

Promoting Inclusive Education in India : A Framework for Research and Practice

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Over the last thirty years there have been numerous publications from academics and practitioners that have focused on various aspects of inclusive education. Virtually all of these are based on the premise that inclusive education is a 'good thing' and should be promoted in all countries of the world, including India. But, despite the plethora of books and articles on the subject, there remains some confusion among key stakeholders, for example parents, policy makers and practitioners, about the definition of inclusive education and about the extent to which findings from research have made a contribution to the development of effective inclusive practice. In order to shed some light on this confusing picture this paper begins with a brief historical review of contrasting definitions of inclusion and inclusive education leading to a proposed operational framework that focuses on the extent to which included pupils are present in a mainstream environment, accepted by others, actively participate and achieve. The second half of this paper uses this framework to consider how it can inform our understanding of existing and future research with particular emphasis on two specific studies that have focused on the relationship between inclusion and pupil achievement. The concluding discussion considers promising areas for further research on inclusive education in India.

Keywords: Inclusive education; special educational needs and disabilities; impact of research.

The Evolving Concept of Inclusive Education

Definitions of inclusion within an educational context, particularly in the USA and Europe, have varied considerably and reflect diverse perspectives and ideologies going back over more than two decades (e.g., Clair, Church & Batshaw, 2002; Falvey & Givner, 2005; Gee, 2004; Giangreco, 2006; Lewis & Doorlag, 2006; Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin & Soodak, 2006). Indeed, up until the early 1990s, the word "inclusion" was hardly used. Instead the terms "integration" or "mainstreaming" were employed, terms that referred exclusively to the placement of children who would normally attend special schools into mainstream schools. There were of course different degrees of integration. This could involve the full time placement of a child with disabilities in a mainstream class, placement in a mainstream class for non academic subjects or placement of a pupil in a special class or unit attached to a mainstream school (see Hegarty, 1991). In this latter example the extent to which

pupils are 'integrated' alongside their non-disabled colleagues was limited to play time and lunch breaks.

A key illustration of the influence of these arguments on shaping policy is the Salamanca Statement Clause 4 (UNESCO, 1994) which stressed that children with 'special educational needs must have access to regular schools'. In England and Wales this position was strongly reinforced by the 2001 Special Needs and Disability Act 2001 which stated that a child with SEN *must* (my italics) be educated in a mainstream school unless this would be incompatible with a) the wishes of the parents, or b) the provision of efficient education of other children.

Although definitions of inclusion that focus on the placement of the children with SEN in a mainstream context have been adopted in UK government policy documents, a problem with definitions of this sort is that they do not say anything about the quality of the education that is offered to pupils. Are pupils placed in units

attached to a mainstream school more “included” than if they were taught in a special school? Jupp (1992) argued that such units can be just as segregating. Indeed, even pupils placed in a regular mainstream class may be isolated from the rest of the class and not truly “integrated” within the group, particularly if they work with a support worker or teaching assistant in one-to-one sessions for the majority of each day. So-called ‘integrated’ placements, therefore, may still leave the pupil ‘segregated’ (Harrower, 1999).

Partly for these reasons, the term ‘inclusion’ became used as a way of describing the extent to which a pupil, categorized as needing to receive special education services, is truly ‘integrated.’ Used in this way the term refers to the extent to which a school or community welcomes such pupils as full members of the group and values them for the contribution which they make. This implies that for inclusion to be seen to be effective, all pupils with disabilities must actively belong to, be welcomed by, and participate in a mainstream school and community. Their diversity of interests, abilities and attainment should be welcomed and be seen to enrich the school community.

Since the late 1990’s definitions of inclusion have widened still further. Booth and Ainscow (1998), for example, took the view that policies on inclusion should not be restricted to the education of pupils thought to have special needs. Inclusion, they argued, is a process in which schools, communities, local authorities and governments strive to reduce barriers to the participation and learning for all citizens. Looked at in this way, inclusive policies and practices should consider ways in which marginalized groups in society, for example people from ethnic minorities and those who are socially and economically disadvantaged, can participate fully in the educational process within mainstream contexts.

