

Inclusive ELT Classes for Students with Special Needs in India

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Abstract

Learning is the discovery of knowledge and promotes thoughtfulness. Generally, students learn either offline or online in the company of others. Inclusive education is interacting with others where everyone teaches one another and learn from each other too. This article examines the requirements of inclusive education in order to raise the awareness of English language teachers in India on how to address the special needs of differently abled learners in ELT classes. In order to deal with pedagogical and theoretical aspects, a variety of sources are used from experiential studies and documents from UNESCO as inputs. The article suggests appropriate and workable strategies so that inclusive teaching can become an effective tool in the ELT classes for students with disability. The study also considers other strategies depending on the degree and development of inclusive education. In India, there are a plethora of mainstream schools and colleges, which have not yet adopted inclusive education.

Keywords: Inclusive education, pedagogy, theory, strategy, disability, training.

Introduction

According to the World Health Organization, one billion people live with disabilities. Over half a billion children are disabled as a result of mental, physical or sensory impairment. Both physical and social barriers limit children; moreover, the disability excludes them from society and prevents them from actively participating in the development of their nations. All the children have the right to education, as they are the

future citizens. In addition, the driving principle is to make them feel welcomed, appropriately challenged, and supported in their efforts. Inclusive education provides quality education within the educational process that caters to students without disability. Further, Special Needs Education is a concept that education is for all children, including learners with disabilities. To such students, ELT classes are a challenge task for teachers and learners alike, especially they are non-English speakers. Improving their academic performance would often require special attention by teachers in order to prevent failures among students with disability.

An inclusive ELT class demands the teacher to be flexible, creative, ready to learn from the learners and also be capable of initiating active learning. The ELT teacher has to embrace effective teaching strategies and techniques. Further, s/he should carefully and innovatively select appropriate materials, design suitable tasks, and adapt proper classroom management skills in order to cater to the diverse learning needs of the students with special needs. They ought to know about the nature, causes, assessment, and treatments of the students with disability (Hallahan et al., 2004).

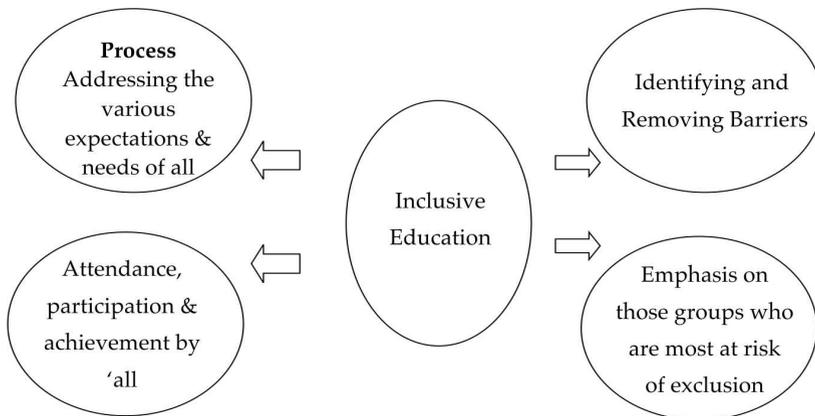
Defining Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is perceived in several ways - as a belief, philosophy, or possibly even as a 'stance' (Dukes & Berlingo, 2020). Many countries across the world are engrossed with the question of inclusive education. In spite of such attention, a thorough examination of the literature and the practice of Inclusive Education reveals that there is no generalized and agreed upon collective definition of this field. The term means different things to different people; it has now become context specific. The concept of Inclusive Education also varies from country to country and has come to be associated with diverse perspectives, which indicate the concern of each realm.

Besides the terminology, educators also discuss how this concept is associated with certain kinds of pedagogic practices required to achieve the educational aims: they describe educational need in terms of what is essential for the pupil to achieve certain educational objectives (Mittler & Daunt, 1995). A rigorous literature review of studies found most teachers had either neutral or negative attitudes about Inclusive Education (De

Boer, Pijl & Minnaert, 2011). The literature available in India on Inclusive Education primarily focuses on the “concerns about the children with disabilities.” In a study, the author quotes Chadha who defines inclusion as “providing to all children (irrespective of the kind and degree of disability) equitable opportunities, to receive effective educational services with needed supplementary aids and support services in age appropriate classes in their neighbourhood schools” (Singal, 2005).

“Inclusion is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs ... It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision.” It also “aims to enable both teachers and learners to feel comfortable with diversity and to see it as a challenge and enrichment in the learning environment, rather than a problem” (Burnett, 2009). UNESCO has labelled the following four key elements as the inherent features of Inclusive Education in its’ guidelines manifesto.



These declarations can also be seen from the educational point of view as education for pupils with special needs in regular schools. The implementation of this depends critically on teacher variables, specifically their willingness to take on this task and their ability to carry it out. It also stands for a system that encompasses a wide range diversity of pupils. One can easily synthesize all these varying definitions but for the concept of inclusion there is no single common definition. The United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) strictly advises countries to guarantee the rights of persons with disabilities by providing them access to an education without discrimination on the

basis of equal opportunity and to ensure an inclusive education system at all levels for lifelong learning. Even this convention does not provide a definitive answer to what is Inclusive Education (Jokinen, 2018). After having attempted to define IE, let us move to the origin and growth of IE.

