

Positive Attitude of Students with Disabilities Towards Vocational Courses in Inclusive Education in The Perspective of Sustainable Development

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Abstract—In India, changes in legislation and policy have increased the number of students with disabilities enrolled in higher education. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) recognizes the right of all children with disabilities, both to be included in the general education systems and to receive the individual support they require. Systemic change to remove barriers and provide reasonable accommodation and support services is essential to ensure that some children who belong to vulnerable groups are not excluded from educational opportunities that are available to all children in the neighborhood schools. Similarly Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals aims to ensure inclusive and equitable education for all. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RTE) 2016 also mandates the Government and local authorities to provide inclusive education by making schools more responsive to the special needs of children including accessible buildings, transportation and suitable pedagogical and other measures. Students with disabilities play a crucial role in the pursuit of sustainable development, and their positive attitude towards vocational courses in inclusive education is a key aspect of this endeavor. Here are several points to consider when discussing the positive attitude of students with disabilities towards vocational courses in the context of sustainable development.

Keywords— Disabled, Education, Sustainable Development, Vocational Courses, Rights.

I. INTRODUCTION

The right to education is a crucial component of ensuring equal rights and academic inclusion for children with disabilities. In India, Equal Opportunities Protection of Rights and Full Participation Act (1995) defines “Person with Disability” (PWDs) as any person that is suffering from at least 40 % of disability and is certified by a medical authority for the same (Ministry of Law, Justice and Company Affairs, 1996: 248). The following types of disabilities and their definitions are specified in Section 2 of the above-mentioned Act-1995: blindness, person with low visibility, Leprosy-cured person,

hearing impairment, locomotion related disability, mental illness, and mental retardation.

At global front, The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is an international human rights treaty aimed at protecting the rights and equality of people with disabilities. United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals recognizes ‘quality education’ as an instrument for world peace and prosperity, and expects a strong commitment by all stakeholders (from developing and developed countries) to provide education for all boys and girls (United Nations, n. d.). The Indian government has been working to close the gaps in their education system in order to create a strong system of inclusive education in the country. The statute must be interpreted in connection with Chapter V of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995, when it comes to schooling for a disabled kid. Every child with a disability has the right to a free education until they reach the age of eighteen, according to Chapter V of the PWD Act (Singh, 2016). Importantly, every child with special needs (CWSN), regardless of the kind, category, or severity of their disability, is entitled to a meaningful and high-quality education under The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 (Bose, Ghosh and Sardana, 2017). The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act 2016 defines inclusive education as a ‘system of education wherein students with and without disabilities learn together and the system of teaching and learning is suitably adapted to meet the learning needs of different types of students with disabilities’ (Ministry of Human Resource, 2020: 26). The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) of India has been hailed as a major milestone in instructional leadership. One of the National Education Policy’s 2020 goals is to ensure the inclusion and fair representation of children with disabilities in India’s educational system. From the foundational stage to higher education, children with disabilities will be able to completely engage in the normal schooling process. This proposed legislation is fully compliant with the requirements of the RPwD Act 2016 and promotes all of its provisions for school education.

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by UN General Assembly in 2015, clearly states that obtaining quality education is the foundation to ensure sustainable development. In addition to improving quality of life, access to inclusive education can help equip locals with the tools required to develop innovative solutions to the gravest problems of the world. However, for providing quality education to all, it is

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important that parents, teachers, educational administrators and communities understand why inclusion matters as this is what will lead to sustainable development.

SDG 4.5 “By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.”

Overall, the national and international declarations, resolutions, policies have regularly given emphasis to including all children in education. In spite of this, all over the world, many children, especially those belonging to the vulnerable sections of society, are tragically still deprived of their basic right to education

II. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Throughout the world including in India, policy of inclusion has become a significant part of all the initiatives taken by the Government. Before we go any further, it is important to understand what inclusive education actually means. Many people working in the field still consider inclusive education to be the same as integrated education that started in the 1970s. In other words, for some people “inclusive education is including children with disabilities (CWD) in regular classrooms that have been designed for children without disabilities”. As a movement, “inclusive education” has gained momentum since 1994 when the United Nations Salamanca Statement, signed by 92 member countries, came into existence (1994). The Statement debated that,

“Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all. Moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately cost-effectiveness of the entire education system.”

Since 1994, move towards creating inclusive schools has been a major initiative for many countries. A number of definitions of inclusive education have been suggested over time. Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson (2006a) have given the following six ways of conceptualizing inclusion across various countries:

Inclusion as concerned with disability and ‘special educational needs’: This is seen as the most common approach. As the authors highlight, seeing inclusion as concerned with disability and ‘special educational needs’ can act as a barrier to the development of a broader view of inclusion. At the same time, the way categories are used to draw attention to the deficiencies of individuals, rather than addressing wider contextual factors, might create barriers to individuals’ participation.

