Inclusive Education for Social Transformation

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INTRODUCTION

The developing and the developed nations have a big challenge in front of them to give equal opportunity to all to have access to education. The right to education Act is introduced to bring equity in the society and remove discrimination. All students irrespective of their caste, religion, and ethnicity have a right to get education. Equality and Non-discrimination are thus two important aspects of the right to education. It is being seen that marginalised groups are often left neglected in most of the educational policies, denying many people their right to education. We find that marginalised people many times belong to multiple marginalised groups. This discrimination can be combated through social inclusion. There is need to bring social transformation in the status of marginalised group. For any change to be brought in, education plays an important role. Here we are focusing on the inclusive education for social transformation.

Inclusive education is one important way to strengthen the ability of education system to make it reach the learners at large. It can therefore be understood as a key strategy to achieve social transformation and Inclusive growth. Inclusive education should be integrated in all the educational policies as education is the fundamental right of every individual. Education is very instrumental in creating a just and equal society. In the World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality, held at Salamanca, Spain, June 1994, it was reported that “A need is felt to consider the fundamental policy shifts to promote the approach of inclusive education, thereby enabling schools to serve all children”.

In today’s context inclusive education has become very important. Inclusive education is being seen as a way to accommodate diversity among the learners. For quality education being imparted, inclusive education is must. To develop a nation the development of all individual is must and for this it is very important to create inclusive societies. To bring social equity in the society inclusive education plays an important role. The movement towards this social equity and inclusiveness should be gradual and based on clearly articulated principles.

To develop effective inclusive education system we need to see education system as a problem and not child as the problem. It now becomes very important to reorganise ordinary schools within the community to focus on quality. The author attempts in this paper to suggest how inclusive education systems can be developed to attain social transformation.

Inclusive Education for Social Transformation

Inclusive education helps in examining that how the different educational provisions can be changed or modified so that it can be made relevant to the local needs. It should treat all pupils with respect and that it should be flexible so that all learners can actively participate. Inclusive education is an issue that cuts across all education initiatives- from early childhood education to primary education, adult education, teacher education, vocational education and curriculum development. Introducing Inclusive education has implications for different aspects such as teacher training, local capacity building and community involvement, curriculum development. It aims to enable both the learners and the educators to feel comfortable with diversity. They should be able to view it as a challenge and enrichment in the learning environment, rather than a problem.

The Education system owes the full responsibility to ensure the fulfilment of right to education. To fulfil the goal of right to education, inclusive education plays an important role. It is the way through which the goal of right to education can be achieved. For inclusive education the system should be equipped and ready to handle diversity. To handle the diversity some of the important aspects discussed below needs to be addressed.
Flexible Teaching Methods
Flexible teaching methods here mean the teaching styles which are adapted to different needs and learning styles of students. It refers to different teaching approaches which are used to address the students coming from varied backgrounds and having varied learning styles and abilities. These strategies should be such which can contribute to an overall inclusive learning environment, wherein all students are treated equally without any discrimination. While selecting pedagogical strategies we should be careful that we employ such methods in the classroom that reflect an understanding of social diversity. The teacher should know the varied learners in the classroom that is which race; language, ethnicity, religions, disability etc are there in the classroom. The teacher should also understand their learning styles and accordingly now plan teaching strategies. One single strategy will not work for the class of such a diverse nature. Teacher should have flexible teaching methods in mind. The teacher can prepare different groups and use different teaching styles for the groups having similar learning styles. Teacher should give variety of practical works and assignments so that learners can identify appropriate assignment and practical work as per their learning styles and capabilities. As the teacher is faced with varied students the instructional strategy used by teacher should have variety of components like audio, visual, illustrations, written material, oral instruction etc. This will help to cater to the need of different learners and even the learners having different disabilities. Variety of teaching learning experiences should be provided. One of the most important principles of inclusive education is that no two learners are alike, and so inclusive schools place great importance on creating opportunities for students to learn and be assessed in a variety of ways. The teacher while giving illustrations in the classroom should be careful to relate it with different cultural backgrounds to which the students belong. Not only while teaching the flexibility should be important but even when students have to show their task or are assessed at that also the students should be given flexibility. The students should be given freedom to show their task the way they want to according to their ability. Thus it is very important for any teacher in inclusive education to consider variety of learning strategies incorporating visual, oral, motor skill etc.

Reorienting Teacher Education
For inclusive education, teacher is the important agent to bring change. Therefore teacher preparations for the same becomes important. Teachers for Inclusive education needs to have a large vision and specific competencies.
teachers should be made to realize that they will face the students with diverse cultural background, diverse capabilities and learning styles in the classroom. To deal with such diverse classrooms they need to attend them with diverse teaching strategies. In this scenario, now it becomes very important to reorient the whole teacher education programme to prepare the future teachers for dealing with inclusive education. Both the pre-service and the in-service teacher education programmes should focus on preparing teachers for the inclusion. The teacher education institutions therefore needs to focus on the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed by teachers for inclusive classrooms. The teachers should be prepared to use diverse teaching strategies and inclusive practices. The teachers should be made aware of the three important aspects of inclusive education which is Equality, equity and quality. Teacher education for inclusion should prepare teachers to engage with learner’s diversity in terms of marginalised groups and in terms of race, gender, disability etc. Teacher education has the potential to bring changes within educational systems that will help in making the inclusive education effective. Teacher education institutions bear a responsibility of preparing the teachers for inclusive education, hence, there is a dire need to reorient the whole teacher education programme. The whole curriculum should be reoriented to cater to inclusive education. The student teachers should be oriented for the diversity in the classrooms they are going to face. They should be prepared to deal with the diversities by using varied teaching strategies. It should be able to demonstrate inclusive teaching and learning practices. They should be equipped with sufficient knowledge, skills and competencies needed to deal with the diverse groups. The teacher education should be capable to make student teachers aware of inclusive education learning goals. The curriculum of teacher education should be capable of promoting messages for equality and inclusion. If the future teachers are exposed to such training focusing on inclusion and if they see their educators demonstrating the same inclusive practice, there is a greater chance that inclusive practice becomes the norm and will be carried further to schools. Such reorientation of teacher education to incorporate inclusive education is important.

