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## Visualising Inclusive School

### Abstract

*The purpose of this study is to reflect how inclusion can be made possible in schools. In this paper, the researcher has carried out a qualitative review of previous studies to know what strategies can be used for inclusive schools. The researcher has categorised the strategies into two types: general strategies and specific strategies. General strategies include location of classroom, classroom environment, sitting arrangement in the classroom, support for physical and mental well-being, Teacher Education and regular training and specialised staff. Specific strategies include teaching strategies, IEP of children with special needs, teaching methods, curriculum and assessment, reinforcement, adaptation, accommodation and modification, assistive technologies, and life skills. Keywords: children with special needs, inclusion, general classroom.*

**“Strength lies in differences, not in similarities.”- Stephen Covey**

### Introduction

In the past, people believed that special children were not capable of learning. They were not considered a part of society. Such children were forced to remain confined within the four walls of home and away from everyone. They were not considered to be a part of regular schools. Later on, special schools were introduced for children with special needs.

A special school caters to children who have special educational needs due to learning difficulties, physical disabilities or behavioural problems. However, in time there has been a growing consensus that special children also have the same rights as any other child, and they ought to be included as active participants of their community. Thus, they began to be integrated into general schools. But general schools made very few changes to their curriculum and pedagogy to suit the needs of children with special needs. As a result, teachers were not always able to support the children with special needs to help realise their potential.

Inclusion aims to provide an educational environment in which the special child feels comfortable in a conventional classroom. This means that the design, physical structure, curriculum and teaching methodology are constructed by keeping the needs of the special child in mind. This is done in a way that it can be accessible to all children without any discrimination. It is designed so that children with special needs can also be a part of the regular classroom environment. Inclusion provides a platform to the children with special needs to grow fully to their potential in an educational environment they share with every other child.

The Gazette of India published the Rights of Person with Disabilities Act 2016, which states inclusive education to mean “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.”

Article 24 of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with

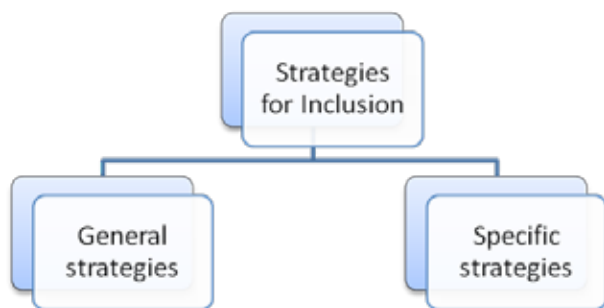
Disabilities (UNCRDP) which is related to the Right to Inclusive Education for all persons with disabilities states that all the children with special needs should also have the right to get quality education and should not be discriminated on any basis. Every child should have access to quality education at all levels—primary, secondary, tertiary, vocational, and life-long learning.

Education should be available to everyone in the communities in which they live. Children with special needs should not be excluded from school education. An aim of inclusive education is to foster the full development of all the children, including that of children with special needs, in the general (regular) school setting. The main basis is to support children with special needs to participate fully in society and make everyone aware of human rights, diversity, tolerance, and respect. Children should be placed in the least restrictive environment or in the most natural settings (Dahle, 2003).

There are challenges in practising inclusion in schools such as lack of awareness about teaching methods appropriate for children with disabilities, inaccessible environment, negative attitudes of school personnel, lack of training, and lack of involvement of parents. There are some strategies that can be used to make inclusion successful in schools.

### Strategies For Inclusion

Strategies can be classified into two ways: general strategies and specific strategies.



### General Strategies

#### *Location of class:*

Classes should be on the ground floor. If they are on the first floor, there should be a ramp along with stairs, as it can be difficult for children with physical disability to use stairs. Thus, the classroom should be at a location where it is accessible to all children with and without special needs.

