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# Dearth of Leadership in Inclusive Education

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*Abstract-* Our society sees disability as a curse and the disabled group as a burden. Disability has found its place among the different terms that differentiates people on the basis of their physical or psychological attributes. An empathetic understanding towards the disabled group will allow individuals to see the world from their perspective. However only empathy will not solve the problem of the neglecting the disabled group from the mainstream society. This paper deals with an empirical understanding of motivating individuals with disability to come forward and face the challenges by taking accountability through leadership. Since educational institutions are where students are designed to think logically and practically, giving the disadvantaged group a chance will allow them to be part of the larger order rather than being restricted to a sympathetic overlooked group. The task of bringing them to be part of the larger group is not an easy task as at times they may feel they are treated specially because of their disability. At this phase the institution needs to work on mechanism that does not differentiate students, teachers, non-teaching staff and other work force based on their disadvantaged position in the society.

*Keywords:* *disability, educational institutions, community interventions.*

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# Dearth of Leadership in Inclusive Education

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*Abstract-* Our society sees disability as a curse and the disabled group as a burden. Disability has found its place among the different terms that differentiates people on the basis of their physical or psychological attributes. An empathetic understanding towards the disabled group will allow individuals to see the world from their perspective. However only empathy will not solve the problem of the neglecting the disabled group from the mainstream society. This paper deals with an empirical understanding of motivating individuals with disability to come forward and face the challenges by taking accountability through leadership. Since educational institutions are where students are designed to think logically and practically, giving the disadvantaged group a chance will allow them to be part of the larger order rather than being restricted to a sympathetic overlooked group. The task of bringing them to be part of the larger group is not an easy task as at times they may feel they are treated specially because of their disability. At this phase the institution needs to work on mechanism that does not differentiate students, teachers, non-teaching staff and other work force based on their disadvantaged position in the society. Preparing a road plan to remove the barriers of discrimination against the disabled group will help in fostering equality in the long run.

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## I. Introduction

The term "Equality" does not have one concrete definition which can be understood even though we use or live by the term. Equality for some can be in terms of class, prestige, power or at least participation in the social order through which our society functions. Manifestation of equality in today's world is spoken by those who are deprived of their basic rights against those who use their power to rule the deprived. This clear indication is based on the hierarchical distribution in our society. Social indicators such as caste, class, gender, disability etc are used to differentiate people that determines their social rank in the society. These social indicators the role an individual is expected to play and live by in order to be an accepted member of the society. Among the indicators, disability is one factor which the society frowns upon irrespective of the other indicators attached to it. Disability is not a new phenomenon and has been socially constructed by the those who see it as a liability in the society. The disabled community from the earlier times have faced severe hardships in various social, political and economic sphere. One of the major hurdles which the disabled group faces is in terms of education and employment in the long run. In terms of education, even with different policies and initiatives undertaken by the government such as inclusive and open education to uplift and bring the disabled group in the mainstream society, the differentiation problem still prevails. The study of inclusive education policy, an initiative by the government works on various factors which determines the role of educational institutions to enrol students irrespective of their disability along with those who are non-disabled and function as one collective unit. However, theproblem of early dropping from school and stigmatization still continues for the students who are disabled.

A part from governmental interventions, educational institutes also need to implement a mechanism which will make the disabled students to be acknowledged as a part of the larger order. This can be possible when the beneficiaries, teachers take the challenge to implement the mechanism and be accountable for its growth or failure. In today's world where there is lack of leadership, individuals should take up the challenge and work for betterment of the marginalized and provide them with an avenue to overcome the odds of hypocritical equality in the society.

## II. Dearth of Leadership in Inclusive Education in the Indian Context

Education in India has gone through tremendous ramifications since the earlier times. Educational policies under the Kothari commission (Commission, 1966) emphasized on fulfilment of the Article 15 under the Directive Principles seeking to provide free and compulsory education for children up to the age 14 years. The 86th Amendment Act to the Indian Constitution contributed further inserting Article 21A making education a fundamental right in the age group between 6-14 years and statutorily enforceable. The Rights of Children to Free and compulsory education (RTE) Act, 2009 further represented the consequential legislation envisaged under Article 21A (MHRD, 2009).The flagship model of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)is constituted for achieving the goal of Universalization of Elementary Education in a time frame as mandated by the 86th Amendment of the Indian Constitution. Even though various strategies have been planned and implemented to advocate the universalization of education to the common masses, India still faces the flak of low admissions to educational

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and vocational institutes and at the same time high dropouts in the middle of the course work.

