

Inclusive Education –A Lesson from Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)

Sheila Christopher, and Premila Chandrasekar

Abstract— A regular education in a regular classroom is one of the first and most important ways for children with disabilities to learn and belong. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) aiming to do just that was launched by the Government of India in order to Universalize Elementary Education and to provide education to all children in the age group of 6-14 years by 2010. The main focus of this study was to analyse and highlight the significant advantages of Inclusive Education for special children. Results indicate that there was no deterioration in academics among regular children and that they had not missed out on valuable time. The major thrust areas for effective implementation of this inclusive model have been suggested.

Keywords---Children with special needs, Inclusive education, Inclusive model, Special Education, SSA

I. INTRODUCTION

A regular education in a regular classroom is one of the first and most important ways for children with disabilities to learn and belong. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) or “Anaivarukkum Kalvi Thittam” is an effort to universalize elementary education through community ownership of the schooling system. It is a programme designed to universalize elementary education within a definite timeframe. The programme of SSA includes the Children with Special Needs (CWSN) as well since Universal Elementary Education cannot be achieved without bringing these children to the mainstream of education. These special children are identified and enrolled in schools to enable them to mingle with their normal counterparts and learn along with them.

In Tamil Nadu, Inclusive Education is being successfully implemented through 35 NGOs in all districts. The CWSN have been identified through Household Survey and Elementary Education Register (EER). During the year (2007-2008), 1,18,019 CWSN have been identified and of them, 102636 children have been enrolled in schools. 15206 children are now under home-based care and training.

Recent research has shown that special education has its own pitfalls. Special education placement for students with

disabilities has failed to demonstrate substantive advantages over regular classes despite lower teacher-pupil ratio and specialized teaching. Special Education has not proven to be academically and socially stronger than would regular class placement." [1] Special-needs students educated in regular classes do better academically and socially than comparable students in non-inclusive settings. It is in this context that inclusive education through SSA project has been implemented. It was found that inclusion was not detrimental to students without disabilities.

In May 2000, the Indiana Inclusion Study concluded that students without disabilities who were educated in inclusive settings made significantly greater progress in math than their peers. Although their progress in reading was not significantly greater than their peers, there was a "consistent pattern" in their scores that favored educating students without disabilities in inclusive settings. Students without disabilities can serve as positive speech and behavior role models and offer acceptance, tolerance, patience and friendship. The SSA programme has opened new vistas in enhancing physical, social, educational and vocational integration of the disabled.

Research has shown that integrated special education results in improved social development and academic outcomes for all learners. It leads to the development of social skills and better social interactions because learners are exposed to real environment in which they have to interact with other learners, each one having unique characteristics, interests and abilities. Able students should adopt positive attitudes and actions towards learners with disabilities. Thus, inclusive education lays the foundation to an inclusive society accepting, respecting and celebrating diversity.

II. METHODS

The main focus of this study was to analyse and highlight the significant advantages of Inclusive Education for special children. With this as the chief aim the research hypotheses were framed A) Does inclusion reduce the progress of non-disabled students and influence them to learn undesirable behaviours from special children? B) Will regular children miss out on instruction time and attention because of special children in their class? C) How have special children benefitted because of inclusion D) Does inclusion help to minimise the gap, or stigma generally attached with special children? E) Do teachers consider having special children in their classroom an additional burden? The study was undertaken during March/ April 2008 in four blocks selected

Sheila Christopher Phd, Associate Professor In Rehabilitation Science, & Dean Of Student Affairs, Holy Cross College, Trichy - 620 002, India.
sheila627@gmail.com.

Premila Chandrasekar, Senior Educational Consultant, Dubai UAE

randomly among the ten Blocks of the district of Perambalur in Tamil Nadu. An evaluation questionnaire from the Government of Tamil Nadu was modified to include questions pertaining to the hypothesis studied. A multiple audience interview schedule and profile of the implementing NGO and regular school was also used to gather data. Phased interviews were conducted with the chief educational officer, special educators, regular teachers, special children and regular students and parents of both special and mainstream children. Children in the classes of three to eight were chosen for the study with twenty respondents from each category mentioned above was selected from among the ten Blocks. The table below gives a clear picture of the breakup of the number CWSN from among the 10 Blocks.

In particular, four specific conditions were the source of concern, blindness, deafness, intellectual disability, and locomotor disability. Less disabling conditions associated with mild visual or auditory impairment, diabetes, epilepsy, or speech disorder, were not considered as (major) problems. Not much attention was also focussed to identify persons with other disabilities like learning disability, autism, ADHD or muscular dystrophy.

