



INCLUSION IN EDUCATION: SOME APPRECIABLE EFFORTS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF GUJARAT

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Abstract

An increase in the rate of enrolment of children in the primary education is clearly visible in India. The credit for this goes to number of initiatives being taken in the country to ensure that each and every child gets access to quality education. The enactment of Right to Education Act (RtE) 2009 adds further strength and as a result, today we see that the concept of inclusion in education is getting broader. Inclusion in education is an ideology which emphasizes that we need to enjoy the existence of each and every child in education system and also we have to develop the skill of enjoying the diversity existing in the classrooms. Inclusion in education integrates all such efforts done by various stakeholders of education system which would remove the discrimination done in the system in the name of social aspects, gender, ability, language, caste/religion etc. Thus, today, inclusion in education means accepting and celebrating all kind of differences whether it is social, gender, ability, language, caste/religion etc. The present article presents efforts done by the primary school teachers of Gujarat state to minimize the exclusion factors and to bring improvement in Enrolment, Retention and quality of education.

Keywords: Enrolment, Retention and quality of education

Right to Education Act (RtE) provides every child of the age six to fourteen years a right to free and compulsory education. The act states that the curriculum of the school education should be developed in consonance with the values enshrined in the Constitution, and it should ensure the all-round development of the child, building on the child's knowledge, potentiality and talent and making the child free of fear, trauma and anxiety through a system of child friendly and child centred learning. Such a positive environment in the schools system can only be developed when each and every child of the system enjoys his/her school life. This also implies that each and every teacher should not only recognize the existence of the child but she/he should be able to celebrate the existence and diversity present in each and every child.

What are the problems? To be clearer, let us see the following short anecdotes:

Ramya is a short and shy girl. She always remains quite in the class and sits in the last line in the class. Due to her calmness she always remains away from the sight of teacher and during class she remains in her own world.

Jayant is a short boy. Once in a week he gets the turn to sit in the 1st bench and other days he struggles very hard to look at the blackboard.

Rajeev does labour work in the field in the early morning time and comes to school only to have his mid-day meal. Teacher knows this fact but remains indifferent to him.

Riya has drunken parents at home. She still struggles to come to school.

Rajan and sameer are good friends in school. Rajan and the class teacher belong to same caste so Ranjan gets more preference over Sameer.

Sahiti is the teacher of class 8. Most of the boys of her class go to work in food courts in the evening. As a result they do not study anything at home. These children feel excluded in the class when compared to other children of the class.

Ramesh is the head teacher of the school and has lot of bias for his caste. As a result of his stereotype mentality he does not believe in any of his teachers who belong to other caste and also does not support their good initiatives this indirectly affects the school environment.

Seema is a child of migrated parents. She joined the new school just now. She is presently struggling very hard to match her pervious learning experiences with the current one.

The situations narrated in these anecdotes are more common

in our Indian classroom. When seen individually, they do not seem to be a major issue. However, if they are not addressed properly it would lead to the exclusion of children from the learning process and would finally affect the quality of education. Thus, exclusion practices happening in our education system play a prominent role in reducing the quality of education.

Why should we care? It is high time to realize that we need to look at inclusion in education from a broader perspective. An increase in the rate of enrolment of children in the primary education in general and enrolment of children belonging to economically disabled classes like SC, ST, muslims etc in particular is clearly visible in our country. The credit for this goes to number of initiative being taken in the country to ensure that each and every child gets access to quality education. The enactment of RtE 2009, adds further strength to these initiatives. As a result today we see that the concept of inclusion in education is getting broader.

What is Inclusion and exclusion of education? Inclusion in education is not just a special drive that deals with physically and mentally challenged children rather it is an ideology which emphasizes the need to enjoy the existence and uniqueness of each and every child. Inclusion in education integrates all such practices (adopted by various stakeholders of education system) which leads to removal of the discrimination done in the schools in the name of social aspects, gender, ability, language, caste/religion etc. Thus, today, inclusion is a broader term and it means accepting and celebrating all kind of differences existing among children whether it is social, gender, ability, language, caste/religion etc.

The practice of exclusion shows its existence in various forms like in curriculum, in daily practices of teachers, inside school campus, outside the campus etc. Teachers intentionally or unintentionally carry these practices with them and it effects the overall development of the children. Hence, exclusion which happens in schools due to various aspects like social, economical, health, educational etc should be addressed seriously and immediately lest it would further degrade the quality of our education system.

What are the effects of exclusion practices? Teachers in the schools intentionally or unintentionally follow these exclusion practices which have a negative impact on the overall development of child. Hence, the ideology and spirit of inclusion in education should be developed and teachers

should be made sensitized to celebrate the existence and uniqueness of each and every child.

