Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Regular Schools: Challenges and Opportunities

Tirussew Teferra *

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Introduction

In Ethiopia, the magnitude of childhood disabling factors and the incidence scale of disability are very high. The presence of diversified disabling factors (e.g. infectious diseases, difficulties contingent to delivery, under-nutrition, malnutrition, civil strife and periodic episode of drought and famine) and the absence of early primary and secondary prophylactics has brought a phenomenal increase. These remain to be a challenge to the country.

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Introduction

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persons with disabilities constitutes 1.9% of the total population. On the other hand, the focused-baseline survey of the persons with disabilities in Ethiopia, which is the first of its type in the country, revealed that the prevalence of disability is about 2.95% (Tirussew et al., 1995). The difference observed in the figures of the two surveys explained that some disability groups such as children with behavioral and language difficulties and victims of crippling health conditions were not covered in the census. The further desegregation of the data of the baseline survey by type of disability and age bracket is given in Table 1a.

Table 1a: Disability by Type and Age Distribution

Type of Disability	Motor Disorders	Visual Impairment	Hearing Impairment	Mental Retardation	Speech and Language disorders	Multiple disabilities	Behavior Problems
Prevalence	41.2%	30.4%	14.9%	6.5%	2.4%	2.0%	2.0%
Age bracket	1-14	15-25	26-39	40-54	50>	-	-
Proportion	15.9%	23.3%	17.7%	14.4%	28.6	-	-

Source: Tirussew et al., 1995

Furthermore, when the educational data is broken down into location the following pattern becomes evident (see Table 1a).

Table 1b: Education by Location

Education by Location	No	Primary	Secondary
Urban	49.8%	21.4%	28.8%
Rural	78.4%	14.5%	7.1%

Source: Tirussew et al., 1995.

The study on gender mix depicted that 55.8% constitutes males while 44.2% constitutes females.

Until recently few special schools have predominantly catered for the special educational needs of children in the country. There are now new trends of integrating and teaching children with disabilities in regular school settings. However, the information available regarding the education of children with disabilities in Ethiopia is incomplete and fragmented. The MOE

(1997) annual statistical report contains adequate information about the state of the education of children with disabilities in the country to date.

Table 2: Enrolment in Special Boarding and Day Schools by Gender

Type of Disability	Special Boarding School Grade 1-6			Special Day School Grade 1-6		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Children Visual Impairment	309	157	466	11	11	22
Children Hearing Impairment	81	56	137	161	147	308
Children Mental Retardation	-	-	-	65	68	133
Total	390	213	603	247	226	463

Source: MOE, 1997

As Table 2 reveals the number of children served in special boarding and day schools is about 1066. It is further reported that about 1210 children with disabilities attend special classes. Table 3 portrays the general participation profile of children with disabilities in special classes at primary and secondary regular schools.

Table 3: Enrolment in Special Classes by Grade Level and Gender

Type of Disability	Level of Education					
	Grade 1-6			Grade 7-12		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Children with Visual Impairments	65	20	85	228	119	347
Children with Hearing Impairments	186	152	338	141	105	246
Children with Mental Retardation	122	96	218	-	-	-
Grand Total	373	268	641	375	194	569

Source: MOE, 1997.

Accordingly, the total number of children who are served by all special delivery modes is 2,276, which is a very negligible figure. That means the vast majority of schoolage children do not have access to education or any sort of rehabilitation services. This and other confounded socio-cultural factors force most persons with disabilities to engage themselves in begging in street corners besides their being dependent and non-self supportive. This state of affairs need to be redressed and it calls for the concerted effort of all parities, that is, the

government, parents, professionals, persons with disabilities and the community at large.

Studies suggest that among the various modes of educational deliveries for persons with disabilities, inclusive education is found to be ethically acceptable, pedagogically sound, psychologically commendable and cost effective in contrast with special school provisions. It is also considered to be the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all (UNESCO, 1994).

This article attempts to critically study the theoretical basis and practical implications of the different modes of educational deliveries in the education of children with disabilities. Understanding of the meanings, challenges and opportunities of inclusive education are discussed. Finally, reflections on the need for the shift towards inclusive education in Ethiopia and implementation strategies for successful inclusion are discussed.

Theoretical framework

The education of children with disabilities has undergone several changes in the last five decades. The changes were reflections of the various paradigms evolved as a result of the understanding of the problems of children with disabilities and the possible remedial or intervention strategies. The following is a brief revisit of the theoretical basis and major educational shifts leading towards inclusive education.

Off-Site Educational Provision

The traditional view towards disabling factors and persons with disabilities were predominantly embedded in religious, socio-cultural values and beliefs. It describes practices defined by a society's religious and cultural beliefs. In most societies, ill-humored ancestors or divine forces at one time saw disabilities

as punishment. Such understanding of disability is usually referred to as the traditional model, which is a construct created by religion and culture in a society (Coleridge 1993). That is why the first special schools and services were, by and large, started by religious and/or charitable organizations in most parts of the world particularly in developing countries (Claesson, 1995; Evans, 1998).