TABLE I

STD.	CWSN				
	VI	HI	MR	PH	Others
III	4	3	7	8	2
IV	3	4	6	5	-
V	5	4	8	6	1
VI	4	6	4	5	3
VII	2	3	-	3	-
VIII	-	-	1	2	-

III RESULTS

Inclusion of special education is a topic of great debate. The desirability for inclusion has resulted in the elimination of the parallel tracks of regular and special education systems. Debate is constant on whether regular class placement is equal to or superior to a special class placement, while others believe that inclusion is not feasible or valuable [1]. Although there are those who argue that special education was created on the belief that students with disabilities needed a protective, special environment to learn, [2] argue for the amalgamation of the special education and regular education systems [3]. A "one size fits all" model for inclusion would not be supported by advocates supporting students with learning disabilities or giftedness who support a range of placements [1]

Inclusion benefits everyone, from children to parents and staff. This study found that students disability, at all levels of severity, have been effectively integrated into general education classrooms. SSA also reported positive outcomes and high levels of professional fulfillment for teachers. As schools are increasingly challenged to serve a diverse student population, the concern is no longer whether to provide inclusive education, but how to implement inclusive education in ways that are both feasible and effective in ensuring schooling success for all children. Benefits of inclusive

education are numerous for both students with and without disabilities.

Each hypothesis was analysed and the results are discussed.

A) *Does inclusion reduce the progress of non-disabled students and influence them to learn undesirable behaviours from special children?* B) *Will regular children miss out on instruction time and attention because of special children in their class?*

Students who participated in social inclusion programs have more positive attitudes towards children with disability labels. This is also demonstrated in research findings. It has been found that for children who share inclusive schools with children with disability they engaged in less disruptive behaviour and spent an equal amount of time working, playing and talking with their peers. There was no reduction in academic progress for non-disabled children. More than 50% of children felt that inclusion has helped them to a good extent, while 27% mentioned that it was satisfactory.

Parents of mainstream children were of the view that their children acquired a few undesirable behaviours (68%). But regular teachers refuted that claim, by saying that these behaviours were found in the mainstream children even before the special children were inducted in the classroom. Mainstream children do not pick up undesirable behaviour from the children with a disability label according to mainstream and special teachers. In fact, they believed there were potential benefits for the non-disabled students. [4] found the same results when she conducted a similar study in an inclusive High School. She went on to show that non-disabled students became more tolerant of their disabled peers and more aware of their needs and after spending time with them reported more positive feelings about themselves.

With regard to more time spent by regular teachers with the special children, initially they had to work overtime to understand the situation and then make the mainstream children accept the special children. The services of the resource teachers have supported the training component for special children that the regular teacher does not spend much instruction time for them. Thereby regular children do not miss out on instruction time and attention because of special children in their class. Time lost to interruptions of instruction is not significantly different to non-inclusive classrooms. A significant finding was that the regular children supported the special children while instructions were given by the regular teacher. (72%) As in all new initiatives there were initial problems of acceptance of the special children, not mainly for the mainstream children but by the parents of regular children and the community.

SSA has helped mainstream children, and they showed: A reduced fear of difference. There was growth in social awareness and improvement in their self-concept. There was development of personal ethics and warm and caring friendships. The more contact with labelled children, the better the outcomes, for example: Tolerance of others and positive changes in their social status with peers were found. Mainstream children value relationships with children with disability labels and have developed their own personal Fig 2

explains clearly how inclusive education through SSA has helped children under the mainstream education.

- C) How have special children benefitted because of inclusion
 D) Does inclusion help to minimise the gap, or stigma generally attached with special children?

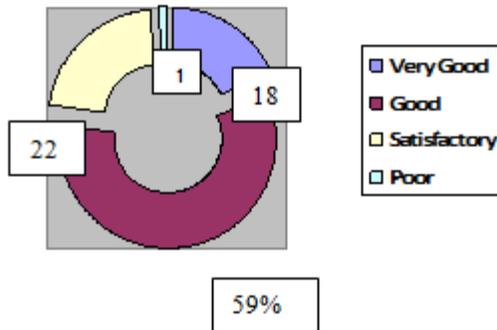


Fig. 1 Benefit of Inclusive Education

Children with intellectual disability do better academically and socially when included. (68%). The longer the child is in segregated education, the larger the gap with the child who is included. In some major studies, inclusion was found to be significantly better than segregation, and children who were segregated lost percentile ranks. These findings also apply to children with severe and profound levels of disability. Children with visual impairment also do better academically and socially in inclusive settings, and do better the more that they are included. (59%). But students with intellectual disability in special schools tended to have fewer friends than students with intellectual disability in mainstream schools and could not cope with the regular stream. (63%).