Requirements for Successful Inclusion

There are no clear-cut drafts for making Inclusive Education a flourishing one. It is a dynamic process and the basic necessity is to cultivate good understanding and sound knowledge of the key developments in Inclusive Education. For example, its origins are based on the influences in international human rights development, as well as the instruments and documents that support them. One needs to understand the concepts, form, approaches and key elements that make inclusive education different from apparently similar paradigms (Stubbs, 2008).

There are a range of factors such as oversized classes, depressing attitudes to disability, examination centred education systems, a deficient support services, inflexible teaching methods and a lack of parent involvement that determine the outcome of the achievements of Inclusive Education. In addition, there are also other factors such as inappropriate process of implementation which involves other stakeholders like supporting staff, education resource service providers and teachers' attitudes which are also the other determinants for the successful implementation of Inclusive Education (Magnússon, 2019). Therefore, Inclusive Education should focus on students' learning needs rather than focusing on their disabilities. It is not that their education is special rather their needs. Inclusive Education needs the following:

- 1. A Differentiated Curriculum:** It is a curriculum that covers and plans for each learner according to his or her ability and needs. The curriculum should break down the subject into small teaching/ learning steps of instructions.
- 2. Resource Room:** A room run by a resource teacher should be equipped with learning materials such as Braille and Braille writing equipment, magnifying lenses, spectacles, reading stands, large print books, hearing aids and speech training kits.
- 3. Itinerant or Peripatetic Teacher:** A teacher, trained in special needs education should advise the regular teacher and give technical support whenever the need arises.

4. **Integration/Mainstreaming:** This term signifies the participation of learners with special educational needs in regular education without demanding changes in the curricular provisions.

Inclusive ELT Classes for Students with Special Needs in India:

The first criterion for triumphant IE is infrastructure, which alone can lead to the meaningful implementation of IE. Educational institutions must provide the given infrastructure, facilities and services to the students with disabilities:

1. The building and other infrastructure should be altered to make them disabled friendly.
2. Adequate supporting staff should be made available to cater to the needs of the disabled.
3. Policies and practices of institutions should be changed to accommodate Inclusive Education. The students should be taught in inclusive general classrooms and should be individually assisted to develop reading, writing and organizational skills along with speech and language services. Further, they should be provided assistive technologies and consultation and other services especially for deaf, hard-of-hearing, and vision-impaired students. There should also be special-education instruction and occupational and physical therapy for students with physical disabilities and special transportation services should also be arranged (Garcia & Tyler, 2010).

Basic Requirements and Attitudes of the English Language Teachers

The English teachers ought to know that disability could arise at any time throughout a person's growth. Some are born with disabilities; others acquire them while growing up. This awareness is essential to identify children with disabilities. The English Language Teacher in India would be catering to diverse groups of students, including students with disabilities. The disabilities may include students with physical, mental, emotional, behavioural, and learning disorders. First of all, he or she must know the issue of disability in students, so as to effectively understand and implement curriculum based on Special Education Needs (SEN) and Inclusive Education. Handicap, disability and rehabilitation are constant features of the human condition to which teachers should rightly attend. English Language Teachers should have

the virtues of belonging, acceptance and tolerance when it comes to dealing with disability and difference. The teachers should treat students with disability like normal children and must look beyond their disability and have respect and appreciation of the equal rights of pupils.

The Need for Training the English Language Teacher in SEN

Another most significant factor that would make Inclusive ELT classes successful is Teachers' Training. This factor would greatly affect the outcome of inclusive practices. The Inclusive ELT classes in India could only be successful if the competency of teachers is increased. The government and the forerunners of Private Educational Institutions should definitely make such opportunities available to the Teachers to attend courses that are related to the IE programme and if there is dearth of such resources special efforts have to be made to create courses that inculcate IE pedagogy and curricula. Already the 'Governments in modern capitalist nation-states are overseeing and encouraging a vast expansion of education and training systems in SEN' (Tomlinson, 2012). Developing countries like India should focus not only on the blind implementation of IE for SEN but should provide proper training to teachers for its effective implementation.

The Impact of Inclusive Education in ELT Classes

The implications and effects of Inclusive Education in ELT classes would reach beyond students with disabilities to even students without disabilities. As proven in research studies, the evidence suggests that normal students, without disabilities do not suffer academically being in the inclusive environments. The inclusive ELT classroom settings with teaching practices that include differentiated instruction addressing the needs of students with special needs are found to be more effective (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013). Inclusive Education is a sound practice for students with special educational needs.

