

Inclusion: Way Forward to Redefine Classrooms

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Abstract

Disabled population form a significant but under represented minority. In the extreme past, this population was ignored and separated from the normal population of the country. With the advent of time, they attracted the focus of policy planners to frame written and planned rights for them. With the growing attention and considerations, Indian government has framed numerous policies and rules for the welfare of disabled population of the country. One of the most favored steps for them is extension of Indian Census survey to eight categories from five. Not only policy planners and framers, every citizen of the country has a sense of belongingness for disabled population. This is the generation, where we not only talk about their requirements but we also provide them all necessary amenities so that they can prosper well in their life. Owing to the growing concern about differently abled population in India, the present paper is an attempt to summarise all domains of this population. This paper discusses the population sector of differently abled with a comparative account of different types of disabilities. It also presents the concept of inclusive education to provide free and compulsory education to each and every child. Further, the paper also has various strategies to redefine a normal classroom to make it more accommodating for special children. Hence, this paper will help teachers and teacher-educators to implement and practice various practices like curricular adaptations, lesson-planning and selection of appropriate teaching-learning material in their classrooms for making inclusion as the universal and approachable concept.

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INTRODUCTION

“Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid”.

Albert Einstein

Many of the disadvantaged are hidden from society because a large section of the society shuns them. This social exclusion creates a hypothetical circle of varied and categorical perceptions in human mind which in turn leads to differential treatment and reactions towards them. This differentiating mindset of the society makes them feel more crippled and handicapped than their actual disability. They feel more disabled by experiencing negative reactions up to the level where if they have the ability to perform any task in an extraordinary way, they often feel demotivated to do just because of the reactions of the society.

The term ‘differently abled’ was coined by the US Democratic National Committee in the early 1980s as a more acceptable term than ‘handicapped’. In India, on 7 February 2012, the Chief Commissioner for Person with Disabilities issued a notice banning the use of the term handicapped in all official correspondence, official reports, government institutions and organisations. Consequently the better version of the name i.e. Differently abled is now used to make this population realise their distinct abilities. Differently abled is defined as limitation of a person’s ability to carry out the activities of daily

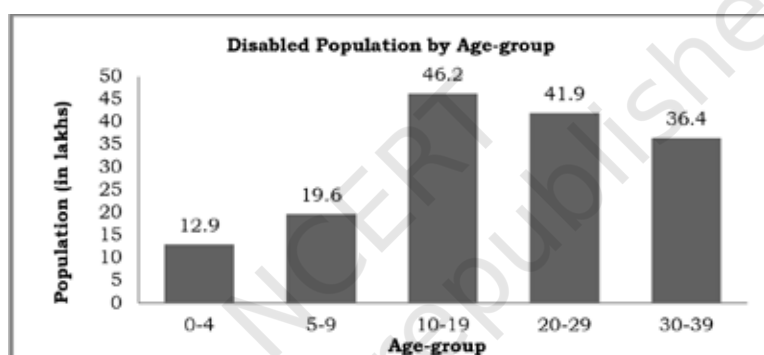
living, to the extent that a person may need help in doing so. The American Disabilities Act (1990) defines disability as physical or a mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of life abilities. Such impairment may include physical, sensory and cognitive or intellectual impairments. The WHO defines it as a restriction or lack of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range which is considered as normal for a human being. According to the Declaration on the Rights of the Disabled Persons proclaimed by the United Nations Assembly (1975), disabled person is any person unable to ensure by himself, wholly or partially, the necessities of a normal individual and social life, as a result of deficiency, either congenital or not, in his or her physical or mental capabilities.

The broad definition of differently abled people lays focus on considering every person in accordance with their disability. With the growing life-style disorders and other significant factors, the number of differently abled is also growing across the globe. But this growth doesn’t match with the established laws, policies and attempts to include them in mainstream society as we have more number of differently abled but not adequate numbers of policies and laws. Though India has one of the most progressive disability frameworks, yet they suffer many challenges in terms of implementation.