Following this model, a paradigm based on the understanding that a child's disability lies 'within' the individual factors emerged. The paradigm has its origin in the biomedical understanding of impairments, according to which disability is usually seen as a lack of competence due to a dysfunction in an individual's mind and body (Reindal, 1995). This conceptualization led to the definition and classification of children with their respective disabilities. This is what is considered as a medical model. As a result different categories and labeling have been created. The consequence of such understanding has led to segregation and isolation of children with disabilities from the mainstream. The emergence of special schools and institutions serving children with disabilities was the result of the influence of the medical model (Evans, 1998).

For over forty years, the medical model of diagnosing, labeling and treating children in segregated provision dominated the thinking of special education. This itself has been shown to be an area of debate and controversies. This paradigm has differed markedly in the way it perceived problems and in the way it generated solutions. It is found to be mono-dimensional or focusing on the singular. In other words, this method has been used to isolate problems and focus on them in some detail; its methodology strips away the difficulties often found in real situation (e.g. classrooms) and it creates solutions of varying efficacy which usually share a disregard for the larger situation. The model of diagnostic /prescriptive teaching, which became popular in the early seventies and which tried to isolate children's problems and fetch remedies for them,

has been shown to be of very limited utility (Thomas and Feiler, 1988).

Consequently, there has been a major shift in the understanding of the nature of learning difficulties over the past twenty years. The view that some children were defective in various ways, and they needed to be separated and taught in a special method quite different from that of other children was critically scrutinized. The understandings attached to a student have an effect on the choice of the educational program and setting that is rated the best one for this student. The prevailing structures and settings of meeting special educational needs have also an effect on how a student with special needs is seen and what is thought of for that student (Moberg, 1997). As noted by O'Toole (1991), the individual and the problem were lifted out of social context in which they existed and attempts were made to impose a solution in a new context of the therapist's making. Ainscow (1994) further indicated that in reality the isolation of institutional settings was a modern form of hiding children with disabilities that was the characteristic of earlier times. He further revealed that there is a growing understanding that handicapping conditions are much more widely spread, more varied and more complex than the systems of categorization based largely on the information that medical criteria tend to indicate. This means, children's behavior and their characteristics are more accurately reflected on a continuum than discrete categories. Furthermore, Tuunainen (1997) contends that " in order to help, we accept labeling, discrimination, and exclusion which in many cases can cause severe problems to the children and to their families". Generally, there seems to exist a consensus among educators and researchers that secluded educational setting has failed to equip children with the necessary psychological strength and social competencies for leading quality life in mainstream society. The failure in this method of educational delivery called for a change in the reconsideration of the disability and. disabling conditions to pave the way towards integrated education.

Integrated Provision of Education

Conceptual problems and negative implications of off-site services necessitated a major change in the mode of educational provision for children with disabilities. The main shift in the delivery of education was geared towards integration or mainstreaming. A drift to an accelerated movement against the practice of off site-services started. Concepts like 'integration' and 'mainstreaming' have been widely used in the literature pertaining to the education of children with disabilities. 'Integration' is a more generic term applied to the school situation and may include departures from mainstreaming such as when more limited contact during part of the day between children with and without disabilities is planned (Guralinck, 1997). In its broadest sense, integration refers to the process of educating children with disabilities in regular classroom whenever the placement best fits their particular learning and/or social needs (Banbury 1987). That is, the majority of children will be enrolled in regular classes with specific program modifications made or with children with disabilities pulled out of the regular classroom for special instruction. It is a process of integrating children with special needs in to regular schools and classrooms instead of placing them in special institutions. Specifically it is the instructional and social integration of children with disabilities in a regular class or at least for a portion of a school day. It refers to both the functional instructional inclusion as well as social integration for unspecified portion of the school day (Mercer and Mercer, 1989; Schulz et, al.·1991; Safford, et al., 1994).

Perhaps no question has preoccupied special education professionals more in the past two decades than the effects, real and potential, of integrating children with disabilities. Integration with a move to recognizing the merits of educating children with disabilities still remained considering the individual's disability as the core problem in the learning-teaching processes (IDDC, 1998). It has tended to focus on 'within individual deficits' geared towards providing special

back-up support and little attention has been given to restructuring the learning teaching environment. This approach can, by and large be considered as a continuation of the medical or the individual model but in a different way. Although a belief in the educational or developmental benefits of integration may provide the foundation for other rationales for integration, there is little evidence that these potential benefits actually occur (Cole et al.1991). Hundert and Houghton (1992) reported that compared with peers without disabilities, children with disabilities placed in regular pre-schools tended to be more socially rejected by peers, displayed more social-isolation, placed more demands on teachers' time, were less attentive, and more often the recipient of negative behavior. Findings consistently revealed relatively modest benefits in peer interactions for children with developmental delays when participating with typically developing children. Although the outcomes of comparisons between integrated and specialized settings have been generally consistent in favor of the integrated setting, the actual mechanisms, through which the peer interactions of children with developmental delays are influenced by settings containing typically developing children, are poorly understood (Guralnick et al., 1996).

