



## Role Of Principal In Facilitating Inclusion Of Children With Special Needs In Primary School Setting In Delhi (India)

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**Citation:** Dr Jasmeet Kaur, (2024), Role of Principal In Facilitating Inclusion Of Children With Special Needs In Primary School Setting In Delhi (India), Educational Administration: Theory and Practice, 30(3), 2790 - 2794

Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i3.8142

### ARTICLE INFO

### ABSTRACT

All learners have a right to education, regardless of their individual characteristics or difficulties. The Right of Children to free and Compulsory Act 2009(RTE Act) was enacted to universalize elementary education for children irrespective of their caste, class, gender, religious and other socio-cultural and economic identities. It intends to promote and provide discrimination free schools and empowers the community and local bodies for monitoring, addressing, preventing and remedying discrimination in school. Inclusive education arose from these convictions that education is a basic human right and it is a foundation for any society.

In a school, principal plays a key role and is the single most influential person in shaping a school's climate, culture, positive teacher attitude towards students and school practices (Washington III, 2006; DiPaola &Walther-Thomas, 2003; Praisner, 2000). Based on this basis, the principal's attitude is vital in reshaping of the school.

This study was undertaken to investigate the role principal in implementing inclusion in the school. It examined the attitude of principal in inclusion of Children with disabilities in school. The research was conducted by a survey that was developed by Praisner (2000), the Principals and Inclusion Survey (PIS) and an interview. The sample survey included a total of 20 principals from Primary schools in Delhi (India). The study examined the connections among the variables of demographics, professional training and education, and professional experience as they are related to principal's attitude.

### Key words:

*Children with Special needs, Inclusion, Principal, Attitude*

### Introduction

Children with special needs have experienced exclusion, discrimination and segregation from mainstream education and their peers. Some are placed in separate special schools or classes. Inclusive education is not only concerned with disabled children, or with finding an alternative to segregated special schooling; it implies a radical transformation of school in terms of curriculum, assessment, pedagogy and grouping of pupils. Inclusion, a philosophy of acceptance, belonging and community, also means that general education classes are structured to meet the needs of all students in the class. This is accomplished through educational strategies designed for a diverse student population and collaboration between educators so that specially designed instruction and supplementary aids and services are provided to all students as needed for effective learning.

*Inclusive education is concerned with all learners, with a focus on those who have traditionally been excluded from educational opportunities – such as learners with special needs and disabilities, children from ethnic and linguistic minorities. (UNESCO, 2001)*

Inclusive education promotes child-to-child learning and participation of parents and community in planning and execution of services for children in general and disabled children in particular UNESCO (1994), states that

*All children learn together, whatever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Inclusive schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuing quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities'.*

It is the implementation of the 'policy and process' that allows all children to participate in all programmes. 'Policy' means that disabled children should be accepted without any restrictions in all the educational programmes meant for other children. It denotes equality, and accepts every child with his own unique capabilities. This principle is accepted by all the international, national and local programmes. The 'process' of inclusion denotes the ways in which the system makes itself welcoming to all. In terms of inclusion of children with special needs, it means the shift in services from 'care of the disabled child' to his 'education and personal development'. Inclusive education goes one step further by defining these children as **Children with Special Needs (CWSN)** who need special attention, rather than children who are 'impaired' or 'handicapped'. Inclusive education is nothing but making the programme for children with special needs as an integral part of the general educational system rather than a system within general education.

### **Effective Inclusion-**

Inclusion is: -

- A philosophy built on the belief that all people are equal and should be respected and valued, as an issue of basic human rights.
  - An "unending set of processes" in which children and adults with disabilities have the opportunity to participate fully in ALL community activities offered to people who do not have disabilities.
- (UNESCO - at the UN-Committee on Rights of the Child, October 6, 1997 - Centre for Human Rights, Geneva)

Every school has to make efforts to overcome the barriers in Inclusive Education. If there are certain changes made in the way things are looked at for Inclusive Education then inclusion would be a success.