DIFFERENTLY ABLED POPULATION IN INDIA

As per the Census 2011, the differently abled population in India is 26.8 million i.e. 2.21 per cent. There has been a marginal increase in the differently abled population in India from 21.9 million in 2001 to 26.8 million in 10 years (Census, 2011). There are 14.9 million men with disabilities as compared to 11.8 million women in the country. The

abled population not only varies with respect to gender and demographical settings but it has different and distinct patterns in different states. Different age groups have different prevalence of disabilities with maximum proportion in school going children of age-group 10-19. Graph 1.1 clearly shows that the high rate of disabilities is prevalent in this age-group which calls for an immediate



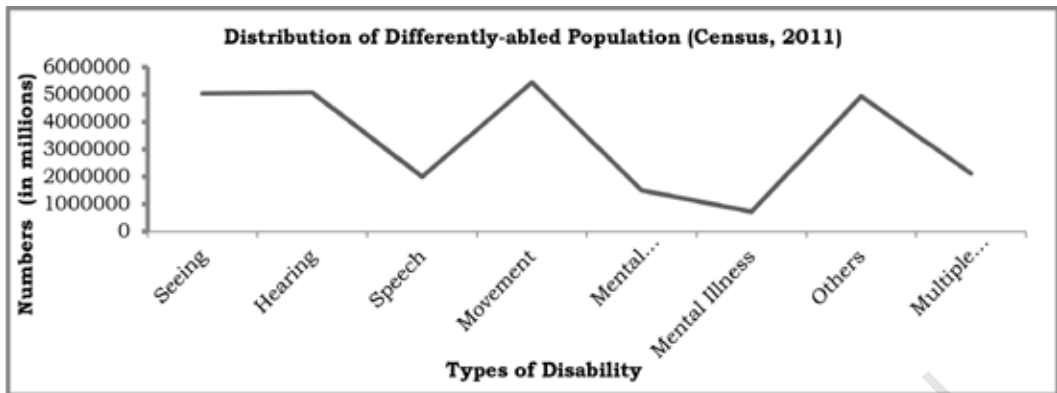
Graph 1.1: Age-wise distribution of differently abled population

Source: Census, 2011, Govt. of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, Office of Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India.

total number of differently abled people is over 18 million in the rural areas and just 8.1 million enumerated in the urban settings. Social groups wise analysis shows, 2.45 per cent of the total disabled population belong to the Scheduled Castes, 2.05 per cent to the Scheduled Tribes and 2.18 per cent to other than SC/ST. Even among these two social groups, the proportion of men with disabilities is higher as compared to women. The distribution of differently

solution as this is the age of going to schools and having formal education.

With the addition of the new dimensions namely mental retardation, mental illness, any other multiple disability in Census 2011, distribution of Indian population represents maximum number of people suffering from multiple and movement disabilities. School-going children of age-group 10-19 are at the extreme end of disabilities. The representation is given in graph 1.2.



Graph 1.2: Distribution of differently abled (Disability-wise)

Source: Census, 2011, Govt. of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, Office of Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India.

It is vividly revealed from Graph 1.2 that maximum proportion of Indian population is suffering from movement disability followed by hearing disability. Census data 2011 reveals that owing to the increasing number of children suffering from movement and multiple disabilities, 54 per cent of the disabled children with multiple disabilities never attended educational institutions. Also, 50 per cent of the children with mental illness never attended educational institution. This clearly shows the ignored provisions which can be practiced and implemented at school for increasing the enrolment of children with disabilities. Thus, these children who never attended any educational institution because of their disabilities are the domain of concern. The way forward must include a practice which can reduce this number to

zero i.e. provision of inclusion in educational settings. Inclusion not only increases the enrolment ratio but will also contribute in sustaining the number in long run. (Census, 2011)

WAY FORWARD FOR DIFFERENTLY ABLED— INCLUSION

Inclusion is a right of each and every child; it is not a privilege for a selected few. It is based on the educational premise that children who learn together, live together. Inclusion in educational settings is a practice to include every child irrespective of their disability, caste, religion, gender and language. It gives opportunity to every child to learn in their own pace and learning style to promote personal, academic and professional development. Inclusion is celebrating diversity and individuality together under the same roof. It is not an 'add-on' facility provided to the students

rather it is a set of mandatory facilities for overall development of all children. The educational pattern based on this concept of inclusion is known as inclusive education.

Inclusive education talks about 4 Ws of educational system; namely Who, What, Why and Where? It involves a team of professionals (who) working on an inclusive and comprehensive curriculum (what) to be taught to the students with the wide variety of methods (why) in a classroom (where). Thus, inclusive education focuses on diverse methodology for diverse learners but in a single classroom. National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE, 2009) considers inclusive education as philosophical as well as an arrangement of institutional facilities and processes.

