ABSTRACT

There have been efforts internationally to include children with disabilities in the educational mainstream. Inclusive education entails increasing the participation of students in, and reducing their exclusion from, the cultures, curricula and communities of local schools. Inclusive education is complex and there are several interrelated factors which affect the process.

This was a qualitative study of describing and analyzing the process of educating children with disabilities in private inclusive schools in Mumbai. The objectives of the research were to explore the process of inclusive education, identify barriers and facilitators and suggest a contextual working model. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with stakeholder groups, and observations in classrooms.

All interview transcripts were analysed to identify emerging themes and the data were organised, which was done by coding and breaking it down into more manageable texts. For the observation and FGD data, the recurring themes were matched with the themes emerging from the interviews. Where possible, quotes that represent key points have been provided illustrate meaning. Then the themes were connected to existing theories to evolve a model of inclusive education.

The findings were under the four main themes of Support Systems, Challenges, Process and Outcomes for children with disabilities in inclusive schools. The major support systems were identified as academic, physical, psychological and parental. Within ‘academic support’ the schools offered remedial teaching to the children, gave them concessions and favoured and practiced supportive classroom strategies. As part of physical support, the school
endeavoured to enhance the mobility and accessibility for children with differing physical needs by installing elevators and ensuring accessibility of the toilets. Apart from these provisions and the help the children sought from the non-disabled peers, there were no good practices reported. The psychological support was provided by the counsellors, resource teachers and peers. The mothers were found to play an important role in terms of helping the child cope with the demands of the regular school.

The major challenges which emerged from the findings were the negative attitudes of the teachers and peers, shortage of resources and lack of training for handling diversity within classrooms. The ‘process’ of inclusive education was analysed by the looking at three dimensions of culture, policy and practices. While the former two were more static components of the process, the practice part was designed to suit individual needs and hence more dynamic. The outcomes of educating children with disabilities in inclusive schools were mixed. The outcomes were dependent of the nature/severity of the disability, the support mechanisms in school and environment and culture of the schools. The most common outcome for the children was fulfilment of aspiration of leading ‘normal’ lives as their non-disabled peers.

The study recommends that the inclusive school must build comprehensive inclusive cultures and must enable access to equal opportunities to all learners by installing support mechanisms, overcoming challenges and building competencies of regular teachers. An emergent model of inclusive education is also presented and discussed.