This broader view of inclusive education has been endorsed by several influential papers published by the United Nations (see for example UNESCO, 2000, 2001; OECD, 2008). References to children with special needs and disabilities in these documents

become subsumed within a much broader rhetoric about the rights of all children from whatever background to receive an education and the focus is often on countries where large percentages of the population do not attend any school. Hence inclusion is defined more in terms of the rights of all children to receive an education. There is also emphasis on the need to improve the quality of, and access to, education for groups who have traditionally been marginalised. In some countries this may include girls, but also children from minority ethnic groups, e.g. Roma; or those who hold different religious beliefs from the majority population in a country.

As definitions of inclusive education broadened to incorporate all people in society who were thought to be at risk of marginalisation, so to did the arguments about this being part of a person’s human right. This is, perhaps, best illustrated in the number of influential reports emanating from the United Nations and other international organisations (see, for example, UNESCO, 1990, 1994, 2000, 2001, 2007 & 8; OECD, 2008). These documents reflect the view that inclusive education should focus on equity and fairness and on all students regardless of disability, gender, ethnicity or other disadvantage. Any form of segregation is seen as a form of discrimination. Hence all children from whatever background and however disabled have a right to receive high quality education with the overall global goal to provide education for all children, young people, and adults by 2015 (see also The World Education Forum held in Dakar in April 2000). The UNESCO documents are seen to have been of particular relevance to so-called developing countries, such as India.

It is hard to argue against the principles and aspirations expressed in these and other similar documents. No parent, teacher, local authority officer or government minister is likely to argue against the notion that all children from whatever background should have access to education. Neither would they quarrel with the notion that schools have a responsibility to offer the highest quality education to all learners from a whole variety of backgrounds and with a range of diverse needs.

Perhaps an inevitable consequence of adopting this broader view of inclusive education, much of which places the concept within the context of human rights is, as Norwich (2013) suggests, that it distances the debate from discussions on how to promote inclusive education for children with special needs and disabilities and has the effect of 'oversimplifying the differences between different aspects of diversity'. Indeed some authors (e.g. Miles and Singal, 2010) have commented that this focus on a broad view of inclusive education can have the effect of reducing government and public interest in providing inclusive services for children with disabilities particularly in non-western countries such as India. Discussions about the needs of these children, they argue, are at risk of becoming subsumed in a wider debate about improving access to education for all children.

However, despite the current broad definition of inclusive education reflected in the UN documents and notwithstanding the concerns expressed by Miles and Singal, (op cit), much of the current literature on inclusive education, including literature from India, still focuses on promoting inclusive education for children with special needs and disabilities. The United Kingdom and Indian Government's documents on inclusive education (see for example Department for Education, 2011; Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, 2015) refer to inclusive education solely in relation to increasing opportunities for children with special needs and disabilities to attend mainstream schools. There are also a number of pressure groups, for example Inclusion Europe (<http://inclusion-europe.org/>) and the Indian Inclusion Summit (<http://indiainclusionsummit.com/>) that exclusively campaign for increased opportunities for inclusive education for people with disabilities. Newspaper articles (see for example Balasubramanian, 2012) in *The Hindu* take a similar view as does a recent conference paper (Singh & Agarwal 2015) although this places the issue of children with disabilities within the wider context of promoting the goal of Education for All. Norwich (op cit) also comments that the vast majority of research literature on inclusive education is still predominately focused on children with special educational needs and

this is reflected in some recent publications about developments in India (see, for example, Jha, 2010; Kohama, 2012)

But despite the fact that almost all government documents and research papers focus on inclusive education for children with special needs and disabilities, we still find that there is confusion about how to define inclusive education for this group of children, not least in among teachers in India (see Hodkinson & Devarakonda, 2009). Some organizations, for example the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education in the UK (CSIE 1989), consider that all children, even the most severely disabled, should be educated in a mainstream classroom alongside their non-disabled peers. Others, e.g. Hornby (1999) and Norwich (2013) are much more cautious and argue that it simply not realistic to provide high quality education for children with severe disabilities in a mainstream school and they advocate a continuing role for special schools. Voluntary organizations such as India Inclusion Summit (<http://indiainclusionsummit.com/>) state that inclusion 'refers to a term used by people with disabilities and other disability rights advocates with the idea that all people should freely, openly and without pity or sympathy accommodate any person with any kind of disability, physical, mental or intellectual, without restrictions or limitations of any kind'. Helpful though this definition is, it says nothing about whether all children with disabilities should be educated in mainstream schools. The policy of Inclusion Europe (<http://inclusion-europe.org/>) is a little more specific 'Inclusive education' they state 'is when pupils with intellectual disability get the support to go to the same school as everyone else'.