Inclusion as a response to disciplinary exclusions: Here, inclusion is associated with children with challenging behaviour who might be, therefore, excluded from school. However, the authors again draw attention to the contextual factors that might lead to these exclusions

Inclusion as about all groups vulnerable to exclusion: Similar to the first perspective, this way of thinking focuses on

certain categories of students such as travelers and ethnic minorities, who are seen as vulnerable to exclusion.

Inclusion as the promotion of school for all: This approach relates to what is called the comprehensive school in England, which refers to the development of a school for all, rather than allocating children in different types of schools based on their attainment.

Inclusion as ‘Education for All’: This refers to UNESCO’s Education for All agenda, with focus on increasing access to and participation within education internationally, by setting certain goals. As the authors highlight, setting global targets can be challenging, since there are differences at the local level.

Inclusion as a principled approach to education and society: Here, the articulation of inclusion, values such as equity, participation, community and respect for diversity, are seen as important in guiding overall policies and practices.

The recent Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016 defines inclusive education as–

“a system of education wherein students with and without disability learn together and the system of teaching and learning is suitably adapted to meet the learning needs of different types of students with disabilities.”

The Act places emphasis on adaptations and accommodations to be made in the teaching and learning processes/methods in an inclusive class so that the children with disabilities (CWD) enjoy their rights equally with others and live with dignity and self-worth. Although, such an approach is made with an intention that CWD should not have to depend on specialized services alone, to benefit from educational resources, activities and practices that are otherwise available to all, inclusivity is actually maintained when all members of a group are able to participate in its activities, which means, provisions made are considerate of all members and not just those from specific groups or, with special abilities, disabilities, and/or needs. Caution needs to be exercised in segregating some for special services as this may draw attention to the deficit in the labelled child and may segregates him/her from others. It may also lead to low expectations from such children and most regular classroom teachers may feel that these children cannot be educated in their regular classrooms since they require special interventions and the teachers are not capable of handling them. Thus, when we talk about differentiating curriculum and child centred pedagogy, we must understand that it is good for all children and not only for CWD.

III. CRITICAL ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATORS IN CREATING INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS

Schools are now the focus of an increasing number of programmes aimed at enhancing quality of education and spreading awareness about societal concerns such as the environment, health, safety, cleanliness and so on. Educational administrators play an important role in promoting and sustaining change in schools. They can guide all members of the school community so that school practices are compatible with the philosophy of inclusion. They help in creating school environments where all students are welcome, respected, are

learning and participating. They need to provide both academic and non-academic leadership to schools; however, their academic role is yet to be adequately realized in the country. Understanding their leadership role for inclusion would help parents, teachers and community members to collaborate better with not only the school but also with the administrators in particular. Their role also includes identifying supports for addressing diverse needs in schools, articulating, training and supervision, organizing physical resources, mapping of school participation and allocating financial resources.

Unfortunately, educational administrators, especially headmasters, are often overwhelmed by the numerous programmes they are called upon to conduct and participate in. As a result, they lack time for bringing in desired changes in the schools

For developing effective education for diverse learners, the administrators need to assume a number of leadership tasks. Some such tasks are:

Understanding the Philosophy of Inclusion and Setting a Vision

In the existing school environment, there would be a broad spectrum of learning needs that have to be met by providing appropriate responses. Inclusive education is not simply a change of terminology from integrated education. It is a movement, a process that addresses and responds to the diverse needs of learners. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision, which covers all children of the appropriate age range, and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children (UNESCO, 1994).

Hence, it becomes important that all those who are responsible for implementing inclusive education, and even students who receive it, understand individual differences and the resulting culture within classrooms. Administrators need to build their vision around such inclusive culture. It is significant that decisions made and initiatives undertaken should reflect the school's commitment to inclusion. No decision, structure or practice should exclude some children and be relevant for the majority group (so called normal children). There may be instances where knowledge emerging from values, attitudes, opinions and/or ideas of the dominant social group lead to the exclusion of some who may be perceived as outsiders and not belonging to the school. Administrators and teachers should strive together to support each other in achieving the vision of enhancing inclusion. For this to happen, both administrators and teachers themselves need to have a sound belief that all children can learn together in the classrooms.

The importance of school-level planning was emphasized by the Kothari Commission (1964) when it pointed to the need for each school to prepare an 'institutional plan' and evolve a 'development programme spread over a period of time'. The SMC is a local body comprising of guardians/ parents, teachers and headmasters. Its constitution is based on the belief that if local bodies are empowered, much improvement could be seen in the schools, both in academic and non-academic areas.

While inclusion is still commonly followed in India's education system, teaching and non-teaching employees are unaware of how important it is for them to be aware of an inclusive academic atmosphere. Sarkar (2020) examined the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) implications for children with disabilities about choice of school- special, regular, or homebased education. It was children with disabilities may be enrolled in neighbourhood schools under the 2012 RTE amendment, which also acknowledges a separate category of children with severe disabilities who may choose home-based education. The RPWD (2016), on the other hand, recognises that children with developmental disabilities have the right to attend either neighbourhood or special schools of their choice. While a range of policies have been developed and adopted to solve problems relating to education for individuals with disabilities, these strategies are insufficient, and all of these interventions must be scaled up. Unless the nature of their impairment precludes them from being appropriately served in a general education classroom setting, students with disabilities should get their education in a general education classroom setting.

