

Inclusive Education and Education for All

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ABSTRACT

The Education for All (EFA) movement is a global commitment to provide quality basic education for all children, youth and adults. Inclusive education is also a new approach towards educating the children with diverse abilities and learning difficulties with that of normal ones within the same manner. It seeks to address the learning needs of all children with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion. The focus of this paper is to explore the theoretical interrelation between the Inclusive education and Education for all and conclude them with various UNESCO documents and other published articles. The entire documentary analysis in the paper shows the relation between inclusive education and Education for All with various perspectives. The paper also shows various implications of inclusive Education as a strategy. The theoretical analysis indicates that inclusive education as an integral part of Education for all.

Keywords: Education for All (EFA), Inclusive education, UNESCO, Theoretical interrelation.

Introduction

Education for All (EFA) is a global movement led by UNESCO, which aimed to provide quality basic education for all children, youth and adults. International efforts to promote EFA intensified following the first *World Conference on Education for All* held in Jomtien, Thailand, with its slogan of 'EFA by the year 2000' (UNESCO, 1990). The significance of Jomtien was its acknowledgement of the exclusion of large numbers of vulnerable and marginalized groups of learners from education systems worldwide. It also presented a vision of education as a much broader concept than schooling, beginning with early childhood, emphasising women's literacy and recognising the importance of basic literacy skills as part of lifelong learning. This was a landmark conference towards inclusive education, even though this concept was not widely used at that time.

Although the initial vision of EFA was broad and ambitious, the rhetoric of 'all' has so far failed to reach the poorest and most disadvantaged children, including those with disabilities (Miles & Singal). With international attention focused on achieving the Millennium Development Goals, EFA has become increasingly focused on ensuring access to, and completion of, five years of Universal Primary Education for all children by 2015. Yet a broader notion of all and a greater appreciation of difference in the education system could hold the key to improving the quality of the education delivered in those five years (Ainscow, 1999).

Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is the new approach towards educating the children with diverse abilities and learning difficulties with that of normal ones within the same manner. 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 preschool provisions, schools and community educational setting with an appropriate network of support services. This is possible only in flexible education system that assimilates the needs of diverse range of learners and adapts itself to meet these needs.

Inclusion is not an experiment to be tested but a value to be followed. All the children whether they are disabled 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, it is unethical and impracticable to put children with special needs to test or to prove anything in a research study to live and learn in the mainstream of school and community (Dash, 2006).

Inclusive Education and Education for All

Progress towards achieving EFA was reviewed at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000 and the following key challenge was identified:

'to ensure that the broad vision of Education for All as an inclusive concept is reflected in national government and funding agency policies. Education for All... must take account of the need of the poor and the most disadvantaged, including working children, remote rural dwellers and nomads, and ethnic and linguistic minorities, children, young people and adults affected by conflict, HIV/AIDS, hunger and poor health; and those with special learning needs...' (UNESCO, 2000).

The broad vision of EFA lives on in the six EFA goals which are now articulated as:

- To expand early childhood care and education;
- Provide free and compulsory primary Education for All;
- Promote learning and life skills for young people and adults;
- Increase adult literacy by 50 per cent;
- Achieve gender equality by 2015; and
- Improve the quality of education. (UNESCO, 2000).

The commitment to EFA was reiterated in the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) developed by the international community (United Nations, 2000). The MDGs are seen as part of a broader commitment towards building a better world in the 21 century by eliminating global poverty, promoting gender equality, education and environmental sustainability. The importance of education as a strategy in poverty reduction is made explicit in these international targets which seek to end the vicious cycle of exclusion from education leading to chronic poverty and further social exclusion.

Inclusive Education as a strategy for achieving Education for All

As a result of the World Education Forum in Dakar, 2000, the challenge of exclusion from education has been put on the political agenda in many countries. This has helped to focus attention on a much broader range of children who may be excluded from or marginalized within education systems because of their apparent difficulties. These may include:

- Those who are enrolled in education but are excluded from learning
- Those who are not enrolled in schools but who could participate if schools were more flexible in their responses and welcoming in their approach;
- The relatively small group of children with more severe impairments who may have a need for some form of additional support.

The Dakar World Education Forum recognised the urgency to address the needs of these learners:

'...Education systems must be inclusive, actively seeking out children who are not enrolled, and responding flexibly to the circumstances and needs of all learners...'

The ultimate goal of inclusive education is a school where all are participating and treated equally. However, it is important to remember that inclusive education is a constant process to ensure that Education for All really is for all.