Our education like any other social institution is ridden by social factors like caste, class, religion, gender, disability etc. From the earlier times, education has been a medium which could be accessed by those who are in the higher. In India's caste system, the upper-class Brahmins were the beneficiaries of higher education whereas the lower class could attain minimum or no education. In the contemporary era, high income families prefer private schools whereas middle income and/or low-income families are forced to admit their wards to a semi- private or government schools. The attitude for this practice is through the status retainment policy which portrays the quality of education attained from private schools are better in the long run for employment as compared to those attained from semiprivate or government schools. In all of these factors, one of the major hindrances which has been overshadowed for a long time but has now come to the light is the factor of disabled students and their struggle in the educational institutes. Disability has no definite definition but can be understood in the terms of medical and social model. In terms of medical, disability is a problem that requires professional medical support. On the other hand, the social model understands disability in terms of a social problem created by the society further aggravating the situation for the disabled individual/group (Theoharis George, 2014). The hardships faced by the disabled group is not only restricted to a specific area of family but in different aspects of the society including education and employment.

With regards to education, the government has implemented a model of inclusive education wherein the main motto is to educate children with disability and learning difficulties with the normal students under the same roof (George, 2001). The policy allows educational institutes to admit children with disability and integrate them with in class rooms designed for children without disability. In the Indian context, inclusive education for the disability cannot be restricted only physical, intellectual, linguistic or emotional conditions but also to marginalised, disadvantaged, ethnic and minority background community as well where the hardships that they face go unnoticed. One of the major loopholes of the inclusive education policy is the attitude and working model of the educational institutions along with its peripheries as well as towards the disabled group. Although the Rights of Disability Act, 2016 lays down the principles for the disabled group to be part of the larger community in terms of equal opportunity and accessibility, freedom to make one's own choices the effective implementation still bears dismal results for the disabled group.

Inclusive education although seen as a different model, functions in accordance of "ONE EDUCATION FOR ALL" policy. Even though the policies for inclusive education remain robust, the ideology to successfully implement it is a question. One of the problems that education faces is the hierarchy created within the four walls based on the capability and capacity of the individual. Educational institutes are in a constant cut-throat competition to gain the honour of excellence. This becomes possible when a handful of students with high performance are given more preference as compared to the rest. One needs to understand that an education institute is a place where parents send their children to learn the values which are deemed acceptable in the society. However, if institutes follow the policy of segregation within their institute, how can this educational policies or intervention bear results (Padma, 2002). For the inclusive education policies to be channelized to bear desirable outcomes, the educational institutes need to break the monotony of hierarchy and share the accountability factor with the help of the administration and also through parents of the children.

## III. Review of Literature

"We can never understand the depth of a situation unless we have faced the situation". Inclusive education which fosters an academic environment to bring children with disabled students together with the normal students has various limitations to it. Society sees disability as a disease and the disabled as carriers of the disease. This social stigma further aggravates the situation when disabled students are not included in the class of the normal students as they lack the basic understanding and may fall back. Even though legal provisions allow student with disability to be a part of an educational institute and student with extreme disability to be admitted in institutes like special or open schools/institutes, it's the society that determines which child fits best in the school. Indian education system has an abysmal record in ensuring education for the disabled students who have been excluded from the general schooling system and have been recommended or placed in special schools (Lachmi, 2019). Some of the reasons for the segmentation of the disabled students from the mainstream educational institutes can be (a) lack of training to take care of the disabled students; (b) lack of disability friendly access to resources or infrastructure (c) overlooking attitude towards the disabled student in terms of knowledge grasping and performance. More importantly the failure of inclusive education model cannot be attributed only to the disabled student but it also needs to take in account the institution element. The noteworthy expression of inclusive education as stated in the Salamanca conference takes into account both the individual and the institution as "*the full inclusion of all children in ordinary schools can come about only as a result of a reform of the school and the education system as a whole. It is the whole education system, and not just*



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*one aspect of it which should be reformed to make inclusive education possible"* (UNESCO, 1994).

One of the major influences who can bind all the elements to initiate the process of inclusive education model is a visionary leader. As Villa and Thousand (Jacqueline, 2005) say that the "systematic change towards inclusive education requires passionate visionary leaders who are able to build consensus around the goal of providing quality education for all learners…. Administrative support and vision to be the most powerful predictor of success moving towards full inclusion". One needs to understand that the leader's role needs to be flexible in order to adapt to the changing situations. As new legalities emerge, the leader needs to be well acquainted in order to pass it to his/her support team. Along with the vision, administrative support is an important element for inclusive education to succeed. As inclusive education is a new phenomenon that is still finding a firm place to sustain, one needs to get away with the traditional practice of segregation of students and rather engage the class of students in a holistic and open mind (Baharul, 2017). This is possible through a rigorous training of the staff of the educational institute, special schools, administration team and at the same time parents. It is important to get the parents involved in this process so as to build a consensus mindset towards the disabled community.