An analysis of the innovations made by various school teachers which were published in the Educational Innovations Bank (developed as an outcome of the MOU among GCERT, IIM-A and GEIC) shows the efforts of many such teachers who believed in the ideology of inclusion in education. These teachers believed that each and every child in the school is important and they tried to address various issues of exclusion like learning disabilities, learning styles, malnutrition, religious/caste beliefs, language, gender biases, health aspects etc. Addressing these issues helped the teachers to improve not only enrolment and retention of children but it also helped in improving the quality of education in their schools. Some such worthy efforts are mentioned below:

Effect of efforts of teachers in Gujarat: Inactive teaching learning process, inappropriate teaching methods, abstract concepts in the curriculum, lack of linkage of the curricular content with the daily life experiences of the children etc. are some of the factors which lead to exclusion of the children from the teaching learning process and thus reduce their retention in the system. The effect of these factors of exclusion can be reduced to a great extent by good efforts of teachers. Many such efforts are being done by the teachers who are teaching at elementary level in the government elementary schools of Gujarat as such Use of local day to day materials like product wrappers, tickets, advertisements cuttings etc helped a teacher to encourage the students to learn English language and enabled them to make their own English language dictionary. A language teacher used music to set the tunes to the poems included in English, Hindi, Sanskrit and Gujarati textbooks of standard 6 to 8 and it helped the teacher to increase the interest of students towards languages. On the other hand, use of drama by developing the paper masks for the roles students have to play on the basis of content given in the Sanskrit lessons helped a teacher to make Sanskrit a child friendly language. It also helped in developing their life skills like communication skill, creativity, inter-personal skills etc. Learning the concepts like volume, positive and negative numbers, pollution etc through activities made the classroom teaching learning process lively and thus improved students interest in learning. Technology aided activities in various forms like giving laptops for self learning, involving students in developing animated lessons based on textbook content, developing e-lessons and giving access to students, developing e-quiz, e-bank (collection of pictures, videos and other materials related to curricular subjects), communicating about the child's performance through SMS to parents helped various teachers in improving the students retention. On the other side, use of various techniques like differentiated instruction, peer group assessment, developing customized dictionaries, mobile library kits etc helped the teachers a lot to improve the reading skill of students and in turn it improved the confidence of students which had a good impact on student's retention. Activities like creating subject wise rooms, creating student oriented schools (where students themselves decide in advance on what to bring to schools, where to keep things in class, which book to read and when etc.), involving the youth of the villages as students mentors, orienting parents about the teaching methodology adopted in Pragna classrooms, creating learning spaces outside classroom, developing local dialect dictionary etc helped the teachers to increase the students interest in teaching learning process and thus increased their retention in the system. Health factors like malnutrition, illness etc often

play an important role in exclusion of the children from education. Swami Vivekanada says that "a strong mind lies in a strong body" i.e., first you have to build the body by nutritious food then only will the mind be strong. Many teachers have made praisable efforts to improve the health of their children which had a positive impact on their retention in schools. A teacher from Rajkot district made appraisable efforts to gain the support from the community members to encourage their participation in the mid day meal programme. As a result he became successful in acquiring maximum Thiti Bhojan (donors) which helped in increasing the food supplements like milk, fruits etc to children. The improvement in the health of the children started showing its reflection in improving their achievement level in curricular subjects. A teacher from Nagar Primary Girls school-1 brings daily a handful of grains and also encourages the students to do the same. As a result he could increase the supplements in the midday meal and thus could solve the problem of anemia in students. A teacher from Surat started the practice of including tulsi and other ayurvedic leaves in mid-day meal. He also included the practice of yoga in daily schedule of students and thus could improve their health. Another teacher developed a checklist to inculcate good habits among students and gets it filled up by them daily. Giving students a tracking mechanism for measuring good habits is increasing their self awareness and is giving them a clear bar to measure their progress on a daily basis. Another teacher from Surendranagar district is making efforts to provide nutritious food to students by setting up a kitchen garden in school and use its produce during mid day meal.

Conclusion

All these efforts made by teachers to improve the health of children are showing a good impact on their retention in the school system. Improving the life skills of students and linking their learning with the day to day required skills helped the teachers to increase the retention of students in schools and also resulted in improving the quality of education. Activities like initiating a school newspaper (where the students are wholly responsible right from collecting the articles to sending the paper to nearby schools), forming street wise peer based learning groups (who take up the responsibility of bringing the irregular children to schools, teaching the children in the evenings etc), organizing the content quiz in KBC (Kaun Banega Crorepati) format, teaching work based skills like (book binding, making paper bags/pen stands, painting, toy making, embroidery), Street-wise monitoring of attendance by student leaders, students lead process to resolve the school problems, incentivizing students' regularity, hard work and good behavior, felicitating mothers of first grade students, encouraging for sharing responsibility of the disabled and mentally challenged children by other students of the class, spreading awareness about girls education among community members etc paid good results to improve the enrolment, retention and quality of education. Such appreciable efforts by teachers show us that inclusive practices in education are not something which demands a lot of time and a lot of hard work from teachers. Rather, inclusion in education is an attitude which all of us have but only need is to bring it out and put it in practice.

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