Given the wide range of views together with some entrenched attitudes in favour of, and sometimes against, inclusive education, perhaps it is not surprising that it has been difficult for national governments, international organizations and other key stakeholders, to agree on a precise definition of the term. Rather than propose yet another definition, in this paper I suggest that a helpful way forward is to conceptualize inclusive education for children with special needs and disabilities

around the following pupil outcomes: Presence, Acceptance, Participation and Achievement.

Presence refers to extent to which pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) attend lessons in mainstream settings in local schools and committees.

Acceptance refers to the extent to which other staff and pupils welcome pupils with SEND as full and active members of their community.

Participation refers to the extent to which all pupils with SEND contribute actively in all the school's activities including in the classroom, playground or school outings.

Achievement refers to the extent to which pupils with SEND learn academic and social skills. It also considers the impact on the achievement of non-disabled pupils of having pupils with SEND in their school.

It is argued that for a school to be truly inclusive, all four conditions should apply to all children regardless of their abilities and disabilities. It is not for example sufficient for children with SEND to simply be present in a school. They need to be accepted by their peers and by staff, they need to participate in all the school's activities and they need to attain satisfactory levels of achievement in their work and behaviour. This formulation is proactive in the sense that it sets a framework for the development of inclusive education for schools, local authorities, communities in all countries of the world and can act as a benchmark against which to judge the extent to which inclusive policies and practices are working for children with SEN and disabilities. In particular it takes the discussion beyond simple statistics about how many children with SEND are placed in mainstream settings (presence). Important though these statistics are, schools, parents and policy makers also need to focus on how to help key stakeholders, including parents, teachers, non-disabled children become truly accepting of children with SEND and how they can manage their schools and classrooms so that these children actively participate and achieve.

Conceptualising inclusive education for pupils with SEND around the notions of presence, acceptance, participation and achievement

also provides a framework that can help us to consider the impact of research from India and elsewhere in this area on improving policy and practice around the world. The remainder of this paper develops this theme by considering some methodological issues and general research findings related to presence, acceptance and participation and, where appropriate, refers to some recent studies in India. This is followed by a more detailed account of two UK studies that have focussed on the relationship between inclusion and pupil achievement. The paper concludes with some reflections on promising areas for future research on inclusive education in India.

Research on Inclusive Education Related to Presence, Acceptance and Participation

This section provides a brief overview of some of the methodological issues addressed by researchers that have explored the impact of inclusive education for children with SEND in relation to the first three elements of this framework, presence, acceptance and participation. Although there is insufficient space to conduct a systematic literature review of all findings that are linked to these areas, some general findings will be referred to by way of illustration.

Inclusive Education and Presence

For some years countries in Europe and the USA have gathered data on the number of children with particular types of SEND who attend (are present in) special and mainstream schools. For example the British Government regularly provides statistics (see the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee report, 2006 and the Department for Education Green Paper, 2011). Such data are important for monitoring trends in provision over the years. Typically information is gathered through large scale surveys and by schools providing information about their pupils to central government.

Findings from large scale surveys of this kind undoubtedly make a contribution to the debate about trends in inclusive education provision (presence). However there are some problematic methodological issues that result in some of the data needing to be considered with caution (Farrell, 2000). For example it is by no means

certain that those completing surveys of this kind have a shared and agreed definition of SEND and this is a particular problem when comparing data between different countries. An obvious example is for children described as having 'learning disabilities'. In the USA such children typically of average intelligence but have specific problems in literacy and sometime numeracy. In the UK the term 'learning disabilities' refers to children with major developmental delay in all areas of learning and cognition. In addition to problems with defining SEND, simply stating that a child with SEND attends a mainstream school may not account for the fact that he or she spends the bulk of their time in a separate resource room and hence it may not be entirely accurate to say that they are included in the mainstream school. There are also problems in collecting data from representative samples. All of this can render statistical data on the presence of children with SEND in any school, let alone a mainstream school, difficult to interpret.