When looking to reach the students who don't participate fully, it is important to give attention to the forms of education provided for all children, including a consideration of which children are given the opportunity to participate in school and which children are excluded and on what basis. Care has to be taken when looking into which children come to be categorized as being in some way 'special' or 'excluded' within particular contexts. In communities where all children, including children with disabilities, are sent to the local school, the community and the school take responsibility for all children. Bringing special needs thinking, where one group of children is identified as different, into such a context might diminish this sense of responsibility. It is also important to remember that a child categorized in one context as 'special' might not be so in another and that children categorized within one 'group' might have more different than similar needs. Experiences in different countries show that it is not sufficient to look at how to integrate one particular group of children, such as children with disabilities.

In some schools one can see that children categorized as having special needs might be in the same classroom, but have separate tasks to do or even a separate teacher. Communication and interaction with the other pupils then become difficult, and eventually the child is excluded within the class. Integrating one group of students may not address other grounds for discrimination in classrooms. So, when moving towards more inclusive policies and practice, the focus needs to be on strategies to remove barriers to learning and participation for all children.

Implications of Inclusive Education as a Strategy

It is necessary to look into how schools can be modified or changed to make sure that the education is relevant to the local context, includes and treats all pupils with respect and is flexible so that all can participate. This requires redirecting resources and inter-sectorial cooperation and has implications on the following areas:

a. Policy Development

In few countries policies exist that open up a possibility for authorities not to take responsibility for certain groups of children. Often this applies to children with severe intellectual disability, but it might also refer, for instance, to ethnic minorities or children without a birth certificate. Also in a great number of countries, the education of some specific groups of learners might be the responsibility of another authority than the Ministry of Education. Often this allows for a situation where these learners are not expected or encouraged to participate in mainstream education.

b. Curriculum Development

The curriculum may be one of the major obstacles for inclusion within the education system. In many countries, the curriculum is extensive and demanding, and centrally designed and rigid. The curriculum can facilitate the development of more inclusive settings if it leaves for the school or teacher to make adaptations so that it makes sense in the local context and for the individual learner. Linked to this is the issue of language of instruction. In many countries it may be different than the language that students use at home making it difficult for some of them to follow what is happening in the classroom. Bilingual education can help to address this problem.

c. Teacher Training

Often much of the teaching in the classroom is based on rote learning, meticulous following of textbooks and copying. In order to change the practices in the classroom into more child-friendly and flexible practices, teachers and schools need training building on the existing expertise. There also needs to be a school environment that encourages risk-taking so teachers have the time and dare try out new approaches, and for example do not have to worry about inspectors or head teachers not liking what they are doing. A whole school approach to school improvement has proven more effective in establishing change in schools, than training a few of the staff.

d. Local Capacity Building and Community Involvement

The first task in building effective support for schools is to mobilize the resources that already exist in schools and the local community. In addition, there might be need for some external support such as teams of teacher trainers or support teachers coming in on a regular basis. For instance, in some countries, the roles of the inspectors have changed from 'grading' schools and teachers to giving pedagogical support on a regular basis. Often this type of support can also be derived from the elders in the local community.

UNESCO recognises that separate projects for marginalized and excluded groups do not have a huge impact. Instead, UNESCO promotes inclusive approaches throughout its activities. UNESCO concentrates on how we can work together to raise the quality of Education for All students. The focus of the work has been on:

- Strengthening inclusive approaches in national EFA plans, education policies and strategies
- Developing approaches and resource materials to address diverse needs in education
- Supporting national capacity building for government policy-making and system management gathering and disseminating information
- Gathering and disseminating information and idea

Conclusion

Education for All ensured that all children have access to basic education of good quality. This implies creating an environment in schools and in basic education programmes in which children are both able and enabled to learn. Such an environment must be inclusive of children, effective with children, friendly and welcoming to children, healthy and protective for children and gender sensitive. The development of such child friendly learning environments is an essential part of the overall efforts by countries around the world to increase access to, and improve the quality of, their schools.

The entire theoretical analyses mentioned above proves that EFA is very much correlated to inclusive education. The issue of inclusion also has to be framed within the context of the wider international discussions around the United Nations organisations' agenda of 'Education For All' (EFA), stimulated by the 1990 Jomtien Declaration. The Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994) provides a framework for thinking about how to move policy and practice forward. Indeed, this Statement, and the accompanying Framework for Action, is arguably the most significant international document that has ever appeared in special education. It argues that regular schools with an inclusive orientation are: '...the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, building an inclusive society and achieving Education For All.'

In the early documentation on EFA, there was a rather token mention of 'special needs'. This has been gradually replaced by recognition that the inclusion agenda should be seen as an essential element of the

whole EFA movement. In taking an inclusive approach we must not lose sight of its origins in special needs discourse as well as the fact that children with disabilities remain the largest group of children out of school.

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