#### *Classroom environment:*

Class should be appropriate according to the number of children. There should not be more than 25–30 students in the classroom. Classrooms should be well-equipped with technologies like speakers, mic, etc. Innovative technologies should be used in the classroom, like software tools (interactive white boards, blogs, wikis, etc.), and visual media literacy tools (concept maps, cartoons, digital storytelling, graphing calculators, geo-spatial technologies, personal digital assistants and use of MP3 files or podcasting, webinar) (Block2:Pedagogy For Inclusive Education, RCI). Activity-based learning should be encouraged in classrooms (National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion, 1994).

#### *Sitting arrangement in the classroom:*

Arrangement of the class should be such that all children should be visible to the teacher and children are also able to see the teacher. The sitting arrangement should be made in a semicircular way in the class, or if that is not possible, then children with special needs should be seated in the front row. However, there shouldn't be any segregation within the classroom. When children with special needs are made to sit alongside other children, it inculcates a feeling of inclusivity in the classroom. The other children also learn to develop a kind and helpful attitude towards children with special needs. Special children should be so seated that they are able to hear and see clearly so as to maximise

understanding in class. They should not be seated near windows and bright light as it can create glare to them.

### ***Support for Physical and Mental Well-Being-***

The **Oxford English Dictionary** defines well-being as the state of being comfortable, healthy or happy. Social and emotional well-being lies under the mental well-being. Sports, exercises and yoga programmes should be a part of the curriculum in order to ensure physical well-being of children. Such activities must be suitably adapted for children with disabilities so they are not left out. Promoting student's well-being and their emotional and physical safety is a fundamental feature of school life (National Council for Special Education, 2011). Schools should provide care (ensure physical and emotional welfare of the child) to the children enrolled in their school. Teachers should be empathetic, friendly, patient and polite so that children can build emotional connections and feel welcome.

### ***Teacher Education and Regular Training:***

Teachers must be trained to work effectively in inclusive environments and teachers with disabilities must also be recruited and trained. Teachers with disabilities in schools will help to promote equal rights, provide unique expertise and skills, contribute to breaking down barriers, and serve as important role models.

### ***Specialised/ Trained Staff:***

There should be a General Education teacher. There should also be a special educator who can help to determine the needs of children with special needs. School administrators must provide indirect services by giving proper implementation of policies, procedures and financial responsibilities. There should be school psychologists, counselors, speech language pathologists (for communication issues), occupational therapists (for fine motor control issues), physiotherapists (for

gross motor control issues), audiologists and other relevant health and social service professionals (Bateman & Cline, 2016).

### ***Specific Strategies***

#### ***Individualised Educational Plan-***

There should be an individualised education plan (IEP) for each child with disability. The IEP is a blueprint for the education of children with special needs. It should be created by a special team comprising the general teacher, special educator, the child's parents, a psychologist, a counselor, a physiotherapist and any other people who may be involved with the child's education and rehabilitation. The IEP is one of the main elements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) by the Govt. of America. It is a written document stating the support and accommodation a child needs, and this document assists parents and teachers in assessing the potential of the child and helping them to develop fully. For the inclusive education concept, the 504 plan (support and remove barriers for children with disability in school) was designed to ensure children with special needs are allowed to learn in the general classroom environment. The IEP sets learning goals and describes the services the school will provide.

#### ***Teaching Method:***

Teachers should recognise diversity among learners in the class and develop classroom environment according to the needs of children with disabilities. Teachers should use various teaching methods, depending upon the nature of disabilities, to help them make the effort to understand with ease. They should use sign languages and visual symbols in classroom discussions as it will enhance learning and giving them more than one way for communication with children. Teachers should pay attention to verbal directions and use fewer words and a clear message (Friedlander, 2009) to avoid complexity while delivering information in class. In the beginning, the teacher should