Thus, integration carries the risk of making things worse as well as making things better (Tungaraza, 1992). In a six country study, segregation was defined as an educational setting that does not allow children with special needs to have social contacts with their peers referring to both special schools and permanent special classes in regular school settings (Meijer et al., 1995). That means, special classes located in the regular school compounds, which do not ensure social contacts between children with disabilities and their non-disabled peers, make the necessary conditions but not the satisfying conditions for effective integration. Furthermore, differences across countries in terms of understanding and realizing integration were also observed. In the six country study of integration, three broad categories of integration policies were identified. These include: 'one-track' integration,

which is mainly oriented towards regular education and avoiding segregation by all means, a 'two-track' system oriented towards both regular and special education, where the separate system of special education plays a key role in the integration efforts, and finally, a 'multi-track' system which offer a continuum of services for special needs of students. When one considers these approaches, the question to what extent an integration can be judged as successful arises. This is a very difficult question to answer. Successful in what respect? To whom? By what criteria? How can it be assessed? By whom? (Meijer et al. 1995). In addition, there are other issues surrounding the process of integration, which need to be clarified. There is a critical lack of information on the characteristics of regular classrooms into which, for example, mentally retarded children could be mainstreamed. Some of the questions which need to be addressed, particularly referring the mentally retarded, include the following: What do we mean when we speak of appropriate placement? Do we mean opportunities of interaction with peers? Do we mean maximizing academic achievement? Do we mean maximizing the opportunities functioning 'normally'? Do we mean enabling the child to lead an independent life (Gottliieb et al., 1991).

Whatever the case may be, it is during integrated education that children with disabilities begin attending the same school within the regular school setting. Studies indicate that initially children were placed into separate classes within the regular school setting. Over time, however, these children were mainstreamed or integrated into existing classrooms or services for at least part of the day. While this approach was an improvement over isolation of many institutional settings, the reality of children's mainstreaming experience was that their needs often went unmet in classes designed for the sighted, hearing or those without any developmental or learning difficulties. And the supplemental special services they received were not only costly, but they set children apart from peers (Evans, 1998). This required a shift of emphasis

on the task of persons providing educational services to make sure that the educational settings were adjusted to accommodate the special educational needs rather than trying to make the children with disabilities fit into the given educational setting (Claesson, 1995; Evans, 1998). The question, therefore, need to be reformulated by asking what is wrong with the school rather than what is wrong with the child. This implies framing the question towards how schooling can be improved in order to help all children to learn successfully (Ainscow, 1994 & 1997). These and similar questions led to the emergence of inclusive education, which is the current conceptual shift in special needs education.

Towards Inclusive Education

Understanding Inclusive Education

The tendency to consider disability as a medical or biological issue presupposes problems that lie exclusively within the individual and solutions consist of attempts of changing the individual (Ratska , A.D.,1989). This view has been sharply challenged by an alternative view which stresses that development proceeds through reciprocal interactions between children and environments so that both the individual and their settings undergo change. In a transactional model, changes in the child's settings (e.g. family, educational and related environments) may radically alter interaction patterns with significant implications for child development and learning (Mitchell and Brown, 1991). In this model, the development of the child is seen as a product of continuous dynamic interactions of the child and the experience provided by his or her family and social context (Meisels and Shonkoff, 1990). In the same line, children's learning difficulties at school are considered not as such emanating from within the individual factor but from the transaction between personal and school factors. The regular school itself is viewed as a major source of learning difficulties. Inappropriate curriculum, content, and

teaching methods insensitive handling and an over-competitive school ethos could contribute to the failure to meet the individual needs of particular children, and this results in failure for the child with the disabilities. This would encourage one to assign such children to segregated education. (Meijer et al. 1995).

Therefore, disability should not be considered as a phenomenon that exists only within an individual; it has also a social meaning (Savolainen, 1995). The social model is a move away from the medical/individual model to social, ethical and economic implications of what it means to have a disability. This view arises from a realization that a child's progress can be understood only in respect to particular circumstance tasks, and set of relationships. According to Ainscow (1994), there is an increasing recognition that difficulties encountered by young people in their general development are likely to arise as much from the disadvantageous circumstances as from individual characteristics. The ecological perspective systems analysis elaborates the nature of obstacles faced at different levels in a society as well as respective strategies for their removal (Caesson, 1995). All these understandings on child development and learning are the basis for the shift to inclusive education.

