, table tennis etc. and cultural activities are encouraged, which help in the intellectual, social, physical and emotional development of children. Children learn to develop potential and adjust to different environments. The students of Amar Jyoti participate in several national and international competitions.



Additional academic support services

Students are trained in communication skills,

debate and elocution in the English lab, while the Science lab enables practical conceptual learning. Similarly, the Computer lab and Smart class enhance learning. Amar Jyoti is a recognised centre for National Institute of Open Schooling for grades 3, 5, 8, 10 and 12. It is also an accredited institution for the education of the disadvantaged to cater to the needs of individuals with additional needs.

Therapeutic interventions

Medical practitioners and specialists in areas like medicine, surgery, orthopaedics, ENT and paediatrics provide free consultation and diagnostic services. In children with delayed milestones, various intervention units like occupational therapy, physiotherapy, speech and audiological unit and early intervention unit play an important role in achieving development. Besides therapeutic services mobility aids are also provided. Corrective surgeries are also performed by the doctors volunteering their free services.

Children facing any difficulties related to psychological, behavioural or any academic issues are assessed at *Child guidance clinic*, counselled and are referred for appropriate intervention. This unit also helps parents of additional-needs children by suggesting to them the mode of education by which their children would benefit and organises parent support programmes where various issues of parenting children with additional needs are discussed.

Capacity development programmes

One of the challenges faced in the implementation of inclusive education is the lack of trained human resources. To meet this demand, Amar Jyoti runs various human resource development programmes. Masters' and Bachelors' programmes in physiotherapy affiliated with the University of Delhi help in developing skilled physiotherapists. Diploma programmes in Special Education with specialisation in mental retardation, hearing and visual impairment approved by Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) are being run. Besides this, various short-term courses to orient teachers from mainstream schools are designed and conducted as per need.

The way forward

To realise the dream of inclusion, it is imperative to have a synergy between the various sectors of society, wherein responsibilities are shared equally. A *mantra of convergence* enables harnessing

resources and expertise for effective universalisation of inclusion, for working towards which the Fifth International Conference on Inclusive Education, held in New Delhi in November 2018, made the following recommendations.

National education policies should effectively assimilate Inclusive Education (IE) in the general education system by:

- earmarking dedicated resource for teacher-training and promoting IE, specially among rural and marginalised communities.
- establishing model inclusive schools.
- including an implementation plan, with specified deadlines to ensure universalisation of IE.
- including strategies that ensure multi-sectoral and inter-sectoral linkages to create greater awareness among implementers and the community.

Teachers training programmes (including those for master trainers) should:

- be designed involving teachers' in the training need assessment.
- be strengthened to include soft skills, social/emotional learning for IE.

Education system should:

- sensitise students, parents, school administrators, teachers and support staff about the imperatives of inclusion in the education system.
- ensure adequate provisions of support system as needed.
- provide services for mobility and independent functioning for learners with disabilities.

Pedagogical reforms should:

- provide flexibility in curriculum and evaluation customized to the needs of learners.
- include opportunities for participation in co-scholastic activities for participation by all learners.
- consider alternatives such as a 'creative stream' in addition to the existing science, commerce and humanities streams to meet the needs of challenged learners.
- include provisions/ strengthening skills/

vocational training as a part of the curriculum. Addition option for skills /vocational training should be made available in National Open Schools.

- work toward ensuring that Universal Design for Learning becomes the norm.

Data and research systems should:

- be established/strengthened to implement research to address policy and implementation gaps.
- establish a database that provides inputs to inform evidence-based policy formulation/revision.
- routinely capture information on drop-outs, transition and academic achievements of all learners.

Strengthen collaborations by:

- promoting collaboration between educational institutes, communities, families and local government to ensure effective implementation of IE.
- creating professional bodies such as national and international academies to promote IE.
- involving the corporate sector to provide resources for IE.
- establishing appropriate mechanisms and structures to ensure inter-sectoral collaboration in policy-making and implementation of IE.

Conclusion

Making education accessible to ALL children – with and without disability – is everyone's responsibility. In recent years, there has been a paradigm shift from charity to empowerment and from the medical model to the psychological model. The journey of IE has overcome a number of challenges and undergone several significant changes ranging from an era of negligence, marginalisation and discrimination towards an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society. The Draft National Education Policy 2019, currently under deliberation, is an opportunity to adopt a holistic approach emphasising convergence of resources and networking to encourage students with and without disability to stand on the same platform as their non-disabled peers and achieve their full potential.



Dr Uma Tuli is Founder & Managing Secretary, Amar Jyoti Charitable Trust (Delhi and Gwalior). An educationist, rehabilitation professional and a sportswoman, she was the first non-bureaucrat to be appointed as the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disability by the Government of India. Dr Tuli has been at the forefront of efforts to mainstream persons with disabilities so that they may lead a life of equality and dignity. She has been conferred with Doctor of Laws, Honoris Causa from Roehampton University, London; the Padma Shri and many other awards and honours. She may be contacted at umatuli3@gmail.com