Problems in obtaining reliable data on the presence of children with SEND in mainstream schools is amply illustrated from data emerging from studies of inclusive education in India (see for example Sharma & Deppeler, 2005; Sanjeev and Kumar, 2007). Indeed Kohama, (2012) reports on an earlier study by Kalyanpur (2008) who referred to data from the National Census which stated that up to 94% of children with disabilities in India did not receive any educational services. This is in marked contrast to data from the World Bank that was more optimistic and stated that only 38% of children in India with disabilities ages 6-13 were not in school and that 70% of children with disabilities ages 5-20 have attended a school at some point in their life. Of these 90% had attended a mainstream school. Kohama also reports that the National Census in 2002 indicated that, 94.8% of children with disabilities who attend school were in mainstream settings - only 5.2% attended a special school. However, as Kohama points out, these statistics do not include children with a disability who did not attend school at all. She also comments on the huge differences in provision between children with SEND living in urban and rural areas in India.

The above brief reference to contrasting findings on inclusive provision in India highlights just some of the problems involved in gathering accurate data on the number and types of children with SEND who are placed in a mainstream or special school, problems that are also reflected in data from other countries. Nevertheless it is important for governments and researchers to continue to collect information about the numbers of pupils with various types of SEND who attend special and mainstream schools, or who do not go to school. The challenge is to agree on a methodology for defining SEND and to ensure that data are collected accurately.

Inclusive Education and Acceptance

There are a large number of studies that have explored the extent to which pupils with a variety of SEND are, or might be, accepted in mainstream schools. A range of contrasting methodological approaches have been used to explore this area, for example quantitative surveys of interested parties (e.g. teachers), classroom observation, semi structured interviews or focus groups with teachers, parents and non-disabled pupils, and sociometry involving class mates of a pupils with SEND.

In relation to the attitudes of teachers in mainstream schools, based on survey findings suggest (see Farrell, 2006; Farrell, et al, 2007) that teachers in mainstream schools in Europe and the USA are broadly positive about the idea of including more pupils with SEND in their schools. However their attitudes are influenced by the particular needs of the pupils, e.g. pupils with severe behavior problems tend to be less accepted than pupils with physical disabilities. In contrast to this generally positive conclusion, in a review of 26 studies Boer, Pijl and Minnaert, (2011) considered that the majority of teachers' attitudes were either neutral or negative toward inclusive education. In relation to teachers' attitudes in India, Parasuram (2006), using attitude scales, found that the key variable affecting teachers' attitudes towards inclusion was 'prior acquaintance with a person with a disability'. There have also been studies comparing the attitudes (acceptance) of teachers from different countries working in mainstream schools towards pupils with SEND

(see for example Sharma, Forlin, Loreman & Earle, 2006) indicating that teachers trained in the 'West' tend to hold more positive attitudes towards the inclusion of pupils with SEND than do teachers from other countries. These and countless other studies on teachers' attitudes indicates that more research needs to be carried out to explore ways of helping teachers to develop positive attitudes towards inclusive education.

Studies on the attitudes (acceptance) of pupils without disabilities of their classmates with SEND are, on the whole less common and employ a variety of methodologies. Using classroom observation and focus groups as part of a series of case studies on the inclusion of primary aged pupils with Downs Syndrome, Fox, Farrell and Davis (2004) found that the attitude (acceptance) of non-disabled children was broadly positive although there was some indication that the pupils with Down Syndrome were 'mothered', particularly by older girls. It is possible that the attitudes of non-disabled children towards pupils with SEND may become less positive the older they get. For example, drawing on survey data, classroom observation and peer nomination, Hebron and Humphrey (2014) found that secondary aged pupils with Autism placed in mainstream schools in the UK were at more risk of being bullied when compared to their peer group. In addition their risk of being bullied reduced if they attended a special school.

A key component of the successful inclusion of pupils with SEND in mainstream schools is the extent to which they are accepted by other staff and pupils. Overall research indicates that much more needs to be done in this area to ensure that such pupils are welcomed into their mainstream school and community, particularly at secondary school. Furthermore evidence suggests that the attitudes of key stakeholders in non-western countries, e.g. India, may be less positive than they are in the West.