The Concept of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education means welcoming all children, without discrimination, into regular or ordinary schools. By this change of attitude against differential treatment of educational differences in people will possibly be seen in a positive perspective. It calls for a respect of difference. Indeed, it is a focus on creating environments responsive to the differing developmental capacities, needs, and potentials of all children. Inclusion means a shift in services from simply trying to fit the child into 'normal settings'; it is a supplemental support for their

disabilities or special needs and promoting the child's overall development in an optimal setting (Evans, 1998). Therefore, the task becomes one of developing the school in response to pupil's diversity. This has to include a consideration of overall organization, curriculum and classroom practice, support for learning and staff development (Ainscow, 1997). It does not mean that we should cease to identify and refer to the disabilities of the learners, or to provide particular kinds of support when and where needed. It does mean that we should cease perceiving learners as all being similar because they are referred to by the same name (Bridge and Moss, 1999). Inclusive education implies that education is about learning to live and learn together with each other (Claesson, 1995). Central to the present thinking is the approach towards learning, which is termed as "inclusive learning", a move away from labeling the student and towards creating special educational environment; concentrating on understanding better how people learn so that they can be better helped to learn; and see people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties first and foremost as learners (Tomlinson, 1996). Therefore, the need to work out the necessary modification and adaptation of educational materials, methodology, facilities, equipment and environmental conditions so that the child's specific educational needs can best be served is essential in an inclusive setting. The special support children with disabilities require in the classroom may range from minor modifications such as altering seating arrangements to major adaptations and considerable assistance (Smith et al., 1983; Gearheart et al., 1988; Heward and Orlansky, 1988; Ysseldyk and Algozzine, 1995).

In favor of the move towards the inclusive approach, the Salamanca Statement and Frame for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO,1994) provides the clearest and most unequivocal call in its articles 2 and 7 respectively as follows.

Article 2 states

> *... that ordinary schools should accommodate all children, regardless of their physical, intellectual, emotional , social, linguistic or other requirements. It further states that all educational policies should stipulate that children with disabilities attend their neighborhood school.*

Article 7 also states

> *... that all children should learn together , wherever 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 ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with communities.*

Indeed, there are some children with severe disabilities for whom it would be extremely difficult to create a truly inclusive educational environment; it would neither benefit the child nor others in the setting. However, this does not mean that the child should be segregated and isolated from all life in the community. There should be a range of inclusive settings whereby the child can feel included and be best served. Such settings among others could be within the ordinary school premises, family circles, at community gatherings, at sports events, religious services and other recreation centers which are likely to ensure the opportunities for social interaction (Evans, 1998).

Challenges of Inclusive Education

The real challenge of inclusive education is to meet the special needs of all children with and without disabilities (Kajubi, 1999). Inclusion is not a soft process, it requires a lot of struggle and commitment to overcome all types of barriers

mainly attitudinal and social. Inclusive education can only flourish in a system which generates inclusive ideology. Where distrust and uncertainty are fabrics of an institutional culture, inclusion becomes almost impossible (Corbett et al. 1997). People have to change their established practices and modes of working. It is always simple and easy just to carry on operating in the well tried procedures. Indeed, practical problems could be encountered while including children with diverse educational needs. But often the practical difficulties have more to do with bringing attitudinal change and the reorganization of learning environments and school activities, with the reallocation of money and resources than with the needs of children. This inertia within the system is an important human issue, and any change requires effort and time, innovation, and sensitivity (Booth and Potts., 1987).

Many factors affect and regulate the development of inclusion. One of the determinant factors refers to attitudes of the community towards persons with disabilities and inclusion. Among others, a limited understanding of the concept of disability, negative attitude towards persons with disabilities and a hardened resistance to change are the major barriers impeding inclusive education (IDDC, 1998). Of particular concern is the fact that teachers' attitudes are seen as the decisive factors, for successful inclusion. Inclusion has been based on the assumption that teachers are willing to admit students with disability into regular classes and be responsible for meeting their needs. However, regular classroom teachers do not perceive themselves as having the appropriate training and skills to meet the instructional needs of students with disabilities (Moberg, 1997). Unfortunately, evaluation studies indicate that teachers do not always have the support they need to make inclusion successful. In some schools, regular teachers are asked to teach special needs students without receiving any form of training as well as administrative assistance. Without support, teachers who do not have sufficient background knowledge in special education are at a loss. An inclusive education demands the class teacher to be

innovative, flexible, creative, ready to learn from the learners and capable of initiating active learning. These are some of the pedagogical challenges facing ordinary class teacher teaching students with diverse educational needs (Mather, 1992; Rekkas, 1997). The development of an inclusive educational policy, curriculum and teacher training programs are frontiers of challenges encountered in course implementing in inclusive education. Generally, the challenge towards inclusive education could emanate from different directions such as attitudinal factors, rigid school system, resistance to change, lack of clear educational guide line, and fear of losing one's job on the part of special school teachers.

Opportunities of Inclusive Education

As compared to segregated settings, in inclusive settings students with disabilities are provided with the opportunity to be exposed and reciprocate to a broad range of social interaction behavior as well as have their social behavior reacted to. Some of these beneficial interactions can be characterised as four non-mutually exclusive types: proximal interactions (sensory contact), helping interactions (non-disabled students voluntarily providing direct assistance promoting social and affective relationship), service interactions (function of responsibilities by the non-disabled person to know how to provide the service and the person with disability to know how to use the service) and reciprocal interactions (the disabled and the non-disabled are both accruing personal benefits from the relationship like playing a game) (Stainback and Stainback, 1985). This dynamic transaction contributes a great deal to the holistic development of the child like for example; learning to perform skills across persons, places, materials, and language cues and establishing social and affective relationships. Furthermore, Egel et al. (1981) found that students with disabilities can profit from learning basic educational tasks by observing non-disabled student peer model.