prompt answers to teach the child how to answer. Teachers should also use task analysis (break learning materials into parts) followed by a step-by-step approach and teaching parts at a time—the second part is made available after completing the first part and there should be repetition and practice again and again till they understand the topic. Teachers should make them learn through concrete objects like blocks for counting, alphabets to learn and recognise, and modeling clay to make objects. Teachers should try to demonstrate everything while teaching and there should be more use of activities to involve them in hands-on experience. Activities should be so constructed that they must relate to the child's prior knowledge. These should be meaningful, interesting, and content-based to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills in children. One teach one assist model should be used (Casale-Giannola, 2012) in which a special teacher plays the role of assistant. There are some models by the National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion (1994) for teachers to support inclusion. These include a co-teaching model (special education teacher co-teaches alongside with general education teacher), parallel teaching (special education teacher teaches small group of children from children with special needs in a general classroom), co-teaching consultant model (special education teacher teaches children with special needs separately but also teaches in the general education classroom for several hours), a team model (special education teacher teams up with one or more general education teachers to form a team), methods and resource teacher model (special teacher whose children distributed in general classroom works with general education teacher), cooperative learning (group of students with a wide range of skills and characteristics to work together).

### ***Adaptation, Accommodation and Modification:***

All students in the inclusive classroom are not the same. So, adaptation, accommodation and modification must be done as per the needs of children in order to enhance their learning in inclusive classrooms. Teachers can adapt, accommodate and modify according to the needs of children.

### ***Curriculum & Assessment:***

There should be a modified curriculum for special children according to their needs and potential. They should teach according to their IEP (National Council for Special Education, 2016). Alternate goals should be set for them. They are not imposed to learn the whole curriculum. There should be an individualised curriculum based on their individuality and their assessment should be done in natural settings and given sufficient time to respond according to their potential. The curriculum should also include activities of daily life, health and hygiene. There should be flexibility in the curriculum. Assessment should be done in such a manner that it helps develop the strengths and abilities of all children rather than highlighting their limitations. Assessment should be based on the quantity of improvement.

### ***Reinforcement:***

Always use positive reinforcement if children give the right answer. There should be use of verbal and non-verbal cues to encourage answers. Pause for a short time for the child to respond, and allow them to discuss in groups sometimes. This will help them in learning from other children in the classroom. Provide clear and defined examples of the behaviour that is expected.

### ***Assistive Technologies:***

Use assistive technology to support children in learning and assessment situations.



The school should use a range of assistive technologies based on individual learner needs like alternative access for children who have limitations in physical strength, movement and coordination (for example: pencil grips, switches, supportive seating) (Block 2: Pedagogy for Inclusive Education, RCI). Alternative and augmentative communication is used to replace or supplement speech for children who have problem in speaking or writing (for example: speech-generating device, communication app for tablet device), literacy support software for children where written information is a barrier to their learning and engagement (for example: text to speech, speech to text, word prediction), visual supports to assist children to understand concepts and organise ideas, as alternative ways to deliver information to children with low vision (for example: software that magnifies text, graphic organiser, visual timetable).

### **Life Skills:**

Some children with special needs lack in necessary life skills. Teachers should tell them and make them learn some basic communication skills (Dahle, 2003), life care skills, personal safety, following directions, how to see time from the digital clock, and then analog clock, signing your name, money management, how to respond to their name being called out, survival reading skills, social skills and practical skills. Teachers should encourage critical thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, and other coping life skills in special children to promote their self-reliance and independent living capabilities.

These strategies should be implemented in inclusive schools for children with special needs:

- Ramps should be made in schools that students can access the classrooms easily.
- Proper care should be taken of children's physical and mental well-being.
- Well trained teachers should be recruited in inclusive schools.
- Individualised educational plan should be made.
- Accommodation, adaptation and modification should be done by teachers according to the needs.
- There should be modified curriculum.
- Assessment should be done according to the improvement.
- Assistive technologies should be used.
- Classroom should not have more than 20-25 students in one classroom.
- Teachings of life skill should be given.
- Various teaching methods should be used.
- Staff and teachers should be polite and well trained.
- They should also appoint well trained teachers with special needs.

### **Conclusion**

In order to make inclusion in schools successful, the points discussed above can be incorporated.



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