Inclusive Education and Participation

It is only the last 10 years or so that interest in researching the extent to which 'included' pupils with SEND actually participate in their schools has started to grow. Anecdotal reports from

teachers, parents and the pupils themselves have suggested that far too often pupils with SEND in a mainstream class are isolated and afraid to, or do not want to, join in with their classmates. Some reports indicate that the presence of a support worker in the class to help the child with SEND could, inadvertently, reduce the chances for him/her to participate. Research on the role of teaching assistants, in particular that of Giangrecco and Doyle (2007), reveal the subtle and often unintended consequences in terms of reducing participation that can result when a teaching assistant spends too much time working on a 1 to 1 basis with the pupils she is supporting. In recognition of this issue the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2011) have published an extensive report that addresses this whole area in considerable detail.

Inevitably one of the key methodologies that is used to research this area involves detailed classroom observations sometimes accompanied by pupil and teachers interviews. A search through recent literature (e.g. Norwich, 2013) indicates that, compared to, for example, research on teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education, there are far fewer examples of studies that have explored the area of the participation of included pupils with SEND in mainstream schools

Inclusive Education and Pupil Achievement

This section considers, in more detail, research that addresses the fourth element of the framework, achievement. Indeed it is the achievement in academic subjects and in the social/emotional development of pupils with SEND who attend mainstream schools that is a crucial factor when judging the success or otherwise of inclusive education. Key stakeholders (e.g. parents) frequently ask for the evidence that these children will achieve more in a mainstream or special school or whether they might achieve more if they did not go to school at all. Many studies have tried, often unsuccessfully, to compare the academic outcomes for children placed in inclusive settings and special schools. By enlarge findings have been inconclusive (see Farrell, 2000; Lindsay, 2007, for an extensive review of research).

Perhaps these inconclusive findings are not surprising given the wide range of problems experienced by children with SEND, including sensory and physical disabilities as well as pupils with severe learning disabilities. It is also extremely difficult and ethically questionable to carry out randomised controlled trials in which pupils with a particular type of special need are randomly allocated to different forms of provision. Moreover there are a variety of so-called 'inclusive' placements such that it is not always easy to make straightforward comparisons between pupils educated in a mainstream school and a special school.

Despite the lack of high quality research evidence on the impact of inclusion on the achievements of pupils with SEND, there is no shortage of literature, sometimes in the form of case studies. For example Jha, (2010) provides a detailed account of pupil achievement in inclusive settings in Delhi. Furthermore the websites of numerous organisations promoting inclusion claim that included pupils achieve far more in inclusive settings than they would in a segregated environment (see for example PBS Parents, 2015; Inclusion BC, 2015; Inclusive School Network, 2015). Although these organizations perform a key role in promoting inclusive education, the evidence they put forward to claim the success of inclusion in terms of raising the attainments of pupils with SEND is mainly anecdotal.

Despite some methodological problems in carrying out high quality research studies in this area, there is some research that has considered aspects of the relationship between inclusive education and pupil achievement in more detail. In the remainder of this section two such studies that were carried out at the University of Manchester are considered in more detail.

The Impact of Teaching Assistants on Improving Pupils' Academic Achievement in Mainstream Schools

This research study comprised a systematic review of the literature carried out by the Inclusion Review Group at Manchester University, (see Farrell, Alborz, Howes & Pearson, 2010). The specific focus of the review was on the impact of teaching assistants (TAs) on improving the

academic attainment of pupils with learning difficulties in mainstream primary schools. Since 1995 there has been a dramatic growth in the number of TAs working in mainstream schools in England and Wales, from 24,000 in 1997 to over 180,000 in 2011. Typically teaching assistants are unqualified teachers who work alongside mainstream class teachers to support children with SEND in mainstream settings. There is little doubt that increasing the provision for pupils with SEND in mainstream schools in the UK would not have occurred without there being a growth in the numbers of TAs being employed. This has major implications for the future of inclusive education in India.