What is more, studies confirm that inclusion has a positive consequence not only for students with disabilities but also for non-disabled students. Growing up and attending school with children with disabilities will help to develop the skills and attitudes necessary to function effectively in the future. This is tantamount to educating future service providers, managers and future parents. It is presumed that the presence of a lot of prejudices reflected by regular schools as well as employers in not accepting persons with disabilities rests on their lack of exposure to, knowledge of and experience about the competence of persons with disabilities. If they have grown up with peers who experience disabilities, it is extremely doubtful that they would act in such a negative and rejecting ways (Voeltz, 1982; Strainback and Strainback, 1985; Booth and Potts, 1987). Separate socialization breeds attitudes of prejudice, intolerance and self-depreciating; and inclusion, particularly at the formative stage of development, can do much to sweep away the barriers of ignorance and misunderstanding that keep the persons with disabilities and the non-disabled persons apart (Booth and Potts., 1987). In general, non-disabled students who have had the opportunities to interact with students with severe disabilities have more positive and accepting attitudes than those who have not had such opportunities (Voeltz, 1982). Such interactions can also reduce non-disabled 'fear' of students with disabilities and promote understanding and acceptance. Studies further suggest that there are many non-disabled persons who realize a tremendous range of emotional and social benefits from their involvement with persons who have disabilities, including realistically enhanced self-concepts. The important maturational feelings that emanate from learning to assume responsibility, the expansive enlightenment that comes best from sincere attempts to communicate with, understand, and the like are a little different from the usual (Corbett et al., 1997).

Moreover, inclusive education developed out of a strong belief in human rights and social justice. The advocates of inclusion

perceive separate special education as dehumanizing, labeling, ineffective, and expensive. The proponents of full inclusion believe that separate special education is not needed at all and that all students can receive appropriate and quality education within the contexts of regular classrooms Stainback and Stainback 1984, Morbeg, 1997.

Inclusive schools are viewed as essential to the enjoyment and exercise of human right at building solidarity between children with special needs and their peers. Inclusion is considered as an equity issue, a solution to a social problem, a philosophy concerned with rights and opportunities of fellow citizens (Banbury 1987; UNESCO, 1994). Finally, the shift towards inclusive education challenges the present system of educational delivery and leads to quality education through trying to address the needs of all children in the class and benefits educational system as a whole.

Reflections on Inclusive Education in the Education of Children with Disabilities in Ethiopia

Background

In Ethiopia, the participation rate of children with disabilities both in special schools and special classes is negligible when compared with the number of children with disabilities in school age bracket. According to statistical report of the Ministry of Education (1997), there are seven residential special schools, eight day special schools and forty two special classes. The reason for the stagnation in growth of special schools in Ethiopia for the last forty years, which in most cases, were initiated by missionaries, can mainly be attributed to financial constraints as well as attitudinal factors.

As mentioned earlier, children attending special schools and classes include the deaf, the blind and the mentally retarded; the number of students served is about 2,276 (MOE, 1997). Children who fall in the age bracket between 5 and 19

constitute about 37.4 % (23,058,825) of the total population in Ethiopia (CSA, 1998). As per the estimation of the national base-line survey of persons with disabilities in Ethiopia, this constitutes about 2.95% of the total population (Tirussew et al., 1995). That is, there are about 691,765 children with disabilities in the school age bracket in the country among which only 0.33% have access to special schools and classes at primary and secondary levels. Similar survey reports in thirteen eastern and southern African countries revealed that only about 0.1% were enrolled in special school programs (Ross, 1988). What is more, over 95.5% of these services were urban-based and generally ill-quipped with human and material resources (Tirussew, 1993). That means, the education of children with disabilities in Ethiopia has failed to reach and serve over 99% of school age children in the country. It is, therefore, argued that special needs provision and rehabilitation would be more effective in their immediate environment rather than in institutions or special schools which are inaccessible due to their locations, which may be hundreds of miles away from home (Eleweke ,1998).