In India, the survey of persons with disabilities (National Sample Survey 76th round in 2018) conducted in rural and urban households, reported that among persons with disabilities of age 15 years and above, 19.3% had highest educational level as secondary and above (Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation, 2019: 1). A total of 106 894 people with disabilities were surveyed in this study (74 946 in rural areas and 31 948 in urban areas). The report also suggested that 62.9% of individuals with disabilities (aged 3 to 35 years) have never attended a regular school. There are just 8 449 students with disabilities among the 1 521 438 students enrolled in 150 colleges and universities across the country, accounting for 0.56% of all students (PTI, 2015). According to the National Center for Promotion of Employment of Disabled Peoples' third edition survey, 74.08% of these were males and 22.7% were females.

One of the most valuable advantages of education is the ability to develop labour market skills of individuals with disabilities to become financially self-sufficient. The exclusion of adolescents with a disability from educational institution is not only a moral and social problem, but it also has a negative impact on national economic development (Banks and Polack, 2014). Phillipa Thomas (2005) in her feature, "Mainstreaming Disability in Development: India Country Report" asserts that poverty is one of the leading factors and effects of disability. There are many social and economic costs associated with disabilities, which differ depending on the individual's situation as well as the form and severity of their condition. A person's disability has not only an effect on the family's way of living, but it also establishes a variety of economic costs in a particular country. A person with disability must pay additional costs to turn an amount of income into a quality of life compared to that of an individual without disability (Raut, Manoranjan and Bharati, 2014). For people with disabilities, education and acquiring new skills are the only way to overcome poverty, register better participation in labour market and make their own space in the society.

There has been considerable progress in this regard in the last few years with a number of international instruments to which India is signatory, legal frameworks, national level policies and the National Curriculums. Despite this, development of inclusive schools that give equal opportunities to participate to all has been far from satisfactory. Although enrolment has significantly increased as a result of Right to Education Act, 2009, there are children and youth who are still deprived of good quality education. There are children who are less likely to start school or attend school as compared to other children. They also have lower transition rates to higher levels of education. Lack of intervention at an early age also has a significant impact on educational opportunities for some children.

Promoting a positive attitude among students with disabilities towards vocational courses

Promoting a positive attitude among students with disabilities towards vocational courses in the context of inclusive education is not only essential for their personal development but also aligns with the principles of sustainable development. Here are several reasons why fostering such positive attitudes is crucial from the perspective of sustainable development:

Equal Access to Education: Inclusive education aims to ensure that all students, including those with disabilities, have equal access to quality education. Promoting a positive attitude towards vocational courses helps bridge the gap between mainstream and special education, ensuring that all students have an equal opportunity to acquire skills and knowledge that can contribute to their personal growth and future employability.

Economic Empowerment: Sustainable development includes economic empowerment as a key component. By encouraging students with disabilities to participate in vocational courses, they gain valuable skills that can lead to employment opportunities. This not only improves their financial well-being but also contributes to the economic growth of their communities and countries.

Social Inclusion: Inclusive education fosters social inclusion by bringing students with and without disabilities together in the same learning environment. Promoting a positive attitude towards vocational courses helps break down barriers and stigmas associated with disability. This leads to a more inclusive and harmonious society, which is a fundamental aspect of sustainable development.

Diversity and Innovation: Sustainable development thrives on diversity and innovation. By welcoming students with disabilities into vocational courses, educational institutions create a diverse learning environment that encourages different perspectives and approaches. This diversity can lead to innovative solutions to societal challenges, contributing to sustainable development.

Environmental Sustainability: Inclusive vocational courses can also incorporate elements of environmental sustainability, teaching students about eco-friendly practices and sustainable technologies. By preparing students with disabilities to work in environmentally conscious industries, we promote sustainable development and a greener future.

Long-Term Benefits: Positive attitudes towards vocational courses can lead to long-term benefits for individuals with disabilities. As they gain skills and become economically self-sufficient, they are less reliant on social support systems, reducing the burden on government resources. This contributes to the sustainability of social welfare programs.

Human Rights and Dignity: Sustainable development is rooted in the principles of human rights and dignity for all. Encouraging students with disabilities to pursue vocational education reinforces their right to education and self-determination, promoting a more just and equitable society.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, fostering a positive attitude among students with disabilities towards vocational courses within inclusive education is not just an educational imperative but also a crucial element of sustainable development. It promotes equality, economic empowerment, social inclusion, diversity, innovation, environmental consciousness, and human rights, all of which are integral to building a sustainable and inclusive future for all.

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