Inclusive Curriculum for ELT Classes

The Inclusive Curriculum for ELT classes ought to have flexible approaches so as to respond to the varied abilities and needs of inclusive classrooms. If the teaching methods and the curricula are inflexible, there would be lack of proper materials for teaching and teachers would definitely feel constrained to fulfil their responsibility. In inclusive ELT classes, the curriculum should be designed in such a way that it suits

ordinary as well as students with disabilities such as visual or hearing impairment. All in all, the curriculum for the ELT classes must provide both process and content which would facilitate students as well as the teachers to work together in order to achieve a meaningful language learning for every student.

Resources for Inclusive ELT Curriculum

As briefly discussed earlier, the educational resources for ELT classes plays a significant role for the successful implementation of Inclusive Education in ELT classes. It would depend not only on proper organization, enacting legislation, rules and regulations, but also on the accessibility of educational resources in the regular classrooms. Teaching and learning materials, equipment provision and financial sources would be among the forefront challenges in the implementation of Inclusive Education.

Many countries around the world have taken a number of cost-effective initiatives to overcome the challenge of scarce resources in order to promote Inclusive Education in general and English Language Teaching in particular (Carter & Nunan, 2001). The initiatives include: Train the Trainer modules for English Language Teachers, University collaborations for pre-service training institutions with school and conversion of SEN schools into resource centres to provide expertise and support to clusters of general education schools wherein the students with Special Needs are used in peer programmes.

Inclusive ELT Strategies

Effective teaching of English for students with Special Needs would be very effective if the teachers are competent enough to respond to a broad range of needs. This could only be accomplished through better differentiation of learning tasks and teaching materials through school-based intervention (Davies, 2004). Some students may experience precise difficulties in learning English and may need help in improving their areas of weaknesses through different strategies to overcome their difficulties. In such cases of students with disabilities (hearing or visual) he or she may require alternative communication systems to counter the difficulties he or she faces in using spoken or written language.

According to Dhawan, the following strategies are highly useful, for example, to visually challenged students to learn English.

- Transmission of English textbooks and supplementary materials into Braille.
- Usage of story-telling, singing, and role-play to reinforce language skills.
- Emphasis on the explanation of synonyms and homophones.
- Introduction of new vocabulary and language items.
- Usage of exposition and experience sharing for the visually impaired.
- Judicial usage of language games, phonetic games, passage reading, sentence making, dialogue practice, report writing, discussions and audio-recording.

All these strategies would prove most helpful in stimulating the interest of the students especially those who require Special Needs (Dhawan, 2011).

Assessment and Evaluation in Inclusive ELT Classes

When it comes to assessment in Inclusive ELT classes, there are numerous ways, including traditional as well as modern methods. For example, the assessment listening skills can invariably use recorded spoken texts to assess students' comprehension. There are marked differences between the written language and spoken language as the grammatical characteristics of written language differs largely from spoken language, students can be assessed by the use of language structures. The learners' progress could be measured in terms of general skills, abilities and values of the students at the end of each learning process. The assessment and evaluation could be ongoing. All the learners must be evaluated individually against their own achievements instead of comparison with other learners. The assessment in inclusive ELT classes must take place in a flexible way and in space and time. It must be clear that, in the process of teaching 'how we assess our students has a profound effect on what they learn and on the ways in which they learn' (Brown et al., 2000). The Inclusive ELT classes must develop and use a framework for assessment both inside and outside the classroom. For outside the classroom one could have standardized tests that can be used and in the classroom, tests can be used in formative and summative ways.

The English Language teachers in inclusive classroom should keep in mind the well-being of students when assigning homework. This is more so if extensive reading or writing is required. The teacher should give additional time for completion of assignments as well as examinations. If necessary, students with special needs can be allowed to complete the examination in more than one sitting. The teacher can also reduce the number of questions to be answered for students with Special Needs. They can also provide alternate ways of testing their knowledge. Visually challenged students must be provided with a scribe for written examinations and the teacher can also examine them orally (Haque & Valeo, 2017).

Conclusion

The Inclusive ELT Classes for students with Special Needs will be effective only when the teachers and the policy makers understand the origin and growth of this Inclusive Education and act in response to the wider range of the needs of disabled students. This task could easily be attained by better delineation of learning tasks and the provision of learning materials. If this process is to be executed properly, it will, in turn, demand administration of special training to the teachers of English who later on would be able to implement inclusive teaching effectively. In the absence of such specialized training teachers of English would never be able to do what they are expected to do. The teachers hence must get training in the implementation of Inclusive Education which would address the needs of special students. The teachers also need to vary their ways of teaching to match the different learning styles such as, visual, auditory and kinesthetic.

The guidelines by UNESCO and the UNO must be strictly followed in the design, implementation, and evaluation in Inclusive ELT classes for the children with special needs and all other normal students. Indian society in general must respect the differences and accept persons with disabilities as part of humanity. Real respect for the diversity of students with Special Needs ensures his or her full and equal participation in English Language Learning. It would result in sustainable and lifelong learning. 'Inclusive Education is a transition from mainstream needs-based teaching to student needs-based learning'³¹ (Lesko et al., 2010). One needs to withdraw from the perspective of a teaching-based curriculum and step into a need-based curriculum.

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