Therefore, the need to make a shift to inclusive education in Ethiopia is a logical choice to overcome practical problems faced in educating children with disabilities in the country. Inclusive education is nothing more than just good school management and good teaching it is a move towards schools that are structured around pupils diversity and can accommodate many different ways of organizing pupils for learning to attain excellence in diversity. A focus on learning rather than teaching should encourage a shift from viewing difference or disability in terms of individual limitations to focus on environmental or societal constraints (Kajubi, 1999). Recently, stories about successful trends of inclusive education have been reported from developing countries such as Uganda, Ghana, India, Lesotho, South Africa, Guyana, Palestine, Peru and Chile (UNESCO,1998 and 1999). Pockets of successful inclusive education trials with children having visual impairment and mental retardation in Kokebe Tsebah

Primary School (Gilnesh and Tibebu, 1999) and German Church Primary School (Dagne, 2000) in Addis Ababa were reported respectively. Further more, a study conducted on blind students integrated in Mulugeta Gedle School at Sebeta showed positive experiences on the part of the teachers, sighted students as well as blind students. However, shortage of adapted materials, inconvenient school environment and lack of back-up support were considered as obstacles encountered in the course of their education (Teferi, 1996). These are all the beginnings of the positive indications of the movement towards inclusive schooling.

Rationales for the Shift to Inclusive Education

Whatever the case may be, the main rationales for the shift towards inclusive education in Ethiopia are that it helps to:

- achieve psychological, social and educational benefits not only by children with disabilities but also by others (such as teachers, non-disabled students and school administrators) who are involved in the learning-teaching processes;

- attain a broad coverage of education of children with disabilities by providing them through making access to neighborhood schools, minimize the huge and unbearable cost incurred by providing special educational services;

- enable children with disabilities exercise their right to be served in an educational setting which promotes their holistic development;

- identify and serve children with hidden disabilities (undetected disabilities such as minor sensory, physical and behavioral impairments) who have already been 'mainstreamed by default' in the ordinary schools;

- empower concerned individuals (such as parents, siblings, teachers and students) as well as the community to contribute to the well-being of children with disabilities in general and their education in particular. It is a viable approach in the sense that not only does it minimize cost and is practical but also promotes inclusion beyond the school environment, and

- enhance the quality of the educational system and curb school wastage, particularly early school drop-out and repetition rates .

Furthermore, there is an urge to note that special education needs of children with disabilities be served in a wide variety of educational settings on the basis of degree and the type of disability. The severity of the problem and the amount of supportive help that may be required need special consideration in the process of inclusion. However, this should not encourage that the child must be segregated and isolated from all life in the community. There should be a range of settings where the child can feel included and have opportunities for social interaction (Evans, 1998). Except children with severe mental retardation and severe multiple disabilities, others with mild mental retardation, sensory impairments, motor or orthopedic (motor) disorders, speech and language difficulties as well as those with behavioral problems can best be served in an inclusive educational setting. As a matter of fact, many children with minor visual, hearing, speech and language, behavioral problems and delayed development are attending their education in ordinary schools without being detected and their educational needs unmet.

A study on the prevalence of hearing impairment among Grade One students in five primary regular schools at Awassa town using audometric and otoscopic testing were conducted. The study revealed that 7% of the student population has a hearing loss in the range of 26-48dB, which could be classified

as mild hearing impairment (Fransua, 1998). It means that these children miss a lot of speech signals which have adverse effect on class discussion, peer interaction and overall academic performance. Neither the classroom teachers nor the parents detected that these children had hearing problem until the time this study was undertaken (Fransua, 1998). A high rate of early repetition and dropout rate is recorded in the primary schools. Recent report of the Ministry of Education (1999) revealed that about 27 % of the children leave school before reaching Grade 2. Presumably, children with undetected mild problems as a group may constitute a good number of early repeaters and dropouts of the primary schools in Ethiopia.

On the other hand, it is also important to note that studies on inclusive education indicate that the education of deaf children is preferred to be offered in a separate class (Kristensen, 1997). Especially, in a country like Ethiopia where the nature of sign language is not studied and where interpretation services are not available, it would be unrealistic to think of including deaf children in the present educational scenario. The result of the education of the deaf in the Ethiopian school system is not encouraging. The high dropout rate and the low educational achievement of deaf children in the Ethiopian school system could be an indicator that there is a lot to be done in this area (Berta, 2000). In order to facilitate the development of sign language, communication skills, active interaction and self-identity among deaf children, providing them with education in special classes in pre-school and primary school years seem to be feasible and practical. However, a range of inclusive activities at school, home, and community levels need to be organized to cater for the needs of deaf children as well as others with severe retardation and multiple disabilities.

Whatever the case may be, the need for an ongoing dialogue and discourse among special needs education professionals, regular class teachers, school administrators, students,

persons with disabilities and parents towards quality inclusive education should be underscored. As it is clear from the forgoing discussions, there is no standardized format or recipe for quality inclusive education. However, based on the present conditions of the education of children with disabilities in Ethiopia and the experience of other countries, useful components which may lead to successful program of inclusion education are suggested.

Set of Ingredients which Lead to Successful Inclusion

The Need for Clear Educational Guideline

As it is stated in the Education and Training Policy of the Country (TGE, 1994) , one of its objectives is " to enable both the handicapped and the gifted learn in accordance with their potential and needs". It does not provide a clear guideline as to which mode of educational delivery would be followed to unfold the potentials of children with disabilities. For example, the policy document in South Africa as reported by Department of National Education, advocates a clear commitment to inclusive education (Nyewe, 1999). Therefore, the need for further elaboration on the direction of special needs education in Ethiopia by the Ministry of Education is in order. It is hoped that a clear and transparent statement of strategy with a shift to inclusive education will be in place in the country soon.