A significant finding was that, visually impaired children had more sighted friends (72%) and were enthused with their support, while children with hearing impairment were more comfortable with their own peers, because communication through signs were easy. (69%). Physically challenged children were always helped by mainstream children and the mainstream children felt privileged and honoured to help in their friend's mobility. Though children with mental retardation were taken care of well by regular children, parents of mainstream children were a little apprehensive about their wards being amidst children with mental retardation.

Apart from establishing more friendships, there was an increased social initiation, relationships and networks. An increased achievement of IEP goals and a greater access to general curriculum resulting in enhanced skill acquisition was found to be a significant achievement of inclusion. Increased school staff collaboration and increased parent participation was a significant finding. (83%). Peers serve as role models and provide a reason to communicate and special children learn motor, communication & other skills within natural settings.

- E) Do teachers consider having special children in their classroom an additional burden?

Research has demonstrated a link between the attitudes of regular education teachers and the success of inclusion of

learners with special educational needs. Therefore, the present study aimed to investigate the attitudes of regular school teachers towards the inclusion of children with special needs into regular classes. Analysis of results indicated that the teachers surveyed were relatively positive in their attitudes towards inclusion. Greater exposure to disability in terms of training and experience was related to more positive attitudes. (78%). Similarly, more positive attitudes were related to greater perceived competence in teaching hearing-impaired pupils. Many of the respondents expressed concern regarding their lack of training, knowledge and skills.(73%). The findings highlight the need for an adequate training and support system for teachers prior to the implementation of an inclusive educational policy.

Though the regular teachers appreciated and acknowledged their happiness in being part of the inclusion project, they still had some suggestions to make. Teachers reported a need for time each day to plan for students with disabilities. (49%).

With regard to training, teachers mentioned that they needed systematic, intensive training, either as part of their certification programmes, as in-services, or as an ongoing process with consultants.(64%). Teachers reported a need for additional personnel assistance to carry out mainstreaming objectives.(37%). This could include teacher-aides and regular contact with special education teachers. Adequate curriculum materials and other classroom equipment appropriate to the needs of students with disabilities needed to be increased. Teachers with minimal experience of children with disabilities felt a sense of inability to cope. (23%). Teachers also reported that their class size should be reduced if students with disabilities are included. (29%). Even those teachers who have stated being in support of inclusion have found themselves trapped by barriers such as class size, lack of personnel, lack of parental involvement, lack of preparation [5]

IV. CONCLUSION

The success of any initiative cannot be achieved by any individual or by the rule of law. Every individual who is involved in the implementation has to take the initiative through to the finals. As such administrators hold very important leadership capacities to instill, foster and gently shove their school into an inclusive mind set [6]; [7]. Whereas some believe that leadership is an individual function, still other feel that leadership is a cross school activity [6]. Regardless, few would argue that the principal is a neutral party in this important issue. [8]. So the success of SSA in the block of Perambalur has been achieved by the sincere effort of innumerable people. The few lacunae found will be remedied and rectified in due course and sure SSA will be a role model for many to emulate.

Inclusion is both a philosophy and a process. As a process, it is an on-going learning experience through which we all work together to prepare students with exceptionalities for life and work. This requires a co-operative effort between administrations, regular and special educators, parents and students themselves. Our goal is to provide a classroom

environment in which all children can learn together, be supportive of one another and yet remain aware of individual differences and therefore live together.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bunch, G., & Valeo, A., (1997). *Inclusion: Recent Research*. Toronto. Inclusion press
- [2] Landrum, T., Tankersley, M., & Kauffman, J., (2003). What is Special about Special Education for Students with Emotional or Behavioural Disorders? *The Journal of Special Education*, 37 (3). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/00224669030370030401>
- [3] Lupart, J., (1998). Setting right the delusion of inclusion: implications for Canadian schools. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 23(3). 251-264. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1585938>
- [4] Siegert J, Schumm, J., Jallad, B., Slusher, J., & Saumell, L., (1996). Teachers' Views of Inclusion. *Learning disabilities research and practice*, 11 (2)
- [5] Vaughn, M. (1996). "It's Not the School, It's the Principal of the Thing." School Administrators Talk About Administrative Behavior in Culturally Diverse Settings. *The Canadian Administrator*, 36(1), pp. 1-11
- [6] Freund, M., & Wald, P. J. (1995). *Community Integration Project: Project CIP. An early education program for children with disabilities*. Final report Washington, DC: Department of Teacher Preparation and Special Education.
- [7] Gillborn, D. (1995). *Racism and Antiracism in Real Schools*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- [8] Ryan, J. and Joshee, R. (2006). *The Inclusive Schools Project*. Retrieved April 30, 2006 from <http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/research/inclusiveschools/>