The role of the inclusive leader is a complex one as the role demands a well formulated plan of action for transforming the culture and practice of the institution (Ambrose, 2003). The process to successfully implement the plan of inclusive education requires certain action such as:

- Setting of realistic and practical vision for inclusion: A leader with a concrete clear plan can plan the further course of action as the process continues. Inclusive education involves students with and without disabilities. Therefore, one of the primary plan of action is to have professionals who will understand the capabilities of each student and work towards creating a holistic environment for the whole group to be part of the continuous process.
- Collective planning and implementation with the support staff: The result of a task is best achieved when its plan and executed with the support of the group. In the process the leader needs to be vocal and straightforward with his/her plan of action. Since the leader cannot be present at all phases, delegation of tasks and responsibilities can fasten the process. This course of action requires the leader to step down from his/her bureaucratic administrative role and become an instructional leader in order to provide pedagogical support to teachers (Lemov Doug, 2012).
- Updating the existing/traditional institutional practice: Educational institutions needs to be on constant transformative mode in order to change the predated structures of class environment. Transformative values such as team building, group study, group presentation etc. need to be inculcated and advocated. Preparing a conducive environment will help in raising the morale of the students. Students too need to updated with the policy plan so as to not catch them off guard. A proper presentation of the policy and the action plan will help the students to accept change slowly and at the same time will help them to be an accepting nucleus of the institute.
- Structural modifications of the institution: Stakeholders need to prepare the institution by designing disability friendly pathways for students. Easy accessibility to the restrooms, library will be of better help to the students as this is one of the major crisis for parents who do not wish to send their wards to private schools (Kluth Paula, 2001/2002).
- Involving Government and Corporates for funding: Funds are an important aspect for any tasks to be implemented specially for an education institution with a goal to start and sustain inclusive education. Stakeholders can approach the government, foreign funding's and corporates to invest in the institute through monetary support or through providing tools and instruments for carrying out instructional, vocational training to the students.
- Involving the parents in the process: major role of the stakeholders is to conduct minor seminars or workshops for the parents or guardians to make them acquainted with the understanding of disability through inclusive studies. Parents of students who are not disabled most of the time apprehensive of allowing their ward to be in class with a disabled student. This further creates an embarrassment factor to the disabled student and to his/her parents which will allow the morale of the student to godown causing him/her to take a drop from the institute (Prachi, 2018). Each step needs to be handled professionally in order to gain the trust of the parents who entrust their children to the educational institutions.
- SWOT Analysis: A complete analysis of the plan can be done once the plan is implemented and functions over a period of time. However, one of the major emphasis should be laid down on SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threat analysis) which will help the stakeholders to access their growth and improve in areas where they lack. The strengths can be hyped further in different areas of the educational institute and can be passed on to



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other educational institutes to inculcate the model of inclusive education (Law Sue, 2000)

The role of leaders in inclusive education requires continuous involvement in the long run. Unlike other educational institutions that follow a pre-determined set of rules, regulations, curriculum etc which keeps in mind the functioning of the educational institute in the centre, inclusive education requires professional planning and execution keeping in mind the student in the centre. The curriculum, plan of action requires to fit the institute keeping in mind the diverse students present inside the classroom. Proper planning will help in yielding desired result whereas a faulty mechanism if not rectified on time may lead to a temporary shutdown of the inclusive education mechanism. In this process beginning from the management to the staff with the students and parents needs to be actively involved as each step can be easily monitored and supported when required. Involving experts from industries who have done research in the fields of disability can help to empower the students with/without disability to choose careers which otherwise society deems restricted to a particular section or group. Breaking the ceiling od segmentation and stigma will help to channelize the growth of the student and in the long run the growth of the educational institution (Bruce, 2000).

## IV. Equipping and Empowering Educational Leaders in India

One of the challenges that Indian society currently faces is lack of leadership. There is an imbalance to the various issues that have darkened the ideology of humanity through aggressive and hegemonical authority against those people who wish to question the authority but continue to be side lined or prefer not to be part of the regime. Social barriers continue to pull down individuals who lack the desired skill or knowledge from engaging with the larger group. With respect to the disability group that has been side lined from the earlier times, the problem still prevails for this community irrespective of the new legal framework created for their upliftment (Marzano J. Robert, 2005). Scholars who emphasize on education for the upliftment of the disabled community speak from their personal understanding of the disabled and the marginalized community. The real experience of the struggle for upliftment can only be preached by those who are agents of the struggle for an identity. In such instances there is a dire need for a leader who can voice the opinion of the group and function as an identity of the collective group in the larger sphere.