An effective inclusion of disabled children in general education system and in society requires these changes. These requirements have already been recognized as prime requisites for successful inclusion of disabled children which are discussed in various educational policies and program drafted towards achieving the objective of inclusive education.

School principal is a primary agent of change and a key figure in promoting or blocking change. More than anyone else it is the school principal who can bring successful school improvement into sharp focus (Fullan, 1992).

The role of principal is equally important in implementation of the policies and programs run by the government. The head of the school should be open for changes in the various areas in the school and classroom. He should be a support for the teachers and in implementing changes in the school and facilitating inclusion.

Incorporating changes and flexibility in the system can facilitate inclusion in a school. Teacher training in the area of special education, arranging assistive equipment wherever necessary, arranging staff meetings to discuss issues related to inclusive education, to listen and discuss the idea of different staff members and encourage the efforts made by them can create a congenial atmosphere in school for inclusive education.

"School leaders in every era have had to ponder both the rhetoric and the reality of how they address questions of diversity in school. (Riehl, 2000).

Creating an inclusive system requires a new approach in attitude. Simply placing children with special needs within the school system will not lead to meaningful inclusion. The focus needs to shift from seeing the child as a problem to a view that problem lies with the school system.

The most important fact for a successful Inclusive Education is the perception and attitude of the principal who plays the most critical role in the whole process.

If implemented well, inclusive education benefits all children through more child-centered teaching techniques, more focus on individual needs and a diversity friendly environment. However, to gain support from communities, people must be aware of the benefits inclusive education can bring to all children.

### **The Study**

Attitudes and perceptions are a major challenge in the area of education of the disabled. While the macro level policies and initiatives have resulted in proper wakening up to this issue, there is generally a feeling that in a scenario made up with large classroom and paucity of resources, The learners with disabilities are still considered as an added burden and not as potential contributors to the society. The persons with disabilities have been often mocked, teased, dehumanized, feared or rejected, pitied or even left alone. With the advent of the legislations and the efforts on the part of the educationists to instill in young children and adults alike the value of equity, there is hope that the attitude of rejection and ignorance would be gradually replaced by increased acceptability. Notwithstanding the best intentions of the government too often for learners with special needs, special schools remain a preferred medium of education by the parents. Therefore, to study the

practices of inclusion and the role of principals in implementing and facilitating these changes followed in a school, a study in this area was needed.

### **Instrument**

A standardized tool was taken for the study. The *Principals and Inclusion Survey* (PIS) measures the extent to which factors such as training, experience and program factors are related to principals' attitudes. The PIS included items from four main sections:

1. Demographics
2. Principal training and experience
3. Attitudes toward inclusion
4. Principal beliefs/perception about most appropriate placement of CWSN.

For the present study only Section 1,2 and 4 were taken.

**Section I** consisted of four questions designed to elicit demographic information on the school itself for the current academic year. This information was used to describe the sample only.

**Section II** had 13 questions designed to gather background data on the principal's training and experience. To ensure the validity of this section, the content chosen for the questions was based on a review of the inclusion literature to identify those factors related to personal characteristics, training, and experience that might relate to education, attitude toward inclusion. Variables that showed a positive, negative, or inconsistent relationship with principals' attitudes toward inclusion were chosen for incorporation in the survey.

Response formats varied between fill in the blank and closed format response categories in which the respondent chose the most appropriate response.

For the present study only 17 items were considered. A reliability measure was not computed for the entire survey due to the variety of question types and amount of different information collected within it.

An interview was also conducted for the study

### **Findings and Discussion**

Demographic Details/Sample Description

#### **a) Profile of Principal**

Out of twenty Principals ten are male and ten are female. They all are above the age of 45 years. They all have a teaching experience of 15 years or above. As a principal four had an experience of ten years and above, six have an experience between six to nine years and ten have an experience of four-five years.

In terms of qualifications, all had degree or a diploma in Education. Out of a total of 20, two (10%) were post graduates, 13(65%) of them were graduates and five (25%) were high school pass out.

#### **b) Principal training and experience**

The principals having more no of experience in this profession were not willing for full inclusion of CWSN in their school.