Developing Inclusive Curriculum

The curriculum requires a certain degree of flexibility in that modifications, substitution, exemption as well as compensations are entertained to accommodate the diverse educational needs of children. It should not be expected that all pupils will be doing the same work; that simply would not be realistic particularly for those children with developmental delay. However, a common curriculum frame-work where the different educational programs pupils follow can be related to each other through common curricula principles is feasible

(Meijer et al.1995). Such framework makes it possible for pupils of different abilities to work together. It also provides a shared language to discuss the curriculum. This makes it easier for teachers to communicate with their colleagues about educational programs for pupils with learning difficulties and to ensure that they participate in common programs of work to the greatest extent possible.

Modifying the Teacher Training Curriculum

The teacher training program should reflect the necessary competencies needed by the teachers who are to take on leadership roles in order to facilitate the development of inclusive schooling. The understanding and skills required should be clear so that the key training areas could be identified. It means that it is always important to recognize the implications of the concept of inclusion in designing curriculum for teacher education curriculum (Ainscow, 1997). A study conducted in South Africa revealed that training programs in the past have resulted in an almost total lack of awareness and skills among existing teachers in dealing with diversity, identifying needs in learners and within the system, and providing curriculum flexibility (Engelbrecht & Chris 1998). The study further concluded that core special needs components in training programs should be organized round a curriculum that confronts issues of the accommodation of diversity education.

The failure to provide some coverage on special educational needs would be for teachers in initial training. It is a major drawback in promoting inclusion education (Meijer et al., 1995). Special needs education courses should therefore be encompassed in all pre-service teacher-training programs as part of the core material covered. This makes the would be teachers to be academically and psychologically ready to deal with diverse educational needs of children with disabilities at schools. Addressing these needs is an essential component of the job, not an optional add-on for some teachers. For those who are currently teaching in ordinary schools, organizing a

continuous in-service training program on inclusion and disability issues is equally important like the pre-service training.

Furthermore, if most children with disabilities are to be accommodated in general education classrooms, special education curriculum must be modified and teacher educators must come to a new understanding of the work their students will undertake to reshape their programs. The training of special education teachers needs to be reconsidered with a view to enabling them to work in different educational settings across all disability areas (Mobbing, 1997). The task of the special educator among others should include: advising other teachers on curriculum materials and teaching approaches; providing supplementary teaching for individual pupils; joining other teachers classes to provide support in the course of a lesson; promoting professional development by arranging in-service activities such as workshops and seminars for regular class teachers; liaising with external agencies; carrying out numerous administrative tasks that are necessary as well as monitoring and evaluating the program. He/she could serve as a special class teacher and functions as an advocate and program planner for children with special educational needs in regular schools (Stainback and Stainback, 1985; Meijer et al., 1995).

Changing the Role of the Regular Class Teacher

Inclusive education is a matter of providing appropriate and high quality education for pupils with special educational needs in regular schools. Whether or not this happens depends critically on teacher variables, specifically their willingness to take on this task and their ability to do so. These two variables are interconnected: teachers, like others, are more willing to carry out tasks for which they have the requisite skills and resources and the possession of a repertoire of skills likewise engenders the desire to use them (Meijer et al., 1995). The concept of inclusion of children with disabilities into regular

classrooms is consistent with the concept of diversity and responsibility to modify curriculum in response to individual and group differences found in the regular classroom.

Teachers will continue to have primary responsibility for the education of all children in their classes. The growing move towards inclusion means that these teachers will have increasing responsibility for larger numbers of children with disabilities (Thomas and Feler, 1988; Saffron et al., 1994; Safford, Spodek and Saracho, 1994). The other role of the regular class teacher is to teach non-disabled students about students with disabilities on issues like respecting individual differences and the benefits that can be derived from interacting with persons of different abilities and backgrounds. Regular class teachers can a) provide non-disabled students with opportunities to interact with students with disabilities, b) encourage and reinforce interactions between the two groups, and train non-disabled students in regard to human difference (Stainback and Stainback, 1985). Finally, the key shared beliefs to be held by regular class teachers are that all children can learn, all children are different, difference is a strength and learning is enhanced through cooperation with teachers, students, parents and the community (UNESCO, 1999).

Promoting Group work and Cooperative Learning among Students

The effectiveness of both peer tutoring and co-operative learning has been well established through applied research. There may be less need to refer students to special education programs in order to meet their interactional needs, because peer-mediated intervention is found to have a vital role in promoting social interaction as well as academic achievement. An additional advantage of peer-influenced intervention may be that once teachers learn how to implement peer tutoring or co-operative learning strategies they can apply this knowledge across a broad range of curriculum areas (Maher et al, 1987; Porter et al., 1991). However, research has indicated that

providing interaction opportunities is not always enough since interactions between non-disabled students and students with severe disabilities do not always occur spontaneously when opportunities are provided (Guralnick, 1997). Teachers can encourage their non-disabled students to play, to study and work as tutors, or simply to spend a little time with a friend who has disability (Stainback and Stainback,1985).