In the educational phase, the management that controls the functioning of the education system need to understand that parallel education system and inclusive education do not function simultaneously. Educational institutions designed for the normal students will find it difficult to cater to the disabled students right from their admission to their performance in the classroom. The real challenge begins when the ward is admitted in the classroom but fails to grasp the normal pace of teaching. This further aggravates the problem as the criteria for disabled students are Dyslexia (problem of reading and retaining), Dysgraphia (problem of writing) and Dyscalculia (problem of mathematics and calculation) (Lakshmi, 2004). Under such circumstances, the burden of constant attention on the disabled students proves to be a problem on the teachers as well as on the parents. Students with linguistic problem find it difficult to communicate to the teachers and at times are victims of mockery form peers. Labelling of the disabled group is not a new phenomenon and still continues keeping them away from participating in the mainstream educational field. Problems of the disability can be curbed when individuals in the management order take the initiative to welcome changes in the structure and function of the institution. One of the major emphasis for leaders to take initiative is through understanding the problem of disability and its different areas. Some of the areas which will help in equipping and empowering the leader and the support staff in the educational field can be:

- Propagating the values of equality in education through micro management in the class room and macro management in the structure and agencies of the educational institution. Creating an atmosphere of empathy can help in sustaining the trust of the disabled students and at the same time values and mission of the institution.
- Breaking the monotony of admitting normal students to the school and instigating parents of disabled students to admit their wards to special schools. The idea of OURS vs THEIRS need to be challenged and removed in order to allow disabled students to be part of the schooling system designed for nondisabled students.
- Understanding the problem of disability through hand on experience via workshops and seminars for the workshop for the administration, support staff. Looking at the society through the lens of the disabled group will eventually help in building up strategies which are disability friendly and supporting.
- Involving orators, social workers who have faced the challenges of stigma associated with disability to interact with the students or rather be part of the curriculum. This will help in preparing an action plan which will be concrete and accessible to the students.
- Creating a conducive environment for the students with respect to disability friendly classroom, easy access to restroom and playground, elevators, educative instruments and gadgets which will



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lessen the problem of keeping up with the students who are not disabled.

- Preparing curriculum which will allow the disabled students their choice of subjects rather than complex and compulsory subjects. The autonomy to choose their choice will help in bringing up and supporting the creativity of the student in specific areas. Providing writers during exams, compensating written exams with oral exams are some of the areas where the institutes can help the disabled students.
- Providing scholarships in academics and extra-curricular activities will help in building up the morale of the students.
- Educational leaders need to prepare a formal report of the action plan and present it to governmental, non-governmental, corporates, foreign investors in the process. Keeping a tab will eventually help in building relations with the welfare group which will help in boosting the institution through funding and other support.
- One of the major roles which a leader can play to accomplish the goals of inclusive education is to conduct a survey of students who have dropped off from the educational institutions on account of low attendance or difficulty in grasping and understanding the course work or any other problem which stops them from coming back to the institution and meet them at their place of residence. This will help in creating a feeling of care and nurture which the disability group are deprived off helping them to get back in track.
- Educational institutes can also tie up with companies for job opportunities within the countries and overseas. This will help to create a feeling of competence and striving for excellence within the students. Creating job opportunities will also help to lessen the burden on the families of the disabled students.

The Government can also be a part of this activity by including candidates who belong to the disabled group to be part of their think-tank in formulating ideas and policies for the upliftment of the community. Only when all the avenues are open for the disabled group to be part and engage in the activities, only then can we expect and speak about our country that spreads the message of equality and harmony to all its citizens.

## V. Conclusion

Inclusive education although a new phenomenon, has gained its momentum in propagating equal opportunities for students with disability to be part of the normal schooling system. Although with the implementation of legalities such as Persons with Disabilities Act (1995), Right to Education Act (2009) along with the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) model, adoption of national policies for persons with disabilities Act (2006), National Policy for Children Act (2013), the real success of providing education will be achieved only when people will lend a hand to the disabled community helping them to be a part of the mainstream education system and treating them as one equals. Until and unless this attitude is nurtured, emphasizes and continued, the hope for a better, egalitarian society can be expected.

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