Inclusive education is a way of thinking and acting that allows every individual to feel accepted, valued and safe. It is a means of enhancing the well-being of every person in community. It helps individual for meaningful involvement and equal access to the benefits of citizenship through recognition and support. Inclusive education works on certain principles to meet the objectives of all round development, guidance and counseling services, protection of rights, transformation of disability into competence and potential, development of social consciousness, self-confidence and self-concept. Inclusive education provides teachers, administrators and parents

a completely revamped setup to deal effectively with their differently abled children. It not only talks about how school or classroom should look like but it also specifies how and what to do inside a classroom to include and consider everyone. There are some teaching-learning practices and infrastructural modifications which redefine the schools and classrooms for all children.

REDEFINING SCHOOLS AND CLASSROOMS FOR DIFFERENTLY ABLED

Inclusive education in schools works on several accommodations and adaptations. The basic components in any classroom are subject, curriculum and methodology. The modifications done in curriculum are known as curricular adaptations and play an important role in transforming a regular class to an inclusive one. It is a comprehensive process to modify and adapt the existing curriculum in the light of the requirement of the special need children. Curricular adaptations are generally implemented in subject matter, pedagogical methods and teaching-learning materials. It becomes meaningful and effective when adaptations are done in order to satisfy all needs of all children irrespective of their disabilities. Effective adaptations should not hamper normal regular classroom practices rather it should be integrated in regular classroom. Table 1.1 shows some adaptations which can be carried out to make an inclusive classroom.

Table 1.1
Adaptations for differently-abled to redefine classroom

SN	Curricular Adaptations	Lesson-planning	Teaching-learning material
1	Size of content	Use of TLM	Age-appropriate
2	Difficulty level	Principle of engagement	Enhancement of learning skills
3	Time and output	Work on meta-cognition level	Active participation and transfer for training
4	Level of support provided	High interest level books	Use of intellectual, and visual specific TLM
5	Level of participation	Logical connection with the construct/concept	Use of multisensory AV aids

It is evident from table 1.1 that while teaching in an inclusive classroom, teacher should consider each and every aspect of learner's cognitive, mental and physical level. they should practice psychological principles based on individual differences while planning for their lesson or selecting any teaching-learning material. Apart from these curricular adaptations, inclusion also talks about infrastructural modifications which can be applied at institutional as well as individualistic level so that they can equally sustain and live normal life just like the rest of us. These are enlisted below in table 1.2

Table 1.2
Modifications for Differently-abled

SN	Architectural Modifications	Individualistic Adaptations	Educational Awareness
1	Creation of ramps and automatic sliding doors	Assignments in electronic format impaired	Workshops to create sense of empathy
2	Wide doors and broad corridors to render wheel chair movement easy	Audio-taped or Braille text for visually challenged	Manuals and worksheets to spread awareness
3	Braille or Bright light boards with large font alphabets	Essential Adaptive equipments	Encouraging team work to foster equality
4	Audio system installed at lifts, floors and emergency exits	Computers with voice output, spell checkers, specialised software	Creating scales of performance for differently-abled

Thus, all these modifications and adaptations at institutional level can provide an easy access to education for differently abled. Institutions and organisations should try to make their campus disability-friendly as much as they can, so that the maximum proportion of children suffering from disabilities can at least have access to their basic right i.e. right to education.

CONCLUSION

“Persons with Disabilities are valuable human resource for the country and seek to create an environment that provides equal opportunities and protection of their rights.” (National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (2006). This policy has put forward the moral duty of addressing the needs of differently abled people so that they can prosper in their own area of specific abilities. Every citizen of the country needs to contribute in creating an acceptable environment by bringing necessary modifications in different sectors like health, education, employment etc. They should come forward for creating

proper and adequate health services at doorstep for them. Teaching fraternity should provide numerous opportunities of getting education as per their interest and ability. In addition, there should be a proper law and order for these people so that they can enjoy their rights and freedom in their occupations as well.

The law must recognise that people with disabilities have diverse needs depending upon the age, severity and the socio-economic conditions in which persons are living. Apart from laws and legislations, the media can also play a pivotal role in transforming the perceptions and in bringing an attitudinal shift in the society by promoting awareness for the rights, education and employment of the differently abled. The society should be dynamic enough to accept all differences with respect for individuality and mutual rights of any differently abled member of the society. There should be a natural tendency to provide equal opportunities and access to disabled people so that they can enjoy their rights and as well contribute to the society.

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