This approach could be effectively utilized in our school system where the class size is large and teacher-student ratio is high. The widely prevalent traditional method of frontal teaching has not only undermined the mobilization of the human resources available in the class but also encouraged passive learning which stifles analytical thinking. On the other hand, the present strategy needs to encourage active learning and design mechanisms of taping the available classroom potential. Among others, this may involve organizing group work in the class, out of class study group and giving group assignments.

Resourcing Regular Schools

Next to teacher competence, the availability of appropriate support ranks high in the list of factors affecting teachers' ability to educate pupils with special needs in regular schools. The requisite support can be provided from within the school or by external staff. If regular schools are not resourced accordingly when they take on the education of theses pupils, it is extremely difficult to discharge their responsibilities and build-up positive attitudes on the part of teachers or to sustain them over a period of time (Meijer et al., 1995). A synthesis of 28 survey reports of 10,560 teachers indicated that teachers need for adjustment on time allotment, training , personnel, materials, class size and degree of disability to carry out effective inclusion (Scruggs' and Mastropieri, 1996). Indeed, the range of resource required and the adjustment needed depend on the socio-economic conditions of the given country. As indicated earlier, it is crucial to address these concerns

using different strategies effectively and utilizing the available local resources.

Inclusion in Early Childhood Education

Studies suggest that biological risk attain normal development provided appropriate early intervention is carried out. Many disabilities, including many emotional problems, result from environmental influences. Early in life, the incompleteness of brain development makes it very open to the influence of experience and culture. It is an organizing influence the impact of which begins early and affects every domain. Human beings whose innate abilities and dispositions help them to select what is relevant and adaptive from infancy, are active organisms exploring the environment. Change in course of children's development results from reciprocal transactions of the biologically maturing organism with the social and physical environment. The integration of diverse research findings provides a coherent and comprehensive view of early development as a foundation for early intervention (Anastasiow and Nucci, 1994).

As noted by Holdsworth (1997) exclusion in the early years can reinforce exclusion throughout life. Furthermore, studies indicated that the success of the inclusive schools depends considerably on early identification, assessment and stimulation of the very young child with special educational need. Programs at this level should recognize the principle of inclusion and be developed in a comprehensive way by combining early childhood education and early childhood health care (UNESCO, 1994). At the same time, this process helps to promote the development of the right attitude by the non-disabled peers towards persons with disabilities. Indeed, other home-based interventions should begin as early as in the first year of the new born child. It is, therefore, educationally sound and psychologically commendable to allow inclusion of children with disabilities into early childhood establishments

available in the neighborhood as early as possible in order to enhance the unfolding of their potentials.

The Special Class

In general, studies suggest that the effects of special classes in regular schools do not look very promising. Students with special educational needs stick together and do not play and talk with other students because both groups follow instructions together for only a limited number of hours even if teachers stay apart. Establishing special classes in regular schools is not always an inclusive measure; it may even lead to an increase of segregation.

Special classes in this sense should be limited in time (for instance not more than 60 per cent of the school time) and be focused on special skills training (for the blind such as braille reading and writing and mobility) as well as providing tutorials for those who need it (Meijer et al., 1995). The special educator can use the special class as a resource and consultation center for the class teacher, parents as well as students with disabilities.

Involvement of Parents .

The involvement of parents is generally perceived as a major dimension of successful inclusion (Nywe, 1999). Empirical studies indicate that for desirable partnership to prevail between teachers, parents and guardians a mutual sharing of knowledge, skills, experiences and decision-making is required (Semakula, 1999). There is a need to involve parents/guardians in deciding the long-term and short-term objectives of the educational programs to be based not only on the child's interest and abilities, but also on the families' priorities. Although many parents look forward to enrolling their children with disabilities in a regular pre-school or school program, the child's inclusion may precipitate in certain concerns. A significant issue for parents is whether their

a distance, to directly checking and directly participating in play activities (Guralnick, 1997).

Setting a Stage for Extra-curricular activities and Out- of-School Inclusive Programs

Extra-curricular activities for all children is often suggested. This may include organizing field trips and visits and formations of clubs like for example, music, art, photography, debate, natural science, research, drama and other recreational programs. This is an important parameter not only for promoting inclusion out side the classroom among students but also for unfolding of the diverse potentials and talents of both children with and without disabilities. Such a habit needs to be nurtured right at primary school so that children will be used to wisely spending their out of school time.

Piloting Inclusive Education in Selected Schools

Finally, undertaking a pilot study on inclusive education in selected schools is envisaged to be helpful to know the practical problems and make the necessary adjustments before embarking on inclusive programs at once all over the country. Furthermore, such sites could also be used as demonstration centers for experience- sharing among teachers, professionals as well as parents.

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