On asking they told that

*'They had not studied about them in their teacher training program. They had only learnt about these children in the inservice programs conducted by the Department'.*

The principal with less no of experience were aware about inclusion of these children in a normal classroom as they had studied about them during the course.

For each disability six options of placing a disabled child were given. They had to choose one option out of the six. The total score from this section had a possible range from 6 to 36, where low score meant a most restrictive environment and a high score meant most inclusive environment in regular school.

- The score range on this survey is 14 to 33. The score range indicates that 15 principals i.e. 75% believed in inclusive environment while the rest believed in either some sort of help outside the classroom or special education. Least restrictive placement in regular education was chosen most often for the categories of hearing and speech impairment, health impairment, physical disability. The most segregated settings of special education services outside regular schools were chosen by respondents for mental retardation and multi handicap.

#### **c) The role of principals in introducing change and facilitating Inclusion in school.**

In addition to the question about the role of the principals in introducing change, an open-ended question was asked about the various kinds of provisions they provide to the CWSN. These responses were of categorized under four main headings mentioned as under-

- Participation in all co-curricular activities available in school and interschool level.

90% of the principals (18 out of 20) made a positive effort that CWSN should be included in all the activities taking place in the school. These activities included participation in games (children with physical disability

are part of all the games which their peers play. If they cannot manage any game like football or cricket then they are made referee of the game). These children are also encouraged to take part in the assembly or any special event organized by the school.

- Financial aid by the Government.

Principals of all the schools send the list of disabled children to the zonal education department so that they can get financial aid from the government.

- Provisions for assessment

Extra time during the written examination/exemption from one language for a hearing impaired child.

Principal's role is very crucial in facilitating inclusion of children with special needs. This was an open ended question and the following responses were obtained from the principals.

40% of the principals (8 out of 20) were aware of the special facilities during the examination for CWSN. Most of them had directed the teachers dealing with these children to give extra time during the examination. Some had also made a provision for a writer for visually impaired children. Only one of them was aware about one language exemption for a hearing-impaired child. Most of the principals had shown keenness to know about the provisions for CWSN. They were made aware about the provisions for CWSN during inservice training programs.

The principals threw light on non-availability of effective infrastructure facilities in schools for disabled children like western toilet facility, broad ramps for movement of wheel chair and side supports on walls inside the toilet.

Further there are no aids, appliances, TLM's provided by the Government, very minimal financial grant is promoted by the Government for providing the assistive devices to disabled under privileged children from low socio-economic status. Also, no support is being provided or being taken from the community in this regard as heads/principals is not aware of supporting organization and funding social agencies.

For effective implementation of inclusion programmes, schools should be provided with basic facilities like aids and appliances from the nearest government dispensary. Above all, training for their effective and optimum utilization should be provided to the staff.

Preparation programs and in service training programs for principals need to address inclusion as part of their required curriculum. Exposure to special education topics/concepts and in service training was related to more positive attitude towards inclusion. The more topics that principals had as a part of their formal training such as workshops, short courses the more positive attitude they had towards inclusion. Hegler (1995) and Stoler (1992) found a relationship between in service hours and attitude for administrators and the literature emphasizes the importance of special education course work for development of more positive attitudes.

## Conclusion

Inclusive education is essential for giving equal importance to children with special needs in all walks of life and to bring them up as a part of society to become self –dependent. The primary school principals' perception about children with special needs was, in part related to their experience and inservice training in inclusion. Most of the principals showed favorable attitude towards inclusion. An awareness of the factors related to inclusion are necessary to assist principals in developing a favourable attitude towards inclusion.

Principals who are prepared well to administer general education programs are made responsible for a broad range of special education programs in areas in which they have had a minimal or no training/or experience. (Anderson and Decker, 1993). Preparation programs and in-service training programs for principals need to address inclusion as part of their curriculum. Professional development opportunities within the zone should also include opportunities to observe and know more about the children. Including principals will enable them to develop an understanding for the needs of the students as well as the skills and strategies necessary to make inclusion work. In addition, whenever possible, principals should assist in development or improvement of inclusive practices

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