Given the rapid growth in the numbers of TAs in recent years, it is not surprising that the UK government has commissioned a number of research studies to examine their deployment and impact. The most influential of these (Blatchford, et al, 2009; Blatchford et al, 2012) covered a broad range of areas including the characteristics of support staff, their conditions of employment, their training, how they were managed and their impact on raising pupil attainment. This research confirmed the findings from other studies (e.g. Farrell, Polat & Balshaw, 2000) which indicates that TAs have become well integrated into mainstream schools, that teachers rely on their support and that, as a profession, they are enthusiastic and willing to learn. However the findings of Blatchford and his colleagues on the work of TAs suggested that they had little or no impact on raising achievement and, for that reason, we were commissioned to look into this area in more detail by carrying out a thorough systematic review of the literature in this area.

The methodology for this review (Alborz et al. 2009) followed the standard systematic review procedures adopted by the Institute of Education University of London. This involved the development of clear criteria for the inclusion and exclusion of potential studies that could be included in the review. Our focus was on research studies (articles, books, book chapters, research reports, dissertations) written in English, but which could have been carried out in any country and at any time. By adhering closely to

our review strategy and following an exhaustive search of various databases, we uncovered 13 high quality randomized control group studies that focused on the impact of TAs on pupils' academic attainments. Interestingly, although our inclusion criteria encompassed children of secondary school age, we were unable to locate any methodologically rigorous studies that focused on this age group. Hence all thirteen studies focused on the work of TAs with primary aged children. Nine of these studies addressed the impact of TAs who worked with a specific group of children with identified problems in literacy and numeracy – we referred to these as targeted intervention studies. The remaining four studies, non targeted interventions, compared the academic performance of large groups of children from many different schools and linked this data to the numbers of TAs who worked in these schools.

The findings indicated that, for targeted intervention studies, i.e. where TAs were properly trained and supported and worked with an identified group of children with SEND, they can have a positive impact on the academic progress of pupils with literacy and language difficulties. However findings from the 4 large scale non-targeted intervention studies, linking the presence of TAs in primary schools with pupils' academic progress, suggested that TAs had no impact. This latter finding mirrors one of the key outcomes from the non-targeted intervention studies carried out by Blatchford et al. (2009) and Blatchford et al (2012).

These findings as a whole have major implications for the ongoing training, management, support and deployment of teaching assistants in mainstream schools in all countries of the world including India. If TAs are employed in mainstream schools to support children with SEND, it is vitally important that they are trained and supported. This will result in pupils with learning difficulties making more progress in their academic work than if they would if this support was not available. TAs can therefore make a substantial contribution to the overall success of inclusive education. But this will not happen unless teachers and senior management staff take responsibility to provide

support and training to TAs and to integrate them into the fabric of the school. Simply placing TAs in a school and leaving them to 'get on with it' will not lead to pupils with SEND making progress.

Inclusion and the Achievement of Pupils without SEND

The bulk of the research literature on SEND and inclusive education focuses on the question of whether children with SEND "do better" in mainstream or special settings (e.g. Lindsay, 2007). There are relatively few studies, however, that have explored the evidence on how the presence of pupils with SEND in mainstream settings impacts on the achievements of the pupils who do not have SEND. As countries move towards a more inclusive education system, as is likely to happen in India, it is perfectly understandable that teachers in mainstream schools might wonder whether the influx of pupils with SEND might bring down the academic achievements of their existing pupils.

In order to investigate this area, colleagues at the University of Manchester conducted a large scale study that explored the relationship between educational achievement and inclusion in mainstream schools in England (Farrell et al, 2007). We were particularly interested to discover whether there was a negative relationship between the number of pupils with SEND in a mainstream school and the attainment of pupils without SEND.

The methodology for the study involved using data from the UK National Pupil Data Base (NPD). This collects demographic and attainment data on all pupils in mainstream schools in England and Wales at ages 7, 11, 14 and 16. There were approximately 500,000 pupils at each age making the total sample for the study to be two million pupils. For each of the two million pupils we obtained data on a number of variables including their sex, attainment in Maths, Science and English, socio economic status, ethnicity, whether or not they had SEND and the size and type of school they attended. This data was analyzed using multi-level modeling which enabled us to determine whether, when all other variables were accounted for, there was a relationship

between the numbers of pupils with SEND in a school and the academic attainments of the pupils who did not have SEND. Findings indicated that there was a small but, for all practical purposes, insubstantial relationship between inclusion and academic achievement at the school level although there was also a large degree of variation suggesting strongly that there were other factors within a school's make up, rather than its degree of inclusivity, that impacted on the average academic achievements of its pupils. All though this was a UK based study, our findings suggest that mainstream schools all over the world, including India, should not be concerned about the possible negative impact on their pupils' achievements of including more children with SEND.