Flexible Curriculum
Curriculum is an important component of any education system. Curricular changes are necessary in order to support the inclusion for social transformation. The curriculum for inclusive education should be flexible and responsive to diverse needs of the students. It should not be overloaded with the academic content. There should be opportunities for both informal and non-formal education in the curriculum. The curriculum should be flexible and all the stakeholders should be involved while designing the curriculum for inclusive education. The inclusive curriculum should be based on the famous four pillars of education given by Delor : learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together (Delors, 1996). The inclusive education needs to take gender, cultural identity and language background into consideration. The inclusive curriculum should have an inbuilt flexibility. It should have the scope to adjust to different needs in such a way that everyone benefits from this curriculum. Accessible and flexible curricula, text books and learning materials will serve the purpose of inclusive education. We should never expect that all learners will learn the same things in same way by using same teaching approach and methodology. We should accept the fact that pupils are different and have different abilities. Therefore it becomes imperative that we have flexible curriculum which have sufficient scope to adjust to individual needs. The teacher should have enough choice in the curriculum to match the individual abilities and their differential learning styles.

Community Involvement
Inclusive education is not possible without the support and assistance of the parents and members of the local community. Any change to be initiated in the society is bound to be resisted. To have a successful initiation one needs to take all the stakeholders into confidence. The parents and community are directly affected by the education system. Without their support any social transformation is not possible. We need to seek their confidence for introducing the inclusive education. The parents may not be comfortable to send the children in an inclusive setting wherein people of diverse groups such as caste, religion, language, disabilities etc are learning together. There is a need to change the attitude of the community. Many parents do not want children with disabilities, or of different castes or ethnicity, or affected by HIV/AIDS in the same classroom with their own children. In such situation it becomes difficult for school to achieve the goal of inclusion. Therefore it is very important to involve community and seek their support for inclusive education. The parents and other community members can be involved in various activities to seek support.

Welcoming Diversity
The basic premise for introducing Inclusive Education is to accept diversity and welcome it. We should not discriminate among any of the group on the basis of their caste, religion, language or disabilities. All should be treated with same respect. An inclusive school should welcome diversity by recognising each group and giving
respective to all individuals. Diversity should be accepted and celebrated. Inclusive education has a commitment to equality, equity and quality. It should give access to all without any discrimination. It should provide meaningful education which will be helpful to learner in their day to day life. It should also be able to respond to educational needs of all. From the perspective of the learner, it is a school where the learner feels comfortable engaging with all aspects of schooling; where he/she has a strong sense that the school is working for them, in their interest; where she/he feels a genuine sense of belonging and well-being.

Teacher
Hyam, (2004) said that ‘the role of educators in changing environment is also required to change, if there is to be a smooth transition from mainstream education to inclusive education’. Teachers are the actual change agents. They are the one who has to actually implement inclusion in classrooms. If those who are expected to implement change are resistant or are not committed, it would not lead to desired changes. Teachers must see the value of the change and be prepared to embrace this change. The teachers are expected to acquire new skills and reject some of their old beliefs and practices. Teacher’s task is very challenging, they are required to reconsider their roles, construct new knowledge and learn new skills to equip themselves for the change. For inclusive education the teachers are expected to upgrade their skills for responding to the new roles and responsibilities for inclusiveness. The content has to be taught differently, it must be integrative, flexible and interdisciplinary. Teachers have to create different situations in which student’s learning is maximized. It can be seen that the roles and responsibilities of regular school teachers has now been comprehensive after the introduction of inclusive education programs. It is therefore vital that teachers have the appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes to fulfil their new roles and responsibilities.

CONCLUSION
Social transformation through Inclusive education can be achieved, if the above discussed components are taken seriously and a professional environment is created which works deliberately and actively towards inclusion for all. Any change to be institutionalised is not free from challenges. Introducing inclusive education is a challenging task. It needs an attitudinal change to make inclusive education realistic and productive. Before we begin the institutionalization of inclusive education we need to mobilize resources for the same. With a nation where illiteracy still exists in a large proportion, moving towards inclusive education will not lead to better results. We cannot take inclusion as an absolute. There are many issues and challenges which need to be addressed first to actually have inclusive education. The biggest challenge is policy making and its implementation. To make this social inclusion effective there is a dire need to have collaboration between policy makers, education personnel and other stake holders. There should be active involvement of the members of the local community such as politicians, religious leaders, local education officers etc.

References: