



REAR-ENDER OF SOCIAL COGNITION AMONG CHILDREN IN INCLUSIVE SET-UP

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Abstract:

The progress of inclusive education is not very new to the education system in the Indian scenario. Inclusive education is at a crossroads in its development. The present article focuses on three main areas of inclusive education and its effects on social cognitive development of children in the inclusive set-up. It emphasizes on the importance of integrated education and the way it influences children's social cognitive abilities. Inclusive education aims at integrated augmentation of children with special needs and normal children through mainstream schooling. Inclusive education as a strategy of acceleration receives attention owing to a rising concern that benefits developments have not been equitably shared in Indian education system. As a result, children in special schools are deprived of integrated development of body, mind and soul. If the children in special school are brought to mainstreaming, they share the same resources and opportunities for learning as normal children. Inclusive education can provide an opportunity of advancement to everyone and it may be proved a unique tool for inclusive escalation. It increases among the children the social cognitive abilities of problem solving, critical thinking and creative thinking and in turn, seeks for an all-round development of the exceptional children by providing aperture and assimilation in terms of cognitive and non cognitive areas.

Key Words: Inclusive Education, Social Cognition, Integrated Development, Mainstreaming & Equitable Sharing

Introduction:

In India, schools are considered as the mirror of society. They play a major role in contributing to the personal and social cognitive development of children, hence the responsibility of developing cultures vests with schools. Social cognition refers to the manner in which one interprets, analyzes, remembers, and uses information about the social world (Bandura, 1986). It focuses on how one processes, gathers, and applies information about other people and social situations (Mathew & Raja, 2015).

Inclusive education means including children with disabilities in regular classrooms that have been designed for children without disabilities (Kugelmass, 2004). It regards to an education system that accommodates all children regardless of their social, physical and intellectual conditions. In the Indian context, inclusion involves students having the right to be truly included, to actively participate with others in the learning experiences provided, to be valued as the members of school community and to have access to a system that delivers a quality education that is best suited to their unique competencies, skills and attributes (Fisher et al., 1999). Inclusive education is about listening to the voices in a school community and empowering all members to develop an approach to schooling that is committed to identifying and dismantling actual and potential sources of exclusion (Slee, 2003). An inclusive learning society should foster collaboration, problem solving, self directed learning and critical discourse (Skrtic et al., 1996). Societies in inclusive schools cooperate and collaborate

for the common good of all. In Inclusive schools dissimilarity is accepted, respected and represented.

Inclusive Education – Concept:

Inclusive education is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners. It involves restructuring the culture, policies and practices in schools so that they can respond to the diversity of students in their own areas. All children in inclusive education, regardless of their ability level, are included in a mainstream classroom or in the most appropriate or least restrictive environment that students of all ability levels are taught and equals, and that teacher must adjust their curriculum and teaching methodologies so that all students benefit. Inclusive education means education that is non-discriminatory in terms of disability, culture, gender and any other aspects of significance assigned by a society. It involves all students in a community, with no exceptions and irrespective of their intellectual, physical or having equal rights to access the culturally valued curriculum of their society in mainstream classrooms (Ballard, 1997). It is therefore, at least concerned with finding ways and means of providing basic education for a wide range of marginalized groups including- differently abled children, street children, working children, children from ethnic minorities, children from remote areas and so on (Dyson & Millward, 2000).

Inclusive Education - An Approach:

Inclusive education is a new approach towards educating the children with disability and learning difficulties with that of normal ones within the same roof. It seeks to address the learning needs of all children with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion. It implies all learners – with or without disabilities being able to learn together through access to common pre-school provisions, schools and community educational setting with an appropriate network of support services (Das, 2013). It is possible only in flexible education system that assimilates the needs of diverse range of learners and adapts itself to meet the quench of students.

Inclusion is not an experiment to be tested but a value to be followed. All the children whether they are differently abled or not have the right to education as they are the future citizens of the country. In the prevailing Indian situation resources are insufficient even to provide quality mainstream schools for common children (Dash, 2006). It is unethical and impractical to segregate children with special needs to provide education. In its place, if they are placed in mainstream school and community and live and learn would enhance their social cognitive development.

Revealing from Related Studies:

Chadhha (2005) found that disabled children of different category ranges from mild to severe and profound cases. The mild and moderate cases are more in number than the severe and profound cases, and they depend on the general education system. This calls for the involvement of inclusive education so that the children who are currently left out of schools can be integrated in schools. United Nations General Assembly (1989) produced the Implementation Handbook for the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It included a section called “Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities” (Hodgkin, 2007). The section argues that the only adequate education for people with disabilities is mainstream education. The Salamanca Statement (1994) revealed education for all, entirely on inclusion and the importance of inclusive education, rather than segregated special schools. Emphasis is placed on using existing infrastructure and knowledge, especially around all-ready

existing special schools and resource centre, using them to help create and maintain inclusive system of education. Clark et al. (1997) revealed that special needs provision would no longer be something that was separate from mainstream education, rather it would be the responsibility of the 'whole school', taking place within ordinary classrooms and delivered by ordinary teachers. Thomas, Walker and Webb (1998) see inclusion, as no longer an extension of the traditional comprehensive schooling but of social justice.

Social Cognition - A Move towards Differently Abled:

Humans are highly intelligent, and they use cognition in every part of their social lives. Psychologists refer to cognition as the mental activity of processing information and using that information in judgment. Social cognition is cognition that relates to social activities and that helps one understand and predict the behaviour of oneself and others. Schools in inclusive set up provides complex social situations and in order to thrive, students must possess social cognition, the process of thinking about how other people are likely to think, act, and react (Mathew & Raja, 2015b). Humans are social beings and social cognition focuses on how one forms impressions of other people; interpret the meaning of other people's behaviour and how one's behaviour is affected by attitudes. An important aspect of social cognition is how some individuals interpret the same situation differently. Some students with disabilities have delays in the development of social cognition and, as a result, often have trouble in interpersonal relationships (Ormrod, 2014). Also, diverse cultures may interpret behaviours differently.

In inclusive education, teachers are in the key position to facilitate how children behave in social situations. To promote a social environment, teachers should:

- Provide opportunities for social interaction and cooperation. Use cooperative learning groups and pair students with peers often
- Create reasons for interaction and provide coaching, so children can interpret social situations correctly
- Teach social skills and provide opportunities for students to practice them
- Foster an acceptance of individual differences and friendships
- Generate platform for creative thinking, problem solving and critical thinking
- Encourage leadership skill development.

Enactive learning which is learning by doing and experiences the consequences of one's actions, influence motivation and shape beliefs. *Vicarious learning*, is learning by observing others, challenges behaviorist ideas that cognitive factors are unnecessary because if people can learn by watching they must be focusing their attention, constructing images, remembering, analyzing and making decisions that affect learning. Therefore, there must be cognitive skills before performance and reinforcement can take place (Bandura, 1977).

Social cognitive theory is effective for learning because it enables the student to gain the knowledge, motivation, and self-discipline (Woolfolk, 2008) necessary to become a life-long learner. When students are given alternatives and control over their learning environment, they gain a sense of ownership and motivation to become lifelong learners. Within the classroom environment there should be an on-going open dialogue between the students and the teachers and there is a great emphasis on individual achievement. The teacher recognizes the potentialities of each student in their learning process and that they know what works best for them and which strategies to use in different situations.

Inclusion - Indian Context:

In the recent past, a concord has emerged among Indian intellectuals and pedagogues for adopting inclusive education in mainstream schools. Inclusion can be viewed from three perspectives in Indian context:

- *Physical inclusion* receives consistent promotion, support and facilitation from the government. All the policies and regulations have made education free and compulsory for all children. No institution can deny admission to a child with disability on account of his/her disability.
- *Social inclusion* is only happening in sections of the society. People from economically upper and affluent classes of society have high expectations from 'Persons With Disabilities' (PWDs) and for acceptance they do not move beyond denial (Bhan et al., 1998). But efforts are being made by educating people through direct instruction and media to bring attitudinal changes in the society.
- *Cognitive inclusion* is mainly trying out by educational institutions, by allowing children with special educational needs to study in general classrooms with non-disabled children. Cognitive inclusion is possible only if the subject matter is broken down into smaller learning units and teacher makes sure that all the children learn the lesson to the expected level. Each child is given equal opportunity to learn, understand, retain and reproduce the information at an appropriate time and in appropriate manner.

Inclusive Education - Vital in India?

According to the Census 2011, there are 26,810,557 crore persons with disabilities in India who constituted 2.21 percent of the total population. (<http://censusindia.gov.in/>). This included persons with visual, hearing, speech, locomotor and mental disabilities. Out of this 55.9 per cent of disabled are males and 44.1 per cent are females. Percent of disabled persons have increased in rural and urban areas during the last decade. Proportion of disabled population is higher in rural areas and decadal increase in proportion is significant in urban areas. There has been an increasing recognition of abilities of persons with disabilities and emphasis on mainstreaming them in the society based on their capabilities (Census of India, 2011). It is vital important to integrate education in order to develop social cognitive skills among children, and there is an urgent need to promote inclusive education. It is clear that inclusive education is the only option which can bridge the educational gap among all groups and can provide equal educational opportunities to all sections of children. In census 2011, information on eight type of disability that has been collected as against five in Census 2001, is disability in seeing, hearing, speech, movement, mental retardation, mental illness, multiple disabilities and any other.

The concept of integrated or inclusive education represents the latest trend in the provisions of placement or alternative programmes suggested in the field of education to the differently abled children. It runs quite contrarily to the ideas and philosophy related to institutionalization, separation or segregation which catered to the needs of establishing institutions and special schools for the care of special children. The philosophy of integration or inclusion thus has its roots in the ideas and principles governed through equity of opportunities for all without differentiation and discrimination.

Implications:

The Government of India has taken several initiatives towards making the education inclusive under the internal human rights norms and standards. The first National Policy on Education, (1986) recommended free and compulsory elementary

education and equalization of educational opportunities especially for girls and children (Dhawan, 2013). The Right of Children to free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 had been enacted by the Government of India. Through this Act, it has tried to translate the normative principles of right to education under Article 21-A into ground reality (Annual Report, 2010-11). The PWDs (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 had been enacted under Article 253 of the Indian Constitution read with item No.13 of the Union List (Kumar, 2013).

Though the Government has taken various steps in bringing inclusive education into limelight, there exists laxity and lack of interest among the people. The reason behind it could be about 90% of disabled children are found in the rural areas in India (World Report on Disability, 2011). There are more hurdles in effective implementation of inclusive education. The special schools as well as integrated education programmes are only a few in numbers and cannot serve all disabled children in their own areas. The teacher is the main agent of change in the society. It is teachers who have to be well equipped to educate children with special needs.

In India most of the schools still lack the basic infrastructure to cater to the needs of differently abled children. Inclusive education aims to restructure schools in order to respond to the learning requirements of all children. But even today, the schools do not provide disabled friendly infrastructures and hurdle free environment (Das, 2013). Another serious challenge is the fact that most disabled people are still excluded from equal access to mainstream education. The curriculum is the most important aspect of learning, but with the rigid curriculum, that are available to students with special needs, side-track them from flexible learning.

The PWDs (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 stressed the need to provide free of cost education to all children in an appropriate environment till they are 18 years old. Emphasis was given to transport facilities, removal of architectural barriers from schools, colleges for providing vocational training; supply of books, uniforms and other materials, suitable modifications in the examination systems to eliminate purely mathematical questions for the benefit of blind students, restructuring of curriculum for students with disabilities etc.

Above all inclusive education is in its infancy period. There are a number of challenges and hurdles to overcome in effectual implementation of inclusive education. The social cognitive skills of higher order thinking need to be developed among the children (Mathew & Raja, 2015c). The following strategies could be used while teaching to develop social cognitive skills among children in inclusive education - teaching students self-discipline and good decision making skills (Anderson, 1993), providing multiple opportunities for self-evaluation, keeping students motivated to learn by setting challenging yet attainable goals, encouraging students to set goals and have high expectations for themselves, rewarding achievement, teaching students to learn independently throughout their lives, allowing students to make choices about their classroom, the assignments, how things are graded etc., using cooperative peer learning groups, using rubrics for self and teacher evaluation, posing rhetorical questions about what was learned, how skills improved, what could have been done differently etc., teaching students that mistakes are opportunities for learning and growth, assigning "complex meaningful tasks that extend over long periods of time" (Woolfolk, 2008).

Develop Positive Attitudes: The greatest obstacle to inclusive education is caused by society, not by particular physical impairments. Most people are not aware of the importance of inclusive education and its positive upshot on society.

Financial Constraints: Availability of funds is a challenge in accessibility of education. In remote villages parents find difficult to educate their children in mainstream schools as the cost of education is higher than their daily income. Poverty often gives rise to dropouts in schools. In economically backward communities, buoyancy for the future is low, and young people can be alienated from schooling and communities.

Quintessential Teachers: A major issue for inclusive education is need for general and special education teachers to work together to develop curriculum, and to provide instruction based upon the individual needs of their students. To implement the current concept of inclusive education, the pre-school teachers should have in-service training on disabilities, and future training courses should include education of children with disabilities (Patanjali, 2005).

Conclusion:

Education acts as catalyst for human resource development, which encompasses better society. Inclusive education aims at integrated development of children with special needs and normal children through mainstream schooling. It is important for improving social cognitive skills, enhancing social status and gaining confidence. Inclusive education allows socialization among the students and thereby cultivates interpersonal relationships. Improvements in inclusive education are not only expected to enhance efficiency but also augment the overall quality of life and enables equitable sharing of knowledge, skills and opportunities.

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