Conclusion

This paper has shown how the concept of inclusion and inclusive education has evolved over the years but that, even today, there is confusion as to its precise meaning. In general all key stakeholder e.g. governments, teachers, parents, remain positive about the idea of inclusive education even if there is uncertainty about how, and to what extent, this policy can be implemented for all children with SEND. There have also been a large number of research studies and anecdotal accounts on inclusive education that draw on a variety of methodologies. But the outcomes of this research can be confusing and sometimes contradictory. Given the wide range of pupils with different types of SEND and given the different educational settings that exist, both between and within countries, perhaps it is unlikely that research findings will ever unequivocally determine the ideal setting that will make inclusive education successful for all children with SEND.

In order to make sense of this evolving and sometimes confusing picture this paper has proposed that inclusive education for pupils with SEND be conceptualised around the notion of presence, the extent to which pupils with SEND attend mainstream schools; acceptance, the extent to which other staff and pupils welcome pupils with SEND; participation, the extent to which all pupils with SEND contribute actively

in all the school's activities; and achievement, the extent to which pupils with SEND learn academic and social skills. This framework helps us to determine the extent to which individuals and groups of pupils have been successfully included. It also provides a focus for an analysis of the impact of research on improving practice in this complex field. The second half of this paper has considered some methodological issues and referred to some research findings that relate to each element of the framework. Two studies on the relationship between inclusion and pupil achievement were referred to in more detail.

Using the framework of presence, acceptance participation and achievement and in the light of previous research in India and elsewhere, it is suggested that future research in India could address the following issues. In relation to research on the numbers of children with SEND who are educated in mainstream schools - presence, a first priority is to ensure that all 29 states responsible for collecting data share a common and agreed definition of SEND and that this definition distinguishes between children with different types of SEND, including physical, sensory and learning difficulties. A second priority is to ensure that data is collected which reflects the full range of provision for children with SEND in urban and rural areas, for example placement in a mainstream school, a unit attached to a mainstream school, a special school or in no school at all. Related to research on presence there is a need for research on the different ways in which children with SEND are supported in mainstream schools, in particular the extent to which teaching assistants (TAs) are employed to support these children. As we have seen earlier in this paper, developments in inclusive education in the UK and the USA would not have taken place without there being a dramatic increase in the employment of TAs. It is likely that similar developments will need to take place in India if more children with SEND are to be successfully included in mainstream schools.

There are a number of aspects in the area of acceptance on which future research on inclusive education in India might focus. The following are just some examples. Given the difference in educational and other opportunities afforded to people living in rural and urban areas it would

be interesting to explore the developing attitudes (acceptance) towards children with a variety of SEND of parents and children from different communities. It would also be interesting to see if there are difference in attitudes (acceptance) of boys and girls with SEND from parents, teachers and other stakeholders. In relation to research on participation, as in other countries, a key element of future research should be on the extent to which children with SEND in mainstream settings actually participate and on the impact of the support they receive on fostering or hindering participation. Finally research on achievement, perhaps the most methodologically challenging area, should focus on collecting accurate data on the progress made by children with SEND in mainstream schools, but that the progress they make should be set against realistic targets which take account of the children's unique special needs and challenges. For example it could be argued that there is no reason why the academic achievements of children with visual, hearing and physical difficulties should not be as high as their non disabled peers and hence targets for successful inclusive education should reflect this. However it would be unrealistic to set such high targets for the achievements of children with learning difficulties who are included in mainstream schools.

Despite the major challenges facing the future development of inclusive education in India, there are a number of studies, some of which are referred to in this paper, that have considered various aspects of inclusive education in the country. Furthermore the government is developing policies that should enable mainstream schools to admit more pupils with SEND and voluntary organisations are also becoming increasingly active. All of this reflects a growing commitment among all stakeholders and, hopefully, increased awareness among the general public, for the continued development of more inclusive policies and practices for all marginalised groups in society. This promising climate creates a fertile ground for continued research on all aspects of inclusive education.

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